For the Cowherds: Coloniality and Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy

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Comparative philosophers have noted that some comparative methods perpetuate colonial legacies. What follows employs aspects of the scholarship of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Anîbal Quijano, and María Lugones to identify one colonially problematic methodology that some well-regarded contemporary comparative representations of "Buddhist Philosophy" arguably adopt. In 1995, Lin Tongqi, Henry Rosemont, Jr., and Roger Ames identified "the most fundamental methodological issue facing all comparativists" by raising and responding to the question: "Does the imposition of modern Western conceptual categories on non-Western patterns of thought and modes of discourse with different categories promote or hinder our understanding of them?"[1] They concluded that when modern Western categories and standards of evidence adjudicate the merits of "an alternative philosophic tradition," that tradition can appear only as "an inferior variation on a Western theme."[2] Jay Garfield has voiced similar concerns. In 2002, he asserted that philosophical methods that interpret non-Western traditions primarily through modern Western assumptions and categories facilitate the subordination and objectification of non-Western traditions. "Alien commentaries gain ascendancy over traditional commentaries," he wrote. "The hermeneutic method of the conqueror becomes the standard means of reading the vanquished, and the vanquished tradition becomes, as the Ven. Geshe Ngawang Samten put it in conversation, 'the domain of curators.'"[3] Yet, as M. Kirloskar-Steinbach, Geeta Ramana, and J. Maffie have observed, comparative, cross-cultural, or intercultural philosophies have tended, with few exceptions, to draw on resources primarily within our fields to identify and correct problematic methodologies.[4] We have not yet widely engaged or used conceptual tools

[1] Lin, Rosemont, and Ames 1995, p. 745.
[2] Ibid., p. 751.
[3] Garfield 2002, p. 244.
[4] Kirloskar-Steinbach, Ramana, and Maffie 2014, p. 14.

that scholars in fields such as postcolonial theory and decolonial theory have developed to identify and dislodge colonially problematic tendencies in our work.

The first section below notes Spivak's contention that some seemingly progressive cross-cultural gestures operate, through their authors' expressed benevolent intentions, to reestablish the subject of the West as the globe's subject. The section then observes that the pattern that Spivak criticizes recurs in a rhetorical aspect of a recent and well-regarded manuscript on conventional truth in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophy—specifically, the choice by the authors of this manuscript to call themselves "the Cowherds." We then engage Spivak's argument and Quijano's and Lugones's theories of 'coloniality'—theories of legacies of colonialism that persist in contemporary global capitalism[5]—to support Spivak's critique and to place in a schematic decolonial framework concerns that scholars such as Lin, Rosemont, Ames, and Garfield voice about asymmetrical relations between the "West" and the "non-West" in some cross-cultural philosophical scholarship.

The second section observes that further rhetorical aspects of the Cowherds' text appear to reiterate the schema that Spivak, Quijano, and Lugones associate with global capitalism. By arguing that this schema also conditions some Cowherds' interpretations of conventional truth in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, the third section aims to demonstrate that these concerns do not pertain merely to rhetorical gestures or analogies, and that global capitalism and its axes of coloniality and modernity substantively affect some conventionally authoritative representations of Buddhist philosophies. Through conversations with decolonial and postcolonial theorists, cross-cultural scholars of South Asian philosophies may discover that some conventional "truths" that now circulate in our field—for example the conviction that philosophy has progressed through history, and that Europe's philosophical legacies and subjectivities exemplify its progress—are false conventionals, to use a term that Mark Siderits coins in his analysis of JnanasrTmitra's *anyapoha* philosophy. When these false conventionals are situated in a decolonial theoretical context, then ordinary cognitive processes of "even people like cowherds (*gopala*s) and women"[6] can dispel them, much as ordinary cognitive processes dispel oasis illusions in deserts.

I

Spivak argues in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" that some gestures of solidarity with "third world" subjectivities[7] by "first-world" intellectuals[8] reveal colonial interests. She notes that Foucault and Deleuze appear in a joint interview to advocate for the in-

[5] Quijano 2000, p. 533.
[6] The relevance of this phrase will be explained shortly.
[7] Spivak 1988, p. 298.
[8] Ibid., p. 292.

terests of oppressed global classes—"the masses" and "the workers' struggle"[9]—but that the images they use to represent the globally oppressed universalize Deleuze's and Foucault's class positions while erasing the specificities of non-Western resistance movements. Spivak sees a practical contradiction within these scholars' valorizations of the oppressed on the one hand and their lack of critical attention to "the historical role of the intellectual" on the other.[10] Modern intellectual classes historically have represented those on "the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center)"[11] as a means of securing their own interests in negotiations among dominant foreign, national, or regional/local elites.[12] As Spivak reads their conversation, Deleuze and Foucault maintain this tradition of employing a kind of "verbal slippage" to promote their interests in the Other's name.[13] By speaking on behalf of the other, they globalize their concrete experiences while rendering invisible or "transparent" the structural difference between these specific experiences and the heterogeneous interests of "the masses."[14] "The much-publicized critique of the sovereign subject thus actually inaugurates a Subject," Spivak concludes.[15] "By appropriating the other through assimilation," a parochial Western subject is again made to seem naturally authoritative.[16]

Before examining how Spivak supports this assertion and how Quijano's and Lugones's theories of coloniality may be read to support her critique, we shall first observe that the gesture of solidarity that she identifies in Foucault and Deleuze's conversation recurs in at least one prominent instance of contemporary cross-cultural philosophical scholarship: *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*, a 2011 manuscript authored by the Cowherds, a collective of scholars who specialize in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophies. Much as Deleuze and Foucault are highly regarded in the fields of critical social theory that Spivak engages, the Cowherds and *Moonshadows* are esteemed among comparativists who specialize in South Asian philosophy. A review of *Moonshadows* in *Philosophy East and West* (vol. 62, no. 3) notes that the Cowherds are "some of the world's foremost experts in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophy" and states that the text does "a great service to Buddhist scholarship."[17]

As the collective explains, the name "the Cowherds" declares solidarity with some whom Madhyamaka texts mark as backward. The Cowherds point to CandrakTrti's statement in his *Prasannapada* that "even people like cowherds (*gopala*s) and women recognize" independently existing objects.[18] The collective replies in earnest to such uses of the phrase. "We are bothered by the sexism of the reference to women, an

[9] Ibid., pp. 273–274.
[10] Ibid., p. 275.
[11] Ibid., p. 283.
[12] Ibid., p. 284.
[13] Ibid., p. 275.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., p. 272.
[16] Ibid., p. 308.
[17] Henkel 2012, pp. 428–429.
[18] The Cowherds 2011, p. v.

attitude taken for granted in CandrakTrti's cultural milieu but no longer acceptable." Continuing earnestly, they observe, "There is a whiff of classism in the use of 'cowherds' as well."[19] The Cowherds therefore intend their name to declare solidarity with non-modern *gopala*s and women, much as Foucault and Deleuze, in the conversation that Spivak cites, mean to declare solidarity with oppressed "third-world" classes. After this declaration of solidarity, however, the Cowherds also mention that they mean their sobriquet playfully. By embracing it, the collective hopes to represent the knowledges of "ordinary" working people: "We hope that the irony in our use of this term to refer to ourselves is apparent," they write:

> We hope that we can appropriate "cowherds" as a synonym for "the man on the street," to indicate the ordinary working person. What cowherds know, in this sense, is what you need to know to do whatever you do, whether it be dairy farming or philosophy. To paraphrase JFK, we are all cowherds![20]

The reference of "the Cowherds" shifts in this more ironic expression. Now, neither does it signify those whom Madhyamaka texts occasionally deride, nor, more contemporaneously perhaps, does it declare solidarity with the subaltern (those who would *not* seem, from the perspectives of "ordinary" persons, to know what they needed to know to do what they do). Rather, in its playful mode, "the Cowherds" references an undifferentiated working class, a timeless and placeless—that is, global—self that the values and forms of a modern intellectual class happen to exemplify (e.g., 'the man on the street,' 'JFK'). The collective's choice of its name therefore appears to perform the very gesture of "verbal slippage" that Spivak problematizes in "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

The slippage that Spivak observes in the rhetoric of Foucault and Deleuze bleeds together two distinct senses of "represent." "Two senses of representation are being run together," she writes: "representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,'"[21] as in economics.[22] A person represents another in the first sense by serving as the other's proxy, by voicing and advocating for the other's interests.[23] Deleuze and Foucault seem to "represent" the interests and subjectivities of workers across the globe in this first sense, much as the Cowherds appear to advocate for the interests and subjectivities of non-modern *gopala* s and women when speaking earnestly.

"Representation" in the second sense works like money. As Marx observes in *Capital,* for a commodity to serve as money, its concrete materiality, or "use-value," must serve

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[19] Ibid., pp. v-vi.

[20] Ibid., p. vi.

[21] Spivak 1988, p. 275.

[22] Ibid., p. 278. As Spivak notes, in German, *Vertretung* expresses "representation" in the first sense, while *Darstellung* expresses "representation" in the second sense.

[23] Ibid., pp. 275–277.

as the form of appearance of abstract value.[24] Nuggets of iron would not work to weigh other objects without serving as a sign for, or re-presenting, abstract "weight."[25] Similarly, pieces of paper would not work as payment without embodying, or re-presenting, an abstraction—abstract human labor, according to Marx.[26] Further, in relation to this money form, the particularities of other commodities must fade from consideration; commodities signify worth through money only insofar as they appear as essentially generic and fungible instances of the abstract value to which the concrete form of money is assumed to be equivalent.[27] Spivak contends that by representing the subaltern in the first sense, Foucault and Deleuze position their concrete experiences as a re-presentation of abstract global subjectivity in the second sense. By speaking on behalf of the other, they make their own subjectivities valuable, like money, and render "others" valuable only insofar as they appear as essentially generic instances of the abstract subjectivity that their own concrete experiences are assumed to re-present. It is this "verbal slippage" to which Spivak seeks to alert scholars.

According to Spivak, the problematic gesture outlined above helps to restore global capitalism's "international division of labor,"[28] an axis that differentiates subjectivities produced in "the Center" from experiences produced in "the Periphery."[29] Global capitalism must "subtract" members of working classes in the peripheries, she contends, "from the realization of surplus value and thus from 'humanistic training' in consumerism."[30] Lugones's and Quijano's decolonial theories can help to explain how modern narratives of progress and constructions of racial difference reproduce this international division of labor between modern subjects and their "others" (as Spivak notes, "one can just as well say the silent, silenced center").

In Quijano's model, global capitalism works along two "structural axes." Neither has priority, and both structure, and are structured by, all social facets in the system. Quijano designates these social facets as "sex, labor, collective authority, and intersubjectivity," but Lugones also stresses their expansiveness, indicating that, according to Quijano, structural axes permeate "all control of sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/intersubjectivity and the production of knowledge from within these intersubjective relations."[31] If Quijano's model is correct, then these axes permeate philosophy, including cross-cultural philosophy; activity in the field would also tend to reinforce these axes.

Global capitalism's first structural axis, according to Quijano, is "modernity." As Lugones notes, this axis differentiates the world's population "into two groups: superior

[24] Marx 1976, pp. 148–151.
[25] Ibid., p. 149.
[26] Ibid., p. 148.
[27] Ibid., p. 144.
[28] Spivak 1988, p. 280.
[29] Ibid., p. 272.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Lugones 2007, p. 191.

and inferior, rational and irrational, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern."[32] Through this rhetoric of progress, diverse social facets within global capitalism situate a subset of humanity as the material exemplars of abstract humanity; they associate networks of normatively positive concepts (e.g., 'rationality,' 'civilization,' 'modernity,' etc.) with an economically and militarily dominant group, while associating networks of normatively negative concepts (e.g., 'irrationality,' 'primitivity,' 'despotism,' etc.) with economically and militarily subjugated persons. To use Spivak's language, global capitalism's axis of modernity facilitates an international division of labor between elite colonial, national, and regional/local groups and the subaltern. Or as Lugones phrases it, modernity divides the world into "a 'dark' and a 'light' side."[33] The dark side appears as the antithesis of sense, while the light side serves, like money, as the form of appearance of sense itself.

Global capitalism emerged with and was enabled by a modernist rhetoric that divided the world into light and dark sides, and, as Quijano and Lugones emphasize, contrasts with dark-side images were inseparable from positive images that capitalism's light side presented to cognition. Both scholars stress that global capitalism's expansion did not export precolonial European ways of living and knowing into colonial contexts, or universalize already established European forms of life as global norms, but instead created new norms through contrast with dark-side images of persons and lands that were targeted for European colonization. Speaking with reference to gender, Lugones observes that "colonialism did not impose precolonial, European gender arrangements on the colonized. It imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers."[34] New European norms of gender—"biological dimorphism, the patriarchal and heterosexual organization of relations"[35]—emerged with modernity, and did so only through opposition to "dark side" images of gender and sexual depravity that proliferated with European colonial expansions. Quijano's and Lugones's theories therefore contend that narratives of progress that envision humanity traveling from a "dark" side to a "light" side are inextricable from global capitalism's "international division of labor," a global division between persons who are assumed to be entitled to democratic due processes and "others" who are assumed to not be so entitled.

In Quijano's model, global capitalism's first structural axis accompanies a second, which he names "the coloniality of power." Lugones defines this axis as follows:

> The coloniality of power introduces the basic and universal social classification of the population of the planet in terms of the idea of "race." The invention of race is a pivotal turn as it replaces the relations of superior-

[32] Ibid., p. 192.
[33] Ibid., p. 202.
[34] Ibid., p. 186.
[35] Ibid., p. 190.

> ity and inferiority established through domination. It reconceives humanity and human relations fictionally, in biological terms.[36]

Again, as Lugones points out, the coloniality of power does not merely racially classify persons; constructions of racial difference reverberate through all facets of social life, and these disparate facets tend to reinforce racial differences in ways that accord with divisions constituted through global capitalism's axis of modernity.[37] Through this second axis, modern Europeans are associated by default, or "naturally," with light-side norms, and militarily and economically subjugated non-Europeans are associated by default with dark-side images. Together, the coloniality of power and modernity help to make global capitalism's specifically racialized and gendered international division of labor between dominant subjects and subjugated persons, and the acts of violence that are required to sustain it, seem invisible, and to make global capitalism's light-side norms and subjectivities seem naturally triumphant.

Spivak argues in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" that in order to naturalize itself as the re-presentation of universal subjectivity, the sovereign subject of global capital must commit acts of violence, including epistemic violence,[38] to differentiate surplus others from itself. These others are constituted as a class, namely "the subaltern," not through any shared interests or subjectivity, but through exclusion.[39] As Spivak puts it, the subject of global capital requires "the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow."[40] Lugones and Quijano imply that narratives of progress and tendencies to apply "dark side" images by default (or "by nature") to non-Western persons and expressions facilitate this ongoing othering effort. Spivak also points out, however, that activities that overtly intend to represent or redeem the interests of excluded others may also constitute a form of epistemic violence that reestablishes global capitalism's international division of labor. When the sovereign European subject's status as the re-presentation of humanity is made visible—or stands revealed as an artifact of violence—social facets within global capitalism may assimilate others into the center, overtly for the benefit of these others, but in practice to re-naturalize this sovereign subject's status as humanity's equivalent or money form. Spivak accordingly says of Foucault's and Deleuze's representations of global workers that they give "an illusion of undermining subjective sovereignty while ... providing cover for this subject of knowledge."[41]

The subject that Deleuze and Foucault create in the name of ordinary global workers excludes the subaltern. As Spivak notes, this "ordinary" subject appears as "neither labor nor management, holding a 'strong' passport, using a 'strong' or 'hard' currency,

[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., p. 191.
[38] Spivak 1988, p. 282.
[39] Ibid., p. 276.
[40] Ibid., p. 280.
[41] Ibid., p. 271.

with supposedly unquestioned access to due process. It is certainly not the desiring subject as Other."[42] Because it reconstitutes human subjectivity in ways that assume the obviousness of light-side subjectivities, their newly inaugurated Subject represents the interests of those on "the exploiters' side of the international division of labor."[43] The international division of labor is made to vanish, and once again the global authority of capitalism's light side is made to seem natural.

As the title of Spivak's article suggests, global capitalism's subaltern cannot speak. It is either relegated to a dark-side realm of nonsense, or it is appropriated as an essentially generic instance of the experiences of global capital's sovereign subject. In the first case, the subaltern appears to embody the antithesis of sense; it is therefore unable to sensibly speak. In the second, the subaltern expresses sense only through relation to a money form of global subjectivity; the particularities of the "redeemed" subaltern consequently fade from concern, and the subaltern appears as an essentially generic instance of the re-presentative European sovereign subject. In neither case can the subaltern intelligibly contest modern colonial discourse.[44]

A schema emerges from these reflections on the postcolonial and decolonial theories of Spivak, Quijano, and Lugones that we may use to contextualize concerns raised by Lin, Rosemont, Ames, and Garfield about some cross-cultural philosophical methods. First, we should expect modernist narratives of progress to sustain an asymmetrical and racialized division of labor between a sovereign subject of global capital, situated in the global North, and the subaltern, situated in the global South. In the context of cross-cultural philosophy, we should be alert to tendencies to associate Western philosophies by default with sophistication, rigor, and so on, and non-Western philosophies by default with rudimentariness, absurdity, and so forth. Second, we should expect some benevolent engagements by Northern scholars with global capital's others to naturalize and globalize Western "light side" norms. In the context of cross-cultural philosophy, we should be alert to tendencies to render non-Western philosophies and philosophers sensible, not through their particularities, but as generic facsimiles of Western philosophies that are assumed by default to re-present universal philosophy. We should anticipate two asymmetries between the "West" and the "non-West." The first is an axis between the global and the subaltern that is sustained through racialized and gendered narratives of progress. The second is an axis inside the light-side realm of sense between the equivalent or money form of global philosophy and the relative, essentially generic form of "other" philosophies. We will now apply this decolonial schema to the Cowherds' examination of conventional truth *(lokasamvrtisatya)* in Buddhist philosophy.

[42] Ibid., p. 273.

[43] Ibid., p. 280.

[44] The subaltern can, of course, unintelligibly contest modern colonial discourse. Cf. Spivak 1988, pp. 307–308.

II

We have seen that the Cowherds' explanation of their name repeats a gesture that Spivak associates with global capitalism. A study of additional rhetoric in *Moonshadows* followed in the third section below by an examination of some Cowherds' interpretations of *lokasamvrtisatya* ("conventional truth") will show how the decolonial schema developed above may be used to identify and hopefully to avoid colonially problematic tendencies in comparative representations of South Asian philosophies. As we will see, in the hands of some but not all of the Cowherds, meanings of *lokasamvrtisatya* appear to divide along a subaltern and global axis—an axis that helps to constitute a second axis between equivalent and relative forms of the universal, "philosophy," which names our field.

In his individual contribution to *Moonshadows,* Mark Siderits uses an analogy of *gop!*s, female cowherds, to show how JnanasrTmitra's epistemological contextualism, and empirical reductionism in general, facilitate epistemic progress. First, he writes, "The gopTs sought ways to increase the butterfat content of the milk their cows produced" because they loved Krsna and knew that Krsna loved butterballs. These efforts led them "to a detailed knowledge of biochemistry," which "enabled them [to] better control the butterfat content of their cows' milk." Their new knowledge of biochemistry "revealed to them the source of the correlation between high butterfat consumption and heart disease" and the causes of human cravings for butterfat. "This in turn helped them develop methods for producing low-fat butterballs that still satisfy the craving." Eventually, the *gopT*s grew to appreciate empirical reductionism, but in the form of a hybridized Madhyamaka-Yogâcâra-Sautrântika philosophy. They became bodhisattvas. "There is still a special fondness for Krsna, and so they are glad that he can enjoy his butterballs without risking the suffering of heart disease." Siderits concludes, "The gopïs now know more than they used to, and there is less overall suffering as a result."[45]

As with the Cowherds' ironic explanation of their name, in this playful imaging of philosophical development, modern Western images, particularly images of science, stand in as re-presentatives of global subjectivity, and the *gopT*s' epistemological advances are lauded through relation to them. As we will see, the particularities of Jnânasrïmitra's epistemological contextualism fade from relevance, and the *gopT*s, whom Siderits overtly champions, appear as generic instances of global capitalism's sovereign subject.

Siderits employs narratives of progress to situate modern Western epistemologies as universal philosophy's money form. "We today know more about the world than did ancient Indians—cowherds, women, and Candrakirti himself," he writes. "We know more about the causes of and cures for diseases, for instance, because we have learned to think of the human organism as an aggregate composed of a huge number of molecules."[46] It

[45] The Cowherds 2011, p. 180.
[46] Ibid., p. 169.

is of course not the case that all humans, including the subaltern, "have learned to think of the human organism as an aggregate composed of a huge number of molecules." Because it excludes the subaltern, the pronoun "we" works in a royal sense, with a provincial group portraying itself, playfully, as global subjectivity. Further, sense is made of the *gopT*s' epistemological activities not primarily through reference to Madhyamaka or Yogâcâra-Sautrântika concepts, methodologies, or goals, but through relation to a universal that modern Western images have been assumed to re-present. Like Nestlé, the *gopT*s develop a "detailed knowledge of biochemistry" and use this knowledge to manipulate the fat-content of their dairy products. Further, the insight the *gopT*s gain that makes them *bodhisattva*s is explained not through explication of Madhyamaka or Yogâcâra-Sautrântika Buddhist conceptions and aims but through relation to the "suffering of heart disease." Therefore, an asymmetry between relative and equivalent forms of philosophical value holds between images of "the West" and "the non-West" in this second instance of the Cowherds' rhetoric; while the *gopT*s' epistemological advances are valued as generic instances of Western philosophies, specific Western philosophies are valued as global philosophy's equivalent form.

Siderits does comment on Jnânasrimitra's particular dialectical methods by remarking that Jnânasrimitra's epistemic contextualism works through "an unending series of sets of triples: false conventional, true conventional, true ultimate, where the true ultimate of one set is the true conventional of an adjacent set."[47] As Siderits suggests, Jnânasrimitra articulates a model of reasoning with and through conventional truths that avoids appeal to static divisions between ultimate and conventional truth. In discussion a problematic judgment, or "false conventional," can be countered through appeal to a less problematic claim, or "true conventional." For example, in Jnânasrïmitra's *Apohaprakaranam* (Monograph on exclusion), the thesis that exclusion appears as an element of images that universals present in cognition[48] serves as a "true conventional" in relation to a "false conventional" thesis that people are aware of universals "by virtue of [their] having a positive form."[49] These "true conventionals" are less problematic in relation to a "true ultimate" that JnanasrTmitra, at one dialectical moment, wants his interlocutors to accept. For example, in his *Apohaprakaranam,* the thesis that "exclusion [alone] is what is revealed by words and inferential reasons"[50] serves as a "true ultimate" in relation to the false and true conventionals previously mentioned. In JnanasrTmitra's dialectics, however, true ultimates are only contextually "ultimate." At other dialectical moments, previous "true ultimates" serve as merely conventionally better judgments, true conventionals, in relation to other false conventionals and other conditionally adopted true ultimates (e.g., in JnanasrTmitra's text, the thesis that "nothing at all is expressed by words"[51]).

[47] Ibid., p. 179.
[48] McCrea and Patil 2010, p. 51.
[49] Ibid., p. 50.
[50] Ibid., p. 51.
[51] Ibid.

As Siderits observes, JnanasrTmitra's epistemological contextualism avoids both "an 'anything goes' relativism" and a blithe assurance of conceptual access to ultimate truths.[52] Nonetheless, in Siderits's analogy of the *gop!*s, these aspects of JnanasrTmitra's epistemology fade from concern. The *gop!*s replace their false conventional beliefs in Krsna and enduring selves with presumably better, true conventional beliefs in Yogacara-Sautrantika reductionism. These true conventional beliefs are presumably "better" in relation to Western scientific true ultimate beliefs. But Siderits does not suggest that Western scientific beliefs are contextually ultimate. His confidence that *gop!*s who conditionally adopted Yogacara-Sautrantika reductionism could arrive at the same truth claims as modern biochemists rather suggests that biochemistry's conventional truths are ahistorical—universal and ultimate—and not contextual.

Other members of the Cowherds construct similar asymmetries between the West and non-West within examples they use to explicate their interpretations of *lokasamvrtisatya.* For instance, to show that Madhyamaka Buddhist ethical practices require skillful cognition of conventional truths, Bronwyn Finnigan and Koji Tanaka picture three persons—Alice, Bill, and Charlie—encountering, or failing to encounter, a begging child. Their illustration borrows from fellow Cowherd Garfield's use of the three characters elsewhere in *Moonshadows.* Garfield argues that, at least for Buddhists such as CandrakTrti and Tsongkhapa, *lokasamvrtisatya* cannot be merely "illusory" or "obscurational truth"—a category of mistaken judgment to be jettisoned in favor of "real" truth—for, if *lokasamvrtisatya* were merely obscurational, then persons who failed to cognize conventional realities would be the most epistemologically skilled. But Garfield notes, as CandrakTrti stresses in his *Prasannapada, lokasamvrti* realities include objects of analysis such as dependent origination and the five aggregates. CandrakTrti and Tsongkhapa therefore cannot and do not hold that persons who do not cognize conventional realities are the most epistemologically skilled. A grasp of ultimately illusory mundane truths and realities must be associated within their philosophies with some kind of epistemic warrant. To illustrate his point, Garfield introduces Alice, Bill, and Charlie.

In Garfield's initial analogy, these characters encounter, or fail to encounter, a mirage while driving in the desert. If *lokasamvrtisatya* were merely obscurational "truth," then the most epistemologically skillful person would be Charlie, who fails to see the illusion because he wears polarizing sunglasses.[53] But because Tsongkhapa's and CandrakTrti's philosophies require skillful practitioners to see mundane conventional realities and recognize their veiled, obscure nature, Alice is the most epistemologically adept of the three. Whereas Bill sees the mirage and mistakes it for water, Alice sees the mirage and recognizes it as a mirage. "Conventional truth," Garfield writes, "is ... not to truth as blunderbusses are to buses or as fake guns are to real guns but

[52] Ibid.

[53] The Cowherds 2011, p. 179.

rather is simply one kind of truth."[54] Seeing well in mundane contexts requires seeing conventional realities and seeing how they are problematic.

Finnigan and Tanaka extend Garfield's analogy to support the similarly textbased point that Madhyamaka theories of ethical development demand skillful cognition of ultimately empty realities. Rather than driving in the desert, Alice, Bill, and Charlie now walk down a street where a child begs for money. They have committed themselves to Madhyamaka Buddhist ethical practices, and "all accept the precept of 'giving' and have made a vow to exercise generosity."[55] As before, Charlie fails to see the child. His is a failure, Finnigan and Tanaka contend, not only of epistemological skill but also of ethical commitment. Cognition of conventional realities "is central, not incidental, to the exercise of a bodhisattva's virtues," they state. "One who actively holds a value is not only committed to acting on it, but is also perceptually sensitive to aspects of situations that are relevant to this value and may call for its expression."[56] To support this contention, Finnigan and Tanaka point to conceptual connections between *karuna* (compassion) and *bodhicitta* in CandrakTrti's and Santideva's texts. For CandrakTrti, they note, great compassion *(mahakaruna)* is grounded in the skillful perception of conventional realities, including "an apprehension of emptiness" and "the interdependence of all sentient beings."[57] Similarly, they observe, Santideva "distinguishes aspirational from engaged *bodhicitta*" by stating that the latter is "a spontaneous virtuous engagement mediated by a direct apprehension of emptiness and dependent origination" while the former is motivated by sentiment.[58]

Although Charlie is committed to a precept of generosity, his ethical commitment is inadequately mediated by direct apprehension of these conventional realities. Conversely, Bill and Alice do see the begging child and consequently attempt to respond compassionately to the child's situation. Bill, it turns out, is in the aspirational stage of *bodhicitta* whereas Alice is in the more ethically advanced engaged stage; therefore, his response falls ethically and epistemologically short while hers is meant to exemplify CandrakTrti's and Santideva's conceptions of *mahakaruna* and *bodhicitta.*

The rhetorical structure of Finnigan and Tanaka's analogy repeats elements of our schema. First, the images they use to illustrate Alice's, Bill's, and Charlie's subjective positions repeat a pattern of representing the other "through the concrete experience of the intellectual, the one who diagnoses the episteme."[59] Alice, Bill, and Charlie are assumed to have "access to more wealth."[60] Their experiences of and responses to the begging child would differ if, rather than residing on "the exploiter's side of the international division of labor," they were subaltern and perhaps held alms bowls of

[54] Ibid., p. 30.
[55] Ibid., p. 37.
[56] Ibid., p. 228.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., p. 229.
[59] Spivak 1988, p. 275.
[60] The Cowherds 2011, p. 230.

their own. These supposedly generic characters are therefore positioned in ways that "ordinary workers" are imagined in the global North. Further, Finnigan and Tanaka differentiate Alice's ethical progress from Bill's ethical underdevelopment in ways that assume that "light side" concepts and norms are generally re-presentative. "Bill responds *affectively,*" Finnigan and Tanaka write:

> He *feels* bad for the child and *feels* guilty for having access to more wealth; he is thereby subtly *attached* to the child, *averse* to the child's suffering, and *averse* to his own feelings of guilt Motivated by his sympathy and guilt, Bill gives some coins directly to the child (who passes the money on to the pimp who manages him and a few hundred other beggars). Bill immediately feels much better ...[61]

Alice, conversely, responds to the child in a way that is supposed to emerge from "a direct apprehension of emptiness and dependent origination," as CandrakTrti and Santideva conceive of these conventional realities. However, Finnigan and Tanaka evaluate her response, not through analyses of conceptions of 'emptiness' and 'dependent origination' in CandrakTrti's and Santideva's texts, but as follows:

> Alice, with more *upaya* and less attachment, sees a social problem. After some kind words to the child, she gets involved with a charitable organization that helps to eliminate the industry of child begging. Her actions have a much more positive effect and occupy much more of her time and attention. She never feels satisfied with the results but continues to strive. This marks the difference between aspirational *bodhicitta* and engaged *bodhicitta,* as well as the difference between acting from sympathy and acting from *karuna.*[62]

While the work of charitable organizations that seek to eliminate child begging may sometimes be compassionate and laudable, it remains unclear how Alice's perception of the begging child as "a social problem" could arise from direct apprehension of *sunyata* or *pratltyasamutpada,* as CandrakTrti and Santideva understand these conventional realities. As the Cowherds acknowledge, CandrakTrti's notion of emptiness *(sunyata)* prompts him to endorse an ethical and epistemological maxim of not arguing with the world *(loka).*[63] Yet Finnigan and Tanaka do not consider whether becoming "involved with a charitable organization that helps to eliminate the industry of child begging" would be an instance either of arguing with the world or of spontaneous virtuous engagement arising from "a direct apprehension of emptiness and dependent origination." Instead, they overlook considerations that could lead CandrakTrti to conclude

[61] Ibid.; italics in original.
[62] Ibid.
[63] See, e.g., The Cowherds 2011, p. 151.

that middle-class charitable efforts to eliminate begging are forms of "arguing with the world." The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act of 1959 partially undergirds administrative conceptions of "begging" in modern India[64] and defines "a beggar" as someone "having no visible means of subsistence, and wandering about or remaining in any public place in such condition or manner, as makes it likely that the person doing so exists by soliciting or receiving alms."[65] This genealogically modern and colonial definition would criminalize the Buddha if read literally. Further, modern responses motivated by such conceptions have frequently been complicit in the criminalization of people who are economically and militarily subjugated.[66] Consequently, there are reasons to suspect that CandrakTrti might not view Alice's middle-class charitable activities as an obvious exemplification of *mahakaruna.*

Further, the direct apprehension of *pratltyasamutpada* (dependent origination) in Santideva's philosophy requires apprehension of the non-difference of sufferings of all sentient beings. Alice's efforts to direct modern power apparatuses against child begging rings would therefore need to exhibit equal concern for the sufferings of those whom such activities would criminalize, if they were to exemplify Santideva's theory of engaged *bodhicitta.* Because middle-class charitable activities to eliminate begging in Southern centers have rarely exhibited such concern for the subaltern, there are reasons to suspect that Santideva might not view Alice's middle-class charitable activities as an obvious exemplification of his theory of engaged *bodhicitta.* Alice's response can be assumed to exemplify CandrakTrti's and Santideva's ethics only if one assumes the natural alignment of these philosophers with the sovereign subject of global capital and their equal inattention, presumably like Charlie, to the international division of labor that sustains this conventional falsehood. The particularities of the other fade from concern; through overtly benevolent efforts to represent CandrakTrti's and Santideva's philosophies, concrete experiences and norms particular to global capitalism's sovereign subject are again made to appear naturally and timelessly authoritative.

III

Several analyses in *Moonshadows* of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist conceptions of *lokasamvrtisatya* hinge on a question: Can Madhyamaka Buddhists critique *any* conventional beliefs and realities, such as, for example, the mundane reality of child begging rings in some cities or the belief held by some pimps today that coercing children to beg on streets facilitates their happiness? Citing CandrakTrti's statement that he does not argue with the world, that he accepts the existence of "what is agreed upon *(sammata)* in the world to exist" and the non-existence of "what is agreed upon in the world to be non-existent," Tom Tillemans asks:

[64] Goel 2010, p. 23.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Cf. Long 2014.

> But what does *that* mean, and what does it imply? It might well seem to imply an extreme conservatism that nothing the world ever endorsed could be criticized or rejected and that, on the conventional [level] at least, a Madhyamika's principal epistemic task was just to passively acquiesce and duplicate ... Let's adopt a shorthand for this version of conventional truth and characterize it and views like it as the "dismal slough." Most of us would agree that the potential flattening of the normative roles of truth and knowledge that such duplication brings is indeed quite dismal.[67]

The "dismal slough," Tillemans continues, would reduce standards of worldly knowledge to an "easy-easy truth, or dumbed-down conventional truth" that would make "technical subjects like logic, linguistics, and economics not to mention physical science ... plainly ... impossible."[68] If Madhyamaka Buddhists advocated "such an anti-intellectual and anti-theoretical view,"[69] then "most of us would agree" that their philosophies of conventional truth were wretched.[70] Not arguing with the world would amount either to refusing to challenge anything that anyone believes or does, or to refusing to contest anything that a community, or "sufficiently widespread" social network, customarily believes or does.[71] Yet, at least some mundane beliefs and circumstances must be subject to criticism; philosophies without some capacity for critique would hardly be philosophical.

Tillemans further contends that textual evidence indicates that the "typical Prasangika's" understanding of CandrakTrti's claim comes perilously close to such an absurd thesis. "For many (cf., e.g., Jayananda, Taktsang Lotsawa, Patsab Nyimadrak), the CandrakTrtian position is interpreted as being that there are no epistemic instruments *(pramana)* and that conventional truth is itself just a series of erroneous inventions."[72] The "typical Prasangika," he explains, refuses to argue with the world because all conventional judgments are obscurational from the perspective of ultimate reality. "Worldly things are taken by the Prasangika as completely unable to withstand analysis (= erroneous), and *therefore* the Prasangika just 'reads off the surface' and adopts worldly descriptions."[73] The "typical Prasangika's" understanding of CandrakTrti's position, according to Tillemans, is that because all mundane truths and realities are obscurational, no one should argue against what is recognized in the world to exist or for what is recognized in the world to not exist. To endorse some over others would be beside the point. Reductionist styles of critique are wasted effort, because the "truths" of biochemistry are ultimately as deluded as Krsna's "truths" about unmanifest selves. And modern middle-class charitable efforts to eliminate child

[67] The Cowherds 2011, p. 152.
[68] Ibid., p. 161.
[69] Ibid., p. 156.
[70] Ibid., p. 152.
[71] Ibid., p. 155.
[72] Ibid., p. 157.
[73] Ibid.; italics in original.

begging are misguided, because such efforts are ultimately as deluded as the work of adults pimping children to beg on streets. "*It looks like all sophisticated explanation is lumped together and that sophistication is itself to be ruled out,*" Tillemans stresses.[74]

Let us observe that in this analysis Madhyamaka theories of *lokasamvrtisatya* appear rather like the subaltern—primitive, dangerous, and ridiculous. This initial subaltern status then prompts other Cowherds to try to redeem Madhyamaka philosophies by relating them to philosophies that are assumed to re-present universal philosophical value. Intercultural theoretical exchanges are of course not in themselves colonially problematic, because ideas have been exchanged across contexts long before modernity and the coloniality of power. Still, within this comparative method of interpreting non-Western philosophies, one region's resources are assumed by default to be intelligible and sophisticated, while resources that originate from other regions, such as Madhyamaka conceptions of *lokasamvrtisatya,* are assumed by default to be subaltern. When many of the most prominent scholars in a field schematically position an economically and culturally hegemonic discourse in the role of developed redeemer, while schematically positioning economically and culturally subjugated discourses as *prima facie* underdeveloped and in need of redemption, and do so, further, along a racialized and gendered axis that facilitated—and facilitates—colonial domination, then one might reasonably suspect that coloniality and modernity condition the field.

The initial status of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophy as subaltern ("dismal") in parts of *Moonshadows* is discursively constructed, for as Garfield's analysis shows, and Tillemans partly acknowledges, textual passages show that CandrakTrti did not hold the dismal, anti-philosophical view that either (a) within mundane contexts all cognitions are on a par, or (b) within mundane contexts communally dominant beliefs and practices should never be criticized. Tillemans points to CandrakTrti's commentary on the first four chapters of Aryadeva's *Catuhsataka,* which identifies four illusions that cannot withstand analysis but that nonetheless captivate people in the world: "thinking that transitory life is permanent, what is actually painful is pleasurable, what is dirty is clean, and what is selfless has a self."[75] Tillemans also cites passages demonstrating that CandrakTrti "does allow for correction of obviously wrong beliefs and attitudes that depend on gross misapplications of well-known epistemic standards."[76] He cites the twenty-fifth *sutra* of the sixth chapter of the *Madhyamakavatara,* in which CandrakTrti claims that ultimately illusory objects that are grasped by unimpaired mental and sensory faculties are conventionally real, while ultimately illusory objects that are grasped by impaired mental and sensory cognitive processes are conventionally unreal.[77] Therefore, textual passages clearly show that CandrakTrti did not hold that all conventional cognitions are on a par.

[74] Ibid., p. 160; italics in original.
[75] Ibid., p. 160 n. 16.
[76] Ibid., p. 160.
[77] Ibid., p. 160 n. 17.

Tillemans nonetheless cautions that these resources are too rudimentary to avoid the dismal slough (i.e., subalternity). "In spite of these rudimentary mechanisms for reform," he writes, "it looks like, for [CandrakTrti], conventional truth is still very much a *dumbed-down truth.* Consistency with attitudes and mere diagnoses of obviously faulty sense organs do not take a typical Prasangika very far in allowing for sophisticated theoretical ideas."[78] Indo-Tibetan Buddhists claim to have mechanisms available to differentiate erroneous cognition from knowledge in the conventional realm, but Tillemans judges these resources to be too underdeveloped to do the work that global philosophy requires.

Textual analyses by Garfield and fellow Cowherd Sonam Thakchoe also show that these Indo-Tibetan Buddhists did not hold the dismal view that, within mundane contexts, communally dominant beliefs and practices should never be criticized. As Thakchoe notes, CandrakTrti employs three criteria in his *Prasannapada* XXIV to distinguish objects of cognition that are *loka* (conventionally real) from those that are *aloka* (conventionally unreal). Cognitions of objects that are conventionally real must be: (1) reflexive or non-analytic *(avicara)*, (2) generated through the five aggregates, and (3) non-deceptive within mundane contexts.[79] Citing Tsongkhapa's commentary on Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika,* Garfield writes:

> Truth, for CandrakTrti and Tsongkhapa must contrast with falsehood. And the standard for the truth of a judgment regarding conventional truth is that it is vouchsafed by the authority of conventional epistemic instruments and cannot be undermined by those instruments This is turn requires a distinction between sound and impaired conventional faculties.[80]

Garfield quotes a lengthy passage from Tsongkhapa's commentary that is worth reviewing nearly in its entirety:

> The internal impairments of the sense faculties are such things as cataracts, jaundice, and such things as hallucinogenic drugs one has consumed. The external impairments of the sense faculties are such things as mirrors, the echoing of sounds in a cave, and the rays of the autumn sun falling on such things as white sand. Even without the internal impairments, these can become the causes of grasping of [such] things as mirages, reflections and echoes as water, etc.
>
> The impairments of the mental faculty are ... such things as erroneous philosophical views, fallacious arguments and sleep ... Taking conventional objects grasped by such unimpaired and impaired cognitive faculties to be real or unreal, respectively, merely conforms to ordinary cognitive practice.

[78] Ibid., pp. 160–161; italics in original.
[79] Ibid., pp. 42–44.
[80] Ibid., p. 34.

> This is because they actually exist as they appear or do not, according to whether or not they are undermined by ordinary cognition.[81]

As with philosophers working within other classical South Asian philosophical text traditions, such as Nyaya and Advaita, Tsongkhapa and CandrakTrti appear to appeal in these passages to a standard of nonsublatability as a component of criteria used to distinguish conventionally real *artha*s from conventionally unreal ones. Cognitions of conventionally unreal objects, such as dream chariots and oasis hallucinations, may be involuntarily replaced by subsequent reflexive, naturally arising cognitions, whereas cognitions of conventionally real, ultimately illusory objects, such as cows and persons, cannot. For example, if one were to arrive at the apparent location of an oasis that was a mirage, perception of barren sand would ordinarily displace one's cognition of "oasis," despite any contrary wishes or rationalizations. But if one were to arrive at the location of an oasis that was conventionally real, cognitions arising through the five aggregates would not non-analytically sublate one's initial cognition. For CandrakTrti and Tsongkhapa, Garfield writes, a criterion of nonsublatability that is vouchsafed by the ordinary functioning of the five aggregates "is *constitutive* of conventional truth. It entails that any judgment about truth is in principle revisable but that, *to be true* is to endure through revision."[82]

Even people who seem ridiculous and backward from modern, global capitalist perspectives ("even cowherds and women!") recognize that this impermanent world seems to be populated with enduring objects such as cows and trees, that painful affections, such as love of parents and children, seem pleasurable, that dirty phenomena, such as feces-filled bodies, seem clean, and that selfless phenomena— temporary, dependently arising experiences—seem to be associated with selves. Tsongkapa's and CandrakTrti's texts accordingly indicate that the world's "agreement" or "acknowledgment" *(sammata)* that certain *artha*s exist occurs *only if* specific criteria, including nonsublatability, are met. Conversely, the texts do not appear to appeal to communally dominant beliefs or practices to establish "what is agreed upon in the world to exist" or "what is agreed upon in the world to be non-existent." The texts therefore do not advance the subaltern thesis that either all conventional cognitions are on a par or that communally dominant beliefs and practices should never be criticized. Elements of *Moonshadows* discursively construct the subaltern status of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophies and do so in ways that the decolonial schema predicts.

At the conventional level, CandrakTrti and Tsongkhapa recognize criteria of truth that are neither isomorphic with nor epistemologically distant from Nyaya *pramana* theories. It could be that, compared to the Naiyayikas, Madhyamaka philosophers such as CandrakTrti and Tsongkhapa place less emphasis on positively warranting conventional truths than on avoiding false conventionals. Conventionally false cognitions appear to be those that can be undermined by the ordinary, reflexive functioning

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., p. 35; italics in original.

of the five aggregates, while conventionally true, ultimately false, cognitions appear to be those that can be undermined only through analysis and praxis (i.e., the Noble Eightfold Path). Regardless, if the "typical Prasangika's" theories of *lokasamvrtisatya* offer only "rudimentary mechanisms for reform" and advocate "a *dumbed-down truth*" that does not go "very far in allowing for sophisticated theoretical ideas," as Tillemans suggests, then one could just as well say the same of all classical South Asian *pramana* philosophies (or all classical non-Western philosophies!), an implication that Siderits helps to make explicit by observing that Nyaya *pramanavadin*s, too, would fail to mimic Nestle's production of low butterfat treats that allegedly reduce the suffering of heart disease.[83] In his analysis, both Madhyamaka philosophers and the Naiyayikas espouse rudimentary epistemologies that cannot replicate the insights of the subject of global capital. "Nyaya lacks the resources to account for epistemic improvement of the sort we are interested in," he states.[84]

Other Cowherds situate this axis between the subaltern and the global differently, for example by contending that Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophies threaten to succumb to the dismal slough (i.e., subalternity) because they do not adequately explain how conventional truths can be positively warranted.[85] In any case, a colonially problematic methodology adopted by these distinguished comparative philosophers works first by asking assumed "universal" questions or imposing assumed "universal" criteria that are drawn from Europe's provincial, not universal philosophical history. Because these criteria or questions are assumed by default to be universal, and because the province that grounds the norms of these comparative philosophers is invariably the racially demarcated "West," this comparative methodology reconstitutes an axis that positions non-Western philosophies as subaltern and Western philosophies as global.

Scholars who employ this methodology then *may* determine whether existent Western forms could make non-Western concepts sensible. In several chapters of *Moonshadows,* Madhyamaka philosophies are accordingly made intelligible, not primarily through their particularities, but through relation to Western categories and concepts that are assumed to be the equivalent to global philosophy. Jan Westerhoff, for example, draws from game-theoretic philosophies of language derived from David Lewis to show how Indo-Tibetan Buddhists might escape the dismal slough even though they hold that truth in the conventional, linguistic realm is ultimately erroneous.[86] While Westerhoff acknowledges that his analysis is not grounded in the particularities of Madhyamaka texts, he states that his primary aim is not to rationally reconstruct, but to "enhance" classical Buddhist philosophies:

> The aim is not to come up with a rational reconstruction of an argument in a particular passage or text (building a working model of an ancient

[83] Ibid., pp. 174–175.
[84] Ibid., p. 175.
[85] Cf. The Cowherds 2011, pp. 180–188.
[86] Ibid., p. 193.

> device), but to address a problem which we do not find discussed in great detail in Madhyamaka texts (building a new piece of machinery to enhance an ancient device).[87]

Siderits proposes that Madhyamaka philosophers could escape the dismal slough, but only by abandoning their resistance to the notion that things have intrinsic natures. As we have seen, he advises Madhyamaka philosophers to adopt a form of epistemic contextualism in which certain objects (specifically, objects of modern biochemistry) are provisionally taken to have intrinsic natures. In another contribution, Finnigan and Tanaka draw on Rudolph Carnap's distinction between internal and external questions to offer a kind of epistemological contextualism that would enable Madhyamaka Buddhists to reform conventional truths within linguistic communities using resources that Carnap provides.[88] Elsewhere in *Moonshadows,* Georges Dreyfus tries to make sense of Patsab Nyimadrak's philosophy by using Sextus Empiricus's Pyrrhonian skepticism to clarify topics that Patsab himself does not address,[89] and then aligning Patsab with philosophies of a sort advocated by Richard Rorty. "The skeptic should remain content to suspend judgment and follow *sensus communis,* using its resources without attempting to go beyond how things appear to her," he writes. "It is a similarly skeptical approach that Patsab seems to recommend to his fellow Madhyamikas."[90]

Each of these comparative philosophical interpretations of *lokasamvrtisatya* appears to repeat a pattern of imposing a global/subaltern axis that situates nonWestern philosophies as *prima facie* subaltern and the West as globally representative, and then valuing non-Western philosophies relatively, according to their abilities to approximate specific Western modes of philosophizing that are imagined to re-present global philosophy. Bearish interpreters shuttle Madhyamaka philosophies toward subalternity, while more bullish interpreters shuttle them closer to conformity with their Western representatives. In neither case, when engaged through this cross-cultural methodology, which we might call "the Charlie approach," is it clear that non-Western philosophies or philosophers can speak.

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Is *Moonshadows* Lunacy?: The Cowherds Respond

The Cowherds

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Is Moonshadows Lunacy? The Cowherds Respond

The Cowherds

We thank Amy Donahue for her attention to our work, and we thank the editors of *Philosophy East and West* for an opportunity to reply. We confess that we were not sure whether to reply. On the one hand we believe that her critique is so misguided that it needs no reply; on the other hand, we were worried that others might take our silence as conceding her point. On reflection, we decided that the larger issue she raises is important enough to restate our position on it: cross-cultural philosophy demands respect for our interlocutors; respect demands serious philosophical engagement, not reflexive deference.

We agree with Donahue that those who are trained in the current techniques of their discipline but use those techniques to study elements of a culture that is far from them in space or time must be careful not to objectify illegitimately the subject of their investigations. Donahue, however, appears not to have grasped the extent to which the Cowherds' enterprise is precisely the way to avoid doing this. We engage philologically and philosophically with the Madhyamaka tradition not as curators or as acolytes but as interlocutors. That is how to respect, and not to objectify, one's conversational partner. The most egregious Orientalism is that which regards those who pursue philosophy in different garb and in different idioms as so different from us that we have no right to take their views seriously or to engage in critical dialogue. We fear that that is what is represented in Donahue's critique. We begin by discussing some specific charges Donahue levels against us. We then turn to the larger irony: she is riding the horse she charges us with having stolen.

I. On Grasping the Snake

It is far from clear precisely what Donahue would have us do differently. One way in which projects of this sort sometimes go astray is by anachronistically imposing a problematic taken from the current philosophical conversation onto another context where it has no place. Hegel and Schopenhauer can be accused of doing this in their treatments of the Indian tradition, but not the Cowherds. Indeed our project runs in quite the opposite direction, taking its guidance from debates among actual Madhyamikas.

Madhyamikas, like other Buddhists, distinguish between what they call *conventional truth* and what they call *ultimate truth.* By *conventional truth* most (though perhaps not all) mean roughly what philosophers nowadays call *common sense* or the folk theory of the world. And by *ultimate truth* they mean what is left standing (if anything) after conventional truth has been subjected to rigorous philosophical analysis. Madhyamaka is distinctive in its (at least apparent) contention that *nothing* can stand up to rigorous philosophical analysis, so that no statements are ultimately true, that nothing exists ultimately.

In *Moonshadows,* we took this commitment to emptiness, and to a distinction that appears both to disparage conventional truth and to take it as the only truth there is, as a philosophical starting point. We explored some of the important canonical sources for these views, and investigated their consequences. The most obvious apparent consequence is that the only truths there can be are conventional truths, the commonsense beliefs that are largely taken for granted by most people most of the time. Donahue contends that some Cowherds exhibit neo-imperialist bias by presupposing a monolithic common sense, presumably that of some oppressor class to which we either belong or owe ideological allegiance—more on this below. But this is simply wrong: we made no assumptions whatsoever as to what constitutes common sense. For all we say it may be universal across times, cultures, and classes, or it may vary widely over all these indices and others as well. There are of course famous instances of variability, like "The earth is flat," that may have been accepted by most people at one time but are widely rejected today. Indeed, in some of our chapters, we specifically wonder about what its domain ought to be, given Madhyamaka commitments, and we consider the consequences of various views. This criticism simply reflects her misreading of our text, and of its purpose—a snake incorrectly grasped.

We also ask whether analysis can play any role in determining what we should believe. What counsel does Madhyamaka offer when analysis shows that some widely held belief that is for the most part unreflectively accepted cannot be true? Should one lapse into silence—be it of the skeptical, the quietist, or the mystical variety—or should one instead try to rectify the situation? And if the latter, is the upshot to be blanket rejection of the folk belief in question, or should some effort be made to show how the conflicting beliefs can be reconciled? The second question is one that Madhyamikas debated vociferously. Our engagement with this question does not objectify or condescend to that debate; it *continues* that debate. If analysis shows

that the chariot and its parts cannot be equally real, then one might simply say that the widespread view that they are is false, or one might instead try to show how the view that both are real might prove useful under ordinary circumstances and so be reconcilable with a deeper truth that is revealed by analysis.

Madhyamikas like Bhaviveka, CandrakTrti, Santaraksita, and KamalasTla took divergent positions regarding how to understand the senses in which ordinary views (however widespread or refined) might be true and false, and we worked to understand and to advance those debates. Bhaviveka's position, for instance, was of course not held out of reverence for the reductive methodologies of the modern sciences, and we never suggest as much. He was convinced instead that reductive analysis is an essential tool in the core Buddhist project of overcoming the 'I' sense. When, for instance, Siderits argues that the ability to explain the efficacy of scientific medicine is a reason to think Bhaviveka was right, he is not attributing to Bhaviveka any views about modern science; nor is he asserting that the standpoint of modern science is somehow an epistemically privileged position; instead, he is offering an additional reason a modern Buddhist might have for taking Bhaviveka's position seriously. (Most people today do, after all, believe that children should be vaccinated against polio, and it might be nice to be able to account for this.) This is what it is to *engage with,* rather than to *curate,* classical debates, whether they be Greek, Chinese, or Indian.

When Tillemans and other Cowherds worry, on one plausible interpretation of his views, that CandrakTrti might lead us into a "dismal slough" of relativism, they are working with KamalasTla to find the best way to understand what has become known as the Prasangika-Svatantrika debate (a debate, we might add, thematized not by Indians but by Tibetans—were they Orientalist imperialists when they addressed this material?). When Dreyfus and Garfield explain Prasangika and certain Tibetan interpreters of that Indian view by bringing in Sextus Empiricus, they are using an example that will be familiar to many readers in order to illustrate the view of Patsab; this is a hermeneutic trope common to the Indian *sastra* literature.

Donahue claims that all of this amounts to a valorization of current Western views over the Buddhist. This charge is not only undefended, it is false. In each of these cases the issues being addressed derive directly from Madhyamaka literature. The language and some of the analytical tools are modern and Western, but there is nothing wrong with that. We are contemporary philosophers who read the Indian and Tibetan texts with care. We believe that Donahue has not read our own text with the same care.

Donahue discusses at some length Finnigan and Tanaka's example of the adventures of Alice, Bill, and Charlie on the bodhisattva path. She asks whether their illustrative suggestion that Alice's response to the child beggar—working with a social service organization striving to eliminate the child begging industry—exhibits more of the bodhisattva's virtues than Bill's and Charlie's responses. Donahue characterizes the example of Alice as engaging in "middle class charitable activities" and "positioned in ways that 'ordinary workers' are imagined in the global North." She then accuses Finnigan and Tanaka of aligning with "the sovereign subject of global capital" and claims

that, through this example, "concrete experiences and norms particular to global capitalism's sovereign subject are again made to appear naturally and timelessly authoritative."

Donahue's discussion of this example, however, misses the point of its role in the Cowherds' enterprise. This example is offered to illustrate a schematic point: that a change in phenomenology might be a way to conceive of ethical development *if,* for reasons offered in the first half of the chapter, one grants the values articulated by such Madhyamaka thinkers as Santideva and eschews the project of providing justification. As Finnigan and Tanaka explicitly state, "variety in situations will often call for variety of response; placing bread in a child's hand may be appropriate in some circumstances but not others" (p. 230). To ignore this acknowledgment of the complexities involved in specific situations, and to assume uncharitably that Alice will unwittingly impose the values of global capital, is simply to beg the question.

II. What Horse Are You Riding?

Donahue's critique is not only deeply misguided in its reading of *Moonshadows,* it is terribly ironic. The Cowherds' project is motivated by great respect for the Madhyamaka tradition. It seems to us that one good way to show respect is by taking Madhyamaka seriously as philosophy. And what would be a better way of doing this than that of continuing the philosophical dialogue? Donahue seems especially put out when Cowherds argue against positions held by CandrakTrti and Tsongkhapa. Has she somehow discerned that Bhaviveka and Santaraksita are not Madhyamikas? And is the only way for scholars to show respect for the Madhyamaka tradition to circumambulate the museum display containing their relics? That is not how Indian or Tibetan philosophers showed respect for one another. They commented upon and argued with one another.

The irony is only compounded when she avers that the norms guiding the Cowherds derive from a "racially demarcated 'West.'" This is somewhat insulting to certain Cowherds. One is Tibetan, and another Japanese. Donahue seems to adopt an Archimedean ethnic/cultural fulcrum from which she ascribes a "racially demarcated Western" point of view to all of us. We doubt that there can be such a fulcrum. We also note that the postcolonial critical framework she adopts, not to mention her own professional position, is a product of this same apparently problematic Western discourse. She is not criticizing us from medieval Nalanda but from twenty-first-century Georgia.

One can argue endlessly about who is an "authentic" Madhyamika, about who gets to read, to represent, or to engage with Indian and Tibetan texts. That question not only does not get one very far, but reinscribes precisely the Orientalist boundaries we seek to erase, but which Donahue takes for granted, even while accusing us of adopting that objectionable standpoint. We are well aware that the answers we propose or the

analyses we suggest in *Moonshadows* may be wrong, and we welcome critiques of our project, be they philosophical or philological. But the use of facile rhetorical analysis and willful misreading to charge us with an imperialist political agenda does not strike us as criticism worth taking seriously.

Reply to the Cowherds: Serious Philosophical Engagement with and for Whom?

Amy Donahue

In ordinary philosophical contexts, it is customary to abide by due processes. For example, we engage the particularities of arguments rather than contenting ourselves with cursory approximations of claims and positions. We reject conclusions by demonstrating that specific premises are suspect or that these premises do not offer valid support. We do not dismiss arguments against us on the basis of sentiment or through *tu quoque* arguments and other fallacies of diversion.

In practice, however, these due processes do not extend equally to all in our community. My point is not that we occasionally fall short of our ideals and norms, which is to be expected. Rather, I mean that explicitly denying these due processes to certain theories and theorists, and doing so in ways that reinforce our field's narrow theoretical and demographic contours, is acceptable practice in much of our discipline (e.g., during peer review processes, on tenure-and-promotion and hiring committees, etc.). Swaths of philosophical scholarship are treated as marginal, and when obliged to engage arguments and persons situated in these *marginal* philosophical positions, it is permissible and even customary to refuse them due processes that prevail in *ordinary* philosophical contexts. When addressing them, we can make rough generalizations about their theses without engaging the particularities of their claims. We can reject their scholarship out of hand as "facile" or not worth "serious" consideration. We suffer no censure if we refuse to examine the premises or validity of their arguments. We can openly employ fallacious *tu quoque* arguments against them while still appearing to ourselves and others as models of *ordinary* philosophical seriousness and rigor! A *de facto* asymmetry exists between *ordinary* and *marginal* philosophical contexts, between contexts in which due processes apply and contexts in which due processes are denied, and it is partially through this asymmetry or "division of labor" that our field reinforces and preserves the privilege of a narrow subset of persons and philosophical possibilities. At its best, cross-cultural philosophy swims against such tendencies.

The Cowherds speak of my "point" and "the larger issue" I raise. But they do not engage the arguments of Spivak, Quijano, or Lugones that serve as the basis of my critique. In lieu of such engagement, they portray my point and the larger issue I raise

in vague and generic terms, while implying that arguments developed by two senior figures in Latin American philosophy and a critical theorist famed for rigor are facile and not worth serious consideration. They nonetheless claim to exemplify "serious philosophical engagement."

I do not mean these observations to be combative. Like many in our field of cross-cultural philosophy, the Cowherds lack familiarity with postcolonial and decolonial theories. Exposure to the unfamiliar can be disorienting. Reflexes sometimes emerge to dismiss the unfamiliar or to subsume it beneath familiar categories. However, such reflexes can also reinforce exclusions and asymmetries in our field. "Serious philosophical engagement" perhaps requires not only that we avoid reflexive deference, but also that we yoke reflexes of dismissal and mischaracterization that sustain a division between *ordinary* and *marginal* contexts in our discipline. Given the history of marginalization of Asian philosophers and philosophies in the academy, I would think such a project would interest some Cowherds.

I accordingly take this opportunity, which I am extremely grateful to the editors of *Philosophy East and West* for providing, to restate the main points of my comment and the larger issues it intends to raise. I then briefly discuss what I believe "serious philosophical engagement" in cross-cultural scholarship requires, and the extent to which habits of reflexive dismissal and of subsuming the unfamiliar beneath familiar categories can and should be corrected. Finally, I address what the Cowherds could do differently.

Spivak's critique of "the sovereign subject of global capital" is also a critique of the subject of modern common sense philosophies (or "the folk theory of the world," to use Lakoff's phrase). These philosophies assume that "ordinary" subjectivities in a domain serve as standards of sense or truth in that domain. The Cowherds assert that Madhyamaka philosophies of conventional truth are "roughly" equivalent to "what philosophers nowadays call *common sense* or the folk theory of the world." A main point of my comment was to contest this mischaracterization of Madhyamaka philosophies and to problematize one comparative philosophical methodology that helps to sustain it.

Spivak argues that the subject of modern common sense philosophies (as well as other modern and "postmodern" philosophies), cannot exist without equivocating between senses of "represent," no matter whether it is posited by persons with sincere and benevolent intentions, regardless of the norms, categories, or experiences these theorists associate with this subject, and regardless of the ethnicities or nationalities of these theorists. Her point is conceptual and ought to be tracked and critiqued conceptually.

Such philosophies, she contends, must claim to speak for, or represent *(vertreten),* everyone in a domain, including those who are marginalized (they must include "even cowherds and women"). Yet for such philosophies to work, a subset of persons needs to appear to embody, or re-present *(darstellen),* this abstract subjectivity. Because members of this subset are particular and not abstract, they cannot appear as exemplars of

ordinary, shared subjectivity without also differentiating others from this subjectivity, including others on whose behalf they claim to speak (they must exclude *marginal* persons such as "cowherds and women"). Due processes associated with "ordinary" subjectivity, Spivak contends, therefore cannot be operative throughout a domain; rather, they must be explicitly denied to "others" in that domain. For it is only through such habits of reflexive dismissal that a subset of particular, not abstract subjectivities can appear to exemplify abstract, "ordinary" subjectivity. If her argument is sound, then the subject of common sense philosophies functions through a contradiction: it must include "cowherds and women" and it must exclude "cowherds and women." These philosophies can therefore seem sensible only insofar as theorists, like poor Charlie, fail to critically attend to habits of reflexive dismissal that sustain asymmetries of due process between "ordinary" subjects and "the subaltern," a class of "others" who are utterly denied due processes and who may constitute a majority in a domain.

This element of Spivak's overall argument should not seem flippant or facile. A variety of scholarly work associates habits of reflexive dismissal with the subject of modern publics and common sense. Quijano and Lugones provide independent support for this step of Spivak's argument and further show how, in contemporary contexts, these habits of reflexive dismissal tend to reinforce racial and gender hierarchies that are legacies of colonialism and modernity. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1986), Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992), Partha Chatterjee (1993), Judith Butler (1993), and Michael Warner (2002), to name a few prominent scholars I did not reference in my comment, also support this premise of Spivak's argument and do so through a variety of philosophical resources and historical archives. If their critiques are sound, then cross-cultural philosophical methodologies that superimpose the subject of modern common sense onto their readings of Madhyamaka philosophical texts will tend to reinforce exclusions of "others" and asymmetries between "the West" and "the nonWest" that are historically inextricable from modernity and coloniality. And indeed, as I demonstrate in the third section of my comment: (1) primary textual evidence does not support the Cowherds' claim that Madhyamaka philosophies of conventional truth are "roughly" equivalent to modern common sense philosophies, and (2) while several Cowherds are "seriously" concerned that some Madhyamaka philosophies of conventional truth lead to a "dismal slough" of relativism, they are not at all "seriously" concerned that Western common sense philosophies might also be flawed. Rather, these philosophies function in their analysis as intrinsic and ahistorical standards of sensibility. Their discussion, therefore, applies due processes asymmetrically to Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophies of conventional truth and modern Western philosophies of common sense.

I admit I have never previously been portrayed as a champion of deference, and I suspect that my teachers will find the charge hilarious. However, to point out these asymmetries between functions of the West and the non-West in some of the Cowherds' scholarship is not to call for reflexive deference. It is instead to call for less Eurocentrism in some Cowherds' ways of doing cross-cultural philosophy.

Spivak, it should be noted, rightly stresses that Western and non-Western elites (including academics in Georgia) are not subaltern, for we participate, however unequally, in due processes that negotiate boundaries of "shared" sense. However, in addition to reinforcing colonial distinctions between "ordinary" subjects and the subaltern, she argues, applications of common sense philosophies require a second asymmetry or axis of difference. The role of the subject of common sense philosophies is to function in a domain as an authoritative standard of sensibility (e.g., of "serious philosophical engagement"). Therefore, it works in its domain much as money functions in contexts of exchange. In these contexts, money appears to have value as an intrinsic property. The values of other commodities, conversely, are expressed not through their own characteristics, but through relation to particular forms of money (e.g., coins). Similarly, within modern domains of shared sense, the particularities of a subset that appears to embody, or re-present, shared, ordinary subjectivity appear to bear sense intrinsically, while others in the domain express sense, if they do, only extrinsically, not through their own particularities, but through relation to categories and judgments of the re-presentative subset. Due to the historical contexts of our contemporary scholarship, this second asymmetry also tends to reinforce and preserve racial and gender hierarchies that are legacies of colonialism and modernity.

If these arguments are sound, then modern common sense philosophies tend to reinforce two asymmetries between "the West" and "the non-West" when they are extended cross-culturally, and tend to do so even when applied by scholars whose intentions seem to themselves to be sincere, benevolent, and "serious." They tend either to reflexively dismiss certain elements of non-Western philosophies as nonsense (e.g., "dismal"), or to subsume certain elements of non-Western philosophies beneath Western categories that are assumed to be intrinsically sensible. The particularities of these appropriated but still marginal others become irrelevant, while the particularities of Western categories are reinforced and preserved as ahistorical standards of philosophical value.

As I seek to show in the second section of my comment, Siderits's and Finnigan and Tanaka's examples repeat these colonial tropes. In Siderits's example, the *gop!*s' epistemic advances are made sense of, not through their own particularities, but through relation to advances of modern biochemistry that are assumed to have inherent value. That polio vaccines are desirable is beside the point. What is at issue is an asymmetry in Siderits's argument between the logical forms of sensibility of modern biochemistry and Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophies. Particularities of modern biochemistry (low-fat dairy products) serve as the standard of sensibility, while IndoTibetan Buddhist philosophies express meaning, not through their particularities, but through relation to this standard. In Finnigan and Tanaka's use of Alice, Bill, and Charlie, we see the same asymmetry. Alice's efforts are assumed to be obviously sensible, while "engaged *bodhicitta*" and *"mahakaruna"* express their meanings, not through their particularities, but through relation to Alice. Unfortunately, the Cowherds do not address these asymmetries in their reply, besides asserting that a statement I make about them in

the third section of my comment is "undefended" and "false," as if the first section of my comment—not to mention my overall argument— did not constitute a defense.

The Cowherds also appear in the "On Grasping the Snake" section of their reply to assume that I lack basic familiarity with classical Buddhist debates about conventional and ultimate truth and rudimentary knowledge of the primary texts in which these debates occur. However, my argument is written not as an external critique of cross-cultural philosophy and philosophers, but as an internal critique of one colonially problematic method of doing comparative, cross-cultural, or intercultural philosophy. Like the Cowherds, I study the primary texts and secondary literature, and I engage in cross-cultural philosophical work. It would be appropriate for us to speak as colleagues.

I wrote my comment to alert the Cowherds and others in our field to certain practices that reinforce asymmetries between "the West" and "the non-West" in our scholarship, which they may not be cognizant of because they have not yet seriously engaged decolonial and postcolonial theories. My aim was not to be uncharitable (or to be bitten by *Moonshadows* as one can be bitten by misunderstanding 'emptiness'), but to alert some Cowherds, as well as others in our field, to some important problems with their scholarship. Serious cross-cultural philosophical engagement, I hope we can agree, should not and cannot trade on undisciplined habits of reflexively dismissing non-Western philosophies, of subsuming these philosophies beneath Western philosophical categories without regard for their particularities, or of assuming that Western philosophies are intrinsically and timelessly sensible. I hope that on reflection some Cowherds agree.

The Cowherds ask what they can do differently. A simple answer is that, first, they could attend to the details of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist primary textual references to conventional truth and consider whether these details might support theories of embodied and intersubjective understanding that differ from modern common sense philosophies. Second, they could avoid either dismissing elements of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist theories and concepts out of hand because they do not fit Western philosophical categories or concerns, or rendering these philosophies sensible primarily by subsuming them beneath Western philosophical categories. Garfield and Thakchoe appear to do a fine job of avoiding these errors in *Moonshadows.* And our colleagues who specialize in East Asian philosophies lately seem somewhat less careless about equating Confucian ethics "roughly" with Aristotelian virtue ethics than the Cowherds are about equating Madhyamaka philosophies of conventional truth "roughly" with modern common sense philosophies. So it is not as if these colonially problematic habits are fated in cross-cultural philosophical scholarship. Third, the Cowherds could work to avoid assuming that modern Western philosophies are unproblematic and timeless. To avoid this error, they could try harder to familiarize themselves with critical literature, such as postcolonial and decolonial theories, which they are presently inclined to ignore. The texts cited in this reply may offer an accessible yet rigorous entryway.

A more complicated answer would acknowledge that language cannot work without some habits of reflexive dismissal and of subsuming the unfamiliar beneath the familiar.

Further, it would note that legacies of colonialism and modernity ensure that asymmetries of due process between Western and non-Western philosophies will persist for some time at the institutional site of universities in the global North (and several in the global South). Finally, it would recognize that it would be naive to imagine that cross-cultural philosophy can ever be practiced in a utopian context, free of power relations.

This more complicated response demands a lengthier treatment than I can hope to provide here. However, it is a response I aim to develop in an upcoming manuscript using aspects of JnanasrTmitra's epistemic contextualism, classical South Asian philosophies of error, and Buddhist philosophies of conventional truth. In the meantime, the Cowherds may wish to read a recent issue of *Continental and Comparative Philosophy* dedicated to the theme "Decolonizing Comparative Methodologies" (Donahue and Kalyan 2015). In that issue, the Cowherds will find articles by fellow specialists in Asian, Latin American, Caribbean, and Eastern European philosophies who seek to address the larger issues raised in my comment, and whose contributions offer more complete responses to the Cowherds' question of what they can do differently.

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For the Cowherds: Coloniality and Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy

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