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Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla on the Advaita Vedānta Theory of a Self

James Duerlinger,
Binita Mehta,
and Siddharth Singh *

Introduction

Śāntarakṣita was an important 8th century CE Indian Buddhist philosopher¹ who introduced Indian Buddhism to Tibet and is believed to have created what the Tibetans call the Yogācāra-Svātantrika School of Madhyamaka Indian Buddhism, which combines the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra philosophies with the logic and epistemology of Dharmakīrti.² He composed (i) *Madhyamakālamkāra* (*Ornament of the Middle Way*),³ (ii)

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¹ An excellent introductory explanation of the philosophy of Śāntarakṣita is that of James Blumenthal's "Śāntarakṣita" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (fall 2009 edition). See the bibliography for further sources.

² Madhyamaka philosophy was first systematically presented by Nāgārjuna (third century CE) in the *Treatise on the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāśāstra*) on the basis of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* (*Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*-s). The Yogācāra philosophy was first systematically presented in the fifth century CE by Vasubandhu and his brother, Asaṅga. The logical and epistemological ideas Śāntarakṣita incorporates into his philosophy were formulated by Dharmakīrti in the seventh century CE.

³ There are at the present time two translations of the *Ornament of the Middle Way* into English. The first is included in *The Ornament of the Middle Way*:

Madhyamakālamkāravṛtti (Auto-Commentary on The Ornament of the Middle Way), (iii) *Vādanyāyāṭikā Vipañcitārthā (Commentary on [Dharmakīrti's] Debate Reasoning (Vādanyāya), a Full Explanation of the Meaning)*,⁴ and (iv) *Tattvasaṃgraha (Compendium of Reality)*, which is a comprehensive critical examination of the major Indian philosophical theories in India. Kamalaśīla was Śāntarakṣita's most important disciple who wrote a commentary on the *Tattvasaṃgraha (Compendium of Reality)* entitled *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā (Commentary on the Difficult Points of the Compendium of Reality)*, which we shall call the *Commentary*.⁵ Since the *Commentary* both includes and explains the *Verses* of Śāntarakṣita's *Compendium*, in what follows we translate and briefly comment upon the *Commentary* discussion of Śāntarakṣita's examination in *Verses* 328–335 of the Advaita Vedānta theory of self (*ātman*).⁶

A theory of self, in the full form it took in India, is a theory in which the ontological status of that to which the first-person singular pronoun in fact refers is explained,⁷ arguments for the theory are presented, objections to alternative theories are put forward, replies are made to objections to the theory, and the

A Study of the Madhyamaka Thought of Śāntarakṣita, by James Blumenthal (Snow Lion Publications: Ithaca, 2004) and the second is included in *Speech of Delight, Mipham's Commentary on Śāntarakṣita's Ornament of the Middle Way* by Ju Mi-pham, translated by Thomas Doctor (Snow Lion Publications: Ithaca, 2004).

⁴ There seems to be at the present time no English translation of Dharmakīrti's treatise and Śāntarakṣita's commentary on it. The Sanskrit text for both is edited by Radula Sāṅkrtyāyana in *Dharmakīrti's Vādanyāya with the Commentary of Śāntarakṣita* (Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, 2007); originally published in the *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*: New Series 21–22 (1935–1936).

⁵ The only translation of the *Commentary* into English presently available is by Ganganatha Jha, entitled *The Tattvasaṃgraha of Śāntarakṣita with the Commentary of Kamalaśīla* (Motilal Banarsidass: Delhi, 1986).

⁶ The Sanskrit text translated here is in *The Tattvasaṃgraha of Ācārya Śāntarakṣita with the Commentary 'Pañjikā' of Shri Kamalaśīla*, critical edition by Swami Dwarikadas Shastri, in two volumes (Bauddha Bharati: Varanasi, 1968).

⁷ Although in the Nyāya, Advaita Vedānta and perhaps in the Sāṃkhya schools a self is not said to be the object of the first-person singular pronoun, but this characterization of a self does not seem to be inconsistent with their characterizations.

consequences for us entailed by the theory are elaborated. A self may be defined as that to which reference is in fact made when the first-person singular pronoun is used to refer.

Advaita Vedānta Theory of a Self

Advaita Vedānta (hereafter simply “Advaita”) is a Hindu philosophical school based on an interpretation of the *Upaniṣads*. The generally acknowledged principal exponent of the Advaita philosophy is Śāṅkara (early 8th century CE), whose most basic Advaita treatises are his commentaries on the *Brahma Sūtras* of Bādarāyana, the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Upaniṣads*. Our references below will be to the works of Śāṅkara.⁸

In his examination of the Advaita theory of a self Śāntarakṣita assumes that the Advaitins distinguish a self to which the first-person singular pronoun ultimately refers from a self that is used to refer to an individualized ego, which is a false self that identifies itself with the body and mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*). In this summary the first self we shall represent as “the Self” and the second simply as “a self.”

In Advaita, it is taught that Ultimate Reality is indestructible, auspicious, all-pervading, undivided or partless, and devoid of action.⁹ The Self is the same as Ultimate Reality. Though the Self is our very self, we ordinarily remain unaware of it because of our ignorance. In dependence upon this ignorance, persons confuse their Self with their bodies and minds and experience themselves as individualized egos distinct from everything else. The self suffers in cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*) because of this ignorance (*avidyā*) of being one with the Self. Enlightenment, which is the complete realization of ourselves as the Self or Ultimate reality, is the recognition of what we already are.¹⁰ So the realization of the Self is the removal of the erroneous

⁸ The beginnings of Advaita Vedānta, however, extend back at least to Gaudapada.

⁹ See Śāṅkara’s *Upadeśa Sāhasrī* II.8.2–3, translation by A.J. Alston in *The Thousand Teachings of Śrī Śāṅkarācārya (Upadeśa Sāhasrī)* (London: Shanti Sadan, 1990). Alston prepared his translation after consulting S. Mayeda’s (1979) translation.

¹⁰ One argument that Śāṅkara advances in favor of the notion of the Self derives from an analysis of deep sleep.

view of ourselves through right knowledge.¹¹

Knowledge of the Self takes the form of an immediate intuition (*anubhava*) that transcends subject-object duality. It is not possible to step outside of the Self to observe it as an object in a distinctive mode. Knowledge of the Self leaves no differentiation between one's self and the Self; it entails the state where the whole of existence is experienced as the Self that is without a possessor or object. In the ordinary waking state and in the dream state, which are characterized by the absence of the knowledge of the Self, our experiences are based on the subject-object duality. In ignorance, reality presents itself as the empirical world of determinate entities.

To understand the nature of the transformed vision, it is necessary to analyze briefly the relation between Ultimate Reality and the empirical world. The Ultimate Reality is the self-existent substratum of the empirical world, which does not constitute a reality distinct from the Ultimate Reality. Śaṅkara says that

As the spaces within pots or jars are non-different from the cosmic space...so it is to be understood that this diverse phenomenal world of experiences, things experienced, and so on, has no existence apart from *Brahman*.¹²

According to the Advaitins, the empirical world, which is neither existent by itself nor without existence, is an appearance (*māyā*) or manifestation of Ultimate Reality.¹³ The error of an unenlightened person consists in viewing the empirical world as exhausting the whole of reality and in failing to be aware of Ultimate Reality as its substratum. An enlightened person, on the

¹¹ See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* I.4.7, translation by Mādhavānanda in *The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad with the commentary of Śaṅkarācārya* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1950 (3rd ed.)).

¹² See *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* II.1.14, translation by Gambhīrānandans in *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1977 (3rd ed.)).

¹³ *Māyā* is also the phenomenal world of duality as apprehended in ordinary perception, when the mind still operates in the state of ignorance; see Śaṅkara's commentary to *Gauḍapāda's Kārikā* III.19, translation by Nikhilānanda in *The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad with Gauḍapāda's Kārikā and Śaṅkara's Commentary* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashram, 2006 (8th impression)). It must be noted that unlike many later Advaitins, Śaṅkara does not equate ignorance (*avidyā*) and *māyā*.

other hand, does not see duality, though seeing it.¹⁴ This paradoxical statement seems to mean that the one who has achieved perfect knowledge of Ultimate Reality or the Self experiences empirical qualities but does not consider them to be absolute characteristics of objects. An enlightened person denies the ultimacy of the multiplicity that characterizes the empirical world. He realizes that there is no distinction between the Self and the objects in terms of their fundamental reality and in this sense his experience of reality is non-dual.

The Theory of a Self According to Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla

Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla are practitioners of Māhāyāna Buddhism, according to which Buddhists strive to become Buddhas for the sake of helping all sentient forms of life become free from the sufferings of cyclic existence. For this purpose, both, great compassion (*māhakarūṇa*) for those who suffer and wisdom (*prajñā*) are needed on the path to Buddhahood. For those who, like Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, follow the Madhyamaka philosophy, the wisdom needed on the path is knowledge of “dependent co-origination” (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which is the middle way between the extremes of independent existence and no existence at all. Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla believe that the “ultimate reality” (*paramārthasatya*) of all phenomena is their “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*), which is their “essential nature” (*svabhāva*) of not existing by themselves, independent of anything else. The chief reasoning Śāntarakṣita uses to establish that phenomena do not independently exist is to argue that they cannot be one or many.¹⁵

Like his Mādhyamika predecessors, Nāgārjuna, Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti, Śāntarakṣita avoids the consequence that phenomena do not exist at all by making their dependent co-

¹⁴ See *Upadeśa Sāhasrī* II.10.13; translations by A.J. Alston. *The Thousand Teachings of Śrī Śāṅkarācārya (Upadeśa Sāhasrī)* (London: Shanti Sadan, 1990). Alston prepared his translation after consulting S. Mayeda’s (1979) translation.

¹⁵ This is often called the neither-one-nor-many argument. In the first verse of the ninety-seven verse *The Ornament of the Middle Way* Śāntarakṣita in effect says that no phenomena independently exist because in reality they are, like a reflected image, neither one nor many, and in the next sixty verses he puts the phenomena asserted by his Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophical opponents to the test of the neither-one-nor-many argument.

origination their “conventional reality” (*saṃvṛtisatya*). But unlike his Mādhyamika predecessors he combined the Madhyamaka theory of the ultimate reality of all phenomena with the theory that by convention dependently co-originating phenomena are “mind only” (*cittamātra*) in the sense that they are of the nature of “consciousness” (*vijñāna*).¹⁶ Such phenomena are conventionally real, Śāntarakṣita believed, because they are objects of knowledge, causally efficacious, impermanent, and can be shown to lack independent existence.¹⁷ From the Yogācārins he accepts not only the mind-only thesis, but also the thesis that consciousness is aware of itself along with its awareness of its object, which is itself of the nature of consciousness.

The conceiving of a self, according to Śāntarakṣita, causes us to suffer in cyclic existence because its conception creates as its object a self that falsely appears to exist by itself and we cling to this false appearance.¹⁸ Freedom from suffering basically arises when practitioners engage in protracted meditation on the lack of a self’s independent existence. Buddhahood is attained when practitioners complete the nine stages of the path of meditation which are explained in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* (*Discourse on the Ten Stages [of the Path of Meditation]*), according to which it is the lack of the independent existence of all phenomena that is the object of meditation.

Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla use brief arguments against the Advaitins’ theory of a self because they seem to believe that the only serious philosophical difference between their theory of a self and their own is the Advaita ascription of permanence to a self.¹⁹ The verses in what follows belong to Śāntarakṣita and the commentary on them belongs to Kamalaśīla.

¹⁶ By contrast the Yogācārins believed that only phenomena that are mind independently exist.

¹⁷ See verses sixty three and sixty four of the *Ornament of the Middle Way*.

¹⁸ If Śāntarakṣita holds the traditional view concerning the cause of our suffering in cyclic existence, he believes that it is clinging to the false appearance of the independent existence of the self conceived in dependence upon the presence of the aggregates that causes us to suffer, not clinging to the false appearance of the independent existence of consciousness that causes us to suffer.

¹⁹ See *Verse 330* in the *Commentary*. This does not mean that this is their only error, but that it is the principal error in their theory of a self.

TRANSLATION

Those who espouse the Advaita system of philosophy and are followers of the *Upaniṣads* think that a self²⁰ is permanent, one and of the nature of consciousness, which appears in the form of the illusory modification of earth and the like. This is the view set forth in the following *Verses*:

Verse 328

Others claim that earth, fire, water and the like are the illusory modification of a permanent cognition²¹ and that this is what constitutes a self.

“This is what constitutes a self” means that a self is of the nature of one permanent cognition of which earth and the like²² are illusory modifications. “Others” are the followers of the *Upaniṣads*. “What is the proof of this?” The answer is given in the following *Verse*:

Verse 329

There is nothing in this world that is capable of being apprehended.

All of this is held to be the illusory modification of consciousness.²³

Apart from cognition, earth and the like are not capable of being apprehended. So they could appear as composites. Atoms do not exist. So by implication it is concluded that earth and the like are merely so many reflections in consciousness. “This” in “All of this” means “earth and the like.”

²⁰ In the translation we do not distinguish a Self from a self, since it is not distinguished in the text.

²¹ “A permanent cognition” is a translation of *niyajñāna*. Throughout the examination of the Advaita theory of a self *jñāna* (“cognition”) and *vijñāna* (“consciousness”) seem to be used as synonyms.

²² In our translation we avoid what is normally translated as “etc.” and instead use “and the like,” “other such things,” and other similar locutions.

²³ “Consciousness” is here and elsewhere a translation of *vijñāna*.

Comments

If we use “things in this world” to represent “earth and the like,” Śāntarakṣita’s account of the Advaita theory of a self may be reconstructed as follows: things in this world are not capable of being apprehended, since they are illusory modifications of a permanent or unchanging cognition. This permanent cognition, according to the Advaitins themselves, is the Self, and that which it apprehends is Itself, but apprehends Itself not as an object, only as subject. So they think that the Self is a permanent non-dual cognition of Itself, and since It is identical to Ultimate Reality, It is also a permanent non-dual cognition of Ultimate Reality. It is this cognition of which things in the world are illusory modifications. Śāntarakṣita, however, seems to assume that “self” (*ātman*) can only in fact be used to refer to an illusory cognition of an object of the sort that he himself accepts: an impermanent illusory cognition of an object as separate in existence from the cognition, but which does not in fact exist apart from its cognition.²⁴ Consequently, he will try to argue in what follows that the illusory cognition of an object is in fact impermanent rather than permanent. Perhaps he is appropriating the Advaitins use of “self” to refer to an individualized ego that identifies itself with the body and mind, since because of its identification its cognitions of objects will be impermanent. In any case, he will be ignoring the Advaitins’ distinction between the Self and a self.

TRANSLATION

The above theory of the Vedāntin is contradicted in the following *Verse*:

Verse 330

The error in the view of these philosophers is a slight one,
since only the assertion of permanence [is incorrect].
For difference is clearly perceived
in the cognitions of color, sound, and other things.

Verse 331

If all of these cognitions were one,

²⁴ This is his acceptance of the Yogācāra idealism as conventional reality.

then color, sound, flavor and other such things
 would be apprehended all at once,
 since different states are impossible in a permanent
 entity.

“The error is a slight one” means that they posit only cognition, which is quite reasonable. “If that is so, then what is the slight error in their view?” It is that they assert permanence [of cognition] “But why should the acceptance of [the] permanence [of cognition] be unreasonable?” The answer is that difference is clearly perceived and so on. Permanence implies always remaining in the same state, and impermanence implies not always remaining in the same state. In fact, the cognition that manifests color, sound, and other things is not always found to be in one and the same state. Actually, it appears at one time to manifest color and at another time to manifest sound, and so on in a certain order of sequence. Under the circumstances, if all these things, sound and the rest, were manifested by a single permanent cognition, then all of them would appear simultaneously, like a bedspread of different colors, since the cognition manifesting them would always be there.

It may be claimed that the cognition of sound and other things are different states appearing one after the other, so that the apprehension of sound and the like could not be simultaneous. In reply to this it is said that “Different states in a permanent entity are impossible,” since the states are not different from the entity to which they belong. So the entity to which the states belong would be liable to production and destruction, appearance and disappearance, in the same way as the states are liable. Or conversely, the states would also be permanent, like the entity to which they belong. If on the other hand the states are different from the entity to which they belong, there can be no idea of the states belonging to this entity, since there is no benefit conferred by the one on the other. And this alternative would also be contrary to the doctrine that permanent cognition is the only one entity there is.

Comments

When Śāntarakṣita says that the error in the Advaitins' view is a slight one, he seems to mean, first, that their view, that color, flavor and other such things are illusory modifications of cognition, is correct. He thinks that their view is correct if it expresses the conventional truth that earth, fire, water and so on are illusory modifications of impermanent cognition, but it is not true that they are illusory modifications of permanent cognition. In Verses 130 and 131 he drops the qualification "illusory," since even in his own view objects in the world falsely appear to be external to cognition.

Kamalaśīla expands Śāntarakṣita's objection to the Advaitins' theory that earth, fire, water and so on are modifications of a permanent cognition. If we render "cognition that manifests sound, color and the like" simply as "different cognitions," the objection to the view that earth, fire, water and so on are modifications of a permanent cognition may be formulated as follows: (i) if cognition is a permanent phenomenon, it always remains in the same state; (ii) if cognition always remains in the same state, different cognitions would always be present; (iii) if different cognitions would always be present, then different cognitions would appear simultaneously, like a bedspread of different colors; (iv) different cognitions do not appear simultaneously, like a bedspread of different colors; (v) so cognition is not a permanent phenomenon.

Kamalaśīla adds an objection to a reply. The reply is that even though different cognitions cannot be simultaneous, they can occur one after another. The intent of the reply is that the modifications of a permanent cognition occur one after another rather than simultaneously. Kamalaśīla argues that at different times different states in a permanent entity are impossible, since the states are not different from the entity to which they belong, which means either that the entity to which they belong would come to be and pass away in the same way that its states would or that the states would be permanent because the entity to which they belong is permanent. Nor can the states be different from the entity to which they belong, he says, since they would not then belong to the entity, in which case they would not benefit the entity. The upshot, he says, is that this alternative is contrary to the Advaita view that permanent cognition, i.e. the Self, is the only entity there is.

When the Advaitins claim, in Verse 328, that things in this world are the “illusory” modification of a permanent cognition, they may think that this qualification implies that the permanent cognition is not really modified. The Advaita view is that it is only the cognition of Ultimate Reality or the Self, the substratum of the world of empirical objects, is permanent, not the cognition of empirical objects. The Advaitins might claim that the objections of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla do not undermine their view because they assume that illusory cognitions must be either other than or the same as the permanent consciousness to which they belong, which the Advaitins deny. In response to their claim, however, Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla would argue that if it is denied that illusory cognitions are either other than or the same as the permanent consciousness to which they belong, they do not exist at all, since what is neither other than nor the same as something else does not exist at all.

TRANSLATION

Further, if a permanent consciousness were to exist, it could be known either through perception or through inference. That it cannot be known through perception is shown in the following *Verse*:

Verse 332

Cognition or consciousness is never apprehended
that is other than the cognitions of color and the like.
And since these latter undergo variations every moment,
what remains there that could be lasting?

In fact, apart from the cognitions of color and the like, which appear one after the other, we do not apprehend any persisting consciousness, permanent and one, whereby it could be claimed to be known through perception. Then since it is well-known that the cognitions of color and the like are apprehended one after the other, and are destroyed every moment, it must be explained what remains there that is not other than those cognitions. So since there is no apprehension of

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any such cognition, which would be apprehended if it were there, it cannot be considered otherwise than as non-existent. This is what the *Verse* means.

Nor can it be claimed that the so-called permanent cognition is known through inference. For such an inference would be based either on the nature of the cognition itself or on the nature of its effects. It cannot be the former, since there is nothing that can prove that it is the nature of the so-called permanent cognition. On the contrary, perception itself precludes any such idea. So the doctrine that the world is the illusory modification of a permanent consciousness is not right.

Comments

The objection to the Advaita theory of a self in *Verse* 332 may be reconstructed as follows: (i) if the world is the illusory modification of a permanent consciousness, a permanent consciousness that is other than or the same as cognitions occurring at different times can be perceived or correctly inferred to exist; (ii) a permanent consciousness that is other than cognitions occurring at different times cannot be perceived or correctly inferred to exist; (iii) so if the world is the illusory modification of a permanent consciousness, a permanent consciousness that is the same as cognitions occurring at different times can be perceived or correctly inferred to exist; (iv) a permanent consciousness that is the same as cognitions occurring at different times cannot be perceived; (v) if a permanent consciousness that is the same as cognitions occurring at different times can be correctly inferred to exist, the inference would be based either on the nature of permanent consciousness itself or on the nature of effects produced by permanent consciousness; (vi) if the inference is based on the nature of permanent consciousness itself, it can be proved that permanence is the nature of consciousness; (vii) it cannot be proved that permanence is the nature of consciousness; (viii) if the inference is based on the nature of effects produced by permanent consciousness, there is perception of effects produced by permanent consciousness; (ix) there is no perception of effects produced by permanent consciousness; (x) so a permanent consciousness that is the same as cognitions occurring at different times is not correctly inferred to exist; (xi) so a permanent

consciousness that is the same as cognitions occurring at different times can be neither perceived nor correctly inferred to exist; (xii) so the world is not the illusory modification of a permanent consciousness.

But this objection, the Advaitins might say, does not pertain to their theory of a self, since they claim that the permanent consciousness is neither other than nor the same as its illusory appearing cognitions occurring at different times. But here again, Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla can reply that what is neither other than nor the same as something else does not exist at all, in which case a permanent consciousness that is neither other than nor the same as its illusory appearing cognitions that occur at different times does not exist at all.

TRANSLATION

Then again, according to this doctrine, [the use of] the ideas of bondage and liberation is not possible. This is what is shown in the following *Verse*:

Verse 333

There can be no distinction between wrong and right
cognition
if a self consists of a single cognition.
How can there be any bondage and liberation?

For one who holds the view that cognition is in perpetual flux, different with different persons, undergoing variations in a continuum, the idea of bondage and liberation is quite reasonable, since it is due to the arising of a continuum of cognitions, wrong and right [respectively]. Through the practice of yoga, gradually purer and purer cognitions arise, the continuum of impure cognitions ceases and the final aim is attained. So the attempt to become liberated from suffering becomes fruitful. For you, on the other hand, a self is of the nature of one permanent cognition. How then can there be any bondage and liberation for such a self? For if the one cognition is permanently wrong, there can be no

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liberation, since there could be no other state for it. On the other hand, if the one cognition were permanently right, there could be no bondage, since it would be always pure. According to our doctrine, cognition is held to be impure or pure in agreement with the different character of the continuum. So the idea of bondage and liberation is entirely reasonable. This has been said; “Cognition is impure or free from faults, beset with impurities or²⁵ free from impurities. If it were never impure, then all embodied beings would always be liberated. If it were never pure, then the attempt to secure liberation would be fruitless.”

Comments

The argument in *Verse 333* may be reconstructed as follows: (i) if the self is of the nature of one permanent consciousness, this one permanent consciousness is contaminated or uncontaminated; (ii) if this one permanent consciousness is contaminated, it is always contaminated; (iii) if this one permanent consciousness is always contaminated, there can be no liberation; (iv) if this one permanent consciousness is uncontaminated, it is always uncontaminated; (v) if this one permanent consciousness is always uncontaminated, there can be no bondage; (vi) so if the nature of the self is one permanent consciousness, there can be no bondage and liberation for the self; (vii) but if the nature of the self is to be a continuum of impermanent consciousnesses, there are bondage and liberation in dependence upon the character of the continuum.

Although the objection from the impossibility of bondage and liberation rests on the assumption that the Advaitins attribute bondage and liberation to the permanent Self, it is clear that they do not do so. Consequently, it is not clear why Śāntarākṣita and Kamalaśīla think that they do. Moreover, the Advaitins have a simple reply to the objection from the impossibility of bondage and liberation for the self: the problem their philosophy is meant to solve is not that the Self is bound in cyclic existence, but that what falsely appears to be the Self is bound in cyclic existence; the solution to the problem is to realize that the real Self is not in fact bound in cyclic existence. Śāntarākṣita does not discuss such a reply.

²⁵ Jha has “and” here, which makes little sense.

TRANSLATION

If it is claimed that bondage and liberation are merely conceptually constructed rather than real, it becomes necessary to explain the basis of this conceptual construction. It has been shown above what this basis is: it is the theory that cognitions are impermanent. So [if consciousness is a permanent phenomenon] the effort to contemplate reality for the sake of the attainment of the ultimate aim and for passing beyond the cycle of birth and death can only lead to pointless exhaustion. This is shown in the following *Verses*:

Verse 334

What could the yogi accomplish or not accomplish by
the practice of yoga?

What is also there that could be rejected? For wrong
cognition also has the same nature.

Verse 335

The knowledge of truth also cannot be brought about.
Since it is of the nature of cognition,
it is always there. So the entire practice of yoga is also
completely pointless.

If a yogi could accomplish or not accomplish something by contemplating reality, his effort would be fruitful. As it is, he can never set aside wrong cognition, since it has the same nature, i.e. the nature of a permanent cognition. For the same reason, it cannot be rejected, since what is permanent cannot be destroyed. Therefore, its rejection is impossible. How can a yogi accomplish or bring about knowledge of reality? Since knowledge of reality is of the nature of a permanent cognition, it would always be there. So the theory in question cannot be right.

Comments

In Kamalaśīla's introductory commentary on *Verses 334–335* he presents a possible Advaita reply to the objection from the

impossibility of bondage and liberation for the self. The reply seems to be that even though the permanent self is said to be bound and liberated, it is not really bound and liberated, since its bondage and liberation are mentally constructed, and since its bondage and liberation are mentally constructed, its bondage and liberation can be attributed to the permanent self in spite of its bondage and liberation being impossible. Kamalaśīla's objection to the reply is to claim that the actual basis of the claim that bondage and liberation are mentally constructed is the theory that cognitions are impermanent. What he means by saying that cognitions are impermanent is that consciousness is a continuum of impermanent cognitions. So the full form of his objection is that it cannot be said that bondage and liberation for a permanent consciousness are mentally constructed, since the basis of the mental construction of bondage and liberation is the theory that consciousness is a continuum of impermanent cognitions. Kamalaśīla concludes that in *Verses 334–335* Śāntarakṣita argues that if consciousness is a permanent phenomenon the effort to contemplate reality for the sake of liberation can only lead to pointless exhaustion.

The reply from the mental construction of bondage and liberation is surely not a reply the Advaitins would give to the objection from the impossibility of bondage and liberation, since they do not claim that a permanent Self suffers in saṃsāra and is liberated.

The objection in *Verses 334–335* is that if cognition or the self is permanent, the attempt to use yoga to contemplate ultimate reality for the sake of liberation of the self can only lead to pointless exhaustion. Since yoga accomplishes its goals by rejecting false cognitions, there must be false cognitions to reject. But if there is only one cognition and it is permanent, false cognition cannot be rejected, because to reject a false cognition is to destroy it, and what is permanent cannot be destroyed. Thus yoga cannot be fruitful.

This objection once again misses the mark, since the liberation of a permanent self is not a view held by the Advaitins.

Final Comment

It cannot be said that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla have conclusively refuted the Advaita theory of a self, since they fail to consider the most likely Advaitin replies to their objections. Most

importantly, they do not consider the reply that different cognitions of objects are themselves illusory modifications, not real modifications, of a permanent cognition.

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