

Chomden Reldri on Dharmakīrti's *Examination of Relations*

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I owe a debt of gratitude to Leonard van der Kuijp for bringing my attention to both of Chomden Reldri's commentaries on the *Sambandhaparīkṣā* upon learning of my interest in the subject. Leonard consistently models a spirit of collegial generosity, with the exchange of resources constituting a regular component of his seminars, as all his students can attest. Sharing these texts with me was just one of innumerable instances of his uncommon thoughtfulness.

DHARMAKĪRTI'S *Examination of Relations* (*Sambandhaparīkṣā*) is unique in the Indian Buddhist canon for being the only extant root text devoted entirely to the topic of the ontological status of relations. But the core thesis of this treatise—that relations are only nominally real—is in prima facie tension with another claim that is central to Dharmakīrti's epistemology: that there exists some kind of natural relation (*svabhāvapratiḥbandha*)¹ that comes in two varieties—an identity relation (*tādātmya*) and a causal relation (*tadutpatti*)²—which can reliably underwrite inferences. Understanding how Dharmakīrti can consistently rely on natural relations to prop up his presentation of inferential reasoning while at the same time advancing an anti-realist account of relations is critical for making sense of his system of logic and epistemology, which came to be nearly universally adopted in Tibetan Buddhism, cutting across traditions.

Despite the importance of the *Examination of Relations* to understanding

I am grateful to Ernst Steinkellner for generously making available his edition of the SP and SPV in advance of its official publication, together with his working English translations of both these texts. Finally, I thank Pascale Hugon for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1. PVS 12.4

2. PV 1.31=PVin 2.37.23–26: *kāryakāraṇābhavad vā svabhāvād vā niyāmakāt / avinābhāvānīyamā darśanān na na darśanāt //*.

Dharmakīrti's thought, Chomden Rikpé Reldri (Bcom ldan rig[s] pa'i ral gri, 1227–1305)³ and Gyeltsap Darma Rinchen (Rgyal tshab Dar ma rin chen, 1364–1432) are the only Tibetan philosophers known to have written independent commentaries on this work. Chomden Reldri, the great scholar, prolific author, and canon cataloger of Nartang (Snar thang) Monastery, in fact, composed two texts commenting on the *Examination of Relations*, which are the subject of the present chapter: (1) *Flower to Ornament the Examination of Relations* ('Brel pa brtag pa rgyan gyi me tog, hereafter *Flower*),⁴ which is a summary of the text identifying the subject of each stanza, and (2) *Annotations and Topical Outline of the Examination of Relations* ('Brel pa brtag pa'i mchan dang sa bcad gnyis,⁵ hereafter *Annotations*), a reproduction of Dharmakīrti's root text interspersed with explanatory annotations with a topical outline appended at the end, for which we have a *dbu med* manuscript in the *Collected Works of the Kadampas* (*Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*).⁶ In this chapter, I offer introductory remarks on Dharmakīrti's *Examination of Relations* and Chomden Reldri's two commentaries, followed by a translation of Dharmakīrti's *Examination of*

3. On Chomden Reldri's life and work, see Samten Zangpo's (Bsam gtan bzang po) biography (BSAM₁), which was requested by Chomden Reldri's nephew; see also Schaeffer and van der Kuijp 2009, 3–8; and van der Kuijp 2003, 406ff. Chomden Reldri is known also by his name in religion, Darma Gyeltsen (Dar ma rgyal mtshan) (BSAM₁, 3a). On Chomden Reldri's names and dates, see van der Kuijp 2003, 406–7.

4. It would seem that Chomden Reldri regarded “flower to ornament” or “ornamental flower” (*rgyan gyi me tog*) as a kind of signature, or at least a favored expression, for he composed no fewer than thirty-five texts that include this expression in their titles.

5. This is the title in the table of contents in the Kadam Sungbum, but the bibliographic title there and in the Lhasa (2006) typeset edition of Chomden Reldri's collected works is listed as 'Brel pa brtag pa'i rab tu byed pa. This, however, is the longer title of the root text, not Chomden Reldri's commentary, as is clear from the manuscript.

6. Among the three editions of the collected works of Chomden Reldri available on BDRC, only the Lhasa (2006) typeset edition includes his commentaries on the SP. Many handwritten manuscripts of his writings are known to have circulated; as Schaeffer and van der Kuijp note, “The library of 'Bras spungs monastery's Gnas bcu lha khang contained some seventy-five texts that issued from his fertile pen” (2009, 51). And indeed, the Lhasa typeset editions of *Flower* and *Annotations* were based on manuscripts found at Drepung, as stated in their colophons. As Pascale Hugon pointed out (in personal correspondence), the source manuscript for the typeset edition of *Flower* is likely no. 19262 (four folios, misspelled 'Grel pa rtag pa rgyan gyi me tog) in the Drepung catalogue ('Bras spungs dpe rnying dkar chag), while there appear to be two manuscripts of *Annotations* in this catalogue, nos. 16382 (nine folios) and 19282 (four folios). Unfortunately, the manuscript of *Flower* is not available, which is particularly regrettable given the number of typos evident in the Lhasa typeset editions of both works.

Relations and Chomden Reldri's *Annotations* together with subject headings for each stanza of the root text based on *Flower*.

I begin with a few observations on Dharmakīrti's account of relations. Nominalism about relations follows from Dharmakīrti's basic twofold ontology of ultimately real particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*) and conventionally real, conceptually constructed universals (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*). As Dharmakīrti explains, ultimately real particulars are each momentary, radically distinct entities (SP 25). As the basic building blocks of the world, particulars are mereologically simple and conceptually primitive. Relations, on the other hand, are necessarily conceptually complex. Dharmakīrti remarks, "A relation is something that is founded in two things" (SP 11a). While a given relation may denominate actual particulars among its relata, it is a mental act that brings the relata together, as it were, into the complex conceptual construct that we call a relation, which is purely a creature of the mind (SP 5, 17). Between the two sources of knowledge in Dharmakīrti's system of epistemology, perception (*pratyakṣa*) yields knowledge of particulars, while inferential cognition (*anumāna*) yields knowledge of conceptual constructs on the basis of what is given in perception by means of the process of the exclusion of what is contrary (*anyāpoha*) (SPV *ad* SP 6). It is inferential cognition, then, that provides structure to the world as we experience it, and it is thus at this second stage of the cognitive process that relations are conceived.

But if relations are only nominally real, what does Dharmakīrti intend by advancing a theory of "natural relations" to underwrite inferences? Although an adequate response to this question lies beyond the scope of this chapter, it is evident from the *Examination of Relations* that *svabhāvapratibandha* cannot be a "natural relation" in the sense of being a mind-independent entity that claims membership among the ultimate furniture of the world. Rather, such a relation is "natural" insofar as the relata that it denominates are (or bottom out in) real particulars that necessarily conform to the requisite pattern of invariable co-presence (*anvaya*) and co-absence (*vyatireka*),⁷ either simultaneously as in the case of an identity relation or sequentially as in the case of a causal relation.⁸ What's more, it is a natural, or essential, property of some particular that necessarily conforms to this pattern. Thus, purported relations like contact (*saṃyoga*), which involve extrinsic properties such as spatiotemporal

7. PVSV 2.19–20=PVin 10.14–15. Cf. NB 2.19: *svabhāvapratibandhe hi sati artho 'rtham na vyabhicarati* |; "For it is due to a natural relation that one thing invariably attends another."

8. On Dharmakīrti's account of *svabhāvapratibandha*, see, for instance, Oetke 1991; Katsura 1992; Steinkellner 1997, 627–29, and 2021, xv–xxi; and Dunne 2004, 42–45.

location, do not count as the kind of natural relation that *necessarily* obtains and can thereby reliably underwrite inferences.

It seems very likely that, as Steinkellner (2022, xviii) argues, Dharmakīrti composed the *Examination on Relations* subsequent to his *Explanation of the Sources of Knowledge* (*Pramāṇavārttika*) and autocommentary (*Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti*), wherein he introduces his theory of “natural relations” in order to clarify that this theory does not commit him to the existence of real, mind-independent relations. And in the *Examination of Relations*, he is specifically concerned with clarifying his account of causal relations, for curiously the identity relation receives no mention whatsoever in this text. Although causal relations garner the most attention in the *Examination of Relations*, Dharmakīrti devotes a number of stanzas to rejecting various species of relations defended by non-Buddhist schools of thought, such as the inherence relation (*samāvaya*), which Naiyāyikas and Vaiśeṣikas take to link properties with substances, universals with particulars, and wholes with parts, and a blending relation (*śleṣa*), which (according to Dharmakīrti) Mīmāṃsakas take to link words with their meanings.⁹ According to these systems, real, mind-independent relations are responsible for structuring reality. Yet, for Dharmakīrti, we occupy a world without structure. All relations—and accordingly all structure—are superimposed by the mind.

The *Examination of Relations* has a negative and a positive agenda: (1) to reject real, mind-independent relations, and (2) to explain how relations are conceptually constructed with a focus on how we know when conceptually constructed *causal* relations are well founded. This agenda is stated explicitly at the outset of the *Commentary on the Examination of Relations* (*Sambandhaparīkṣāvṛtti*), which the Tengyur editions identify as Dharmakīrti’s autocommentary, and indeed, Chomden Reldri refers to it as such. However, a Sanskrit manuscript of the *Sambandhaparīkṣāvṛtti* discovered at Drepung (’Bras spungs) Monastery, an edition of which was recently published by Steinkellner (2022), attributes the text instead to Dharmakīrti’s student Devendrabuddhi (ca. 630–90).¹⁰ In addition to the *Sambandhaparīkṣāvṛtti*,

9. As Eltschinger (2021, 101) notes, despite the fact that the Mīmāṃsā explicitly reject the blending relation (*(sam)śleṣa*), Dharmakīrti critiques this kind of relation in the context of rejecting the Mīmāṃsaka claim that a permanent and uncreated relation between words and their meaning (*śabdārthasambandha*) supports their belief that the Vedas lack a human author (PV 1.213–268, PVSV 113.23–25, 118.27–119.1). For a discussion of this dispute, see Eltschinger 2007, 115–28, 134–43. As Steinkellner (2022, xvii–xviii) points out, the SP and SPV elaborate on this argument from the PV.

10. Steinkellner (2022, xiv–xv) conjectures that the SPV was recorded by Devendrabuddhi after receiving a teaching on the SP from Dharmakīrti, noting that the SPV is markedly sim-

the Tengyur includes two additional commentaries on the *Examination of Relations*, the *Sambandhaparīkṣāṭīkā* by Vinītadeva (ca. 710–70) and the *Sambandhaparīkṣānusāra* by Śāṅkaranandana (ca. ninth–tenth century). Aside from these canonical commentaries, two Jaina commentaries survive, Prabhācandra's (980–1065) *Sambandhaparīkṣāvvyākhyā* and Vādidivasūri's (1080–1170) *Syādvādaratnākara*.¹¹

That Chomden Reldri is one of only two known Tibetans to author commentaries on the *Examination of Relations*—one of the so-called seven epistemological treatises of Dharmakīrti (*tshad ma sde bdun*)¹²—should not come as a surprise. As van der Kuijp (2003, 407) remarks, “In terms of quantity, the sheer volume of his literary output in this area [i.e., logic and epistemology] strongly suggests the likelihood that he was the most prolific and versatile Tibetan writer on *tshad ma* of his or, for that matter, of any other age.” Indeed, in this genre, Chomden Reldri also composed commentaries on texts including Dignāga's *Compendium on the Sources of Knowledge* (*Pramāṇasamuccaya*) as well as each of Dharmakīrti's seven epistemological treatises—the *Explanation of the Sources of Knowledge* (*Pramāṇavārttika*), the *Determination of the Sources of Knowledge* (*Pramāṇaviniścaya*), the *Essence of Logic* (*Nyāyabindu*), the *Essence of Reasoning* (*Hetubindu*), the *Proof of Other Minds* (*Santānāntarasiddhi*), the *Logic of Debate* (*Vādanyāya*), and the *Examination of Relations*—in addition to writing a collective commentary on all seven. While Chomden Reldri had a great many teachers,¹³ in the fields of logic and epistemology¹⁴ he received teachings on the *Examination of Rela-*

ple when compared with Dharmakīrti's sophisticated commentarial work in, for instance, his PVSV. See Tauscher 1994 for an edition of precanonical Tibetan translations of the SPV and SPṬ based on fragments discovered at Tabo (Ta pho).

11. Both texts are extant in Sanskrit and comment only on the first twenty-two stanzas of the SP. For editions of Prabhācandra's commentary, see Shastri 1972 and Jha 1990; the latter includes English translation and analysis. See Eltschinger 2021 for a detailed survey of Indian commentaries on the SP.

12. The SP is arguably more a metaphysical treatise than an epistemological one, though it does take up the question of how we come to know when (nominally real) causal relations obtain and the process by which we form conceptual constructs of relations.

13. See BSAM₁, 2aff, for a detailed record of the teachings and teachers of Chomden Reldri, accounts of which comprise most of the text. It is also worth noting that Chomden Reldri studied Sanskrit from Śīlaśrī (BSAM₁, 5b), which he makes a point to demonstrate. For instance, he provides Sanskrit translations of his own text title of *Flower* (*Sambandhaparīkṣālamkārapuṣpa*) and provides the Sanskrit etymology for the title of the root text.

14. For instance, Chomden Reldri studied “various texts” in this genre with Dānaśīla, a

tions from two scholars who appear to be his primary teachers in this domain: Tönshak (Ston śāk)¹⁵ of Putang (Phu thang)¹⁶ and Uyakpa Sönam Senggé ('U yug pa Bsod nams seng ge, or Rigs pa'i seng ge,¹⁷ ca. 1200–after 1267).¹⁸ Chomden Reldri also received teachings from Sakya Paṇḍita Künga Gyeltsen (Sa skya paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 1182–1251) on his own *Treasury of Epistemology and Logic* (*Tshad ma rigs gter*),¹⁹ the sixth chapter of which cites numerous verses from the *Examination of Relations*.

Chomden Reldri is remarkable not only for the volume of his output, but also for his original thought,²⁰ and there are several unique features of his commentaries on the *Examination of Relations* that bear noting. Although Chomden Reldri comments in the concluding section of *Flower* that he follows (what he takes to be) Dharmakīrti's as well as Vinītadeva's commentaries in his explanation, there are nevertheless several ways in which he deviates from these ear-

junior paṇḍita who accompanied the famed Kaśmīri scholar Śākyaśrībhadrā (1127–1225) on his travels in Tibet (BSAM₁, 4b–5a); Kyeldrakpa Senggé (Skyel grags pa Seng ge) taught him the PVin and PV with numerous commentaries (BSAM₁, 9b); and Kytön Drakbum (Kyi ston Grags 'bum) taught him the PVin (BSAM₁, 9a).

15. From Tönshak, Chomden Reldri received instruction on the PVin with Dharmottara's short and long commentaries (-*tīkā*), NB, SS, SP, HB, VN, long and short versions of Dharmottara's *Examination of the Sources of Knowledge* (*Pramāṇaparīkṣā*), PS, and Dharmottara's *Explanation of Exclusion* (*Apohaprakaraṇa*) (BSAM₁, 5a). The final syllable of Tönshak's name is rendered *shag* in BSAM₂, 7; van der Kuijp (2003, 411) suggests that *śāk* stands for Śākya, prompting Hugon (2011, 129–130) to conjecture that this figure is Śākya brtson 'grus, who is mentioned in the colophon of Chomden Reldri's commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Vādanyāya* titled *Rtsod rigs rgyan gyi me tog*, which is the earliest known Tibetan commentary on this work.

16. Putang in Ü (Dbus) is also Chomden Reldri's birthplace (BSAM₁, 1b).

17. From Uyakpa, he received teachings on the PV, NB, SS, SP, HB, VN, PS, and the *Treasury of Epistemology and Logic* together with Uyakpa's commentary (BSAM₁, 9b–10a).

18. Dates follow Schaeffer and van der Kuijp 2009, 75. Uyakpa was one of the so-called nine principal students, or "sons" (*gnyal zbig gi bu dgu*), of Nyelzhik Jampel Dorjé (Gnyal zhig 'Jam dpal rdo rje, ca. 1150–1230), who was the abbot of Lingtö (Gling stod) from 1199 to 1207. His nine principal students founded many satellite institutes (*bshad grwa*), assisting in the diffusion of the teachings associated with Sangpu; on the history of Sangpu and the spread of its influence, see van der Kuijp 1987 and Hugon 2016. Uyakpa later converted to Sakya (Sa skya), becoming a disciple of Sakya Paṇḍita. As the story goes, Uyakpa is said to have gone to Sakya to engage Sakya Paṇḍita in debate, only to end up becoming Sapaṇ's disciple (van der Kuijp 2003, 401).

19. BSAM₁, 7b–8a.

20. As van der Kuijp (2003, 408) observes, Chomden Reldri is unhesitating in criticizing the views of his fellow Kadampa philosophers and even his own teachers, including Sakya Paṇḍita.

lier commentaries. For example, Eltschinger observes that when it comes to the various kinds of relations that Dharmakīrti rejects, “None of Dharmakīrti’s commentators . . . attempt to identify the advocates of these different models” (2021, 101). Yet Chomden Reldri’s commentaries explicitly name the opponent systems defending the various relations that Dharmakīrti’s critique targets. For the present purposes, I will leave aside the questions of (1) whether these ascriptions are in fact Dharmakīrti’s intended opponents (though there are certainly instances where they are not)²¹ and (2) whether these systems are rightly characterized as advancing these kinds of relations (though there are certainly cases where they are not).²² Nevertheless, in connection to the first question of Dharmakīrti’s intent, it bears noting that Chomden Reldri identifies Yogācārins as proponents of real dependence relations²³ and Sautrāntikas, Vaibhāṣikas, and Yogācārins as proponents of real causal relations,²⁴ and given that Dharmakīrti himself defends claims associated with both Sautrāntika and Yogācāra systems at various places in his corpus, these are curious ascriptions.

In addition to identifying these non-Madhyamaka Buddhist schools as realists about certain relations, there are several places in *Flower* that are suggestive of a Madhyamaka reading of the *Examination of Relations*. For instance, Chomden Reldri uses characteristically Madhyamaka language when identifying the purpose of the text, stating that Dharmakīrti intends to explain that (1) all the kinds of relations that he surveys ultimately lack an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*),²⁵ and yet (2) two kinds of relations (i.e., identity and causal relations) do exist conventionally.²⁶ Similarly, Chomden Reldri later comments

21. For example, in *Flower* (2a.1–2), Chomden Reldri claims that even some Tibetans maintain that a real causal relation exists between cause and effect sequentially.

22. For instance, Chomden Reldri identifies one of the opponents targeted in Dharmakīrti’s critique of the “blending” relation in SP 2 as the Mīmāṃsā. See note 9 above.

23. He seems to be drawing a connection between dependence (*paratantra*, *gzhan dbang*) and the nature of the same name from the Yogācāra three-nature theory.

24. *Flower* points to Śrāvakas and Yogācārins as proponents of real causal relations, while *Annotations* instead identifies the Sautrāntika and Vaibhāṣika, omitting Yogācārins.

25. Cf. SPV *ad* SP 1, according to which the purpose of the text is to reject relations as real entities (*vastubhūta*). Gyaltsap sticks closer to the Indian commentaries and to Dharmakīrti’s own text by phrasing the negative program as rejecting the existence of substantially real relations (RGYAL 2a2: *’brel pa rdzas grub bkag pa . . .*) and the rejection of relations as particulars (RGYAL 2b1: *’brel pa rang mtshan pa med . . .*). Unfortunately, a comparison of Chomden Reldri’s and Gyaltsap’s commentaries is not possible here, but see Nishizawa (1997, 224–25) for Gyaltsap’s outline of the SP.

26. *Flower* 1a.2: *’khor ’das ’brel ba don dam du // rang gzhan [em: bzbin] med kyang kun rdzob tu // ’brel gnyis bstan pas . . .*

that “the conventional mode of existence of things is distinct things arising anew in each moment,”²⁷ when this is how Dharmakīrti famously describes the mode of existence of *ultimately* real particulars. Finally, in identifying the purpose of the text, Chomden Reldri mentions Śāṅkaranandana’s claim that Dharmakīrti rejects relations in order to establish the two kinds of selflessness: (1) the selflessness of persons is established by the rejection of agency relations, inherence relations, etc., since in the absence of such relations, neither can there be a real person qua agent, experiencer, etc., and (2) in the absence of any real subject in dependence upon which real phenomena qua objects of experience might exist, the selflessness of phenomena is established, where it is understood in the Yogācāra sense of the absence of subject-object dualism. Yet Chomden Reldri insists that rejecting real agential relations in fact establishes *both* kinds of selflessness, apparently reconceiving the selflessness of phenomena in a Madhyamaka framework.²⁸

The following translation of Dharmakīrti’s *Examination of Relations* is based on Steinkellner’s (2022) Sanskrit edition, and the translation of Chomden Reldri’s *Annotations* follows the *dbu med* manuscript from the *Collected Works of the Kadampas*.²⁹ Since this commentary takes the form of annotations to the root text, the root text embedded in the commentary is bolded. I follow the Sanskrit translation of the root text except when the Tibetan differs to the extent that a translation of the Sanskrit would be incompatible with Chomden Reldri’s paraphrase; these instances are indicated in the apparatus. It was sometimes necessary to change the order of ideas of the root text as quoted in the commentary due to the grammatical structure of the annotations.

The enumerated and italicized subject headings are paraphrases (rather than strict translations) of the subjects of each verse as identified in Chomden Reldri’s *Flower*. Nevertheless, significant editorial remarks about this text are noted. To assist with the comprehensibility of these texts, implied ideas that are elided for the sake of meter, etc., are included in the translation, but in the interest of readability, brackets are omitted; parentheses denote Chomden Reldri’s own parenthetical remarks.

27. *Flower* 3b.4: *skad cig so sor skye ba’i da ltar gyi dngos po tha dad ’di tsam zbig kun rdzob kyi gnas tshul yin . . .*

28. *Flower* 4a.2–5.

29. The Lhasa (2006) typeset edition of *Annotations* that was based on this manuscript was consulted, but it includes a number of typos and misplaces certain annotations while omitting others.

Dharmakīrti's *Examination of Relations* and
Chomden Reldri's *Annotations and Topical Outline
of the Examination of Relations*
with subject headings according to Chomden Reldri's
Flower to Ornament the Examination of Relations

In Sanskrit, *Sambandhapariṣāprakaraṇa*;³⁰ in Tibetan, *Explanation of the Examination of Relations*.

Homage to Mañjuśrī Kumārabhūta!

The following is stated in order to reject real relations maintained by our own and other schools of thought.

1. Dependence Relations: Established-or-Unestablished Dilemma

Rejecting real dependence relations maintained by Yogācārins

Suppose there is a dependence relation. If the relata were already established, then what dependence is there? Thus, in reality, there are no relations between anything. [SP 1]

Suppose, as some followers of the mind-only system claim, **there is a dependence relation**. If that other thing, i.e., the dependent **relatum**, were already established, then what dependence is there? Its being unestablished or both established and unestablished are also untenable. **Thus, in reality**, viz., ultimately, **there are no dependence relations between anything**.

2. Blending Relations: Identical-or-Distinct Dilemma

Rejecting real blending relations that (1) Sāṃkhya claim obtain between all things and prime matter³¹ and (2) other non-Buddhist systems claim obtain between words and their meanings³²

Suppose there is a relation that is a blending of natures. But how could that be if there are two distinct things? Thus, there does not actually exist a relation between essentially distinct things. [SP 2]

30. *Annotations* 1b.1: *sambandhapariṣāprakaraṇa*; em. *sambandhapariṣāprakaraṇa*.

31. *Flower* 1b.1: *rang gzhan*; em. *rang bzhin*.

32. Chomden Reldri presumably has the Mīmāṃsakas in view here; see note 9 above.

Suppose, as the Sāṃkhya claim, **there is a relation that is a blending of natures** into one, i.e., the causal foundation of all things, prime matter (*prakṛti*). But in that case, it is said: **how could that be tenable that they are one if there are two distinct things** in which the relation resides? **Thus, there does not actually exist a blending relation between essentially distinct things.**

3. *Reliance Relations: Real-or-Unreal Dilemma*

Rejecting real reliance relations maintained by Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools of thought

Suppose there is a relation of reliance on another. How could that non-existent relatum rely on anything else? Or else, how could an existent entity, being completely independent, rely on anything else? [SP 3]

Moreover, **suppose**, as some others claim, **there is a relation of reliance on another**. But **if that relatum were non-existent** like the horns of a rabbit, **how could it rely on anything else? Or else, if it were existent** like a vase, **being completely independent, how could it be tenable for such an entity to stand in a relation of relying on anything else?**³³

4. *Relations Cannot Exist between Two Things Like Glue:*³⁴ *Relation Regress*

Rejecting relations that Vaiśeṣikas claim exist between two things like glue

If there were a relation due to two relata being related with a single thing, then what is that relation between the two and that thing? Moreover, an infinite regress would ensue. Thus, there is no admissible view of a relation. [SP 4]

The Vaiśeṣika claim that there is a relation located between the two relata, like glue. As for that, **if one took it that there were a relation due to two relata being related with a single thing, then what is that relation between the two relata and that relation, which is a third element? Moreover, an infinite**

33. The Tibetan translations of SP 3 includes the hypothetical grammatical particle *na* (n.e. Skt.) in articulating both alternatives of this “existent or nonexistent” dilemma.

34. *Annotations* 4b.3 alternatively describes the fourth topic as rejecting a relation that is distinct from its relata.

regress would ensue. Thus, i.e., therefore, **it should be understood that**³⁵ **there is no relation** whatsoever between any of these things.

How the mind apprehends relations

These two things and everything that is distinct from them exist only in themselves. Thus, things themselves are not merged but are brought together by conceptual construction.³⁶ [SP 5]

These two things, i.e., the relata, and everything that is distinct from them exist only in themselves, i.e., their own nature. Thus, things themselves are not merged with other things, i.e., they are not related, **but are brought together by conceptual construction**³⁷ as though they were reliant.

How the terms “action” and “agent” are established despite the fact that a distinct action and agent do not actually exist

In accordance with just that conceptual construction, for the purpose of bringing about the understanding of things as conceptually distinct,³⁸ speakers utter words like “action” and “agent.” [SP 6]

In accordance with just that conceptual construction, for the purpose of bringing about the understanding of things as conceptually distinct from other things, **speakers utter words**³⁹ like this is the “action,” or effect, of that “agent,” or cause, despite the fact that there exists no relation between action and agent.

35. Here, I translate the Tibetan *shes par bya* instead of the Sanskrit *matīś*.

36. Cf. PVSV 113.23–25 *ad* PV 1.227cd and PVSV 115.24–116.2 *ad* PV 1.231cd; for English translations of relevant passages, see Steinkellner 2022, xviii note 29; and Eltschinger 2007, 248 and 259.

37. *Annotations* 2a.3 accords with the Tabo variant *rtog* in SP 5d; canonical translations read *rtogs*. As Steinkellner (2022, xiii note 20) points out, the precanonical manuscript of the Tibetan translation of the SP (ed. Tauscher 1994) found at Tabo Monastery (together with manuscripts of the SPV and SPṬ) includes numerous preferable variants to the canonical versions indicating mistakes introduced during revision.

38. SPV *ad* SP 6 clarifies that distinctions of this kind are merely conceptual constructions formed by the process of the exclusion of what is other (*anyāpoha*).

39. *Annotations* 2a.4: *tshog*; em. *tshig*.

5. *Causal Relations*⁴⁰*Simultaneous-or-Sequential Dilemma*

Rejecting the Simultaneous Lemma: Rejecting real relations that Śrāvakas and Yogācārins claim exist between cause and effect simultaneously

How could even a relation between cause and effect be established as founded in two things, since these two do not exist simultaneously? And if it is not founded in two things, how is it a relation? [SP 7]

Although the Sautrāntika and Vaibhāṣika⁴¹ claim that there is a **relation between cause and effect**, it is conveyed that **even this does not exist**. As for that, **how could such a relation be established as founded in two things, since these two do not exist simultaneously**, one ceasing when the other arises? **And if it is not founded in two things, how is it a relation?**

Rejecting the Sequential Lemma: Rejecting real relations that even some Tibetans claim exist between cause and effect sequentially^{42, 43},

Suppose there were a real relation that existed sequentially in one relatum at a time, without requiring the simultaneous existence of the other relatum. There is no relation that exists in only one of the relata, since it would absurdly exist even in the absence of that other relatum. [SP 8]

Even if one were to **suppose there were a real relation that existed sequentially in one of the two relata at a time**, one prior and the other subsequently, if that were established, then it follows that it would not **require**, i.e., rely on, **the simultaneous existence of the other relatum**, since it would **absurdly exist even in the absence of that other relatum**. **Thus, there is no relation that exists sequentially in only one of the relata.**

40. *Flower* only explicitly enumerates these first five topics; cf. *Annotations* outline.

41. Note that Yogācārins are omitted in *Annotations*.

42. *Flower* 2a.1 cites SP 8a1 as *rim gyis* rather than *rim las* as found in all extant Tibetan translations of the SP.

43. Obviously, Chomden Reldri can't mean that Dharmakīrti intended to engage a Tibetan view here but is instead observing that this position found defenders in his own intellectual context.

If, in dependence upon one of those two relata, a relation proceeded to the other relatum, what it depends on should be an assisting factor, but how can that relatum assist when it does not exist? [SP 9]

If this relation gradually proceeded to the other relatum at one time, that could not be a relation either. If, in dependence upon one, i.e., by requiring one of those two relata, what it depends on should be an assisting factor, but how can that relatum assist when that on which it depends does not exist?

Rejecting a real causal relation as a single thing

If two things were related as cause and effect because they are both related to a single thing, then it follows that this same state of affairs would obtain for right and left horns since they are both related with “being a pair,” etc. [SP 10]

If two things, like the pair of fire and smoke, were related as cause and effect because they are both related to a single thing, then it follows that this same state of affairs, i.e., being related as cause and effect, would obtain for right and left horns since they are both related with “being a pair,” etc. Given that those two could not become cause and effect in that manner, nor could fire and smoke.

For a relation is something that is founded in two things. Its defining characteristic is none other than this. [SP 11ab]

For a relation is something, i.e., an object, that is founded in two things, and its, i.e., a relation’s, defining characteristic is none other than this, i.e., being founded in two things.

In the expression “a relation between cause and effect is founded in distinct things,” the word “distinct” is simply a term that is dependent on what the speaker intends to express and does not reflect reality.

If being a cause and effect is just the combination of the determining conditions (*upādhi*) of a specific sequence of presence and absence, [SP 11cd] then why is it not the case that a relation between cause and effect simply consists in these two combined determining conditions, i.e., presence and absence? One may say that it is because they are distinct, but does this term “distinct” not depend on the one who uses it?⁴⁴ [SP 12]

44. As Steinkellner (2022, xvii) points out, see PVSV 38.17–24 *ad* PV 1.68–69 (translated

If it is maintained that **being a relation between cause and effect**, such as fire and smoke, etc., is **just the combination of the determining conditions of a specific sequence of presence, i.e., existence, and absence, i.e., nonexistence, then why is it not the case that a relation between cause and effect simply consists in these two combined determining conditions, i.e., presence and absence, like both horns?** Which is to say, this follows. **Does this term “distinct”—and “identical”—not depend on what the speaker intends to convey?**⁴⁵ Which is to say, it does. Thus, many things could be conveyed by the same words “cause and effect” without contradiction.

How the meaning of cause and effect is ascertained even though real causal relations do not exist

If, upon seeing x at t_1 , one sees y at t_2 , which was not seen at t_1 , and when one does not see x , one does not then see y , a person makes the connection that y is an effect without even having been told.
[SP 13]⁴⁶

If, upon seeing x at t_1 , e.g., fire, one sees y , e.g., smoke, at t_2 , which was not seen previously at t_1 , and when one does not see x (fire), one does not then see y (smoke) either, a person understands⁴⁷ all by themselves that y is an effect of x without even having been told, i.e., taught.

How terms are applied after having been learned

Since, in the absence of this special sequence of observation and non-observation, the idea of an effect does not occur, words like “effect” are also applied for the sake of convenience. [SP 14]

Since, in the absence of this special sequence of observation and non-observation, the idea of an effect does not occur, words like “effect” are also

in Dunne 2004, 136; Eltschinger 2014, 262ff.; and Eltschinger et al. 2018, 76ff.) and PVSV 118.27ff. *ad* PV 1.327 for Dharmakīrti’s explanation of how the fact that real entities are dis-tinct (*bheda*) is concealed by the superimposition of relations.

45. The Tibetan of SP 12c differs from the Sanskrit. Since the Sanskrit reads *bhedāc cen*, one would expect something like *tha dad [phyir] zhe na*, but the Tibetan instead reads *tha dad ces bya’i*. Thus, the phrase translated here as “One may say that it is because they are distinct” is omitted from the Tibetan translation.

46. On the three- or fivefold examination (*trikapañcakacintā*), the process by which we know causal relations to obtain based on a series of observations and non-observations, see, for example, Gillon 1991; Inami 1999; and Lasic 1999 and 2003.

47. Tib. *shes*; cf. Skt. *anveti* “makes the connection.”

applied for the sake of convenience by those knowledgeable about linguistic conventions speaking to other individuals who apprehend such brief expressions as “the vase that has a cause is a product.”

Example to illustrate the previous point

From the successive presence of x followed by y , the understanding that y is the result of x is conveyed. That is called “the referent of that convention,” just as when understanding “cow” from a dewlap, etc. [SP 15]

From the reason of the successive (i.e., prior) presence of x followed by y , if there is the understanding that y is the result of x , a knowledgeable individual may subsequently convey the fact that what was understood is called “the referent of that convention” to communicate that an effect is present when it is present, by virtue of which an ignorant individual will call this fact to mind. This is just as when, for example, someone knowledgeable about linguistic conventions causes an individual who is ignorant of linguistic conventions to understand “cow” from the sign of a dewlap, etc.

Explaining how relations are superimposed by conceptual thought

When y is about to come into being, x is present, and only when x is present will y come into being—these two are commonly known as “cause” and “effect” from this sequence of perception and non-observation. [SP 16]

When y (i.e., the effect) is about to come into being, x (i.e., the cause) that will bring it about is present, and only when x (i.e., the cause) is present, i.e., only after the cause is present, will y (i.e., the effect) come into being—these two things are commonly known as, i.e., called, “cause” and “effect” from this sequence of perception and non-observation.

Conceptual constructions that have false content, whose referents—cause and result—are real objects to just that extent, make things appear as though they were connected. [SP 17]

Conceptual constructions that have false content, whose referents—cause and result—are real objects to just that extent,⁴⁸ only as conceptual constructions, make things appear in that manner as though they were connected.⁴⁹

48. *Annotations* 3a.4: *re shig*; em. *re zbig*.

49. Skt. *ghaṭitān*; n.e. Tib.; *Annotations* supplies an equivalent with *'brel par*.

*Cognition falsely establishes relations*⁵⁰

If two things are distinct, what is it for them to be connected? Even if the two are non-distinct, what is it for them to stand in a relation of cause and effect? For if something else exists, then how could these two unconnected things be connected? [SP 18]

One may ask, “Why is this content false?” **If two things are distinct**, each existing in its own nature, **what is it for them to be connected? Even**⁵¹ **if the two are non-distinct, what is it for them to stand in a relation**⁵² **of cause and effect? For if some other thing exists between them, then how could these two unconnected things be connected**, since the absurd consequence would follow that fire and water too would be connected as cause and effect?

Rejecting other kinds of relations imagined by non-Buddhist systems such as contact, inherence, and possession relations maintained by Naiyāyikas

All this—what is in contact and what is inhered in, etc.—has been investigated by this, since there is no mutual support or any such relatum. [SP 19]

Naiyāyikas claim that there are five relations, such as **contact, inherence**,⁵³ **possession, etc. All this has also**⁵⁴ **been investigated by this general refutation, since there is no mutual support**, e.g., the inherence of the properties white and shiny in a cushion,⁵⁵ **or any such relatum.**

Denying that an inherence relation obtains between wholes and their basic parts, since this would absurdly entail that all causes and effects stand in an inherence relation because of the fact that parts “produce” wholes

For even if an effect were produced by something that it inheres in, that cause would not be inhered in then, nor would it be inhered in

50. *Flower* 2b.1 cites SP 18a1 *tha snyad* . . . ; em. *tha dad*.

51. Skt. *api*; n.e. Tib.

52. While the abstract nominalization of the compound *kāryakāraṇatā* conveys the meaning of a relation, there is no corresponding nominalization or term for “relation” in the Tibetan translations.

53. While the Sanskrit refers (by way of the *-in* suffix) to the relata that stand in relations of contact and inherence, the Tibetan refers simply to contact and inherence.

54. Tib. *+kyang*; n.e. Skt.

55. *Flower* 2b.3 gives a similar example, though in place of *gdan* it reads *gnal[snal] ma*.

on account of that production⁵⁶ since absurd consequences would follow. [SP 20]

For even if an effect, e.g., a whole, were produced by something that it inheres in, e.g., atoms, those two do not⁵⁷ stand in an inherence relation since the cause would not be inhered in then, i.e., when the result has already arisen, and since the absurd consequence would follow that the same would apply to the case of a potter and a pot, i.e., the potter would absurdly inhere in the pot.

Rejecting inherence relations between relata that do not support one another since this would absurdly entail that anything could stand in an inherence relation with anything else

If there could be a relation, either in the case of inherence or otherwise, even between two things that did not support each other while inhering or otherwise, then everything could be mutually inherent. [SP 21]

If there could be a relation due to inherence even between two relata of inherence (or it could be said those two that inhere)⁵⁸ that did not support each other while inhering or otherwise, then everything in the world could also⁵⁹ stand in mutual inherence relations.⁶⁰

Rejecting contact relations

Even if two things bring about a contact relation, it cannot on that account be accepted that the two are conjoined, since it would then follow that action, etc., would enter into a contact relation. And remaining (*stḥiti*) has been explained in detail. [SP 22]

Here, it is claimed that the contact relation is brought about from the action of one member of a pair as in the case of a tree and a bird, or by the action of

56. Skt. *na tato*; cf. Tib. *de gnyis min*.

57. See previous note.

58. Deviating from the remainder of the manuscript, this annotation (*de dag gnyis ni 'du ba'am zer*) is written in *dbu can* rather than *dbu med*, indicating that it may have been added by a different hand. The only other *dbu can* annotations in the manuscript are editorial: the addition of a missing syllable (*Annotations* 3a.4, SP 16a: *'gyur*) and missing suffix (*Annotations* 4a.1, SP 22d: *+r*) from the root text.

59. Tib. *+kyang*; n.e. Skt.

60. Tib. SP 21 reads *phan tshun 'brel ba* (“mutually related”) rather than Skt. *samavāyi para-sparam* (“mutually inherent”).

both members as in the case of individuals involved in a quarrel with each other. **Even if two things, i.e., relata, bring about a contact relation, it cannot on that account be accepted as a Buddhist commitment that the two are conjoined since it would then follow that action,⁶¹ etc., by virtue of which contact is brought about, would enter into a contact relation. And remaining has already been explained in detail in the texts, *Pramāṇavārttika* and *Pramāṇaviniścaya*.**

Rejecting relations of contact, inherence, etc., between permanent entities

Based on contact, etc., whatever was previously unfit to stand in that relation becomes fit, because for something that has a nature that is permanently fit to stand in a relation, the lack of this fitness would be contradictory. [SP 23]

If it is claimed that **based on contact, possession, action, etc.,⁶² separation, etc., whatever was previously unfit to stand in that relation, such as a vase, becomes fit, because for something, e.g., an effect that has been produced, that has a nature that is permanently fit to stand in a given relation, the lack of this fitness would furthermore be contradictory.**

Relations like possession, separation, going, remaining, etc., all qualify only impermanent things and are wholly reducible to the things that they qualify

Thus, let something's nature that is referred to as its fitness be spoken of as "separation," "connection," or "motion." What is the use of imagining some other real motion, etc.? [SP 24]

Thus, let this nature,⁶³ e.g., of an impermanent vase, that is referred to as its fitness, be spoken of as "separation," "connection," or "motion," etc.⁶⁴ What is the use of imagining⁶⁵ some other real motion, etc.?

61. *Annotations* 3b.4, SP 22a agrees with the Tabo variant *las sogs*; canonical translations read *la sogs*.

62. Tib. SP 23: *las sogs* rather than *la sogs* as expected; n.e. Skt. for *las*.

63. Tib. *ngo bo 'di*; cf. Skt. *svabhāva 'sya*.

64. Tib. SP 24b + *sogs*; n.e. Skt.

65. *Annotations* 4a.3 SP 24d: *brtags* in accord with Tib. of SPV. Canonical translations of SP: *rtags*

*Distinct things arising anew in each moment is the conventional mode of existence*⁶⁶

Even if these relations did exist, since the relation “of this” is not commonly accepted, it is reasonable that things that arise in each moment have distinct natures. [SP 25]

Even if these substantial relations, such as motion, etc., **did exist** as distinct things, **since the relation** “the motion of this person” **is not even commonly accepted**, it is therefore **reasonable**—and it should be added that it is “established”—**that the conventional mode of existence of things is that they arise in each moment as distinct entities**,⁶⁷ i.e., they exist with their own natures. These annotations have thus been appended.

Here, since all phenomena exist with their own natures, an agential relation is rejected for established and unestablished things. However, a necessary connection is not rejected,⁶⁸ as has been established above. Thus, since all things ultimately lack any agential relation, it has been demonstrated that they are primordially pacified. These annotations⁶⁹ to the *Examination of Relations* have been set out by Chomden Reldri.⁷⁰

The *Examination of Relations* by the great master and scholar Dharmakīrti is concluded. It was translated by the Indian scholar Jñānagarbha and the translator Bandé Namkha (Bande Gnam mkha’).

This was edited and finalized by the chief editor-translator, the monk Tingedzin Zangpo (Ting nge ’dzin Bzang po), under the guidance of the Indian scholar Śrī Subhūtiśānti.

Homage to the Buddha! The eight topics of the *Examination of Relations* are as follows:⁷¹

66. *Flower* 3b.4: the quotative *zhes* follows *rigs shing grub bo*, although only *rigs* is included in Tib. SP 25d.

67. Tib. *dnegos po tha dad*; cf. Skt. *svabhāvabhedha*.

68. Necessary connection (*avinābhāva*, *med na mi ’byung ba*) refers to the invariable connection that obtains between the relata in the two kinds of natural relation (*svabhāvapratibandha*) that underwrite inferences: an identity relation (*tādātmya*) and a causal relation (*tadutpatti*).

69. *Annotations ad* 4a.4: *chan*; typeset edition: em. *mchan*.

70. *Annotations ad* 4a.4: *dpal ldan*; typeset edition: em. *bcom ldan*.

71. The following topical outline (which is rendered in the same size as the SP root text that it follows) also includes several annotations, which denote the first few words of stanzas falling under each topic, and which are indicated by parentheses in the translation. For ease of reference, I supply the verse numbers here in square brackets. All annotations to the topical outline are omitted in the Lhasa (2006) typeset edition.

1. Rejecting dependence relations (“Suppose there is a dependence . . .” [SP 1])
2. Rejecting blending relations (“Suppose there is a blending of natures . . .” [SP 2])
3. Rejecting reliance relations (“Suppose there is a relation of reliance on another . . .” [SP 3])
4. Rejecting a relation that is distinct from its relata (“If there were a relation due to two . . .” [SP 4–6])
5. Rejecting causal relations [SP 7–18]
6. Rejecting inherence relations (“ . . . what is in contact and . . .” [SP 19–21])
7. Rejecting contact relations (“ . . . action, etc. . .” [SP 22–25ab])
8. Explaining the point of what was established by these refutations (“ . . . in each moment . . .” [SP 25cd])

The rejection of causal relations has four subtopics:

- 5.1 Rejecting causal relations by examining them as simultaneous and sequential (“ . . . between cause and effect . . .” [SP 7–9])
- 5.2 Stating the absurd consequences that would follow if a causal relation arose from being connected to a single thing and if a real causal relation consisted in co-presence and co-absence (“If . . .” [SP 10–12])
- 5.3 The meaning of cause and effect and the way in which these conventions are ascertained (“ . . . *x* . . .” [SP 13–15])
- 5.4 Based on several lines of reasoning, establishing that it is an erroneous cognition that apprehends relations (“When *y* is about to come into being . . .” [SP 16–18])

The meaning of the *Examination of Relations* has thus been properly summarized by Chomden Reldri.⁷²

Editorial Abbreviations and Symbols

+	add
*	unintelligible
em.	emended
n.e.	no equivalent in

72. An annotation at the end of the text appears to read: *z zhus yang * zhus yang zhus* (“This has been proofread twice”).

Abbreviations of Primary Sources

- BSAM₁ Bsam gtan bzang po. 2006. *Bcom ldan rigs pa'i ral gri'i rnam thar dad pa'i ljon shing*. In *Gsung 'bum Bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri*, vol. 1, 41–94. Lhasa: Khams sprul bsod nams don grub.
- BSAM₂ Bsam gtan bzang po. 2007. *Bcom ldan rigs ral pa'i rnam thar*. In *Gsung 'bum Bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri*, vol. 1, 1–30. Kathmandu: Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang.
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- Flower* Bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri. 2006. *'Brel pa brtag pa rgyan gyi me tog*. In *Gsung 'bum Bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri*, vol. 10, 48–56. Lhasa: Khams sprul bsod nams don grub.
- HB *Hetubindu* (Dharmakīrti).
- NB *Nyāyabindu* (Dharmakīrti).
- PV *Pramāṇavārttika* (Dharmakīrti). 1971/72. Yusho Miyasaka, ed., *Pramāṇavārttika-kārikā* (Sanskrit and Tibetan). *Acta Indologica* (Narita: Naritasa Shinshoji) 2: 1–206.
- PVin *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (Dharmakīrti).
- PVSV *Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti* (Dharmakīrti). 1960. Raniero Gnoli, ed., *The Pramāṇavārttikam of Dharmakīrti. The First Chapter with the Autocommentary* (Text and critical notes). Serie Orientale Roma 23. Rome: Istituto Italiano per Il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.
- PS *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (Dignāga).
- RGYAL Rgyal tshab Dar ma rin chen. 1982. *'Brel ba brtag pa'i rnam bshad nyi ma'i snying po*. In *Gsung 'bum Rgyal tshab rje*. New Delhi: Zhol par khang. (Block prints reproduced from 1897 set of prints from Lhasa zhol blocks, Dga' ldan phun tshogs gling.)
- Skt. Sanskrit of SP.
- SP *Sambandhaparīkṣā* (Dharmakīrti), in Steinkellner 2022.
- SPT *Sambandhaparīkṣāṭīkā* (Vinītadeva).
- SPV *Sambandhaparīkṣāvṛtti* (Devendrabuddhi), in Steinkellner 2022.
- SS *Santānāntarasiddhi* (Dharmakīrti).
- Tib. Tibetan translations of SP.
- VN *Vādanyāya* (Dharmakīrti).

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