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Natural Awareness: The Discovery of Authentic Being in the rDzogs chen Tradition

Natural Awareness as Authentic Being

Abstract

According to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition ‘*The Great Perfection*’ (*rDzogs pa chen po*), we can distinguish between two basic dimensions of mind: an intentional dimension that is divided into perceiver and perceived and a non-dual dimension that transcends all distinctions between subject and object. The non-dual dimension is evident through its intuitional characteristics; an unbounded openness that is free from intentional limitations, a spontaneous luminosity which presences all phenomena, and self-awareness that recognizes the original resonance of beings. Owing to these characteristics, the descriptions of this dimension exemplify an integrative way of speaking about primordial reality, which resolves the assumed dichotomy between *kataphatic* and *apophatic* discourses by pointing to a dimension that pervades all phenomena without being identified with any of those. In this article I intend to discuss the characteristics of the non-dual dimension and their implications for our understanding of human consciousness and the inherent co-emergence of positive and negative perceptions of reality.

Keywords

Tibetan Buddhism; 'The Great Perfection'; Non-duality; Phenomenology.

The inquiry into the various aspects of mind (*sems; citta*) played a central role in the Buddhist milieu from its earliest stages, beginning with the teachings that were attributed to the Buddha himself by numerous traditions. This inquiry emphasized the essential role of an experiential approach towards the various modalities of cognition, including perceptions, feelings, emotions and thoughts.¹ Moreover, owing to its very definition as unconditional, the soteriological goal of the Buddhist teachings, being the extinction of afflictive emotions and freedom from deluded conceptions, indicated two basic modes of experiential awareness. The first mode was characterized by afflictive emotions and fictional perceptions of reality, while the second mode was without those afflictions and delusions from its very beginning.² The distinction between these two modes raised a fundamental question about the possible relations between the conditioned and the unconditioned. This question concerned the very nature of human existence since one of its main interests lay in the issue of primordially. If the conditioned mode preceded the unconditioned, as evidenced by our worldly experience and multiple Buddhist descriptions alike, then how could the unconditioned appear at all? Yet, if the unconditioned preceded the conditioned, why has the latter arisen and the former forgotten? This fundamental conundrum received diverse answers within different traditions and some of those asserted a basic principle of non-duality (*gnyis med; advaya*) that championed the originality of an unconditioned reality, which was free from all forms of dualistic distinctions.

The non-dual principle was evident in a variety of Buddhist traditions, one of those being the Tibetan *Great Perfection* (*rDzogs pa chen po*) that wove together numerous views of Sūtra (*mDo*) and Tantra (*rGyud*) for the sake of presenting a vision of primordial completeness concerning all of reality.³ This tradition found its eloquent and highly elaborated articulation in the works of the fourteenth-century Tibetan teacher Klong chen rab 'byams pa (Longchen Rabjampa).⁴ Throughout his writings Klong chen pa presented a rich tapestry of views concerning the various aspects of lived experience (*nyams*) and their luminous source, which he termed 'Mind-itself' (*sems nyid; cittatā*). Some of the most extensive treatments of these topics are found in his 'Seven Treasures' (*mDzod bdun*),⁵ in which he meticulously rendered a comprehensive picture of Buddhist view and praxis that culminated in the non-dual vision of 'The Great Perfection'. Among those, three treasures gave special attention to the question concerning the relation between the two primary modes of awareness: 'The Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle' (*Theg mchog mdzod*),⁶ 'The Treasury of Words and Meanings' (*Tshig don mdzod*)⁷ and 'The Treasury of the Space of Phenomena' (*Chos dbyings mdzod*).⁸ Since these particular works minutely described Mind-as-such (*sems nyid; cittatā*), which was identified with the Ground⁹ (*gzhi; ālaya*) of both 'Cyclic Becoming' (*'khor ba; saṃsāra*) and 'Transcendent Peace' (*mya ngan las 'das pa; nirvāṇa*),¹⁰ they are well suited for revealing the profound implications of the principle of non-duality on the possible modes of awareness.¹¹

As a first step in our investigation, we will present the arguments used by Klong chen pa when analysing the various descriptions of the Ground as found in multiple Buddhist views. Following this, we will discuss the phenomenological and ontological ramifications of these descriptive distinctions. Having concluded this discussion, the three characteristics of Mind-as-such will be introduced along with a detailed inquiry into their unique meanings in a non-dual context. As will become evident throughout both discussions, the terminologies that Klong chen pa disqualified, on the one hand, and adopted, on the other hand, share much in common in terms of their attributive content. As such, we will argue that what distinguishes these two contexts can be clarified when approaching the Ground of beings through a perspective that differentiates between the non-dual and the dual modes of being. Thus, the main difference between these terminologies is their hermeneutical context since a non-dual interpretation facilitates their integration while a dualistic interpretation distinguishes between those on the base of temporal and causal considerations.

Distinguishing the Ground

The actual realization of the non-dual vision faces a twofold difficulty; first, an existential confusion regarding the be-ing of beings and, based on that, an interpretive misidentification of the Being that is not a distinct entity. Consequently, as a preliminary step on the way to explicate this vision, it is imperative to examine the erroneous modes of describing the basic ground of beings, because the recognition of it is often clouded by dualistic presuppositions that cover the actuality (*don*) of non-dual be-ing. In other words, without examining the common ways through which the basic ground is described, it would be difficult to release the non-dual vision from the implicit presuppositions of objectification and division.

The fundamental necessity of examining the descriptions of the ground was recognized by Klong chen pa in his ‘Treasury of Words and Meanings’, as he initiated it with an analysis of the seven ways of referring to the basic ground.¹² Through this analysis Klong chen pa discarded six of the ways while accepting the seventh as the suitable mode of speaking about that which is primordial with relation to the dualistic mode of being.¹³ According to him, the seven ways of describing the basic ground are

In general, there are no more than seven ways which describe the Ground in the tradition of ‘The Great Perfection’: The tradition which asserts the Ground as spontaneously present, as indeterminate, as the actual foundation of a determined factuality, as able to become anything whatsoever, as able to be [descriptively] accepted as anything whatsoever, as varied, and as originally pure.¹⁴

As mentioned above, Klong chen pa distinguished between the first six ways which belong to the discursive mode used by the tenet systems (*grub mtha'*; *siddhānta*) when referring to the ground,

and the last way which is maintained by those that follow the contemplative path (*lam; mārga*).¹⁵ This distinction already suggests a fundamental methodological distinction between two basic modes of speaking about the Ground. On the one hand, the propositional-logical discursive mode of the tenet systems is based on analysis of entities that are perceived as distinct beings separated from one another due to their discernible existence in a spatio-temporal space.¹⁶ On the other hand, the contemplative mode discards the analytical methodology of objective discourse in favour of an uncontrived (*bcos med*) meeting with the actuality of lived experience. Based on such meeting the contemplative method reveals a unique mode of being which is not determined according to similarities and distinctions between particular beings. Furthermore, since both modes share similar terminologies when referring to the Ground, it can be claimed that the difference between those lies in their method of inquiry, since each of those is already characterized by implicit pre-suppositions about the nature of be-ing. Hence, the individual method plays a crucial role in determining the relations between awareness and phenomena, as well as in providing the hermeneutical basis for different interpretations of shared terms.¹⁷

The Six erroneous Ways of describing the Ground

Following his enumeration of the seven ways of speaking about the Ground, Klong chen pa discussed each of the first six ways by using a threefold elaboration: first, introducing the main characteristics of the Ground according to each particular way, then refuting those by pointing to their absurd logical consequences (*thal; prasaṅga*) and, finally, summarizing the significance of these refutations in relation to an authentic (*yang dag pa; tattva*) rDzogs chen view concerning the Ground. Simultaneously, even though each way is discussed separately, all of those view the Ground, according to Klong chen pa, as a being that exists in a similar manner to distinct entities, and as such it cannot fulfil its assumed status as an all-embracing ground.¹⁸ Therefore, the inherent logical tensions which are pointed to in the context of each way arise, first and foremost, from perceiving the Ground in an objectified mode of being as either ‘this’ or ‘that’, regardless of the particular attributes that are utilized in each context.

The first description of the Ground which is discussed by Klong chen pa characterizes it as spontaneously present in its mode of abiding (*gnas lugs; tathātvā*), unlimited and having all the manifested enlightened qualities (*yon tan; guṇa*) already present. Klong chen pa refuted this description by indicating the inner tensions between the existential states of cyclic becoming and transcendent peace and claiming that if the ground was spontaneously present within a worldly mode of being it would necessarily imply the co-presence of both states since the Ground was already fully manifested. Furthermore, this kind of spontaneous presence would nullify any causal connection within a spatio-temporal frame of being as cause and fruition will exist at the same time. Lastly,

Klong chen pa described the Ground according to the rDzogs chen view as originally pure in its essence and totally pure in its nature. The purity of those indicated the primordial condition of the Ground as completely free from the stains (*dri ma; mala*) of objectifying tendencies which are related to both bondage and liberation as opposing states of determined being that is constrained under the excluding relations of an object. Hence, the twofold purity revealed the spontaneous presence of the perfect Ground when it is viewed as the source for arising (*'char gzhi*) phenomena and not as a determined entity or conscious state that is intentionally perceived.¹⁹

The second description of the Ground discussed by Klong chen pa viewed it as indeterminate since lacking any objective essence that can be determined as a single self-nature. Consequently, the Ground is made to appear in accordance with whatever the mind imputes it to be. Klong chen pa refuted this description by pointing to its absurd implications concerning causality as the imputing mind can vacillate back and forth between the states of cyclic bondage and transcendent liberation, without being established in one state or another.²⁰ Instead, Klong chen pa described the Ground as primordially unproduced and without linguistic and conceptual discriminations. Therefore, the Ground is like the sky since both are free from any partial determination that will reduce them into the status of a distinct objective entity.²¹ Once again, this description reveals the fundamental distinction between a non-dual, non-objectified mode of being and an objectified one when referring to the Ground of beings since the same attribute can be accepted or rejected depending on the way through which the Ground is perceived. As a result, it is possible to claim that the particular meanings of each description derive from the distinctions between different modes of being attributed to the Ground.

The third description of the Ground asserted it to be an actual foundation of a determined factuality as its essence is without change just like the sky and its modes of appearance cannot be altered or transformed. Hence, the Ground is the unchanging essential foundation for the determined modes of phenomenal appearance that constitute together the world of factual objective beings. Klong chen pa refuted this description by revealing the tension between an unchanging objective essence of the Ground and the mere possibility of attaining liberation because the actual determined essence of the Ground cannot be transformed from bondage to liberation. Consequently, both the realization of the Ground and the path of praxis are inconsequential and fruitless as the Ground by its very essence is always the same in terms of its determined existence. Klong chen pa concluded the discussion on this description by affirming the view of the Ground as without transition or change due to its original purity from the stains of dualistic objectifying perceptions, whether realized as such or not. Nevertheless, on the ontic level of distinct experiential appearances Klong chen pa rejected the claim about the inefficiency of an exerted praxis to purify the mind.²² The differentiation

of the unaltered Ground and the ontic purity of transformed experiences points, once again, to two distinct modes of being, which are neither exclusive nor identical. This is because the Ground and the individual experiences that arise from it cannot be dissociated and, simultaneously, cannot be considered as equivalent since in that case any reference to the Ground will become obsolete.

The fourth description of the Ground referred to it as being able to change into anything whatsoever since its essence is without definite segmentation and differentiation (*phyogs dang ris su ma chad pa*) and, as such, its mode of abiding can change indeterminately. As in previous refutations, Klong chen pa negated this description through presenting its destructive implications for any causal order, especially the one which relates to bondage and liberation. Since the Ground can change into anything whatsoever each and every moment, then even liberation can be reversed into a state of bondage.²³ Having refuted this description, Klong chen pa claimed the Ground to be in itself without transition or change, and consequently without transformation into another.²⁴ Such a description points to the unique mode of being of the Ground as it is beyond the existential modes of temporality and causal objective relations. As a result, we are faced with a challenge of bringing together the Ground as a non-object with its status as the origin of objects and, in other words, relating the non-dual mode of being as the source of the dual mode of objectified being.

The fifth description of the Ground asserted it as being able to be accepted (*khas blang*) as anything whatsoever since arising as the essence of all objects in a manner which is unrestrained (*phyogs yan*) and without determined grounding. Klong chen pa refuted this descriptive position by claiming that its acceptance will lead to characterizing the Ground through opposing objective attributes, such as existing/not existing or permanent/null. Furthermore, accepting this description will lead to an identification of the Ground with countless objects, which in its own turn would prevent any possibility of recognizing its singular essence. Having refuted this position, Klong chen pa asserted the Ground to transcend all objective attributes, such as those that he referred to before. However, these attributes can still be utilized for describing the Ground when perceived as symbolic examples, which emphasize particular aspects of it for the practitioner.²⁵ Such attributions indicate a certain affinity between the Ground and particular beings since without such an affinity it would not be possible to relate to the multiple aspects of the Ground by referring to particular beings. Yet, as Klong chen pa himself reminds us, identifying the Ground with the arising objects, even if those are infinite in their variety, necessarily leads to logically absurd consequences as we are faced with the daunting task of accommodating a supposedly infinite object in a mode of being that is dualistic and objectively excluding.

The sixth description of the Ground viewed it as variegated (*sna tshogs*) since its essence self-arises (*rang shar*) as everything and, as such, it inevitably appears through various modes. In his

refutation of this position, Klong chen pa claimed that if the Ground was variegated it would have been impossible to refer to it as it could never be gathered into a singular Being. Moreover, he argued that accepting such a description will necessarily lead to a state in which the Ground will be in continual flux and, consequently, the fruit of liberation would not be attainable in any final manner. Following his refutations, Klong chen pa asserted the Ground in a threefold way. First, he claimed it to be free of any basis for categorical characterization (*mtshan gzhi*) due to its lack of any objective establishment. Second, he described it as free of any factor that is objectively characterized, since its self-nature is liberated from its very appearance and, as such, it is not liable to an objective enframing. Third, as its mode of abiding is free from conceptual elaborations (*spros pa; prapañca*) the Ground is free from any objective characteristics (*mtshan ma; lakṣaṇa, nimitta*). Finally, since those three - the basis of characterization, the factor to be characterized and the objective characteristic - cannot be found when relating to the Ground, then although it is revealed unceasingly as the source of arising of the various phenomena it is, in itself, beyond the fault of being an object.²⁶

The refutations of the six ways of describing the Ground reveal a shared problem, which is the tendency to approach the Ground of beings as another entity, even if it is considered as having a unique ontic status. Consequently, all of these descriptions have unsolvable inherent tensions that arise from the need to bridge between an objective mode of being that is constrained by temporality, causality and exclusive relations, and an horizon of Being which is beyond all phenomenal distinctions. As none of those descriptions pointed to the difference between these two modes of being when interpreted from an objective frame-of-being, we are left with a logical impasse that seems unresolved as long as the Ground and the beings are considered as sharing a common way of being.

The authentic Way of describing the Ground

Unlike its predecessors, the seventh position presented by Klong chen pa leads us beyond the inherent tensions that arise from perceiving the Ground as a unique object since its description of the Ground refers explicitly to its unique mode of being:

The original purity of the primordial Ground transcends the [ontic] limits of existence and non-existence, being the great transcendence from articulation, mental contemplation and [classifying] expression. Since the essence is originally pure it is free of the limit of permanent existence and is not [ontically] established as objective phenomena with their categorical characteristics. As the self nature [of the Ground] is spontaneously present it transcends the [ontic] limit of a nihilistic non-existence, being the completely pure being-as-such of the empty luminous light. [The Ground] is the naturally primeval expansive awakening (Buddha), the wisdom-energy (*dgongs pa*) of the unchanging dimension (body) of Reality. As cyclic bondage and transcendent liberation are not established anywhere, it is the great primordial [matrix of]

knowing that is primordially empty [yet] self-emergent (*ye stong rang byung gi ye shes*), abiding like the sky from the primordial beginning.²⁷

As the second part of this article includes an extensive discussion on the essence and self-nature of the Ground, here we will only briefly elucidate the main points that are found in the seventh description of the Ground. Due to the difficulties arising from the ambivalent mode of being of the Ground that resulted in numerous inherent contradictions, Klong chen pa presented his own position by describing the unique mode-of-being of the Ground, which transcends the ontic limits of existence and non-existence and all possibilities to speak about it in an objective manner. According to him, the Ground from its own primordial beginning (*ye thog*)²⁸ is not an entity for objective thinking and categorical characterization. As such, the Ground is not a distinct object with unique characteristics, but a unique mode of being without any entitative characteristics. This mode of being is described by referring to the essence and self-nature of the Ground, which are originally pure and spontaneously present, respectively.²⁹ The original purity emphasizes the non-objectiveness of the Ground since it implies the radical freedom of the Ground from the cognitional (*shes bya'i sgrib pa; jñeyāvaraṇam*) and emotional (*nyon mongs sgrib pa; kleśāvaraṇam*) obscurations, which sustain the objectifying tendencies towards outer phenomena, inner subjective experience and, even, subjectivity itself as the Ground of all experience that is turned into a unique ineffable object.³⁰ Although Klong chen pa solely mentioned the original purity of the Ground as its defining characteristics, in his actual description he presented it in tandem with the spontaneously present self-nature. As the Ground is the source of all phenomena, the original purity by itself cannot provide an adequate description of it since it does not indicate the luminous creative power which is at the root of phenomenal experience. Hence, only the mutual description of original purity, which transcends the limit of permanent objective existence, and spontaneously present self-nature that transcends the limit of non-existence, can indicate the Ground in its unique non-dual Be-ing.³¹ Since this mode of being is so alien to the objectifying tendencies, it should be evoked time and again by poetic similes that are able to lead objective thinking into its own limits. For example, as the mind tries to perceive the limitlessness of the sky or re-connect the flow of lived experience to its transcendental ground, it can reach its own limits of finitude and closure. Simultaneously, it can open to its own transcendental self-emerging knowing that resists the limits of an established mode of being that is perceived through dualistic and excluding categories.³²

In conclusion, by presenting the seven ways of describing the Ground of beings, Klong chen pa pointed to a radical distinction between two modes of being. On the one hand, the mode of being as an object that is characterized by excluding categories, such as inner/outer, physical/mental and subjective/objective, within a spatio-temporal frame of being. On the other hand, the mode of being

of a non-objectified spontaneously present Being that is not separated from beings, as it is their primordial ground, while not existing as an entity in itself. Needless to say, such a Being presents to us a radical challenge in terms of how to think and speak about it without relying deeply rooted somatic, emotional, cognitive and discursive habits that reify the perceived phenomena that emerge in the present flow of experience. Consequently, these habits cover up the vast open back-ground in which all phenomena arise, abide and dissolve. Yet, according to Klong chen pa the abovementioned challenge is not insurmountable so long as we are willing to release our objectifying habits; first, on a discursive level and, later, on the level of lived praxis.

The Integrative Language of Being

Phenomenological and Religious Contexts

Klong chen pa's discussion concerning the various definitions of the Ground of beings indicated an essential difference between a non-objective and an objective mode of being. Moreover, from the refutations of the first six definitions and the assertion of the seventh, an initial description of this essential difference has already taken shape. The following section will further elaborate on this essential difference by relating it to the three basic characteristics of the Ground of beings, Mind-as-such. These three characteristics were minutely explicated by Klong chen pa through several kinds of discourse, including doctrinal classifications, phenomenological descriptions and poetic images. Furthermore, the delineations of the three characteristics serve as a gateway for general deliberations on the phenomenological attitude,³³ as well as on the distinction between 'positive' (*Kataphatic*) and 'negative' (*Apophatic*) modes of discourse when speaking about that which is the source of beings. When approaching these issues through the descriptions of the Ground of beings, there arises a non-dual and non-predicative mode of relating to the transcendental dimension of subjectivity as revealed in the realm of lived experience. This non-dual mode clarifies the unique language of Klong chen pa, which brings together a rich array of supposed oppositions into a wholeness that is not limited by any of these. As such, before turning to the specific description of this mode, we will discuss its more comprehensive implications in the context of religious and philosophical discourse.

First, Klong chen pa's descriptions of the Ground establish it as the transcendental dimension of subjectivity, which is present within the entire range of individual experiences.³⁴ This locus is well evidenced in Klong chen pa's terminology that include terms like 'Mind-as-such/Mind-itself' (*sems nyid; cittatā*), 'Transcendental awareness' (*rig pa*), 'Primordial knowing' (*ye shes; jñāna*) and 'Subjectivity-itself' (*bdag nyid; ātman*) when referring to the primordial dimensions of Reality. These terms attest to the fundamental place of the transcendental dimension in the stream of lived experience, both in the context of being and knowing, as it precedes the distinction into the poles of subjective knower and objective known. At the same time, since the transcendental dimension is

revealed through the fabric of experiential phenomena and their meaningful relations, and not as a distinct experience, it holds a unique place which is not equivalent to that of individual phenomena yet not totally separated from it.³⁵ In addition, as this dimension is revealed to **be** the abiding ground of the spatio-temporal world, any attempt to relate to it through a causal frame of being will obscure its uniqueness and originality. Put differently, relating to this dimension as a unique object which is essentially separated from the flow of present experience already distorts it, even without any formal description of it. Finally, since this dimension is revealed through the flow of present experience, its characteristics are already latent within it and, as such, they are not to be regarded as existing attributes of an isolated substratum. Hence, in Klong chen pa's descriptions of the three characteristics of Mind-as-such we find a continuous emphasis on their transcendental status and their indivisible embedded-ness within the flow of experience.

The identification of the Ground with the transcendental dimension of mind, which is not separated from phenomena yet not identical, leads us into a well-known religious and philosophical problem about the proper mode of speaking about the source of beings that is not a being in itself.³⁶ On the one side, the attributive mode of speaking that is also known as *kataphatic* discourse, which has the meaning of affirmation or 'saying with', is based on a positive/positing description of such a source. This mode refers to the essential nature of such a source, even while emphasizing the mere analogical role of the attributes utilized to describe it. On the other side, the latter mode of speaking that is known as *apophatic* discourse, with the meaning of negation or 'saying away', rejects the possibility of giving any kind of attributive description about the source of beings since such a description will limit and distort the transcendental nature of it.

Klong chen pa's intricate descriptions of Mind-as-such clearly exemplified the multiple relations between those two modes of speaking; one which positively described Mind-itself, also identified as the Ground of beings, and another that aimed to negate all affirming descriptions concerning it, since those are liable to being reified into a permanent (*rtag pa*) essence.³⁷ At first sight these two modes of speaking seem like complete opposites, as one asserts the possibility of speaking about the source of beings by using discrete attributes, while the other rejects all such attempts by asserting the danger of forgetting the unique essence of this source when describing it through common attributes. However, in accordance with the integrative language of Klong chen pa we can ask whether those modes of speaking are beyond any reconciliation, or perhaps their commonly acknowledged opposition to one another is grounded in some implicit pre-suppositions about their assumed 'object'?

Even though the discursive modes just mentioned received their meaning within a theological and, even, monotheistic context, they are also well attested in the context of the Buddhist milieu from its early stages. For example, already within the discourses attributed to the Buddha himself as

found in the Pāli canon, we find diverse modes of speaking about the final goal of the Buddha's teachings, known as Nibbāna/Nirvāṇa. These modes range from keeping silent about this goal up to giving rich descriptions of it, and even advocating its primordial status as a pre-condition for the mere possibility of attaining liberation from cyclic existence.³⁸ Later positions that were introduced within the context of 'The Great Vehicle' (*Theg pa chen po; Mahāyāna*) have also differed in their view about the proper way of speaking about the final goal, as is evident within the teachings that are found in the traditions of the 'The Perfection of Wisdom' (*Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa; Prāṅṅā-pāramitā*) and 'The Buddha Nature' (*De bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po; Tathāgata-garbha*). Furthermore, these diverse approaches are also found in the tenet systems that arose from these traditions, including 'The Middle Way' (*dBu ma; Mādhyamika*) and 'The Yogic Practice' (*rNal 'byor spyod pa; Yogācāra*).³⁹ Lastly, the kataphatic/apophatic division is expressed in 'The Adamantine Vehicle' (*rDo rje theg pa; Vajrayāna*), which presented a strong inclination to identify the final goal of liberation with the basic ground of being, as it claimed it to be the indivisible matrix of emptiness and luminosity. Thus, the rDzogs chen tradition as the culmination of this Vehicle according to its own self-presentation integrated within its explications of the Ground of beings various modes of speaking that were inherited from multiple scriptural and philosophical traditions. As Klong chen pa is considered to be the main doctrinal authority of 'The Great Perfection' tradition in general, and its 'Heart Essence' (*sNying thig*) strand in particular, his descriptions of the Ground reveal a complex mode of speaking that challenges the sharp distinction between positing and negating modes of speaking. The challenge stems from describing the Ground as lacking all possible kinds of attributive existence while spontaneously presenting itself in a non-dual manner. Hence, by examining the rich descriptions about the Ground of beings we can gain precious insights into a mode of speaking that defies a common-held dichotomy concerning our ability to speak about that which is not an object of perception, cognition and analysis. Moreover, due to the direct and clear language used by Klong chen pa when referring to the nature of mind, his descriptions can help with the clarification of similar attempts to speak about a non-reified reality that is revealed through lived experience.

The Three Characteristics of Mind-as-such

The seventh way of describing the Ground of beings revealed a unique mode of speaking which integrated a positive presentation of the Ground and a self-referring negation, which is evident in the assertion of its essence as originally pure from objectifying perceptions. As such, the detailed description of this Ground through its three indivisible characteristics (*dbyer med kyi mtshan nyid gsum*) demonstrates various existential approaches towards the radical mode of non-reified being. These approaches include the *kataphatic* and *apophatic* modes of speaking, the non-dual vision of Mind-as-such and phenomena (Loy, 1988), the phenomenological-cum-constituting modes of

transcendental subjectivity (Fink, 1995) and the Heideggerian ‘Ontological difference’ between Being and beings (Heidegger, 1993). The shared principle that connects these diverse approaches into a single field of meaning is their common attempt to point towards a dimension of reality which is beyond the realm of objective existence, yet not separated from it in an isolated realm of its own. This principle is well attested in Klong chen pa's description of the Ground, which balances between a radical distinguishing of various modes of being and an emphasis on the all-inclusiveness of the Ground with relation to the entire range of experiential appearances.

Klong chen pa presented the Ground of beings through three basic characteristics, which are its empty essence (*ngo bo*) that is originally pure (*ka dag*), its luminous self-nature (*rang bzhin*) that is spontaneously present (*lhun grub*) and its compassionate resonance (*thugs rje*) that is all-pervading (*kun khyab*):

The [mind]-stream of the natural Ground is the triad of essence, self-nature and compassionate resonance which are transcendently known as originally pure from the beginning. Furthermore, as the essence is originally pure, the attribute of ‘dimmed transcendental awareness’ does not exist and even the mere designation of ‘delusion’ is not experienced as existent. As the self-nature is spontaneously present, transcendental knowing shines forth as light. Because the compassionate resonance is all-pervading the act of [phenomenal] arising is unceasing. It (the Ground of beings) abides as the space [from which] whatever [phenomena of] transcendent peace and cyclic existence occurs.⁴⁰

Klong chen pa's introduction of the three characteristics gives us a glimpse to the phenomenological orientation that is utilized when referring to the natural Ground. As those three are presented through their modes of being-given in lived experience, they are revealed to be the transcendental modes of all experiential appearances because they do not refer to any distinct object but rather to the basic fabric of lived experience. That is to say, these characteristics describe the back-ground for all experience, whether it is self-recognized as such or not.

The transcendental status of the three characteristics as the back-ground of lived experience is further enhanced by considering the non-dual principle that is invoked by Klong chen pa when referring to the Ground of beings since this principle requires a radical thinking about a unique mode of being that is revealed through objects, yet not identical to them. An initial description of such a mode was introduced while presenting some of Klong chen pa's assertions about the three characteristics of Mind-as-such. Now, it is time to turn to a more refined examination of the qualities of each characteristic, with the intention of deepening our understanding concerning the unique mode of non-dual Be-ing.

Essence

As indicated by Klong chen pa in his various discussions concerning the Ground of being, the essence of it, being its first characteristic, is empty from all kinds of objective reification and originally pure from its own beginning. Owing to their mode of self-referential attribution, the descriptions of the essence challenged deeply rooted views that relate being with objective-ness and essence with what a thing is in itself. Since the essence of the Ground explicitly resists, in this context, any mode-of-being that is object-like, and its so-called ‘attributes’ defy any attempt of being perceived through an intentional structure that is based on distinctions, we find ourselves facing the question about the meaning of such an essence.

According to the common usage within the Buddhist milieu, the essence (*ngo bo; svabhāva*) as a foundational term refers, on the one hand, to what a thing is in its most fundamental nature, and, on the other hand, to its mode of being as an entity or its facticity.⁴¹ From this twofold definition it becomes apparent that the ordinary usage of the term 'essence' cannot accommodate within itself the unique mode of being of the Ground since it already presupposes a necessary relation between essence and being an entity, unlike the rDzogs chen view that asserts the non-objective-ness of Mind-as-such, as in the following quote:

Mind-as-such, the self nature of enlightened mind, is without arising and dying, happiness and suffering, since it is pure like the sky. Without being classified into [objective] things, it is free from the [intentional] phenomena of Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa. It cannot be named as ‘this’, being totally spacious it is changeless, without movement, spontaneously present and unconditioned.⁴²

Hence, when referring to Mind-as-such what is required is no less than a radical re-vision of the term 'essence' itself. Without such a re-vision any essential attributes of the Ground would just imply a unique entity that is basically equivalent to other entities in terms of their mode of being. As already claimed, the transcendental shift enables this kind of re-vision since it identifies the Ground with subjectivity-itself (*bdag nyid; ātman*) that is purified from any objectifying tendencies which will place it in a spatio-temporal frame of being. Thus, the essence of the Ground marks from its very beginning (*ye thog*) a transcendental dimension and not as an ultimate entity.

Emptiness

The non-objectified essence of the Ground is pointed at by asserting it as empty from all cognitive elaborations and emotional hindrances. Since the terms ‘empty’ (*stong pa; śūnya*) and ‘Emptiness’ (*stong pa nyid; śūnyatā*) play a vital role in numerous Mahāyāna traditions, it is vital to distinguish between their common interpretation, which is based on a causal objective frame of being, and the unique meaning of these terms within a phenomenological non-dual view concerning the

essence of Mind-as-such. The *locus classicus* of the causally oriented interpretation of those terms can be found in the ‘Root Verses on the Middle Way’ (*dBu ma tsa ba shes rab; Mūla-madhyamakārikā*) composed by Nāgārjuna (*Klu sgrub*) in which he related the empty essence of phenomena (*chos; dharma*) with their dependently arising (*rten 'brel; pratitya-samutpāda*) mode of existing within a nexus of causes and conditions: *Whatever emerges as dependently arising is asserted as emptiness. That, being the supported designation, is itself the Middle path. There are no phenomena which are not dependently arisen. Therefore, there are no phenomena which are not empty.*⁴³ From these assertions we learn that phenomena are empty of an independent unchanging essence due to their thoroughly pervading causal nature. In this way, Nāgārjuna indicated the essence-less nature of phenomena without negating their immediate non-objectified appearance (King, 1994). Yet, once we claim the Being spoken about to be beyond the objective mode-of-being, the common identification of emptiness with dependent origination and conditionality seems to lose its grounding since this Being transcends the causal chain. As such, its essence cannot be refuted any longer by causal claims and nor can it be presented through the emptiness-cum-dependent origination identity. Thus, the common view of emptiness as negation of in-dependent objective existence reaches its own conceptual limitations, and it cannot be applied to the essence of Mind-as-such. Consequently, a mere acceptance of the term ‘empty’ as an attribute of the Ground of beings is insufficient with relation to an authentic (*yang dag pa; tattva, bhūta*) understanding of the essence of it. Additionally, the causal-cum-conditional interpretation of this term neglects the primacy of lived experience and its immediate mode-of-presencing in favour of an objective frame of being. In other words, this kind of interpretation covers the primacy of being-given within the present flow of experience by solely referring to the constituted mode of an object, which is analysed in a causal manner without a phenomenological description of it. Hence, both from a methodological and existential point of view, the common usage of the term ‘empty’ is incongruent with the fundamental orientation of the non-dual rDzogs chen view regarding the essence of the Ground.⁴⁴

Since the common usage of the term ‘empty’ is exceeded by the rich range of meanings related to it in the rDzogs chen view, we have to look directly at those without the mediation of analytical discursive modes that are object oriented. To begin with, perhaps the central poetic association of ‘empty-ness’ within the rDzogs chen view is that of the sky/space (*nam mkha'; ākāśa*) which is without centre and borders (*mtha' dbus med pa*), being completely equal in all directions without any hindrance from the ephemeral clouds that come and go. Furthermore, the empty essence is related throughout Klong chen pa's writings to a rich net of spatial similes, such as ‘expanse’ (*dbyings*), ‘sphere’ (*klong*), ‘open even-ness’ (*phyal ba*), ‘spaciousness’ (*gu yangs po*) and ‘limitless’ (*mtha' med*), and all those point to its unrestricted expansiveness that transcends any objective spatial

boundary. As a result, these similes reveal the essence to be empty due to its immediate openness, which cannot be intentionally perceived as a distinct being, let alone objectified.⁴⁵ Moreover, the empty essence is revealed as the transcendental openness of Mind-itself that always engulfs and pervades experiential objects. As such, it is certainly not a conceptual construct reached by logical analysis and refutation. In this sense, beyond the objective mode-of-being there is already and always the boundless expanse that lies at the edges of all experiential spatial boundaries.⁴⁶

To conclude, the transcendental boundless openness of the empty essence brings the phenomenological description and the indicative capacity of language to their limits. On the phenomenological level, the empty essence is beyond the status of a phenomenon which is given, yet it is always there as the vastness that the objectifying tendencies cannot cover completely. Thus, the empty essence is ever-present (*kun 'gro*) as the open transcendental dimension of beings. Similarly, on the conceptual level, the normative usage in the term 'empty' when referring to the essence is actually a de-objectifying act of self-reference. Since the essence indicates what the thing really is, then asserting it as empty (from objective essence) negates our ability to posit it as a certain 'this or that'. Thus, the supposedly positive act of naming cancels itself, yet remains as a trace of immediate recognition of a phenomenon that transcends the distinctions on which categorical language is based. When relating this unique description to the kataphatic/apophatic distinction, the mere explication of the essence in a positive manner as empty turns out to be an act that erases any categorical meaning. However, due to its phenomenological context as an all-encompassing transparent vastness this act is not a mere negation of the objective mode-of-being, as with ordinary *apophatic* language. Rather, it functions as a reminder for a non-objective mode-of-being that is present through its absence. Hence, when reconnected to its phenomenological roots, this particular speech act transcends the usual dichotomy of *kataphatic* and *apophatic* modes of speaking that rely on an objective frame of being because it turns our attention to a luminous absence (*stong gsal*), in which we already **are**.

Self-nature

The luminous absence of the spacious openness which engulfs all experiential appearances is yet to account for the transcendental wholeness of Mind-as-such. Since the originally pure essence mainly relates to the inherent openness of lived experience, its other aspects such as its shining-forth, knowing (*shes pa*) and being known (*shes bya*) are still left without a transcendental explanation. The former aspect, which is that of shining appearance, received its transcendental roots in the second characteristic of the Ground, being its self-nature, while the latter aspect of knowing was grounded in the third characteristic, being the compassionate resonance of Mind-itself. Moreover, those two aspects constituted together what is known in the Mahāyāna as 'The Form Bodies' (*gzugs sku; rūpakāya*). According to Klong chen pa, these bodies mark the dimension of lived experience

with its two poles of knowing awareness and shining appearance, which are perceived as subject and object within a dualistic frame of being.

As indicated above, the self-nature of the Ground of beings was described by Klong chen pa as a luminosity that is spontaneously present through the whole range of phenomenal appearances:

Concerning the enlightened [transcendental] meaning of the self settled dimension of perfect rapture (*longs sku; sambhogakāya*); it is the body of complete enjoyment, all pervasive, naturally luminous and spontaneously present. Although within all, it is seen by only a few. If [you are] without effort and seeking, resting [with] whatever appears, it will become clear. That self-nature of the dimension of perfect rapture, self-luminous knowing awareness, is perfectly clear while apparent objects arise unceasingly in a vivid manner that is without [objectifying] grasping.⁴⁷

In this passage Klong chen pa utilized the common identification of the self-nature of Mind-as-such with the dimension of perfect rapture for presenting it as self-luminous, spontaneously present and all pervasive. These characteristics indicate the inherent expressivity (*rtsal*) of the Ground as the appearances of luminous light (*'od gsal*) which are given through the flow of lived experience. Moreover, from its very beginning the Ground is endowed (*'byor ba*) with the expressive capacity of manifesting as the world of phenomena, owing to the indivisibility of open essence and luminous nature. Hence, the ever-renewing self-luminosity is not merely contingent or accidental, destined to dissolve within the soteriological horizon of liberation. Consequently, the world as the immanent manifestation that emerges from the expressivity of the Ground is a natural emanation of it and, as such, it is a sphere to be re-cognized and not an object to be negated.

Self-luminosity

The own-nature of the Ground as self-luminous can be discerned within the shifting emphasis of the tantric vision, in general, and the rDzogs chen vision in particular, from analytical-logical practices to practices that are open to the dimension of direct experience.⁴⁸ Since this shift reveals the indivisibility of spacious emptiness and rapturous luminosity that is so central to those visions, it simultaneously discloses the existential insight about the fundamental place of luminosity in the sphere of Mind-itself.⁴⁹ Therefore, as the rDzogs chen vision is not based on the destructive analysis of phenomena in order to refute their inherent self-objective-ness, it can turn into the dimension which is already pre-given with respect to the objective mode-of-being. This dimension is the pre-objective stratum of lived experience, in which the inherent expressivity of Mind-as-such shines as the clear phenomena of inner and outer beings. Furthermore, only when these shining expressions of the self-luminosity are grasped at and are turned into the objective pole of the perceiver-perceived division does a refuting analysis become feasible since such an analysis already presupposes the being-given of objects within lived experience. Thus, the self-luminosity that shines through this

flow cannot be reduced to an object for refuting analysis since it is the transcendental condition for the mere possibility of it. As such, the self-luminosity is primordial both in terms of direct experience and phenomenological necessity for the application of destructive analysis.

As already indicated, the natural self-luminosity of Mind-as-such is the ever-present quality within all phenomena because its absence prevents the shining appearance of phenomena, regardless of the way those are perceived. That is to say, phenomena are not hidden objects that wait for their illumination by a separated luminous mind, but they are in themselves the explicit manifestations of the self-luminous clear light of Mind-itself. Thus, the natural self-luminosity is not limited to special phenomena which transcend the objective mode-of-being, even if within those its intensity is much clearer, since its presence is not a mere experiential quality but the own-condition of all appearances. Moreover, because the world of dualities can emerge only on the base of these immediate luminous manifestations as the pre-given clear appearances, it is always penetrated by natural self-luminosity, which is directly disclosed by the own-uncovering of the world. In short, the primordially of self-luminosity indicates the transcendental status of the Ground, which is always present in the world as its own-condition for being.

Spontaneously Present

The mode of being spontaneously present (*lhun grub*)⁵⁰ points to the close relations of the Ground with the phenomena which are perceived as existing by being causally produced or established (*grub*). As indicated by their respective terms of being, both the Ground and all of phenomena are present in a certain way; the Ground is present spontaneously while phenomena are perceived within a causal frame of being.⁵¹ However, as we have already seen, the transcendental presence of Mind-as-such challenges interpretations which view it as the complete negation of the causally objective mode of being. In this case, positing the spontaneous mode of present in stark opposition to the causal mode of being present would entail a sharp separation of these two, thus preventing any possibility of a phenomenological understanding of the intricate relation between the primordial mode of spontaneous present and the worldly mode of causally objective being. In addition, this kind of opposition would cover the embedded presence of Mind-as-such within the constituted world and, as an unexpected result, the Ground would become equal in its mode-of-being to any other phenomenon since it will lose its transcendental uniqueness. That is to say, the Ground would become a unique entity that is spontaneously present against all other entities which are causally produced. Hence, in order to preserve the non-dual relation of the Ground and beings, there is a need for an interpretation that accommodates the basic difference and the shared affinity alike. As with previous terms that refer to the Ground of beings, such an interpretation would be based on the differentiation (*rnam par 'byed pa; vibhāga*) of transcendental and immanent aspects within the

flow of lived experience. This kind of distinction was implied within one of Klong chen pa's descriptions concerning spontaneous present:

Within the enlightened dimensions and primordial [transcendental] knowing, which are already primordially existent, there is no causal fruition that emerges from compounded adventitious conditions. If those [the latter] were to exist then the self-emergent primordial knowing would not be. Being by nature gathered, it will disintegrate again and then how could it be indicated as spontaneously present and uncompounded.⁵²

From the passage above, we learn that for Klong chen pa the mode of spontaneous presence transcends the causal mode-of-being as it is beyond the temporal processes of gathering and disintegrating. Moreover, without this mode the primordial be-ing of Mind-as-such would not be possible since it will be subjected to conditional change within the temporal flow. At the same time, as was already indicated in the refutation of the six erroneous ways of describing the Ground, referring to it as a spontaneously present object which lacks any dynamic change would negate the basic assumptions of the Buddhist doctrine regarding bondage and liberation. This entails that an object-oriented interpretation of this passage, which perceives the enlightened dimensions and the self-emergent primordial knowing as certain distinct states that are already perfect, would necessarily lead to the unsolvable tensions with regard to the mere possibility of liberation. Consequently, what is needed is a radical interpretation of both the mode of spontaneous presence and the transcendental dimension that is characterized by it.

A first glimpse to such an interpretation is given to us by perceiving the natural self-luminosity of Mind-as-such as the primordial condition for the mere emergence of apparent phenomena. Due to its all-pervasive status, the self-luminosity transcends the causal frame of being since it is already pre-given as the apparent phenomena in an immediacy that precedes all conditioned changes and causal explanations. Put differently, the causal production and the mere knowing of gathering and disintegrating already presuppose the flow of lived experience. Thus, those constituents of spatio-temporal existence cannot be used to explain the spontaneity of the mere event of shining-forth in a circular manner, as long as we keep close to the experiential roots of this event.⁵³ By acknowledging the primacy of bare luminosity over spatio-temporal frames, we recognize it as the transcendental clear light that manifests through the spontaneous emerging of immediate experience. That is to say, the spontaneously present self-luminosity is the primordial mode-of-arising of phenomena themselves. Thus, this mode does not depend on prior conditions for its mere self-occurrence (*rang byung*). In addition, the spontaneous self-luminosity does not indicate a separate entity that is completely distinct from worldly phenomena with their cognitive and emotional hindrances. Rather than that, the spontaneous presence signifies the dynamic and immediate way through which

phenomena emerge and abide. Consequently, we can view it as spontaneously present-ing because it concerns both the presence of self-luminosity and its ever-emerging immediacy, which is the transcendental quality of all phenomena.

Looking yet again on the *apophatic/kataphatic* distinction in the context of the self-nature of the Ground, we can notice how the description of it as self-luminosity that is spontaneously present radicalizes the meaning of its *kataphatic* pole. Since the self-luminosity is the primordial aspect of all appearances, it is possible to refer to Mind-as-such as transcendental Be-ing that abides as the original root of all phenomena. Yet, owing to its spontaneity, this Be-ing is beyond the usual dichotomy of existence and non-existence since it is neither present as a causally produced distinct object nor as a pure emptiness. Thus, this mode of Be-ing reveals a primordial sense of ‘being’ that is not constrained by temporality and causality, even if revealed through those. Hence, by recognizing the Ground that is naturally luminous as the ever-present source of beings, its characterization eludes any objectifying description that relies on spatio-temporal distinctions. As such, it transcends once again the usual modes of speaking that are based on positing or negating an objective mode-of-being since its immediate luminosity is present yet beyond all distinguishing attributes. Simultaneously, the natural self-luminosity accounts for the analogical use of certain immanent attributes when speaking about Mind-as-such, as these attributes are actually various modes of manifestation of its self-radiance. Put differently, since the luminous expressivity of the Ground shines within and through the world of phenomena it is possible to use certain qualities of the latter in order to indicate the manifested presence of the former.

Compassionate Resonance

The interchangeable use of the terms ‘Ground’ (*gzhi*), ‘Mind-as-such’ (*sems nyid*) and ‘Enlightened Mind’ (*byang chub sems*) by Klong chen pa indicates the intimate relation between those and the flow of lived experience in all its varieties.⁵⁴ Since the enlightened mind is identified as the Ground of the dualistically divided mind-stream, it can be regarded as the source of all phenomena along with their organizational patterns through which they receive their contextual meaning. Hence, the delineation of the Ground of beings is not yet completed without accounting for the origins of the meaningful and relational world, as already and always revealed in the realm of lived experience. The essence and the self-nature of the Ground indicated some of these origins when referring to the spacious openness that encompasses all phenomena and to the natural luminosity which appears in a spontaneous manner as the entire range of phenomena. However, these two characteristics by themselves only give a partial account of the lived world because they lack two foundations of it, being the pole of (subjective) awareness within the flow of lived experience and the relational matrix of the world as a space of inter-connectedness. Consequently, in addition to

these two, a third characteristic that will refer to these two foundations becomes essential for a full account of the transcendental dimension of Mind-itself.

The third characteristic, which received the name ‘Compassionate resonance’ (*thugs-rje; karuṇa*), was referred to by Klong chen pa in various ways, some of which resemble the description just mentioned and some that pass over it through presenting this characteristic as the indivisibility of the first two. Therefore, in what follows the main attention will be given to the first type of descriptions since those referred to compassionate resonance in a richer way that is not merely derived from its predecessors. Furthermore, due to its subject matter being the unceasing flow of the world and inter-connected resonance, the descriptions of this characteristic are usually less clear than the descriptions that refer to the essence and the self-nature. As a result, the need for a phenomenological interpretation for the sake of understanding the transcendental qualities of this characteristic is even more pronounced since it can be easily covered-up by spatial and temporal relations between individual phenomena. Hence, the interpretation that will be presented shortly draws much of its claims from phenomenological inquiry regarding the life-world and inter-subjectivity as it tries to point to hidden meanings within Klong chen pa's descriptions of this third characteristic.⁵⁵ But, first of all, let us have a look on two of the rich descriptions of compassionate resonance as presented by Klong chen pa himself:

Concerning the wisdom-energy of the dimension of emanations, it is the unceasing [continuous] playful display, [being] the expanse of the all pervading emanation body. It [the wisdom-energy of the dimension] is everywhere, clear within the arising of phenomena. It is the expanse of pure self-knowing-awareness, the magical display of wish fulfilling qualities and activities, and it does not exist otherwise.⁵⁶

Since compassionate resonance abides as the primordial knowing-wisdom of transcendental awareness (*rig pa*) it is distinctly clear [in an individuating manner] as the unceasing process [capacity] of enlightened knowledge. [Although clear,] the [luminous] appearances as the [perceived] object and the [perceiving] subject which are aspects of action and its agent do not exist [in an objectified manner].⁵⁷

Klong chen pa's descriptions of compassionate resonance give us an introductory picture of it as a knowing quality which pervades all phenomena in an unceasing manner without solidifying these into perceiver and perceived. In addition, the compassionate resonance brings together knowing awareness and enlightened activity that are completely disclosed in the transcendental and immanent aspects of the flow of lived experience, which is present as the world of phenomena. Hence, the compassionate resonance reveals the primordial indivisibility of knowledge and action, wisdom and resonance, since a full realization of Mind-as-such necessarily involves their seamless co-expressiveness. Put differently, once the Ground is realized in a self-aware manner, the expressions of ethical inter-related-ness start to radiate in an unceasing manner without any contrived intention.

This ethical aspect of lived experience is supported by the perfect knowledge of the enlightened mind concerning the immanent aspects of the world as this knowledge enables to optimally benefit the minds of all sentient beings (*sems can; sattva*).

The two aspects of compassionate resonance manifest together the spontaneous presence of an inter-related awareness, which is the primordial condition for the awakening of an ethical impulse that is worldly oriented and optimally skilful in responding to the needs of other mind-streams. Hence, this ethical impulse, commonly referred to in the Buddhist milieu as compassion (*snying rje*),⁵⁸ is not only an inter-subjective affective response but also an expression of a primordial expanse of relations that is grounded in Mind-itself. That is to say, since compassion towards the suffering of sentient beings is an expression or a trace of its transcendental origin of primordial inter-relatedness, it can be interpreted as a sign for the indivisible wholeness of transcendental relatedness and immanent resonance. Moreover, since the individual flow of lived experience is, from its own-being (*chos nyid; dharmatā*), already and always related to the wholeness of the world, whatever happens in it will necessarily resonate in each flow. Therefore, it is possible to view compassion as a certain kind of resonance, which is tuned to the suffering of sentient beings, even if it is not the only one to serve this role. For example, the common teachings of ‘The Four Immeasurables’ (*tshad med bzhi; catvāry apramāṇāni*) present four kinds of relational resonance, which are Loving-kindness (*byams pa; maitrī*), Compassion, Joy (*dga' ba; mudita*) and Equanimity (*btang snyoms; upekṣā*), and each of those serves as an expression for the basic inter-relatedness of individuality and wholeness (Salzberg, 1995). However, maybe due to the strong soteriological orientation of the Buddha's teachings towards liberation from suffering, the resonance of compassion became the hallmark for signifying the transcendental place of inter-relations within the rDzogs chen view and in more general circles of the Buddhist milieu.

All-pervasiveness

As we have already seen, the quality of all-pervasiveness is present in both the essence and the self-nature of the Ground of beings, as the transcendental presence of those abides primordially throughout the present flow of experience. These two characteristics are experientially revealed as spacious openness and shining appearance, respectively, yet they still lack the third all-pervasive transcendental aspect which is the ever-present awareness that knows clearly the entire range of phenomena. The identification of compassionate resonance with pure self-knowing (*rang rig dag*) reveals the third all-pervasive aspect of the ground, being the quality of self-awareness which abides in the flow of present experience. Like its predecessors, this quality penetrates in an uninterrupted manner each spontaneous moment of known appearance, while its dis-appearance, such as in the case of deep sleep, is simultaneously the dissolution of known appearances into the Ground. Hence,

the non-objective mode-of-being of compassionate resonance is revealed as an all-pervasive quality of awareness that is actualized through the self-arising of a field of awareness in which all phenomena are known. Furthermore, within a strict phenomenological context, the completed (*rdzogs*) reality of phenomena comes only as the co-emergence (*lhan cig tu skyes pa; sahaja*) of being-known and being-given since all phenomena are marked by the indivisible unity of an appearing aspect and a knowing aspect, or the objective and the subjective poles when perceived within a dualistic frame of being. Thus, compassionate resonance, as the basic quality of awareness, inherently abides in the event of being-given as phenomenon. As such, it is not present as a distinct subjective awareness that is external to phenomena. Consequently, when viewed from a transcendental perspective, the pervasive abiding of awareness within phenomena is no longer an event which demands an explanation about the coming together of separated subjective and objective levels of reality. Rather, phenomena are revealed as shining appearances within the immediate flow of lived experience because their mere disclosure is already imbued with an aspect of bare knowingness, which in itself is without change or modification (*'gyur med dang bcos med*).

Yet, although compassionate resonance as the knowing aspect of experience is present throughout all phenomena, the flow of individual phenomena still remains. Hence, the all-pervasive nature of compassionate resonance does not mean the dissolution of apparent distinctions in a unitary awareness, even if these distinctions are no longer supported by emotional and conceptual preferences. In this sense, the 'other' still emerges as a distinct phenomenon, as attested by the common descriptions of enlightened beings that spontaneously act for fulfilling the aims of 'others' (*gzhan dag*), even when those supposed 'others' rest equally (*mnyam pa nyid*) within the spacious expanse of Mind-as-such. Finally, only if this mode of alterity is retained can the affective and ethical aspects of compassion arise in a continuous movement towards actualization since these are relational by their very nature.

Unceasing awareness

The pervasive presence of compassionate resonance within all phenomena was explicated by Klong chen pa as unceasing (*ma 'gags*) and without stoppage (*'gag med*). These terms point to an aspect of continuation which is revealed through the uninterrupted spontaneous shining of self-luminosity and immediate self-awareness. However, because of the non-objective mode-of-being of Mind-as-such it is vital not to confuse this aspect with the common notion of continuation as the perseverance of an object throughout time, even though those are connected. Since the immediate self-awareness that abides in all phenomena is co-extensive with the stream of lived experience itself as a transcendental condition, the unceasing aspect of the former is revealed by the flowing and ecstatic nature of the latter. As indicated by the phenomenological descriptions of its mode-of-presence,

this flow gathers together temporal and spatial dimensions into a single expanse of awareness (*phyam gcig*) that is immediately present, yet transcending any limited frame of objective time that will posit it as a present moment that is static.⁵⁹ That is to say, the flow of lived experience is both open-ended and cohesive by its very be-ing since it continuously shines without losing its self-relatedness that is embedded in the temporal inter-subjective world of past, present and future. In this sense, this flow always transcends ('*da' ba; ek-stasis*) its present content since it is open to fresh expressions which emerge unceasingly. At the same time, the unceasing emergence actualizes the dynamic expressivity of the Ground that is the support for the sense of lived temporality and continuity. Put differently, without the unceasing self-emergence of luminosity and awareness the inter-related dynamism that is at the heart of temporality would not be possible.

Thus, the indivisible self-emergence (*rang shar*) of luminosity and awareness can be claimed as the transcendental origin for the sense of temporal continuation as an embodied being in a meaningful world. As such, this indivisible mode of unceasing awareness and luminosity completes the description of a primordial non-objective mode-of-being that is embedded in the immanent flow of lived experience, regardless of the particular experiences and possible reifications of the latter. Hence, even when the unceasing spontaneous self-emergence is solidified into a sensed temporality of discrete objects, it still abides as the transcendental back-ground of all these. Moreover, without its hidden presence these constituted modes of temporality would lose their sensed meaning that is grounded in the inter-related dynamics of lived experience since they would not be connected anymore to one another.⁶⁰

Conclusion: A Non-dual Authentic Be-ing

Our phenomenological inquiry about the Ground of beings or Mind-as-such has started with a perplexing difficulty concerning the very possibility of relating to the Ground in an authentic manner that will refrain from turning it into a distinct object. This difficulty was already acknowledged by Klong chen pa while explicating the seven possible ways of describing the Ground. Based on Klong chen pa's refutations concerning six of these ways, a basic distinction between two modes of being has begun to take shape. On the one hand, an objective mode of being which leads to inherent contradictions within the Ground since it can no longer encompass the wholeness of be-ing when perceived as an object that is constrained by temporal limitations. On the other hand, the description of the Ground as originally pure and spontaneously present signified a unique non-objective mode-of-being that transcends the boundaries of causality and temporality. In this regard, the specific attributes of the Ground were found to be secondary to the basic pre-suppositions about the mode-of-being of the Ground as the former were utilized in the context of the objective and non-objective modes-of-being alike.

Following the introduction of the seven ways to describe the Ground, Klong chen pa referred to three basic characteristics of this very Ground. These three, being its open essence, luminous self-nature and compassionate resonance, shed further light on the non-objective mode-of-being, which was revealed to be a transcendental dimension of the immanent flow of lived experience. Since the Ground of beings was described as the indivisible unity of the transcendental conditions of lived experience, it became clear that the Ground-cum-Mind-itself is not to be found in a distinct existential realm that is separated from the stream of phenomenal experience. At the same time, the Ground should not be reduced to a status of a distinct phenomenon within this stream since it is all-pervasive and ever-present, unlike distinct phenomena that are transitory and limited. Consequently, the transcendental Ground and the immanent experience were disclosed in their non-dual basic affinity because the former was revealed as fundamentally embedded in the ever-renewing flow of the latter. Yet, although the Ground unceasingly shines through this flow, as its vast openness, clear appearances and inter-relating awareness, it is rarely recognized in its non-objective mode-of-being. This lack of recognition is facilitated by the objectifying tendencies of emotional and cognitive habits, which cover-up the Ground by limiting the space of awareness into a frame-of-being that is based on discrete entities and temporal relations.

Lastly, the clear distinction offered by Klong chen pa between the objective and non-objective modes-of-being served as an example for a fundamental division within numerous religious and mystical traditions, which concerns the proper way of speaking about the Ground of beings without turning it into an entity. The explications of the three characteristics revealed a middle path between a mode-of-speaking that attributes positive predicates to the Ground and a negating mode-of-speaking which resists all such attempts.⁶¹ This middle path was grounded in the indivisibility of a luminous absence of the Ground and a spontaneously present lucidity and awareness, which only together reveal a primordial and authentic mode-of-being. The indivisibility of these basic aspects was accessed by a re-turn to the actuality of lived experience while opening to its supposedly paradoxical nature as a flow of shining appearances that is imbued by a vast spaciousness. As such, the immediate presence of this mode-of-being transcends the dichotomy of positing and negating since it accommodates both shining Being and empty No-thing-ness in an indivisible manner. As the poetic language of Klong chen pa and its predecessors expressed this immediate realization with much clarity, precision and depth, it is only suitable to conclude his descriptions of the transcendental dimension of Mind-as-such with an allusion to this authentic recognition of primordial Ground:

Within self-emerging primordial knowing, [where] labels do not exist [as objective referents] and phenomena are exhausted, whatever arises as its dynamic energy and playful display is

without [a causal] foundation (grounding). Without bondage or liberation, the [actual] mode-of-abiding is the settled self nature. What is named ‘liberation’ is simply [phenomena] natural[ly] fading away without [leaving] a trace. Since there is no contradiction when conceived as ‘anything’ or ‘nothing’, it is expressed by the words ‘primordially liberated’.⁶²

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¹ One of the clear examples for the centrality of this investigation is found in the Buddha's teachings on the four establishments of mindfulness in *The Sati-paṭṭhāna-sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya* 10; i, 55). As part of these teachings, the Buddha introduces a rich set of practices that are aimed to cultivate attentive mindfulness to the entire range of experiential life. Although these practices do not constitute Buddhist praxis in an exclusive manner, they still form an indispensable part of it up to the attainment of liberation from all deluded conceptions. For a further discussion on the role of these practices in the Buddhist context, see Anālayo (2003) and Shulman (2010).

² The question concerning the presence of awareness in the liberated state, especially in the early stages of the Buddhist teachings, is yet to receive a definite and conclusive answer (for a summary of various answers to this question, see Griffiths (1986). Furthermore, this question was still pertinent in later periods, such as Tibet in the 11th C.E., where the rNying-ma scholar Rong zom pa advocated a view that attributed a non-mental experiential reality to the natural state of liberation (Almogi, 2009, pp. 188–193).

³ From the Sūtric side, this tradition employed various strands of Mādhyamika (*dBu ma*), Yogācāra (*rNal 'byor spyod pa*) and Tathāgata-garbha (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*), while from the Tantric side it utilized many terms from 'The Great Yoga' (*rNal 'byor chen po; Mahāyoga*), yet giving those original meanings that were aligned with its vision of non-fabrication (*bcos med*) and simplicity (Van Schaik, 2004). An elaborate discussion on the early formative period of this tradition is found in Karmay (1988).

⁴ On the life of this prolific teacher, see Dudjom Rinpoche (1991, pp. 575–596); Thondup (1989, pp. 145–188, 1996, pp. 109–117).

⁵ For a chronological and thematic account of these treasures, see Germano (1992, pp. 15–26) and Wangchuk (2008).

⁶ Klong chen rab 'byams pa (2009d) (hereafter TCD 1).

⁷ Klong chen rab 'byams pa (2009e) (hereafter TDD). For a translation of the first five chapters of this work, see Germano (1992).

⁸ Klong chen rab 'byams pa (2009a, 2009b) (hereafter CBD and LTD, respectively). Translations of the root verses (*rtsa ba*) and the auto-commentary (*rang 'grel*) of this treatise are respectively found in Longchen Rabjam (2001a, 2001b).

⁹ The term 'Ground' in the context of 'The Great Perfection' carries within itself a variety of meanings, most notably the distinct references to Mind-as-such vis-à-vis the underlying base (*gzhi; ālaya*) of the constituting dualistic mind. Hence, when referring in this work to the first meaning this term will appear as capitalized, even though its meaning defies radically any assumption that identifies the ground of being with a special kind of ontic substratum that is still present within the dualistic mode of being.

¹⁰ Throughout this work we will use interchangeably the terms 'Ground (of beings)' and 'Mind-as-such', even though each one of those has a slightly different usage within Klong chen pa's writings. Unlike the Ground which is more ontologically oriented, Mind-as-such carries a noticeable association to a phenomenological approach as it points to the essential relation between the mind-stream and its core transcendental nature. Yet, the distinction between these two philosophical contexts is challenged by the basic phenomenological orientation of the Buddha, as it approaches beings through their mode-of-presence in the space of lived experience. Hence, the inquiry into being is not separated from a phenomenological inquiry about the modes of being-given. For a further elaboration of this relation, see Ying (2010).

¹¹ For a comprehensive account of the relations between Mind-as-such and the Ground, see Higgins (2013).

¹² For a comprehensive discussion on the seven ways of describing the Ground of beings, see Achard (2002). In his article, Achard based his discussion on 'The Treasury of Supreme Vehicle', while this article relies on more concise description that is found in 'The Treasury of Words and Meanings'.

¹³ A similar discussion in which the seventh way is also discarded as partial can be found in ‘The Treasury of Supreme Vehicle’ (TCD 1, pp. 312-326). Yet, as will become clear when describing the seventh way, both treatises refer to it as the indivisibility of empty essence and spontaneously present self-nature.

¹⁴ spyir rdzogs pa chen po'i lugs kyi gzhi'i 'dod lugs bdun las mi 'da' ste| gzhi lhun grub tu 'dod pa'i lugs| gzhi ma nges par 'dod pa'i lugs| gzhi nges pa don gyi dngos gzhi 'dod pa'i lugs| gzhi cir yang bsgyur du btub par 'dod pa'i lugs| gzhi cir yang khas blang du btub par 'dod pa'i lugs| gzhi sna tshogs su 'dod pa'i lugs| gzhi ka dag tu 'dod pa'i lugs so|| (TDD, p. 4).

¹⁵ 'di la gang zag rnam pa gnyis kyi dbang du byas nas grub pa'i mtha' rjes su 'dzin pa dang lam rjes su 'dzin pa gnyis las| (TDD, p. 5).

¹⁶ A comprehensive presentation of Klong chen pa's approach to the various tenet systems is found in his ‘Treasury of Tenet Systems’ (Klong chen rab 'byams pa, 2009c) (hereafter GTD). For a translation and an analysis of this work see (Butters, 2006).

¹⁷ On the importance of the methodological stance for hermeneutics, see Heidegger (1996, pp. 23–35).

¹⁸ This assumption reminds what was termed by Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead ‘A Category Mistake’ as it posits into a shared category two distinct linguistic referents, which do not share the same level of generality (Thomasson, 2013). Once these are brought together the forgetfulness of their distinct mode-of-being necessarily results in absurd consequences. Hence, in order to resolve this we should, first of all, recognize the different existential category of each referent.

¹⁹ TDD, pp. 6-7; TCD 1, pp. 314-315.

²⁰ It is important to notice that this refutation is based upon two presuppositions; the first one being that the imputing mind does not function causally, and the second one being the ontic equivalence between the undetermined ground and a determined subjective state. However, since both of these presuppositions are not essentially valid it is possible to describe the Ground as indeterminate, as done by Klong chen pa himself, if one of those or both is discarded.

²¹ TDD, pp. 7-8; TCD 1, pp. 315-316.

²² TDD, p. 8; TCD 1, pp. 316-317.

²³ It is possible to raise an objection to the identification of omni-changeability with contingent changeability. Hence, if the Ground could change into anything whatsoever, but still on the base of causal relations, then causality itself would limit the possible range of change, thus negating the ontic claim of this description.

²⁴ TDD, pp. 8-9; TCD 1, pp. 317-318.

²⁵ TDD, p. 9; TCD 1, pp. 318-319.

²⁶ TDD, pp. 9-10; TCD 1, pp. 319-320.

²⁷ ye thog gzhi'i ka dag ni smra bsam brjod 'das chen po yod med kyi mtha' las 'das pa ste| ngo bo ka nas dag pas yod pa rtag pa'i mtha' dang bral te dngos po dang mtshan ma'i chos su ma grub pa| rang bzhin lhun gyis grub pas med pa chad pa'i mtha' las 'das te| 'od gsal stong pa'i chos nyid rnam dag rang gsal gdod ma'i sangs rgyas| chos sku 'gyur med kyi dgongs pa| 'khor 'das gang du'ang ma grub la ye stong rang byung gi ye shes chen po thog nyid nam mkha' ltar gnas pa ni|| (TDD, pp. 10-11).

²⁸ As the Ground is not an object within a temporal causal nexus, the question regarding the meaning of attributing a primordial beginning for it naturally arises. Since this question will be referred to later in this work, it is suffice to say that this kind of beginning does not position the Ground within whatever concept of temporality or objective time, but rather indicates its transcendental status in constituting the mere sense of time, and as such it is a never-ending beginning that is always at the back-ground of each moment.

²⁹ Although Klong chen pa titled this position as ‘originally pure’ in his actual description it is the indivisibility of purity and spontaneous present that characterizes the Ground, more than all. Yet, owing to the strong objectifying tendencies which were demonstrated in the previous descriptions, the initial emphasis on original purity alone enable to realize the unique nature of spontaneous presence, in contrast to the similar term that appeared in the first description.

³⁰ As already stated, the mere characterization of the Ground as originally pure does not guarantee its being accepted since such purity can be interpreted in multiple ways. For example, if the original purity is presented in a moral context as opposed to non-purity, as is the case with virtuous and non-virtuous conduct, then it is possible to present against it refuting arguments which are similar to those used by Klong chen pa, such as the difficulty of a pure Ground to accommodate our felt-sense impure everyday existence. Hence, the original purity has to refer, first and foremost, to the mode of being of the Ground and not to any particular characteristics of it as a supposed object.

³¹ For example, Klong chen pa asserted in his ‘Treasury of Supreme Vehicle’ that ‘Furthermore, since [luminosity] is not accepted as the coarse external clarity it is free from the [objectifying] extreme of permanence. Since it is asserted as the subtle inner luminosity, it is free from the extreme of nihilistic nothingness.’ (de yang phyir gsal rags par khas ma blangs pas rtag pa'i mtha' las grol| nang gsal phra bar 'dod pas chad pa'i mtha' las grol lo|| TCD 1, p. 326).

³² Even though Klong chen pa continues its discussion of the Ground as originally pure by refuting several objections to it and presenting its manner of being as the source of arising, due to some overlapping with the following part of this chapter these were omitted from the description of the Ground as originally pure. Yet, as these have direct relation to a non-dual description of the Ground they will have an implicit presence throughout the rest of the chapter.

³³ The phenomenological aspects of several Buddhist views and practices have been widely discussed within the context of academic scholarship. Although most of these discussions focused on East Asian traditions, certain Tibetan traditions, most notably ‘The Great Perfection’ and ‘The Great Seal’ (*Phyag rgya chen po*; *Mahāmudrā*), were also approached from a phenomenological perspective. For a phenomenological discussion concerning Buddhist views and practices, see Guenther (1989, 1992), Kopf (2001) and Lusthaus (2003).

³⁴ The usage of the term ‘Transcendental’ to denote the ever-present dimension of a priori patterns of consciousness originated with the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant. For example, in his first introduction to the ‘Critique of Pure Reason’ Kant stated that ‘I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our a priori concepts of objects in general.’ (Kant, 1998, p. 133). However, unlike Kant who analysed the fundamental patterns that constitute a spatio-temporal way of being, Klong chen pa mainly discussed the transcendental characteristics of Mind-itself, which form the ever-present actuality (*dam pa'i don*; *paramārtha*) of awareness. Moreover, in most of his transcendental deliberations, Klong chen pa provided intricate phenomenological descriptions of the non-dual dimension of awareness, which is disclosed when the various movements of intentional consciousness dissolve. In this sense, Klong chen pa, like contemporary phenomenologists, presented a model for philosophical inquiry that is concerned with the basic structures of lived experience and the ways through which they shape reality, and not with a critical analysis of propositions and their conceptual underpinnings (Mohanty, 1985, pp. 214–215).

³⁵ In this respect, the transcendental dimension in the rDzogs chen context is quite similar to its characterization by Kant as embedded within perceived experience, even though it does not originate from it (Kant, 1998, p. 136). Yet, unlike Kant, Klong chen pa maintained that this dimension can be directly recognized in an intuitive manner, even if this recognition is essentially different from the intentional mode of knowing an object.

³⁶ For example, Martin Heidegger discussed this differentiation throughout his writings when referring to the question about the being of beings. According to him, the being of beings is not identical to any particular being, but it is also not totally separated. As such, there is a need to analytically distinguish between the two without any essential separation (Heidegger, 1996). Also, Jean Luc Marion addressed this difference when asserting God as beyond all notions of being as a definable entity (Marion, 1991). Thus, these two thinkers revealed each in his own way the basic difference between two modes of awareness that are intimately related to two orders of reality, which are aloof from one another.

³⁷ For a discussion on these key philosophical and theological terms, see Sells (1994). For a discussion on the application of these terms in a Buddhist context, see Ruegg (1992, p. 11).

³⁸ For a comprehensive discussion on the various attitudes that are found in the Pāli Nikāyas concerning the ways of speaking about the final goal of Nibbāna, see Ajahn Pasanno & Ajahn Amaro (2009).

³⁹ For a discussion of this distinction in the milieu of Chinese Mahāyānic traditions, see Gimello (1976).

⁴⁰ gzhi rang bzhin gyi rgyud ni thog ma'i ka dag gi rig pa ngo bo rang bzhin thugs rje gsum mo| de yang ngo bo ka nas dag pas ma rig pa'i ming med de| 'khrul pa btags pa tsam du yang yod ma myong| rang bzhin lhun gyis grub pas rig pa 'od du gsal| thugs rje kun la khyab pas 'char byed go ma 'gags shing| 'khor 'das gang yang 'byung ba'i dbyings su gnas pa'o|| (TCD 1, pp. 140-141).

⁴¹ rang bzhin dang gnas lugs| (*Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, 1993, p. 663). For a comprehensive definition of this key term, see Duff (2010).

⁴² sems nyid byang chub sems kyi rang bzhin ni| mkha' ltar dag pas skye shi bde sdug med| dngos po ris med 'khor 'das chos las grol| 'di zhes mi mtshon mkha' klong rab yangs pas| mi 'gyur mi 'pho lhun grub 'dus ma byas|| (CBD, p. 6).

⁴³ yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ sūnyatām tām pracakṣmahe/ sā prajñaptir upādāya pratīpat saiva madhyamā// apratītya samutpanno dharmāḥ kaścīn na vidyate/ yasmāt tasmād aśūnyo hi dharmāḥ kaścīn na vidyate// (Nāgārjuna & De La Vallée Poussin, 1903, vv. 24.18–19); rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba gang| de ni stong pa nyid du bshad| de ni brten nas gdags pa ste| de nyid dbu ma'i lam yin no| gang phyir rten 'byung ma yin pa'i| chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin pa| de phyir stong pa ma yin pa'o| chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin no|| (Nāgārjuna (Klu sgrub), 1982, pp. 29.6–7).

⁴⁴ In this context, we can ask whether translating *stong pa* as ‘empty’ expresses the unique meaning of it in a phenomenological non-dual oriented view. For example, a different translation offered by Guenther is ‘open’, see Guenther (1984). Yet, due to rich imagery of the essence as open, unrestricted and spacious that relies on other terms, we chose to translate this term according to the traditional interpretation, as this also hints at the appropriative role of using such a canonical term in a view that challenges the object-oriented logical discourse.

⁴⁵ The similes that mark the openness of non-dual awareness also clarify why this primordial dimension transcends the supposedly fundamental relation of directional intentionality. According to Husserl, the agent of the intentional life is intuitively known as ‘the peculiar center of the lived-experiencing, as the one being absorbed in it, or the one suffering it in a conscious manner; it is the identical pole, the center of actions and passions—the latter corresponds to conditions like: I am sad, I am delighted, I am happy.’ (Husserl, 2001, p. 17). Thus, when awareness is totally open, being without centre and periphery, the basic structure of an intending centre and intended phenomena cannot remain any longer in its binary form.

⁴⁶ The transcendental dimension of the empty essence can be further elaborated by relating it to the threefold classification of outer (*phyi*), inner (*nang*) and secret (*gsang*) sky/space which is found in Klong chen pa's writings. From within the secret space, which refers to the space of Mind-as-such, emerges the inner, as the felt dimension of embodied being, and the outer, as the spatial world. Hence, the secret space is in a transcendental relation to those since it is the primordial space from which various modes of spatiality arise. With this in mind, we can notice that the supposedly independent outer physical space is constituted from the primordial spacious essence of Mind-as-such which is externalized and objectified. In other words, without a primordial dimension of spacious openness, which is termed in the rDzogs chen tradition as empty essence, all other modes of spatial being, embodied and external alike, would not be possible, hence the transcendental nature that pervades all modes of spatial existence.

⁴⁷ longs sku rang babs kyi dgongs pa ni| khyab gdal rang gsal lhun grub longs spyod rdzogs| kun la yod kyang mthong ba 'ga' yi yul| gang snang rang gzhag bya btsal bral na mngon| rig pa rang gsal longs sku'i rang bzhin de snang yul ma 'gags par shar dus 'dzin pa ma zhugs par sal le ba'i dus na legs par gsal te| (LTD, p. 144).

⁴⁸ For example, in his ‘Treasury of Tenet Systems’, Klong chen pa asserted that the supremacy of the ‘Adamantine Vehicle’ over the ‘Great Vehicle’ can be partially attributed to the realization of clear light within the ever-present ground (*ye nas grub pa gzhi*), which is the dimension of reality (*chos sku; dharmakāya*) that is without conceptual activity (GTD, 212-213). For a concise presentation of the principle of indivisible luminosity and emptiness within the tantric traditions that is highly inspired by Klong chen pa, see Dudjom Rinpoche (1991, pp. 243–268).

⁴⁹ For a discussion of luminosity within the context of tantric traditions, including the rNying-ma and Bön rDzogs chen lineages, see Hatchell (2013) and Kapstein (2004).

⁵⁰ For the roots of this term within the literature of ‘The Buddha Nature’ theory when referring to the mode-of-presence of the enlightened essence that abides in the mind stream of all sentient beings, see Hookham (1991) and Asaṅga & Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Thayé (2000).

⁵¹ The relation between *lhun grub* and *grub* with regard to their spontaneity and causality is strengthened when we look at the longer form of the first, which means ‘come to being (produced) by spontaneity’ (*lhun gyis grub*). From this we learn that the main difference between these two is not in the coming-into-being (*grub*) itself, but rather in its mode-of-emerging, spontaneous or causal. As such, the spontaneously present is certainly not an experiential content. An example for this usage can be found in the following quote from ‘The Treasury of Supreme Vehicle’: ‘Since one's-own-dwelling comes-into-being by spontaneity [spontaneously], [the preferential attitudes of] rejection and acceptance do not exist in it.’ (rang gnas lhun gyis grub pa'i phyir| 'di la spang blang gnyis med pa'o|| TCD 1, p. 332).

⁵² ye nas grub zin sku dang ye shes la| 'dus byas glo bur rkyen byung rgyu 'bras med| 'di dag yod na rang byung ye shes min| 'dus byas nyid phyir 'jig pa nyid dang ni| lhun grub 'dus ma byas zhes gang slad mtshon| (CBD, p. 13).

⁵³ This point was clearly stated by Edmund Husserl while referring to the relation between the Life world and the Sciences. According to him, the Sciences have forgotten their origins of lived experience within an already pre-given world, and as a result they assume that the world can be reduced to their own causal explanations since it is first of all an aggregation of objects which are causally connected. A detailed description of this forgetfulness and its destructive influences on understanding transcendental subjectivity can be found in Husserl (1970).

⁵⁴ The interchangeability of these terms was especially prevalent in the early stages of ‘The Great Perfection’ within the texts of the Mind series (*sems sde*) (Karmay, 1988). Later on, the prominence of the terms ‘Ground’ and ‘Mind-as-such’ increased while the usage of the term ‘Enlightened Mind’ in relation to these two decreased. However, throughout the numerous rDzogs chen traditions we find a basic affinity between the Ground of beings and the transcendental dimension of Mind-itself.

⁵⁵ The main phenomenological works which provided inspiration for the current interpretation of ‘compassionate responsiveness’ due to their emphasis on transcendental thinking are Fink (1995); Heidegger (1996); Husserl (1970); Zahavi (2005).

⁵⁶ sprul sku'i dgongs pa ni| ma 'gags rol pa sprul sku gdal ba'i klong| kun la yod de 'char ba'i dus na gsal| yid bzhin yon tan phrin las cho 'phrul yang| gzhan na med de rang rig dag pa'i klong| (LTD, pp. 144-145).

⁵⁷ thugs rje rig pa'i ye shes su bzhugs pas mkhyen pa'i cha ma 'gags par so sor gsal kyang bya ba dang byed pa'i nram pa yul yul can du snang ba ni med de| (TDD, p. 15).

⁵⁸ This is the non-honorific form of this term, which its honorific that refers to the enlightened awareness of the Buddha appeared before.

⁵⁹ For phenomenological discussions about the temporal aspect of lived experience, see Husserl (1991), Kopf (2001) and Zahavi (2003).

⁶⁰ It could be argued that the causal and structural explanations which are provided by various Buddhist traditions, such as dependent-origination or the base-consciousness, can account for the various modes of temporality that are found in individual mind-streams and inter-subjective relations. Yet, these explanations refer mainly, and even only, to the objectified aspects of phenomena. As such, they cover-up the primal support of the temporal modes, which is lived experience and the different relations between knowing awareness and shining appearances that are found in it. Hence, it would be quite groundless to claim, in a phenomenological sense, that such explanations reveal to us the primordial sources of different notions of temporality since these explanatory models are in themselves examples of the objectifying tendencies which solidify phenomena into fundamental structures that precede lived awareness.

⁶¹ A similar integrative mode of speaking about the primordial Ground of reality is found in the works of other spiritual teachers, such as Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius (Franke, 2013, p. 62). Therefore, we can wonder whether there are shared motifs in the philosophical/existential orientation of these thinkers, which result in identifying lived reality with a unity of presence and absence. For example, is it possible that all these thinkers tried to describe the primordial dimension of awareness as revealed in lived-experience?

⁶² rang byung ye shes chos zad ming med la| rtsal dang rol pa ci shar gzhi med nyid| 'ching grol med pa gnas lugs rang bzhin babs| grol zhes brdar btags rang yal rjes med tsam| kun yin kun min brtags par mi 'gal bas| ye nas grol zhes tshig tu brjod pa yin| (CBD, p. 36).