MADHYAMAKA AND YOGĀCĀRA

Allies or Rivals?

Edited by

JAY L. GARFIELD
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Madhyamaka and Yogācāra

Introduction

MADHYAMAKA AND YOGĀCĀRA: ALLIES OR RIVALS?

Jay L. Garfield and Jan Westerhoff

THE ESSAYS IN this volume are aimed at answering a philosophical question arising from the study of Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine: Are the philosophical positions of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra schools consistent with one another, or do they represent irreconcilable visions of the fundamental nature of reality? This question arises naturally from a consideration of the philosophical visions advanced by principal figures in these schools and from a consideration of Buddhist doxography as it first emerges in the Indian context, and then later ramified in Tibet and in East Asia.

Philosophically, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are each attemps to spell out the metaphysics of emptiness characteristic of the Mahāyāna. But they do so in very different vocabularies, and in very different ways, grounding their analyses in distinct sets of Mahāyāna sūtras. This by itself does not entail their inconsistency. They might turn out to be distinct perspectives that, together, yield a coherent whole. On the other hand, the fact that important figures associated with each of these traditions explicitly take on and refute positions advocated by the other (see, for instance, Candrakīrti's attack on Yogācāra in *Madhyamakāvatāra)*, and the fact that authoritative sūtras of one school explain their superiority to those taken as authoritative by the other (as, e.g., the *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra*), suggest real doctrinal tension.

In Tibet and China, Yogācāra and Madhyamaka are often distinguished doxographically, in terms of the positions associated with them (the ultimate reality of mind versus its emptiness; the reflexivity of awareness versus its nonreflexivity; the existence versus the nonexistence of the external world, etc). In addition, they are often ranked against each other. On

the other hand, even when Madhyamaka is ranked above Yogācāra, there are doxographical traditions in which a synthesis of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra (called in Tibet the *Great Madhyamaka*) is ranked above both, suggesting a higher consistency that transcends apparent inconsistency.

While the doxographies of Tibet and China are indeed retrospective, hermeneutical, and perhaps even procrustean, they are not to be ignored. The literatures they systematize indeed largely cohere, and they constitute corpora of commentarial literature that are historically coherent. Madhymaka literature comments on Madhyamaka texts, and, when polemic, takes issue with Yogācāra texts, and vice versa. And when Śāntarakṣita attempts his grand synthesis in *Madhyamakālaṁkāra,* it is clear that he is responding to the sets of literature later systematized by Tibetan and Chinese doxographers. The doxographic categories must hence be taken seriously, and, just as their consistency or inconsistency was a matter for dispute among Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese scholars over the first two millenia of Buddhist history, it remains a topic for dispute among contemporary scholars.

The dispute between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka is not idle, or of interest only to intellectual historians. These are complex and profound doctrines, and to the extent that we cannot even determine whether they are mutually consistent, it is fair to say that we do not fully understand them. Just as, in the great monastic universities of India and Tibet, debate about doctrinal matters is meant to facilitate deeper understanding of both sides of the debate, we offer this set of essays in the hope to deepen understanding of these two schools. Of course the vast literatures subsumed under each of these heads are hardly as homogeneous as traditional doxographers would maintain. They emerge from the reflection of multiple scholars over many centuries. So we might also expect that this investigation would lead to greater nuance not only in our understanding of the broad doctrines that characterize each of these schools, but also of the variation in doctrine subsumed by each.

Chaisit Suwanvarangkul opens our investigation by inquiring into the fundamental terms of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra analysis—*pratītyasamutpāda* and *dharmadhātu*. He explores their semantic range in the literature of these two schools and the evolution of the understanding of these crucial terms in the course of the interaction between the schools, asking whether the conception of truth in terms of *pratītyasamutpāda* as it is articulated in Madhyamaka is consistent with the articulation of truth in terms of *dharmadhātu* as articulated in Yogācāra.

Mattia Salvini also addresses questions concerning language that lie at the foundation of our understanding of the relationship between the literature of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra schools. In his essay he explores the differences between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra approaches to the philosophy of language as well as the very different understandings of core philosophical vocabulary and concepts that inform these schools. This examination sets the stage for an exploration of the respects in which the disparities between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra might either rest on real differences between fundamental conceptual frameworks, or might be apparent differences reflecting differences in their use of and approach to language.[1]

Let us first consider the view that these are inconsistent systems. From a systematic perspective the philosophical projects of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka indeed seem to be diametrically opposed: Yogācāra is both ontologically and epistemologically foundationalist; Madhyamaka is antifoundationalist in both senses. Yogācāra proposes a theory of the ultimate nature of reality; Madhyamaka rejects the possibility of any such theory. Yogācāra maintains the ultimate reality of mind and the nonexistence of the external world; Madhyamaka accepts the conventional existence of both.

Sonam Thakchöe argues that this difference is deep, ontological, and grounded in the very different understandings of *trisvabhāva* theory. He argues that if one adopts a Yogācāra understanding of the three natures, it is impossible to see Madhyamaka as anything but nihilism. On the other hand, if one adopts a Madhyamaka perspective on this doctrine, Yogācāra appears to be committed *both* to nihilism and to reification—nihilistic regarding the conventional and the external world, and reifying mind and ulitmate reality. He argues that this distinction also informs the difference between the Svātantrika and the Prāsaṅgika schools of Madhyamaka.

Mark Siderits generalizes this argument for irreconcilable difference, advocating that these two schools reflect two very different attitudes toward the project of antirealism. Mādhyamikas, he says, are committed to a global antirealism, while Yogācāras must restrict the scope of their antirealism to the external and the conventional. This represents a different view of the very structure of antirealistic critique. Beyond particular philosophical difference, Siderits argues, these two schools diverge sharply on the role of philosophical analysis in the Buddhist project: while

1. In this context see also Asaṅga's Mahāyānasaṃgraha 3:9, and, for the discussion of some later sources, Harris 1991: 128.

for Mādhyamikas it is a central soteriological vehicle, for Yogācārins it stands behind meditative practice.

David Eckel's contribution centers on Bhāviveka's criticism of Yogācāra. Focusing on Bhāviveka's account of the Yogācāra in chapter 5 of the *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* and the *Tarkajvālā,* he discusses Bhāviveka's understanding of the sources of the Madhyamaka-Yogācāra dispute, his style of argumentation, the structure of his argument, and particular points of disagreement. Running through all of these controversies is an undercurrent of resentment at the Yogācāras' "undigested pride" in their interpretation of the central texts of the Mahāyāna. Bhāviveka provides the most extensive available evidence about the intellectual and emotional shape of this controversy in what might be called the classic period of Indian Yogācāra (the period of Dharmapāla, Sthiramati, and Xuanzang).

Dan Lusthaus examines both the adversarial and accomodating moments in dialogue between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra philosophy in India, using Chinese commentaries as a lens. He argues that, while Mādhyamikas were indeed harsh critics of Yogācāra, most Yogācāra scholars were sympathetic to early Madhyamaka, although not to its development in Madhyamaka scholastic literature. Lusthaus argues that rereading the Indian literature with close attention to Chinese commentaries shows us that late Madhyamaka indeed slides into a kind of nihilism, while Yogācāra is consistent with a robust realism to be found in early Madhyamaka.

While these scholars emphasize the doxographically enshrined differences between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, there are also reasons to believe that the schools' positions may in the end not be so far apart. The apparent oppositions may dissolve as we look more closely. First of all, it is actually not clear whether we would want to characterize early Yogācāra as a foundationalist theory, as a type of idealism that sees the ontological foundation not in the Abhidharma's *dharmas,* but in some kind of mental phenomena. While this might be the most natural interpretation of central passages in Dignāga's *Ālambanaparīkṣa* Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavarttika,* and Vasubandhu's *Viṃśatikā,* it is certainly not the view of Asaṅga in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi,* in which the body is characterized as an important condition of mind, or indeed in Vasubandhu's *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa,* where he seems to deny the reality of both mind and the external world as the proper understanding of the Yogācāra doctrine of mind-only. Vasubandhu states, "By the perception of mind-only there is the nonperception of knowable things. By the nonperception of knowable

things, there is the nonperception of mind."[2] This passage certainly gives the impression that mind is here not regarded as an existentially ultimate foundation, but rather that it is itself to be transcended in the same way in which knowable (external) things are to be transcended by the realization of mind-only.[3] Nevertheless, the question of foundationalism (or lack of it) in early Yogācāra is complex.[4]

Jan Westerhoff argues that even at the very beginnings of Mahāyāna philosophy, there are prospects for unity between the two schools. He argues that Nāgārjuna, the very founder of the Madhyamaka school, was more sympathetic to Yogācāra ideas than the Madhyamaka tradition and traditional doxographers might lead us to think. He suggests that Nāgārjuna saw the meditative practices associated with Yogācāra as indispensible to realizing Madhyamaka philosophical positions and that he saw the Yogācāra view as indispensible propaedeutics to Madhyamaka.

The connection between Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka and Yogācāra is further explored in Eviatar Shulman's contribution. He suggests that common interpretations of Nāgārjuna are based on a very selective reading of his body of works and often fail to come to terms with Nāgārjuna's unrelenting critique of existence. Shulman argues that Nāgārjuna advocates a strong antirealist philosophy, which views "the world" as intimately related to the way it is perceived and experienced. This presents an interesting parallel with Vasubandhu's metaphysical vision. Vasubandhu emphasizes the lack of differentiation between subject and object and sees the external world as dependent on the mind. The difference between the two thinkers might therefore be read as one of temperament and style, not one of substance.

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2. *cittamātropalambhena jñeyārthānupalambhatā jñeyārthānubalambhena syāc cittānubalambhatā*

3. Jay Garfield, in "Vasubandhu's Treatise on the Three Natures" in his *Empty Words. Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 128–151: 150) reads this verse as primarily rejecting attachment to a self and to one's mental state at the same time as rejecting external objects. But *citta* can here also be understood as referring to what is fundamentally real according to the Yogācāra system.

4. There are other passages where Asaṅga appears to be quite clear about the existent of the dependent nature, the mental basis on which faulty imputations are superimposed. In *Madhyāntavibhāga* 1.2 he asserts the existence of the imagination of the unreal (*abhūtaparikalpa* = *paratrantra*) empty of all duality (*abhūtaparikalpo 'sti dvayaṃ tatra na vidyate | śūnyatā vidyate tu atra tasyām api sa vidyate*). See Harris 1991: 125–126.

But even if we disregard the connection between early Madhyamaka on Yogācāra ideas, the history of Buddhist thought presents us with a variety of other reasons for seeing Madhyamaka and Yogācāra to be less antagonistic than they sometimes appear.

As Jonathan Gold points out in his chapter, the famous and longstanding doctrinal disputes between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra began with Bhāviveka, a century or two after the creation of foundational Yogācāra texts. Gold suggests that Asaṅga and Vasubandhu's supposed anti-Madhyamaka passages should be read as more broadly about the relation between Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna. They argue to not read the Mahāyāna scriptures as implying a wholesale rejection of traditional Buddhist doctrine, especially karma and nirvana. The core Yogācāra contribution to the interpretation of the Mahāyāna doctrine of the emptiness of all conceptual-linguistic constructs is an awareness of its frame: Linguistic emptiness, properly understood, cannot thoroughly undermine the doctrinal validity of karma and nirvana, because it is inconceivable, and so is strictly "beyond disputation" and supports neither the "existence" nor "nonexistence" of other doctrinal entities, and because *its* proper understanding only arises *after*, and in dependence upon, one having gained confidence in *them*. The disputational, anti-Hīnayāna rhetoric of much of Mahāyāna is thus replaced with an ecumenical, pan-Buddhist inclusivism, based in an acknowledgement that until liberation, the ultimate is inconceivable.

Moreover, despite the fact that there was a great deal of debate between proponents of the two schools, it is important to be aware that the debate literature tells only one side of the story. Leading Yogācāra authors commented on Madhyamaka texts. Asaṅga, Sthiramati, and Guṇamati composed commentaries on the foundational text of Madhyamaka, Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Dharmapāla commented on Āryadeva's *Catuḥśātaka* and *Śataśāstra* (Ruegg 1981: 49–51). And in the 8th century the Indian master Śāntarakṣita and his disciple Kamalaśīla set out to create a synthesis of both systems known as Yogācāra-Madhyamaka (*rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma pa*).

Their underlying view is perhaps best summed up in Śāntarakṣita's famous verses from the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*:

> On the basis of the Cittamatra, know that there are no external things. In addition, on the basis of this approach, know that there is no self anywhere.

> Riding the chariot of the two systems, holding the reigns of reasoning, the Mahāyāna is indeed obtained.[5]

The soteriological structure set out in these verses is very clear. First the practitioner has to establish by Yogācāra arguments that external physical objects (that is, objects belonging to the first of the five physicopsychological components, the *rūpa-skandha*) do not exist. The resulting system reduces all existents to the merely mental, and, more particularly, to the foundational consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*). As a second step one has then to apply Madhyamaka arguments to this foundation in order to demonstrate that it, too, fails to exist by intrinsic nature (*svabhāvatas*). The realization of the Mahāyāna is therefore not obtained by choosing between two contradictory philosophical systems, but by applying the arguments of each in its proper place.

That this two-level conception is not alien to Madhyamaka is also supported by Bhāviveka in his *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā*, which notes that, "As the succession of leaves etc. comes from the great power in the lotus-root, streams of objects come from the mind, though the mind is not fundamentally real."[6] The important point about this metaphor is that the root of the lotus is not connected to anything else[7] (unlike, for example, a tree, whose root is embedded in the ground), floating on a lake and covering the entire lake with the leaves and flowers that sprout from it. In the same way, Bhāviveka argues, the entire realm of saṃsāra flows from the mind, even though the mind itself does not have any fundamental status (*dravya*, *rdzas*). What we find here is an agreement with the key Yogācāra idea that the world is mind-made, without taking on board the further assumption that the mind plays a foundational ontological role.

According to the synthetical approach of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, the Yogācāra theory of the three natures—the imputed nature (*parakalpitasvabhāva*), dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*) and perfected nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*)—is in place in order to prevent the

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5. *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 92–93. *sems tsam la ni brten nas su | phyi rol dngos med shes par bya | tshul 'dir brten nas de la yang | shin tu bdag med shes par bya || tshul gnyis shing rta zhon nas su | rigs pa'i srab skyogs 'ju byed pa | de dag de phyir ji bzhin don | theg pa chen po pa nyid 'thob ||*

6. *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* 5.48 *yathā parṇādisantānā bahuśālukaśaktitāḥ | tathādravyasataś cittāc citrāḥ saṃtativṛttayaḥ* Malcom David Eckel, *Bhāviveka and his Buddhist Opponents* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2008, 258). See also Christian Lindtner, "Cittamātra in Indian Mahāyāna until Kamalaśīla" in his: *A Garland of Light. Kambala's Ālokamālā* (Asian Humanities Press, Fremont CA, 2003, 143–145).

7. *de la rtsa ba'i 'brel pa gzhan med par* (Eckel 2008: 414).

two conceptual extremes of superimposition (*samāropa*) and excessive denial (*apavāda*) and, thereby, also the two extreme views of nihilism and foundationalism.[8] The former are prevented by pointing out that the imputed nature is not fundamentally real, while the latter are prevented by noting that there is some basis (the dependent nature) on which the imputed nature is imputed.[9] Yet neither the dependent nature nor the perfected nature are fundamentally real. Any scriptural claims for their fundamental reality, this account claims, has to be interpreted as a provisional teaching (*neyārtha*), as a teaching put forward to combat the specific difficulties of an audience tending toward the extreme of excessive denial.[10]

Nevertheless, one might object that this apparently irenic resolution may be just another way of reinstating the view that these positions are inconsistent. After all, if the role of Yogācāra is merely that of a stepping-stone to Madhyamaka—metaphysics for dummies, as it were—and if Madhyamaka constitutes the true view whose comprehension it enables, this is not a vindication of Yogācāra as consistent with Madhyamaka, any more than the institution of teaching Newtonian mechanics as a preliminary to relativistic physics is a vindication of the consistency of these two views. In the same way we might as well speak of a "synthesis" of Lamarckian and Darwinian theories of evolution, where this means that we first teach a student Lamarckism to introduce them to the idea that traits *are* inherited, in order to subsequently dispell their erroneous view that traits acquired during an organism's lifetime can be passed on by inheritance. So, the very staging of progress as Śāntarakṣita presents it suggests that the views of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are *inconsistent*.[11]

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8. As Eckel nicely observes, the relation between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra is exactly symmetrical in this respect. Both proclaim to tread the middle path between two extremes, but what the Yogācāra postulates to ward off excessive denial is considered to be reification by the Madhyamaka, while the Madhyamaka rejection of what it considers to be reification is deemed to be excessive denial from a Yogācāra perspective. M.D. Eckel, "Bhāvaviveka's Critique of Yogācāra in Ch. XXV of the Prajñāpradīpa," in Christian Lindtner (ed), *Indiske Studier* 5 (Miscellanea Buddhica, Copenhagen 1985, 25–75: 31).

9. Ian Charles Harris, in *The Continuity of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Brill, Leiden, 1991: 107), writes: "This means that something must still be present once ignorance has been uprooted and the mental concepts associated with it have been suppressed. However this can no longer be presented as merely external existents. Reality is no longer seen as independent, or other, to self."

10. David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* (Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1981: 95).

11. See Richard King: "Yogācāra and its relationship with the Madhyamaka school," *Philosophy East and West* 44:4, 1994, 659–683: 664.

This is the position taken by James Blumenthal, who argues that while Śāntarakṣita adopts certain specific Yogācāra ideas, his final outlook is Madhyamaka, and that his final position regarding the relation between the two systems is hierarchical: that Madhyamaka presents the correct metaphysical account of reality, and that Yogācāra is important only as an intermediate position to be considered by one not ready for the full Madhyamaka view.

Another way of locating the Yogācāra within the Madhyamaka philosophical landscape is to consider it as an elucidation of Svātantrika Madhyamaka.[12] For the Svātantrika there can be substantial theories of conventional truth, theories that can deviate from the intuitive or commonsensical position we hold on the world. If this is accepted a (Svātantrika-)Madhyamaka can perfectly well accept the force of the Yogācāra arguments refuting the existence of external objects as the best *conventional* theory of the world, a theory that is supported by experiences made during meditative training,[13] without admitting that the theoretical entities it postulates (such as the *ālayavijñāna*) exist at the level of ultimate truth.

Jay Garfield takes yet another approach to synthesis, suggesting a phenomenological reading of Yogācāra through a reading of Vasubhandu's *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* along with a methodological or heuristic reading of Madhyamaka. Garfield argues that at least in this text, we see Yogācāra not as an ontological position, but as an investigation of experience, and that we can parse that investigation through the Madhyamaka technique of the *catuṣkoṭi* to develop a richer understanding of that Yogācāra analysis. On this view, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are not rivals, simply because their projects are orthogonal and consistent with one another.

Once again, such a synthesis may be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, we see Yogācāra as a way of elucidating Madhyamaka, and, thus, consistent with it. On the other hand, there is a tension: Madhyamaka set out to show that the Yogācāra view of the world cannot be an ultimately true theory. But then again, according to Madhyamaka, Madhyamaka is not an ultimately true theory, either, since, if Madhyamaka arguments are successful, there are no ultimately true theories. And if for

12. Ruegg 1981: 88.

13. Harris 1991: 108–109, King 1994: 681, note 56.

the Mādhyamika *all* theories (including Madhyamaka) are relegated to the level of the propaedeutic,[14] Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are in the same boat. Each constitutes a way of seeing things. And this brings us back to where we started: Are these ways of seeing things consistent, or inconsistent? We invite the reader to inquire with us in the chapters collected in this volume.

14. See Candrakīrti's commentary on 18:5 and 8 of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.

1

Pratītyasamutpāda *and* Dharmadhātu *in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism*

Chaisit Suwanvarangkul

THE SANSKRIT WORD *pratītyasamutpāda* ("dependent arising" or "dependent origination") is one of the terms that indicate the Buddha's teaching on the process of birth and death, and it occurs in the canons of all the schools of Buddhism. Another term is *dharmadhātu*: "domain of reality." According to the *dharmadhātu* theory in the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* (DBh), all beings create themselves, and even the universe is self-created. *Dharmadhātu* has come to represent the universe as completely corelative, generally interdependent, and mutually originating. It is stated that there is no single being that exists independently.

The aim of this chapter is to find out how the terms *pratītyasamutpāda* and *dharmadhātu* developed and changed over time and united into one truth. First, I will consider the *pratītyasamutpāda* in the sixth *bhūmi* of DBh in order to understand its connection with the *dharmadhātu*. Next, I will consider the development from *dharmadhātu* to *pratītyasamutpāda* in the *Mādhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya* (MAnVBh) chapter 2, *Āvaraṇapariccheda, Daśaśubhādyāvaraṇam* of *Yogācāra*. And finally I will consider the relationship between *pratītyasamutpāda* and *dharmadhātu* in the MAnVBh chapter 1, *abhūta-parikalpa* stanza 1 in the *Sad-asal-lakṣaṇa*.

To explore the relationship of these two truths is to know about Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. As *pratītyasamutpāda* is the main idea of Madhyamaka and can be linked to the idea of *śūnyatā*. *Dharmadhātu* is one of the main ideas of Yogācāra. Can these two truths go simultaneously together or do they go in a contrary direction?

I. From pratītyasamutpāda *to* dharmadhātu *in the Sixth* bhūmi *of the DBh.*

The sixth *bhūmi* of the DBh is outlined into several sections as follows[1]:

A. Having obtained the ten equalities (Aramaki, 1974: 168), the Bodhisattva enters the sixth *bhūmi*.
B. The Bodhisattva contemplates the birth and death of all sentient beings in order to complete compassion.
C. The Bodhisattva contemplates the birth and death of all sentient beings by the ten characteristics (Aramaki, 1974: 171) of *pratītyasamutpāda* as follows, (1) the relationship between *pratītyasamutpāda* and *pratītyasamutpāda*.
D. The meaning of each of the 12 chains of *pratītyasamutpāda*.
E, F. (2) the 12 chains of *pratītyasamutpāda* are mind only.
G. (3) the two actions of each of the 12 chains of *pratītyasamutpāda* (Aramaki, 1974: 177)
H. (4) the continuation from one chain to another chain in each of *pratītyasamutpāda*.
I. (5) the 12 chains of *pratītyasamutpāda* are the vicissitudes of *kleśa*, *karma* and *vipāka*.
J. (6) the 12 chains of *pratītyasamutpāda* are beyond past, present and future lives.
K. (7) the 12 chains of *pratītyasamutpāda* have three kinds of sufferings (Aramaki, 1974: 183).
L. (8) (9) (10) the Bodhisattva contemplates the arising and cessation of the 12 chains of *pratītyasamutpāda*.
M. the conclusion of ten characteristics of the 12 chains of *pratītyasamutpāda*.
N. when the Bodhisattva contemplates the ten characteristics of the 12 chains of *pratītyasamutpāda*, the three doors of liberations become manifest.
O. when the Bodhisattva contemplates the non-arising and non-cessation of the ten characteristics of the 12 chains of *pratītyasamutpāda*, the wisdom of Bodhisattva vow becomes manifest.
P. the ten kinds of emptiness (also ten kinds of signlessness, and ten kinds of wishlessness) become manifest. (Aramaki, 1974: 191)

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1. A, B, C, — are the sections separated by J. Rahder (ed.) DBh, Louvin, 1926.

Q. the Bodhisattva attains the ten kinds of Bodhicittas. (Aramaki, 1974: 191)
R. After the Bodhisattva have practiced the skillful means and wisdom, the enlightenment becomes manifest.
S. in the sixth *bhūmi*, the Bodhisattva attains million millions of concentrated abilities and is protected by million millions of Buddhas.

The sixth *bhūmi* mentions *pratītyasamutpāda* and explains the relationship between *pratītyasamutpāda* and the three liberations (三解脱門 or 三三昧 *vimokṣa-traya*). The three liberations in the sixth *bhūmi* are emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness. In this *bhūmi*, the Bodhisattvas use their wisdom to contemplate the cycle of birth and death of all creatures in terms of the following ten aspects, forward and back ward in time:

1. the interconnections of the elements of becoming (*bhavāṅgānusaṃdhitas*);
2. being all in one mind (*ekacittasamavasaraṇatas*);
3. differentiation of one's own action (*svakarmasaṃbhedatas*);
4. inseparability (*avinirbhāgatas*);
5. the procession of the three courses of affliction, action, and suffering (*trivartmānupravartantas*);
6. the connection of past, present, and future (*pūrvāntapratyutpannāparāntāvekṣaṇatas);*
7. accumulation of the three kinds of suffering (*triduḥkhatāsamudayatas*);
8. production by causes (*hetupratyayaprabhavatas*);
9. attachment to origination and annihilation (*utpādavyayavinibaṃdhatas*); and
10. contemplation of becoming and annihilation (*bhāvakṣayatāpratyavekṣaṇatas*).[2]

After contemplating the *pratītyasamutpāda* with these ten aspects, the Bodhisattvas then expound as follows:

> tasyaivaṃ daśākāraṃ pratītyasamutpādaṃ pratyavekṣamānasya/ nirātmato niḥsattvato nirjīvato niḥpudgalataḥ svabhāva-śūnyataḥ

2. Cleary, p. 748

kāraka-vedaka-rahitataś ca/ pratyavekṣamānasya śūnyatā-vimokṣa-mukham ājātaṃ bhavati/[3](DBh p. 102 ll. 3–6)

Thus while Bodhisattvas contemplate the *pratītyasamutpāda* in these ten aspects, because of contemplating it in terms of being without self, without being, without soul, without person, inherently empty, without doer or subject, the door of liberation through emptiness becomes manifest to them.

tasyaiṣāṃ bhavāṅgānāṃ svabhāva-nirodhātāyantavimokṣapratyupasthānato/ na kiṃcid dharmanimittam utpadyate/ ato' syānimitta-vimokṣa-mukham ājātaṃ bhavati/ (DBh p. 102 ll. 6–7)

Because of the nullity of intrinsic of nature of these elements of becoming, being in the presence of ultimate liberation, no sign of any elements occurs to them. Hence, this door of signlessness becomes manifest to them.

tasyaivaṃ śūnyatānimittam avatīrṇasya na kaścid abhilāṣa utpadyate/ anyatra mahākaruṇāpūrvaṃgamāt/ sattvaparipākād evam asyāpraṇihita-vimokṣa-mukham ājātaṃ bhavati/[4] (DBh p. 102 ll. 7–9)

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3. In *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* edited by Vaidya (p. 33 ll. 26–28), this passage is as follows:

tasyaivaṃ dvādaśākāraṃ pratītyasamutpādaṃ pratyavekṣamānasya nirātmato niḥsattvato nirjīvato niṣpudgalataḥ kāraka-vedaka-rahitato 'svāmikato hetupratyayādhīnataḥ svabhāva-śūnyato viviktato 'svabhāvataś ca prakṛtyā pratyavekṣamānasya śūnyatā-vimokṣa-mukham ājātaṃ bhavati[/]

While Bodhisattvas thus contemplate the *pratītyasamutpāda* in these twelve aspects, because of contemplating it in terms of being without self, without being, without soul, without person, without doer or subject, without owner, depending on cause and belief, inherently empty, kept apart, the door of emptiness liberation becomes manifest to them by the original cause of own-being.

4. In *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* edited by Vaidya (p. 34 ll. 1–2), this passage is as follows:

tasyaivaṃ śūnyatānimittam avatīrṇasya na kaścid abhilāṣa utpadyate/ anyatra mahākaruṇāpūrvakāt sattvaparipācanāt/ evam asyāpraṇihita-vimokṣa-mukham ājātaṃ bhavati/

In those who have thus descended into emptiness and signlessness, no desire whatsoever arises, except, led by great compassion, for the full development of sentient beings: thus this door of liberation of wishlessness becomes manifest to them.

> When those who have descended to emptiness and signlessness, no desire whatsoever arises, except, led by great compassion, for the full development of sentient beings: thus this door of liberation of wishlessness becomes manifest to them.

In this way, the Bodhisattvas contemplate the fact that all creatures in *saṃsāra* dependently originate. In the *pratītyasamutpāda*, there are no ideas of self and other, of agent and perceiver, of being and nonbeing. As the liberation of emptiness arises, the contaminated being of the Bodhisattva turns into the purified being of the Bodhisattva, or the *dharmadhātu*.

After the Bodhisattvas have contemplated the *pratītyasamutpāda*, the door of liberation through emptiness becomes manifest to them. After realizing that the *pratītyasamutpāda* is not a real entity, they gain absolute liberation through the origination of solitude. They continue to contemplate the *pratītyasamutpāda* until the door of liberation through signlessness becomes manifest to them. The condition of being without self, without being, without soul, without person arises after the realization of emptiness, and no sign of any thing occurs to them after the signlessness. But still they have great compassion for all creatures. The wish to help all creatures is still in their minds, and the door of liberation through wishlessness becomes manifest to them. The Bodhisattvas contemplate the fact that all creatures are still in *saṃsāra* due to *pratītyasamutpāda*. The Bodhisattvas understand the relationship between the *pratītyasamutpāda* and the three doors of liberation as follows:

> sa[5] imāni trīṇi vimokṣamukhāni bhāvayann ātmaparasaṃjñāpagataḥ kāraka-vedaka-saṃjñāpagato bhāvābhāvasaṃjñāpagato/ bhūyasyā mātrayā mahākaruṇā-puraskṛtaḥ prayujyate/ aparinişpannānāṃ bodhyaṅgānāṃ parinişpattaye/ (DBh p. 102 ll. 9–11)

> Causing these three doors of liberations to become manifest, they leave behind the ideas of self and other, of agent and perceiver, of being and nonbeing. All the more, filled with compassion, they work to perfectly attain the elements of enlightenment which they have not yet attained.

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5. In *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* of Vaidya (p. 34 l. 3), this word is "ya" instead of "sa."

In this way the Bodhisattvas contemplate *pratītyasamutpāda* while practising these three doors of liberations. Then they leave behind the ideas of self and other, of agent and perceiver, of being and nonbeing. At this moment the Bodhisattvas turn themselves from contaminated beings into pure *dharmadhātu*.

II. From Dharmadhātu *to* Pratītyasamutpāda *in the MAnVBh Chapter 2*, Āvaraṇa Pariccheda, Daśaśubhādyāvāraṇam

Dharmadhātu, which is the fundamental truth, entails the following properties: (1) is in the all-encompassing beings, (2) is the foremost, (3) is the yet foremost aim that flows from that, (4) is the nonseizing, (5) is an absence of distinction in the series, (6) is the aim neither of affliction nor of purity, (7) is the absence of variety, (8) is the aim that there is neither "inferior" nor "superior," and (9, 10) is the fourfold basis of power that has been never known.

The ten *bhūmi* (stages) are the locations or stages along the path that the Bodhisattvas are able to use to pursue the perfections in order to ascend to the next, higher location. Moreover, they are places of morality, where the ten truths can be practiced.

bhūmiṣu punar yathā-kramaṃ/
sarvvatragārthe[6] *agrārthe*[7] *niṣyandāgrārtha eva ca/*
niṣparigrahatā[8]*rthe ca santānābheda eva ca[//] II 14*
niḥsaṃkleśa-viśuddhy-arthe'nānā[9]*tvārtha eva ca/*
ahīnānadhikārthe ca caturddhā-vaśitāśraye[//] II 15
dharmma[10]*-dhātāv avidyeyaṃ akliṣṭā daśadhāvṛtiḥ*[11]*/*
daśa-bhūmi-vipakṣeṇa pratipakṣās tu bhūmayaḥ[//] II.16
(MAnVBh p. 34 l.20–p. 35 l. 5)

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6. Without saṃdhi, metri causa (see Nagao 1964: 34)

7. Pāda in vipula III (ibid.: 34)

8. Manuscript (Ms). ˚grahātā (ibid.: 35)

9. As "Avagraha" is unmetrical; this is read as "anānā°." (ibid.: 35)

10. Ms. dharmmā (ibid.: 35)

11. Ms. āvṛttiḥ (ibid.: 35)

And to the stages, [there may be obstructions,] in this order:
"In regard to the all-encompassing aim,
to the foremost aim,
to the yet foremost aim which flows from that,
to the aim of nonseizing.
to an absence of distinction in the series,
to the aim neither of affliction nor of purity,
to the aim of an absence of variety,
to the aim that there is neither "inferior" nor "superior",
and to the fourfold basis of power,
there is this ignorance in the Element of Existence [dharmadhātu],
a tenfold nonafflicted covering,
by way of factors adverse to the Ten Stages,
but the antidotes to them are the Stages!" II. 14–16.

We can quote from Vasubandhu together with Sthiramati in the commentary that explains the ten stages as follows:

1) prathamayā hi bhūmyā dharmma-dhātoḥ sarvvatragārthaṃ prativiḍhyati [/] yenātma-para-samatāṃ[12] pratilabhate[13]/ (MAnVBh p. 35 ll. 10–11)

That is, with the first stage, [the Bodhisattva] understands the all-encompassing aim of the *dharmadhātu* by which one learns the sameness of "self" and "others."

On the first stage, the Bodhisattva has wisdom to transcend all beings and has an own-nature path to enlightenment. This truth can be quoted from *Madhyāntavibhāga* as follows:

dharmma-dhātu-vinirmukto[14] yasmād dharmo na vidyate[//] (MAnVBh p. 67 l. 8)

Since there is no being [dharma] that can be exempt from *dharmadhātu*.

12. Ms. para-matāṃ (ibid.: 35)

13. Ms. pratilabhabhate (ibid.: 35)

14. Ms. Vinimurkto (ibid.: 67)

Then there is no difference between own-self and other-self, as we have the same truth: *dharmadhātu*.

> 2) dvitīyayā 'grārthaṃ [/] yenāsyāivam bhavati tasmāt tarhy asmābhiḥ[15]samāne'bhinirhāre[16]sarvvākāra-pariśodhanābhinirhāra eva yogaḥ karaṇīya[17] iti/ (MAnVBh p.35 ll.11–14)
>
> With the second stage, [*dharmadhātu*] is the foremost aim, because at that time [the Bodhisattva has thought] like this. This is [the foremost aim], when [we have] same carrying out by our [effort], by which [one decides that] one should do practices in order to carry out a clearing of all aspects.

On the second stage, the Bodhisattva knows by his wisdom that the *dharmadhātu* is clear and pure by own-nature. The *dharmadhātu* is foremost aim. Whoever practices the ten wholesome courses of action (*daśakuśala*)[18] can attain the enlightenment.

> 3) tṛtīyayā tan-niṣyandāgrārthaṃ/ yena dharmmadhātu-niṣyandasya śrutasyāgratāṃ viditvā tad-arthaṃ tri-sāhasra-mahāsāhasra-pramāṇāyām apy agni-khadāyām ātmānaṃ prakṣipet/ (MAnVBh p. 35 ll.14–16)
>
> With the third stage, the aim which flows from [the *dharmadhātu*] is the foremost. Having realized the aim of what has been heard which flows from the *dharmadhātu*, [the Bodhisattvas] throw themself even into a fire-pit, which has the extent of the three thousand and great thousand [worlds].

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15. Ms. Āsmā (ibid.: 35)

16. Ms. bhivihīre, without avagraha (ibid.: 35).

17. Ms. karīṇīya. Regarding "tasmāt . . . karanīya", see J. Rahder, *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, p. 26 (ibid.: 35)

18. The ten wholesome courses of action are enumerated as follows: 1) to abstain from killing, 2) to abstain from stealing, 3) to abstain from misconduct with sensual pleasures, 4) to abstain from telling lies, 5) to abstain from slanderous words, 6) to abstain from harsh words, 7) to abstain from silly chatter, 8) to abstain from avariciousness, 9) to abstain from revenge, 10) to abstain from wrong views.

On the third stage, the Bodhisattva accomplished an understanding that the aim that flows from the *dharmadhātu* is foremost. The word of Buddha is the revelation of understanding, because the revelation, such as the teaching and the instruction, flows from the *dharmadhātu* by the purity of *dharmadhātu* that is in the name of *dharmakāya* in all forms. Because the *dharmadhātu* is foremost, the instruction from the *dharmadhātu* is foremost, and the *dharmadhātu* is the sign of purity.[19]

> 4) caturthyā niṣparigrahatārthan[20] tathā hi dharmma-tṛṣṇāpi vyāvarttate/ (MAnVBh p. 35 ll. 17–18)
>
> With the fourth stage, [*dharmadhātu*] is the aim of nonseizing, for instance even the desire for Dharma is destroyed.

On the forth stage, the *dharmadhātu* is the same for all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and sentient beings. There is no attachment between others and mine. The Bodhisattva understands the *dharmadhātu* by nonmental proliferation (*niṣprapañca*) and obtains qualities related to enlightenment (*bodhipakṣadharma*). The desire that seeks for the truth in the scriptures still exists until the forth stage, but after that it is destroyed.

> 5) pañcamyā santānābhedārthaṃ daśabhiś cittāśaya-viśuddhi-samatābhiḥ/(MAnVBh p. 35 ll. 18–19)
>
> With the fifth stage, the aim of [all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the *dharmadhātu*] is the absence of distinction in the series, with its ten samenesses of the purification of the place of mind.

On the fifth stage, all the past, present and future Buddhas understand the identity of sameness with the sameness of purified development of higher and higher *bodhipakṣadharma* and all the sameness of purified development of maturity of sentient beings. Because the store-consciousness

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19. tritīyayā tanniṣyandāgrārtham/ prativídhyatīti prakṛtam[/] dharmadhātuprativedha-prabhāvitatvād buddhavacanasya[/] yas*māt dharmakāyanāmasarvākāraparišuddha-dharmadhātuvaśena prabhāvito dharmadhātuniṣyandaḥ* sūtrādiko deśanādharmaḥ[/] dharmadhātvagratayā tanniṣyandadeśanādharmāgratā dharmadhātupariśuddhinimittatvāc ca[/] (Yamaguchi, p. 101 ll. 10–15).

20. Ms niṣparigratahatārthan

has transformed, and because the sign of the identity of *Dharmakāya* is the same in [every sentient being], therefore [the Bodhisattvas] practice *Dhyāna* (perfection) in this stage.[21]

> 6) ṣaṣṭhyā niḥsaṃkleṣa-viśuddhy-arthaṃ pratītyasamutpāde [/] nāsti sa kaścid dharmmo yaḥ saṃkliśyate vā viśudhyate veti prativedhāt[/] (MAnVBh p. 35 ll. 19–21)
>
> With the sixth stage, it comprehends the aim where there is neither affliction nor purity, because of its realization that there is no event which is being afflicted or purified [by defilement, karma, etc] in the *pratītyasamutpāda*.

More explanation of the sixth stage appears in the paragraphs below.

> 7) saptamyā 'nānātvārthaṃ nirnimittatayā sūtrādi- dharmma-nimitta- nānātvāsamudācārād [/] (MAnVBh p. 35 ll. 21–22)
>
> With the seventh stage, there is no aim of an absence of variety [in *dharmadhātu*], because there is no purpose of variety of dharma sign, such as the scriptures, by a lack of sign.

There is the dharma sign, such as scriptures, until this stage, but after that each sign does not exist in the *dharmadhātu* because the Bodhisattvas understand that all sentient beings have the same nature.

> 8) aṣṭamyā 'hīnānadhikārtham anutpattika-dharmma-kṣānti-lābhāt saṃkleśe vyavadāne vā kasyacid dharmmasya hāni-vṛddhy-adarśanāt [/] (MAnVBh p. 35 l. 22–p. 36 l. 1)
>
> With the eighth stage[22], There is neither the aim of "inferior" nor the aim of "superior," because neither the decrease of affliction nor

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21. sarvabodhipakṣyadharm*ottarottaravibhāvanaviśuddhyāśayasamatayā ca/ sarva-sattvaparipācana- viśuddhyā*śayasamatayā ca/ ābhiḥ samatābhiḥ sarvabuddhānāṃ saṃtānābhedaṃ pratividhyati/ ālayavijñānaparāvṛttila*kṣaṇadharmakāyasyābhedatvāt/ tasmāt tasyāṃ bhūmau dhyānapāramitātiriktat*arā bhavati/ (Yamaguchi p. 103 ll. 15–19)

22. In *dharmadhātu,* sentient beings can enlighten and be Buddha, but because of the contamination of *saṃsāra* is not the aim of "inferior" or the purification of *nirvāṇa* is not the aim of "superior", because the decrease of affliction of *saṃsāra* and the increase of purification of *nirvāṇa* is not observed by the forbearance through realizing the non-arising of dharma (*anutpattika-dharmma-kṣānti*).

> the increase of purification is observed in virtue of the forbearance achieved through realizing the non-arising of phenomena (*anutpattika-dharmma-kṣānti*).

Because *dharmadhātu* is pure from its nature, there is no difference between the step to comtaminate and the step to purify. Therefore the *dharmadhātu* is always the same in all places at any time. On the eighth stage, the Bodhisattva can understand that in *dharmadhātu* there is no decrease of affliction and no increase of purification by the forbearance (through realizing) the non-arising of *dharma* (*anutpattika-dharmma-kṣānti*).

> 9) jñāna-vaśitāśrayatvaṃ navamyā[23] pratisaṃvil-lābhāt [/] (MAnVBh p. 36 ll. 4–5)

> With the ninth stage, [the Bodhisattvas] thoroughly understand that [the *dharmadhātu*] is the state of [the third] basis for potency in knowledge[24] with the attainment of analytical insight.

On the ninth stage, the Bodhisattvas can accomplish the four *pratisaṃvid* (analytical insights), which are 1) *dharmapratisaṃvid*, 2) *arthapratisaṃvid*, 3) *niruktipratisaṃvid*, and 4) *pratibhānapratisaṃvid*. By the *dharmapratisaṃvid*, the Bodhisattvas understand the discrimination of knowledge and origin of analytical insight. By the *arthapratisaṃvid*, the Bodhisattvas understand the discrimination of meanings of all phenomena in all their characteristics. By the *niruktipratisaṃvid*, the Bodhisattvas understand the discrimination of language, the etymological or linguistic explanations. By the *pratibhānapratisaṃvid*, the Bodhisattvas understand the discrimination of acumen.

> 10) karmma-vaśitāśrayatvaṃ daśamyā[25] yathecchaṃ nirmmāṇaiḥ satvārtha-karaṇāt [/] (MAnVBh p. 36 ll. 5–6)

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23. Bhāṣya navamyāṃ (Yamaguchi used *navamyā*; the author follows Yamaguchi).

24. There are fourfold potencies are: 1) potency in absence of discriminations, 2) potency in the total clearing of the Buddha-field, 3) potency in knowledge, and 4) potency in action. One penetrates the state for the basis of the first and second potencies in the dharmadhātu on the eighth stage, the third potency on the ninth stage and the fourth stage on the tenth stage. (stefan 1998: 230 ll. 28–33)

25. Bhāṣya daśamyāṃ (Yamaguchi used *daśamyā*; the author follows Yamaguchi).

> With the tenth stage, [the Bodhisattvas] thoroughly understand that [the *dharmadhātu*] is the state of [the fourth] basis for potency in action because the action is for the sake of sentient beings through transformation [of body] as wish.

However, in the sixth stage it is explained that the difference between the contaminated and purified beings has disappeared. Here, I will refer to the commentary of Vasubandhu:

> ṣaṣṭhyā niḥsaṃkleṣa-viśuddhy-arthaṃ pratītyasamutpāde [/] nāsti sa kaścid dharmmo yaḥ saṃkliśyate vā viśudhyate veti prativedhāt/ (MAnVBh p. 35 ll. 19–21)

> With the sixth stage, it comprehends the aim where there is neither affliction nor purity, because of its realization that there is no event which is being afflicted or purified [by defilement, karma, etc] in the *pratītyasamutpāda*.

In the verse of Maitreya in the commentary of Vasubandhu it is explained that "It was not contaminated and also purified by the defilement and karma etc." The reason for this, as Sthiramati comments, is:

> ṣaṣṭhyā niḥsaṃkleśaviśuddhyarthaṃ dharmadhātoḥ pratividhyatīti saṃbadhyate/pratītyasamutpādalakṣaṇaḥ *saṃkleśas tasminn āgantujāt prakṛtyā na saṃkliṣṭaḥ/ prākṛtikaviśuddher na vi*śudhyati/ (MAnVT p. 104 ll. 3–6)

> With the sixth stage, (the Bodhisattva) comprehends the aim where there is neither affliction nor purity of *dharmadhātu*. The affliction in being with the characteristic of the *pratītyasamutpāda* arises accidentally, not from the natural state; (it does not mean that) it was purifying (its natural state, because) its natural state is pure.

In section I, the sixth *bhūmi* of DBh, the Bodhisattvas contemplate the *pratītyasamutpāda* and expound these three doors of liberations. They leave behind the ideas of self and other, of agent and perceiver, of being and nonbeing. At this moment the Bodhisattvas turn from contaminated beings into pure *dharmadhātu*. But in section II the MAnVBh chapter 2, explains that the *dharmadhātu* in its natural state is not contaminated and

also is not purified. As Vasubandhu and Sthiramati explain: a) the *dharmadhātu* is brilliant and luminous in its natural state, because it is the nature of all creatures, b) when the Bodhisattvas enlighten the *dharmadhātu*, the affliction arises accidentally; it is purified by the eradication of affliction. Therefore, the eradication of affliction equals the purification of beings. It does not mean that the *dharmadhātu* was contaminated in its natural state; rather c) the *dharmadhātu* is pure in its natural state, and is beyond all-encompassing defilement.

It is at this point in time that the mechanism of the Great Compassion starts to work. Because defilement has been annihilated, the being is purified. However, this does not mean that the *dharmadhātu* is purified. In this way, when the Bodhisattvas practice on the Bodhisattva-path, they change from contaminated beings into purified beings. And conversely, when the Great Compassion works, they change from purified beings into contaminated beings. We can understand from this that the physical body of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas are nonself, and also that all sentient beings are nonself. They are all one in the *dharmadhātu* and all work together. This does not mean that the natural state was contaminated and purified.

In the first half of this essay, I have analyzed two sections: the sixth *bhūmi* of DBh and the MAnVBh Chapter 2. I have argued that each of these texts shows that the two truths – *pratītyasamutpāda* and *dharmadhātu* or Madhyamaka and Yogācāra – rely upon each other. During the process of enlightenment and becoming a pure being (section I), the Bodhisattvas turn themselves from contaminated beings to purified beings. After that, the Bodhisattvas, as the pure beings, are able to come to *saṃsāra* to help all contaminated beings in this world with great compassion (section II). In section III, I will explain the relationship of these two truths.

III. The Relationship between pratītyasamutpāda *and* dharmadhātu *in the* Madhyāntavibhāga *Chapter 1*, Abhūta-parikalpa *stanza 1*, Sad-asal-lakṣaṇa

There are nine characteristics of contaminated beings that have been described in the MAnVBh, chapter 1. They are as follows:

1. *sal-lakṣaṇa*, existence characteristic,
2. *asal-lakṣaṇa*, nonexistence characteristic,

3. *sva-lakṣaṇa*, existence by way of its own characteristic,
4. *saṃgraha-lakṣaṇa*, comprising characteristic,
5. *asal-lakṣaṇānupraveśopāya-lakṣaṇa*, skillfull means characteristic of the entrance into its own nonexistent characteristic,
6. *prabheda-lakṣaṇa*, division characteristic,
7. *paryāya-lakṣaṇa*, synonym characteristic,
8. *pravṛtti-lakṣaṇa*, evolution characteristic,
9. *saṃkleśa-lakṣaṇa*, affliction characteristic.

There are 5 characteristics of purified beings that have been described in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, chapter 1, *Śūnyatoddeśa*. They are as follows:

1. *śūnyatā-lakṣaṇa*, characteristic of emptiness,
2. *śūnyatā-paryāya*, synonym of emptiness,
3. *śūnyatā-paryāyārtha*, meaning of synonym of emptiness,
4. *śūnyatā-prabheda*, divisions of emptiness,
5. *śūnyatā-sādhana*, accomplishment of emptiness,

Let's contemplate the contaminated and purified beings in this third section of our discussion. The MAnVBh chapter 1, stanza 11 states that:

> tredhā dvedhā ca saṃkleśaḥ saptadhā 'bhūta-parikalpanāt [//] I.11 (MAnVBh p. 21 l. 21)
>
> Together, the threefold, twofold, and sevenfold afflictions [the twelvefold afflictions of the *pratītyasamutpāda*] originate from unreal ideation [*abhūta-parikalpa*].

From this stanza we can infer that unreal ideation and *pratītyasamutpāda* are the same. The MAnVbh chapter 1, stanza 1 explains this as follows:

> tatra lakṣaṇam ārabhyāha/
> abhūta-parikalpo'sti dvayan tatra na vidyate/
> śūnyatā vidyate tv atra tasyām api sa vidyate [//] I1
>
> tatrābhūtaparikalpo grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpaḥ/ dvayaṃ grāhyaṃ grāhakañ ca/ śūnyatā

> tasyābhūtaparikalpasya grāhya-grāhaka-bhāvena virahitatā/ tasyām api sa vidyata ity abhūtaparikalpaḥ/ evaṃ yad yatra nāsti tat tena śūnyam iti yathābhūtaṃ samanupaśyati yat punar atrāvaśiṣṭaṃ bhavati tat sad ihāstīti yathābhūtaṃ prajānātītyaviparitaṃ śūnyatā-lakṣaṇan udbhāvitam bhavati/ (MAnVBh p. 17 l.15–p. 18 l.7)

There, beginning with the characteristics, the author says:

> "There is unreal ideation; duality is not found there;
> But emptiness is found here; and that (unreal ideation) is found in this (emptiness) as well." I.1.
>
> There [in this passage], "unreal ideation" is the distinction of grasped object and grasping subject. The two are grasped object and grasping subject. "Emptiness" is the separation of unreal ideation from the being of grasped object and grasping subject. "And that (unreal ideation) is found in this (emptiness), as well": i.e., unreal ideation [is found in emptiness, as well]. And if it [duality] is not there in that way, then, as a result, one sees "as it is," namely, that it is empty. Furthermore, one completely observes that that which remains [after duality vanishes] is what is [really] existent here, and the emptiness characteristic is made to arise in an unreversed manner.

And also we can see from the *Ṭīkā* of Sthiramati:

> atha vā lakṣaṇaṃ saṃ*kleśavyavadānābhidhānād anyan nāstīty ataḥ saṃkleśavya-vadānalakṣaṇaparīkṣārtham āha/*
> *abhūtapari* kalpo'sti
> iti vistaraḥ/ abhūtaparikalpasvabhāvaḥ saṃkleśo bhrāntilakṣaṇatvāt / katham etaj jñātavyaṃ bhrāntilakṣaṇam iti yena
> dvayaṃ tatra na vidyate/
> svātmany avidyamānena grāhya-grāhakākāreṇa prakhyān*ād bhrāntisvarūpeṇa jñāyate/ idānīṃ vyavadānasvarūpaparīkṣārtham āha/ śūnyatā vidyate tv atra*
> *iti/ śūnyatāsvabhāvo hi vyavadānaṃ dvay*ābhāvasvabhāvatvāt/ atra ca śūnyatāprabhāvitatvād mārganirodhayor api grahaṇaṃ veditavyam / saṃkleśapakṣād eva vya vyavadānapakṣo mārgayitavyo na punaḥ

pṛthaktvam asyāstīti pradarśanārtham āha atreti/ yadi dvayaṃ nāsti kathaṃ tasyāṃ vidyamānāyāṃ[26] loko bhrūta iti pṛṣṭam/ataś cāha/ tasyām api sa vidyate// iti/
(MAnVT p. 12 l. 26–p. 13 l.16)

Or rather, the *lakṣaṇa* or characteristic is no other than the expression [of characteristic of] defilement and purification. Therefore in order to examine this characteristic of defilement and purification, he says:

"Unreal ideation exists," etc.
The essence of unreal ideation is defilement because its characteristic nature is false. How should this be understood? Since [unreal ideation] is a false characteristic,

"Duality does not [absolutely] exist in it."
And because it is the being perceived by the form of grasping subject and grasped object, which does not exist in itself, its illusive own form is evident. Now, in order to examine the aim of its own form of purification [*vyavadāna*], he says:

"Emptiness however exists in it."
For the essence nature of Emptiness is purification because it is the essence nature of the unreality of duality. [Omitted] now the following question may arise: If the duality [grasping subject and grasped object] does not exist, then even though this (emptiness) exists, why is here the illusion of the world? Therefore he states:

"In this [emptiness] too, that [unreal ideation] is found."

The MAnVBh chapter 1, stanza 1, explains the contaminated being. The contaminated being has unreal ideation as its essence nature. On this view, because of the essential of ideation, one is led to discriminate between the grasping subject and grasped object. However, when the Bodhisattvas became enlightened with no grasped object, this shows that the grasping subject does not exist either. At this moment the Bodhisattvas becomes one with the purified *dharmadhātu* or *tathatā*. Therefore, in stanza 1, the concept of unreal ideation is explained: there are neither

26. Yamaguchi: *sā vidyamānā*.

grasped object nor grasping subject. When the Bodhisattvas realize that there is duality in unreal ideation, then the enlightenment of *dharmadhātu* or *tathatā* occurs. At this moment, the Bodhisattvas are transformed from contaminated beings into pure *dharmadhātu*, but, at the same time, in stanza 1, purified *dharmadhātu* has emptiness as its essential nature. Next, the Bodhisattvas work to help all creatures achieve purified *dharmadhātu* through their great compassion. We can recall at this time that the contaminated being (unreal ideation) and the purified being (*dharmadhātu*) are the same, and we can conclude that in *dharmadhātu* there is unreal ideation, and in unreal ideation there is *dharmadhātu*.

Summary

In this chapter I have summarized, based on the analysis of the thought of the sixth *bhūmi* of DBh and the MAnVBh chapter 2, that unreal ideation and *pratītyasamutpāda* are the same. The sixth *bhūmi* of DBh has explained that in the *pratītyasamutpāda*, the nature of oneself, life, creatures, human beings, behavior, and experience does not exist. This is also the idea of Madhyamaka about *pratītyasamutpāda*.

In the MAnVBh it is stated that the nature of these things can be understood as the grasped object and grasping subject. In short, if we compare the sixth *bhūmi* of DBh to the MAnVBh, chapter 1, stanza 1, when the nature of oneself, life, creatures, human beings, behavior, and experience of grasping subject in *pratītyasamutpāda* do not exist, the door of the liberation of emptiness opens. This means that *dharmadhātu* is located in unreal ideation. Furthermore, when the Bodhisattvas contemplate *pratītyasamutpāda*, they realize these three doors of liberations. Then they are able to leave behind the ideas of self and other, of agent and perceiver, of being and nonbeing; in short, unreal ideation is also located in *dharmadhātu*.

According to the sixth *bhūmi* of DBh and the MAnVBh chapter 1, stanza 1, when the Bodhisattvas practice on the Bodhisattva-path, they turn from contaminated beings into purified beings. Moreover, when the Great Compassion works, they turn from purified beings into contaminated beings.

In the MAnVBh chapter 2, it is explained that the physical body of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas are nonself and also that all the sentient beings are nonself. They are all one in the *dharmadhātu* and all work together.

This does not mean that the *dharmadhātu* turns into a contaminated being, or becomes clean by any other force. Rather, these two truths of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are "allies:" they have a relationship, rely upon each other and can be understood as the same.

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2

Language and Existence in Madhyamaka and Yogācāra

PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS

Mattia Salvini

"The world is only names"; you declared this loudly.
Apart from the expression, nothing to be expressed can be found.[1]

NĀGĀRJUNA

There are some who say: "Everything is designations only; this is reality. If one sees in this way, he sees correctly". Since for them the mere thing that is the basis of designation is not there, the designation itself cannot by all means be there! How could then reality be there as designations-only? Therefore, in this way, they have over-negated both reality and designation. And since he over-negates designation and reality, such person should be understood to be the foremost nihilist.[2]

ASAṄGA

1. *nāmamātraṁ jagat sarvam ity uccair bhāṣitaṁ tvayā | abhidhānāt pṛthagbhūtam abhidheyaṁ na vidyate* || Acintyastava 35.

2. *bhavanty evaṁvādinaḥ prajñaptimātram eva sarvam etat tattvaṁ yaś caivaṁ paśyati sa samyak paśyatīti teṣāṁ prajñaptyadhiṣṭhānasya vastumātrasyābhāvāt saiva prajñaptiḥ sarveṇa sarvaṁ na bhavati kutaḥ punaḥ prajñaptimātraṁ tattvaṁ bhaviṣyati | tad anena paryāyeṇa tais tattvam api prajñaptir api tadubhayam apy apavāditaṁ bhavati | prajñaptitattvāpavādāc ca pradhāno nāstiko veditavyaḥ| Bodhisattvabhūmi, Tattvārthapaṭala.*

MADHYAMAKA AND YOGĀCĀRA offer complex and articulate scholastic devices for the development of higher cognition (*prajñā*), which consists in the analysis of *dharma*s (*dharmapravicaya*) and in the resultant understanding of their emptiness. These two schools do so by debating the nature of sentience, cognition, conceptualization, language, and existence. Precise and often elliptic discussions are cast against a vast erudite background, wherein traditional grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), Abhidharma, non-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, and Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophy and epistemology all have a significant role to play. Even such branches of knowledge as traditional medicine *(āyurveda)* and literary aesthetics (*alaṁkāraśāstra*) may be useful in appreciating the intended sense of a specific argument.

Traditional Buddhist doxographers have employed the terms *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* while referring to two recognizable and distinct systems: I propose that such a procedure may be both reasonable and desirable. Upholders of either *siddhānta* ("established conclusion") were well-informed and had good reasons to debate with each other; they understood the opponents' position and represented it faithfully. While the two systems shared a common language, they retained specificities of which their proponents were clearly aware.[3]

I shall sketch the main points of my own reconstruction by starting from the most basic conceptual categories, and with what is perhaps a central concern for both systems—the mind. While reading the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka philosophical positions, I intend to bring awareness to some fundamental and commonly accepted definitions of *vijñāna* ("consciousness") and to the relationship between consciousness, emptiness, and liberation.[4]

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3. Anacker on the other hand had suggested that "They might have disagreed because they were academics fighting for post and recognition." (Anacker, 3; see also his assessment of Bhāviveka, Candrakīrti, Sthiramati, and Dharmapāla in note 16 of Anacker's book: "They seem to love arguing among themselves"). I have some reservations about the usefulness of such hypotheses about motives and character flaws, as they seem too closely *ad personam* and hardly ascertainable; on the other hand, they take into scarce account the exemplary accuracy with which those same authors conducted their debates—even while portraying an opponent's view.

4. For example, any debate about whether Yogācāra may be idealism or not is partly vitiated (in my opinion) by the fact that what the modern interpreter means by "mind" and what a Yogācāra philosopher means by *vijñāna* may be too different to allow meaningful assimilation under the same heading. At the very least, if the Yogācāra *vijñāna* still qualifies as "mind" in a way commensurable to its usage in, say, Bishop George Berkeley, one should perhaps explain the precise point of commonality—since we cannot assume that what we translate as "mind" is a given with certain identical features to be recognized through intuition alone in every possible context.

Attention to the specific Buddhist sense of words like *citta* and *vijñāna* may allow us to respect the sophistication and the specificity of the position we wish to reconstruct; rather than falling back to a less technical, "common sense" acceptation of the English renderings "mind" and "consciousness." This may seem a minor drawback, but it is in fact of crucial importance even while interpreting epistemological discussions about what is ultimately meaningful (*paramārtha*) according to Madhyamaka and Yogācāra (can *paramārtha* be cognized by the mind? And if not, why not, exactly?)

Buddhist scholasticism is in principle conservative, relying on sets of precise definitions (*lakṣaṇa*) that show remarkable uniformity throughout different systems. Recognizing the defining traits of the *dharma*s is "higher cognition" (*prajñā*) and is therefore relevant for both soteriology and ontology. To those coming from a different philosophical background, the idea of relying on succinct definitions in order to elicit a cognition of the nature of reality may appear odd. We must remember, though, that the "cognitive shift" from ignorance to its elimination is mediated by a gradual process of training in discipline and attention, for which clear, unambiguous, and brief definitions might create a workable system of references. What may appear as scholastic technicality is in fact linked to the broader Buddhist context of the philosophical texts we are trying to comprehend. Furthermore, Buddhist technical terms in Sanskrit are precisely that—*technical* terms, thrice removed from their approximate English renderings due to idiom, etymology, and contextual sense (more often than not, the three being closely connected).

For these reasons, while arguing about a specific reading of the Madhyamaka/Yogācāra divide, I shall place emphasis on discussing their idiom, and the idiom's presuppositions, as well as its relationship to salient features in the lines of philosophical argumentation. I am here primarily interested in drawing attention to the language of this sophisticated exchanges; and to the ways through which this debate may disclose the nature and role of its own language. Buddhist scholars such as Sthiramati and Candrakīrti were interested not only in what was being debated, but they also discussed what *might* be debated, and how—explicitly and implicitly delineating the wider purpose and sense for the composition of the texts we are now reading.

Terminology: vijñāna, vijñapti, grāhya, grāhaka

Consciousness, on the other hand, is the most subtle of all;
since its defining trait is mere apprehension.[5]

YAŚOMITRA

The philosophical vocabulary of the Yogācāra consists of terms commonly used in a broader Buddhist context; even as they acquire a specified meaning through recontextualization, their link to a widely accepted sense remains the perceptible starting point.

Yogācāra thought is associated with the position of *vijñaptimātratā* (cognition-only); with the statement "the Three world-spheres are only *citta"*; with the idea that the true referent of usages like "self" or *"dharma*s" is the dependently arisen *vijñāna*; and with the ultimate denial of both *grāhya* and *grāhaka* (the object and the agent of perception). We can therefore see that many of the crucial expressions that have become synonymous with the Yogācāra philosophical stance are linked to *vijñāna*, its functioning, and its relationship to anything else that may (or may not) exist.

The term *vijñāna* is usually translated as "consciousness" (and, uncommonly, as "awareness"). If we look at some of its definitions (even in Yogācāra texts), we find that *vijñāna* is consistently described as the cognition of an object/domain/referent. I include as relevant sources the *Abhidharmakośa* and one of its derivative texts (the *Arthaviniścayasūtranibandhana*), since the Kośa is presupposed in most Yogācāra and Madhyamaka texts that postdate it. The following passages are rather clear in taking *vijñāna*, *vijñapti*, and *upalabdhi* as synonyms; they are all expressing the defining trait of *vijñāna/citta*:

> The specific cognition of an object.[6]
> The cognition, the perception in respect to such and such object.[7]
> The perception of objects, such as visible form, etc.[8]
> The perception of an object.[9]

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5. *vijñānaṁ tu sarvasūkṣmam upalabdhimātralakṣaṇatvāt* | Yaśomitra on *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 1.22. Here Vasubandhu and Yaśomitra are explaining why consciousness is taught last in the list of the five aggregates.

6. *viṣayaprativijñaptiḥ* | *Abhidharmakośa* 1.16.

7. *viṣayaṁ viṣayaṁ prati vijñaptir upalabdhiḥ* | *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 1.16.

8. *rūpādiviṣayopalabdhiḥ* | *Arthaviniścayasūtranibandhana*, page 89.

9. *viṣayopalabdhiḥ* | *Arthaviniścayasūtranibandhana*, page 120.

> The cognition of a point of reference.[10]
> Seeing a referent.[11]

Vijñāna is the barest element of sentience, arising as the momentary perception of a point of reference; all further mental functions can occur only on its basis. It is also called *citta*, while additional specifications about its object are called *caitta* (or *caitasa*; *tadviśeṣe tu caitasāḥ*).[12] According to Yaśomitra's subcommentary, Vasubandhu implies that point by glossing *vijñapti* (cognition) as *upalabdhi* (apprehension/perception):

> "Perception" means the apprehension of a mere object. Feeling and the other mental derivatives, on the other hand, have the nature of apprehending specifications.[13]

According to most systems of Abhidharma, every basic *citta* arises accompanied by a certain number of *caitta*s; the two share the same point of reference (*ālambana*), and are therefore part of the same basic cognitive instance. For example, when a moment of eye-consciousness arises, it will be accompanied by a certain number of additional mental attitudes, also directed to the very same moment of visible form. What in English we usually call "mind" would probably include both *citta* and *caitta*, and it is therefore worth remembering that we restrict its sense to *citta* only by a conscious, context-bound convention in the translations. Taken together, *citta* and *caitta* are included within the broader category of *nāma*, which thus includes the whole of sentience. The following definitions of *nāma* are therefore relevant to further understand the basic structure and functions common to both *citta* and *caitta*:

> [It is so called] due to its "bending," i.e. reaching another birth, by the force of *karman* and the afflictions flowing out from craving.[14]

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10. *ālambanavijñaptiḥ* | Pañcaskandhaka, page 16.

11. *arthadṛṣṭiḥ* | Madhyāntavibhāga.

12. Different systems of Abhidharma have different ideas about the precise relationship between *citta* and *caitta*. Yet, relation to a point of reference (*ālambana*) seems to be a common trait of both, in all cases.

13. *upalabdhir vastumātragrahaṇam* | *vedanādayas tu caitasā viśeṣagrahaṇarūpāḥ* | Yaśomitra on *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 1.15.

14. *tṛṣṇābhiṣyanditakarmakleśavaśena namanāt upapattyantaraṁ gamanād ity arthaḥ* | *Arthaviniścayasūtranibandhana*, page 120.

> Or, it is *nāma*, because it bends towards objects like visible form etc.[15]
>
> *Nāma* bends towards objects due to the force of the sense-objects—hence it is "*nāma*".[16]
>
> "It has the characteristic of bending": it has the nature of "bending" once it is in front of a point of reference; since it does not come about without the latter.[17]

These definitions of *nāma* provide a visual metaphor referring to the process of perception: rather than "tending towards," though, the image here is of "bending towards."[18] The alternative way to define *nāma* is "what bends down", that is, goes to a new birth, due to the force of *karman* and

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15. *rūpādiṣv artheṣu namatīti vā nāma* | *Arthaviniścayasūtranibandhana*, page 120.

16. *nāmendriyārthavaśenārtheṣu namatīti nāma* | *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 3.30.

17. *namanalakkhaṇanti ārammaṇābhimukhaṃ hutvā namanasabhāvaṃ tena vinā appavattanato* |

> S-ṭ III.2 (subcommentary to the Nidānasaṃyutta). While the Pali Text Society's Pali English Dictionary (1952) translates *namana* as "naming" versus *namanā* as "bending", the Sanskrit tradition supports Margaret Cone (2010), who gives "bending" even for *namana*. Besides, this and other commentarial passages could hardly make sense by taking *namana* as "naming." Similar definitions of *nāma* from the Pāli tradition can be found in Khuddakapāṭha-a IV (Paramatthajotikā-Kumārapañha) PTS 78,$_{28}$–79,$_{1}$; Vism 638, PTS 558,$_{24–5}$ (Visuddhimagga) and Visuddhimagga-mahāṭīkā 663. Occasionally, the Pāli commentarial tradition restricts *nāma* to refer to three aggregates rather than four—excluding *viññāṇa*. I thank Giuliano Giustarini for references from the Pāli and related suggestions.

18. The wisdom of interpreting the Buddhist models of mind through the lenses of "intentionality" may be worth some further scrutiny. Specific systems of Buddhist Abhidharma present different problems in that respect; for example, the lack of simultaneity between object and perceptual act makes even the "bending towards" purely metaphorical in the case of the Sautrāntika. In their cognitive model "direct perception" only refers to the causal contiguity between the momentary object and the moment of consciousness that it helps to produce; that one may be linked to the other is a matter of inference and teleological coordination rather than phenomenologically observable "tensions". A different set of difficulties can be detected in the Yogācāra system, especially when considering the *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* and its interpretation of the actual referents of the *dhātu*s and *āyatana*s (Chapter 1). I am not in a position to suggest that intentionality should be altogether discarded as a heuristic device, but I believe it should be used with caution and with attention to the specific account of cognition we refer to. It may otherwise become an interpretive straightjacket or an unwarranted addition of a layer of sense alien to the philosophical purport of the texts; and I would at least doubt that all possible depictions of cognition will imply or necessitate an intentional structure.

the afflictions. The first type of definition of *nāma* refers to a single instant, a moment of sentience; the second one, on the other hand, is concerned with sentience as a continuum—that is, the continuity of a sentient being from one life to the next, which constitutes *saṁsāra*. The two senses are of course related, since *vijñāna* needs to take a new point of reference in order for the new birth to take place: perhaps this is one juncture where reality, cognition, and liberation are most clearly connected within a Buddhist framework. It is not by chance that the primary focus of most discussions of dependent arising and correct view are directly related to the shift from one life to the next (i.e., the twelve parts of *pratītyasamutpāda*). Whether we refer to sūtra or śāstra literature, this holds good for all branches of Indian Buddhism, as a vast amount of textual evidence makes abundantly clear.[19]

"Perceiving an object" and "moving to a new birth" are causally linked in both Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, where the whole process of *saṁsāra* springs from the deluded perception of a nonexistent point of reference. Nāgārjuna expresses this somewhat cryptically in the *Pratītyasamutpāda hṛdayakārikāvyākhyāna*, referring to the five causal links in the twelve limbs of dependent arising:

> In this way, from those five causes not being possible objects of the mind, no other effect arises: this should be understood as liberation.[20]

Perhaps the clearest enunciation of this relationship between lack of a point of reference and liberation is to be found in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Śāntideva argues that those who take a point of reference (however lofty) will necessarily have to continue within *saṁsāra*; hence, those who take seeing the Four Truths of the Noble Ones as the cause of liberation, and take those Truths as points of reference for their meditation, are not truly

19. Whether we read the Nidānasamyukta or the Śālistambasūtra, the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā or the Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya, the relationship between the analysis of dependent arising, the continuation of sentience between lives, and the removal of "views" remains (at least thematically) the same. On this see Salvini (2011b).

20. *evam acintyāt taddhetupañcakān nānyat phalam utpadyate| ayaṁ mokṣo veditavyaḥ|*

beyond *saṁsāra*.[21] To overcome suffering one must abandon all points of reference, that is, realize emptiness. Verse 9.48 expresses this succinctly: "A mind with a point of reference will have to abide here or there" (*sālambanena cittena sthātavyaṁ yatra tatra vā*). The realization of ultimate truths, on the other hand, is only the scope of the nonreferential awareness of the Noble Ones (which is distinguished from *vijñāna* or *buddhi*, and is termed *jñāna*).[22]

Compared to the Madhyamaka position(s) regarding nonreferential awareness, in a Yogācāra context the situation may appear to be more complex. In Yogācāra texts, the perfected nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*) is described as a point of reference for purification (*viśuddhyālambana*). That means, more precisely, that emptiness is the object of the awareness of a Noble One when in *samādhi*. However, the perfected nature is nothing but the absence of an object of cognition and of the cognition of an object—the absence of a point of reference and the consciousness that arises based on that. The awareness of a Noble One takes as its point of reference the truth that no point of reference is there to be taken up; hence its "object" must be a "point of reference" in a very specified sense.

The referential, binding feature of consciousness is fundamentally mirrored in the structure of language, which is ordinarily understood as referential and is therefore enmeshed in superimposed mental constructs (*vikalpa*). In different ways, both Madhyamaka and Yogācāra authors discuss the limits of discussing nonreferential awareness *(jñāna)*, or *paramārtha*, through language;[23] and both understand the Buddha to have expressed himself provisionally or through *indirection*—a topic to which I shall return—due to necessity rather than choice. A liberating cognitive shift is, first of all, a shift in language (a theme embedded

21. Let me note that texts from the Pāli tradition too consider that *nibbāna* may be taken as a point of reference by a specific type of *citta*. See for example Abhidhammaṭṭhasaṁgaho 3.62: *lokuttaracittāni nibbānārammaṇānīti* (Chatta Sangayāna 4.0).

22. The usage is of course not perfectly consistent, especially in the case of *jñāna*, which may well be found as a synonym of *vijñāna*. However, I am not aware of instances where the opposite holds good (i.e., where *vijñāna* is used to refer to the nonreferential cognition of Noble Ones and Buddhas). Apart from usages internal to the Madhyamaka texts themselves, one should also compare the Laṅkāvatārasūtra, which devotes a whole section to the distinction between *jñāna* and *vijñāna* (in the Anityatāparivarta).

23. "The nature of things is not divided into perceived and perceiver, or expressed and expression"*; bzuṅ ba daṅ ni 'dzan pa daṅ | brjod par bya daṅ rjod par byed | khyad med de bzhin ñid yin no* | Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga 6.

perhaps in any Buddhist commentary—and certainly as old as the Abhidharma).

In the Yogācāra system it is the subtle influence of one's attachment to an object of perception and a perceiving consciousness (i.e., a point of reference and the cognitive structure it propels, respectively) that causes repeated birth to occur. Hence, in both systems, there's a clear connection between the two senses of "bending towards": as a misguided cognitive act and as the arising of consciousness in a new realm of rebirth.

The idea of "bending towards" a new birth becomes more graphic when the process is described in the context of the "intermediate-state sentient being" (*antarābhava-sattva*), who effectively "descends" into the mother's womb at the moment of conception. He/she feels attachment and aversion toward the future mother and father (or vice versa, according to his/her future gender) and, propelled by mental afflictions and *karman*, the *antarābhavasattva* infuses the embryo with sentience, linking *nāma* to a specific continuum of *rūpa*.[24] We can therefore see clear parallels between the Buddhist understanding of the nature and functioning of sentience, the process of rebirth, and specific descriptions of that very process. The close connection between language and cognition should by now have made understood why Buddhist technical terms need to be *precise*.

Furthermore, the defining features of *vijñāna*/*citta* are of paramount importance in understanding how both Madhyamaka and Yogācāra treat conventional truths. While this may be rather obvious in the case of Yogācāra, contemporary scholarship has tended to view the conventions of Madhyamaka as primarily a (socio-)linguistic affair, in a very modern sense. This is despite the fact that Candrakīrti, Śāntideva, and Prajñākaramati discuss conventions almost exclusively in terms of cognition, relying on categories that are fundamentally Abhidharmic (the six types of consciousness) according to their standard defining traits (the apprehension of an object or point of reference). *Vijñāna* and its definitions form the Abhidharmic backbone of Madhyamaka epistemology, allowing the system to accept a system of conventions that does not need to rely on an absolute core (*ātman*). The linguistic formation of conventions is derived from the dependently arisen character of sentience. This derivation is not reversible. Language finds its matrix in the twelve parts of

24. See *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 3.15.

dependent arising, rather than the other way around. That this is to be understood as the proper order of priorities is exemplified in Nāgārjuna's famous statement about what is *not* convention: "Possible expressions cease, once the scope of mind has ceased" (*nivṛttam abhidhātavyaṁ nivṛtte cittagocare*). Conventions and their emptiness are understood through the mind rather than through language. I do not believe that any Madhyamaka philosopher would wish to state that the mind *is* language, or that the mind is a derivative incident within the many intersections of human linguistic activity. Such ideas would perhaps be a juxtaposition of contemporary philosophical concerns upon a very distant perspective on language, sentience, suffering, and its cessation.

Complementing and contrasting the definitions of *nāma*, the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*) is described in the Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya as "not bending" (*anatam*) precisely for the absence of "bending towards":

> It is "not bending" since, due to the absence of craving for desire, form, and the formless, it does not bend towards (*anamanāt*) the various types of existence.[25]

Specifically within the Yogācāra system, the term *vijñapti* acquires prominence and contextual importance. In this respect, it is worth pointing out that several definitions of *vijñāna* attest that it is a synonym of *vijñapti*. Taking the *vijñapti* in the expression *vijñaptimātram* as anything else but a synonym of *vijñāna* may be arbitrary and possibly philologically unwarranted. It seems rather unreasonable to try to associate the *vijñapti* of that expression with the other Abhidharmic sense of "informative action", considering that we are explicitly concerned with the (false) cognition of (false) objects; even to read an undertone of that other meaning seems out of place. We should further consider that the third *pariṇāma* (transformation) of consciousness described in the Triṁśikā is defined as *vijñaptir viṣayasya* (the cognition of an object/domain); this offers a perfect match between the standard definition of *vijñāna* (even in non-Yogācāra Abhidharma) and the technical definition (*lakṣaṇa*) of the six *pravṛttivijñāna*s in the Triṁśikā. Such terminological correspondence further discredits any association between the *vijñapti* of *vijñaptimātratā* and the alternative Abhidharmic sense of "informative action".

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25. *anataṁ kāmarūpārūpyatṛṣṇābhāvena bhaveṣv anamanāt* | Tatia 75, 1–9.

The relationship between dependent arising and its point of reference takes as its Buddhist locus classicus the following formulation (to be found in a number of *sūtra*s, and often quoted in the *śāstra*s):

> Depending upon visible form and the eye-faculty, eye-consciousness arises.[26]

Some Ābhidharmikas would add additional causal factors; however, the two causal factors of an object-domain (*viṣaya*) and a sense-faculty (*indriya*) are accepted as necessary by all. In that context, as the Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya makes clear, the object functions as a point of reference (*ālambana*) and the sense faculty functions as a basis (*āśraya*) for the arising of consciousness.

This needs a further level of interpretation in the context of "cognition-only" (*vijñaptimātratā*) since, within that system, both the point of reference and the basis can only be aspects of consciousness. At least two important Yogācāra texts explain more precisely which aspects of that cognition/consciousness (*vijñapti* or *vijñāna*) may be conventionally termed "object" and "sense-faculty," respectively. The Twenty Verses and their commentary consider that *vijñapti*s arising with a specific appearance and their seeds in the *ālayavijñāna* ("store-consciousness"), respectively, are the real referents of terms referring to the outer and inner "entrances" (the *āyatana*s, which refer to six objects and to the six faculties that perceive them). The *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* offers a more elaborate system, involving aggregates, bases, and entrances. It is, in some respects, different from the Twenty Verses, but not incompatible. In both cases, the basic principle is that *vijñapti*s constitute the actual referents even of expressions that other Buddhist systems of Abhidharma would consider more directly referential.

In the passage quoted two paragraphs earlier, the arising of a moment of *vijñāna* depends upon a point of reference or support (*ālambana*); this basic Buddhist doctrine is not disputed by the Yogācāra (although the point of reference may well be a mere projection). Sthiramati makes it clear in his Triṁśikābhāṣya:

> (Objection:)
> If there exists an *ālayavijñāna* apart from the *pravṛttivijñāna*s, then its point of reference and aspect should be explained. Since, a

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26. *rūpaṁ pratītya cakṣurindriyaṁ cotpadyate cakṣurvijñānam* | See for example the initial sections of the Prasannapadā.

> consciousness without a point of reference or without an aspect does not make sense.
>
> (Reply:)
> It is not taken to be either without point of reference or without an aspect: rather, its point of reference and aspect are not discerned.[27]

Such point of reference, the object of consciousness, is also called *grāhya*—the object of apprehension, the object of perception. Hence now we have the pair of the object of perception (*grāhya*) and the agent of perception (*grāhaka*), that is, a point of reference and the consciousness that arises based on that. The category "agent" is used in the flexible and specific sense derived from the conventions of Sanskrit syntactical analysis, which requires nothing more than causal prominence: no continuation through time, no sentience, no further specification is required for something to be called "agent" (*kartṛ*). Hence, one impersonal moment of consciousness can very well fit into the category "agent of perception" (*grāhaka*).

Any student of Yogācāra quickly comes to notice that both the object and the agent of perception are considered to be unreal aspects. First the point of reference is shown to be nonexistent; then the moment of *vijñāna* that apprehends it also is understood to be impossible. Both *grāhya* and *grāhaka* do not exist (*upalabdhiṁ samāśritya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate | upalabdhiṁ samāśritya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate || Madhyāntavibhāga* 1.6).

However, Yogācāra philosophers use *vijñāna* in another sense, a usage unique to the system, which may cause some confusion and even perplexity. *Vijñāna* in fact is also used to refer to something that truly arises, that is, the momentary *projection* of what is unreal (*abhūta-parikalpa*) rather than the *grāhya* and *grāhaka,* which are *projected* (*parikalpita*). *Vijñāna* as the *perception* of an object must obviously be a falsity; however, *vijñāna* as the *projection* of the two (perceived/perceiver) does occur.

This raises a significant question. Yogācāra philosophers argue that, (a) the object of perception (*grāhya*) and (b) the agent of perception (*grāhaka* = *vijñāna*) do not exist. However, (c) their projection does exist; and (c) is once again called *vijñāna*, although the term is normally used,

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27. *yadi pravṛttivijñānavyatiriktam ālayavijñānam asti tato'syālambanam ākāro vā vaktavyaḥ | na hi nirālambanaṁ nirākāraṁ vā vijñānaṁ yujyate | naiva tan nirālambanaṁ nirākāraṁ veṣyate | kiṁ tarhy apariccinālāmbanākāram* || Bhāṣya on verse 2.

and was earlier used, to refer to (b). It is worth noticing that *vijñāna* in a Yogācāra context may alternatively refer to an aspect of what is merely imagined (*parikalpita*) or to the actual occurrence of dependent arising (*paratantra*). Hence the question: why use the term *vijñāna* in order to refer to (c), when (c) is the projection of both (a) and (b)?

I believe the reason may be that *vijñāna* in the second sense retains the quality of appearing within a cognitive structure, although internal to merely projected elements (hence the necessity of reflexive awareness). This sets *vijñāna* (c) immediately apart from what we would consider inert. (It may be part of the reason why Śāntarakṣita defines reflexive awareness as the difference from what is insentient; notice that he could have used the *capacity to cognize* for the same purpose.)[28]

At the cost of repeating myself, I would like to stress that it is crucial to distinguish between *vijñāna* in sense (b) (which is unreal) and *vijñāna* in sense (c) (which is real). Much secondary literature on Yogācāra is not sufficiently clear on this point, even by the simple choice of translating *grāhaka* as "subject" rather than "perceiver" (or more precisely "agent of perception"). "Subject" could conceivably be used for either *vijñāna* as (b) or as (c) (since the latter, too, is clearly not inert or insentient), and hence the whole reconstruction becomes somewhat garbled.[29] In his commentary on *Madhyāntavibḥāgabhāṣya* 1.4, Sthiramati is especially emphatic in explaining that only *vijñāna* as the agent of cognition is unreal, and that it has to be distinguished from the real aspect that appears (deceptively) as both object and agent of perception:

> Because of the non-existence of its referent, that consciousness is non-existent. "It cognizes, thus it is called "consciousness": in the

28. Tattvasaṁgraha 2000.1.

29. Similar considerations hold for using the opposition between "internal" and "external" when interpreting Yogācāra, especially if we are assessing such contraposition on the basis of the terms *ādhyātmika* and *bāhya* when they refer to the twelve entrances. It is in fact only by an approximate stipulation that *ādhyātmika* is translated as "internal" in that context, since here it more specifically means "close to the mind"—not just etymologically but according to a long-standing interpretive tradition (discussed in a later section of this chapter); five out of six of the "internal" entrances refer to the sense organs, which are instances of *rūpa* rather than *nāma* and are "close to the mind" only in the sense of functioning as causal factors for the arising of perception. It may be legitimate to ask whether taking "internal" and "external" in their more usual English senses (rather than as "close to consciousness" versus "far from consciousness" as classical Buddhist authors would, based on a specific depiction of dependent arising) superimposes a series of philosophical problems not really necessitated by a more careful handling of the terms.

> absence of something to be perceived, the act of cognizing is also not fit. Therefore, due to the non-existence of its referent, consciousness *as the agent of cognition* is non-existent, but *not* as (having/causing) the appearance of referents, beings, self, and cognitions. Since in case the latter type were to be non-existent, complete non-existence would follow.[30]

"Consciousness as the agent of cognition" is what I earlier termed (b), the ordinary Buddhist sense of *vijñāna* that here stands refuted in the preceding quotation; "consciousness as (having/causing) the appearance of referents, beings, self, and cognitions" is what I called (c), the truly existent layer of dependent arisen *vijñāna* in a sense specific to the Yogācāra system. It is crucial to understand that when Yogācāra authors refute an ultimately existent *vijñāna* or *citta,* it is done so *always* in sense (b) and *never* in sense (c) (something the commentarial literature emphasizes in no ambiguous terms).[31]

This preliminary terminological survey is meant to avoid a series of possible interpretive pitfalls, which may derive from somewhat arbitrary reconstructions of the sense of crucial philosophical terms. Madhyamakas were well aware of the different usages of *vijñāna* and cognate terms in Yogācāra treatises, and adequately respected such distinctions in their arguments. They were especially clear and careful in distinguishing between the (unreal, *parikalpita*) perceptive aspect of *vijñāna* in the sense of *grāhaka,* and the (real) projective aspect of *vijñāna* in the sense of *paratantra* (the dependent nature), also called *pariṇāma* (the transformation of consciousness*)*. Prajñākaramati explains that there is an aspect of

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30. *arthābhāvāt tad vijñānam asat | vijānātīti vijñānaṁ grāhyābhāve vijānanāpy ayuktam | tasmād arthābhāvād vijñātṛtvena vijñānam asad, na tv arthasattvātmavijñaptipratibhāsatayā | tadasattve hi sarvathā'bhāvaprasaṅgaḥ |* I thank Harunaga Isaacson for pointing out that, due to the syntactical structure of the verse on which Sthiramati's comments are based, *arthasattvātmavijnaptipratibhāsatayā* implies a bahuvrīhi relationship with *vijñāna*; it is unclear what precise type of bahuvrīhi it would be, hence I have offered two different options within brackets.

31. Brunhlotz upholds that "ultimate reality in Yogācāra is clearly not some real mind or "mere mind""(Brunhlotz, page 477). Since here "mind" is almost surely a translation of *citta* or *vijñāna*, I would have to disagree; Vasubandhu and Sthiramati are rather explicit in asserting the true/ultimate existence of the dependently arisen *vijñāna*. All the Yogācāra texts quoted by Brunhlotz to support his position can be better understood in the light of the distinction I just discussed; this is especially true of the quotations from Sthiramati, since reading him as Brunhlotz does would superimpose on that great commentator a startling amount of self-contradictions. In effect, Brunhlotz is here representing a variant of what I consider to be a recurrent misreading: see for example Anacker (1984) and Lusthaus (2009).

consciousness that Yogācāra philosophers take to be real and "different from the aspect of mind as a perceiver" (*āntarād grāhakacittākārāt*, 9.16); he thus sets an admirable example of precision in the exegesis of his opponents' system.

The Referents of Words: Metaphores, the Two Truths, and Dependent Arising

Words are not like guards with clubs and nooses, taking away the autonomy of the speaker.[32]

CANDRAKĪRTI

The term *vijñānapariṇāma* (transformation of consciousness) is explained by Vasubandhu as the actual referent of indirect expressions like "self" or "*dharma*s." The sense of *indirection* is here of tremendous importance, as it links Vasubandhu's statement to the fundamental nature of the Buddha's teaching method, based on the shift from nonliteral intent (*abhiprāya* or *sandhi*) to actual defining traits (*lakṣaṇa*); or also, from what needs further interpretation (*neyārtha*) to what is a fully drawn-out meaning (*nītārtha*). We may note that the fundamental sūtra for the Yogācāra system is titled *The Disclosure of the Intent* (*Sandhi-nirmocana*). Indirection, furthermore, brings us into the realm of expressive refinement, and, hence, literary aesthetics (*alaṁkāraśāstra*), wherein the expressive capacities of words are discussed at length.

In my understanding (largely following Sthiramati's commentary), Vasubandhu's position entails that all that exists is nothing more and nothing less than a succession of dependently arisen *vijñāna* (in the sense that I earlier termed (c)), plus the true existence of the nonexistence of anything else. Any meaningful linguistic reference must in the end point to the continuum of momentary *vijñāna*, that is, to dependent arising in a Yogācāra sense; except for those expressions that refer to the uncompounded *dharma*s, or to the *dharmatā* (the nature of the *dharma*s, i.e. their emptiness). The Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya and the Twenty Verses seem to confirm this basic structure while describing the ultimate referents of "aggregates" "bases," and "entrances." The reason for their

32. *na hi śabdāḥ dāṇḍapāśikā iva vaktāram asvatantrayanti* | Prasannapadā 1.3.

being meaningful only as indirect expressions is that their literal meaning could make sense only within a perceived/perceiver structure.

The term that Vasubandhu employs to express the idea of a secondary or indirect usage is *upacāra*, which could perhaps even be translated as "approximation." *Upacāra* is a conscious superimposition, as when we state that "this student is fire," although we have no intention to literally identify the student with the fire (which could scarcely make sense). In order for our *upacāra* to work, though, the student should be there in the first place. Or, rather, our expression must mean something *more*, and more sensible, than the literal referent; the two levels of sense cannot have the same level of cogency. As we shall see, Sthiramati (following Asaṅga) understands the structure of indirect expressions as identical to the relationship between existence as a mere name/concept (*prajñaptisat*) and ultimate existence (*dravyasat*). "Self" and "*dharma*s" are mere names; their truly existing referent is, once we carry the analysis to its limit, the momentary flow of *vijñāna*. This usage of *upacāra* is not unique to the Thirty Verses: it has an important precedent in Vasubandhu's own work, which Sthiramati was certainly well aware of (having himself composed a commentary on the Abhidharmakośa). Within the Yogācāra system itself, the Tattvārthapaṭala of the Bodhisattvabhūmi employs the very same terms and anticipates the basic structure of Sthiramati's argument.

In Abhidharmakośabhāṣya 1.39, the "self" (*ātman*) is described as an *upacāra*, where the *real referent* is the mental continuum (*citta*). It is also clear that there has to be a real referent; such is the rationale that prompts the initial discussion in the Bhāṣya, as well as Vasubandhu's detailed response, in order to make sense of the term *ādhyātmika* referring to the six "internal entrances." Vasubandhu's etymology clarifies that the term comprises the indeclinable *adhi* in compound with *ātman* ("self"); and the obvious problem is that a "self" could hardly qualify to enter a Buddhist list of ultimate elements of existence: hence, the expression should not be taken literally. The same idea is also expressed concisely in a later compendium, the Arthaviniścayasūtranibandhana, in the very same context:

> Indeed, the "self" does not exist. Since that does not exist, how is it that this is said: "the eye is upon the self" (*ādhyātmikam*)? Since, if discipline is not there, the training in higher discipline (*adhiśīla*) could not be established.

> That is correct. On the other hand, the proponents of a "self" think that the self is the basis for the sense of "I". In reality, though, the mind is the basis for the sense of "I" and hence it is called "self" by approximation.[33]

In fact, it is easy and reasonable to see the first of the Thirty Verses as an extension of the same usage: in the Kośa the self (*ātman*) is an *upacāra* actually referring to the mind; in the Thirty Verses *both* the self *and* the *dharma*s are *upacāra*s actually referring to the mind—and that is the only difference in terms of ontology (with the added qualification that now "mind" or *vijñāna* has acquired a different layer of sense).[34] The verse reads as follows:

> *ātmadharmopacāro hi vividho yaḥ pravartate |*
> *vijñānapariṇāme'sau pariṇāmaḥ sa ca tridhā ||*

I would translate it as:

> The *upacāra* of "self" and "*dharma*s", which occurs in many ways,
> Refers to the transformation of consciousness, and that transformation is threefold.

Sthiramati's reading of this, which I shall now discuss in greater detail, is consistent with Vasubandhu's treatment of secondary usages in the Bhāṣya.

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33. *Arthaviniścayasūtranibandhana* page 95: *nanv ātmā nāsti | tadabhāvāt katham ādhyātmikaṁ cakṣur ity ucyate? na hi śīlābhāve'dhiśīlaṁ śikṣā vyavasthāpyeta | asty etat | kintv ahaṁkārasanniśraya ātmety ātmavādinaḥ kalpayanti | tattvatas tu cittam ahaṁkārasya sanniśraya ity ātmety upacaryate ||* The treatment in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* is somewhat more elaborate and provides the further support from the Buddhavacana; yet, the basic structure of *upacāra* seems identical and well-defined in this shorter passage.

34. K.K. Rāja seems to consider that the treatment of *upacāra* in the Thirty Verses and their commentary is one of the oldest such discussions within Sanskrit literature—which reappear under the synonymous headings of *bhakti, lakṣaṇā,* and so forth. However, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* offers the very same basic features of *upacāra*, and I believe the treatment in the Thirty Verses presupposes and perhaps consciously echoes the Bhāṣya. Please notice that the fundamental characteristics of *upacāra* as presented even by later writers on *alaṁkāraśāstra* are already present in the Bhāṣya: the literal meaning/referent does not make sense; a different, secondary meaning/referent must be identified. Late writers on *alaṁkāraśāstra* call this a *śabdavṛtti* or "function of words"; *vṛtti* is etymologically related to the *pravartate* in the first of the Thirty Verses, and could possibly be translated with "mode of reference" as well.

In the introductory section of his commentary to the first verse of the Thirty Verses, Sthiramati rejects two possible philosophical extremes in respect to *vijñāna*:

> Some think that "just like consciousness, the object of consciousness too exists as *dravya* indeed,"
> "just like the object of consciousness, consciousness also is only conventional and not ultimate" [. . .][35]

Here it is rather clear that Sthiramati uses *dravya* as a synonym of *paramārtha* (ultimate) rather than *saṁvṛti* (conventional)—disallowing the possibility that something may be *dravyasat* (substantially existent) and *saṁvṛtisat* (existent as no more than a convention) at the same time. The first extreme regards practically all non-Mahāyāna philosophical schools of Buddhism, wherein sentient and non-sentient entities (*nāma* and *rūpa*) are both described as truly arising and ceasing (rather than mere designations). The second extreme must clearly refer to the Madhyamaka, and Sthiramati explains further why accepting that everything is mere *saṁvṛti* would be problematic:

> Because it is impossible to have an *upacāra* without a basis, necessarily the transformation of consciousness exists in reality; it should be accepted as that in reference to which the *upacāra* of "self" and "*dharmas*" occurs. Therefore, the following conclusion does not withstand reason (*yukti*): "consciousness too, like the object of consciousness, is only conventional and not ultimate"; because, what would follow is non-existence even conventionally. That is because conventions are not possible without something to depend upon (or, "without taking up something"—*upādāna*). Therefore, these two types of extreme positions, since they are not reasonable, should be abandoned—such is the statement of the Ācārya.
>
> In this way, the object of consciousness in its entirety, having an imagined nature, is not to be found in reality; consciousness, on the other hand, since it is dependently arisen, exists as *dravya*. This

35. *vijñānavad vijñeyam api dravyata eveti kecin manyante |vijñeyavad vijñānam api saṁvṛtita eva na paramārthataḥ* [. . .] Sthiramati's commentary on the Thirty Verses, verse 1.

> is what should be accepted. Moreover, the fact that consciousness is dependently arisen is made known by the word "transformation".[36]

This passage should be read carefully, as it carries several implications that would not have escaped the attention of a medieval Buddhist philosopher—the likely intended audience of the text.

It is important to notice that here Sthiramati relates Vasubandhu's usage of the term *upacāra* to the distinction between *saṁvṛti* and *paramārtha/dravya* (once again used as synonyms). I have already argued that this is a convincing exegesis even in light of the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, and this exegesis also makes it clear that the first verse of the Thirty Verses must be read as stating that the transformation of consciousness is the *referent* of the *upacāra*, rather than its causal matrix. This point is obscured by most previous translations of that verse, which seem to read Vasubandhu as saying that there must be an existent transformation of consciousness *wherein* a metaphor or *upacāra* could come about—in other words, some causal stream to make the arising of that metaphor possible.[37] I believe this to be a significant misreading of the sense of the seventh vibhakti in the term *vijñānapariṇāme*, which here indicates the referent of an expression rather than its (existential) location.[38] This syntactical misreading makes it, in turn, difficult to recognize the relationship between Vasubandhu's verse and the broader context of conventional versus ultimate existence

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36. *upacārasya ca nirādhārasyāsaṁbhavād avaśyaṁ vijñānapariṇāmo vastuto'stīty upagantavyo yatrātmadharmopacāraḥ pravartate | ataś cāyam upagamo na yuktikṣamo vijñānam api vijñeyavat saṁvṛtita eva na paramārthata iti | saṁvṛtito'py abhāvaprasaṅgāt | na hi saṁvṛtir nirupādānā yujyate | tasmād ayam ekāntavādo dviprakāro'pi niryutkikatvāt tyājya ity ācāryavacanam | evaṁ ca sarvaṁ vijñeyaṁ parikalpitasvabhāvatvād vastuto na vidyate vijñānaṁ punaḥ pratītyasamutpannatvāddravyato'stītyabhyupeyam|pratītyasamutpannatvaṁ punar vijñānasya pariṇāmaśabdena jñāpitam |*

37. My understanding of the seventh Vibhakti as indicating referent rather than location is supported by Sthiramati's commentary: *ayaṁ dviprakāro'py upacāro vijñānapariṇāma eva na mukhye ātmani dharmeṣu ceti* [. . .] It is quite obvious that *na mukhye ātmani dharmeṣu ca* couldn't indicate a possible existential location for certain verbal expressions to occur—rather, it means that neither an actual "self" nor "dharmas" are the real referents of those expressions, which refer to the transformation of consciousness by approximation, and hence constitute two types of *upacāra*.

38. When deciding to study the *vibhakti* system by superimposing Latin case-terminology, it is important to keep in mind that terms like "locative" are only broad and very fallible indications of the actual use of a certain *vibhakti* in a specific context. Sanskrit grammarians more carefully distinguished the expression from the expressed by employing two distinct descriptive categories—*vibhakti* and *kāraka*, respectively—thus offering a more sophisticated and precise explanatory model that would avoid such confusions.

(*saṁvṛtisat* versus *dravyasat*), which informs his treatment of *upacāra* even in the Kośa, and to which Sthiramati is so perceptive in his commentary. The difference is here between saying that "the metaphorical superimposition occurs within consciousness" versus "the metaphor ultimately refers to consciousness". Let me stress that this difference is philosophically *crucial*, since only the second reading (which I believe to be correct) allows for the indirection of reference that indicates the transformation of consciousness as ultimately existent. Sthiramati's understanding of the syntax is further supported by the following passage of the Tattvārthapaṭala of the Bodhisattvabhūmi, where it is obvious that the seventh vibhakti cannot have any other sense but reference:

> In this way, in reference to one *dharma*, in reference to one thing, various manifold designations (*prajñapti*), or approximations (*upacāra*), are made through many expressions.[39]

Please consider that here Asaṅga is arguing for a distinction between verbal expressions and their truly existent ineffable basis; Sthiramati's interpretation seems perfectly in line with the Tattvārthapaṭala and highlights how the Thirty Verses may be read in accordance to that text. Both in terms of argumentative cogency, as well as for his perceptiveness to the nuances in the word choice of the root text, the commentary is very convincing.

Sthiramati's usage of *upādāna,* while referring to the basis of conventions, is also significant. Several Abhidharmic treatises divide the aggregates into the mere aggregates and the "aggregates of appropriation" or "aggregates of clinging" (*upādānaskandha*). Clinging to the aggregates is the basis for the occurrence of *saṁsāra*; from a cognitive perspective, the aggregates are the basis that is taken up (*upādāna*) for the conceptual designation of a "self." This is how *prajñaptis* are formed, even according to Candrakīrti. He offers the example of the designation "chariot" arising after taking up (*upādāya*) the parts of the chariot.[40] When we consider that Candrakīrti is there explaining a verse that he reads as identifying *upādāya prajñaptiḥ* ("dependent designation") with dependent arising, we can see that Sthiramati's

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39. *tathā hy ekasmin dharma ekasmin vastuni bahuvidhā bahavo bahubhir abhilāpaiḥ prajñaptaya upacārāḥ kriyante* ||Wogihara, page 44.

40. See Candrakīrti's commentary to Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 18.24; see also Salvini (2011a).

terminological choice is well-informed and carries layers of implicit criticism against his Madhyamaka opponents. Sthiramati is here implying that the Madhyamaka downplay an ontological distinction necessary for their own characterization of dependent arising as dependent designation.

Plausibly reading "transformation" as a synonym of "dependent arising" and hence of the "dependent nature," Sthiramati argues that the dependent nature must be really existent (*dravyasat*) precisely *because* it is dependently arisen, which implies that dependent arising cannot be taken as a merely notional process. This is a very direct criticism of the Madhyamaka position, according to which all *dharma*s are empty of ultimate existence since they are dependently arisen. (Indeed, some later Tibetan Mādhyamikas consider this to be the most important reasoning to prove emptiness.) I believe the Madhyamaka may be the only Buddhist philosophers to uphold that dependent arising proves lack of actual arising rather than its opposite. ("Actual" here means *dravyasat* rather than *prajñaptisat*.) I also believe they may be the only Buddhist philosophers to assimilate the process of designating a whole in dependence upon its parts to the process of the arising of effects following certain causal assemblages (dependent designation = dependent arising).

Sthiramati is here offering a criticism that strikes at the defining features of Madhyamaka thought, while at the same time highlighting the extent to which it is at odds with practically any other school of Buddhist exegesis. Furthermore, discussing a term like *upacāra*—which could be employed outside of a technical Buddhist context—Sthiramati can argue that Madhyamaka philosophers are also attempting to uphold a linguistic impossibility; a nonreferential metaphor, which could not exist, as the distinction between the metaphorical image and what is actually intended by it would be impossible to establish without the intended referent being there in the first place. A metaphor (*upacāra*) is made possible by the existence and plausibility of the intended referent, since its comprehension is elicited by the nonexistence or implausibility of the literal referent. If the intended referent were also to be as nonexistent or as implausible as the literal referent, "this man is a bull" or "this student is fire" would mean nothing at all. Sthiramati's understanding of *upacāra* as a synonym of *prajñapti* finds support (and possibly, inspiration) in Asaṅga's explicit equation of the two in the Tattvārthapaṭala of the Bodhisattvabhūmi.[41]

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41. *tathā hy ekasmin dharma ekasmin vastuni bahuvidhā bahavo bahubhir abhilāpaiḥ prajñaptaya upacārāḥ kriyante* || Wogihara, page 44, quoted in note 39.

That text further equates *prajñapti* with *saṁvṛti*, and its overall treatment of the terms is also possibly a precedent for Sthiramati's exegesis of the Abhidharmasamuccaya—to which we shall now turn.[42]

More on Existence and the Two Truths

If something is not cognized when it is divided,
Or when it is removed from something else through the mind,
As in the case of a pot or water, it is conventionally existent;
Otherwise, it is ultimately existent.[43]

VASUBANDHU

Just like apart from form and the rest
There is no "pot";
Apart from wind and the rest
There is no "form."[44]

ĀRYADEVA

Perhaps the clearest philosophical difference between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra is in their respective position about what exists and what does not exist; and about what level of truth any ascription of existence may pertain to. The verse from Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa poses a strong relation between analysis, perception, and truth: as we shall see, despite several important differences, much of the discussion about existence and the two truths in Madhyamaka and Yogācāra revolves around similar themes.

Madhyamaka is both straightforward and unique. It is straightforward, since nothing whatsoever is posited to exist as anything more than a convention (*saṁvṛtisat*). It is unique, since all other systems (including the Yogācāra) uphold that conventional existence must be based on some existence that is not a mere convention—hence accepting that certain causes and effects must arise and cease, and that the process is in some

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42. *rūpādisaṁjñake vastuni yā rūpam ity evamādyāḥ prajñaptayaḥ tāḥ saṁvṛtaya ity ucyante* || Wogihara, page 49.

43. *yatra bhinne na tadbuddhir anyāpohe dhiyā ca tat | ghaṭāmbuvat saṁvṛtisat paramārthasad anyathā* || *Abhidharmakośa* 6.4.

44. *rūpādivyatirekeṇa yathā kumbho na vidyate | vāyvādivyatirekeṇa tathā rūpaṁ na vidyate* || Catuḥśataka 14.14 quoted in Prasannapadā 1.1.

sense more than a conventional designation. As we have seen Sthiramati clarifies this point in a few important passages of his commentary to the Thirty Verses, wherein he is most plausibly criticizing the Madhyamaka. His criticism is well-informed and hits directly at the unique (and counterintuitive) Madhyamaka position that conventions can exist with no basis apart from themselves. Incidentally, the expression *avicāraramaṇīyatā* found in Indian Madhyamaka texts doesn't quite mean "satisfaction with no analysis," but rather, "being satisfactory as long as not analyzed." The expression refers to a quality of conventional *dharma*s rather than to an inner contentment on the part of the Madhyamaka adept (pace Eckel).[45] The last point is important, because Madhyamaka philosophers (including Nāgārjuna, Śāntarakṣita, Bhāviveka, and Candrakīrti) do consistently show their "lack of satisfaction with no analysis" and engage in an analysis of conventional truths in which Abhidharmic categories and definitions remain an explicitly privileged set of conventions. As we will see shortly, this has some bearing on the comparison between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra.

Resisting analysis also entails that whatever resists analysis exists independently of our notions (i.e., certain *dharma*s may be said to arise and cease whether we have a notion of their arising and cessation or not). The term *dravyasat* should primarily be understood in that way; the translation as "substantially existent" carries suggestions about solidity and reification perhaps not entirely pertinent in the context of *dravyasat*. This should warn us against quickly accusing anyone who wishes to "resist analysis" and to oppose the Madhyamaka critique as "reifying" this or that.[46]

While Sthiramati's commentary on the Thirty Verses could appear unambiguous and relatively easy to interpret, the situation

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45. I discussed this in some detail, offering a corrective translation of the relevant section of the Prasannapadā, in Salvini (2008).

46. I would argue that it is unfortunate to suggest that the Yogācāra would *reify* the mind if we read them as accepting it as existent; or at least we should be very clear about the nature of the truly arising mind in Yogācāra (as well as about the nature of *reification,* a complex philosophical concept) before coming to such a conclusion. A mere concept (*parikalpa*) devoid of all it conceptualizes (*parikalpita*), and hence "luminous" awareness by nature, is all that truly arises—and that, too, for no more than a moment. Far from being a reified world of opaque "things", the Yogācāra universe of *dravyasat* is rarified and subtle, and it is difficult to see the identification of *dravyasat* with *reification* as anything but problematic.

with the Abhidharmasamuccaya and its Bhāṣya may prima facie seem rather confusing. There we find that *saṁvṛtisat, prajñaptisat, dravyasat,* and *paramārthasat* ("conventionally existent," "existent as a designation," "substantially existent" and "existent in the ultimate sense") are distinguished from each other. We might therefore think that the four terms refer to four different categories of existence, and that this may allow reading even the Thirty Verses in a different light; yet, I believe such a conclusion may be unwarranted.

First of all, we must be careful in understanding whether the distinctions presented pertain to the referent or to the meaning of those expressions. Any two synonyms can be distinguished in terms of their meaning, even when their referent is identical (*vṛkṣa* and *pādapa* both refer to a "tree", but only the second term means "one who drinks with its feet"). Furthermore, the terms could be partially synonymous. And, the usage in a particular passage may depend upon a specific etymologization that may not apply in all contexts (as when *paramārtha* is read as a *bahuvrīhi,* referring to the path).

The following passage of the Abhidharmasamuccaya explains the four expressions:

> Among the aggregates, bases and entrances, 1. how is something "substantially existent" (*dravyasat*), 2. how many are substantially existent, and 3. for what purpose is the examination of the substantially existent? 1. The scope of the sense faculties, independent from verbal expressions and independent from something other than itself, is "substantially existent." 2. All is substantially existent. 3. It is for the purpose of abandoning attachment to the self as a substance.
>
> 1. How is something "existent as a designation" (*prajñaptisat*), 2. how many are existent as a designation, and 3. for what purpose is the examination of that which exists as a designation? 1. The scope of the sense faculties, dependent upon verbal expression and dependent upon something other than itself, is "existent as a designation." 2. All is existent as a designation. 3. It is for the purpose of abandoning attachment to a self that is existent as a designation.
>
> 1. How is something "conventionally existent" (*samvṛtisat*), 2. how many are conventionally existent, and 3. for what purpose is the

> examination of the conventionally existent? 1. The point of reference of affliction is "conventionally existent." 2. All is conventionally existent. 3. It is for the purpose of abandoning attachment to a self as the cause of affliction.
> 1. How is something "existent in the ultimate sense" (*paramārthasat*), 2. how many are existent in the ultimate sense, and 3. for what purpose is the examination of that which exists in the ultimate sense? 1. The point of reference of purification is "existent in the ultimate sense". 2. All is existent in the ultimate sense. 3. It is for the purpose of abandoning attachment to a self as the cause of purification.[47]

Here it seems that the four categories refer to different aspects of the very same aggregates, bases, and entrances.

The Bhāṣya clarifies the distinction between "substantially existent" and "existent as a designation" (*dravyasat* and *prajñaptisat*) in the following manner:

> "The scope of the sense faculties, independent from verbal expressions": it is the object perceived without having first distinguished through names like "form, feeling" and so forth.
>
> "Independent from something other than itself": that is something which is understood as such without depending on some other object; not like in respect of a pot and so forth, where the understanding of a "pot" etc. occurs in dependence upon form and so forth.[48]

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47. *skandhadhātvāyataneṣu kathaṁ dravyasat kati dravyasanti kimarthaṁ dravyasatparīkṣā| abhilāpanirapekṣas tadanyanirapekṣaś cendriyagocaro dravyasat| sarvaṁ dravyasat| ātmadravyābhiniveśatyājanārtham|| kathaṁ prajñaptisat| kati prajñaptisanti kimarthaṁ prajñaptisatparīkṣā| abhilāpasāpekṣas tadanyasāpekṣaś cendriyagocaraḥ prajñaptisat| sarvaṁ prajñaptisat| prajñaptisadātmābhiniveśatyājanārtham| kathaṁ saṁvṛtisat| kati saṁvṛtisanti| kimarthaṁ saṁvṛtisatparīkṣā| saṁkleśālambanaṁ saṁvṛtisat| sarvaṁ saṁvṛtisat| saṁkleśanimittātmābhiniveśatyājanārtham|| kathaṁ paramārthasat| kati paramārthasanti| kimarthaṁ paramārthasatparīkṣā| vyavadānālambanaṁ paramārthasat| sarvaṁ paramārthasat| vyavadānanimittātmābhiniveśatyājanārtham||*

48. *abhilāpanirapekṣa indriyagocaras tadyathā rūpaṃ vedanetyevamādikaṃ nāmnā citrayitvā yasyārthasya grahaṇaṃ bhavati | tadanyanirapekṣas tadyathārthāntaram anapekṣya yatra tadbuddhir bhavati | na yathā ghaṭādiṣu rūpādīn apekṣya ghaṭādibuddhir iti ||*

What is here of some relevance—for the sake of comparison with the Madhyamaka—is that the four categories are not described in terms of whether something resists analysis or doesn't. That basic principle (similar to what is enunciated in the Abhidharmakośa) is here replaced at a crucial juncture by the principle that *dravyasat* (the "substantially existent") is not "what cannot be broken into parts by the mind", but rather, what does not depend upon verbal expression in order to be cognized.

A difficult point of this presentation is that here both the "substantially existent" (*dravyasat*) and that which is "existent as a designation" (*prajñaptisat*) could possibly be read as included within the "conventionally existent" (*saṁvṛtisat*). The inclusion of both categories under *saṁvṛtisat* may appear to complicate matters considerably when we decide to delineate a precise comparison with the Madhyamaka; however, there are at least two sets of considerations that must be here taken into account.

Regarding the first consideration, in this particular passage the usage of *saṁvṛti* ("convention") and *paramārtha* ("ultimate" or "highest meaning") makes no reference to ontology, but is rather bound to the soteriology of affliction of purification. This usage may be dictated by contextual reasons, and it may not exclude other usages wherein *saṁvṛtisat* and *paramārthasat* ("conventionally existent" and "existent in the ultimate sense") are more directly synonymous with *prajñaptisat* and *dravyasat* ("existent as a designation" and "substantially existent"), respectively (as it seems to be the case in the commentary to the Thirty Verses and elsewhere). Here, too, it would be at least plausible to read the two sets as partially synonymous.

The second point to consider is how Madhyamaka authors themselves may have some level of flexibility in using the term *dravya* to distinguish between layers of existence (albeit within conventions). There is at least one passage in a short work by Nāgārjuna in which a distinction very much akin to *dravya/prajñapti-sat* seems to be implied in reference to the twelve limbs of dependent arising and a "self," respectively. In the *Pratītya asamutpādahṛdayakārikāvyākhyāna* the "self" or "person" is refuted; what seems to remain after such refutation is the succession of causes and effects, as embedded in the doctrine of "dependent arising in twelve parts" (the main topic of the treatise). We can see a clear ontological distinction between those twelve limbs (causes and effects in an Abhidharmic sense) and the "self" that may be misconstrued to abide over and above them, especially in the following passage:

> "*The whole world is cause and effect*"; apart from a designation, *there is no other "being" here,* construed to be existing ultimately. What is a construct does not exist. As one wishes for something which is a mere construct, it does not make sense that the wished-for *dravya* could exist.[49]

The passage could be read as implying that *dravya*-type existence does make sense for the causes and effects, since otherwise they would stand refuted in the same way as the "being" (*sattva*) has been refuted; similarly, the rationale of the passage loses cogency if we were to say that causes and effects too are nothing but designations (*prajñapti*). No doubt this usage could well be read as internal to a larger context, according to which everything indeed is *prajñapti*; however, it allows for the possibility that the "substance/designation" (*dravya*/*prajñapti*) distinction could even be used in some Madhyamaka contexts, even if only to distinguish between two aspects of the conventional. If we chose to say that Nāgārjuna wrote this treatise from a perspective of general Abhidharma rather than from a specifically Madhyamaka standpoint, the fact would remain that a Madhyamaka (no less than Nāgārjuna) may in fact argue from within the Abhidharmic framework of *prajñapti* versus *dravya* type of existents. This may seem to offer a possibility of reading a similar contextual gradation in the Yogācāra system, which would render the two philosophies compatible; but let me add some further consideration about *prajñapti* versus *dravya*.

Apart from that short passage, we must take into account how Madhyamaka philosophers do (most clearly) distinguish between the conventions of the momentary aggregates, bases, and entrances as opposed to the conventions of objects extended through time and space. Śāntideva and Prajñākaramati offer a cogent rationale to fit the categories of Abhidharma within the "conventions of the *yogin,*" considered superior when compared to the "conventions of worldly people" (*yogisaṁvṛti* versus *lokasaṁvṛti*). The *yogin* is defined as someone who has obtained a direct realization of the selflessness of persons (*pudgalanairātmya*); his mind remains a convention/obscuration, but one that has done away with

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49. *hetuphalañ ca hi jagat prajñaptiṁ vihāya anyo nāsti kaścid iha sattvaḥ| paramārthataḥ kalpitaḥ| kalpitaś ca nāsti| kalpitamātraviṣaye kāma iṣṭadravyaṁ sat na yujyate|* Here *kāme* may appear to lend an unusual syntax, but it is confirmed by the Tibetan *btags pa tsam gyi yul du 'dod pa ni rdzas su 'dod par mi ruṅ ṅo*. I believe that it may therefore be sensible to take *kalpitamātraviṣaye* as a *bahuvrīhi* qualifying *kāme*.

the mistake of imputing extension in time, and is therefore attuned to the momentariness of *dharma*s. Similar passages in Candrakīrti's Prasannapadā suggest that for a Madhyamaka the conventions of Abhidharma remain privileged conventions, and one wonders whether the term *dravyasat* could be employed in a Madhyamaka setting to simply indicate that privileged position (rather than implying "resistance to analysis"). That possibility is at least envisaged by the passage in Nāgārjuna's short work mentioned a few paragraphs earlier. Even if we follow this interpretive opening, though, the usage of the same categories in Sthiramati's commentary to the Thirty Verses precludes reading the ontology of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra as compatible and in ultimate agreement. And other passages are even more explicit in offering a rationale to define the precise level of existence of basic Abhidharmic categories.

In his Bhāṣya, Sthiramati tells us that the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*'s description of the aggregates, bases, and entrances as *parikalpita* (completely imagined), *vikalpita* (misconstrued as something else), and *dharmatā* (the ultimate nature of the *dharma*s), respectively, corresponds to the three natures (*trisvabhāva*) in relation to the selflessness of persons:

> The imagined nature is the nature of a "self", etc., which is not to be found and is imagined in reference to the aggregates, etc.;
> The dependent nature is those very aggregates, etc., in respect to which that false mental construct of a "self", etc., comes about;
> The perfect nature is the *tathatā*, whose defining trait is disjoined from existence and non-existence, since it has the defining trait of the non-existence of a "self", etc., and of the existence of selflessness, within the aggregates, etc.[50]

The distinction between "completely imagined" and "misconstrued" (*parikalpita* and *vikalpita*) is important, since it allows Yogācāra to offer a specific and articulate system of Abhidharma while contending that the various defining traits (*lakṣaṇa*s) are not arbitrary elaborations of a mere illusion. There is a sense in which the aggregates, bases, and entrances can be said to really arise and cease; as long as the proper referents of

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50. *parikalpitaḥ svabhāvaḥ skandhādīny adhiṣṭhāyāvidyamāna ātmādisvabhāvo yaḥ parikalpitaḥ | paratantraḥ svabhāvaḥ tāny eva skandhādīni yatrāsāv ātmādyabhūtavikalpaḥ pravṛttaḥ | pariniṣpannaḥ svabhāvo bhāvābhāvaviyuktalakṣaṇā hi tathatā skandhādiṣv ātmādyabhāvanairātmyāstitālakṣaṇatvāt* | Tatia 45.

terms like "eye-entrance" or "visible-form-entrance" are understood to be no more than mere cognitions and their seeds, planted in the store consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) by previous cognitions.[51] This is surely to be contrasted with the Madhyamaka's lack of a definite Abhidharmic system, and with the flexibility that an author like Candrakīrti may show in respect to specific Abhidharmic descriptions. (This is not to imply that Candrakīrti took them to be completely arbitrary—on the contrary.)[52]

The *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya* and its subcommentary by Sthiramati have more to say on the same distinctions (3.16).

Vasubandhu:

> Form is of three types: thoroughly imagined, as the thoroughly imagined nature of form; misconstrued, as the dependent nature of form—since the misconstruction of "form" is made in respect to that; the *dharmatā*-form, as the perfected nature. As it is for form, so also feeling and the other aggregates, the bases, entrances and so forth should be included. In this way, since the aggregates, etc., are included within the three natures, the tenfold *tattva* ("reality") of skillfulness should be seen within the root *tattva*.[53]

Sthiramati:

> Among these, what is the "thoroughly imagined form"? It is "the thoroughly imagined nature of form": that is what, in respect to which the nature of an object is thoroughly imagined apart from the perception of a name. [Or, following Pandeya; "that is the perception according to a name referring to something else; the nature of an object is thoroughly imagined in respect to that"]. Since it is utterly non-existent it is called "thoroughly imagined".

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51. This is according to Vasubandhu's Twenty Verses and their commentary. Alternative (and possibly compatible) models to understand the real referents of the aggregates, bases, and entrances can be found in the first section of the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and Bhāṣya.

52. On this see Salvini (2008).

53. *trividhaṁ rūpam | parikalpitaṁ rūpam, yo rūpasya parikalpitaḥ svabhāvaḥ, vikalpitaṁ rūpam, yo rūpasya paratantrasvabhāvaḥ—tatra hi rūpavikalpaḥ kriyate; dharmatārūpam, yo rūpasya pariniṣpannaḥ svabhāvaḥ | yathā rūpam evaṁ vedanādayaḥ skandhāḥ, dhātvāyatanādayaś ca yojyāḥ | evaṁ triṣu svabhāveṣu skandhādīnām antarbhāvād daśavidhaṁ kauśalyatattvaṁ mūlatattva eva draṣṭavyam |*

The "misconstrued form" is "the dependent nature of form": the sense is that it is bound to causes and conditions. In what sense, moreover, is this called "misconstrued form"? Thus he says "Since the misconstruction of 'form' is made in respect to that": since in reference to consciousness appearing as form, those who have not seen *tattva* form the notion of "form" after they have not thoroughly understood; hence they have attachment to "form", just like there is grasping at a "self" in respect to the aggregates. Therefore, referring to the dependent, it is said "misconstrued form."

The "*dharmatā*-form" is "the perfected nature": that is emptiness, in itself free from the misconstrued form and the thoroughly imagined form.[54]

[. . .] Among these, the utterly non-existent state of perceived and perceiver in respect to the appearing feeling and the rest, just as the state of being perceived is thoroughly imagined in respect to the appearances of form, is the "thoroughly imagined feeling", up to the "thoroughly imagined consciousness." That, in respect to which the misconstruction of perceived and perceiver is made, is the "misconstrued feeling", up to the "thoroughly imagined consciousness". The "*dharmatā*-feeling" is the perfected nature of feeling; in the same way, it should be understood up to the "*dharmatā*-consciousness". In respect to the bases, entrances, etc., also, it should be explained in detail according to how it is fit.[55]

[. . .] It is the "thoroughly imagined" since it is designated as the nature of form, etc.; being the basis for designations it is the

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54. *[. . .] tatra kiṁ parikalpitaṁ rūpam? yo rūpasya parikalpitaḥ svabhāva iti | tac ca yā'nyatra nāmnopalabdhis tatra viṣayasvabhāvaḥ parikalpyate [sa ca yo'nyatra nāmopalabdhes tatra] | so'tyantam asattvāt parikalpita ity ucyate | vikalpitaṁ rūpaṁ yo rūpasya paratantraḥ svabhāva iti hetupratyayapratibaddha ity arthaḥ | kim arthaṁ punar idaṁ [ayaṁ] vikalpitaṁ rūpam ucyata ity ata āha—tatra hi rūpavikalpaḥ kriyata iti | yasmād rūpakhyātavijñāne'dṛṣṭatattvair aparijñāta [aparijñāya] rūpasaṁjñatvād rūpābhiniveśaḥ kriyate yathā skandheṣv ātmagrāhaḥ | tasmāt paratantre vikalpitaṁ rūpam ity ucyate | dharmatārūpaṁ yo rūpasya pariniṣpannaḥ svabhāva iti | tad vikalpitarūpaparikalpitarūpavigatātmikā śūnyatā |* What I have put between square brackets is Yamaguchi's version; generally, it offers better readings, but Sanskritists will notice that, on occasion, I have followed Pandeya

55. *[. . .] tatra pratibhāseṣu vedanādiṣu yo'tyantam asadbhūto grāhyagrāhakabhāvo rūpapratibhāseṣu yathā grāhyabhāvaḥ parikalpyate sā parikalpitā vedanā yāvat parikalpitaṁ vijñānam | yasmin grāhyagrāhakeṇa vikalpaḥ kriyate sā vikalpitā vedanā yāvad vikalpitaṁ vijñānam | dharmatāvedanā yo vedanāyāḥ pariniṣpannaḥ svabhāvaḥ | evaṁ yāvad dharmatāvijñānaṁ veditavyam | evaṁ dhātvāyatanādiṣv api yathāsambhavaṁ vistareṇa vaktavyam |*

> "dependent", since it depends from conditions; the latter's quality of being utterly free from being form, etc., is the "perfected." [56]

According to the Yogācāra, the aggregates, bases, and entrances have an existent aspect that is existentially independent of verbal/conceptual expression (*abhilāpa*) or designation (*prajñapti*), and that, rather than being in itself a mental construct (*vikalpa*), is the basis for mental constructs to arise; this is akin to saying that conventional existence (*samvṛtisat*) or existence by designation (*prajñaptisat*) must be based on that ineffable and unrefutable level of existence called *dravyasat* ("substantially existent"). It perfectly corresponds to Sthiramati's position in the commentary quoted earlier. It also corresponds to Asaṅga's argument in the Tattvārthapaṭala, to which this part of the Bhāṣya seems to be heavily indebted. As we have seen, Sthiramati distinguishes between the thoroughly imagined nature (*parikalpita*) being the designations (*prajñapti*) versus the dependent nature (*paratantra*) being the basis for those designations (*prajñaptyadhiṣṭhāna*). Dependent arising (*pratyayaparatantratva*) is not a feature of the imaginary designations themselves, but rather of their really existent basis. I believe Vasubandhu expresses the same view of ontology in the commentary to the Twenty Verses, while explaining the meaning of the "selflessness of *dharma*s" (*dharmanairātmya*):

> The entrance into the selflessness of *dharma*s does not indeed come about by thinking that "by all means, a *dharma* doesn't exist". On the other hand it is "in respect to the imagined self" (verse 10). The immature imagine the own-existence (*svabhāva*) of *dharma*s in terms of perceived, perceiver and so forth; the *dharma*s' selflessness is in terms of that imagined self; not, on the other hand, in terms of the ineffable self which is the object/domain of the Buddhas. In this way, entering the selflessness of cognition-only too in terms of a self imagined through another cognition, the entrance

56. *[. . .] rūpādisvabhāvaprajñaptatvāt parikalpitaḥ, prajñaptyadhiṣṭhānabhāvāt paratantraḥ, pratyayaparatantratvāt, tasyaiva rūpādibhāvātyantavigatatvaṁ pariniṣpannaḥ |*

> into the selflessness of all *dharma*s comes about—thanks to the establishment of cognition-only and *not* by denying its existence.[57]

Two rather important points clarified by this passage are that "self" in the expression "selflessness of *dharma*s" is a synonym of *svabhāva* (own-existence, nature, essence); and that *dharma*s are only empty of that *svabhāva* that is imagined and expressible—not of the ineffable *svabhāva* that even Buddhas (whose cognition is infallible) take as their object/domain.[58] As in the other Yogācāra texts discussed earlier, we find here a close systemic connection between ineffability, true existence, and a qualified understanding of emptiness/selflessness.

All of this is at odds with the Madhyamaka position that the only type of existence regards conventional designations (*saṁvṛti*, *prajñapti*). This position is directly related to the idea that notional dependence is the most universal form of dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*), always entailing existential dependence as well. Nāgārjuna's famous identification of *pratītyasamutpāda* with *upādāya prajñāptiḥ* (an act of designation made possible by reference to something else) is explicitly contradicted by the logic of Sthiramati's comments, and by Asaṅga's arguments from the *Tattvārthapaṭala* that are their likely source.[59] One could bracket the description of substance versus designation (*dravya* versus *prajñapti*) in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* as (once again) context bound; but this does not seem to be necessitated by any consideration of systemic coherence, and

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57. *na khalu sarvathā dharmo nāstīty evaṁ dharmanairātmyapraveśo bhavati | api tu | kalpitātmanā || 10 || yo bālair dharmāṇāṁ svabhāvo grāhyagrāhakādiḥ parikalpitas tena kalpitenātmanā teṣāṁ nairātmyaṁ na tv anabhilāpyenātmanā yo buddhānāṁ viṣaya iti | evaṁ vijñaptimātrasyāpi vijñaptyantaraparikalpitenātmanā nairātmyapraveśāt vijñaptimātravyavasthāpanayā sarvadharmāṇāṁ nairātmyapraveśo bhavati na tu tadastitvāpavādāt |*

58. Here Anacker offers a problematic subcommentary (note 10, page 176): "The completely signless perception of Buddhas is here seen to be equivalent with the Universal Self of the Upaniṣads. The recognition of their fundamental oneness is rare in Buddhist writing." (Anacker offers other such subcommentaries, especially in his notes.) Such an obvious interpretive mistake (apart from its arbitrariness) should warn us to pay attention to the contextual sense of Buddhist philosophical terminology. Vasubandhu, in fact, is probably making an epistemological point: what is even perceived by Buddhas cannot be discarded, since a Buddha's cognition is authoritative in principle.

59. It should be clear by now that I cannot agree with Dan Lusthaus's estimate of the relationship between the philosophies of Asaṅga and Nāgārjuna. See Lusthaus (2009). I am not at all convinced that the two share an identical view.

the *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*'s subcommentary does not support such interpretation.

I have offered a somewhat lengthy reconstruction of the possible positions about different types of existence (*dravyasat*, *prajñaptisat,* and *saṁvṛtisat*) to show that, despite the complexity of the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka arguments, a coherent exegesis of those systems still necessitates distinguishing them in terms of ontology (at least, in most contexts).[60] It is furthermore worth noticing that Madhyamaka authors represent the concerns of their Yogācāra opponents with accuracy; even without explicitly employing the terminology of designation versus "substance" (*prajñapti* versus *dravya*), Śāntideva well captures the idea that conventions necessitate a real basis, in the following half-verse:

> If you say that "*saṁsāra* should be based on a real thing, otherwise it would be like space"[61]

The terminology is here reminiscent of Asaṅga's argument that designations (*prajñapti*) need a really existent thing (*vastu*) as their basis (*adhiṣṭhāna*), and the hypothetical objection is conceptually identical to the view expressed in the *Tattvārthapaṭala*[62] (as also in Sthiramati's commentary on the Thirty Verses discussed earlier in this section). The same concern with the need for a real basis of designation is to be found in the hypothetical Yogācāra opponents of Kamalaśīla's *Madhyamakālokā*; remarkably, it is also an argument put forth by a late author like Ratnākaraśānti (whose criticism of Madhyamaka bears more than a passing resemblance to Asaṅga and Sthiramati's own). Like many post-Dharmakīrtian philosophers, Kamalaśīla and Ratnākaraśānti tend to frame their arguments within the context of *pramāṇa* theory, prefiguring

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60. One further reason to offer an articulate discussion is in order to counter Brunhlotz's lengthy reconstruction of the relationship between the three natures and the two truths (see especially page 469 and following). Brunhlotz seems to understand that both the *parikalpita* and the *paratantra* would fall within *saṁvṛti* in the sense of not being ultimately existent, which I consider an interpretive mistake not corroborated by either text or context; especially as he uses Sthiramati—who is directly at odds with his own reconstruction—as a source.

61. *vastvāśrayaś cet saṁsāro'nyathākāśavad bhavet* || 28cd ||

62. "In respect to that, when "the object of designation is not there", then the designation too, being without a basis, cannot be there." *tatra prajñapter vastu nāstīti niradhiṣṭhānā prajñaptir api nāsti* | Bodhisattvabhūmi, Wogihara, page 46.

the favored Tibetan approach in discussing conventionalities. This makes it more difficult to detect the Abhidharmic background of *prajñapti* versus *dravya;* that background is more explicit in works by earlier authors.

At this juncture we can already notice a relationship between ineffability, the limit of analysis, and the two truths. We can also understand that this relationship is differently delineated in Madhyamaka and in Yogācāra. The importance of language and conceptual analysis in establishing the two truths also means that the analysis of the expressive forces through which ineffability and existence may be (somewhat) articulated will have a prominent role at crucial points in the debate about what is versus what is merely a concept.

The Syntax of What Can't Be Said

It is not that, Mahāmati, verbal expression is well-known in all Buddha-fields. Verbal expression, Mahāmati, is contrived.[63]

LAṄKĀVATĀRASŪTRA

A basic tension between the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka positions about analysis, language, and (un)reality can perhaps be captured in the following opposition: "What exists is ineffable" versus "What is ineffable cannot be said to exist." The first position becomes more reasonable when we consider that something ineffable should be beyond possible analysis (how do we analyze what we cannot even express or conceptualize?); resisting analysis is, after all, the mark of true existence. The second position appears coherent in qualifying ineffability so as to include inexpressibility in terms of existence or nonexistence (or both, or neither). But how do these two approaches debate with each other, and which tools do they employ for that purpose?

Some scholars appear to have been surprised by the role that classical syntactical categories play at crucial junctures in the Madhyamaka/Yogācāra debate. Sanskrit classical grammar (*vyākaraṇa*) may seem to be a "second degree" convention, a refined system of linguistic regulations to

63. *na ca mahāmate sarvabuddhakṣetreṣu prasiddho'bhilāpaḥ | abhilāpo mahāmate kṛtakaḥ |* Laṅkāvatārasūtra 2.133.

be learnt by the intellectual elite, rather than the backbone of conventional perception. However, the situation is not so simple; this may be best understood by reading some actual examples of the philosophical use of *vyākaraṇa*.

Two important categories occurring in Yogācāra thought refer to "self-contained" existential units. These most basic, ultimate components escape analysis thanks to their ineffability and allow construal of the rest of the system upon their basis. The two categories, reflexive awareness (*svasaṁvedanā*) and the "own-characteristic" (*svalakṣaṇa*), are ultimate because they ontologically precede the arising of further concepts and analysis. Śāntideva and his commentator Prajñākaramati have amply discussed the first, while we find a refutation of *svalakṣaṇa* in the *Prasannapadā*; in both cases, syntactical factors (*kāraka*) play a role in the debate.

Although *svasamvedanā* is not directly argued for by Asaṅga or Vasubandhu, I believe Śāntideva has ample reason to focus on this category in order to refute the Yogācāra system as a whole, since, if some form of reflexive awareness is not accepted, the contention that the object and the agent of perception (*grāhya* and *grāhaka*) are illusory aspects in a single moment of mind could hardly be defended in the first place.[64] Leaving aside the details of the rather complex argumentation offered in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and its main Sanskrit commentary, I would like to focus on the last sections of this debate—where the question of ineffability, and the limit of analysis, comes into play.

The hypothetical proponent of *svasaṁvedanā* argues that reflexive awareness is not to be understood according to the ordinary syntactical categories we may usually be prompted to employ: this would be the *kāraka*s (syntactical factors) of "object of the action" (*karman*) and "agent" (*kartṛ*), plus the action itself (*kriyā*). The structure of the term *svasaṁvedanā* does in fact suggest that reflexive awareness is, simultaneously, the agent that is aware, the object that it is aware of, and the action of being aware. This opens up the possibility of a series of analytical refutations. In particular, being distinguishable into object, agent, and action would make *svasaṁvedanā* a name for a collection of three different basic elements,

64. Later authors also recognize the paramount systemic importance of *svasaṁvedanā* for the Yogācāra system. See for example Advayavajra's characterization of Yogācāra in the Tattvaratnāvalī and in the Madhyamakaṣaṭka.

rather than a truly existent singularity—it would make it vulnerable to analysis. Hence the proponent of *svasaṁvedanā* states that:

> [. . .]We do not accept the self-illumination of cognition according to the division of object, agent and action; because, for one existent thing three natures as object and so forth are not fit. Therefore, even in case of a refutation through the division of action and so forth, there would be no refutation for us: because it would not harm self-illumination as being born from one's own causes. Therefore, in respect to self-awareness, the defects you brought forth do not follow. As it has been said:
> Consciousness is born as distinct from insentient things.
> This only is its self-awareness: not being insentient.
> Self-awareness is not divided into action and *kāraka*s:
> as it is one without parts, it cannot have three natures.[65]

To this, Prajñākaramati offers an apparently "casual" reply:

> Having resorted to the sense of words as well-established through conventional usage in terms of the division into action and *kāraka*s, we spoke a refutation. Because, the word "self-awareness" expresses that sense. If on the other hand, fearing a flaw, even the sense of words as well-established in the world is abandoned, then, you will be refuted according to the world itself.
>
> Even in this way, self-awareness is not established as an ultimate. It is as follows: it has been said that what is born from causes and conditions, like a reflected image, lacks an essence. And in this way, clearly there is no self-awareness of cognition, since in reality it has no essence of its own.

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65. *na punar asmābhiḥ karmakartṛkriyābhede(na) jñānasyātmaprakāśam iṣyate | ekasya sataḥ karmādisvabhāvatrayasyāyogāt | tan na kriyādibhedena dūṣaṇe'pi kiñcid dūṣitam asmākaṁ syāt svahetujanitasyātmaprakāśasyānupaghātāt | iti nātmasamvedane pratipāditadoṣaprasaṅgaḥ | taduktam—vijñānaṁ jaḍarūpebhyo vyāvṛttam upajāyate | iyam evātmasaṁvittir asya yā'jaḍarūpatā || kriyākārakabhedena na svasaṁvittir asya tu | ekasyānaṁśarūpasya trairūpyānupapattitaḥ | atrocyate kriyākārakabhedena vyvahāraprasiddhaṁ śabdārtham adhigamya dūṣaṇam uktaṁ svasaṁvedanaśabdasya tadarthābhidhāyakatvāt | yadi punar doṣabhayāl lokaprasiddho'pi śabdārthaḥ parityajyate tadā lokata eva bādhā bhavato bhaviṣyati | ittham api na paramārthataḥ svasaṁvedanasiddhiḥ | tathā hi hetupratyayopajanitasya pratibimbasyeva niḥsvabhāvatvāt |* Prajñākaramati's commentary to 9.19. The verse is from *Tattvasaṁgraha* 2000.1.

In the second part of the refutation, Prajñākaramati is conceding the possibility of employing an ad hoc stipulation about what the syntax of *svasaṁvedanā* may (or may not) be, therefore making it at least a viable conventional category. Even this, though, would only avoid its being analyzed in terms of whole and parts—while it would still stand ultimately refuted by a reasoning taking dependent arising as the logical ground. The first part, on the other hand, addresses more directly the relationship between philosophical debate and the *kāraka* system.

It may seem at least odd that the question of the ultimate nature of the mind should here be settled by discussing whether a certain definition fits the category put forth by a Sanskrit grammarian, however illustrious. Nevertheless, to read only this much in the exchange between Śāntarakṣita and Prajñākaramati would be to miss the point of the debate. Pāṇini's *kāraka*s are not rules in the sense of regulating edicts ensuring that a language retains certain formalities; rather, they outline the basic structure of any possible action or activity, any assemblage of causal factors giving rise to an effect, and hence structure the comprehensible expression of causal processes through speech. Since all sentences are made understood by a net of syntactical relations, Prajñākaramati is amply justified in pointing out that his opponent has concocted an ad hoc category that remains not analyzable only due to its being, by arbitrary stipulation, not a set of known syntactical relations. If this somewhat artificial use of language is then thought to ensure that *svasaṁvedanā* resists ultimate analysis, Prajñākaramati is even more justified in suggesting that ultimate ineffability cannot be obtained by conscious stipulation. The opponent is arguing that *svasaṁvedanā* is beyond analysis because it does not entail usual syntactical relations; Prajñākaramati answers that this is a bit like saying that we have to abandon language before we can utter that word.

Candrakīrti uses a very similar line of argument when refuting the *svalakṣana* ("own-characteristic"), offering a (harsher) precedent for Prajñākaramati's rebuking of the Yogācāra linguistic idiosyncrasy:

> Alternatively, this explanation of words following the connections of actions and *kāraka*s is not accepted. That makes things extremely difficult! You communicate through those very words, employed in reference to the link between action and the *kāraka*s; at the same time, you do not wish the meaning of those words to be "action",

> "instrument", and so forth. Alas! Your usage is connected to some mere fancy! [66]

This passage of the Prasannapadā better highlights the rationale in brining *kāraka*s into the debate. Words like *svalakṣana* are part of a linguistic context wherein the meaning of an expression is defined by a net of relations between actions and the factors that contribute to those actions (the *kāraka*s). If one argues that one's usage is completely disconnected from those relations, one would incur a performative contradiction even while offering that explanation; alternatively, the explanation should remain incomprehensible, not being part of any system of shared conventions, but being only connected to one's wish to escape analysis—and expressing no more than that.

That Candrakīrti's argument may be worded more strongly than Prajñākaramati's is due to a significant difference in the two refutations. While the *svalakṣaṇa* seems implausible even as a conventional truth, Prajñākaramati interprets the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* as possibly allowing for conventional *svasaṁvedanā*. This is clear from the last sections of the commentary on 9.25 and the following, introductory sections of the commentary to 9.26. When the hypothetical opponent explains that without *svasaṁvedanā* objects could not even be experienced,[67] Prajñākaramati offers no direct counterargument—but rather he asks whether this is meant ultimately or conventionally. If it is meant ultimately, a Madhyamaka would simply *agree* that such is the case. Prajñākaramati furthermore states that the flaws pointed out by the opponent do not apply to the Madhyamaka, precisely because he is refuting *svasaṁvedanā* from an ultimate, rather than a conventional, perspective;[68] this implies that a Madhyamaka would have to accept conventional *svasaṁvedanā* in order to avoid the logical problems highlighted by his opponent. Even the context of the refutation suggests that the concern is not with conventional analysis. The arguments against *svasaṁvedanā* are meant to show that there can be no ultimately existent mind—and hence the primary concern

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66. *atha śabdānām evaṁ kriyākārakasambandhapūrvikā vyutpattir nāṅgīkriyate tad idam atikaṣṭam | tair eva kriyākārakasambandhapravṛttaiḥ śabdair bhavān vyavaharati sabdārthaṁ kriyākaraṇādikaṁ ca necchatīti aho bata icchāmātrapratibaddhapravṛttir bhavata ||* Prasannapadā, 1.3.

67. *tathā hi svasaṁvedanasya pradiṣedhāt* [. . .] *na kathaṁcid apy arthasya pratītir iti ||*

68. *tena svasaṁvedanābhāvād arthānadhigamādayo'pi doṣāḥ paramārthapakṣavādina iha nāvataranti |*

could not be with the conventional existence of reflexive awareness. And as we have seen, Prajñākaramati had already conceded for a conventional acceptance of *svasaṁvedanā*, as long as it may be clear that reflexive awareness stands refuted as an ultimate.[69]

In both Madhyamaka texts, resorting to syntax is not a matter of overscholasticism; rather, it allows a reflection as to whether the opponent may have created a category that tries to escape the basic presuppositions of the conceptual and expressive frameworks he is himself employing.

An additional and philosophically significant consideration is that Sanskrit traditional grammarians understand syntax in accordance with a causal structure; in this respect, the *kāraka* system is rather akin to the analysis of dependent arising. Just as dependent arising is analyzed as the arising of an effect through the interplay of six causes (*hetu*s) or four conditions (*pratyaya*s), so also the six *kāraka*s are syntactical capacities through which we may express the factors that bring about the accomplishment of an action. That *kāraka*s may be directly linked to the conceptual relation between causes and effects is explicitly acknowledged by Puruṣottamadeva, a Buddhist, and a grammarian who follows Pāṇini. In a fascinating work that may be understood as "philosophy of syntax" (and that starts with a criticism of the Advaita position on word-reference), the author captures the close relationship between morphology, syntax, and dependent arising. The relationship is illustrated in the following verse:

> A *kāraka* is explained as a cause; and that, expects an effect.
> Nominal and verbal endings are analyzed according to the link between effects and causes.[70]

Considering the paramount importance of notional dependence in Madhyamaka, it should be no surprise that philosophers like Candrakīrti and Prajñākaramati may turn to the refined categories offered by Pāṇini and his commentators to reflect upon language and its ontological implications. Traditional grammar decidedly focuses on words (*śabda*), refraining

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69. The only possible move to argue that *svasaṁvedanā* needs to be refuted even conventionally would be to argue that reflexive awareness is one such category that could exist only by existing as an ultimate. Neither Śāntideva, nor his commentator, ever bring forth such an argument. On the contrary, they ignore this issue.

70. *nimittaṁ kārakaṁ proktaṁ tac ca kāryam apekṣate | kāryakāraṇasambandhāt vicāraḥ suptiṅantayoḥ* || Kārakacakram, verse 2.

from a discussion about the ontological plausibility of their meanings/referents (*artha*); but in a world of mere notions, the difference between syntactical relations and relations "out there" may be a rather complex matter.

Some Conclusions

> *When the yogin observes through higher cognition and doesn't perceive existence in any of the three times, then negating what could he construe that "something doesn't exist"?*[71]
>
> KAMALAŚĪLA

> *That of which it is empty does not truly exist; that which is empty truly exists: emptiness makes sense in this way.*[72]
>
> ASAṄGA

I have tried to highlight how, at every turn, the debate between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka depends on a sophisticated use, and understanding, of language. This consistent focus on language appears in the attention to the stipulated semantics of sentience, consciousness, and liberation; in the analysis of reference and its intentional indirection, which allows one to speak of conventions without committing to their being ultimate referents; and in the awareness that when discussing the limits of analysis and expression it is necessary to take into account the basic syntactical structures that make analysis and communication possible in the first place.

Classical commentaries can be read and understood as scholastically precise, in a sense that allows for remarkable flexibility of usage while retaining clear demarcations of systemic differences. That classical commentators may have *misunderstood* the terms of the debates they were in, and poorly represented the opponents' position, seems rather difficult to uphold, considering that those terms are largely disclosed and made comprehensible by those commentaries themselves, without which relevant cross-references and the context of the root texts could hardly be

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71. *yadā kālatraye'pi yoginā prajñayā nirūpayatā bhāvo nopalabdhaḥ tadā kasya pratiṣedhān nāstīti kalpayet* | Third Bhāvanākrama.

72. *yena hi śūnyaṁ tadasadbhāvāt, yac ca śūnyaṁ tadsadbhāvāc chūnyatā yujyeta* | Tattvārthapaṭala.

perceptible in the first place.[73] Although "reading back" later categories in earlier texts may not always be warranted, it often makes a system more comprehensible, cogent, and philosophically sophisticated rather than not; considering this, I believe that the traditional doxographical distinction between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka should be taken as a fundamentally fruitful heuristics to gain a sense of direction in a large collection of difficult texts.

Surely due to my own limitations, it has taken me years and a number of rereadings to start appreciating the complexities and truly vast erudition that forms the fabric of the debates between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. In other words, I feel that I am just beginning to even understand their *language*, and its intent. I am far from certain of having well understood authors like Sthiramati or Candrakīrti, but I am somewhat puzzled at any attempt to bracket their differences as some sort of later deviation from the texts they are commenting upon. The assumption that the contemporary interpreter finds him/herself in a privileged position to read the root texts is fortunately not universally shared; assuming the exact opposite would seem more reasonable on a number of counts.

To summarize the fundamental difference between the two systems in the shortest possible manner: for the Yogācāra, only the compounded imagination and the uncompounded nonexistence of the imagined exist; for the Madhyamaka, existence and nonexistence, compounded or uncompounded, are themselves merely imagined.

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73. I am leaving out the question of the editorial constitution of the root texts as we have them in the first place; however, their relationship to the commentaries into which they are often encased could make one say that sometimes the commentary *makes* the root text even in its presently available ostensible shape. To say that later doxography (as embedded in the commentarial traditions) is simply wrong or has missed the point completely may be too idiosyncratic to be even comprehensible (since we may be speaking of an artificially constructed ur-content that nobody could ever cognize). When I write of "commentarial traditions" I mean to include the available living traditions of oral explanation and expansion of the texts.

Possible differences of emphasis and conclusiveness between the Maitreya treatises and Vasubandhu's writing do not affect my reconstruction; since by Yogācāra I mean specifically those treatises when cast within their Indic commentarial tradition (i.e., Vasubandhu and Sthiramati). On the other hand, I do not think that the Maitreya treatises on their own may be read as philosophically so specified (and the same may be true of some sections of Asaṅga's works). This is not to say that Vasubandhu is not a faithful interpreter of Asaṅga—rather, an author may well be free to adopt different stances in different treatises, and Vasubandhu seems to follow the specifically Yogācāra strain in Asaṅga's thought.

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3

Reification and Nihilism

THE THREE-NATURE THEORY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Sonam Thakchöe

Astīti śāśvatagrāho nāstītyucchedadarśanam|
Tasmādastitvanāstitve nāśrīyeta vicakṣaṇaḥ||
To say "it exists" is to adopt reification. To say "it does not exist" is the view of nihilism. A wise person, therefore, subscribes neither to "existence" nor to "nonexistence."
NĀGĀRJUNA, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 15.10[1]

NĀGĀRJUNA'S POSITION AS stated in the epigraph to this chapter is common to all traditional Buddhist philosophers.[2] Proponents of all Buddhist schools, including the Yogācārin and the Mādhyamika, have always claimed to follow a middle-way, steering clear of two extremes. The first of these two extremes is reification *(sgro 'dogs / samāropa)*, which is often referred to as the view of existence *(astitvadarśanaṁ/yod par lta ba)*, or the extreme of eternalism *(rtag mtha' / śāśvatānta)*. The second of the two extremes is nihilism *(skur 'debs / apavāda)*, which is often referred to as the view of nonexistence *(med par lta ba / nāstitvadarśanaṁ)*, or the extreme of annihilation *(chad mtha' / abhāvānta)*.

The philosophical disagreements that arise do not stem from intent so much as from application. Specifically, while all schools intend to chart a "middle-way," they disagree on what precisely is a "middle-way" *(dbu ma /*

1. Nāgārjuna. 1960. *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna*. ed. Vaidya, P. L. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning.

2. My heartfelt thanks go to Joshua Quinn-Watson for turning this paper into plain English.

madhyama), and what the two extremes it is situated between are. Each school offers its own definition of "reification" *(sgro 'dogs / samāropa)* and of "nihilism" *(chad mtha' / abhāvānta)*, definitions that overlap, but also, inevitably, conflict.

The Yogācārin and the Mādhyamika offer their own accounts of the extremes of reification and nihilism. The Yogācārins believe they alone adhere to the middle-way principle, while their philosophical peers inadvertently commit to reification or nihilism, or both. The Mādhyamikas likewise believe they alone adhere to the middle-way principle and that the other philosophers fall into the extremes of both reification and nihilism.

Where the Yogācārin argues that it avoids the extreme of reification because its rejects even the conventional reality of conceptual nature, the Mādhyamika argues that it avoids the opposite extreme of nihilism by contradicting that position, accepting the conventional reality of conceptual nature. Where the Yogācārin argues that its view avoids the extreme of nihilism because it accepts the ultimate reality of dependent and perfect natures, the Mādhyamika argues that it avoids the extreme of reification by denying the ultimate reality of the same.

My prosecution of the discussion is styled on the *grub mtha'*–doxographical approach, which was made widely known by Bhāvavevika in his *Tarkajvāla*, and later adopted by Tibetan philosophers including *lCang sky rol pa'i rdo rje, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje*. This approach is sometimes rightly criticized for its tendency to overstate the doctrinal unity of the schools in question.[3] I acknowledge that this is a genuine concern, especially if this approach fails to recognize the existence of many critical and nuanced philosophical debates within each of these schools and the individual philosophers whose views and careers often straddle them. In this chapter, however, I will appropriate the *grub mtha'* approach, approximate as it is, with the hope of also drawing attention to the internal philosophical schisms that contribute to the more basic philosophical rift between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka on three-nature theory.

The three-nature theory is a useful platform to discuss the hermeneutic rivalry between the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka schools, and their respective views of the two extremes. This theory holds the central place in Yogācāra's philosophy and is also the means by which the Yogācārin

3. I am grateful to Professor J.L Garfield for pointing out this methodological concern.

defends it position against those that accuse it of advocating extremes. This theory also highlights the key contentions in the Yogācāra/Madhyamaka debate. Moreover, the three-nature theory is particularly useful in the way it shows the subtle ontological and epistemological differences within the Madhyamaka school: the so-called Svātantrika/Prāsaṅgika debate. Ultimately, its use will assist the investigation into whether Yogācāra and Madhyamaka are philosophical rivals or allies.

Reification: The Reality of Conceptual Nature

According to the Yogācārin the extreme of reification (*sgro 'dogs kyi mtha'*) is the view that *conceives* of the reality of conceptual nature (*parikalpita / kun brtags pa'i ngo bo nyid*). It is the view that reifies linguistic statements or concepts—"this is form," "this is sound," "this is smell," "this is taste," and "this is a tactile phenomenon"—by assigning them a corresponding unique reality (*svalakṣaṇa / rang gi mtshan nyid*): respectively, a uniquely real form, uniquely real sound, uniquely real smell, uniquely real taste, and uniquely real tactile phenomenon. Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva's Grounds* (*Bodhisattvabhūmiḥ / Byang chub sems dpa'i sa*) defines the extreme of reification in this way:

> A reified conception that clings to the unique reality (*ngo bo nyid kyi rang gi mtshan nyid*) of linguistic statements such as "this is form etc." designating things such as forms etc. even though they are not. (Toh. 4037. *Sems tsam,* Wi 25b)[4]

Since it conceives conceptual phenomena to be uniquely real, even though they are not, conceptual nature consists of a reification.

For the Yogācāra, unique reality (*svalakṣaṇa)* is an objective reality that is independent of any linguistic conceptual characterization. Hence, to believe that statements or concepts (such as "this is shape" and "this is color") have a uniquely real reference is to believe that the reality that these statements or concepts represent is objectively real. And this, the Yogācārin argues, amounts to reifying the conceptual nature by giving it a status equal to dependent nature, a possibility the

4. *Gzugs la sogs pa'i chos rnams la gzugs la sogs pa'i dngos po la 'dogs pa'i tshig gi ngo bo nyid kyi rang gi mtshan nyid yod pa ma yin pa la sgro btags nas mngon par zhen pa gang yin pa dang.*

Yogācārin rejects vehemently. While on Yogācāra's account dependent phenomena (such as shapes and colors) *are* uniquely real, the concepts and the statements that refer to them ("this is shape," "this is color") *are not* also uniquely real.

In Vasubandhu's *Discernment of the Three Natures (Rang bzhin gsum nges par bstan pa / Trisvabhāvaniṛdeśa; hereafter TSN)* (Toh.4058. *Sems tsam* Vol. Shi, 10a–11b),[5] the Yogācāra definition of dependent nature is given as "what appears" *(yat khyāti),* and conceptual nature as "as it appears" (*asau yathā khyāti*). Dependent nature is appearance itself, conceptual nature (*parikalpita*) is the *mode* in which it appears. That mode is conceptual because appearance is only a representation—"unreal conceptual fabrication" (*asatakalpo*). (*TSN* 2, *Sems tsam* Chi 10a).[6]

Yogācāra argues that there are two reasons for this. First, it is from representations that we, the Yogācārins say, fabricate a sense of *self* as a subject, an ultimately real agent by which we differentiate ourselves from others. In reality, there is no subject-object duality corresponding to conceptual nature. There is simply a series of momentary representations—dependent nature—that calcify into a separate sense of a self (*aham, vijñapti*).

Second, it is from these representations, the Yogācārin argues, that we fabricate a sense of objects as existing externally and objectively when there is no such reality. The objective mode, in which are included known beings (*sattva)* and objects (*artha*), is only the representational output of our own storehouse impressions masquerading as perceptual input. Beings and objects thus perceived are falsely believed to be existing dually and externally.

For Yogācāra, conceptual nature is an unreal mental fabrication (*asatakalpo*), since there is no reality that corresponds to the separation of an objectively real subject from the objectively real objects we imagine. It is also clear that the representations—dependent nature—provide the basis for the conceptual nature, since these mental representations are the basis for our ontological self-deception. We are decevied, specifically, by two forms of reification *(sgro 'dogs / samāropa)*: that which conceives of a real personal self (*gang zag gyi bdag 'dzin / pudgalātmāgrāha*), and that which conceives of the real self of phenomena *(chos kyi bdag 'dzin / dharmātmāgrāha).*

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5. Translated into Tibetan by Śāntibhadra and 'Gos lhas btsas.

6. *'sau yath khyāti sa kalpitaú /. . . kalpanāmātrabhāvataú // 2 // brtags pa tsam gyi dngos yin pas // . . . ji snang de kun brtags pa yin //2//*

On a Yogācāra account, conceptual nature is completely nonexistent, a "synonym *(rnam grangs)* of nonexistence *(med pa),*" as Asaṅga puts it. Such a position, Yogācāra maintains, is not nihilism (Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasaṁgraha Sems tsam* Ri 18b).[7] Rather, it is necessary to avoid any commitment to the alternative extreme of reification. Any view that justifies the existence of conceptual nature is inevitably committed, on the Yogācārin's account, to that extreme. Since the Madhyamaka argues that conceptual nature is real, the Yogācārin paints the Mādhyamika as reificationist. (The Mādhyamika, as we shall see, paint the Yogācārins as nihilistic on account of *their* characterization of conceptual nature.)

According to Yogācāra, the objects of conceptual nature (such as shape and colors) appear due to the force of "linguistic impressions" *(mngon brjod kyi bag chags / abhidhānavāsanā)*. Thus, these objects are only provisionally conceptual. Forms that are the objects of sensory cognitions, and forms that are the objects of thought conceiving such forms, come into existence due to the force of the linguistic impressions, or "impressions of the similar type" *(rigs mthun gyi bag chags / samakulavāsanā)*. All these forms—colors and shapes—are uniquely real objects *(gzugs rang mtshan pa)* and are therefore real dependent phenomena, not conceptual phenomena.

To the extent that phenomena such as the five aggregates exist as linguistic imputations—in terms of their identities *(ngo bo)* and their properties *(kyad par)*—there is no reification involved. Phenomenal identities (*x* and *y* are "forms," or "feelings," or "perceptions") and phenomenal characteristics (*z* is "the production of form," or "the production of feeling," or "the production of perception") are mere concepts, names, and signs.

Yogācāra considers this to be philosophically unproblematic, and not a reification. However, the failure to recognize conceptual nature as it is impels us to conceptually grasp merely conceptual things as more than than they are—as though they are, instead, uniquely or objectively real. We impart mere concepts, names, and signs with more reality than they warrant. It is this mistake that the Yogācārin argues is the extreme of reification: attributing a real self to phenomena that lack it.

For instance, if we believe that color is the uniquely real referent of the expression "this is form" (the statement of identity, *ngo bo*) or "this is the production of form" (the statement of property, *khya par*), we are guilty of

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7. *Sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das rnams kyis theg pa chen po shin tu rgyas pa bstan pa gang yin pa'i bstan pa der kun tu brtags pa'i ngo bo nyid ji ltar rig par bya zhe na, med pa'i rnam grangs [19a], bstan pas rig par bya'o, ,*

reifying or grasping the self of phenomenon. This reification is regarded as an obstruction to awakening knowledge *(shes bya'i sgrib pa)*.

In his *Mahāyāna Compendium (Mahāyānasaṁgraha, hereafter MS / Theg pa chen po bsdus pa)*, Asaṅga rebuts the reificationist position. Asaṅga begins by asking:

> How do we know that the character *(bdag nyid)* of dependent nature is not conceptual nature, as it appears to be? (*MS Sems tsam* Ri 18b)[8]

If the "reificationists" are correct about their ontology of unique reality, the character of dependent nature would become the same as conceptual nature because it appears that way— it appears as if the two are not two, but one.

But that, he argues, would be contradictory, for three reasons:

1. Thought would exist prior to name, which is not the case;
2. A single person would become many persons just because many names can be used to refer to a single person; and
3. A person may become a variable without a definite status because names that are used to refer to the person may be used variously *(nges pa med)* (Asaṅga, *MS, Sems tsam* Ri 18b).[9]

Vasubandhu's *Commentary on Mahāyāna Compendium (Theg pa chen po bsdus pa'i 'grel pa / Mahāyānasaṃgrahabhāṣya, hereafter MSBh*) explains the three arguments in greater detail. (Toh. 4050 *Sems tsam*, Ri, 150ab)[10] The first argument is that no entity is established prior to its name; therefore dependent nature and conceptual nature are necessarily different:

> Were it the case that dependent nature and conceptual nature become indistinguishably one, then the mind should be able to conceive the entity without relying upon any name. The fact,

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8. *Gzhan gyi dbang gi ngo bo nyid kun tu brtags pa'i ngo bo nyid du ji ltar snang ba de'i bdag nyid ma yin par cis mngon zhe na,*

9. *Ming gi snga rol na blo med pas de'i bdag nyid du 'gal ba dang, ming mang pos bdag mang por ba dang, ming nges pa med pas bdag 'dres par 'gal ba nyid kyi phyir ro, ,* Also see Asaṅga, *Sems tsam* Ri 18b: *'dir tshigs su bcad pa, ming gi snga rol blo med phyir, ,mang ba'i phyir dang ma nges phyir, ,de yi bdag nyid bdag mang dang, ,bdag 'dres 'gal bas grub par 'gyur, ,chos rnams med la dmigs pa dang, ,kun nas nyon mongs med rnam dag, ,sgyu ma la sogs pa med 'dra dang, ,de bzhin mkha' 'drar shes par bya, ,*

10. Translated into Tibetan by Atīśa Dīpaṁkaraśrījñāna and Tshul-khrims-rgyal-ba.

> however, is that without the name "vase," it is not possible for the mind to conceive the entity "vase." If however the name "vase" and the entity "vase" are characteristically indistinct, there is no reason for the mind not to be able to conceive the vase [without the name "vase." Since it is the case that the mind cannot conceive of the vase prior to the name "vase"] – the two are not identical. Therefore it is contradictory for name and referent *(don)* to be indistinguishable (Vasubandhu, *MSBh Sems tsam,* Ri, 150a).[11]

This argument can be stated slightly differently. Consider a referent *(gzhi)* for the linguistic term "vase": say, a hollow-centred, flat-bottomed object, bulbous and of greater height than width, that is used to hold liquids. If it were the case that this object is objectively established as the real referent of the term "vase," then the entity "vase" is already established prior to its naming as "vase." In this case the entity "vase" would not be linguistically dependent, for it would have existed as a "vase" without it being named so. If this conclusion is acceptable, then the thought "this is a vase" could arise with respect to the referent independently of the name that refers to it. That is, even prior to its naming as "vase," the hollow, flat-bottomed water container would be thought of as a "vase" on sight alone. Naming would be entirely uneccesary. Surely this is absurd, for such a thought does not arise absent prior familiarity with its name.

The second argument is that dependent nature and conceptual nature are distinct, because if they were not, then a single person would become many people because a single person can bear multiple epithets. (Vasbundhu, *MSBh Sems tsam*, Ri, 150ab)[12] Take the case of the Buddha himself, who is also referred to as Gautama, Tathāgata, Bhāgavān, Śākyamuni, Arhata, and so on. If the individual is established as the objectively real

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11. *De bstan pa ni ming gi sngo rol na blo med pa de'i bdag nyid du 'gal ba'i phyir zhes bya ba ste, gal te gzhan gyi dbang dang kun tu brtags pa dag gcig pa nyid du gyur na ming la ma ltos par blo don la 'jug par 'gyur te, ji ltar bum ba zhes bya ba'i ming med par ni bum pa'i don la bum pa'i blo 'byung bar mi 'gyur ro,,gal te yang bum pa zhes bya ba'i ming dang bum pa mtshan nyid gcig pa yin na ni de la 'jug par 'gyur na yang gang gi phyir mtshan nyid gcig pa ni ma yin pa nyid de, des na ming dang don de'i bdag nyid yin par 'gal bar 'gyur ro, ,*

12. *Yang 'dir ni ming ni gzhan gyi dbang yin la, don ni kun brtags pa nyid du rnam par gzhag ste, gang gi phyir ming gzhan gyi dbang gi stobs kyis don gcig la yang ming mang po kun tu rtog ste, gal te ming dang don dag mtshan nyid gcig pa nyid yin na des na ming bzhin du don yang mang po nyid du 'gyur ro,,de ltar gyur na don yang mang po'I bdag nyid du 'gyur bas don gcig mang po'i nyid kyang yin zhes bya ba ni 'di ltar 'gal ba nyid yin no, ,*

referent of these names, as the realist opponents assert, then *each* name demands its own uniquely real referent—each name will refer to a unique individual, rather than the same person, in this case the Buddha. And this is absurd, too (Vasubandhu, *MSBh Sems tsam*, Ri, 150b).[13]

The third argument is that dependent and conceptual nature must be dintinct, because if they were not, a single person would become a variable without a definite status because names are not single-use; the same name can be shared by distinct individuals (Vasubandhu, *MSBh Sems tsam*, Ri, 150b).[14] Unless dependent and conceptual nature are distinct, the individuals who share a single name would not be. Consider the case of two individuals named "Devadatta." If one accepts that there is an objective referent for linguistic expression, the name "Devadatta" would refer to both by virtue of the objective mode of existence; the name "Devadatta" would reflects its referents' objective reality. But if that were the case, because there is only one name, and because each name has only its unique objective reality as its referent, there can be only one individual. This, too, is absurd.

All three arguments demonstrate that things such as the colors, shapes, and sounds are not established as unique or objective referents upon which to designate linguistic terms such as "colors," "shapes," and "sounds." These arguments do not deny that things are referents of linguistic concepts, but do deny that things are *uniquely real objective referents* of thoughts, concepts, and language.

With these arguments, Yogācāra offers proof of the emptiness of conceptual nature, and therefore also proof of the unreality of external physical objects. Yogācāra concludes that conceptual nature is empty of being an uniquely real objective referent upon which to designate identity expressions such as "form" and "sound" and express properties such as "red form" and "pleasant sound" (Dorje, 2012: 462).[15]

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13. *Gzhan yang de dag ngo bo nyid gcig pa yin na 'gal ba gnyis pa 'dir yang thal bar 'gyur te, gang gi phyir go'i sgra [150b] don rnam pa bcu la 'jug par 'gyur ba lta bus ming la ni nges par med pa ma yin te, des na gal te ming dang don dag gcig pa nyid 'dod na ni don de gnyis kyi bdag nyid can yin pas 'gal ar 'gyur ro, ,*

14. *De ltar 'dod na skyon gsum la yang 'byung bar 'gyur te, gang gi phyir bag chags la sogs pa mtshan nyid can gyi ming gi don rnams gcig pa nyid du 'gyur ro,,don 'di nyid tshigs su bcad pas bstan pa la, grub par 'gyur zhes bya ba ni gzhan gyi dbang dang kun tu brtags pa dag gcig pa nyid du 'grub pa'o, ,*

15. *Ngo bo dang khyad par gyi tha snyad 'jug pa'i 'jug gzhir rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pas stong pa.*

This conclusion is not surprising, because the central thesis of Yogācāra philosophy is that what appears to be external reality is actually only the ideas, images, and creations of the mind, outside of which no corresponding object exists. The universe is a mental universe. All physical objects are fictions, unreal even conventionally, and similar to a dream or mirage in which all we seem to outwardly perceive has been inwardly produced. This claim, that only mind is conventionally real, is the focus of Yogācāra treatises, including Vasubandhu's fundamental treatise, the *Commentary on the Twenty Verses* (*Nyi shu pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa'i 'grel pe / Viṃśatikā-kārikāvṛtti, Viṃ)*. In it, Vasubandhu states:

> All this is indeed only consciousness, because of the appearance in it of nonexisting objects just like the vision of the nonexistent net of hairs, moons etc. by someone afflicted with an optical illusion (Toh. 4057. *Viṃ Sems tsam* Shi 3a).[16]

Nihilism: A Denial of Perfect and Dependent Natures

Yogācāra argues that the extreme of nihilism *(skur 'debs kyi mtha'),* on the other hand, is the view that conceives the lack of unique reality of the dependent *(paratantra / gzhan dbang)* and perfect *(pariniṣpanna / yongs grub)* natures. Asaṅga*'s Bodhisattvabhūmi* describes this as follows:

> A perfect entity that ultimately exists as inexpressible *(brjod du me med)* is the foundation upon which the representing words are designated. One who has drifted from *dharma-vinaya*, it is to be noted, is the one who is both nihilistic *(skur 'debs)* [about dependent nature] and one who undermines *(chud gzon par byed pa)* [the perfect nature] as utterly and completely nonexistent (Asaṅga *Bodhisattvabhūmi* IV, *Sems tsam* Wi 25b).[17]

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16. *'di dag rnam par rig tsam nyid // yod pa ma yin don snang phyir // dper na rab rib can dag gis // skra zla la sogs med mthong bzhin //1// Vijñaptimātramevaitadasadarthāvabhāsanāt / yathā taimirikasyāsatkeśacandrādidarśanam //* Vk_1 //

17. *'dogs pa'i tshig gi mtshan ma'i gzhi 'dogs pa'i tshig gi mtshan ma'i rten du gyur pa, brjod du med pa'i bdag nyid kyis don dam par yod pa yang dag pa'i dngos po la thams cad kyi thams cad du med do zhes skur pa 'debs shing chud gzon par byed pa gang yin pa 'di gnyis ni chos 'dul ba 'di las rab tu nyams pa yin par rig par bya'o, ,*

In this context, nihilism is not a simple denial of the perfect and the dependent natures, or the assertion that they are conventionally nonexistent. Here, nihilism is the view that specifically denies theses two natures' unique reality *(rang gi mtshan nyid kyi med pa)*.

Asaṅga, in his *Mahāyānasaṁgraha II,* defines dependent nature as:

> Cognition that, having its roots in the storehouse-consciousness, constitutes erroneous conceptions (*Sems tsam* Ri 13a).[18]

Vasubandhu, in his *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa II,* defines dependent nature as that which is (i) causally conditioned (*pratyayādhīnavṛttitvāt*) and (ii) the basis of both what incorrectly appears conventionally real and the unreal conceptual fabrication (*asatkalpa*) that gives rise to reified subjects and objects (*Sems tsam* Shi 10a).[19]

Dependent nature is "causally conditioned" because it exists due to the force of the subliminal "impressions" (*vāsanās*). By subliminal impressions (*vāsanās*), Yogācāra means latent representations contained in the "storehouse-consciousness" (*ālayavijñāna*).[20] These latent representations are reactivated in our consciousness under certain conditions, and serve as the intentional objects of cognitions. So conditioned, they arise as "what appears."

The use of the phrase "what appears" to describe dependent nature is significant in two ways. First, it is a reminder that all we have access to is appearance. Our cognitive access is limited to intentional objects; intentional objects are no more than mental representations; and representations are just manifest forms of the subliminal impressions. Although these representations are purely mental creations, the Yogācārin says, we engage with them dualistically, as though they exist as external realities.

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18. *De la gzhan gyi dbang gi mtsan nyid gang zhe na/ gang kun gzhi rnam par shes pa'i sa bon can yang dag pa ma yin pa kun rtog pas bsdus pa'i rnam par rig pa'o /*

19. *Yat khyāti paratantro . . . / pratyayādhīnavṛttitvāt . . . // 2 // (rkyen gyi dbang gis 'jug pa dang . . . gang zhig snang de gzhan dbang ste . . .* //2ac//)

20. Ālayavijñāna (storehouse-consciousness) is one of the most innovative and central ideas in Yogācāra idealism. In the storehouse-consciousness are contained series of dispositions or subliminal impressions *(vāsanās)* of various kinds, which, manifest as the material resources for the representations in five are sensory cognitions and the mental cognition *(manovijñāna)*.

Second, it is a reminder that every aspect of the entire world of appearance—appearance whose phenomenological presentation varies so wildly—are but figments of the central storehouse. Apart from those representations, which are simply consciousnesses masquerading as external objects, there is nothing real. Our reality is simply our projections being perceived by, and as apart from, the very mind that projected them.

Given that dependent nature is actually free from duality, the conceptual nature that appears dual is a mere superimposition upon it. Accordingly, the nondual perfect nature (*pariniṣpanna*) is dependent nature's ultimate reality. Thus the *Discourse Unravelling Intent* (*Ārya-saṃdhinirmocana-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra // 'phags pa dgongs pa nges par 'grel pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo)* defines perfect nature as "reality as it is: the intentional object of a pure consciousness" (Toh. D 106. *Mdo sde*, Ca 35b).[21]

Vasubandhu, in his *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*, defines "perfect nature (*pariniṣpanna)* as the eternal, unalterable absence of 'as it appears' from 'what appears'" (*TSN* 3, *Sems tsam* Chi 10a).[22] "What appears" is dependent nature, composed of a series of mental representations. "As it appears" is conceptual nature: the fabrication of subjects and objects from that dependent series. The representations (i.e., dependent nature) appear to cognition as though possessed of a subject-object duality of which they are actually wholly devoid. The perfect nature is thus the negation of conceptual nature—imagined duality—superimposed upon "natureless" dependent nature.

Since the conceptual nature is dual, the perfect nature in which it is absent is nondual. "The non-duality of the dependent nature is the reality (*dharmatā*)," explains Vasubandhu (*TSN* 4, *Sems tsam* Chi 10a).[23] That is, the perfect nature of nonduality is an *inalienable* characteristic of consciousness. This is the sense in which Vasubandhu's earlier definition (*TSN* 3) of perfect nature describes the absence of imagined duality from appearance as "unalterable." The perfect nature's nonduality is a basic

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21. *De bzhin nyid rnam par dag pa'i dmigs pa gang lags pa de ni yongs su grub pa'i mtsan nyid lags te / de la brten nas bcom ldan 'das chos rnams kyi don dam pa'i ngo bo nyid ma mchis pa de nyid las gcig 'dogs par mdzad lags so //*

22. *Tasya khyāturyathākhyānaṃ yā sadāvidyamānatā /jñeyaú sa pariniṣpannasvabhāvo 'nanyathātvataḥ // 3 // (Gang snang de yi ji ltar snang // rtag tu med pa gang yin de // gzhan du 'gyur med ces bya bas // yongs su grub pa'i rang bzhin yin //3//)*

23. *Tasya kā nāstitā tena yā tatrādvayadharmatā //* 4cd *// (De la de med gang yin pa // de nyid de yi gnyis med chos //*4cd*//)*

ontological fact: the perfect nature has always been, is now, and must always be free from subject-object duality.

As Maitreyanātha argues in the *Separation of the Middle from Extremes (Madhyāntavibhaṅgakārikā*), perfect nature is reality as it is (*tathatā*), for, whether or not there is a Buddha perceiving reality as such, the reality of things remains constant (Toh. 4021. *Sems tsam* Phi 41a).[24]

Vasubandhu, in his *Viṃśakārikāvṛtti,* describes perfect nature as "indescribable by nature" *(abhilāpyenātmanāḥ*) and an "object of the [knowledge] of buddhas" (*buddhānāṃ viṣya*)—that is, an object of supermundane cognition free from deluded mental constructions of ordinary cognition" (Toh. 4057. Viṁ.10, *Sems tsam* Shi, 6b).[25] Since it is mental fabrications (*lokottara-nirvikalpa-jñāna*) that underwrite the conceptual subject-object duality, it is in the knowledge transcending those fabrications that one directly sees the falsity of that duality (*ViṃV* 33, *Sems tsam* Shi 8b).[26]

The indescribable perfect nature is, in the same text, identified with emptiness (*śūnyatā*): the nonself of all dharmas (*dharmanairātmya*) and persons (*pudgalanairātmya*).

> In this way we develop [the understanding of] of the non-self of person. And yet in another way we develop the understanding of the non-self of the dharmas (*Viṃ*V2, *Sems tsam* Shi 3b).[27]

The Yogācāra recognizes two types of emptiness of the latter, of dharma, or form. First, form is empty of being established as the uniquely real referent of the thought that conceives "form" *(gzugs rang 'dzin rtog pa'i*

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24. *Stong pa nyid ni mdor bsdu na // de bzhin nyid dang yang dag mtha' // mtshan ma med dang don dam dang // chos kyi dbyings ni rnam grangs so // gzhan min phyin ci log ma yin // de 'gog 'phags pa'i spyod yul dang // 'phags pa'i chos kyi rgyu yi phyir//rnam grangs don te go rims bzhin //*

25. *Gang byis pa rnams kyis chos rnams kyi rang bzhin kun brtags pa'i bdag nyid des de dag bdag med kyi sangs rgyas kyi yul gang yin pa brjod du mad pa'i bdag nyid kyis ni med pa ma yin no //*

26. *Gang gi tse de'i gnyen po 'jig rten las 'das pa rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes thob nas sang par gyur pa de'i tse de'i rjes las thob pa dag pa 'jig rten pa'i ye shes de mngon du gyur nas yul med par ji lta ba bzhin du khong du chud de de ni mtsungs so //*

27. *Tathā pudgalanairātmyapraveśo hi anyathā punaú / deśanā dharmanairātmyapraveśaú . . . //*10 // (*de ltar gang zag bdag med par // 'jug par 'gyur ro gzhan du yang // bstan pas chos la bdag med par // 'jug 'gyur . . . //*10//)

zhen gzhir rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pas stong pas stong nyid). Second, form is empty of being substantially distinct from the cognitive process by which "form" is conceived *(gzugs rang 'dzin tshad ma dang rdas tha dad kyis stong pa'i stong nyid)*.[28]

These two forms of emptiness demonstrate, the Yogācārins argue: (i) the ultimate truth of all phenomena, (ii) that emptiness is invariably perfect *('gyur med yongs grub)*, and (iii) that it is the ultimate domain of right-path's engagement *(rnam dag lam gyi dmigs pa mthar thug)*.

Yogācāra's rationale for the identification of the indescribability of reality and the insubstantiality of all things is that a substantial conception of self (*ātman*) and phenomena presupposes a subject-object duality, in which the self is the subject and phenomena the objects of experience. It is impossible to sustain a conception of self and things as existing substantially without also believing the two to be substantially different. A correct knowledge of the nonself of all dharmas and persons thus negates the interlinked conceptions that self and object are substantial *and* that they are dual. An understanding of the emptiness of phenomenal self *(dharmanairātmya)* and personal self *(pudgalanairātmya)* is therefore *itself* a realization of nonduality. Such a realization, according to Vasubandhu, is like awakening from a deep slumber of ignorance (*ViṃV 33 Sems tsam* Shi 8b).[29]

In the *Thirty Verses (Triṃśikākārikā, Triṃ)*, Vasubandhu also equates perfect nature with mere-consciousness:

> This is the ultimate (*paramārtha*) of the dharmas, and so it is the reality (*tathatā*) too. Because its reality is like this all the time, it is mere consciousness.[30]

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28. Although they are both recognized as the realities, or selflessnesses, of the phenomena *(chos kyi bdag med)*, some claim the latter to be subtler than the former. Others deny any subtle difference between the two for the reason that both are subtle selflessnesses of the phenomena; they, however, do admit a difference between the two in terms of the difficulty in approaching and grasping the concepts.

29. *Gang gi tse de'i gnyen po 'jig rten las 'das pa rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes thob nas sang par gyur pa de'i tse de'i rjes las thob pa dag pa 'jig rten pa'i ye shes de mngon du gyur nas yul med par ji lta ba bzhin du khong du chud de de ni mtsungs so //*

30. *Triṃ* 25, *Sems tsam* Shi 3b: *Dharmāṇāṃ paramārthaśca sa yatastathatāpi saú / sarvakālaṃ tathābhāvāt saiva vijñaptimātratā // 25 // Chos kyi don gyi dam pa'ang de // 'di ltar de bzhin nyid kyang de // dus rnams kun na'ang de bzhin nyid // de nyid rnam par rig pa tzam //25//*

Sthiramati, in his *Commentary on the Thirty Verses* (*Triṃśikābhāṣya / Sum bcu pa'i 'grel pa*), reads "ultimate" in the previous verse (*paramārtha*) as referring to "the world-transcending knowledge" (*lokottara-nirvikalpa-jñāna*), in that there is nothing that surpasses it:

> Since it is the object of [the transcendent knowledge], it is the ultimate. It is like space in having the same taste everywhere. It is the perfect nature, which is stainless and unchangeable. Therefore, it is known as the "ultimate." (Toh. 4064. *Sems tsam* Shi 169ab)[31]

In other words, for the Yogācārin, the ultimate reality simply is *perfect* nature, which is emptiness, the object of cognition of the transcendent mind, and consciousness in its nondual and nonconceptual natural state. As Maitreyanātha puts it, ultimate truth takes three primary forms: as emptiness, it is the ultimate object; as nirvāṇa, it is the ultimate attainment; and as nonconceptual knowledge, it is the ultimate realization (*Madhyāntavibhaṅgakārikā, Sems tsam* Phi 42b).[32]

We have seen that the dependent and the conceptual natures together supply Yogācāra's position on conventional reality, while the perfect nature supplies it position on ultimate reality. An important qualification, though, is that while conceptual nature is constitutive of conventional truth, it remains *imaginary*—false even by empirical and practical standards. Dependent nature alone is conventionally real, and perfect nature alone is ultimately real.

We have seen that for Yogācāra, nihilism is the view that denies the dependent and perfect natures' unique reality *(rang gi mtshan nyid kyi med pa),* intrinsic reality *(rang ngos nas med pa),* and ultimate existence *(don dam par med pa)*. But who do they accuse of subscribing to this form of nihilism? We turn now to their critique of Madhyamaka.

The Yogācāra Critique of Madhyamaka

Here, Yogācāra's adversaries are not the usual suspects—the Hindus, Vaibhāṣikas, and Sautrāntikas. Its adversaries are all fellow Mahāyānists: the

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31. *Dam pa ni 'jig rten las 'das pa'i ye shes te / bla na med pa'i phyir ro // de'i don ni dam pa'o // yang na nam mkha' ltar thams cad du ro gcig pa dang /dri ma med pa dang mi 'gyur ba'i chos yongs su grub pa ste / don dam pa zhes bya 'o//*

32. *Don dang thob dang sgrub pa ni // don dam rnam pa gsum du 'dod //*

Mādhyamikas, and in particular the Prāsaṅgika subschool, which rejects in all circumstances *svalakṣaṇa*, the concept of unique reality.

This is made quite obvious in Asaṅga's *Compendium of the Ascertainment of the Grounds of the Yogic Deeds (Yogācārabhūmi-viniścayasaṃgrahanī YVS / rnal 'byor spyod pa'i sa rnam par gtan la dbab pa bsdu ba)*, where he explicitly criticizes the Madhyamaka doctrine of the two truths:

> Some Mahāyānists, under the spell of their own error, claim: "All exist conventionally. All do not exist ultimately." I ask them this: "What is the ultimate *(don dam pa)*? What is the conventional *(kun rdzob)*?"
>
> They reply by saying: "The fact that all things are empty of inherent reality is itself the ultimate *(ngo bo nyid med pa)*, and the conventional is the objectification of inherent reality of things that are [by nature] empty of inherent reality. Why? Because conventionality consists of those entities that are in fact inherently unreal, yet are labelled *('dogs pa)*, expressed *(mngon par 'rjod pa)*, and taken for granted as linguistic convention" (Asaṅga, *YVS*, Toh. 4038. *Sems tsam* Shi 42b).[33]

Although Asaṅga does not explicitly name his adversary here, his characterization of the theory he attacks makes it clear that it is the Mādhyamika. After all, it is the Mādhyamika that posits ultimate truth as ultimately devoid of any inherent *(ngo bo nyid)* or unique reality *(rang gi mtshan nyid)*, and who posits conventional truth as cognitive processes *(kun rdzob)* erroneously grasping the inherent or unique reality of things that utterly lack it. Under the spell of this conventional cognitive error, we, the Mādhyamikas say, use designations *('dogs pa)*, expressions *(mngon par 'rjod pa)*, and linguistic convention *(tha snyad)*.

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33. *Theg pa chen po pa la la rang gi nye bar bzung nas 'di skad ces kun rdzob tu ni thams cad yod la, don dam par ni thams cad med do zhes zer ro; ,de la 'di skad ces tshe dang ldan pa don dam pa ni gang yin, kun rdzob ni gang yin zhes brjod par bya'o, ,de skad ces dris pa na, gal te de 'di skad ces chos thams cad kyi ngo bo nyid med pa gang yin pa de ni don dam pa yin la, ngo bo nyid med pa'i chos de dag la ngo bo nyid du dmigs pa gang yin pa de ni kun rdzob yin no, ,de ci'i phyir zhe na, 'di ltar de ni yod pa ma yin pa dag la kun rdzob tu byed pa dang, 'dogs pa dang, mngon par brjod pa dang, tha snyad du byed pa'I phyir ro zhes lan 'debs par gyur na,*

The actual refutation of the Madhyamaka is presented in two ways: as a refutation of Madhyamaka's conventionality, and as a refutation of Madhyamaka's ultimacy.

First, in order to refute Madhyamaka's account of conventionality, Yogācāra seeks to determine whether or not the Mādhyamika posits conventional truth from the perspective of mundane cognitive process, and whether or not those cognitive processes are produced from causes of their own kind *(rigs 'dra snga ma'i rgyu)*—linguistic expressions *(mngon par brjod pa)*.

If the Mādhyamikas admit they are produced by causes of their own kind, then, the Yogācārins argue, such cognition could not be ultimately *un*established *(don dam par ma grub pa ma yin par thal)*. Ultimately real things, according to the Yogācārin, are only those that are causally produced. For instance, because dependent phenomena—such as seeds, sprouts, minds, and mental factors—arise dependently from their respective causes and conditions, they arise with their own unique realities *(rang gi mtshan nyid kyi grub pa skye ba)*. This is what Yogācāra calls "ultimate production," since this way of production coheres with its mode of existence *(don gi gnas tshod la yod pa'i skye ba)*. Asaṅga's *Yogācārabhūmi Viniścayasaṃgrahanī* states:

> Does [the Mādhyamika] accept the objectification of inherent reality *(ngo bo nyid du dbmigs pa)* to be a product of linguistic expressions *(mngon brjod)* and conventional *(kun rdzob)* causes? Or, does the Mādhyamika accept it to be merely linguistic expressions and convention? If it is asserted that [the objectification of inherent reality] is a product of linguistic expressions and conventional causes, then it could not be said to be "nonexistent" *(yod pa ma yin no)*, since it is a product of its linguistic and conventional causes. If it is maintained that [the object of inherent reality] is merely a linguistic expression and convention, it could not have any basis. Were that the case, even the so-called "linguistic" and "conventional" would not be appropriate. (*YVS Sems tsam* Zi 42b–43a)[34]

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34. *Ngo bo nyid du dmigs pa de / mngon par brjod pa dang kun rdzob kyi rgyu las byung par 'dod dam / 'on te mngon par brjod pa dang / kun rdzob tsam yin par 'dod / gal te ngon par brjod pa dang / kun rdzob kyi rgyu las byung pa yin na ni de na mngon par brjod pa dang / kun rdzob kyi rgyu las byung pa yin pas yod pa ma yin no zhes bya bar mi rung ngo // gal te mngon par brjod pa dang / kun rdzob tsam zhig yin na ni des na gzhi med par brjod pa dang / kun rdzob ces bya par mi rung ngo //*

If the Mādhyamikas hold that the unique reality of causes and conditions fail to produce uniquely real effects, then they would be forced to conclude, the Yogācārins reason, that a production of an effect from causes and conditions is impossible. But this would fall foul of observable fact. After all, the Yogācārins say, conventional production of effects from their causes is everywhere observed. If productions of effects from their causes are as unreal as the Mādhyamikas claim they are, all empirical observations of real effects produced from real causes would be no more than epistemic frauds, akin to mistaking a coil of rope for a snake.

We empirically observe the productions of effects from causes. Therefore, it must follow that the uniquely real causes and conditions are causally efficient, since they produce their uniquely real effects. This observation is proof, the Yogācārin argues, of the existence of ultimately real production *(don dam par skye be yod par grub)*. It is for this reason that Dharmakīrti, in the chapter on *Pratyakṣa* (*mngon sum le'u)* of the *Elucidating Verses of Right-cognition (Pramāmaṇavārttika / Tshad ma rnam 'grel)*, says:

> If all [entities] are causally inefficient, how is it that we observe sprouts being efficiently produced by the seeds. If you accept this conventionally, how could it be [causally inefficient]? (Toh. 4210. *Tshad ma* Ce 94b)[35]

The second Yogācāra refutation of the Madhyamaka, in terms of the ultimate, needs to be understood within the framework of dependent nature *(paratantra-svabhāva)*. According to Madhyamaka, dependent nature is ultimately empty of any unique reality *(svalakṣaṇa / rang mtshan)*; ultimate truth is simply the emptiness of the dependent nature. Yogācāra rejects this claim by appealing to *pramāṇa*, epistemically reliable cognitions, which, it says, present us with the unique reality of dependent nature. If dependent nature is empty of any unique reality (as the Mādhyamika claims), there should be no reason for mundane reliable cognitions to present us the exitence of unique reality. But mundane reliable cognitive processes do present us this unique reality, and so verify its existence. Thus, the Yogācārin argues, dependent nature has inherent reality, and it is unreasonable for the Mādhyamika to deny it in the face of the evidence presented by mundane cognition.

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35. *Sa bon sogs ni myug sogs la,, nus mthong gal te de kun rdzob,, 'dod na ci ste de ltar 'gyur, ,*

At the philosophical core of the Yogācāra critique of Madhyamaka is the contention, as Prof. Sema Dorje puts it, that any cognition lacking "unique reality is a nonexistence."[36]

If Madhyamaka insists on rejecting the unique reality of even false cognitions, there cannot be any good reason to affirm ultimate truth as the emptiness of said unique reality.

Even though mundane cognitions reify the existence of unique reality, the emptiness of unique reality could not be regarded as the ultimate, for there is, on the Madhyamaka account, no *pramāṇa* or cognitive instrument that can affirm that ultimate truth. Since all cognitive processes are unreal and deceptive (therefore *apramāṇas*), even the cognitive apprehension of unique reality must not be uniquely real.

Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva's Grounds (Byang chub sems dpa'i sa / Bodhisattvabhūmi, hereafter BSB)* refutes one particular view as nihilistic. This view, according to Asaṅga, is that:

> All is merely conceptual designations *(thams cad ni btags pa tsam du zad)*, and this is the reality *(de ni de kho na yin no)*. Whoever sees this has a right view. (Asaṅga, *BSB IV, Sems tsam*, Wi, 26a)[37]

According to Asaṅga, if all is mere designation, no entity could be an acceptable designatum, a basis of designation. Absent a designatum, the process of its designation would be impossible. Absent designatum and designation, reality can hardly be said to be "merely" designated. This view, which deprecates both reality and designations, should, Asaṅga argues, be considered a primary view of nonexistence (Asaṅga, *BSB IV, Sems tsam*, Wi, 26a).[38] Although Asaṅga does not name his opponent, the view he targets here and rejects as nihilistic appears to be the Prāsaṅgika. But, as we shall see later, if so, the refutation is flawed. The view the Prāsaṅgika holds does *not* reject designatum and designation outright, only their intrinsic reality. We now turn to Madhyamaka's critique of Yogācāra.

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36. Sempa Dorje, *Grub mtha' snying po kun las btus pa lung rigs snye ma*: 455: *Blo 'khrul ba nyid rang mtshan gyis med pa med dgos pa 'di ba'i rtsa ba grub mtha' yin pas so //*

37. *Thams cad ni btags pa tsam du zad de, , 'de ni de kho na yin no, , su 'de ltar lta ba de ni yang dag par lta ba yin no zhes de ltar lta zhing de skad smra'o, ,*

38. *De dag gi ltar na 'dogs pa'i gzhi'i dngos po tsam yang med pas, , 'dogs pa de nyid kyang thams cad kyi thams cad du med par 'gyur na, , btags pa tsam gyi de kho nya yod par ga la 'gyur te, btags pa dang, de kho nan yid la skur ba btab pas na, med pa lta ba'I gtso bo yin par rig par bya'o, ,*

The Svātantrika Critique of Yogācāra

Bhāvavevika, in his *Verses on the Essence of Middle Way* (*dBu ma'i snying po'i tshig l'hur byas pa / Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā, hereafter MHK*), first attacks the Yogācāra claim that conceptual nature *(kun rtags pa'i ngo bo nyid)* lacks unique reality *(rang gi mtshan nyid ngo bo nyid med pa)* on account of being conceptually fabricated, like the coil of rope mistaken for a snake.

> [Yogācāra's claim that] conceptual [nature] is nonexistent is unacceptable because it is not like the imputed snake *(btags phyir)* [on a coiled rope]. Moreover, it is uncertain if it is an entity like the rope as it is contradicted by ordinary convention. (Bhāviveka's *MHK, dBu ma* Dza 22na)[39]

Glossing this text in his *Blazes of Reasoning* (*Tarkajvālā /Rtog ge 'bar ba)*,[40] Bhāvavevika argues that conceptual nature is not nonexistent like the imputed snake. He illustrates this point by questioning the Yogācāra claim:

(1) Do you assert that because conceptual nature is like the imputed snake, it therefore lacks unique reality *(rang gyi mtshan nyid)*?
(2) Or, do you assert instead that because conceptual nature is an object of conceptual cognition like a coiled rope, it therefore lacks unique reality?

Bhāviveka says that neither position is acceptable. Conceptual nature could not lack unique reality, otherwise it would become nonexistent, which it patently is not. The coiled rope could not lack unique reality, because it is contradicted by ordinary convention *('jig rten grags pas gnod)*, according to which ropes are accepted (Bhāvavevika, *Tarkajvālā, dBu ma* dZa 214b).[41] According to Bhāvavevika, anything that exists must

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39. *Kun brtags yod pa ma yin te, ,brtags phyir sbrul dang 'drar mi 'dod, ,thag pa'i dngos por ma nges phyir, , yang na grags pa gnod par 'gyur, ,*

40. Bhāvavevika, *Blazes of Reasoning*, 40b–329b.

41. *Zhes bya ba ni brtags pa yin pa'i phyir zhes bya bas ci re zhig sbrul bzhin du kun brtags pa'I ngo bo nyid mtshan nyid ngo bo nyid med pa nyid du 'gyur ram, 'on te rnam par rtog pa dang bcas pa'i shes pa'i yul yin pa'i phyir thag pa'i dngos po bzhin du kun brtags pa'i ngo bo nyid mtshan nyid yod par 'gyur ba ma nges pa'i phyir ro, ,gal te thag par yang rang gi ngo bo nyid du yod pa ma yin no zhe na, de lta na grags pas gnod par 'gyur te, 'di ltar 'jig rten na chu dang thag pa dang rgyu dang lag pa dang mi'i rtzol bas bkal ba'i thag pa yod pa nyid du grags pa'i phyir ro,,*

be *conventionally* uniquely real *(svalakṣaṇa)*. Anything that lacks unique reality conventionally must not exist at all (even conventionally). Because conceptual nature exists, Bhāvavevika reasons, it must therefore be conventionally uniquely real. However, Yogācāra denies conceptual nature's unique reality even conventionally, and therefore, from Bhāvavevika's Madhyamaka perspective, Yogācāra is nihilistic about conceptual nature.

Bhāviveka next addresses the Yogācāra claim that external objects are nonexistent because they are conceptual fictions, and that they appear objectively real *(don gyi mtshan ma snang)* only on account of language—names *(ming)* and terms *(rda)*—from which all concepts arise. According to Bhāviveka, the Yogācāra argument that concepts arise from language is a strategy linked to their broader idealist claim. It is used:

> in order to deny the [external] objects. Without language there arise no defilements and no name will have its referential objects. But animals without any linguistic skills give rise to defilements. (Bhāvavevika's *MHK dBu ma dZa* 22a)[42]

Bhāviveka argues that it is not necessary that concepts should always arise from linguistic convention. After all, he says, animals give rise to various defiled, emotional concepts such as fear, hate, and love. If concepts only arise from language, then we would have to deny that animals have any conceptual thoughts and emotions (so, too, we might add, prelinguistic human children). Since animals lacking linguistic capability nevertheless use concepts and give rise to a range of emotions, there must be an objective (i.e., extralinguistic) reality from which such concepts arise. And that objective reality, Bhāvavevika says, is simply the unique reality of external objects such as colors and shapes that are conventionally uniquely real.

Bhāviveka questions the unique reality of dependent nature by asking how the Yogācāra school asserts the unique reality of the dependent nature:

(1) Does it claim that dependent nature is uniquely real *conventionally*?
(2) Or, does it claim that dependent nature is uniquely real *ultimately*?

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42. *Rnam pa kun tu yul 'gog phyir, ,de med par yang kun nyon mongs, ,ming las don 'jug las 'byung min, ,smra mi shes pa'i dud 'gro yang, ,nyon mongs skye ba mthong phyir ro; ,*

> If the existence of dependent nature is established conventionally, [I too say it is so] established. If however its existence is [asserted to be established] ultimately, there is no example [to be produced] and the reason is contradictory (Bhāvavevika's *MHK dBu ma* dZa 22b).[43]

Bhāviveka, of course, would agree with Yogācāra, were its claim that dependent nature's unique reality is established conventionally. Bhāviveka's Svātantrika Madhyamaka holds this view: dependent nature is, he says, established as uniquely real *(svalakṣaṇa)*, but only conventionally. Unique reality on the conventional level, he argues, is what gives dependent nature its causal and functional efficacy. This ontological commitment not only does not entail reification, he says, but is necessary to avoid falling into the alterntative extreme of nihilism. From Bhāvavevika's perspective, his fellow Mādhyamikas, the Prāsaṅgikas, fall into the extreme of nihilism on account of their refusal to make this commitment, and deny unique reality entirely.

It is with the second possibility—that Yogācāra claims that dependent nature is *ultimately* established as a unique reality—that Bhāviveka forcefully disagrees. If dependent nature is *ultimately* attributed unique reality (*svalakṣaṇa)*, then, from Bhāvavevika's Svātantrika-Madhyamaka standpoint, Yogācāra falls into the extreme of reification. It is not possible, he says, for the Yogācāra to produce a valid argument showing that dependent nature possesses an ultimately established unique reality. It is not possible to produce an example of an entity that, while arising dependently, also exists ultimately, which is to say, independently—the two plainly contradict. For anything to exist ultimately is for that thing not to stand in any causal relation. Therefore, it is impossible for that which is ultimately established as a unique reality to also arise from its causes and conditions.

Similarly, Bhāviveka rejects the Yogācāra view that perfect nature *(yongs grub kyi ngo bo)*—nondual reality *(gnyis stong gyi de kho na nyid)*—is established *ultimately (don dam par 'dod pa)*. In his *MHK*, he says:

> If the reality of the existent and nonexistent entities is ultimate, how could there be freedom from the extremes of reification and nihilism? (Bhāviveka, *MHK*5 *dBu ma* dZa 22b)[44]

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43. *Gzhan dbang yod pa nyid smras pa, ,kun rdzob tu ni grub pa sgrub; ,gal te don dam dpe med cing, ,gtan tshigs 'gal ba nyid du 'gyur, ,*

44. *Yod dang med pa'i dngos nyid kyi, ,ngo bo don dam nyid yin na, ,sgro 'dogs pa dang skur mtha' las, ,grol ba khyod la ji ltar yod, ,*

If perfect nature is established ultimately, the following absurd consequences would arise, according to Bhāviveka:

First, if perfect nature (or nondual reality) entails that which is already ultimately established, it cannot escape the extreme of reification *(sgro 'dogs kyi mtha')*, for to posit the ultimate reality of anything is already a form of reification.

Second, if perfect nature entails ultimately establishing that which is not previously ultimately established, it cannot escape the extreme of nihilism *(skur 'debs kyi mtha')*, because it implies a nihilist view of what came *before* perfect nature is ultimately established.

Third, if perfect nature is ultimately established, the wisdom realising nondual reality would in fact be a dualistic experience, for it would entail the cognitive experience of the object (apart from the subject) that is ultimately real.

Finally, if perfect nature is ultimately established, a perfect awakening to the realisation of the same nature of all things *(mnyam nyid)* would be impossible, for each awakening process would involve different ultimately established objects (Bhāviveka, MHK5 *dBu ma* dza 23b).[45]

All these critiques stem from Bhāviveka's Madhyamaka stance that all things lack ultimate reality *(don dam par bden pa)* and unique reality, and that causal efficacy *(don byed nus pa)* is a function not of ultimately uniquely real phenomena, but of illusory and dependently originated phenomena.

In the *Grand Commentary on the Lamp of Wisdom (Shes rab sgron ma rgya cher 'grel ba / Prajñāpradīpaṭīkā) of the Avaloketavṛtti (Span ras gzigs rtul zhugs)*, we read:

> According to the way of the Mahāyāna-Madhyamaka, mundane convention *(kun rdzob kyi tha snyad)* consists of the dependent origination of external and internal phenomena. Unexamined, they appear imposing *(ma rtags gcig pu na mnyams dga' ba)*, yet they are functionally efficient despite being merely illusory. Those who are attached to the ultimate reality of mundane convention revolve around the triple saṃsāric spheres, and so continue the bondage of afflictive defilements. Those who are, on account of being *un*attached to this [i.e, mundane convention]

45. *Ston pa dmigs med mi 'gyur te, ,de bzhin nyid la dmigs pa'i phyir, ,byang chub mnyam nyid mi 'gyur te, ,de nyid rang snang tha dad phyir, ,*

> and realising its ultimate unreality *(don dam par ngo bo nyid med par shes pas)*, destroy the saṃsāric seed, and go on to attaining, without much difficulty, the great unbinding nirvāṇic happiness. This is the way in which the perfection of wisdom is expounded by exponents of the Madhyamaka path *(dbu ma'i lam smra ba)* including Ācārya Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Bhāviveka, Buddhapālita. (*Avaloketavṛtti,* Toh. 3859. *dBu ma* Za 84ab)[46]

Mādhyamikas argue that dependently originated physical (i.e., "external") objects and nonphysical (i.e., "internal") objects are causally efficient not just in spite of being, but *because* of being ultimately unreal *(don dam par ngo bo nyid med par shes)*.

In short, the Svātantrika critiques of Yogācāra's three-nature theory are made in the service of their claim that the three natures are causally effective because they possess intrinsic reality conventionally, while lacking it ultimately. To the extent Yogācārins deny conceptual nature's causal efficacy (by denying its intrinsic reality conventionally), they are, the Svātantrika say, nihilists. On the other hand, to the extent that they claim that dependent and perfect nature possess intrinsic reality ultimately, they are, the Svātantrika say, reificationists. From the Svātantrika standpoint, everything is empty of intrinsic reality ultimately.

Finally, we turn to the Prāsaṅgika critiques of Yogācāra and Svātantrika.

The Prāsaṅgika Critiques of Yogācāra and Svātantrika

From the Prāsaṅgika point of view the Svātantrika critique of Yogācāra is just as problematic as the Yogācāra position itself. Bhāviveka's critique, the Prāsaṅgika argue, reveals him to be a reificationist because he is committed to *svalakṣaṇa* conventionally.

We have seen that Bhāviveka argues that conceptual nature is established as *svalakṣaṇa*. He says anything that is not established as *svalakṣaṇa*

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46. *Theg pa chen po'i dbu ma pa'i tshul 'di la kun rdzob kyi tha snyad du ni phyi dang nang gi rten cing rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba ma brtags gcig pu na nyams dga' ba sgyu ma tsam du bya ba byed nus par yod [84b] cing de la mngon par zhen pas ni srid pa gsum du 'khor zhing kun nas nyon mongs pa'i rgyun kyang 'brel par 'gyur la, de la mngon par ma zhen cing don dam par ngo bo nyid med par shes pas ni srid pa'i sa bon 'gag cing mi gnas pa'i mya ngan las 'das pa'i bde ba chen po yang thob pa med pa'i tshul gyis 'thob par 'gyur te, de ni, slob dpon klu sgrub kyi zhal snga nas dang, 'phags pa lha dang, legs ldan 'byed dang, bud dha p'a li ta la sogs pa theg pa chen po dbu ma pa'i lam smra ba rnams kyis shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tsul bstan pa yin no, ,*

is simply nonexistent. Conceptual nature, on account of existing at all, he argued, must therefore be established as *svalakṣaṇa*. It was for this reason that Bhāvavevika charged Yogācāra with nihilism for denying conceptual nature the *svalakṣaṇa* he granted it. To deny *svalakṣaṇa*, even conventionally, was tantamount to denying conceptual nature's very existence, he argued.

From the Prāsaṅgika point of view, though Yogācāra and Svātantrika divide the three natures in different ways, they share two underlying philosophical positions that lead them to both extremes.

Prāsaṅgika argues that both Yogācāra and Svātantrika are guilty of the extreme of reificationism, because they share the position that, where the three natures exist and are functionally efficient, they are so on account of their established *svalakṣaṇa*.

Similarly, Prāsaṅgika argues that both Yogācāra and Svātantrika are guilty of the extreme of nihilism, because they share the position that, where the three natures are not established as *svalakṣaṇas*, they do not exist, and so lack even conventional functional efficiency.

Prāsaṅgika by contrast, argues that all three natures exist on an equal ontological and epistemological footing. The three natures are *equally* empty of intrinsic reality, both conventionally and ultimately. All three are dependently originated, and what is dependently originated is causally effective. And all three natures are nothing more or less than conceptual designations. Dependent and perfect natures are as linguistically and conceptually relational as is conceptual nature.

This is the Prāsaṅgika "middle-way" stance. In the *Four Hundred Verses* (*Catuḥśatakaṭīkā, hereafter CŚṬ),* Candrakīrti argues that all realities are:

> like the snake which is conceptually imputed on the coiled ropes, the [realities] that exist due to the existence of the concepts *(rtog pa)* and do not exist due to the absence of the concepts and are indeed not established through their intrinsic nature (*CŚṬ dBu ma* Ya: 133a).[47]

Nāgārjuna, in his *Śūnyatāsaptatikārikā (ŚSK),* explains this point by well-known analogy. Suppose the Buddha (the Bhāgavān-Tathāgata) is able to

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47. *De'i phyir gang dag rtog pa yod pa kho nas yod pa nyid dang, rtog pa med par yod pa nyid med pa de dag ni gor ma chag par thag pa bsngogs pa la brtags pa'i sbrul ltar rang gi ngo bos ma grub par nges so, ,*

generate an emanation *(sprul pa)* of himself, which then generates another emanation.

> Since the original emanation displayed by the Tathāgata is empty of intrinsic reality, there is hardly any need to mention that the emanation generated by the emanation is likewise empty. The two [emanations] exist only *merely nominally (ming tsam yod pa)*. Whatever forms they may take *(gang ci'ang rung te)*, they are *mere concepts (rtog pa tsam)*. (*ŚSK*41, *dBu ma* Tsa 25b)[48]

Tathāgata emanations, Nāgārjuna argues, exist merely nominally *(ming tsam yod pa)*, as mere concepts *(rtog pa tsam)*, for they are fundamentally empty; they are not intrinsically real Tathāgatas. Candrakīrti, in his *Śūnyatāsaptativṛtti (ŚSV*41*)*, concurs, explaining that the emanation generated from the emanation generated by the actual *(yang dag pa)* Tathāgatā itself is empty, for it lacks Tathāgatā's intrinsic reality *(rang bzhin)*. On Candrakīrti's reading,[49] the designation "emanations" is in fact devoid of any real referent or meaning *(snying po dang dral ba)*, for the designata (the aggregates of the emanations) are themselves devoid of intrinsic reality *(rang bzhin dang dral ba)* (*dBu ma* Ya 319a).[50]

The emptiness of Tathāgatā's emanations, Nāgārjuna argues, is simply a vivid illustration of the emptiness of *all* things. Elsewhere in the *Śūnyatāsaptatikārikā*, for instance, he uses the emanation analogy to show the emptiness of actions and agents:

> The agent is likened to the emanation *(sprul pa)*, its action likened to the emanations displayed by the emanation *(sprul pas sprul pa)*: they have mere existence *(cung zad yod)*, and are only concepts *(rtog*

48. *Ji ltar bcom ldan de bzhin gshegs, ,rdzu 'phrul gyis ni sprul pa sprul, ,sprul pa de yis slar yang ni, ,sprul pa gzhan zhig sprul gyur pa, ,de la de bzhin gshegs sprul stong, ,sprul pas sprul pa smos ci dgos,,gnyis po ming tsam yod pa yang, ,gang ci'ang rung ste rtog pa tsam, ,*

49. There is a slight terminological variation between Nāgārjuna's ŚSK41, which reads "Whatever they may become" *(gang ci'ang rung te)*, and Candrakīrti's commentary ŚSV41. It is possible, however, that Candrakīrti could be using a different version of the root text when he was writing the commentary.

50. *Gnyis po'i ming tsam yod pa yang, ,gang cung zad de rtog pa tsam zhes bya ba snying po dang bral ba ste rang bzhin dang bral ba zhes bya ba'i don to, ,*

pa tsam) that are empty of any intrinsic nature *(rang bzhin gis stong)* (ŚSK 42, *dBu m*a tsa 25b).[51]

The three natures are, Prāsaṅgika argues, precisely like the emanations. They exist only nominally, and as mere conceptual designations. All three natures are devoid of an intrinsical reality.

Another defence of this claim comes from Candrakīrti's commentary to Nāgārjuna's *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* (YṢK34, *dBu ma* Tsa 21b).[52] There, Candrakīrti argues that all determinate categories, sensory faculties, and phenomenological experiences are dependent on conceptual constructs, which in turn depend on the terminology of everyday language. Since the three natures are such entities, they must be also conceptual constructs.

Candrakīrti's argument, then, is that cognitions apprehend the objects of experience, and they apprehend them conceptually and therefore linguistically. Specifically, objects of experience are apprehended by cognitions as belonging to specific categories—here, one of the three natures. Were dependent and perfect natures not capable of presenting themselves in some form to the cognition, it would not be possible for the mundane convention to linguistically posit dependent and perfect natures as really existing. They, like all known phenomena, are determined by conceptual linguistic activities participating in cognitive processes, and hence must be regarded as conceptually categorized entities (YṢK 34 *dBu ma* Ya 21b–22a).[53]

What about perfect nature, which is equated with ultimate truth and, indeed, nirvāṇa? Could it really be argued that perfect nature exists as

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51. *De bzhin byed po sprul dang mtshungs, ,las ni sprul pas sprul dang mtshungs, ,rang bzhin gyis stong gang cung zad, ,yod pa de dag rtog pa tsam, ,*

52. *'byung ba che la sogs bshad pa, ,rnam par shes su yang dag 'du, ,de shes pas ni 'bral 'gyur na, ,log par rnam brtags ma yin nam,* Skt text (ed.) B Kumar (1993) *mahābhūtādaya khyātā vijñāne nicayastathā |tajjñānena viyukttena mṛṣaiva na vikalpitam* ||34

53. *'byung ba che la sogs bshad pa, ,rnam par shes su yang dag 'du, ,de shes pas ni 'bral 'gyur na, ,log par rnam [22a], ,brtags ma yin nam, ,zhes bya ba smos so, ,rnam par shes pas dmigs pa gang gi rnam pa 'dzin cing skye ba'i dmigs pa de, rnam par shes pa la rnam pa nye bar bsgrubs pa'i rang gi dngos po thob nas dngos po'i don gyi ngo bo nyid kyis 'byung ba chen po la sogs par yongs su brtags so, ,rnam par shes pa la 'ga' zhig gi rnam par ma bzhag pa la ni 'jig rten gyis yod pa nyid du rnam par gzhag mi nus te, mo gsham gyi bu la sogs pa yang yod par thal bar 'gyur ba'i phyir ro, ,de bas na 'byung ba dang 'byung ba las gyur pa dang, sems dang sems las byung ba dang, sems dang ldan pa ma yin pa rnams ni rnam par shes pa'i rnam pa'i rgyu can yin pa'i phyir 'byung ba chen po la sogs pa gang dang gang bshad pa ci yang rung ba de dag thams cad ni rnam par shes par yang dag par 'du zhing khongs su chud do, ,*

merely names or concepts? Prāsaṅgika maintains just that. Perfect nature—ultimate and nirvāṇa as it may be—exists, like everything else, as merely names or concepts. Consider this passage from Candrakīrti's *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*:

> It is just so! Since saṃsāra is also a concept *(rtog),* nirvāṇa too must be a concept *(rtog pa),* for they both exist as mundane linguistic conventions *(loka-vyavahāra / 'jig rten gyi tha snyad)*. For this reason it is proclaimed in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* as follows:
>
> [Śāriputra]: "Venerable Subhūti, do you claim that even nirvāṇa is like an illusion, like a dream?"
>
> [Subhūti replies]: "Śāriputra, even if there were a truth that surpasses nirvāṇa, I would still say, 'This is like an illusion.' If nirvāṇa were not dependent upon the conception of saṃsāra, it would not be like an illusion. Since [it is dependent, however], even nirvāṇa is to be conceptualised *(rtogs pa)* as a conventional truth." (YṢV 5cd, *dBu ma* Ya 7b)[54]

In the defence of the thesis stated earlier—that perfect nature is conceptual and linguistic—Candrakīrti supplies two arguments:

1. Perfect nature is a mundane linguistic convention *(loka-vyavahāra / 'jig rten gyi tha snyad),* and hence a conventional truth.
2. Perfect nature (nirvāṅa) is linguistically dependent upon conceptual and dependent natures (i.e., saṃsāra), and hence is illusion-like and dream-like.

Thus, from the Prāsaṅgika perspective, nothing is capable of possessing unique reality of intrinsic nature. *Svalakṣaṇa* is not simply not found, it is

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54. *Ci mya ngan las 'das pa yang kun rdzob kyi bden pa yin nam, de de bzhin te, 'khor bar yongs su rtog pa yod na mya ngan las 'das par yongs su rtog ste, de gnyi ga yang 'jig rten gyi tha snyad yin pa'I phyir ro, ,de bas na bcom ldan 'das ma las gsungs pa, tshe dang ldan pa rab 'byor mya ngan las 'das pa yang sgyu ma lta bu rmi lam lta bu'o zhes smra'am, sh'a ri'i bu mya ngan las 'das pa bas ches lhag pa'i chos shig yod na yang sgyu ma lta bu'o zhes kho bo smra'o zhes 'byung ngo, , gal te de 'khor bar rtog pa la ltos pa ma yin na de sgyu ma lta bur mi 'gyur ro, ,de bas na mya ngan las 'das pa yang kun rdzob kyi bden par yongs su brtags pa yin no, ,*

a theoretical impossibility. All things are entirely empty of extralinguistic identity, and exist not individually and apart, but, necessarily, in dynamic webs of causal interdependence. Any ontology that denies this reality by ascribing to causally efficient things and people unique reality *(svalakṣaṇa)* or intrinsic reality *(svabhāva)* is thus not a genuine "middle-way." Such an ontology is, instead, committed to reification and nihilism. Both Yogācāra and Svātantrika are commited in different guises to *svalakṣaṇa* ontology and, Prāsaṅgika argues, they are in fact unknowingly committed to both extremes. Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* 15.11 says this of the Yogācāra:

> Some assert as follows. That the only [real] things are dependent phenomena *(paratantra)* of the mind and the mental factors, and then [claim] that they can get away with *(pariharati / spong ba)* falling into the view of existence *(astitvadarśanaṁ/yod par lta ba)* by explaining that it [i.e., dependent phenomena] is devoid of conceptual nature *(parikalpitasvabhāvābhāvād)*. They claim to have avoided *(pariharati)* the view of nonexistence *(med par lta ba / nāstitvadarśanaṁ)* by asserting the mere existence of the dependent entities *(paratantravastumātrasadbhāvān / gzhan dbang gi dngos po yod pa'i phyir)* which is the causal condition for the afflictive defilements *(myon mongs pa)* and process of purification *(rnam par byang ba'i rgyu)* (*dBu ma* 'a 93na).[55]

Though he recognizes their attempt to avoid the extreme views, Candrakīrti judges Yogācārins' efforts as futile, for their ontology entails commitments to both extremes.

> According to this theory, because conceptual [entities] do not exist and because dependent [entities] exist, views committing to both existence and nonexistence follow. (*Prasannapadā* 15.11, *dBu ma* 'a 93na)[56]

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55. *Gang zhig gzhan dbang sems dang sems las byung ba dngos po tsam khas blangs nas, de la kun du brtags pa'i ngo bo nyid med pas yod par lta ba nyid spong zhing gzhan gyi dbang gi dngos po kun nas nyon mongs pa dang rnam par byang ba'i rgyur gyur pa tsam zhig yod pas ni med par lta ba nyid spong bar byed pa, ,* Skt. (ed.) PLVaidya (1960) *yastu paratantracittacaittavast umātramabhyupetya tasya parikalpitasvabhāvābhāvādastitvadarśanaṁ pariharati, saṁkleśavyavadānanibandhanasya ca paratantravastumātrasadbhāvānnāstitvadarśanaṁ pariharati,*

56. *De'i ltar na, kun tu brtags pa yod pa ma yin pa'i phyir dang, gzhan gyi dbang yod pa'i phyir yod pa dang med pa nyid du lta ba gnyi gar yang 'gyur ba'i phyir, ,*

The only safe passage between the two extremes, he argues, is the Prāsaṅgika view, in which the causal interdependence of all things proves the impossibility of something's intrinsic existence, and the total absence of intrinsic existence underwrites causal interdependence. The "middle-way" in other words, is the equation of emptiness and dependent arising.

> How could they avoid committing [themselves] to the two extremes? [By accepting that] it has been demonstrated [elsewhere] that it is untenable for entities to be intrinsically real *(ca sasvabhāvenāyuktatva/ rang bzhin dang bcas pa nyid yod par mi rigs)* because they are produced by causes and conditions *(hetupratyayajanitasya)* (*Prasannapadā* 15.11, *dBu ma* 'a 93na).[57]

But Prāsaṅgikas cannot only criticize Yogācāra and Svātantrika for their failure to have arrived at the Prāsaṅgika position, in which *svalakṣaṇa* is absent. They must also demonstrate the deficits of the Yogācāra and Svātantrika ontologies, in which *svalakṣaṇa* is contained. They attack that ontology, in part, with the following line of argument: assuming there is *svalakṣaṇa,* how does it behave in the second moment of its existence? Specifically:

> Do you or do you not accept disintegration or cessation in the second moment of intrinsically or uniquely real dependent nature?

If Yogācārins and Svātantrikas deny the decay or cessation of the first moment of the uniquely real dependent nature, they commit themselves to the extreme of eternalism. If the previous moment of the uniquely real dependent nature does not disintegrate in the moment that follows it, it is reasonable to assume it will remain unchanged in the third moment, and in all moments subsequent. That something endures unchanged beyond even a single moment is evidence that it will endure, unchanged,

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57. *De'i ltar na, kun tu brtags pa yod pa ma yin pa'i phyir dang, gzhan gyi dbang yod pa'i phyir yod pa dang med pa nyid du lta ba gnyi gar yang 'gyur ba'i phyir mtha' gnyis spangs par ga la 'gyur, rgyu dang rkyen gyis bskyed pa ni rang bzhin dang bcas pa nyid du yod par mi rigs par bstan zin pa'i phyir bshad pa mi rigs pa nyid do, ,* Skt. (ed.) PLVaidya (1960) *tasya parikalpitasyāvidyamānatvāt paratantrasya ca vidyamānatvād astitvanāstitvadarśanadvayas yāpi upanipātāt kuto'ntadvayaparihāraḥ? hetupratyayajanitasya ca sasvabhāvenāyuktatva-pratip ādanādayuktamevāsya vyākhyānam |*

eternally: it exists outside the web of causal interdependence. An intrinsically real dependent nature would remain fixed and immutable; no plausible reason for something invulnerable to change to later change can be provided. This is the extreme of reification. Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* 15.11 says:

> Whatever is said to exist intrinsically, since there could be no change in its intrinsic reality, could never become nonexistent. Therefore, to assert that something exists intrinsically is to adopt the view of reification. (*dBu ma* 'a 92b)[58]

On the other hand, if Yogācārins and Svātantrikas accept that an intrinsically real dependent nature *does* change, that it does decay or cease in its second moment, they would be conceding that it is not intrinsically real at all. As Vasubandhu makes clear in his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, this conclusion is inevitable even though Yogācārins and Svātantrikas do not reach it.[59] Candrakīrti concurs: it is contradictory and impossible, he argues, for any intrinsically real thing to undergo or have undergone disintegration, or to admit change in any circumstance. What exists independently, in other words, cannot also be said to change dependently.

If Yogācārins and Svātantrikas nevertheless insist on disregarding this obvious contradiction, and posit change and cessation after the first moment, they will have severed any ontological continuity between first and subsequent moments of said "intrinsically real thing." For something

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58. *Gang zhig rang bzhin gyis yod par brjod pa de ni rang bzhin la ldog pa med pas nam yang med pa ma yin te, de ltar na rang bzhin yod pa nyid du khas blangs pas rtag par lta bar 'gyur la /*

59. In *Abhidharmakośabhāśya* AKB IV.2b–3b, Vasubandhu presents Sautrāntika's position of momentary destruction of all conditioned things as follows. "All conditioned things are momentary *(kṣaṇika / skad cig pa)*. What is understood by "momentary" *(kṣaṇika)*? Moment *(kṣaṇa / skad cig)* means to perish immediately after having acquired its being; momentary *(kṣaṇika / skad cig pa)* is a dharma that has moments (kṣaṇa), as a staff-wielder *(daṇḍika /dbyug can)* is one who has a staff *(daṇda /dbyug pa)*." Vasubandhu, AKB IV.2b *mNgon pa* Ku 166b: *'gro min gang phyir 'dus byas ni // skad cig pa yin zhes bya ba brjod do // skad cig ces bya ba 'di ci zhe na / bdag nyid du red ma thag tu 'jig pa'o // de 'di la yod pas na skad cig pa ste dbyug pa bzhin no //*

Also see AKB IV.2b, *mNgon pa* Ku 166b: "A conditioned thing does not exist beyond the acquisition of its being: it perishes on the spot where it arises; it cannot go from this spot to another. Consequently bodily action (lus kyi las) is not movement."

intrinsically real to change and cease is in fact for it to be irreversibly extinguished. This is the extreme of nihilism. Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* 15.11 says:

> To assert that "a thing, [having been produced intrinsically as an entity in the previous moment and now having subsequently disintegrated,] does not exist," is to fall into the absurd view of nihilism (Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* 15.1, *dBu ma* 'a 92b).[60]

Thus, from the Prāsaṅgika's perspective, both the Yogācārin and Svātantrika's positions on dependent nature are extremes of reification. Both, we have seen, insist on the *svalakṣaṇa* of dependent nature, believing that, without it, dependent nature would be nonexistent and causally inert.

Although the Yogācārin is committed to the *svalakṣaṇa* of the dependent nature *ultimately*, and the Svātantrika is committed to it only conventionally, the Prāsaṅgika argues that there is little difference between the two positions. As long as dependent nature is granted *svalakṣaṇa* at all (whether it is described conventionally or ultimately) it would, the Prāsaṅgika argue, achieve precisely the opposite effect than that the Yogācārin and Svātantrika attribute to it. Its ontological rigidity would render dependent nature not causally effective, but utterly causally inert; ontologically sequestered from, and unaffected by, causes and conditions.

The Prāsaṅgika position, on the other hand, avoids this absurdity. Candrakīrti explains in the *Prasannapadā* 15.11:

> [For us], who deny things' intrinsic reality *(bhāvasvabhāva/ dngos po'i rang bzhin)* there are no absurd views of reification and nihilism *(śāśvatocchedadarśanaprasaṅgaḥ)*, because things are not objectified as being intrinsically real *(bhāvasvabhāvānupalambhāt)* (*dBu ma* 'a 92b).[61]

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60. *Sngon gnas pa'i gnas skabs su, dngos po'i rang bzhin khas blangs nas da ltar phyis de zhig pas med do zhes khas blangs pas chad par lta bar thal bar 'gyur ro, ,*

61. *Gang gi ltar na dngos po'i rang bzhin nyid mi 'thad pa de la ni rtag pa dang, chad par lta bar thal bar mi 'gyur te, dngos po'i rang bzhin ma dmigs pa'i phyir ro, ,* Skt. (ed.) PLVaidya (1960): *yasya tu bhāvasvabhāva eva nopapadyate, na tasya śāśvatocchedadarśanaprasaṅgaḥ, bhāvasvabhāvānupalambhāt ||*

Moreover:

> It is only in position of the Madhyamaka *(madhyamakadarśane)* that the views of existence and nonexistence are not rendered absurd. That is not the case with the position of those asserting consciousness [i.e., Yogācāra] (*Prasannapadā* 15.11, *dBu ma* 'a 92b).[62]

Obviously the type of Madhyamaka position Candrakīrti commends is his own—that of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka. Bhāvavevika's Svātantrika Madhyamaka position is guilty of the same absurdities as the position of the Yogācārin.

Having branded as extreme the ontology of his opponents, Candrakīrti turns to defending his own position from charges of extremism—particularly the accusations of nihilism made against it by the Yogācāra and Svātantrika. They argue, we have seen, that the Prāsaṅgikas, in their eagerness to avoid the extreme of reification, plunge into the alternative extreme of nihilism. Candrakīrti characterizes the criticism as follows:

> Since you [the Prāsaṅgikas] advocate that "reality of things to be non-intrinsic *(bhāvānāṁ svabhāvo / rang bzhin yod pa ma yin no)*," you are not committed to the view of essence *(dngos por lta ba med)*, thus do not adopt the view of reification *(rtag par lta ba med)*. But are you invariably committed to the view of nihilism *(ucchedadarśanaṁ)*? (Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* 15.11, *dBu ma* 'a 92b)[63]

Candrakīrti forcefully disagrees. "Ours is not the view of nihilism," he says (*Prasannapadā*, *dBu ma* 'a 92b).[64] A view of nihilism, he argues, is one that denies an intrinsic reality *previously* accepted. Prāsaṅgikas never accept such a reality, and so cannot be accused of subsequently denying it.

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62. *De'i phyir de ltar dbu ma pa'i lta ba kho na la yod pa dang med pa nyid du lta bar thal ba med pa yin gyi, rnam par shes par smra ba'i lta ba la sogs pa dag la ni ma yin no zhes shes par bya'o,* ,Skt. (ed.) PLVaidya (1960): *tadevaṁ madhyamakadarśane eva astitvanāstitvadvayadarśanasyāprasaṅgaḥ, na vijñānavādidarśanādiṣviti | vijñeyam |*

63. *Gal te dngos po rnams rang bzhin yod pa ma yin no zhes khas len pa la dngos por lta ba med pas rtag par lta ba med mod, chad par lta bar thal bar ni nges par 'gyur ba ma yin nam zhe na,* Skt. (ed.) PLVaidya (1960): *nanu ca bhāvānāṁ svabhāvo nāstītyabhyupagacchato mā bhūdbhāvadarśanābhāvācchāśvatadarśanam, ucchedadarśanaṁ tu niyataṁ prasajyate iti*

64. *De ltar med par lta bar ni mi 'gyur ro,* , Skt. (ed.) PLVaidya (1960): *naivamabhāvadarśanaṁ bhavati |*

To buttress this claim, he compares the Prāsaṅgika position with a genuininely nihilistic position, which we first mentioned in Candrakīrti's criticism of the other schools— that is, acceptance in subsequent moments the cessation of "intrinsically real" things:

> Those who first *(pūrvaṁ)* maintained that things exist intrinsically *(bhāvasvabhāvamabhyupetya)*, and then later *(paścāt)* maintained that they do not exist repudiate *(skur ba btab)* the intrinsic reality of things that they had objectified in the first place, and thus they would fall into nihilism. (Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā*, *dBu ma* 'a 92b)[65]

Prāsaṅgika could not be charged with this form of nihilism, because it never holds this kind of position. Prāsaṅgika does not admit any form of intrinsic *(svabhāva)* or unique reality *(svalakṣaṇa)*, and in fact consistently and categorically rejects their possibility in every domain—metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and soteriology. Having never subscribed to the *svabhāva* ontology, it could not be charged with nihilism on account of later denying it.

To be prone to what we might call the "nihilism trap" is impossible without first ascribing intrinsic reality to things, minds, and persons. The other schools do so: the Svātantrika ascribe it conventionally, the Yogācāra ultimately. And, Candrakīrti says, eager to avoid the trap of nihilism by investing their ontology with substance, these schools fall into a trap by doing just that. Hence the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* states:

> O Lord whoever first accepts desire, hate and confusion in virtue of their essential reality *(bhāvābhyupagamaṁ kṛtvā / dngos por gyar gis blangs nas)* and later says the essential reality of desire, hate and confusion do not exist becomes a nihilist! (Cited in *Prasannapadā* 15.11, *dBu ma* 'a 93a)[66]

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65. *'di ltar gang zhig sngar dngos po'i rang bzhin khas blangs nas, phyis de ldog pa la rten par byed pa de ni dngos po'i rang bzhin sngar dmigs pa la skur ba btab pas med par lta bar 'gyur gyi,* Skt. (ed.) PLVaidya (1960): *yo hi pūrvaṁ bhāvasvabhāvamabhyupetya paścāt tannivṛttimālambate, tasya pūrvopalabdhasvabhāvāpavādāt syādabhāvadarśanam |*

66. *Ji skad du mdo las, bcom ldan 'das [93a], ,gang gis sngar 'dod chags dang zhe sdang dang gti mug dag dngos por gyar gyis blangs nas, phyis 'dod chags dang zhe sdang dang gti mug dag dngos po yod pa ni ma yin no zhes smra ba de ni med pa par yang 'gyur lags so, , zhes rgya cher gsungs pa lta bu'o, ,* 11 Skt. (ed.) PLVaidya (1960) *Yo hi bhagavan pūrvaṁ rāgadveṣamohabhāvābhyupagamaṁ kṛtvā paścānna santi rāgadveṣamohabhāvā iti bravīti, sa bhagavan vai nāstiko bhavati | iti vistaraḥ ||*

Because dependent nature is intrinsically real, desire, hate, and confusion are also intrinsically real—conventionally so for Svātantrika, and ultimately so for Yogācāra.

Yet both schools also maintain the Buddhist orthodoxy that one may eradicate, and awakened beings have eradicated, these very things. Those who correctly train their minds are thus able to bring to cessation intrinsically real afflictive emotions (dependent nature). This is a glaring contradiction: taken together, it is the claim that *independently* existing things can nonetheless be annihilated in *dependence* upon spiritual practice.

If something exists intrinsically, it necessarily exists independently, permanently, and immutably, Candrakīrti argues. Even though the schools do not assert these qualities, asserting intrinsic reality is to do so by proxy, and theirs is thus a reificationist position.

If something that exists intrinsically is subsequently eradicated—in this case, the afflictive emotions—then the eradication is necessarily total and irrevocable. Even though Svātantrika and Yogācāra do not accept the possibility, Candrakīrti argues, the ontological continuum is severed. That which was, has gone entirely out of existence. Total existence is replaced by total nonexistence, and a reificationist position is replaced by a nihilistic position.

Candrakīrti returns to the Prāsaṅgika position, again rejecting the criticism of nihilism on the grounds that Prāsaṅgika never accepted any intrinsic reality to be nihilistic about:

> Why does stating "that [intrinsic reality] which has never been objectified *(ma dmigs pa)* [in the first place] does not exist" amount to asserting nihilism *(kiṁcinnāstīti brūyāt / ci zhig med par smra par 'gyur)*?
>
> This cannot be the case, because here there is no involvement of the object to be negated *(pratiṣedhyābhāvāt / dgag bya med pa phyir ro)*.
>
> This is like someone with clear vision saying to another affected by faulty vision that the "fallings hairs" he perceives do not exist.
>
> We assert that "all [intrinsically real] things *(dngos po thams cad)* are nonexistent like the falling hairs in the sky that appear to faulty vision are nonexistent." Our intention is to eradicate clinging to the

> distorted [objects] *(phyin ci log tu gyur ba)*. Stating that much, however, is not a commitment to the absurd view of nihilism.[67]

Prāsaṅgika argues, forcefully and consistently, that the three natures, like all other things, are not intrinsically or uniquely real. This argument, Prāsaṅgika says, is the ontological equivalent of pointing out the unreality of objects that appear to dysfunctional eyes. The "falling hairs in the sky" perceived by those suffering from "floaters" are not even conventionally real and have never been so. They are totally illusory, an illusion usually caused by strands of collagen lodged in the eye's vitreous humor. Equally nonexistent and equally illusory is the intrinsic reality of the dependent and perfect natures. The ony thing Prāsaṅgikas are guilty of denying, they argue, is something—intrinsic reality—that does not, cannot, and will not exist. To deny that which is nonexistent can hardly be the extreme of nonexistence.

Thus, for Prāsaṅgika, the cognitive processes that perceive the intrinsic reality of the dependent and the intrinsic reality of the perfect natures, are no more reliable than the degraded eye perceiving "floaters" as "falling hairs." To the person accustomed to degraded eyesight, the argument that "floaters" are entirely illusory might seem unacceptably nihilistic, but in fact that argument is entirely accurate. Likewise, to those of us who are accustomed to treating the three natures as possessing intrinsic reality, the argument that they are totally bereft of such reality can seem unacceptably nihilistic, but, Prāsaṅgika argues, it is nonetheless entirely accurate. The argument conflicts with our tendency to cling to intrinsic reality, but it is that tendency, not the argument, that is out of step with the nature of things.

Prāsaṅgikas equate emptiness and dependent orgination, linking their arguments for the absence of intrinsic reality with arguments for the presence of dependent origination. The three natures are, they argue, dependently originated. They come into existence and go out of existence

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67. Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* 15.11, *dBu ma* 'a 92b: *Gang zhig rab rib can gyis dmigs pa'i skra shad dag la rab rib med pa ltar gyur cing ci yang ma dmigs pa des med do zhes smras pa na, ci zhig med par smras par 'gyur te, dgag bya med pa'I phyir ro, ,phyin ci log tu gyur pa rnams log par mngon par zhen pa bzlog par bya ba'I phyir rab rib med pa rnams ltar dngos po thams cad yod pa ma ma yin no zhes kho bo cag smra mod kyi, de skad smras pa na, kho bo cag chad par lta bar thal bar 'gyur ba ni ma yin no, ,* Skt. (ed.) PLVaidya (1960): *yastu taimirikopalabdhakeśeṣviva vitaimiriko na kiṁcidupalabhate, sa nāstīti bruvan kiṁcinnāstīti brūyāt pratiṣedhyābhāvāt | viparyastānāṁ tu mithyābhiniveśanivṛttyarthamataimirikā iva vayaṁ brūmaḥ - na santi sarvabhāvāḥ iti | na caivaṁ bruvatāmasmākaṁ parahitavyāpāraparāyaṇānām uccheda darśana prasaṅgaḥ |*

only when the appropriate causes and conditions are satisfied. This argument is what gives force to their earlier claim that the three natures' causal efficiency depends upon the absence, rather than the presence, of intrinsic or unique reality.

The very fact that all three natures dependently originate and are therefore entirely relational entities proves their emptiness of any intrinsic or unique reality. That which exists intrinsically or uniquely exists in causal isolation, under its own power; that which exists only under the power of causal relations is necessarily empty of intrinsic or unique existence.

Through this equation, Prāsaṅgika argues, the extremes of reification and nihilism are concurrently avoided. The fact that the three natures are nonintrinsic *(bden pas stong pa)* avoids the extreme of reification; this fact also entails their causally efficiency *(don byed nus pa's dngos po)* and avoids the extreme of nihilism. As we can see, Prāsaṅgika does not advance any separate argument *('gog 'byed kyi rigs pa)*, proof *(sgrub byed)*, or evidence *(rgyu mtshan)* in order to repudiate the two extreme views. They chart a course between the two by linking their arguments for emptiness with their arguments for dependent origination.

Conclusion

Yogācārins deny the *svalakṣaṇa* of conceptual nature even conventionally, which they believe is sufficient to avoid the extreme of reification. However, they assert the *svalakṣaṇa* of dependent and ultimate natures, which they believe necessary to avoid the extreme of nihilism. Accordingly, Yogācārin argues that the Mādhyamikas *are* nihilist because they deny the ultimate *svalakṣaṇa* of dependent and perfect natures.

Svātantrika Madhyamaka argues that Yogācāra, by denying conceptual nature conventional *svalakṣaṇa*, nevertheless falls into the extreme of nihilism. Simultaneously, it argues that Yogācāra, by attributing to the dependent and perfect natures ultimate rather than conventional *svalakṣaṇa*, stray into reification.

Svātantrika Mādhyamika accuses Prāsaṅgika of nihilism for the same reason it does the Yogācāra—denying *svalakṣaṇa* conventionally.

Svātantrika's own position is to deny all three natures ultimate *svalakṣaṇa* and attribute to all three natures conventional *svalakṣaṇa*. They believe the former is sufficient to avoid the extreme of reification and the latter sufficient to avoid the extreme of nihilism.

Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika argues that, despite their best intentions, Yogācāra and Svātantrika fall into the extremes they intend to avoid. The reason is simple: their admission of any *svalakṣaṇa* at all.

Both Yogācāra and Svātantrika feel that some component of *svalakṣaṇa* is necessary to both existence and causal function. Prāsaṅgika, however, argues that, if the three natures were invested with any *svalakṣaṇa*, either conventionally or ultimately, their ontological rigidity would render them causally isolated, ineffective, and eternal. To permit any *svalakṣaṇa* in one's ontology, Prāsaṅgika argues, is to fall into the extreme of reification.

Prāsaṅgika argues that both Yogācāra and Svātantrika also inadvertently fall into the extreme of nihilism. They exhibit, Prāsaṅgika argues, a subtle nihilism that is implied by their twin commitments to *svalakṣaṇa* and the cessation and change of things that possess it. If something possessed of *svalakṣaṇa* is capable of cessation in a subsequent moment of existence (for instance, the afflictive emotions), then its cessation would entail its total nonexistence, the irrevocable severing of the ontological continuum. If we accept the possibility of change of an intrinsically real thing, then its moment of total existence is followed by total nonexistence.

Prāsaṅgika argues that by building a partial-realist ontology, Yogācāra and Svātantrika are involuntarily committed to reification and nihilism. By ascribing *svalakṣaṇa* or *svabhāva* to the three natures, they commit themselves to both reification and nihilism, even though they do not admit *(mi bzhed)* this commitment nor actively advocate it *(mi smra)*. By attributing to things intrinsic reality, one is reifying; by attributing to that same thing the potential to cease and change, one is implying nihilism. Thus, Prāsaṅgika argues that as long as one is committed to any degree of intrinsic or unique reality, reification and nihilism are the inevitable side-effects. Since Prāsaṅgika avoids any commitment to *svalakṣaṇa* or *svabhāva*, it argues that it alone charts a successful "middle-way" between the two extremes.

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4

The Case for Discontinuity

Mark Siderits

MY AIM IN this chapter is modest: to lay out two critiques, that of Madhyamaka by early Yogācāra, and that of early Yogācāra by Madhyamaka, and to try to determine what the underlying philosophical issues might be. I shall thus be setting out a case for discontinuity between the two schools. One source of this discontinuity is to be found in a disagreement over the place of philosophy in Buddhist practice. But another source is more strictly philosophical in nature: disagreement over the prospects for a coherent global antirealism. If this diagnosis is correct, then it seems unlikely that there can be a workable synthesis of the two schools that does not involve subordinating one to the other.

The question before us is whether Yogācāra and Madhyamaka are rivals or allies. I take the first answer—rivals—to amount to the claim that there cannot be a real synthesis of the core doctrines of the two schools, that it is not the case that the two schools are "really saying the same thing, only in different words." I shall call this the discontinuity thesis, and I am going to look at some evidence bearing on whether it is true. The reader will no doubt be familiar with what might be called standard-issue Indian inclusivism, which has it that practitioners of different schools reach the same summit via their different paths, but only because the many paths converge on a single path short of the summit, and that that single path is the continuation of the path preferred by the proponent of the inclusivism in question. Your path will get you to the top because it happens to be another way to get onto my path, which really does get you over the final stretch. I am going to proceed on the assumption that this would not count as a strategy for showing there to be continuity between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka considered as schools of Buddhist philosophy. This sort of inclusivist

strategy involves subordinating other paths to the one preferred path, and in philosophy this does not count as reconciliation.

Of course if one thought that it is meditation that really gets the practitioner to the summit, and that philosophy's role is at best marginal, one might think that philosophical differences are unimportant. But this does not seem to be how early Yogācārins and Mādhyamikas thought about themselves and their schools. While they probably did not think that philosophy is the only significant component of practice, they do seem to have believed that it plays an important role, so that getting one's philosophy right is crucial to attaining enlightenment. And each side seems to have thought the other side got it disastrously wrong. Was this just posturing on their part? Might it be that perhaps institutional rivalries prevented their seeing just how close their views really are?

A Case for Continuity

I want to start by briefly discussing two authors who think that that there is substantial philosophical continuity between the two schools: Ian Harris and Gadjin Nagao. It is sometimes claimed that the gap between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka is unbridgeable given that the former affirms the existence of an inexpressible ultimate while the latter unequivocally rejects all metaphysical views. Harris and Nagao both demur. Harris takes Madhyamaka to accept an "ontologically indeterminate realm" that exists as "a flux of mutually conditioned processes" (177). Nagao similarly understands Madhyamaka to hold the view that "True reality is, fundamentally, relative relationship itself" (175). So according to these authors both schools do, after all, affirm an inexpressible ultimate. The schools disagree about the relatively superficial matter of how one might come to apprehend it: by realizing the nondual nature of consciousness, or by using dialectic to bring an end to conceptualization. Indeed one can imagine a *Gītā*-style rapprochement according to which Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are merely two yogas appropriate for persons of different temperaments.

This reconciliation is effected by taking the Madhyamaka critique of *dharmas* to be aimed at establishing that, because no dependently originated entity has a determinate nature of its own, ultimately everything is connected to everything else. (We may call this the "Indra's net"

reading of Madhyamaka.)[1] Since conceptualization works by way of discrimination, it would then follow that the ultimate nature of reality is inexpressible. And since there can be no grounds for distinguishing among varieties of inexpressible ultimates, we are invited to conclude that the disagreement with Yogācāra is merely nominal.

Of course the Yogācāra route to an inexpressible ultimate is quite different. I understand that route to go through the subjective idealism of *cittamātra*. One might legitimately question whether Asaṅga is committed to *cittamātra*, but no such question can, I think, be raised concerning the stance of Vasubandhu or Dignāga. The role of the denial of an external world I take to be twofold: (1) demonstrating that the world is thoroughly mistaken in its understanding of the nature of reality, thereby making more plausible the key Buddhist tenet that everyone might be misled about the reality of an "I"; and (2) extirpating the sense of an inner subjective realm by refuting the external world by contrast with which it is defined. It is in achieving (2) that one arrives at an inexpressible ultimate, presumably because all conceptualization requires the subject-object dichotomy that is sublated when the physical is denied. One might wonder whether the resulting view is appropriately called an idealism, given that the reality it affirms is beyond all conceptualization. But the view has it that the last best thing to be said about reality, before kicking away the ladder, is that it is mind-only. Surely "idealism" is a less misleading characterization than others that might be imagined.

The reconciliation proposed by Harris and Nagao is actually a clear case of standard-issue inclusivism. It works by privileging this Yogācāra view that there is an ultimate nature of reality that fully enlightened beings correctly apprehend and we unenlightened folk get hopelessly wrong. This comes out quite clearly when Harris says that it is only if this is what Mādhyamikas also mean to say that they can escape the charge of nihilism (131). That charge is, of course, one that Yogācāra made against Madhyamaka from the outset. One will find the charge threatening only if one takes seriously the idea that there is an ultimate nature of reality, a

1. Indra's net is said to contain a jewel at each node. There are infinitely many such nodes, and each jewel at a node reflects the light from each other jewel in the net. The metaphor is used in Hua Yen to express its teaching that everything is in some sense inter-connected.

"how things are anyway." Yogācārins clearly do, but Mādhyamikas do not. Mādhyamikas do say that, because everything that exists originates in dependence on causes and conditions, all things are empty, i.e., devoid of intrinsic nature. But this is also said to entail that ultimately nothing whatever originates. If nothing whatever originates, it cannot be that things originate in relations of mutual interdependence. So either Mādhyamikas are nihilists, as Yogācārins say, or they are in some other line of work than that of saying something about the ultimate nature of reality (or saying that nothing can be said about it).

The charge of nihilism is not without some plausibility. This is exactly what follows from the claim that all things are empty in the Madhyamaka sense—lacking intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*)—when that claim is understood in its Abhidharma context. For what Abhidharma had established is that nothing lacking in *svabhāva* could be ultimately real. This is what Vasubandhu (*qua* Sautrāntika) means when he makes the criterion of *dharma*hood that of being what continues to exist after separation and analysis. The idea is simple enough. Given that all partite things are conceptual fictions, there must be ultimate building blocks out of which they are conceptually constructed. And since the constructed things depend for their nature on the natures of their parts, there must be things having natures entirely their own—natures they bear independently of other things and the mind's aggregating tendencies, its powers of mental construction. So if we accept the arguments meant to support the *svabhāva* criterion of ultimate reality, it does look as though the Madhyamaka claim that all things are devoid of *svabhāva* is tantamount to nihilism.

Those who propound the Indra's net interpretation no doubt think theirs is a charitable reading of Madhyamaka. For metaphysical nihilism is an absurd doctrine that is readily refuted: one could not so much as consider it if it were true (since at least the mental episode of its consideration would have to exist). What proponents of the Indra's net reading fail to notice is that Mādhyamikas never question the Abhidharma conclusion that anything lacking in *svabhāva* could not be ultimately real. Madhyamaka does reject the further step that there must therefore be things with *svabhāva*, but not the reasoning meant to show that things lacking *svabhāva* are not ultimately real. And by that reasoning, it could not be the case that each thing's nature is inextricably intertwined with those of other things. To say that would be precisely to say that there is nothing ultimately real. So this way of trying to rescue Madhyamaka from the

charge of nihilism looks like a nonstarter. Perhaps we would do well to take more seriously the critique of Madhyamaka we find in Asaṅga and Vasubandhu.

The Yogācāra Critique of Madhyamaka

That critique starts from common ground shared by the two schools: the teaching of emptiness, and the notion that fully enlightened ones cognize things in a way that is not subject to distortion through conceptualization and so is in some sense inexpressible. Both teachings are found in various Mahāyāna sūtras considered authoritative by both schools. The immediate question for Yogācāra is how to interpret the first of the two, emptiness. In the earliest strata of the *Prajñāparamitā* literature emptiness is expounded as the being devoid of *svabhāva*, and this is how Madhyamaka understood it from the outset. But Asaṅga says that emptiness is a difficult doctrine requiring explication.[2] The Yogācāra doctrine of *trisvabhāva* is, of course, the explication he has in mind. It is meant to yield a nonnihilist understanding of emptiness while simultaneously providing a place for an inexpressible ultimate that can be the object of buddhas' cognition. The Madhyamaka understanding of emptiness does neither. It entails that everything is a conceptual fiction, having the same ontological status as the chariot and the column of ants. This is said by the Yogācārin to be incoherent, since in the absence of real things the conceptual fiction is groundless and so equally unreal. This means, of course, that there is nothing for fully enlightened beings' cognitions to be distinctively about (save perhaps the single fact that nothing exists).

The *trisvabhāva* interpretation of emptiness avoids these difficulties. As Vasubandhu explains, the teaching of emptiness is not to be taken to mean that things have no intrinsic nature whatever, just that their nature is inexpressible and only to be apprehended by a kind of cognition that transcends the subject-object duality. One achieves such a cognition by means of a dialectical progression that crucially involves *vijñaptimātra* (impressions-only). Having first dissolved the person and other enduring substances into a causal series of *dharmas* (using standard Abhidharma techniques), one next comes to see all *dharmas* as mere *vijñapti*. In doing so one is attributing to the *dharmas* an intrinsic nature of being *vijñapti*.

2. All references to Asaṅga are to the passage of BBh given in the appendix.

So the processes of imaginative conceptual construction are still at work. But the realization that all is just mind in turn leads to the realization that the subject-object duality is a false superimposition: if there is nothing "outside," then it makes no sense to speak of the *dharmas* as "inside," either. The way is then made clear to achievement of genuinely nondual cognition that grasps (because it just is) the inexpressible nature of the *dharmas*.

Asaṅga likewise holds that the Madhyamaka understanding of emptiness is clearly mistaken. One cannot, he says, assert of all things that they are empty unless there are things to be characterized as either empty or non-empty. Consequently, acceptance of emptiness on the Madhyamaka understanding cannot lead to liberation, and its teaching leads others off the Path. But intriguingly, Asaṅga also says it is conducive to laxity in following the precepts. It is not immediately evident why, but perhaps he has in mind the difficulty Kamalaśīla would later see in Candrakīrti's version of Madhyamaka: there can be no grounds for criticizing conventionally established practices.[3] One would then have no recourse save to accept what the world generally says, and the world does not insist that the precepts be followed.

This appeal to normative consequences suggests that the real issue is the nature of truth. As I shall use the terms, a *realist* about truth is someone who holds that the truth of a true statement is a property that statement has independently of our attitudes and of the conventions we use in expressing and grasping it; and an *antirealist* about truth denies that the truth of a true statement could be this sort of mind-independent property. Realists typically hold something like a correspondence view of truth—the view that truth is "telling it like it is"—while antirealists claim that the very idea of such correspondence is incoherent. It is not uncommon for antirealists about truth to be accused of undermining our moral institutions. The idea appears to be that if there are no mind-independent facts to which our statements are ultimately answerable, then we are free to choose which statements we affirm. Since moral claims such as "Killing and lying are wrong" often conflict with our desires, this freedom will likely result in the denial of those moral claims. And Buddhist practice clearly depends on their acceptance. If adherence to the precepts is not required for liberation from *saṃsāra*, then we have

3. Kamalaśila's criticism is discussed in Tillemans 2010.

no grounds for confidence in the Buddha's teachings. So the antirealist about truth can be no Buddhist, and their teachings will inevitably lead us away from our goal.

Asaṅga has one more charge to make against Madhyamaka: it has "imaginatively constructed views that are arrived at only through reasoning." It has, in other words, failed to achieve the proper balance between *yoga* and *darśana*, meditation and philosophy. That he himself thinks there is such a balance to be struck is, I believe, evident in his "*only* through reasoning." We might be tempted to conclude from his use of "imaginatively construct" (*prapañcyate*) that he thinks philosophical rationality inevitably leads us astray. If the goal is reached through apprehension of a reality that is inexpressible, then given philosophy's reliance on conceptual distinctions, how could it not lead us astray? Now Yogācāra (*yoga-ācāra*) obviously puts great emphasis on the *ācāra* (practice) of *yoga*. But I don't think the careful philosophical work of such Yogācārins as Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Dignāga, and Dharmakīrti was meant just for the debating hall. Here is my hypothesis concerning the place of philosophy in Yogācāra. The altered states of consciousness that can be attained through advanced meditative techniques often carry with them a strong sense of their veridicality, as well as the conviction that they cannot be fully expressed through ordinary concepts. The difficulty is that when yogic practitioners set out to try to convey the important truths they take themselves to have grasped, they frequently disagree among themselves. We see this, for instance, when various Indian schools seek to justify some of their more abstruse and controversial metaphysical claims by appealing to "extraordinary" or yogic perception. The claims defended in this way vary across schools, but the strategy will still have some force for those who meditate. The suggestion is that philosophical rationality serves to put constraints on possible interpretations of a powerful but otherwise inchoate experience. Asaṅga's charge against the Mādhyamikas is not that they do philosophy. It is that their philosophizing is not informed by insights that can only be acquired through meditation. They have not achieved the proper balance between *dhyāna* and *darśana*.

The Madhyamaka Critique of Yogācāra

I shall not try to work out how Madhyamaka might respond to this specific charge. Anything I might say about the relation between yoga and philosophy in early Madhyamaka would be largely speculative. What I

should like to talk about is their side of the dispute over the nature of truth. Nāgārjuna of course predates all our Yogācāra authors, but he develops any number of powerful arguments against the various Abhidharma conceptions of ultimately real entities (*dharmas*) and their relation to *svabhāva*. This result, taken together with his claim that emptiness is itself empty, yields a stance that questions the coherence of "ultimate truth." Indeed Nāgārjuna explicitly rejects the reasoning that Asaṅga relies on in accusing the Mādhyamika of incoherence. He agrees (MMK 13.7) that there could be things that were truly said to be empty only if there were ultimately real (and so non-empty) things; but, he adds, nothing can be found that is not empty. The seemingly paradoxical result is to be resolved by rejecting the underlying assumption that emptiness is to be understood as characterizing ultimately real things. The point is not to replace false metaphysical theories with the true one. The point is, rather, to reject the view of truth from which metaphysical theorizing issues.

When Madhyamaka does begin to engage Yogācāra, this stance is immediately brought to bear on *cittamātra*. Thus in his commentary on *Catuḥśataka*, Candrakīrti welcomes Dharmapāla's arguments against the ultimate reality of corporeal elements (*rūpa dharmas*), but claims that there are equally powerful arguments against the ultimate reality of mental elements as well.[4] Bhāviveka goes further. First he rejects the standard infinite-divisibility argument for *cittamātra*, on the grounds that it overlooks the (conventional) distinction between an aggregate (*saṃghāta*) and a combination (*saṃcita*) (MHK 5.35-6). And if, as Yogācāra holds, the nature of the ultimately real is inexpressible, then it cannot be said to be of the nature of the mental (MHK 5.53-4). So *cittamātra* can be neither conventionally nor ultimately true.

It looks, then, as though we must take emptiness seriously and literally. Why, however, is this not tantamount to nihilism? Perhaps the easiest way to understand the Madhyamaka answer is by considering the fact that nihilism is a metaphysical theory, a view about "how the world is anyway." It is the view that the world mind-independently is devoid of any and all existing things. Again, Nāgārjuna tells us quite explicitly that emptiness is not to be understood as a metaphysical theory (MMK 13.8). To do its work properly, Candrakīrti explains, emptiness must be like a physic that expels itself while expelling other things from the gut

4. See, for example, CŚV on k323, Tillemans 1990 vol.2, 109–111

(PP 248). But if we are to continue to hold that nothing lacking *svabhāva* is ultimately real, and are also to take seriously and literally the claim that nothing has *svabhāva*, how can we avoid the nihilist conclusion? Well, how was Vaccha to avoid the conclusion that the enlightened person ceases to exist after death, given that a person is just a karmically fuelled causal series of psychophysical elements, and that the enlightened person's karmic fuel is exhausted at death?[5] The middle path the Buddha wants Vaccha to follow is not that the enlightened person attains some indescribable state that cannot be said to be either existence or nonexistence. To take the middle path is to reject the assumption common to eternalism and annihilationism—that there are persons. The Buddha's middle path is antirealism concerning statements about persons: there are no mind-independent facts that make such statements true or false. Madhyamaka simply globalizes this stance concerning the truth of statements. We avoid the nihilist conclusion by rejecting the assumption common to existence-ism and nihilism: that there are mind-independent facts that make any statement true or false. Madhyamaka is global antirealism about truth.

While Asaṅga says that the teaching of emptiness requires careful explication, Mādhyamikas seem to have thought it is the claim that buddhas cognize an inexpressible ultimate that needs special handling. Just as Yogācārins seek to reduce to absurdity the Madhyamaka stance on emptiness, so Mādhyamikas reject as incoherent Yogācāra literalism about an inexpressible ultimate. Candrakīrti, for instance, dismisses out of hand the Yogācāra attempt to defend their doctrine of the *svalakṣaṇa* against the criticism that there can be no characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) without a thing characterized. When the Yogācārin claims that the *svalakṣaṇa* transcends the characteristic-characterized distinction due to its being ineffable (*avācyatā*), Candrakīrti replies that, since ineffability would mean the absence of both characteristic and characterized, there could then be no *svalakṣaṇa*.[6] Likewise when an opponent seeks to avoid the difficulty that two opposed concepts are mutually interdefined by proposing that in reality their natures are ineffable, Candrakīrti replies that in this case

5. On Vaccha, see M 1., 483–488.

6. *atha vocyate, [avācyata]yā siddhir bhaviṣyatīti cen naitad evaṃ / avācyatā hi nāma parasparavibhāgaparijñānābhāve sati bhavati / yatra ca vibhāgaparijñānaṃ nāsti, tatredaṃ lakṣaṇam idaṃ lakṣyam iti viśeṣataḥ paricchedāsaṃbhave sati dvayor apy abhāva eveti / tasmād avācyatayāpi nāsti siddhiḥ /* (PP, 65).

ineffability would mean their thorough blending, which could not occur unless each had its own separate nature.[7] In short he is well aware of the paradox of ineffability, and feels free to use it against his opponent.

Bhāviveka likewise seeks to demonstrate the inadequacies of the Yogācāra position, for example, by pointing out that if they wish to claim that the *svalakṣaṇa* is inexpressible (*anabhilāpya*), they will be ill-equipped to deny the existence of an equally inexpressible self (K, 60). And when the Yogācārin claims that their account of emptiness avoids nihilism because conceptual superimposition is onto an ultimately real locus that is beyond concepts and so inexpressible, he replies that their reason is contradicted (*hetoś cāpi viruddhatā*). By this he means precisely that they have run afoul of the paradox of ineffability (MHK 5.71, Eckel, 274).

Still there are those Mahāyāna texts that claim buddhas have such cognitive powers. If these claims are not to be taken seriously and literally, how are we to interpret them? Here it is important to bear in mind that this claim about enlightened ones is likely to have originated as a way of trying to bolster the authoritativeness of the tradition's founder. The difficulty for the antirealist Mādhyamika is that if truth is not correspondence to mind-independent reality, it is not clear how buddhas could have cognitions that correctly grasp the ultimate nature of things. But there is a way around this difficulty. One might say that the special epistemic status of enlightened ones comes not from their grasping how things ultimately are, but from their having overcome all sources of error about how things are. Bhāviveka says just this. He says that buddhas see by a kind of nonseeing, due to their rejecting innumerable wrong conceptions by means of faultless inference conforming to authority (MHK 5.105-6). And, he adds,

> 5.94: [The nature of things] is cognized non-conceptually, and is entirely inexpressible, because of the fact that nothing is really arisen, as was said before in the refutation of arising.

The point here is a subtle one that is easily overlooked: it is that the ultimate nature of reality is something that is inexpressible and only cognizable

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7. *avācyatayā siddhirbhaviṣyatīti cet / keyamavācyatā nāma / yadi miśrībhāva so 'nupapanna / pṛthakpṛthagasiddhayormiśrībhāvābhāvāt / anirdhâryamânau svarūpatvād vandhyāputraśyāmagauratādivanna sta eva saṃbhavavibhavāviti* // (PP on MMK 21.6).

nonconceptually because, there being no ultimately real entities to figure in truth-makers for purported descriptions of the ultimate nature of reality, no such description (including "inexpressible" and "unconceptualizable") can be asserted. The negative prefixes in "inexpressible" (*anabhilāpya*) and "nonconceptual" (*nirvikalpaka*) are to be read in the style of the commitmentless *prasajya-pratiṣedha*. The cognition of the ultimate nature of things—their all being empty of intrinsic nature—is nonconceptual because, there being nothing to cognize, no cognition arises.

It will no doubt be objected that this leaves no room for the sort of transformative realization that all Buddhists agree marks the end of the path. All four Indian commentators on MMK 18.9-12 agree that when Nāgārjuna characterizes reality as not known by means of another (*aparapratyaya*), and calls pratyekabuddhas' knowledge "independent" (*asaṃsarga*), he means that release is not attained by acquisition of knowledge that is "merely propositional" in nature. Candrakīrti gives the example of the person with eye-disorder (the *taimirika*), pointing out that there is a difference between knowing that the floaters they see do not exist, and no longer seeing any floaters. Someone who has studied Nāgārjuna's arguments and takes them to be sound might be said to know, in some sense, that all things are devoid of intrinsic nature, yet still lack the insight that supposedly transforms one into a fully realized being. If references to an inexpressible nonconceptual cognition are explained away as slightly ironic allusions to the absence of any cognition deserving to be called apprehension of the ultimate, then it seems no room remains for such a transformative personal realization. But perhaps this might be answered by way of the point that there can be no "master argument" for emptiness: a Mādhyamika can help others grasp emptiness only by reducing to absurdity their interlocutor's various candidate proposals for the status of Final Truth About Reality.[8] There is no principled way for the Mādhyamika to stop the opponent from continuing to generate new theories in the wake of the defeat of old theories. Yet presumably the opponent will eventually get the point and stop. This cessation might be described as a seeing that is a non-seeing. It is not incorrectly described as attaining the insight that all things are empty. But it is manifested by simply ceasing to hanker after the Final Truth about the ultimate nature of Reality.

8. I discuss the point that there can be no such master argument in Siderits 2000.

The Case for Discontinuity

The points at issue in the dispute between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka are deep and difficult. It is hard to know what to make of global antirealism about truth. It is likewise difficult to see how to get around the paradox of ineffability. I shall not attempt to resolve any of the issues involved here. Our job was just to see if the apparent gap between the two schools is indeed unbridgeable. Given my reading of early Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, it is. Attempts at reconciliation must follow the timeworn strategy of inclusivism. And, given the philosophical differences between the schools, that will inevitably involve either subordinating one to the other, or else refusing to take their philosophical practices seriously. And in fact both sides have their own form of inclusivism. Their being schools of Mahāyāna may make their inclusivism inevitable. But the summits they propound look quite different.

On the Yogācāra side we have, for instance, Vasubandhu's discussion of the Buddha's teaching of the twelve *āyatana*s (Vimś. 9–10), which he describes as working at two (or three) different levels. For those beginning on the path to cessation, the doctrine functions in the argument for non-self by helping to show that consciousness is impermanent (namely by showing that the consciousnesses involved in distinct sense modalities are themselves distinct). For more advanced practitioners, the doctrine plays a role in the proof that external objects are unnecessary posits in explaining the arising of sensory cognition. This then leads to the understanding of *cittamātra*, which in turn leads to realization of the nondual (and thus inexpressible) nature of the real. The first level clearly corresponds to the path as understood in the Abhidharma schools, while the second represents the Yogācāra consummation of that path. The summit one reaches on that path is just the pure luminous thusness so often described as what one comes to see in certain advanced meditative states. This description of the progressive understandings of the doctrine of the *āyatana*s is then immediately followed by Vasubandhu's defense of his nondualist understanding of emptiness over the Madhyamaka nihilist understanding.

An early formulation of Madhyamaka inclusivism is to be found in MMK 18.8–9. In v. 8 Nāgārjuna gives four alternative views about the nature of reality, and describes them as the graded teaching (*anuśāsana*) of the Buddha. The commentators identify these with different Buddhist schools, with the lower stages representing Abhidharma views and the fourth stage representing the Yogācāra notion of an inexpressible

ultimate ("neither real nor unreal"). But in v. 9 we get the Madhyamaka take on the nature of reality. The characterization is strictly negative: free of intrinsic nature, not populated by hypostatization, not having many separate meanings, and the like. This might make it seem equivalent to the preceding verse's "neither real nor unreal" characterization identified by the commentators as the Yogācāra view. But here the negations are to be understood as of the commitmentless illocutionary variety (*prasajya pratiṣedha*). Once one stops furnishing the world with entities by hypostatizing what are merely useful ways of talking, the very question of the nature of reality dissolves. To continue to press the question is like insisting that the fire that has gone out must have gone in some direction.

Now in these two formulations, neither party is claiming that the position of the other will make a positive contribution to progress on the path as they understand it. But we can easily imagine something like this being said. Indeed we know that just this sort of thing was said by proponents of later Indian attempts at Yogācāra-Madhyamaka synthesis. The present point, however, is that, given the differences between the two characterizations of the summit, any positive contribution the rival school could make would have its practitioners ascending what, from that rival school's perspective, must be the wrong mountain. To shift the metaphor, Indian Mahāyāna may be presented as a tent big enough to accommodate multitudes; but there is a dais at the center, and that dais is always raised above the surrounding floor.

Appendix: Vasubandhu and Asaṅga on Two Readings of Emptiness

Vasubandhu:

> [Objection:] If indeed no dharma exists anywhere, then this "impressions only" does not exist either. How is it established?
>
> [Reply:] It is not the case that the essencelessness of dharmas is intimated by saying that no dharma exists anywhere. However, what is falsely constructed by the ignorant—the intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) of dharmas, what is to be grasped and the grasper, etc.—by means of that imagined essence [of impressions] their essence-

> lessness [is intimated]; but this is not done by means of that inexpressible essence which is the object of cognition of the Buddhas. Since the essencelessness of impressions-only as well is intimated by means of a constructed essence of another impression, the essencelessness of all dharmas is intimated by the establishment of impressions-only, not by the denial of their existence. (Viṃś. 10)

Asaṅga:

> Likewise banished from our Dharma-lineage is the universal nihilism that denies the mere thing among *dharma*s such as *rūpa* and the like. I shall say more about this. Denying the mere thing with respect to *dharma*s such as *rūpa* and the like, neither reality nor conceptual fiction is possible. For instance, where there are the skandhas of *rūpa* etc., there is the conceptual fiction of the person. And where they are not, the conceptual fiction of the person is unreal. Likewise if there is a mere thing with respect to *dharma*s like *rūpa* etc., then the use of convenient designators concerning *dharma*s such as *rūpa* and the like is appropriate. If not then the use of convenient designators is unreal. Where the thing referred to by the concept does not exist, the groundless conceptual fiction likewise does not exist. Hence some having heard the sūtras associated with Mahāyāna, associated with the deep [doctrine of] emptiness, difficult to understand and recognized as having an intended meaning [that requires explication], not thoroughly discerning the meaning of what was expounded in its true import, having imaginatively constructed views that are arrived at only through reasoning, say: "The truth is that all is just conceptual fictions. Who sees this sees perfectly." As for their view, due to the absence of the thing itself which serves as basis of the concept, conceptual fictions must all likewise absolutely not exist. How then will it be true that all is just conceptual fictions? Through this conception on their part, reality, conceptual fiction, and the two together are all denied. Because they deny both conceptual fiction and reality, they should be considered the nihilist-in-chief. For those who are knowledgeable and of good conduct, the nihilist is accordingly not to be spoken of or associated with. He himself fails in his endeavors. Likewise those who concur in his views are led into ruin. It was in this context that the Buddha said, "It is better

that one have the view that there is a person than that one conceive of emptiness incorrectly." For what reason? Someone having the view that there are persons is confused about just one cognizable, but they would not deny all cognizables. Not because of this would there occur a cause [for rebirth] in evil circumstances. Nor should he confute or mislead another who is intent on the Dharma and liberation from suffering. One should establish [another] in truth and in the Dharma. Nor should one be lax in following the precepts. Again through emptiness wrongly conceived one would be confused about the cognizable thing. All cognizables would also be denied. And with that as cause one falls into disaster. One would bring disaster [of rebirth] upon another who seeks the Dharma and liberation from suffering. One would be lax in following the precepts. For this reason the denial of the real thing is banished from our Dharma-lineage.

How, again, is emptiness wrongly conceptualized? Some ascetics and Brahmins do not acknowledge that [viz. intrinsic nature] of which something is empty. Nor do they acknowledge that which is empty [viz. things and *dharmas*]. It is in this way that emptiness is said to be wrongly conceived. For what reason? Because that of which it is empty is non-existent, but that which is empty is existent—it is thus that emptiness is possible. What will be empty of what, where, when everything is unreal? This thing's being devoid of that is not [then] possible. Thus emptiness is wrongly conceptualized in this case. (BBh 30-2)

Abbreviations

BBh *Bodhisattvabhūmi* of Asaṅga. Ed. Nalinaksha Dutt. K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute: Patna, 1978.

K *Karatalaratna, or, The jewel in hand: a logico-philosophical treatise of the Madhyamaka School*. Ed. N. Aiyaswami Sastri. Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 1949.

M *Majjhima-nikāya*. Ed. V. Trenckner. 3 volumes. London: Pali Text Society, 1888–99.

MHK *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* of Bhāviveka. Ed. and transl.in David Eckel, *Bhāviveka and His Buddhist Opponents*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

MMK *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* of Nāgārjuna. In Pandeya, Raghunath, ed., *The Madhyamakaśāstram of Nāgārjuna*, with the Commentaries *Akutobhayā by Nāgārjuna, Madhyamakavṛtti* by Buddhapālita, *Prajñāpradīpavṛtti* by Bhāvaviveka, and *Prasannapadā* by Candrakīrti, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988.

PP *Prasannapadā* of Candrakīrti. In Louis de la Vallée Poussin, ed., *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās (Mādhyamikasūtras) de Nāgārjuna avec la Prasannapdā Commentaire de Candrakīrti*. Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1970.

Viṃś *Viṃśikā* of Vasubandhu. In *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi: deux traites de Vasubandhu*. Ed. Sylvain Levi. Vol. 245 de Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes-études. Sciences historiques et philologiques. Louvain: 1925.

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5

"Undigested Pride"

BHĀVIVEKA ON THE DISPUTE BETWEEN MADHYAMAKA AND YOGĀCĀRA

Malcolm David Eckel

ANY SERIOUS HISTORICAL study of the relationship between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka has to consider the work of the sixth-century Madhyamaka thinker Bhāviveka. This is true not only for the quality of his arguments, but because Bhāviveka was there at the start, when the rumblings of controversy between these two traditions of Mahāyāna interpretation burst into public debate. Clifford Geertz has remarked that the authority of anthropological writing comes from the sense that the anthropologist has actually "been there" and experienced another culture face to face (Geertz 1988). This is an anthropologist's version of Woody Allen's famous dictum that "ninety percent of life is just showing up." In the dispute between the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka traditions, Bhāviveka actually showed up. Or, at least, he tried to. If we can believe the account of Bhāviveka's career by the seventh-century Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, Bhāviveka was so disturbed by Dharmapāla's teaching of the Yogācāra at Nālandā that he traveled from South India to confront him in debate. According to Xuanzang, Dharmapāla refused the challenge. But Bhāviveka's work tells enough about his objections that we can construct a convincing account of that imagined debate.

Bhāviveka also showed up in another sense. While Indian authors like Bhāviveka did not generally use their works to air their resentments, the debate with the Yogācāra elicited an unusually fierce response. It seems that the trip from Andhra to Nālandā (if it ever took place) was not a genial exercise in intellectual tourism. Judging from his account of the Yogācāra, Bhāviveka felt that he and his tradition had been insulted, and he wanted to return the favor. In this chapter, I would like to comment briefly on the nature of the insult and outline the form of Bhāviveka's response. The relationship

between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka evolved quite substantially beyond the time of Bhāviveka, especially in the eighth century, when Mādhyamikas began to grapple with the influence of Dharmakīrti in Buddhist epistemology. But Bhāviveka helps us put our feet on the ground in historical actuality, not only to understand the intellectual convictions that fired the dispute, but to understand the innovations that entered the tradition at a later date.

I will divide my remarks into four parts: Bhāviveka's sources, his style of argumentation, the structure of his argument, and a sampling of particular points of disagreement, including the status of external objects.

Sources

In "The Analysis of Reality According to the Yogācāra" (*yogācāratattva-viniścayāvatāra*), which functions as chapter 5 of his *Verses on the Heart of the Middle Way* (*madhyamakahṛdayakārikāḥ*), Bhāviveka quotes three separate Yogācāra sources. The first of these quotations comes, not surprisingly, from *The Discrimination Between the Middle and the Extremes* (*madhyāntavibhāga*), a work that is ascribed to Asaṅga or, if one prefers, to the bodhisattva Maitreya. The verse has to do with the concept of "no-apprehension" (*anupalabdhi*):[1]

5.4 upalabdhiṃ samāśritya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate /
nopalabdhiṃ samāśritya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate //

The Sanskrit yields a rather cryptic English translation:

> From apprehension comes no-apprehension;
> from no-apprehension comes no-apprehension.

But with the help of the commentary, the meaning of the verse is clear. Bhāviveka (or one of his disciples) takes it as an account of the cognitive stages that lead to an understanding of "ideation-only" (*vijñaptimātra*), the signature doctrine of the Yogācāra. About this he has more to say later in the text.

The second quotation comes from Dignāga's *Investigation of the Percept* (*ālambanaparīkṣā*):

5.39 asaty api ca bāhye 'rthe dvayam anyonyahetukam /
śaktir viṣayarūpaṃ ca

1. All quotations from Bhāviveka's critique of the Yogācāra are taken from Eckel 2008.

> Even without an external object, the potential and the form of the object cause each other.

In a rhetorical gesture that is almost unprecedented in Bhāviveka's text, this verse is introduced by Dignāga in the first person: "In the treatise [entitled] *The Investigation of the Percept*, I have firmly established the following position." This is a helpful reminder that the figure of Dignāga lurks in the background of any discussion of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in the sixth century. The list of Yogācāra opponents was not limited to the usual suspects, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu; it included Dignāga himself.

These two quotations play important roles in the argument, but they do not raise the anger of Bhāviveka's third quotation, in this case from the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*:

5.82–83 prajñapter apy asadbhāvo vastvabhāve bhavet sati /
taddṛṣṭir nāstiko 'kathyaḥ sa hy asaṃvāsya eva ca //
svayam āpāyikatve 'sau pareṣāṃś ca vipādakaḥ /

> If nothing is real, there cannot be any ideas (*prajñapti*). Someone who holds this view is a nihilist, with whom one should not speak or share living quarters. This person falls into a bad rebirth and takes others with him.

Here Bhāviveka resorts to the unusual expedient of summarizing a prose passage from the *Tattvārtha* chapter of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* in verse. The passage alludes to the dangers associated with an unnamed "nihilist" (*nāstika*) and advises the reader not only to avoid speaking with such a person, but to avoid living in close proximity. Whether the word *asaṃvāsya* refers to a specific form of monastic discipline is unclear, but it suggests that the person in question should be shunned, if not expelled from the monastery altogether. Who might such a person be? Bhāviveka takes this passage as a reference to Mādhyamikas like himself, and he responds with an insult of his own:

5.83cd iti dveṣāmiṣodgāro 'bhimānājīrṇasūcakaḥ //

> These angry words are like vomit: they show undigested pride.

The Sanskrit is somewhat more colorful than my bland English translation. The word "vomit" (*āmiṣodgāra*) actually refers to vomit of raw flesh or

carrion—not an appealing image. What kind of creature would throw up undigested carrion? No doubt some kind of scavenger. I imagine that Bhāviveka is saying, in scarcely veiled terms, that the Yogācārins are no better than dogs.

If you will pardon the pun, these two verses (MHK 5.82-83) constitute the meat of the dispute, and they take a moment to digest. The first point to notice, although it is often overlooked, is that Bhāviveka thought he was responding to a Yogācāra attack. Writing many centuries later, Tāranātha (1575–1634) attributed the split between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka to Bhāviveka and his disciples (Eckel 2008: 11). This view has sometimes been repeated uncritically by subsequent scholars. Against this view, let it simply be said that Bhāviveka understood the origin of the dispute quite differently, and, unlike Tāranātha, he was there. These verses also help us understand why Bhāviveka took this not just as an attack but as a *Yogācāra* attack. In the opening verse of his chapter, Bhāviveka uses the word "Yogācāra" in the plural to name his opponents. The commentary distinguishes Yogācāras from "those who hold the doctrine of the Madhyamaka" (*dbu mar smra ba pa rnams*). Why does Bhāviveka refer to his opponents as Yogācāras? It is a common misconception to think that Yogācāras are "practitioners of yoga," as opposed to Mādhyamikas, who are proponents of the middle-way. But Mādhyamikas have no monopoly on the middle-way, and Yogācāras have no monopoly on the practice of yoga. The last page of the commentary on Bhāviveka's *Verses on the Heart of the Middle Way* makes it clear that the word "Middle Way" (*madhyamaka*) refers not just to the *madhyamaka-siddhānta* (the Madhyamaka doctrine), but to the *madhyamaka-śāstra* (the Madhyamaka text), in other words, to the text of Nāgārjuna on which the Madhyamaka tradition is based (Eckel 2008: 65). The simplest interpretation of the term "Yogācāra" is to take it the same way, as a reference to the foundational text of the tradition expounded by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. They are "Yogācārins" because they follow the text-tradition of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, the text from which Bhāviveka quoted his offensive verse.

The three sources I have just mentioned (the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, and *Bodhisattvabhūmi* or *Yogācārabhūmi*) are clear and well established. Bhāviveka quotes them and addresses them directly in his critique. But another body of Yogācāra texts casts a shadow over Bhāviveka's argument without being quoted or mentioned by name. This is the corpus of Yogācāra exegetical literature on the sūtras of the Perfection of Wisdom. At the end of his opening account of the

Yogācāra position, Bhāviveka puts the following verse in the mouth of his opponent:

5.7 prajñāpāramitānītir iyaṃ sarvajñatāptaye /
na tūtpādanirodhādipratiṣedhaparāyaṇā //

> This approach to the Perfection of Wisdom is [the means] to attain omniscience, while the one that concentrates on the negation of arising and cessation is not.

Again the commentary leaves no doubt about the identity of the villains.

> This approach to the Perfection of Wisdom—namely the one that we [Yogācārins] present—is the means to attain omniscience. The approach that concentrates on the negation of arising and cessation—namely the approach of the Mādhyamikas (*madhyamavādin*)—is tantamount to nihilism (*nāstikadṛṣṭi*) and is not the means to attain omniscience.

In this verse, the dispute between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka is not an abstract controversy about emptiness; it is a struggle over the interpretation of authoritative texts.

What sources did Bhāviveka have in mind when he objected to Yogācāra interpretations of scripture? Writing two centuries later, Haribhadra mentions commentaries on the Perfection of Wisdom by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu (Eckel 2008: 67), but these commentaries are no longer extant. We can get a taste of their rhetorical position, however, from a short work by Dignāga called *Epitome of the Perfection of Wisdom* (*prajñāpāramitāpiṇḍārtha*). Here Dignāga says: "The teaching in the Perfection of Wisdom is based on three [identities]: imagined, dependent, and absolute. The words 'do not exist' rule out everything that is imagined. Examples such as illusion (*māyā*) teach dependent [identity]. The fourfold purification teaches absolute [identity]. The Buddha has no other teaching with respect to the Perfection of Wisdom." For our purposes, the key words are the last: "the Buddha has *no other* teaching." We do not generally think of Mahāyāna philosophers as making exclusive claims about the interpretation of scripture, but that is the sense of Dignāga's words, and that is the position that elicits Bhāviveka's response.

The Style of Argument

I will not dwell at length on the style of Bhāviveka's argument, except to make two points. First, Bhāviveka brings to his dispute with Yogācāra the same three-part syllogism that he uses in his disputes with other text-traditions, including the Śrāvakas (his name for Nikāya Buddhists), the Vedāntins, the Mīmāṃsakas, and others. The syllogism is derived from Dignāga and is one more measure of the influence Dignāga held over Bhāviveka. My second point is that we can see in Bhāviveka's use of syllogistic reasoning a measure of respect not only for Dignāga, but for the role of reason itself as a measure of ultimate truth. Two centuries later, the Madhyamaka thinker Jñānagarbha defined the ultimate (*paramārtha*) as a rational cognition, expressed in the classic three-part syllogism made popular by Dignāga (Eckel 1987: 71). This paradoxical position seems to turn the standard structure of Buddhist epistemology upside down, but it is anticipated by Bhāviveka in his critique of the Yogācāra understanding of ultimate reality. The Yogācārin begins the exchange by saying that ultimate reality (literally, the *dharmatā* of *dharma*s) cannot be known by logical reasoning (*tarka*).

5.104 tattvasyātarkagamyatvāt tadbodho nānumānataḥ /
nātas tarkeṇa dharmāṇāṃ gamyate dharmateti cet //

> Reality is not known by logical reasoning so it is not understood by inference; this is why ultimate reality is not known by logical reasoning.

The Yogācāra position has strong precedent in Buddhist tradition, and it makes intuitive sense. After all, the Buddha did not achieve awakening by rational investigation; he sat down and experienced reality directly. That should seem obvious, but Bhāviveka has something else in mind.

5.105 ihānumānān nirdoṣād āgamānuvidhāyinaḥ /
kalpitāśeṣavividhavikalpaughanirākṛteḥ //

> With faultless inference, consistent with tradition, Buddhas completely repel a flood of different concepts of imagined things.

5.106 akalajñeyayāthātmyam ākāśasamacetasaḥ /
jñānena nirvikalpena buddhāḥ paśyanty adarśanāt //

Then, without seeing, they see all objects of knowledge just as they are, with nonconceptual knowledge and with minds like space.

5.107 ato 'numānaviṣayaṃ na tattvaṃ pratipadyate /
tattvajñānavipakṣo yas tasya tena nirākriyā //

For this reason, reality is not known as an object of inference, but inference rules out the opposite of the knowledge of reality.

The point is subtle and extremely clever. Bhāviveka accepts the traditional position that you cannot use reason to grasp reality as an object in its own right. All you can do is use reason to rule out mistaken apprehensions of reality, including the misapprehension that there is any reality to grasp and any understanding to grasp it. All that is left as a criterion of ultimate awareness is reason itself. I take this to be the meaning of the title of Bhāviveka's commentary. His text is a *tarkajvālā*, a flame of reason: it burns and it illuminates. I will leave it to others to say how congenial this view would be to a logician like Dharmakīrti. Judging from the passage I just quoted, Bhāviveka thought that it was consistent with the basic affirmations of Buddhist tradition; it was only the Yogācāra position that it turned upside down.

The Structure of the Argument

One of the most impressive characteristics of Bhāviveka as an author is the structural clarity of his thought. His work is more than a series of arguments; it is a tightly structured system, and the guiding principle of this system is the concept of a middle way. For Bhāviveka, the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka approaches to the middle way were diametrically opposed. The Chinese monk-traveler Yijing (635–713) gave a concise account of the contrast in his translation of Asaṅga's commentary on the Diamond Sūtra: "For Yogācāra the real exists, but the conventional does not exist; and [Yogācāra] takes the three identities as foundational. For Madhyamaka the real does not exist, but the conventional does exist; and actually the two truths are primary" (translation by Dan Lusthaus, quoted in Eckel 2008: 69). The difference between the two traditions is more complicated than this, but just barely.

The symmetry of the Yogācāra position is evident in the first few verses of *The Distinction between the Middle and the Extremes* (*Madhyāntavibhāga*):

> abhūtaparikalpo 'sti dvayaṃ tatra na vidyate /
> śūnyatā vidyate tv atra tasyām api sa vidyate //
>
> The imagination of what is unreal exists. Duality does not exist in it, but emptiness does exist in it, and it exists in emptiness.
>
> na śūnyaṃ cāśūnyaṃ tasmāt sarvaṃ vidhīyate /
> sattvād asattvāt sattvāc ca madhyamā pratipac ca sā //
>
> This is why it says that nothing is empty and nothing is non-empty, because of the existence [of the imagination], the non-existence [of duality], and the existence [of emptiness], and this is the Middle Path.

The categories mentioned in these two verses can be aligned with the three identities in the following way:

duality	imagined identity	does not exist
imagination	dependent identity	exists
emptiness	absolute identity	exists

In later verses, the text complicates the picture slightly by equating the imagination (*parikalpa*) with consciousness (*vijñāna*) and asserting that consciousness both exists and does not exist, but the symmetry of the Yogācāra position remains.

Bhāviveka's response follows the same symmetrical form. He considers the non-existence of imagined identity (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) to be an "improper denial" (*apavāda*) of things that exist conventionally (Eckel 2008: 263). In other words, the Yogācāra understanding of imagined identity falls into one of the extremes of the middle way. The Yogācāra understanding of dependent identity (*paratantra-svabhāva*) falls into the other extreme. If the Yogācārins are saying that imagination exists conventionally, Bhāviveka has no objection. But if they are saying that imagination exists ultimately, they engage in an "improper reification" (*samāropa*). As Yijing clearly saw, the point here is not the specific arguments that each side gives to justify its positions; it is the symmetry of

their arrangement. The Yogācārins and Mādhyamikas each give an account of the middle way, and each account is a direct reversal of the other.

Particular Points of Disagreement

The separate arguments in Bhāviveka's analysis of the Yogācāra are quite diverse and deserve detailed study in their own right. In this chapter I will mention only two arguments to illustrate the riches that await a serious reader of Bhāviveka's text.

There has been a great deal of discussion in scholarly circles about the Yogācāra approach to external objects. I do not want to enter into the complicated twists and turns of this argument, in part because much of it depends on Chinese sources that are not yet fully studied. But it might help clarify this discussion to know that Bhāviveka had a clear position on this issue. Bhāviveka devotes 38 of the 114 verses in his discussion of the Yogācāra to a refutation of the view that consciousness has no external objects. Much of the argument is derived from well-known Yogācāra sources, such as the *Viṃśatikā*, but Bhāviveka also takes up Dignāga's version of the argument in the *Ālambanaparīkṣā*. In this section Bhāviveka takes a step that, as far as I know, is unprecedented in Indian Madhyamaka literature. He argues, from a conventional point of view (*saṃvṛtyā*), that external objects consist of combinations (*saṃcita*) of homogeneous (*sajātīya*) atoms (Eckel 2008: 245–51). What does he mean by "homogeneous atoms"? They are atoms that exist "in the same location and in the same continuum." These "combinations" are not to be confused, he says, with mere "collections" (*samūha*) such as an army or a forest, that consist of elephants and horses or *haridru* and *khadira* trees. It strikes me as unlikely that Bhāviveka would have made such an elaborate effort to refute and then offer an alternative to a position that was not widely held in his time. He took the Yogācāra sources at face value, as I imagine many did in the debates that enlivened philosophical discussion in sixth-century India.

Bhāviveka also engaged Dignāga on a point that has significant implications for the understanding of Buddhist theories of language. In his section on "imagined identity," Bhāviveka criticizes Dignāga's concept of *apoha* or (as Bhāviveka understood it) "exclusion by the other" (Eckel 2008: 265–73). I will not attempt to summarize the details of his argument, except to say that Bhāviveka offers a striking alternative. In

response to Dignāga, Bhāviveka argues that words refer to "things that possess universals" (*sāmānyavadvastu*). His position is similar to that of the Naiyāyikas and Vaiśeṣikas, and it corresponds to a position that Dignāga discusses and rejects in *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 5.4 (Eckel 2008: 206). Tom Tillemans, Helmut Krasser, and others have noted that Bhāviveka's position moves toward a position that was made famous by Dharmakīrti (Krasser 2011). How this affects our understanding of Dharmakīrti is yet to be determined, but it offers another occasion to appreciate the power and critical depth of Bhāviveka's own thought. Bhāviveka goes on to define a universal (*sāmānya*) as "emptiness of that which is dissimilar" (*vijātīyena śūnyatvam*). For him an "emptiness" does not exist in the abstract; it has to be located in a particular place. In this case, the "place" of emptiness is "the thing that possesses the universal." It is a shame that Bhāviveka's definition of a unversal did not gain greater currency in Buddhist thought. In my view, it contains one of Bhāviveka's more rarefied philosophical jokes. For him, ultimate reality is defined as emptiness of self. Here he defines conventional reality (the reality to which words refer) as emptiness of other. It is Madhyamaka irony at its best.

Conclusion

The question posed by the panel for which this essay was originally prepared was "Madhyamaka and Yogācāra: Rivals or Allies?" By now it should be clear where Bhāviveka stood on this question. There were many strong bonds that tied these two traditions together. They shared the same scriptural sources, paid homage to the same Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and cultivated the same perfections in their pursuit of the bodhisattva path. But Bhāviveka's text makes it clear that there also were profound differences in their interpretation of scripture and in their view of the world. He also makes it clear that these differences were expressed in active debate. Judging from Bhāviveka's language at crucial moments in the argument, the rivalry between these two traditions was not friendly. Bhāviveka had a deep critical intelligence, and he was fiercely combative in confronting his philosophical opponents. Among his most bitter opponents, it seems, were those fellow Mahāyānists with whom he shared the deepest traditional affinities. His arguments against the Yogācārins give us a lot to chew on, as difficult as it may be to digest.

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6

Xuanzang and Kuiji on Madhyamaka

Dan Lusthaus

THE DOXOGRAPHERS TELL us that, at the highest levels of analysis, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra hold positions that are incommensurate; apparently, this is supposed to be true on the lower levels as well. Two avenues available for evaluating such claims are (1) the writings of the protagonists themselves, and (2) historical information that can be gleaned about the major players.

Two valuable sources for exploring the relations between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra during the seventh century are the *Biography* of Xuanzang and Kuiji's *Comprehensive Commentary on the Heart Sūtra*. The famous Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang 玄奘 (600–664) traveled to India (left China in 627 and returned in 645), recording copious details of the places he visited, their histories, customs, legends, monastic population figures, and so on. Upon his return to China, he had the monk Bianji 辯機 (619? –649) compile this information into what has remained one of the peerless masterpieces of ethnography and history, *Record of Western Lands* (*Xiyuji* 西域記).[1] It remains one of our most important and informative resources on seventh-century India. Closely related to the *Record* is the *Biography* of Xuanzang, written by his contemporaries Huili 慧立 and

1. Bianji was executed in 649 after being implicated in an illicit relationship with the married Princess Gaoyang 高陽公主, Emperor Taizong's 太宗 daughter. (She was forced to commit suicide in 653 as a result of further "indiscretions.") *Record of Western Lands* (T.51.2087; full title *DaTang Xiyuji* 大唐西域記, "Record of Western Lands for the Great Tang [Dynasty]") has been translated into Western languages several times. The most recent complete translation is by Li Rongxi. Xuanzang gives directions (so many *li* northeast or southwest from one place to the next) throughout the *Record* that are so accurate that Aurel Stein, following Xuanzang's directions, found lost cities and sites in Central Asia exactly where Xuanzang said they were. Stein could then immediately identify them, thanks to Xuanzang.

Yancong 彥悰, fully titled *DaTang daciensi sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 (*A Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty*).[2] The focus of the *Record* is on the places and people—Xuanzang himself is almost a ghost observer—but the *Biography* devotes its attention to Xuanzang and his adventures and interactions with the people and places he visited. Countless details and events not found in the *Record* are presented in the *Biography*. For instance, in the *Record,* when Xuanzang arrives at a place associated with an important Buddhist figure, such as Nāgārjuna, Bhāviveka, Dignāga, or Dharmapāla, he usually relates some facts and stories about that figure, perhaps concerning debates they engaged in. He never discusses his own activities aside from what, as a pilgrim and tourist, he sees or hears. The *Biography* remedies that with numerous tales of his studies, exploits, debates, teachers, and so on. Xuanzang was one of the major transmitters of Yogācāra (and other) materials to China, and he was one of the best and most prolific translators of Indian texts. He translated Madhyamaka as well as Yogācāra and other texts.

Kuiji's *Comprehensive Commentary on the Heart Sūtra* (hereafter *Commentary*) is the earliest extant commentary we have on the *Heart Sūtra*.[3] It has two main distinctive features, aside from its inordinate length given the brevity of the sūtra itself. First, more than a third of the text is devoted to explaining what the word "practicing" entails in the early line of the sūtra that states that Avalokiteśvara was "practicing the profound

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2. Huili, who was a colleague of Xuanzang's, wrote much of the *Biography* during Xuanzang's lifetime, drawing on Xuanzang's travelog *Record of Western Lands*, oral accounts, and other sources. The work was unfinished when Xuanzang died, and, feeling unable to bring the project to completion on his own, he brought Yancong on board, more for his reputation as a literary stylist than for his familiarity with either Xuanzang or the finer points of Buddhist doctrine. Whether the numerous hagiographical embellishments in the *Biography* were original to Huili's efforts or were additions supplied by Yancong's "literary" stylings is impossible to determine. Like the *Record*, the *Biography* has been translated into Western languages several times. I will be using the most recent complete English translations by Li Rongxi (Li 1995), modifying it when necessary (e.g., Li often mis-Sanskritizes names, titles, and terms), since it often tends to be more reliable in many places than its predecessors.

3. Kuiji 窺基. *Panre boluomiduo xinjing youzan* 般若波羅蜜多心經幽贊 (T.33.1710). A complete English translation is available, which I will be using (Heng-ching and Lusthaus, 2001). Since that English translation provides the Taishō page numbers in the margins alongside the translation, and several of the quoted passages that will be used are lengthy, I will forgo providing the Chinese text or references to it and instead provide the page numbers to the English translation. What I will provide here, which is not given in the published translation, are citations to the sources Kuiji quotes and discusses.

Prajñāpāramitā." The second distinctive feature of Kuiji's *Commentary*, more germane to the present topic, is that for every term and passage in the *Heart Sūtra*, he presents first a Madhyamakan interpretation followed by a Yogācāra interpretation, and, when they are at odds, a debate can break out, sometimes extending into extra rounds. Hence the entire *Commentary* is a detailed exposition of the affinities and disagreements between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra.

Some Preliminary Considerations

It is important to recognize that one has to be cautious about essentializing either Madhyamaka or Yogācāra, in the sense of reducing either to a closed, fixed set of doctrines, ideas, talking points, or inviolable commitments. Both exhibit remarkable diversity across the works of their key authors. For instance, not only are there obvious and famous differences between the interpretations of Nāgārjuna propounded by Bhāviveka as opposed to Candrakīrti, but even greater diversity emerges in later figures in India (e.g., the Tibetan understanding of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla as Madhyamaka rather than Yogācāra thinkers) and especially among the disputants of later Tibetan forms of Madhyamaka.[4] Similarly, while generalized secondary treatments of Yogācāra tend to lump all Yogācāra

4. Even while recognizing that the labels Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika never existed in India, scholars nevertheless continue to use those terms to identify what are supposed to be the major divisions of Madhyamaka, assuming that even if later concoctions, these labels accurately identify the actual rift in Indian Madhyamaka and the Tibetan understanding from early on. Those inventions of later Tibetan doxographic systems however have distorted the picture, not only by projecting them back into India, but in thereby also obscuring how Tibetans themselves understood divisions within Madhyamaka for many centuries. Some recent studies offer correctives, but due to the relatively late nature of the materials they use, they assume their newer labels didn't arise until the eleventh century of so in India and Tibet. As will be demonstrated in this paper, the classifications they are now uncovering were already in full force at least since the sixth century during the time of Xuanzang and Kuiji. Kuiji's description of Madhyamaka as illusionist may strike some as odd and unusual, but that was the dominant understanding at least through the 11th and 12th centuries. See Orna Almogi, "Māyopamādvayavāda versus Sarvadharmāpratiṣṭhānavāda: A Late Indian Subclassification of Madhyamaka and its Reception in Tibet," *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies* [国際仏教学大学院大学研究紀要], Vol. XIV, 2010, 135–212. Although mistaken about this classification being late (speculating that it originates in the 11th century in India), Almogi demonstrates not only that this classification existed in India and early on in Tibet, but that "the rather unfamiliar subclassification into Māyopamādvayavāda—or the 'strand which maintains that [phenomena] are one, inasmuch as they are like illusions' (*sgyu ma lta bu gnyis su med par smra ba*, also known as *sgyu ma lta bur 'dod pa: *māyopamamata or sgyu ma rigs grub pa*; henceforth

authors, especially those of the first few centuries of Yogācāra's development, into the same doctrinal basket, there are actually vast differences between the putative founders, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, and even between Vasubandhu's earlier and later writings[5], and additional conflicting interpretations and divergences promulgated by Sthiramati, Dharmapāla, Vinītadeva, etc.. The disputes between the different Yogācāra thinkers and factions display tremendous diversity on a wide range of topics, major and minor, and the tradition revels in that richness. At the same time, one also finds much overlap between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra thinking when one examines the full range of their writings, which shouldn't be surprising given that, together, they constitute the two exemplars of Indian Mahāyāna.

Additionally, the presentations of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra offered by the much later doxographers often get many positions wrong. Earlier teachings are distorted in the name of freezing messy and complex diversities into a manageable set of comprehensible (and memorizable) teachings by assigning them to niches that edify pre-assumed and preferred hierarchical relations. Fitting things together neatly and vindicating one's own school had precedence over getting the details right in terms of conforming to the actual statements found in the texts that the doxographers pretend to encapsulate and represent. Doxographical classification is heavily agenda-driven.

One way to minimize the pitfalls of distortion through generalization is to focus narrowly on specific texts, and to let them, rather than an agenda or some prior homogenization, do the talking. To that end I focus on Xuanzang and Kuiji. Xuanzang is not only the leading Chinese Yogācāra figure of the seventh century, but he also made a notable impact in India, studying *and* lecturing at Nālandā and elsewhere, and, as we will

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Māyopamavāda: sGyu ma lta bur smra ba)—and Sarvadharmāpratiṣṭhānavāda—or the 'strand which maintains that all phenomena have no substratum whatsoever' (*chos thams cad rab tu mi gnas par 'dod pa*, or simply *rab tu mi gnas pa*; henceforth Apratiṣṭhānavāda: Rab tu mi gnas par smra ba) (p. 134) . . . [is i]n fact, the only explicit and clear-cut division into two branches of Madhyamaka found in Indian sources . . . [namely] that into Māyopamavāda and Apratiṣṭhānavāda." (pp. 134–35).

5. The differences have even allowed some leading western academics to argue for decades there were two Vasubandhus. There was only one. For a recent compilation of evidence challenging the two-Vasubandhu theory, see Ōtake, Susumu 大竹晋, *Gengi kan'yaku basubandu shakukyōrongun no kenkyū* (元魏漢訳ヴァスバンドゥ釈経論群の研究) Tōkyō: Daizō Shuppan, 2013. See also Jonathan Gold, *Paving the Great Way: Vasubandhu's Unifying Buddhist Philosophy* (NY: Columbia University Press) 2014.

see, impressing royalty, such as King Harsha, in the process. Kuiji, considered the founding patriarch of the *Weishi* school of East Asian Yogācāra, came to represent "orthodox" Yogācāra for all East Asians. Xuanzang's observation and participation in the Madhyamaka-Yogācāra debates of his day, and Kuiji's discussions, are thus precious, authoritative, and, as we'll see, highly informative.

Before looking at Xuanzang's *Biography* and Kuiji's *Commentary* more closely, some quick observations may be helpful.

First of all, Yogācāra texts rarely challenge basic Madhyamaka, for example, Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, who are venerated in the Yogācāra tradition. Rather, when there is criticism, it is aimed at "those who misunderstand emptiness" (meaning later Mādhyamika authors who failed to properly understand the teachings of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva). Criticism is not leveled at the teachings of the founding figures. Yogācāras wrote approving commentaries of foundational Madhyamaka works, such as Asaṅga's summary commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (MMK), whose Chinese title, *Shun zhonglun* 順中論, means "Treatise on Comforming to the Middle Way",[6] and Sthiramati's full commentary on MMK.[7] When Dharmapāla, defending Yogācāra from attacks by Bhāviveka, mounts his counterattack, he does so through the vehicle of his own commentary[8] on Āryadeva's root text, *Catuḥśataka*; Dharmapāla's counterattack is aimed at Bhāviveka, not Āryadeva, and hence not at Madhyamaka per se, but at what he would contend is Bhāviveka's misunderstanding of Madhyamaka, that is, his target is faulty Madhyamaka, not Madhyamaka per se. Since Yogācāra had not yet appeared when Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva were active, neither author mounted an attack on it.

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6. *Shun zhonglun* 順中論 (T.30.1565), translated by Gautama Prajñāruci 瞿曇般若流支 in 543. There has been some controversy over whether Asaṅga is the actual author, but that Gautama Prajñāruci, an Indian translator in China who primarily translated sūtras and sūtra commentaries as well as Yogācāra (e.g., Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikā*, T.31.1588 唯識論 *Weishi lun*) and Madhyamaka texts (e.g., Nāgārjuna's *Vigraha-vyāvartanī*, T.32.1631 回諍論 *Hui zheng lun*), found the concept of an Asaṅgan commentary on Nāgārjuna feasible illustrates how the two traditions were considered compatible at that time.

7. *Dasheng zhongguanshi lun* 大乘中觀釋論 (T.30.1567), translated by Weijing and Dharmarakṣa between 1027 and 1030.

8. *Dasheng guang bai lun shi lun* 大乘廣百論釋論 (T.30.1571), translated by Xuanzang in 650.

On the other hand, key Mādhyamikas such as Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti devoted sections of their works to attacking Yogācāra. Examples of this include Bhāviveka's chapter on Yogācāra in his *Madhyamaka-hṛdaya*[9] and Candrakīrti's attack on Yogācāra (and other schools) in chapter six of his *Madhyamakāvatāra*. Generally, Madhyamaka deals with negation and refutation, whatever the topic, while Yogācāra balances refutation with affirmation. Hence Mādhyamikans feel obligated to refute Yogācāra, to find something in it to negate, while Yogācāra is happy to embrace and affirm Nāgārjuna, reserving its counterattacks for the later Mādhyamikans who make Yogācāra one of their prime targets.

Another observation we can make before discussing the *Biography* and the *Commentary* is that Xuanzang believed in the complimentarity of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka; while at Nālandā, he wrote a verse text in Sanskrit espousing the reasons. While that text has not come down to us, hints as to its probable contents may be gleaned from the *Cheng weishilun* (T.31.1585), Xuanzang's encyclopedic commentary on Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikā* (Thirty Verses) drawn from Indian commentaries and other sources. Additionally, Xuanzang himself debated and defeated Mādhyamikas at Nālandā. We will look at that in a moment.

We should finally note that, when the classical Madhyamakans attack Yogācāra, Dignāga figures prominently on their hit list. The entire *pramāṇavāda* tradition is attacked by Candrakīrti. Bhāviveka, on the other hand, accepts the Dignāgan *anumāna* (logical inference) method while still attempting to refute other aspects of Dignāga's epistemology.

Since Xuanzang left India before Candrakīrti became known, the account he brought to China of the polemics between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra does not include Candrakīrti or any subsequent developments, Rather he takes Bhāviveka, Dharmapāla, and his own encounters with his Indian contemporaries as the cutting edge. Kuiji, reliant on Xuanzang's reports for the Indian context and on contemporary developments in China—most notably the recent writings of Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), the last major Sanlun/Chinese Madhyamaka figure—will understand Madhyamaka in that light, and it is that understanding of Madhyamaka to which he naturally responds.

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9. *Madhyamakahṛdayam of Bhavya*, edited by Christian Lindtner (Chennai: The Adhyar Library and Research Center, 2001), chap. 5; English translation with corresponding *Tarkajvālā* in M. David Eckel, *Bhāviveka and his Buddhist Opponents* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Xuanzang and Debates

The context of the well-known classical works that engage in polemics or critiques of their seeming rival Mahāyāna school is *debate*. Debate, by design, exaggerates differences and contrasts, highlights oppositions, and is rhetorically and often emotionally contentious. It is a verbal sport that seeks methods to victory, that often aims to humiliate and vanquish the opponent. Hence, it is in the nature of debate to paint one's opponent with negative labels in order to more easily dismiss or undermine him. That is why Madhyamaka's attackers will call it *nāstika* ("nihilist," literally "adherents to nonexistence"), whether or not they actually believe Mādhyamikas are truly nihilists or not. It is a way to dismiss a troublesome opponent by a caricature of his position. So the Mādhyamikan is dismissed as a nihilist (*nāstika*), while the Yogācāra is ridiculed as an idealist (*citta-mātra;* a term that was turned into the claim that only mind is real—a claim repeatedly attributed to Yogācāra by opponents and doxographers, but typically denied in Yogācāra texts). Neither characterization is accurate. In India, debate was taken very seriously—it could literally be a death sport, with the loser expected to forfeit his life, freedom, or livelihood as a consequence of failure. At minimum, defeat brought loss of prestige for oneself and one's tradition. Even as debates were steeped in seriousness and urgency, they nonetheless were often peppered with sarcastic put-down humor, perhaps as a counterweight to the tension caused by the seriousness of the conflict and competition.

Turning now to the *Biography*, the following occurred during Xuanzang's time at Nālandā.

> At one time, the worthy Siṃhaprabha 師子光 who previously had lectured the assembly on the *Madhyamaka-kārikā* and *Catuḥśataka-śāstra*, stated that his aim was to refute the *Yogācāra*[*-bhūmi*]. The Dharma-master (Xuanzang), himself trained in the subtleties of the *Madhyamaka-kārikā* and *Catuḥśataka-śāstra*, as well as being skilled in the *Yogācāra*[*-bhūmi*] took it (to be the case that) the sages who established each of those teachings did so with the same intent; there were no contradictions or oppositions between them. Those who were confused and unable to understand this complimentarity (不能會通) would talk about them as contradictory, but this was a fault with the transmitters, not with the Dharma. Pitying his narrow-mindedness, Xuanzang went numerous times to interrogate

him, and repeatedly Siṃhaprabha was unable to respond, so his students gradually dispersed, and came to study with the Dharma-master.

For the Dharma-master, the *Madhyamaka-kārikā* and *Catuḥśataka-śāstra* only aimed to refute *parikalpita*, they don't discuss *paratantra-svabhāva* or *pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*.[10] Siṃhaprabha wasn't able to understand this well, holding the view that when the *śāstras* state "All is unattainable" this refers to what is established in the *Yogācāra* as *pariniṣpanna*, etc., that all must be discarded because every form is (only) a word.

To explain that the tenets espoused by both systems are to be considered a harmonious complimentarity and not contradictory to each other, the Dharma-master composed "Treatise on the Complimentarity of Tenets" 《會宗論》 (*huizong lun*) in 3000 verses. When completed, he presented it to Śīlabhadra[11] and the Great Assembly; there were none who didn't praise its value, and all shared and propagated it.

Siṃhaprabha, ashamed, left and went to the Bodhi Temple, where he had studied together with someone from eastern India named Candrasiṃha 旃陀羅僧訶, whom he now asked to challenge Xuanzang to a debate in order to alleviate his humiliation. But when Candrasiṃha confronted Xuanzang, he shrank in fear, awe-struck, silenced, not daring to utter a word. And so the Dharma-master's reputation increased. [12]

The irony between Siṃhaprabha believing that everything is to be dismissed since all things are nothing but words (所以每形於言), and Candrasiṃha

10. This is precisely the explicit position taken by Vasubandhu in his *Viṃśikā* (Twenty Verses), in verse 10. Vasubandhu's passage will be discussed shortly. Kuiji will pick up on this theme below in the section of this essay on his Heart Sūtra Commentary.

11. Śīlabhadra was the head of Nālandā at that time.

12. Li 1995, pp. 129–130, modified; 時戒賢論師遣法師為眾講《攝大乘論》、《唯識決擇論》。時大德師子光先為眾講《中》、《百論》，述其旨破《瑜伽》義。法師妙閑《中》、《百》，又善《瑜伽》，以為聖人立教，各隨一意，不相違妨，惑者不能會通，謂為乖反，此乃失在傳人，豈關於法也。慜其局狹，數往徵詰，復不能酬答，由是學徒漸散，而宗附法師。法師又以《中》、《百》論旨唯破遍計所執，不言依他起性及圓成實性，師子光不能善悟，見《論》稱：「一切無所得」，謂《瑜伽》所立圓成實等亦皆須遣，所以每形於言。法師為和會二宗言不相違背，乃著《會宗論》三千頌。《論》成，呈戒賢及大眾，無不稱善，並共宣行。師子光慚赧，遂出往菩提寺，別命東印度一同學名旃陀羅僧訶來相論難，冀解前恥。其人既至，憚威而默，不敢致言，法師聲譽益甚。 (T.50.2053.244b26–c14)

being reduced to wordlessness may not immediately come through in Li's translation, even with my modifications. The key misunderstanding of the faulty Mādhyamikans is, basically, to dismiss everything as unreal, illusory, rather than recognizing that it is only *parikalpita* that is illusory and thereby requiring refutation, not *paratantra* or *pariniṣpanna*.

In the *Viṃśikā*, Vasubandhu responds to the following objection after pointing out that the purpose of the teaching of *vijñapti-mātra* is to enter into an understanding that *dharmas* lack selfhood (*dharma-nairātmya*):

> yadi tarhi sarvathā dharmo nāsti tad api vijñaptimātraṃ nāstīti kathaṃ tarhi vyavasthāpyate
>
> If, therefore, no *dharmas* at all exist, then there would not even be "nothing but what is made known by cognition" (*vijñapti-mātra*). So how could [*vijñapti-mātra*] be established?[13]

Vasubandhu responds:

> na khalu sarvathā dharmo nāstīty evaṃ dharmanairātmyapraveśo bhavati | api tu |
>
> **kalpitātmanā || 10 ||**
>
> yo bālair dharmāṇāṃ svabhāvo grāhyagrāhakādiḥ parikalpitas tena kalpitenātmanā teṣāṃ nairātmyaṃ na tv anabhilāpyenātmanā yo buddhānāṃ viṣaya iti |
>
> Entry into the non-self of dharmas (*dharma-nairātmya*) does not mean that there are no dharmas at all. On the contrary:
>
> [what is unreal is]
> **their imagined nature ([*pari-*]*kalpita*)**.
>
> Ignorant people imagine (*parikalpitas*) that it is in the nature of dharmas to be grasped and grasper, etc. Non-self of dharmas applies

13. Xuanzang renders this in Chinese as: 若知諸法一切種無。入法無我。是則唯識亦畢竟無何所安立。(T.31.1590.75c4–5): "If knowing that all types of dharmas are nonexistent (is done in order to) enter the dharma of non-self, then *vijñapti-mātra* also ultimately would be nonexistent, so how can [it] be established?"

> (as an antidote) to this imagined nature, but not to what is not-conceptual-linguistic (*anabhilāpya*), which is the cognitive-field (*viṣaya*) of the buddhas.[14]

As will be clear, this is a fundamental tenet for Xuanzang and Kuiji, and, as we've already seen, serves as a critical line of demarcation between the "illusionism" of faulty Mādhyamikans and Yogācāra.

Returning to the *Biography*, after these events, we are told that some Hīnayāna monks press King Harsha to invite Mahāyāna monks from Nālandā so that the Hīnayāna monks can debate them, promising to show that the Mahāyāna of Nālandā is just "sky-flower" heresy (*konghua waidao* 空花外道), not real Buddhism. Among these Hīnayāna monks is an old Brahmin Saṃmitīya from south India named Prajñāgupta 般若毱多 with connections to the court in south India. He had authored a work entitled "Refutation of Mahāyāna" 《破大乘論》 in seven hundred verses.

Harsha issues a formal invitation to Nālandā, requesting they send monks to defend Mahāyāna. A monk named Correct Dharma Store 正法藏, upon receiving the invitation, selects a team of four monks: 海慧 Sāgamati, 智光 Jñānaprabha, 師子光 Siṃhaprabha (the defeated Madhyamakan), and Xuanzang.[15] While Xuanzang the Yogācāra and Siṃhaprabha the Mādhyamika might be rival debaters inside Nālandā, when confronted with non-Mahāyāna outsiders, they quickly are on the same side, same team. Thus the rivalry, while serious and heartfelt, becomes moot when facing a larger, that is, anti-Mahāyāna context.

> Sāgamati and the other two monks were worried, but the master [Xuanzang] said to them, "I have studied the Tripiṭaka of the various

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14. Xuanzang's rendering: 非知諸法一切種無乃得名為入法無我。然達愚夫遍計所執自性差別諸法無我。如是乃名入法無我。非諸佛境離言法性亦都無故名法無我。(T.31.1590.75c5–9). "It is not by knowing that all types of dharmas are nonexistent that one attains what is called entering into the dharma of no-self. Rather, understanding that no-self applies to the dharmas that are differentiated by the imaginary nature (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) of foolish people that is called entering into the no-self of dharmas. As well, it is not because the cognitive-objects (*viṣaya*) of the Buddhas apart from language are entirely nonexistent that it is called the dharma of no-self (since they are not nonexistent)." If one reads 自性差別 as *svabhāva* and *viśeṣa* (as Kuiji does in his commentary on the *Viṃśikā*), then instead of "no-self applies to the dharmas that are differentiated by the imaginary nature (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) of foolish people," that would read: "the no-self of dharmas applies to the self-nature (*svabhāva*) and differential qualities (*viśeṣa*) imagined (*parikalpita*) by foolish people."

15. T.50.2053.244b26–245a15; cf. Li 1995, 130–32.

> Hīnayāna schools and completely mastered their theories while I was in my own country and by the time I got to Kashmir [by debating the most prominent monks along the way]. It is impossible for them to refute the Mahāyāna teachings with their own theories. Although my learning is shallow and my intellect weak, I have the confidence to deal with the matter. I hope you teachers will not worry about it. In case I am defeated in the debate, I am a monk from China and you will not be involved in the matter." The other monks were pleased to hear it."[16]

Xuanzang was borrowing a strategy that the current head of Nālandā, Śīlabhadra himself, is said to have used when still a youth shortly after having become a student of Dharmapāla, according to Xuanzang's travelog, the *Xiyuji (Record of Western Lands)*.[17] When a *tīrthika* from the south challenged Dharmapāla to a debate, Śīlabhadra volunteered to stand in his place, over the objections of Dharmapāla's other students, who protested that he was too young and inexperienced. He argued that, precisely for that reason, if he were to be defeated, no shame would fall on them, and so Dharmapāla, reassuring the other monks, sent Śīlabhadra to debate the challenger, whom he dispatched handily.

While the Nālandā monks were gearing up for the debate, Harsha sent another letter cancelling the invitation without specifying a reason. A debate of sorts under Harsha's provenance would take place much later, near the end of Xuanzang's stay in India (I will return to that shortly).

One of the debates described in the *Biography* that had nothing to do with Madhyamaka concerned a feisty Brahmin who came to Nālandā, challenging anyone to take him on. He was so confident of his ability to defeat all comers that he swore he would kill himself if he lost. Xuanzang takes the challenge, defeats him, but doesn't allow him to kill himself, insisting that he become his slave instead, an arrangement that the Brahmin accepts. One of the ways this arrangement paid off for Xuanzang, which also provides some behind-the-scenes insight into the debate culture of the time, is spelled out in another story in the *Biography*.

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16. Li 1995, 131, slightly modified. 其海惠等咸憂，法師謂曰：「小乘諸部三藏，玄奘在本國及入迦濕彌羅已來遍皆學訖，具悉其宗。若欲將其教旨能破大乘義，終無此理。奘雖學淺智微，當之必了。願諸德不煩憂也。若其有負，自是支那國僧，無關此事。」諸人咸喜。(T.50.2053.245a9–14).

17. *DaTang Xiyuji* T.51.2087.914c. Cf. Li 1996, 240–41.

While still at Nālandā, Xuanzang composed a treatise of 1,600 verses titled *Po ejian lun* 《破惡見論》 ("Refutation of Wrong Views") in response to having received and studied a 700-stanza treatise by Hīnayānists that attempted to refute Mahāyāna.

> At that time when the Master intended to go to Uḍra, he obtained a treatise in seven hundred stanzas, composed by the Hinayanists in refutation of the Mahāyāna teachings. He read through it and found several doubtful points in it. He asked the Brahman whom he had subdued in debate, "Have you attended lectures on this treatise?" The Brahmin replied, "I have attended lectures on it five times." When the Master wished him to give an explanation of the treatise, he said, "As I am your slave, how can I explain anything to Your Reverence?" The Master said, "As this is a work of another school, I have not seen it before. There is no harm in you giving me an explanation of it." The Brahmin said, "If so, please wait until midnight, lest people hear that you are studying the Dharma with a slave and defile your good name."
>
> Thus in the night the Master sent away all other people and asked the Brahman to expound the treatise. When he had just gone through it once, the Master completely grasped its gist. He found out the erroneous points and refuted them with Mahāyāna teachings in a treatise he wrote in sixteen hundred stanzas, entitled "Treatise on the Refutation of Wrong Views." He presented the work to the Venerable Śīlabhadra, who showed it to his disciples, who all praised it with appreciation and said, "With such all-comprehensive scrutiny there is no opponent he could not vanquish!" The treatise is to be found elsewhere.[18]

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18. Li 1995, 134, modified slightly. 時法師欲往烏荼，乃訪得小乘所製《破大乘義》七百頌者。法師尋省有數處疑，謂所伏婆羅門曰：「汝曾聽此義不？」答曰：「曾聽五遍。」法師欲令其講。彼曰：「我今為奴，豈合為尊講？」法師曰：「此是他宗，我未曾見，汝但說無苦。」彼曰：「若然，請至夜中，恐外人聞，從奴學法，污尊名稱。」於是至夜屏去諸人，令講一遍，備得其旨。遂尋其謬節，申大乘義而破之，為一千六百頌，名《破惡見論》。將呈戒賢法師及宣示徒眾，無不嗟賞曰：「以此窮覈，何敵不亡。」 (T.50.2053.245c2–12). That treatise is not extant, and there is no record of its having been translated into Chinese. Perhaps it was translated and circulated privately among Xuanzang's circle. Perhaps this only means that Xuanzang brought a copy back with him from India so that a Sanskrit original was in storage at that time.

Xuanzang then sets the slave free; the slave goes to Kāmarūpa in eastern India, and tells King Kumara about Xuanzang, who then invites him there. The treatise makes its way to Harsha, who then issues a strong invitation for Xuanzang to come.

When Xuanzang finally does make it to Harsha's court, he defeats debaters from the Saṃmitīya and other schools, converts Harsha's daughter from Saṃmitīya to Mahāyāna, and so impresses Harsha that the king calls together a great convocation, inviting eighteen other kings, over a thousand monks from Nālandā, and thousands of monks and scholars from all schools. There are great processions, banquets, and at the heart of the eighteen-day assembly, Xuanzang poses a challenge to all comers.

> The Master was invited to take the chair in the assembly to extol Mahāyāna teachings and to explain his intent composing the treatise. The Venerable Vidyābhadra 明賢, a *śramaṇa* of Nālandā Monastery, was asked to read it to the assembly while a written copy was hung outside the gate of the meeting place for everybody to read.[19]

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19. This reveals an important factor in debate. Intonation! Proper articulation, including precise enunciation and speaking in a cultivated as opposed to inelegant accent or dialect, were crucial elements of debate. Failure to enunciate properly could not only result in defeat, but would open the one who "misspoke" to ridicule and jeers. Demeanor and articulation were as important as logical acuity in debate, perhaps even more important, since, like any sport, only well-informed aficionados will appreciate and understand the more subtle aspects and rules, while the general audience, including the royalty who often served as arbiters and judges of debates, were not astute students of subtle or arcane logical technicalities; but they could recognize when someone was flustered, stymied, hesitant, stumbling over words, etc., and the rules of debate were such that these tell-tale signs signaled defeat. What is alluded to here is that Xuanzang could "lose" the debate simply by mispronouncing something. His Chinese accent—regardless of his mastery of Sanskrit vocabulary, style, concepts, and logic—would have disqualified him from this sort of high-level formal debate against unsympathetic rivals, or, at minimum, it would have given his opponents openings to criticize *how* he said it while avoiding *what* he said. Understandably, a potential opponent might be concerned about facing someone who had someone else articulate his arguments as unfairly having to work against a stacked deck, since one of the tools for vanquishing an opponent in a debate is to get him to say something unfortunate for his case while caught up in the heat of battle, such as something self-contradictory or something with inadvertent consequences that, had the proponent thought it through, he might not have said. By filtering all answers through an intermediary—with whom he might confer while composing the "reply"—the possibility of catching him off-guard is greatly diminished. The importance of intonation is reflected in stories of debates that ended quickly when one of the disputants simply repeats verbatim the opposing claimant's position while perfectly mimicking that opponent's intonation, implying that one not only understands the logic of the claimant's argument by being able to recite it from memory precisely, down to its finest nuances, having heard it just once, but, by fearlessly repeating it, one implies that one not only understands it down to its roots, but that

> If one word was found illogical or refutable in the treatise, the writer would cut off his head in apology. But until nightfall, nobody raised a word of objection. King Śīlāditya [Harsha] was glad of it, and after adjourning the meeting, he returned to his palace. . . . On the following morning they came again. . . .
>
> After the elapse of five days, the Hīnayāna adherents and *tīrthikas*, seeing that the Master has crushed their theories, felt hatred and intended to murder him. The king got wind of it and issued an order . . . "Some evil and presumptuous people who are not ashamed of themselves are trying to hatch a sinister plot against him with malicious intention. If this is tolerable, what else is unforgivable? Anybody in the assembly daring to injure the Master will be beheaded, and anyone who insults or abuses him will have his tongue cut out. But no limit is set on the argumentation of those who wish to make a statement in defense of their own doctrines."[20]

Not surprisingly, no one challenged Xuanzang during the entire eighteen days. Debate was a bloodsport, sometimes eliciting homicidal passions. But its purpose was noble, as was the hoped-for outcome.

> In the evening when the congregation was about to disperse, the Master once more extolled Mahāyāna teachings, eulogizing the merits of the Buddha, and caused numerous people to return from

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one is confident that one recognizes its weaknesses, and that therefore one has intellectual contempt for it as well—the equivalent of having knocked someone down in a fistfight and motioning them to think twice about getting up for further beating. The stress on proper diction and intonation, long an essential element in Sanskrit, also was considered important in early Buddhist Pāli texts. The Vinaya (I.196) and the Soṇasutta in the *Udānapāli* (5.6.10; PTS ed., p. 59) tell of monk Soṇa Kuṭṭikaṇṇa reciting the entire *Aṭṭhaka vagga* of the *Sutta Nipāta*, to Buddha's great approval (*abbhanumodi*), with "proper intonation" (*sarena abhaṇī . . . sarabhañña-pariyosāne*); cf. the Pāli commentaries: *Dh.A.* IV.102; *Ud.A*, 312; *A.A.* 241; etc. See J.A. Jayawickrama, "A Critical Analysis of the Sutta Nipāta," *Pali Buddhist Review* 1, 3 (1976): 140.

20. Li 1995, 147–148, modified slightly. 施訖，別施寶床，請法師坐為論主，稱揚大乘序作論意，仍遣那爛陀寺沙門明賢法師讀示大眾。別令寫一本懸於會場門外示一切人，若其問有一字無理能難破者，請斷首相謝。如是至晚，無一人致言。戒日王歡喜，罷會還宮，諸王、及僧各歸所，次法師共鳩摩羅王亦還自宮。明旦復來，迎像送引聚集如初。經五日，小乘外道見毀其宗，結恨欲為謀害。王知，宣令曰：「邪黨亂真，其來自久。埋隱正教，誤惑群生，不有上賢，何以鑑偽。支那法師者，神宇沖曠，解行淵深，為伏群邪，來遊此國，顯揚大法，汲引愚迷，妖妄之徒不知慚悔，謀為不軌，翻起害心，此而可容，孰不可恕！眾有一人傷觸法師者斬其首，毀罵者截其舌。其欲申辭救義，不拘此限。」 (T.50.2053.247c10–26).

> the wrong to the right and to discard Hīnayāna theories and embrace Mahāyāna teachings.[21]

Sometime after this debate, when Xuanzang was returning to China, he again ran into the two Mādhyamikan Siṃhas, now up north in a place called *Vilaśāṇā 毘羅那拏. What were they doing? They were now teaching Abhidharma and Yogācāra texts! Is this a sly hint of their "conversion" as result of their debates with Xuanzang, or merely a sign of the ecumenical nature of Indian Buddhism at the time?

> Proceeding further northwest for three *yojanas*, he came to the capital city of the country of *Vilaśāṇā, where he stayed for two months and met two schoolmates, Siṃhaprabha 師子光 and Candrasiṃha 師子月, who were then lecturing on the *Abhidharmakośa*, *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, the *Vijñapti-mātra śāstra*[s] [one ed. has: *Triṃśikā-vijñapti-śāstra*], and so on. They were happy to greet him. After his arrival, the Master also lectured on the *Yogācārabhūmi-viniścaya* and *Abhidharmasamuccaya-vyākhyā* for two months, after which he took his leave and continued his return journey.[22]

While the two Siṃhas are teaching basic texts, Xuanzang offers the advanced courses on the more detailed commentaries.

As mentioned, debate was a bloodsport. Xuanzang acquired his slave in debate—the challenger had vowed that, if he lost, he would kill himself, but Xuanzang insisted he become his slave instead—and that "slave" helped prep Xuanzang for other debates. During Harsha's convocation

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21. Li 1995, 148. 將散之夕，法師更稱揚大乘，讚佛功德，令無量人返邪入正，棄小歸大。(T.50.2053.247c27–29).

22. Li 1995, 155 modified. 復西北行三踰繕那，至毘羅那拏國都城。停兩月日，逢師子光、師子月同學二人，講《俱舍》、《攝論》、《唯識論》等，皆來迎接甚歡。法師至，又開《瑜伽決擇》及《對法論》等，兩月訖，辭歸。 (T.50.2053.249.b8–12). The *Yogācārabhūmi-viniścaya* is Asaṅga's own commentary in the second-half of the *Yogācārabhūmi* on the first half. The title of the second text《對法論》 is another name for 大乘阿毘達磨雜集論, T.31.1606, Sthiramati's commentary on Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, 大乘阿毘達磨集論 T 31.1605. While later tradition typically identifies Xuanzang with Vasubandhu and Dharmapāla, largely as a result of Kuiji's *Cheng weishilun* commentaries, it is notable that the two advanced texts his Biography has him teach at the culmination of his time in India are actually by Asaṅga and Sthiramati. On Xuanzang and Sthiramati, see Dan Lusthaus, 2002, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, chapter 15, and Sakuma Hidenori, 2006 (2008), "On doctrinal similarities between Sthiramati and Xuanzang," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, v.29, n.2, 357-82.

Xuanzang offers his own head if defeated; the Hīnayāna and Tīrthika supposed challengers turn out to be sore losers plotting murder.

Debate is about vanquishing foes. Positions (*dṛṣṭi*) were not casual playthings to try out, dabble in, or take or leave with passing moods. They were one's blood and flesh (*śoṇita-māṃsa*, 血肉). Rivals could spar to sharpen and strengthen each other, but serious debate was life and death.

The priorities in terms of rivalries as expressed in Xuanzang's *Biography* see the crucial divide as not between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, but between Mahāyāna and the rest. Debate was not just about vanquishing foes, but about winning converts. Even Xuanzang's Madhyamaka rivals end up teaching Yogācāra and Abhidharma texts. Xuanzang was a successful debater worthy of admiration not because he crushed opponents and their theories, but because he won converts.

Kuiji's Heart Sūtra *Commentary*

As mentioned previously, the *Commentary*, despite being a commentary on a famously short text, the *Heart Sūtra*, is a substantial, lengthy text that provides a Madhyamakan interpretation followed by a Yogācāra interpretation for every term or passage. Briefly, in Kuiji's treatment, sometimes they are in conflict (e.g., certain ideas about emptiness); sometimes they simply take different hermeneutic directions on a certain term or passage without incurring any conflict; and sometimes the Yogācāra statement is basically an expanded exposition of what the Madhyamaka only proposed in a terse sound bite, an unpacking of the implicit meaning of the Madhyamaka statement.

There is too much in the *Commentary* for me to review here in full, but I have selected some passages that illustrate each of those moves, with most attention to the arguments against the Madhyamakan misunderstanding of emptiness. Some of what Kuiji presents as Madhyamaka will sound familiar to modern scholars, some will not (he doesn't provide sources, but we know that Kuiji made a thorough study of Jizang and his followers, which he seems to have combined with what Xuanzang related about Madhyamaka in India). So, once again, this is an interesting document that reinforces the point made earlier about the diversity of positions and ideas that come under the umbrellas of the two school names.

Kuiji begins by citing the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra*'s account of the three turnings of the Dharma wheel. This is because the *Heart Sūtra,* being a *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* that focuses on emptiness, belongs to the

second turning of the wheel. For Kuiji and others, Madhyamaka represents that second turning, while Yogācāra represents the third, which nonetheless absorbs, subsumes, and "corrects" the second turning. As stated in the passage he quotes from the *Saṃdhinirmocana*, the first turning focuses on the Four Noble Truths, which, despite their profundity, are not ultimate and, so, the first turning "became a source of disputes." In response, a second turning of the Dharma wheel by the Buddha explained that *dharmas* are "without self-nature, production and extinction, originally nothing other than nirvāṇa." But this was not yet understood, so this, too, "became a source of disputes." Finally, "for the sake of aspirants of all vehicles, the Buddha then turned the wheel disclosing . . . unsurpassed, comprehensive and ultimate teachings fully revealing the whole truth, which will not become a source of disputes" (p. 8)[23].

That was, of course, wishful thinking, since Madhyamakans would have nothing to do if there were no one to refute and argue with.

Kuiji then cites a passage from MMK, 18:6:[24]

> Sometimes the Buddhas speak of self,
> Other times they speak of no-self.
> All phenomena are in reality
> Neither self nor no-self.

What is interesting is the implication he takes away from this:

> Other sutras also say that the Buddha used one voice to convey boundless teachings and that different sentient beings comprehended them differently according to their own capabilities.

He goes on to say that during Buddha's day, disciples were too intelligent to engage in disputes, but after his nirvāṇa, disputes broke out. He implies that the same thing happened to Nāgārjuna by then quoting a passage from Vasumitra's *Doctrinal Differences of the Sects* 異部宗輪論 (T.49.2031.15a15–16), cautioning that, while relying on the Buddhist scriptures, one should be careful to "distinguish gold from sand." The

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23. Page references are to Heng-ching and Lusthaus 2001.

24. 諸佛或說我　或時說無我　諸法實相中　無我無非我 (T.33.1710.523.c4–5), citing Kumārajīva's translation at T.30.1564.24a1–2.

"sand" apparently is the next passage, which he takes from Bhāviveka's *Jewel in the Hand Treatise* (translated into Chinese by Xuanzang in 649):[25]

> The true nature of conditioned things is empty
> For [such things are] illusory and dependently arisen.
> Unconditioned things also lack substantial reality.
> For they are unsubstantial like sky flowers.

By stipulating three types of things, namely, (1) illusory, (2) dependently arisen, and (3) unconditioned, Bhāviveka is claiming that all three of the *trisvabhāva*s "lack substantial reality" and are as unreal as "sky flowers." Here we have the "sky flower heresy" that the Hinayanist detractors of Nālandā's Mahāyāna were complaining about. It amounts to calling everything unreal, as if all were *parikalpita*, false imagining. Siṃhaprabha's Mādhyamika nominalism would be open to the same criticism.

Kuiji responds with what, in his view, is a more correct estimation by first unpacking Bhāviveka's statement with this restatement:

> On the level of conventional truth all dharmas are existent, while according to the ultimate truth all are empty. However, the nature of true emptiness is neither empty nor existent; it is only from the perspective of ultimate truth that the nature of all dharmas is seen as emptiness. *From this teaching, beings develop [an erroneous] view of emptiness*. Thus, the Bodhisattva Asaṅga requested Maitreya to expound the teaching of the Middle Way so as to eliminate both attachments [to existence and to emptiness]." (9, emphasis added)

Kuiji is accusing Bhāviveka of collapsing the two truths and, thus, creating a confusion that Asaṅga and Maitreya endeavor to correct. The corrective comes from the *Madhyānta-vibhāga*, which is probably the most quoted text (aside from the *Heart Sūtra*) in his *Commentary*. He explains the two verses he quotes thus:

> This is to say that conventionally self and dharmas exist, while ultimately both are empty. However, in order to eliminate clinging

25. *Dasheng zhang zhen lun* 《大乘掌珍論》卷1:「真性有為空 如幻緣生故 無為無有實 不起似空華」(T.30.1578.268b21–22). This Bhāviveka text only survives in Chinese. The original Sanskrit title may have been something like *Hasta-maṇi*.

> to emptiness or existence, the Buddha claimed that all dharmas are both existent and empty, or that they are neither empty nor existent. . . . It is to eradicate afflictions in accordance with the malady that existence and emptiness are expediently expounded. The followers of later generations grew attached to words and assumed that what they understood was in agreement with the Middle Way and that what others understood was erroneous. (10)

Existence and emptiness are two extremes. As with self or non-self, both can be asserted or refuted, depending on their therapeutic context. They are antidotes to the opposite extreme, not to be confused with the actual middle-way, which is "a middle distinguished from the two extremes" (*madhyāntavibhāga*). Taking existence or emptiness as the middle-way is a confusion that can entail the stubborn belief that one's theory captures the true middle. This arrogance of believing that one's own understanding of the middle-way and emptiness is correct and orthodox while considering the understanding by others to be erroneous—which Kuiji sees in some Madhyamakans—is an issue to which we will return later.

That closes his introductory portion, and he begins the actual exegesis of the *Heart Sūtra* with the words that make up its title.

Probably the most profound difference between Kuiji's *Heart Sūtra* commentary and any other I've seen, as well as a key difference between his visions of Yogācāra and of Madhyamaka, is his reading of the sūtra line near the beginning, "When practicing the profound *Prajñāpāramitā*." The Madhyamakans look right past this line, to what is about to come, which will deal with the emptiness of *dharmas* in order to break attachment to them. Kuiji has them cite a passage from the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (the full passage occurs five or six times in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, T.5.220; similar or partial versions appear nearly thirty times in the sūtra). The *Prajñāpāramitā* passage asserts that *prajñāpāramitā* and its name are imperceptible, rendering the "practice" somewhat invisible and mystical.[26]

In contrast, Kuiji devotes more than a third of his text to explicating in detail what "practice" entails, in the process giving a thorough account of

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26. 大經次言。不見般若波羅蜜多。不見般若波羅蜜多名。般若自性空。般若名空故。(T.33.1710.524c15–17). "The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* says: '*Prajñāpāramitā* is imperceptible and the name *prajñāpāramitā* is also imperceptible, because *prajñāpāramitā* is empty of inherent existence, and the name *prajñāpāramitā* is likewise empty'." (Hengching and Lusthaus, 15).

the various meanings and types of *vijñapti-mātra*, an overview of the *pāramitās*, and a condensed but thorough summary of a major portion of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, ranging across a wide range of topics. In contrast to the short shrift Madhyamakans give to the notion of "practice," he writes:

> only after one has trained in wisdom can one understand the nature of emptiness; therefore, the sūtra first indicates the dharmas to be practiced. (p. 15)

> Mādhyamikans assert that conventionally speaking, practice means that in order to realize transcendent, nondiscriminating wisdom (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*) and right contemplation of emptiness, one should train to acquire that wisdom which is obtained from hearing and reflecting and which can do away with the *ālambana*. Training to develop insight into emptiness is called "practice." However, according to ultimate truth, due to the fact that there is nothing to be obtained and discriminated, there is nothing to be practiced. This, then, is what is termed "practice" . . . Now, what we call "practice" is actually non-practice; this is what is meant by practice. It is not that there is something to be practiced. . . . There is nothing to be practiced and . . . there is nothing that cannot be practiced. This is what is meant by practice. . . . Again, it is explained that any conceptualization or grasping is the root of saṃsāra, and thus not practice. Disciplining the mind to eradicate conceptualizations is the root of transcending worldly existence. This is practice.

> The Yogācāras say that although a magician who plays tricks cannot actually transform anything, it appears that he can. Similarly, due to causes and conditions, a person hears the Dharma, believes it, trains to realize it, and teaches it without forsaking it for a moment. However, [cognizing] nonconceptually (*nirvikalpa*) [while] not showing the marks of practice (i.e., the various experiential and meditative realms of cognition) is what is meant by practice. It is not that there is no need to practice. It is the "illness" [of erroneous conceptions] that should be eliminated, not the Dharma. If there are fundamentally no dharmas that can be practiced or from which one can sever [attachment], then those ignorant of the Dharma will claim that they are already enlightened and, wrongly claiming to be enlightened, they will cause themselves great harm. Since the substance of

> the "flowers" [seen in the sky] due to cataracts of the eyes is empty, the flowers are not what needs to be cured. Since these flowers do not exist, how can they be eliminated? However, if the cataract is not eliminated, there will be no healthy eye. How can ultimate truth (*paramārtha*) reveal that the [sky] flower is essentially empty?[27]
>
> If there is nothing that is to be practiced and nothing that is not practiced, and if the unenlightened state of sentient beings is nothing other than enlightenment, then all beings should have been enlightened from beginningless time. However, from the very beginning, they are not enlightened so, who is it that is enlightened? This is like the presumptions of non-action by the non-Buddhists, which contradict reason and violate the scriptures. How can they accomplish the wisdom of enlightenment? If terminating conceptualization were a genuine [exclusive] practice, no-thought would be the true and perfect path, all precepts would be useless, and training would be forsaken. Consider this carefully and quickly eliminate such a perverted view. (16–17)

Then Kuiji begins his long excursus on the details of practice, nearly twelve Taishō pages (63 pages in English!), later finally returning to the words of the *Heart Sūtra*.

Why is the practice "profound"? The Madhyamakans again display their arrogance and sense of superiority:

> [*Prajñā*] is a subtle teaching and inconceivable, those of the two vehicles cannot comprehend it and common people cannot fathom it. Therefore, it is said to be profound.
>
> The Yogācāras comment . . . it is difficult for the bodhisattva to perfectly realize the true form of suchness, to obtain illuminating wisdom, to express teachings in words, to achieve myriad practices, and to penetrate the existence and emptiness of the field of objects of cognition (*viṣaya-gocara*). The perfection of wisdom is foremost and the others are supplementary. They are called "*prajñā*" and are therefore profound. (80)

27. Restated, this means: "It is not by simply declaring that a sky flower is empty that the eye disease is cured."

It is not just the poor fools of the two vehicles (that is, the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas, both considered Hīnayāna, followers of the "inferior vehicle") who have a hard time understanding the subtleties—it is the bodhisattvas themselves, the practitioners of the third vehicle, Mahāyāna, the "great vehicle." And the difficulties entail not just abstract principles, but the profusion of details involved in each of the practices, which make it difficult to marshal the necessary skills for expressing the teachings verbally in an effective way to assist others. Bodhisattvas have difficulties in comprehensively and deeply understanding how "existence and emptiness" fully apply to the concrete objects of experience, the *viṣaya-gocara*, which confront each of us—the cognitive field in which each of us is embedded, immersed, that is, the concrete existential dimension of the teachings applied to actual human life.

Commenting on the passage "[Avalokiteśvara] had an illuminating vision of the emptiness of all five skandhas, and so forth"[28] Kuiji further illustrates how Madhyamakan sound bites, even when proper, tend to be too cursory, requiring further unpacking and clarification.

> The Mādhyamikans comment [that the previous passage aimed] to break attachment to the perceiving subject by revealing its emptiness, while this passage is to break attachment to the perceived object by revealing its emptiness. If one is obstructed by ignorance and confused about the principle of *paramārtha*, and falsely takes the *skandhas* and others as existent, one is like a person who believes images seen in a dream to be real. If one correctly comprehends the principle of ultimate truth and does not become attached, one is like a person who awakes from a dream and realizes that the phenomena [seen in the dream] do not exist. Therefore, the practice of *prajñā* can illuminate the empty nature [of phenomena].
>
> The Yogācāras comment that although all practices are nothing but the practice of *prajñā*, realizing the true and expelling the false

28. The *Heart Sūtra* commentaries of Kuiji and his rival Wŏnch'uk 圓測 both include "etc." ("and so forth")—Ch. 等 *deng*, which would correspond to Skt. *ādi*—on a couple of occasions where the received versions of the Xuanzang translation as well as the Sanskrit editions lack anything corresponding. Wŏnch'uk explicitly says that he checked the Chinese against Sanskrit versions and found the *ādi* there. See Dan Lusthaus, "The *Heart Sutra* in Chinese Yogācāra: Some Comparative Comments on the *Heart Sutra* Commentaries of Wŏnch'uk and K'uei-chi." *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 3, Sept. 2003.

comes from the wisdom that illuminates emptiness. Therefore, the text emphasizes this point. The word "emptiness" here signifies the three non-self natures: the substance of everything with the nature of mere imagination (*parikalpita*) is nonexistent and lacks self-nature; therefore, it is said to be empty. [The nature of] "arising dependent on others" (*paratantra*) [is analogous to the following:] form is like foam, feeling is like floating bubbles, perception is like the shimmer of heat (e.g., as in a desert mirage), impulses are like the plantain (i.e., hollow on the inside), consciousness is like the tricks of a conjurer; since they are unlike the way they are grasped [in ordinary perception] and lack a self-creating nature, they are also called "empty."

According to another interpretation, it is the absence of *parikalpita* in *paratantra* that is the true nature (*pariniṣpanna*), which is why the latter is called "empty." Actually, the three natures are neither empty nor non-empty. The implicit intent of calling them empty is to break attachment. The reason the last two (i.e., *paratantra* and *pariniṣpanna*) are called empty is not because they are completely nonexistent. Buddha's implicit intent in calling them empty is to indicate, in general, that [both] existence and nonexistence are said to be empty. The Buddha said:[29]

> The ultimate truth is that the production of form is devoid of self-nature. I have already taught that. Anyone who does not know the hidden intention (密意) of the Buddha loses the right path and cannot proceed to enlightenment.

Furthermore, this emptiness is the essence of suchness, the nature of which is neither empty nor existent but is revealed through emptiness. In order to counteract attachment to existence, emptiness is spoken of provisionally (*prajñapti*). Foolish people who do not understand this assert that the five *skandhas* and other *dharmas* are definitely devoid of true existence; hence they discriminate between them (i.e., true existence and the *skandhas*). To trace them back to their original substance, they are nothing but suchness. For, apart from the noumenal, the phenomenal has no separate nature (82–83).

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29. *Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra* T.16.676.696b4–5; also quoted in *Yogācārabhūmi* T.30.1579.722a5–6.

Kuiji lets the Madhyamakan and Yogācāra disagreements heat up while commenting on the passage "Form does not differ from emptiness, and emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness and emptiness itself is form." He has the Madhyamakan say:

> The phrase "form does not differ from emptiness, and emptiness does not differ from form" is to break attachment to the notion that apart from conventionally grasped form (*grāhya-rūpa*) there is true emptiness. Beings do not understand true emptiness and thus cling to form, erroneously increase deluded karma, and revolve in saṃsāra. Now, [this passage] shows that the form of a flower seen through a cataract is actually caused by the diseased eye and is nothing but empty existence. Ultimately, form does not differ from emptiness. According to the Holy Teaching, whatever dependently arises is completely empty.
>
> "Form itself is emptiness, and emptiness itself is form." This is to break foolish people's views that it is only when form has become nonexistent that it becomes empty. . . .
>
> The Yogācāras comment that, according to [to the Mādhyamika interpretation of] ultimate truth, all dharmas are empty and nonexistent. Although this sounds reasonable at first glance, actually it is not necessarily so. The true and the conventional mutually shape each other, for if the conventional is not existent, the ultimate ceases. Form and emptiness are mutually dependent, for if form ceases, emptiness disappears. Therefore, the substance of form is not originally empty.
>
> The Madhyamakans comment that actually emptiness is neither empty nor not empty. It is for the purpose of turning confusion into understanding that form is said to be empty. It is not that the emptiness of form is definitely empty, for emptiness is also empty.
>
> The Yogācāras comment that if form produced through conditions is originally nonexistent, then the fool would originally be wise, and common people and a sage would be mutually interchangeable. If we all consider ourselves teachers, who are the confused?
>
> Madhyamakans comment that afflictions (*kleśa*) become enlightenment. Saṃsāra is nirvāṇa. The troubles of the world are the seeds of Tathāgatahood. All sentient beings are originally in quiescence. Are not the foolish originally wise?

The Yogācāras comment that [there are two extremes: one claiming that form and emptiness are radically different, and the other claiming that they are identical.] If one asserts that things of form are separate from the principle of emptiness, then one [can] reject form as delusion and seek emptiness [alone] for enlightenment. If [on the other hand] emptiness already is originally form, wisdom becomes identical to stupidity. [If so,] wouldn't it be perverse to seek wisdom and reject stupidity? Furthermore, why abhor saṃsāra and seek nirvāṇa if pain (*duḥkha*) and pleasure (*sukha*) are not distinct? [If they are the same,] what is the use of seeking nirvāṇa? Stupid people in saṃsāra would have already attained nirvāṇa, and sages seeking the highest accomplishment would be committing heretical error.

The Madhyamakans comment that worldly affairs, delusion and awakening, seeking the state of a sage, and forsaking worldliness are all ultimately empty, so why [should one] seek one and forsake the other?

The Yogācāras comment that if the phenomenal is allowed to be called nothing but emptiness, then in ultimate truth there is self-contradiction, because it would be as if the unenlightened realize that form is emptiness, while the enlightened do not realize the emptiness of form; that the diligent sages are pitiable and detestable, and the indolent and foolish are admirable. The Buddha said, "How does a bodhisattva comply with the perfection of skillful means?" If sentient beings do not understand the sūtra in which the Buddha expounds all dharmas as devoid of self-nature, existent things, production and extinction, and as like an illusion and a dream, then the bodhisattva should explain to them that the sūtra does not mean all dharmas are nonexistent; rather, it means that only the self-nature of dharmas is nonexistent. Therefore, all dharmas are said to be devoid of self-nature. Although there are designations of things depending on [whatever level of] discussion is yet possible, according to ultimate truth, their expressible nature is not their own true nature. Therefore, it is said that all dharmas are nonexistent.

If in theory the self-nature of all dharmas is originally nonexistent, what then is produced and what is destroyed? Hence, all dharmas are said to be neither produced nor destroyed. Illusions and dreams are not real or existent as they appear, but it is not that their

> shapes or images are nonexistent. Similarly, all dharmas are not as real and existent as foolish people habitually think they are, and yet it is not that all dharmas, though ultimately beyond language, are, in themselves, entirely nonexistent. When one awakens to the fact that all dharmas are neither existing nor nonexisting, this is like [awakening] from an illusion or a dream whose nature is nondual (i.e. dream realities are neither entirely existent nor nonexistent). Therefore it is said that all dharmas are like an illusory dream.
>
> With regard to all dharmas in the Dharma realm (*dharmadhātu*), the bodhisattva does not become attached to or forsake them even a little bit, nor does he increase, decrease, or destroy them. If the dharmas are truly existent, he sees them as existent, and if they are truly nonexistent, he sees them as truly nonexistent. To instruct others like this is what is meant by the bodhisattva's complying with skillful means. (pp. 90–93)

This discussion continues for awhile. Then for the passage where what has been said about form being interlocked with emptiness is extended to the remaining four *skandhas*, Kuiji gives an account of those *skandhas*, cites the *Viṃśikā* and *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, and then points out that "the Madhyamakans and Yogācāras have the same interpretation in regard to this" (97). This brings them back to being on friendly footing, nicely patching things up after the heat generated by the dispute over the previous passage. From that point on, Kuiji primarily cites the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, since that resolves, to his satisfaction, all remaining tensions about the proper understanding of the middle-way.

Do the Madhyamakans among us recognize themselves in his characterization of Madhyamaka? If so, his critique has found its target. If not, then we have a case of an authoritative Buddhist mischaracterizing a rival—but authoritative Buddhists would never do that, would they?

Did anyone notice that Kuiji takes *gocara* and *dharmas* as really existent? Did anyone see his warning against taking the "illusion" analogy too literally, unless carefully understood as comparable to dream images, which are both existent and nonexistent? They are occurrences, experiences with impact, which are not what they appear to be. But they are not simply fantasies, either. To think they are is to reduce everything to *parikalpita*, which would mean enlightenment is impossible, and our situation hopeless. There is reality, suchness, which is the precise occurrence of things (*vastus*) just as they are (*yathā-bhūta*), devoid of our illusionary projections.

For Xuanzang and Kuiji, grounding themselves in a pivotal statement from Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikā*, when Mādhyamikans take emptiness as license to treat everything as illusion, they have abandoned the middle-way to inhabit an extreme. In comparison to Mādhyamikans, Yogācāras are realists.

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7

Nāgārjuna's Yogācāra

Jan Westerhoff

THE AIM OF this chapter is to bring together various passages from Nāgārjuna's works that refer to what appear to be Yogācāra ideas, in order to gain some insight into what Nāgārjuna's view of Yogācāra might have been. I distinguish three different views of the Madhyamaka-Yogācāra relation. The first, the adversarial view, regards the two systems as opponents. The second, gradualist view considers Yogācāra as a key step for realizing the truth of Madhyamaka. The third and final, instrumentalist view sees Yogācāra as embodying a set of meditative techniques indispensable for realizing the goal of the Buddhist path. The chapter argues that Nāgārjuna does not hold an adversarial view of the relation between Mahyamaka and Yogācāra, but that his approach is best understood in terms of the gradualist and instrumentalist conceptions.

Even though Nāgārjuna is the founding father of Madhyamaka, his works contain various passages referring to Yogācāra ideas. The aim of this chapter is to examine some of the most important of these in order to sketch an account of what Nāgārjuna's view of Yogācāra might have been.

As a methodological framework let us distinguish three ways in which the Mādhyamika can conceptualize the relationship between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. First of all, Yogācāra can be regarded as simply wrong (we will call this the adversarial approach).[1] The Mādhyamika claims to have shown that all attempts to postulate some kind of substantial entity with an

1. Cf Williams 1998: 247: "There is the view that the *cittamātra* thought of Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda in fact is not setting out to contradict the ontology of Madhyamaka. Deep down they both hold that all things without exception are lacking in *svabhāva*. No thing, not even the mind (*citta*) from which this approach gains its name, actually, finally, has any greater reality than any other, and all are *niḥsvabhāva*. I have long held that textually, historically and philosophically this is quite wrong."

intrinsic nature, something existing by *svabhāva,* leads to a contradiction. Yet the Yogācārin does precisely this when claiming that there is one fundamental way reality really is—that it is all mental. The Yogācārin would thus have to be regarded as mistaken, much like the Ātmavādin with his theory of a substantially existent soul, or the Ābhidharmika with his substantially existent *dharmas.*

The second approach considers Yogācāra as the best philosophical position to hold apart from Madhyamaka (the gradualist approach). Philosophical systems are ordered by quality, with the systems of the Tīrthikas, the Ātmavādin, and the Cārvākas occupying the bottom rung. Higher than these are the Ābhidharmikas, who have realized the selflessness of persons, but still hold on to substantially existent *dharmas.* After this we come to Yogācāra, and beyond this there is only one further level of philosophical sophistication, expressed by the Madhyamaka system. The gradualist position sits naturally with the idea that the Yogācāra worldview provides us with the best account of conventional truth, while Madhyamaka describes the best account of ultimate truth. Unlike the adversarial approach, this view sees the Yogācārin's assertions as truths, not as falsehoods, even though it does not consider them to be absolute truths.

The third account, which we will refer to as the instrumentalist account, considers Yogācāra as embodying a set of meditative techniques, as a tool for realizing the goal of the Buddhist path. Unlike the gradualist view, this perspective considers Yogācāra not as a lower-level truth, a truth that we have to rely on as long as we, as unenlightened beings, are confined to the realm of conventional truth. Rather, this view sees Yogācāra as an indispensable tool to be employed to achieve enlightenment.[2]

The most famous passage from Nāgārjuna's works with a clear Yogācāra flavor is without a doubt verse 34 of the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā,*[3] which reads

2. A clear example of the gradualist approach is Śāntarakṣita, while the instrumentalist approach is most frequently associated with Kamalaśīla. See Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 253–254.

3. There is a considerable discussion in the contemporary secondary literature of the question which of Nāgārjuna's works are to be considered authentic. This chapter refers to a variety of works that have been attributed to Nāgārjuna in Indian or Tibetan sources, and the authenticity of these works is more debatable in some cases than in others. We should note, however, that the key points I am making can be based on passages from works included in the Yukti-corpus, in particular the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* and *Ratnāvalī,* and the authenticity of the Yukti-corpus appears to be a plausible and well-supported position. As for the remaining works, even if one holds that these were not in fact written by Nāgārjuna, it is clear that these are early texts that through their attribution to Nāgārjuna were regarded as

> The great elements etc. are included in consciousness. If, knowing that, they cease, are they not falsely construed?[4]

There are a variety of translational choices for the key phrase *vijñāne samavarudhyate*. Some stress primarily the sense of containment, others that of ontological reduction.[5]

Of course both senses are essential for understanding Nāgārjuna's point here. The issue is not just that the four great elements are included in consciousness insofar as they are perceived, but in a more fundamental sense, so that their way of existence is subsumed by *vijñāna*.

It is interesting to note in this context that modern translations offer two different ways of understanding the phrase *tajjṇāne vigamaṃ*. On the one hand this can be understood as saying that understanding (that the great elements are contained in consciousness) leads to freedom.[6] On the other hand it can be taken to mean that the understanding of this containment results in the dissolution of the great elements.[7]

Madhyamaka works by Indian and Tibetan scholars, and these texts talk about Yogācāra ideas. As such they are clearly important when trying to understand the early relationship between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. It certainly won't be sufficient to argue against their authenticity merely on the grounds of their containing Yogācāra ideas, at least not without begging several of the questions currently under investigation. For a sophisticated discussion of the idea of authorship in relation to the discussion of the authenticity of tantric works ascribed to Nāgārjuna, see Wedemeyer 2007: 7–43.

4. *mahābhūtādi vijñāne proktam samavarudhyate || tajjñāne vigamaṃ yāti* (Ruegg reads *yadi*) *nanu mithyā vikalpitam 'byung ba che la sogs bshad pa | rnam par shes su yang dga 'du| de shes pas ni 'bral 'gyur na| log pas rnam brtags ma yin nam |* (Lindtner 1982: 110).

5. The former include Scherrer-Schaub (1991: 252), which, following Ruegg (1981, 20, note 44), has "contenus dans le *vijñāna*"; Loizzo (2007: 185) gives "incorporated into consciousness"; Della Santina (2002: 115) has "included in consciousness"; and Yamaguchi (1926: 57), "are included in *vijñāna* (consciousness)." As for the latter, Lindtner (1987: 111) renders the phrase as "absorbed in consciousness"; in (1981: 168), he gives "can actually be reduced to consciousness"; Kajiyama (1978: 132) has "are in fact reduced to cognition"; Tola and Dragonetti (1983: 113) have "consist only of consciousness"; and Ichigō (1985: lxxxvi) has "are in fact reduced to consciousness."

6. "Since knowing that, you break free [of them], [. . .]" (Loizzo 2007: 185); "If freedom arises through this understanding [. . .]" are they not erroneously imagined?" (Della Santina 2002: 115).

7. "S'ils cessent [d'exister] lorsq'on connaît cela [. . .]" (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 252); "they are dissolved by understanding them" (Lindtner 1987:111); "since, by knowing this, they are dissolved, [. . .] (Tola & Dragonetti 1983: 113). Compare in this context also the claim made in *Ratnāvalī* 41 that in liberation there are no *skandha*s and thus, *a fortiori*, no material objects *(mokṣe nātmā na ca skandhā)* (Tucci 1934: 316).

Of course these two translations are not necessarily contradictory, as the "freedom" might be taken to just consist in the cessation of the great elements. Nevertheless the latter translations are considerably more explicit in bringing out the idea that the "containment in consciousness" should be regarded as a form of ontological constitution, not just claiming that the great elements are the intentional objects of conscious states. Only if consciousness is in some fundamental way responsible for the existence of the basic constituents of matter would it make sense to say that the attaining of a specific state of consciousness (such as liberation) would lead to its dissolution.

Candrakīrti clearly understands this verse according to the gradualist approach, pointing out that

> Knowing that consciousness also is not originated substantially, he knows that the primary elements etc. without exception are produced from it.[8]

Even though the arising of the fundamental constituents of matter (which are the four great elements) from consciousness (and thus the relative ontological priority of consciousness over matter), is not disputed, consciousness itself is not accorded any fundamental ontological status; it is not regarded as ontologically prior in any absolute sense.

It is thus hardly surprising that this verse was used as scriptural support for Śāntarakṣita's well-known synthesis of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka in verse 94 of the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*, where he states that

> Relying on *cittamātra* one should know that external things do not exist, relying on this method one should understand the complete selflessness of that [mind] too.[9]

A passage covering the same material in greater detail is contained in Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* 93–94:

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8. *ji ltar gnas pa'i sems rang gi ngo bos skye ba med par shes pas des bskyed pa 'byung ba chen po la sogs pa ma lus pa dag* (Loizzo 2007: 325).

9. *sems tsam la ni brten nas su | phyir rol dngos po med she par bya | tshul 'dir brten nas de la yang | shin tu bdag med shes par bya* (*Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* 34 is quoted in the *vṛtt*i on the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*) (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 253).

93. Earth, water, fire, and wind,
Long and short, subtle and coarse,
As well as virtue and so forth are said by the Victorious One
To be dissolved in consciousness.

Ajitamitra notes that the four great elements are only postulated at the level of conventional reality, not at the ultimate level.[10]

94. With reference to indemonstrable, boundless consciousness
the universal master,
earth, water, fire, and wind,
are not found in any place.

95. Here long and short,
subtle and coarse, virtue and non-virtue,
Here name and form as well
Are dissolved without remainder.

96. All that arose earlier in consciousness
because of not knowing
because of knowing that
later they are dissolved in consciousness in this way.

97. All these beings and objects are said to be
fuel of the fire of consciousness.
After being burnt in this very way
by the light of discrimination, those are extinguished.

98. The reality (*tattva*) of what is earlier imputed by ignorance
is later ascertained.
When a thing is not found,
how indeed could there be an absence?

99. Because of the mere non-existence of matter
space is a mere name.
Without elements how could there be matter,
or how could there be even being a mere name?[11]

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10. *de ni tha snyad du gsungs kyi don dam par ni ma yin no* (Okada 1990: 72).

11. A critical edition of the Tibetan and Sanskrit text is in Hahn 1982: 37–39. For the Tibetan, see also Hopkins 1998. 93. *sa dang chu dang me dang rlung | ring thung phra dang*

Verses 93–95 appear to be a clear reference to the end of the *Kevaddha-sutta*, where the Buddha says:

> Where do earth, water, fire and air no footing find? Where are long and short, small and great, fair and foul, where are name and form wholly destroyed?
>
> And the answer is:
>
> Where consciousness is signless, boundless, all-luminous, that's where earth, water, fire and air find no footing, there both long and short, small and great, fair and foul—there name and form are wholly destroyed. With the cessation of consciousness this is all destroyed.[12]

Nāgārjuna mentions the very same examples (the four great elements, long and short, etc.) that we find in the sūtra. In addition the triple characterization of consciousness here as signless, boundless, all-luminous is clearly the source for Nāgārjuna's characterization in Ratnāvalī 94ab. The first two characterizations of consciousness we find there match very well (*anidassanaṃ / bstan med* and *anantaṃ / mtha' yas pa*), while the third (*sabbato phabaṃ / kun tu bdag po*) does not seem to do so. We might

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sbom nyid dang| dge sogs nyid ni rnam shes su| 'gag par 'gyur zhes thub pas gsungs| 94. rnam shes bstan med mtha' yas pa| kun tu bdag po de la ni| sa dang chu dang me dang ni| rlung gi gnas thob pa 'gyur ma yin| (There are various readings for 94d; the one given here accords with Ajitamitra's gloss as "*gnas skabs rnyed par mi 'gyur ro.*" See Okada 1990: 171). *95. 'dir ni ring dang thung ba dang | phra sbom dge dang me dge dang| 'dir ni ming dang gzungs dag kyang| ma lus par ni 'gag par 'gyur| 96. gang ma shes phyir rnam shes la| sngon chad byung ba de kun ni| de shes phyir na rnam she su| phyis ni de ltar 'gag par 'gyur| 97. rnam shes me yi bud shing ni | 'gro chos 'di kun yin par 'dod| de dag ji bzhin rab byed pa'i| 'od dang ldan pas bsregs nas zhi| 98. mi shes pa ni sngon brtags pa| phyis ni de nyid nges pa dang | gang tshe dngos po mi rnyed pa| de tshe dngos med ga la 'gyur| ajñānakalpitaṃ pūrvaṃ paścāt tattvārthanirṇaye | yadā na labhate bhāvam evābhāvas tadā kuha* (The Sanskrit of verse 98 comes from *Prasannapadā* 188.18–19.) *99. gzugs kyi dngos po ming tsam phyir| nam mkha' yang ni ming tsam mo| byung med gzugs lta ga la yod| de phyir ming tsam nyid kyang med| rūpasyābhāvamātratvād ākāśaṃ nāmamātrakam | bhūtair vinā kuto rūpaṃ nāmamātrakam apy ataḥ* (The Sanskrit of verse 99 comes from *Prasannapadā* 413.11–12. Note the considerable difference from the Tibetan version (on this seen Hahn 1981: 38, Hopkins 1998: 108), our translation follows the Sanskrit.)

12. *Kattha āpo ca paṭhavī tejo vāyo na gādhati. Kattha dīghañ ca rassañ ca aṇuṃ thūlaṃ subhāsubhaṃ. Katta nāmañ ca rūpañ ca asesaḥ uparujjhatī'ti. Tatra veyyākaraṇaṃ bhavatī: Viññāṇnaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato pabhaṃ, ettha āpo ca paṭhavī tejo vāyo na gādhati, ettha dīghañ ca rassaṇ ca aṇuṃ thāla.m subhāsubhaṃ, ettha nāmañ ca rūpañ ca asesaḥ uparujjhati. Viññāṇassa nirodhena etthetaṃ uparujjhatī'ti.* (Dīgha Nikāya vol I, 223; Walshe 1995: 179–180)

be tempted to argue that the Tibetan should actually not read "*kun tu bdag po*" (universal master), but "*kun tu dag po*" (completely pure), which comes quite close in meaning to "*sabbato pabhaṃ*". Yet in fact that is not necessary; in his commentary on the *Brahmanimantanikasutta*, which contains the same terms, Buddhaghosa gives three different ways of understanding "*sabbato phabhaṃ*," the second of which is "the lord above everything."[13]

It is obvious how this sūtra passage can be given a Yogācāra interpretation. If the four great elements, the basis of the material world, as well as name and form, body and mind, are "brought to an end" in consciousness, meaning that they cease when consciousness ceases, it is easy to understand consciousness as an ontological support, as the basis from which all these phenomena are manifested. Yet, as Nāgārjuna makes clear later, such a basis cannot be understood as existent in any absolute sense, because the basis and what is based on the basis exist in a mutually dependent way. This becomes clear already in verse 97, when Nāgārjuna compares the elements and other objects to fuel that keeps the fire of consciousness burning. We remember from Nāgārjuna's discussion in chapter 10 of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* that fire and firewood do not exist existentially independent of each other. In this particular example Nāgārjuna points out that after the "light of discrimination" (*rab byed pa'i 'od*) burns the elements, they are extinguished. After the elements have disappeared in this way, there is no more fire. Yet if fire is what corresponds to consciousness in this example *(rnam shes me),* there will be no more consciousness after the elements are dissolved. We therefore cannot understand consciousness as a substantial basis such that the elements depend on it, while it is independent of the elements and would continue to exist in their absence.

In his commentary on 99cd, Ajitamitra points out that "because the named does not exist the name also does not exist, therefore being a mere name does not exist."[14] The insight of Nāgārjuna that Ajitamitra wants to make explicit here is that "being a mere name" (*nāmamātraka*), the fact that matter is imputed on the four great elements and does not have any existence without them, cannot be regarded as ontologically fundamental either. The reason for this is that the bearer of the name *(ming can),* the

13. Ñānananda 1971: 69–70.

14. *ming can med pas ming yang med pa'i phyir ming tsam med do* (Okada 1990: 74).

elements, only have a derived existence in turn, being a superimposition on consciousness. And if consciousness itself cannot be ascribed an independent existence in the light of remarks from verse 97, then it can also not be the case that "being a mere name" either in the sense of matter being superimposed on the four great elements, or in the sense of the four great elements being a superimposition on consciousness, is an ontologically fundamental description of the world either. In accordance with the gradualist perspective Nāgārjuna regards the Yogācāra view of the primacy of consciousness[15] as a key philosophical insight transcending the Abhidharma perspective of substantially existent dharmas, but not as a philosophically accurate description of the world at the absolute level.[16]

Thus when Nāgārjuna notes in verse 35 of the *Acintyastava*[17] that "the whole world is a mere name" (*nāmamātraṃ jagat sarvam*), he does not regard this as a statement of ultimate truth. It is rather specifically intended for those who assume that the expressible *(abhidheya),* what the system of conventions speaks about, can exist independent of the expressions *(abhidhāna),* the conventions themselves. But if everything expressible is dependent in this way, it cannot be that the philosophical theory that everything is a mere name *(nāmamātraka),* which is also expressible, exists as an independent and fundamental truth.

A work in which Nāgārjuna is considerably more explicit in the exposition of the gradualist stance toward Yogācāra is the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*.[18] This text has not attracted much scholarly attention in modern times,

15. It is worth noting in this context that current scholarship distinguishes two threads in the history of Yogācāra. One thread, which we might call "Yogācāra light," is a nonfoundationalist Yogācāra that does not posit the ultimate reality of the mental. The other thread is a "full-fat" version that does so (see King 1998). It is also argued that the "light" version is historically earlier, while the high-calorie version only comes later (through Dharmapāla, as Ueda [1967] argues). We might also want to point out that it is similarly possible to come up with a similarly calorie-laden version of Madhyamaka (basically a theory saying that the ultimate truth is that everything depends on everything else). This understanding is, however, explicitly rejected in Madhyamaka sources as part of the discussion of the emptiness of emptiness.

16. It is interesting to note that Bhikkhu Ñānananda (1971: 66) interprets the *Kevaddhasutta*'s claim that the four great elements, etc., "find no footing" as "a corrective to that monk's notion that the four elements *cease altogether* somewhere—a notion that had its roots in the popular conception of self-existing material elements."

17. Lindtner 1987: 152–3.

18. Lindtner 1987: 180–217.

even though it belongs to some of "the most frequently quoted among all works ascribed to Nāgārjuna in later Indian literature."[19]

Nāgārjuna elaborates "the Buddha's teaching that all is merely mind"[20] by pointing out that "no external objects whatsoever exist distinct from consciousness,"[21] but that these objects are nothing but the appearance of consciousness under a material aspect *(rūpākāra)*.[22] Nevertheless, this theory does not describe how the world is at the ultimate level (*tattvataḥ, de nyid*). Instead, the theory is taught for the instrumental purpose of dispelling the fear of immature beings (*uttrāsaparihārārthaṃ balānāṃ* [27b]). This implies that the Yogācārin's final analysis of reality into three natures—the imagined *(parikalpita),* dependent *(paratantra),* and perfected nature *(pariniṣpanna)*—is in fact not final, but has to be understood in terms of a more fundamental concept, namely the Madhyamaka theory of emptiness.[23] This includes the ultimate existent in Yogācāra terms: the foundational consciousness *(ālayavijñāna)*. Instead of being an absolute truth, it has the defining characteristics of relative truth: "it does not exist in the way it appears, and does not appear in the way it exists"[24], "it appears as a truth, even though it isn't one,"[25] "has an illusory nature,"[26] and "is by nature insubstantial."[27] Consciousness lacks a substantial foundation[28] and is without *svabhāva* from the very beginning.[29]

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19. Lindtner 1987: 180.

20. *cittamātram idaṃ sarvam iti yā deśanā muneḥ* (27a)

21. *rnam shes las ni tha dad par | phyi rol don ni 'ga' yang med* (22cd). In this context compare verse 19 of Nāgārjuna's *Mahāyānaviṃśikā* (Lindtner 1987: 12 regards its attribution as "dubious," though Tucci 1956–71: 1, 200 considers authorship by Nāgārjuna or by another Madhyamaka author as equiprobable): "Just as they imagine the world, (though it is not born, so) beings are themselves not born: in fact this notion of birth or origin is a mental representation; but no external things (really) exist." *kalpayanti yathā lokaṃ notpannāś ca svayaṃ janāḥ | utpādo hi vikalpo 'yam artho bāhyo na vidyate* (Tucci 1956–71: 1, 207).

22. *rnam shes so sor snang ba 'di | gzugs kyi rnam par snang bar 'gyur* (23cd).

23. *kun brtags dag ni gzhan dbang dang | yongs su grub pa 'di nyid ni | ston nyid bdag nyid gcig pu yi* (28a–c).

24. *de ji ltar de ltar snang min | ji ltar snang de de ltar min* (32ab)

25. *bden min bden pa bzhin du* (34b)

26. *sgyu ma'i rang bzhin sems* (41d)

27. *bdag med ngo bo ste* (32c)

28. *sems kyi ni | bdag gi gnas pa spangs pa yin* (56ab)

29. *thog ma nyid nas sems kyi ni | rang bzhin rtag tu med par 'gyur* (55ab)

Nāgārjuna offers a variety of reasons for denying (foundational) consciousness the status of fundamental reality.

The activity ("movement," *gyo*) of consciousness is dependent on the body,[30] and without the body there would be no consciousness.[31] This means that we do not have a well-founded chain of existential dependence with macroscopic objects depending on the four great elements, which in turn depend on consciousness, which is the basic foundation of all that exists. Instead we have a circular dependence structure: matter existentially depends on consciousness in the way the Yogācārin has just indicated, but it is also the case that consciousness depends on matter (and, more specifically, on the body), since without matter there would be no manifestation of consciousness. As such the mind is also a mere name, an empty superimposition on a material basis.[32] This leads to the rejection of the well-known ontological distinction between primary and secondary existents, between objects deemed ontologically fundamental (such as subatomic particles, property-instances, sense data) and those considered derivable and definable in terms of them (such as macroscopic objects and composite mental events).

By examining the passages from Nāgārjuna's works that we have looked at so far it, is quite clear that he endorses a gradualist view of the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka relationship. Yet there is a further dimension to Nāgārjuna's understanding of Madhyamaka. He does not just consider Yogācāra as a kind of runner-up for the prize of the best philosophical theory. Yogācāra ideas also have a crucial role to play in meditative practice.

An interesting text to consider in this respect is Nāgārjuna's *Bhāvanākrama*.[33] This interesting short work consists of 56 verses, all of which can also be found (often with some variation) in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*. The *Bhāvanākrama* has been given some attention by Christian Lindtner in 1992[34] and 1997. He understands it as expressing

30. *de bzhin kun gzhi rnam shes ni | lus brten nas ni gyo ba yin* (35cd)

31. *lus med na ni rnam par shes | yod pa min* (36ab)

32. *sems ni ming tsam yin pa ste | min las gzhan du 'ga' yang med || ming tsam du ni rnam rig blta | ming yang rang bzhin med pa yin* (40)

33. Lindtner (1987: 12) classifies its authenticity as "dubious." See also page 15, note 31.

34. All subsequent Tibetan quotations and matches with Sanskrit verses from the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* are based on this publication.

Nāgārjuna's gradualism, positioning Yogācāra as a philosophical system between the Abhidharma and Madhyamaka, as well as containing advice on how to use Yogācāra meditative techniques in the progress toward liberation.[35]

23. Where there is no mind, there is no matter,
the mind is deluded without beginning.
All matter appears,
when the mind is arises,
then through wisdom the *yogi*
should see the world as without appearance.[36]

In this and the following verses Nāgārjuna gives advice on how the practitioner should practice (note the optative in the Sanskrit) and how the world should appear to him once the Yogācāra perspective has been transformed from a philosophical viewpoint to an experiential reality.

24. Appearances, entities, and conceptualizations
are perturbations of the mind.
That which is the power of selflessness
removes conceptual distinctions.[37]

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35. "Indeed BV [*Bhāvanākrama*] is very interesting in this connection because one can actually detect the MMM [Mahāyāna Method of Meditation, which Lindtner sees expressed in *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* X 256–8] behind its composition: "After the refutation of ātman (4–9), the doctrine of *skandhamātra* is refuted (10–24), then Yogācāra, or Vijñānavāda (25–26). The highest stage is represented by Madhyamaka. [. . .] The standpoint of BV is exactly the same as that of LS [*Laṅkāvatārasūtra*], namely to use *cittamātra* as a means of progressive meditation" (1997: 121). "The purpose of this *Bhāvanākrama*, which certainly belongs to the 'circle' of early Indian Madhyamaka, is to show how *cittamātra* can be used as a means of meditation to attain *nirābhāsajñāna*, i.e. *nirvikalpasamādhi*." (1997: 120)

36. *'dir ni sems med gzugs yod min 'khrul pa'i sems las lhag par med 'byung ba kun la gnas nas ni gang tshe sems ni rab 'jug pa de tshe mi gnas rnal 'byor pas 'gro la rigs pas lta ba na; sarvarūpāvabhāsaṃ hi yadā cittaṃ pravartate | nātra cittaṃ na rūpāni bhrāntaṃ cittam anādikam || tadā yogī hy anābhāsaṃ prajñayā paśyate jagat |* (LS X 93). The order of the Tibetan stanzas differs from that of the Sankrit. My translation follows the Tibetan order. I have also included the two lines *de tshe mi gnas rnal 'byor pas | 'gro la rigs pas lta ba na* at the end of stanza 23, rather than at the beginning of stanza 24 (as suggested by Suzuki 1932: 233).

37. *mtshan ma dngos po rnam rig dang yid kyis gyo ba yod ma yin bdag med dbang po gang yin dang rnam par rtog pas 'jig par byed; nimittaṃ vastuvijñaptir manovispanditaṃ ca yat | atikramya tu putrā me nirvikalpāś caranti te ||* (LS X 94).

In this verse it is interesting to note that the key Madhyamaka concept of selflessness *(nairātmya, bdag med)* is mentioned as instrumental for removing the mental perturbations that give rise to phenomenal reality. We do not find a reference to this in the closest parallel in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*. Lindtner (1992: 245) argues that an early recension of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, differing from the one available today, "was known to and influenced the writings of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva."

43. Because of the non-appearance of entities
for the *Yogin*s the absence of entities is abandoned.
The sameness of entities and their absence
is the fruit of the Nobles' realm.[38]

The realization of the Yogācāra viewpoint, with its specific characteristic of "non-appearance" *(nirābhāsa)*, keeps the practitioner from falling into the extreme of nihilism *(abhāva)*. The sameness of entities and their absence *(bhāva-abhāva-samatva, dngos dang dngos med mnyam pa nyid)* is due to the fact that neither exists substantially or fundamentally *(svabhāvatas)*, as both are equally empty.

44. My own mind is seen,
there is no external object.
Thus one should ascertain the confusion,
and bring to mind the reality.[39]

The use of the optative underlines the fact that we are not just dealing with a philosophical description of how the world is, but with advice for how the practitioner (based on his meditative training) should see the world.

45. When *citta*, *manas*,
and *vijñāna* do not arise

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38. *'di na dngos rnams mi dmigs pas dngos med spangs pa'i rnal 'byor pa dngos dang dngos med mnyam pa nyid 'bras bu 'phags pa'i spyod yul yin; nirābhāso hi bhāvānām abhāvo nāsti yogināṃ | bhāvābhāvasamatvena āryāṇāṃ jāyate phalam* || (LS X 207).

39. *gang gis bdag gi sems mthong na phyi yi don ni yod ma yin de ltar dngos la ma 'khrul na de bzhin nyid kyang rjes su dmigs; madīyaṃ dṛśyate cittaṃ bāhyam arthaṃ na vidyate | evaṃ vibhāvayed bhrāntiṃ tathatāṃ cāpy anusmaret* || (LS X 218).

then one obtains the mind-made body
as well as the Buddha-field.[40]

A result of the meditative practice moving beyond the appearance of mental factors is the attainment of supernatural powers *(siddhi)*, in this case that of the mind-made body *(manomaya-kāya)*. The attainment of this body is traditionally described as the fruit of the fourth *jhāna*. The *Samaññaphalasutta* describes the meditator creating another body from his own body, a body "having a form, mind-made, complete in all its limbs and faculties."[41] The *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* distinguishes three kinds of mind-made body, the first of which is described as follows: "when [. . .] the waves of consciousness are no more stirred in the mind-ocean and the *vijñāna* functions are quieted, the bliss of which is enjoyed by him; and when he thus recognizes the non-existence of the external world, which is no more than his own mind, he is said to have the mind-made body."[42] According to this interpretation the mind-made body is not primarily understood as some kind of magical double, but as a sign of the meditative realization of a key insight of Yogācāra, namely the mental nature of all phenomena. This realization will then also lead to the obtaining of full Buddhahood by obtaining the Buddha-field *(buddhabhūmi)*.

54. Having entered mind-only
he should not conceive of external objects.
Standing on this foundational reality
he should surpass mind-only.[43]

The view that all that exists is merely mental *(cittamātra)* provides the foundation for meditative techniques that lead the practitioner to no longer conceiving of external objects. But the practitioner is then advised

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40. *gang tshe yid dang sems dang ni rnam par shes pa'ang mi 'jug la de tshe sems 'di'i 'bras bu ni sangs rgyas kyi ni sa yang 'thob yadā; cittaṃ manaś capi vijñānaṃ na pravartate | tadā manomayaṃ kāyaṃ labhate buddhabhūmi ca* || (LS X 226).

41. Walshe 1995: 104.

42. 3, 57, Suzuki 1973: 136

43. *sems tsam la ni brten nas su phyi rol don ni mi brtag go de bzhin nyid dmigs gnas nas ni sems tsam las ni 'da' bar bya; cittamātraṃ samāruhya bāhyam arthaṃ na kalpayet | tathatālambane sthitvā cittamātram atikramet* || (LS X 256).

to surpass this view, regarding it not as an ultimate truth but as something that is also only conventionally real.

> 55. Having surpassed mind-only
> he should surpass the state of non-appearance.
> Having based himself on the state of non-appearance
> the *Yogin* sees the Mahāyāna.[44]

The nonappearance of external objects *(nirabhāsa)* is something that should both form the basis *(gnas)* of meditative practice and be something the practitioner should transcend *('da bar bya)* by realizing that it is not ultimately real. This is the only way in which the goal of the Mahāyāna path, that is, full enlightenment, can be achieved.

In these verses we find advice on the meditative realization of the philosophical position that constitutes the key tenet of Yogācāra, namely that only phenomena are only mental in nature. This advice is combined with the espousal of a gradualist tradition, according to which the realization of the Yogācāra view cannot be regarded as a realization of the ultimate truth about reality, but that it has to be transcended as well. This view and its meditative realization are of instrumental value but do not occupy the final position in an ascending doxographical hierarchy.

We find the very same point made in Kamalaśīla's first *Bhāvanākrama*, in a passage that quotes verse 54cd of Nāgārjuna's *Bhāvanākrama*:

> Therefore, it should be concluded that the mind is devoid of the object *(grāhya)* and subject (*grāhaka*), it is non-dual. 'Resting on the foundation of reality (*tathatā*)' being the definition of non-duality one should also go beyond the *cittamātra* stage.[. . .][45]
>
> In non-dual knowledge (*advayajñāna*) the adherence to substantial existence (*vastutva*) should be abandoned, which means one should remain in the knowledge which is non-dual knowledge without appearance (*advaya-jñāna-nirābhāsa*). This being the case

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44. *sems tsam las ni 'das nas su snang ba med las 'da' bar bya snang med gnas pa'i rnal 'byor pa de yis theg pa chen po mthong; cittamātram atikramya nirābhāsam atikramet| nirābhāsasthito yogī mahāyānaṃ sa paśyati* || (LS X 257).

45. *tato cittaṃ grāhyagrāhakaviviktam advayam eva cittam iti vicārayet, advayalakṣaṇe tathatālmbane sthitvā tat api cittamātram atikramet* (Tucci 1956–71, vol II, 211: 6–9).

> one becomes established in the ascertainment of the insubstantiality (*niḥsvabhāva*) of all things. Thus established, by entrance into the highest truth (*paramatattva*) one enters into realization-free absorption (*nirvikalpa-samādhi*). [. . .][46]
>
> Paths like that of the *śrāvaka*s etc. have been taught only for the instruction of the ignorant. "There are only *skandha*s, there is no self," thinking in his way the *śrāvaka* enters into the selflessness of persons. "The three *dhātu*s are only mind," so thinking he enters the selflessness of external objects of the *vijñānavāda*. Now, by entering the selflessness of non-dual knowledge one enters the supreme truth (*paramattva*), for it is not the case that entering into mind-only is in fact entering into reality.[47]

We find here a clear exposition of gradualism, moving from the selflessness of persons associated with the Abhidharma, via the Yogācārin's denial of external, nonmental objects to the realization of the ultimate truth *(paramatattva, 'phags pa bden pa)*. Even though Kamalaśila does not say so explicitly in this passage, we can identify this final truth with the Madhyamaka perspective, given that it is understood as entailing the emptiness of *svabhāva* of all things *(sarva-dharma-niḥsvabhāvatā, ngo bo nyid kyis stong pa nyid)*.

The passages above have made it clear that Nāgārjuna does not understand Madhyamaka and Yogācāra as adversaries. There is, instead, good evidence for attributing to him a gradualist and an instrumentalist approach, conceiving of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka as an ascending hierarchy of successively more sophisticated philosophical systems, while stressing the importance of the meditative realization of fundamental Yogācāra views for the obtaining of full liberation.

We might worry that the distinction between gradualist and instrumentalist interpretations of the Madhyamaka-Yogācāra divide in fact just boils down to a single view differentiated by different emphases. We can

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46. *tatrāpy advayajñāne vastutvābhiniveśaṃ tyajet, advayajñānanirābhāsa eva jñāne tiṣṭhed ity arthaḥ | evaṃ sati sarvadharmaniḥsvabhāvatāpratipattau sthito bhavati | tatra sthitasya paramatattvapraveśāt, nirvikalpasamādhipraveśaḥ* (Tucci 1956–71, vol II, 211: 14–19).

47. *kevalam avatāraṇābhisaṃdhinā śrāvakādimārgo deśitaḥ | tathā hi skandhamātram evaitat | na tv ātmāstīti bhāvayan śrāvakaḥ pudgalanairātmyam avatarati | vijñāptimātraṃ traidhātukam iti bhāvayan vijñānavādibāhyārtha nairātmyam avatarati | anena tv asyādvayajñānasya nairātmyapraveśāt paramatattvapraviṣṭo bhavati | na tu vijñāptimātratāpraveśa eva tattvapraveśaḥ* (Tucci 1956–71, vol II, 217: 2–9).

be gradualist about different philosophical views (resulting in the familiar Abhidharma-Yogācāra-Madhyamaka doxographic hierarchy), or we can be gradualist about different meditative techniques, beginning with those associated with the Abhidharma (such as the examination of the *skandhas*), then moving on to Yogācāra and then to Madhyamaka. On this understanding Yogācāra is no more a meditative tool for Madhyamaka than Abhidharma is. Each level of understanding has its specific philosophical views, and its meditative techniques. The difficulty with this reading is that it is hard to specify exactly what the distinct Madhyamaka meditative techniques may amount to. When examining Nāgārjuna's works we find not much discussion of meditative practices,[48] and certainly no description of anything that would constitute a meditative technique specifically associated with Madhyamaka.

One way of trying to resolve this issue is by conceptualizing the relationship between Buddhist philosophical approaches and meditative practice in two different ways. For the sake of brevity, we will refer to these ways as the "one license" view and the "many licenses" view. Being able to drive a Smart, a VW Polo, and a Lotus 340 requires mastery of the same set of skills, despite the way that they convey you to your destination in different ways and at different speeds. For this reason one license is sufficient for all of them. But driving a car, sailing a boat, and flying a plane require different skills, and therefore require different licenses. According to the one-license view, there is one core set of Buddhist meditative techniques that are deployed independent of the philosophical position adopted. Of course these techniques can be used in different ways and with different emphases by the different philosophical schools, and therefore lead to different results. But there is no difference in the key properties of the techniques employed, just as there is no fundamental difference in technique when it comes to driving a regular car and a sports car. The many-licenses view argues that because of the different key philosophical assumptions of the different Buddhist systems of tenets, different meditative techniques have to be associated with the different schools. A set of techniques associated with one philosophical outlook can yield results relative to that outlook, but it will not be applicable to another one. In the same way the skills acquired when driving a car will not help you fly a plane.

48. See, however, the interesting discussion of Nāgārjuna's devotional practices in Mitrikeski 2008.

It is evident that whatever meditative techniques Ābhidharmikas, Yogācārins, and Mādhyamikas employ, they are understood as leading do described differently goals associated with the experiential realization of the associated philosophical position. For Abhidharma this entails realization of the selflessness of persons and of the fundamentally existent physical and mental dharmas; for the Yogācārin realization of mind-only means that the appearance of external objects ceases;[49] and for the Mādhyamika the realization of the emptiness of persons is to be supplemented by the realization of the emptiness of all phenomena. Yet this does not necessarily mean that these three groups of practitioners would have to employ different meditative techniques. We could argue that in all cases the same technique of analytical meditation (*dpyad sgom*, **vicāraṇa-bhāvanā*) is employed, but that it is directed at different philosophical positions that are to be first analytically investigated and then meditatively realized. This would constitute an argument in favour of the one-license view. How much weight can be put on this depends on the precise way in which "analytical meditation" is to be understood. As a kind of meditation, its result should belong to the wisdom gained from meditation *(bhāvanāmayā paññā),* not to wisdom gained from reflection *(cintāmayā paññā)*. In the case of the latter, that of understanding of the Buddhist doctrine and of the specific philosophical positions associated with it gained from reflecting on it and analysing it, it is clear that the very same analytical techniques are going to be employed to assess the soundness of a Yogācāra argument and of a Madhyamaka argument, as the same standards of rational coherence are going to be employed. Yet in the case of analytical meditation and the wisdom gained from meditation, we are talking about the shift from a *mere intellectual understanding* of a philosophical position to its *experiential realization*. But this also means that it is no longer clear that what is going to bring this shift about is the same in the case of Abhidharma, Yogācāra, and Madhyamaka, or whether each would have to rely on a proprietary approach.

While it is difficult to decide between the one-license view and the many-licenses view, it is important to note that the instrumentalist

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49. This should not be understood as saying that as a result everything goes blank and all objects vanish from sight. What disappears is rather the appearance of external objects *as external*. When the dualism of observing subject and observed objects ceases, objects are no longer mistakenly considered as external. They are then also not regarded as internal, either, since once the mental nature of all phenomena has been established, the entire foundation of the internal-external distinction is removed.

approach to Yogācāra introduced above can be conceptualized on either view. If there is just one set of core meditative practices, a Madhyamaka speaking about meditative techniques could just refer to those associated with Yogācāra, perhaps because his audience is most familiar with them in this form. On the other hand, if Yogācāra is associated with a specific set of techniques, he could recommend them to the Mādhyamika's use if Madhyamaka had no proprietary techniques associated only with it.

One might argue that there are no such proprietary techniques because there is no Madhyamaka path. Madhyamaka is rather to be understood as a particular kind of reasoning that illuminates the meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*s, that helps to generate faith in them, and counters attachment to philosophical views as providing insight into what the world is like at the ultimate level.[50] We could then conceptualize Madhyamaka as something that acts on any view that is achieved by applying meditative techniques, whether it is the Ābhidharmika's direct perception of *dharmas,* or the Yogācārin's view that all is only mind. The Madhyamaka perspective contributes the insight that none of these views can constitute an absolute truth. As such Madhyamaka wouldn't be a path in itself (which explains the absence of clear Madhyamaka meditative techniques), but a set of arguments that operates on the result of any of the different Buddhist paths.

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50. I owe these observations to Jonathan Gold.

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8

Nāgārjuna the Yogācārin? Vasubandhu the Mādhyamika?

ON THE MIDDLE-WAY BETWEEN REALISM AND ANTIREALISM

Eviatar Shulman

IN MANY RESPECTS, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are retrospective categories; when a philosopher wished to align himself with an earlier, idealized authority, he presented himself as subscribing to the same view as that of the "founding father" of his school. These categories also exist in order to simplify and to structure the main positions advocated by Indian Buddhist philosophers. Categorization of this sort, although insensitive to the subtle positions particular to each philosopher of the school, is a scholarly impulse equally necessary to both the Buddhist tradition and to modern students of Buddhist philosophy west of India. This impulse can, however, create more perplexity than clarity; although sincere, it produces a problematic, unwarranted effect: the most creative, original thinkers of both systems of thought under discussion are defined, at best, according to the way they were understood by their students, at times hundreds of years later than their time. At worst, we understand these philosophers today as they were presented by their rivals.

In this chapter I will attempt to refine our understanding of the central philosophers at the root of the two traditions, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra: Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, respectively.[1] My intention is to point to the

1. Asaṅga appears to have been more significant to the rise of the Yogācāra school, but the work of his brother Vasubandhu is more valuable and comprehensive from a philosophical perspective. Many of the questions that will arise here regarding Vasubandhu, such as his relation to Madhyamaka thought, are also relevant to understanding Asaṅga.

close affinity between the philosophical visions of these two seminal thinkers, mainly in the fields of ontology and metaphysics. I will argue that the main differences between the two were in their philosophical temperaments, and not in their understanding of reality. While there *may* be a distinction between them regarding their soteriological positions—what is the nature of the mind that knows *śūnyatā*?—an acceptance of a marked difference on this point must inevitably remain a matter of interpretation. Regarding their metaphysics, however, a straightforward, careful reading of the main texts these thinkers left us exposes a broad common ground and a shared worldview.

The outline of this worldview is as follows. First, both philosophers carry out a devastating attack on any form of realism. Nothing, for them, exists objectively; there is no reality and no reliable notion of truth. Next, with realism thoroughly abated, we are left, inevitably, with some form of idealism or antirealism. For both of these thinkers, the demolition of realism does not lead to skepticism, but to a conviction regarding the necessity of a strong version of antirealism. Such a robust antirealism inevitably possesses at least an idealistic leaning, as it attributes some type of creative capacity to the mind. In less demanding, less analytical terms (more natural to Vasubandhu), this implies that reality depends on subjectivity, that is, on a full continuity between mind and world. For Nāgārjuna, this position is required by his denial of nonexistence, which leaves reality "similar to an illusion"; his is a world with no objective truth to be found, and thus—ontologically—the world can never be detached from experience. While Nāgārjuna, whose method is sharply analytical, cannot much more than hint at this picture, Vasubandhu invests his philosophical energies in arguing in its favor. But for both, this light idealist or committed antirealist position can only be maintained "conventionally" or metaphorically, since they see mind and consciousness as just as empty as anything else. Thus, for both philosophers, reality is, in fact, similar to an illusion, being a projective manifestation of karma, of understanding, or of linguistic, perceptual, and cognitive conventions. This is the positive nature of emptiness—the empty world as a manifestation of human perception. Hence, Vasubandhu emerges as possibly the most reliable commentator on Nāgārjuna, or the closest Mahāyāna thinker to him in his exposition of the logic of the empty.

Parts of the understanding I have just outlined have been articulated previously in modern scholarship. Specifically, there have been a number of insightful contributions to the theme that connects Madhyamaka and

Yogācāra.[2] Other approaches have been quite different, most prominently those that have been influenced by *dge-lug-pa* theoretical schemes. The *dge-lug-pa* system defines Yogācāra as a strong form of idealism,[3] in accordance with the way it is seen by later Indian Madhyamaka.[4] Through its powerful commitment to the truth of conventional truth and its emphasis on its understanding of the full equation of dependent-origination and emptiness, it also allows realist elements to penetrate its presentation of Madhyamaka; relational existence is, ultimately, a form of existence. One of my main goals in what follows will be to demonstrate that these perspectives should be forsaken so long as we are dealing with Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu—full-fledged idealism, as well as any scent of a real world, should remain out of the picture. While these approaches may be relevant to understanding later strands of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra,[5] and while they surely have didactic merit in shaping the discussion of emptiness,[6] they do not apply to the earlier philosophers of these systems.[7]

My presentation will begin with short discussions of Nāgārjuna and of Vasubandhu, from which we will proceed to a broader assessment of the relation between their thought and the theme of realism and antirealism.

I. Nāgārjuna the Yogācārin?[8]

The most characteristic, if enigmatic, feature of Nāgārjuna's thought is his insistence that his position confidently steers clear of both existence

2. See esp. Anacker (1986: 3), Nagao (1991: ch. 14), and King (1994).

3. At times writers of this tradition, however, in speaking of the real existence of "other-powered natures" (*paratantrasvabhāva*), appear to see these as external to consciousness. See, for example, Shantideva in BCA 9.27, and Tsonkhapa in *Legs-bshad-snying-po* (translated in Hopkins [2000: ch. 9]).

4. See, for example, Candrakīrti in MA 45, 62–64, and Śantideva in BCA 9.15,17.

5. See Ueda (1967).

6. The paradigmatic example here is the four-tenet system in Tibetan Buddhism (e.g., in Sopa and Hopkins [1989]).

7. This is also true of the earlier Mahāyāna sūtras, who, with no hesitation, mix what later became Madhyamaka and Yogācāra principles and employ them side by side.

8. For a fuller exposition of the presentation of Nāgārjuna in this section, see Shulman (2007 [2009]).

and nonexistence.[9] There is no reason to qualify this statement by saying that it pertains only to certain realms of philosophical discourse, such as to discussions of epistemology or language. There is also no reason to squirm in denial—this is not a refutation only of "inherent existence."[10] Rather, the claim is all-pervading—any view of existence or nonexistence must be avoided, and all realms of truth or reality, as well as of unreality, must succumb to ubiquitous emptiness. Nowhere in his writings will Nāgārjuna delimit this statement, not even with the help of the all too easily available concept of "conventional truth." This emptiness applies, as we know, even to emptiness itself.

Nāgārjuna's critique of any notion of existence is unrelenting; all *bhāva*, existence, must go. Nonetheless, he will not affirm *abhāva*, nonexistence, a concept he deems incoherent.[11] This leaves him with very few positive things to say, aside from likening reality, or different aspects of reality, to illusions.[12] This rigorous consistency, which will allow for no positive, affirming position, is the fundamental characteristic of Nāgārjuna's method—in his philosophy there are absolutely no discounts; his negation of all truths is entirely comprehensive. Nāgārjuna never strays from a fully logical, analytical approach, and thus absolutely nothing can be portrayed as real.[13] This resilient denial of existence has, however, caused his interpreters some problems. Often he was understood to advocate a nihilist view, and his well-wishers have had to work hard to distinguish his position from an affirmation of a negative truth. This impulse to distance the Madhyamaka view from nihilism has gone too far, since it has allowed reality to creep back in through the back door.

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9. See MMK 5.8, 15.10, AS 13, 22, 37, RĀ 43–46, 58, YṢ 1, and my discussion in Shulman (2007 [2009]): section II.

10. The same is true regarding the newer qualifications of "existence" in Madhyamaka scholarship, such as the suggestion in Priest, Siderits, and Tillemans (2011) to speak of things as "REALLY" existing.

11. See MMK 5.6, 15.5, RĀ 1.55, YṢ 2.

12. See MMK 7.34, 17.31–33, 23.8, ŚS 14, 36, 40–42, 66, VV 65–67, YṢ 15–17, 27, 56, LS 18, AS 4, 5, 18, 24, 29–30, 33, 47, 48. There are verses in the RĀ that support this understanding as well, but it is applied mainly to the aggregates. See Shulman (2011) for a discussion of the philosophical portion of this text and the focus of its argument, which has different goals in mind than the one Nāgārjuna targets in his other philosophical treatises.

13. Garfield (2008: 17–20) puts this well when he speaks of the rationality of Nāgārjuna's antifoundationalism.

The favorite text of those whom I will call the "Madhyamaka Realists" has always been chapter 24 of the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (MKK), supported to a lesser extent by a somewhat forgiving reading of the *Vigraha-vyāvartanī* (VV). What characterizes these texts is that, in both, Nāgārjuna pauses for a short moment in the midst of his usual, forceful attack on reality in order to answer arguments posed by his imaginary opponents. In these texts he is not arguing for emptiness, but showing his interlocutors what their denial of emptiness would entail. This is a crucial distinction; while checking his opponents he provides a less analytically demanding, milder definition of emptiness. Thus, for a short while, rather than saying that reality is totally empty, he now says that if reality is not empty, this would mean that things possess *svabhāva* ("self-nature"), and thus that we live in a static, frozen world with no dependant relations. In the favorite quote of the Madhyamaka-Realist, the well-known MMK 24.18, emptiness is equated with dependent-origination, understood to imply a general philosophical concept of relativity or causality. This verse comes only a few verses after Nāgārjuna spoke of the need to acknowledge "conventional" or "practical" "truth" (*saṃvṛti-satya, vyavahāra-satya*), which supposedly reaffirms some reality of the empty world. Detaching these verses from their broader context of the MMK,[14] the Madhyamaka-Realist thus believes that Nāgārjuna has affirmed relational existence after all.[15]

From a bird's-eye view, the historical development of the Madhaymaka-Realist view looks something like this: Indian Madhyamaka must have

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14. I disagree with Garfield (2002: 26), who sees chapter 24 not only as "the central chapter of the text and the climax of the argument", but also as the opening of the last section of the text in which Nāgārjuna answers objections and generalizes his theory of emptiness. Although there is an opponent in chapter 24, and 25.1 (and maybe 25.9–10) is also the voice of an opponent, this is not a central theme of the chapter. Chapter 17 is the chapter that is most conspicuously structured as a debate with an opponent. Moreover, chapters 25–27 betray no more general application of the doctrine than other chapters of the text. If one wants to speak of "the climax of the text" and of the generalization of the argument, I would single out chapters 13 and 15.

15. In fact, there is more to be said about 24.18, aside from its being a defensive formulation of Madhyamaka truth that should only be understood as a conventional truth in itself. One should keep in mind that in a traditional Buddhist context, *Pratītyasamutpāda* is much more than an abstract theory of relational existence or conditionality. Rather, it relates to the way the mind conditions experience and existence in saṃsāra (see Shulman [2008] for further discussion of this theme). This means that a natural Buddhist connotation for the equation between dependent-origination and emptiness is that things are conditioned by mental processes of grasping. This further resonates with the definition of emptiness as *upādāya prajñaptir* in the verse.

had many textures, and we are far from reaching a reliable understanding of the main debates that took place within this tradition;[16] the one debate we normally speak of, between the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika "schools," is clearly structured according to problems that were important mainly for Tibetan Madhyamaka.[17] When the Madhyamaka reached Tibet, it was characterized by a dominant nihilist inclination, which focused on the absolute nonexistence of reality and saw enlightenment as a form of cessation. This Madhyamaka understanding has its roots in later Indian Madhyamaka, mainly in Candrakīrti.[18] It is in this context that Tsongkhapa, surely the traditional scholar who exerted the strongest impact on the modern study of Madhyamaka, thought and wrote. Tsongkhapa's driving impulse was a dedicated effort to distance Madhyamaka from any trace of nihilism. The main building blocks he used were the concepts of conventional truth and dependent-origination. Modern scholars are still very much under the influence of Tsongkhapa's conceptualizations and the way he was followed within the *dge-lug* tradition. These scholars thus open the door to realism, since they take Tsongkhapa's formulations, which were conditioned by specific historical realities, as final.

The tricky thing about the Madhyamaka-Realist is that he normally sees himself as an Antirealist. And indeed he's right, if he is compared to a full-fledged metaphysical realist; the Madhyamaka-Realist does not believe that there are true things "out there" or that knowledge is founded on a correspondence with reality.[19] He will even normally consent that things are "only names" or "merely imputed." There is, for him, no intrinsically existent reality. Or maybe this characterization of him is too forgiving—when there are relational entities with no intrinsic existence, are there really no "things" "out there"? And when these non-things can be reliably known, even conventionally, has correspondence not been allowed back into the picture? The underlying realistic inclinations of Madhyamaka-realists are revealed when we notice that they are at pain to prove that the mature Madhyamaka vision makes conceptual space for such notions as

16. Tillemans (2011: 152–155) discusses Kamalaśīla criticism of Candrakīrti's conventionalism; this is an interesting step in the direction of understanding inter-Madhyamaka debates. See also Shulman (2010) for some differences between Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti.

17. See Dreyfus and MacClintock (2003, esp. introduction).

18. See Vose (2009), as well as Yoshimitsu (1993) and Almogi (2009: esp. 227–229).

19. For a good presentation of this type of Madhyamaka antirealism, see Siderits (1988, 1989).

causality,[20] normative truth,[21] valid knowledge,[22] and even for the benefits of modern science.[23] Yet the Nāgārjunian text does not allow these ideas to be taken seriously, or at least not as seriously as Madhyamaka-Realists would wish. In order to create conceptual space for such intuitions about the world and about knowing it, Madhyamaka-Realists thus attempt to blunt Nāgārjuna's thorough refutation of existence; they prefer to say that Nāgārjuna denies only a certain type of existence—substantial, inherent existence. Although it is important to investigate what room Nāgārjuna did leave for causality and valid knowledge or normative truth, the impulse to see these as part of the central outline of Nāgārjuna's thought avoids the main point he is consistently making—there is no reality.

The "Realist view of Madhyamaka" surely echoes positions advocated by traditional thinkers of the school, but it is difficult to reconcile with the bulk of the Nāgārjunian corpus. In Nāgārjuna's treatises we find conventional truth as a tangential concept. Not only does conventional truth play a minor role in Nāgārjuna's texts, but, when it does appear, it does not affirm human understanding in general or the reality of the world; rather,

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20. Garfield (2002: ch. 2) should be seen as the classic formulation here. Garfield argues for a positive position regarding causation in the MMK, which relies on the notions of relational and conventional existence—phenomena are conventional truths that lack inherent existence. Specifically, Garfield advances a highly problematic reading of MMK 1, arguing that in this chapter Nāgārjuna makes a distinction between causes that have intrinsic powers to bring about their effects (*hetu*), and conditions (*pratyaya*), which bear no metaphysical promise. Thus, he believes Nāgārjuna to affirm *pratyayas* and deny *hetus*. I believe that this distinction has no basis in the Nāgārjunian text, for two main reasons: First, in 1.2, Nāgārjuna lists *hetu* as one of the four *pratyayas*. Second, such an understanding goes against the current of the whole of the chapter, and mainly against the explicit denial of the veracity of *pratyayas* in verse 14. I find that Nāgārjuna is quite explicit in his refusal to accept any true notion of causation.

21. Priest, Siderits, and Tillemans (2011), as well as Tillemans (2011). Tillemans' paper is a compelling attempt to help Candrakīrti out of the "dismal slough" of pure conventionalism. Nevertheless, its underlying theme is the attempt to allow for normative truth in Madhyamaka.

22. See Thakchöe (2011) for an enlightening discussion of this theme in Candrakīrti and Tsongkhapa. See also Gardield's (2011: 26–29) claim that for Nāgārjuna in the VV, *pramāṇas* are established relationally. Such an understanding appears impossible to reconcile with VV 46: 46. Now (if), for you, the establishment of *prameyas* is through the establishment of *pramāṇas*, and the establishment of *pramāṇas* is through the establishment of *prameyas*, then for you there is no establishing of either one of them. *atha te pramāṇasiddhyā prameyasiddhi prameyasiddhyā ca / bhavati pramāṇasiddhir nāsty ubhayasyāpi te siddhiḥ //*

23. Siderits (2011: 177–179), in an attempt to show that Mādhyamikas should accept *svabhāva* after all, in specific epistemological contexts.

it only marks the truth of Buddhist teachings in the empty world.[24] Most important, the view that Nāgārjuna affirms relational existence contradicts many statements in which he explicitly argues against it. In this case, the initial perception of relativity serves to contradict its ontological value—*when all exists relationally, there is nothing left that can depend*. As Nāgārjuna says while discussing the nature of the great elements in the *Ratnāvalī* (RĀ):

> RĀ 1.88. so sor rang yod de dag ni / ji lta bur na phan tshun yod /
> so sor rang yod ma yin pa / de dag ji ltar phan tshun yod //
>
> If each one of them [the elements] exists on its own—
> How will it relate in mutuality?
> If each one of them (the elements) does not exist on its own—
> How will it relate in mutuality?

The elements—for us they are but an example—cannot relate to each other; they do *not* exist in dependence: If they exist independently they do not relate, and if they exist dependently, then there is nothing that can relate. Nāgārjuna provides a more elaborate conceptual definition of this idea in MMK 10.10:

> MMK 10.10 yo 'pekṣya sidhyate bhāvas tam evāpekṣya sidhyati /
> yadi yo 'pekṣitavyaḥ sa sidhyatāṃ kam apekṣya kaḥ //
>
> The thing established in dependence—that thing which it is to be established in dependence on—if it also must depend, it itself needs to be established! What depends on what?

"What depends on what?" This is the acute problem with dependence—one has to exit the cycle of dependence in order to provide an initial base for other things to be established in dependence upon. This would transgress the logic of the empty and contradicts the whole Madhyamaka vision. Nothing, in truth, can depend. This is made clear at 10.8, where Nāgārjuna speaks of the particular case of fire and the material it is to burn:

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24. See MMK 24.8–10, which respond to the claim not that Nāgārjuna denies reality, but that he denies the validity of the Buddha's teachings. See also YṢ 21–22, and my discussion of this theme in Shulman (2007 [2009]: Section III).

MMK 10.8.
yad apekṣyāgnir indhanam apekṣyāgniṃ yadīndhanam /
katarat pūrvaniṣpannaṃ yad apekṣyāgnir indhanam //
If fire depends on burning materials, or burning material depends on fire—which is completed before the other, on which fire or burning material depends?

Another powerful articulation is *Acintyastava* 16:

AS 16.
na svabhāvo 'sti bhāvānaṃ parabhāvo 'sti no yadā /
bhāvagrāhagrahāveśaḥ paratantro 'sti kas tadā //

When there is no self-nature of entities, and no other-nature either, what is this frenzy of grasping at existence, which is the dependence on another?

There are many other verses in the works of Nāgāṛjuna that support this understanding, most importantly MMK 1.1;[25] *dependence is a way to characterize existence, which is fully negated by the Madhyamaka system*. Nonetheless, Madhyamaka-Realists prefer to overlook these verses and to concentrate only on the reality, on the positive truth, of dependence. It is true, however, that in this they are not wholly mistaken; although causality, for Nāgārjuna, *is* empty, it is things that appear to exist in dependence on their causes and conditions that the Madhyamaka dialectic proves to be empty. What empirically depends is analytically empty. The Madhyamaka-Realist thus focuses on the more external layer of the doctrine and hinges his argument on the claims Nāgārjuna makes while he is defending himself against his opponent's charges.

Let us reflect a little more deeply on this view I have been calling, somewhat unfairly, "Madhyamaka-Realism." This view is founded on two main points. First, emptiness in not just emptiness, but emptiness of; it is the lack of inherent existence in all things. Second, emptiness is but the higher (or, commonly, the "ultimate") truth about things. There is another, conventional truth, which is the relative truth of what we normally see. Thus, things are just as they are, only that they lack *svabhāva*. They

25. For example, YṢ 43–45. See Shulman (2007 [2009]: section III). The many contexts in which Nāgarjuna speaks of *anutpāda* (non-arising, e.g. MMK 7), are a related theme.

are not metaphysically real, and no absolutely reliable knowledge can be gained of them. They do not possess true causal power, but are nonetheless there, and they are real as conventional phenomena (although only "Ārya beings" truly perceive them to be no more than conventions[26]).

The trouble with this view is that if it is to mean what it says, it must more boldly forsake any notion of existence. If phenomena remain the same, but they are only said to lack *svabhāva*, the whole point of the system is, in actuality, only a philosophical fine-tuning. If things are just as they were, and we must only remind ourselves again and again that things are actually relational, not much changes; we could and maybe even should go on grasping just as before at these relational things, and whether they have *svabhāva* or not shouldn't really make much of a difference. Furthermore, if these *svabhāva*-less things are to function in a system that is founded on a notion of causation—if, for example, as Garfield would have it, things have no metaphysically established causational power, but they function nonetheless on conditions[27]—than once again, nothing, or at least not much, has changed, and the request to reconfigure our perceptual and emotional instincts regarding the world we grasp at has a rather weak foundation.

Nonetheless, the view that emptiness is the lack of *svabhāva* can become a powerful articulation of Madhyamaka logic if it is to take full responsibility for what this view of reality demands. This means that what lacks *svabhāva* does not really exist, and that it cannot be reliably known. More important, what lacks *svabhāva* can only be true in relation to the way it is perceived. In fact, it cannot be distinguished in any way from its perception. It lacks, indeed, *sva-bhāva;* that is any existence (*bhāva*) it possesses of its own (*sva*); it has no objective existence whatsoever. Our perception of a thing is therefore part of the conditions that constitute it, and there is no reason to say that this refers only to the mental side of a metaphysically real equation of correspondence. While refuting concepts, the Mādhyamika is, in the very same breath, refuting the things these

26. The reliance on the perceptions of Ārya beings as possible indicators of absolute truth is a most regrettable consequence of this way of seeing Madhyamaka. Such a notion weakens the strength of the Madhyamaka rationality, its main claim to fame. Furthermore, the notion that Ārya beings are the true seers of reality once again introduces realist elements into the Madhyamaka system, since there is, once again, a reality that they can see and a perfected nirvānic state in which they see it (contra verses such as MMK 16.9, 10, YṢ 5, 6, and MMK chapter 25, primarily verses 19–20).

27. See above, note 20.

concepts refer to, as well as any intuition that they are metaphysically real (relational existence included!). The Madhyamaka critique targets our sensory perception just as much as it destroys our conceptual and linguistic faculties of reasoning. It does not leave *pratyakṣa*—sensory experience—as a foundation for epistemology *or* ontology. There really can be nothing that lacks *svabhāva*. If this is not accepted, the realist impulse of the Madhyamaka-Realist is revealed—he still wants his world, founded on the inevitable notion of causality, and his reliable knowledge of it.

There is another problem with accepting the view I have just outlined as a credible interpretation of Madhyamaka; it often inclines toward being a philosophy of language. This, ultimately, leads it into skepticism, which is not on par with the strong analytical realization of emptiness that is at the heart of Madhyamaka. When all that are negated are concepts, some unknowable reality must remain, or at least the impulse to know anything about true reality must be relinquished. This leaves an element of existence in the system's vision, which is untouched by Madhyamaka reasoning. This may not trouble the Madhyamaka skeptic, since he doesn't fully believe or not believe in existence, and since he forsakes any claim to knowledge regarding the external world. But such a position misses the point, since everything that can possibly exist must be *svabhāva*-less and empty, and the Mādhyamika does realize this truth. The Mādhyamika skeptic or philosopher of language cannot explain why it is he believes there is an external world, or a realm of the real that is not affected by the logic of the empty, or why he leaves something he doesn't know. Although Madhyamaka reasoning teaches him that there is nothing real and allows him to authoritatively state this, he prefers, when questioned about the world, to remain with an "eel-wriggling" "I don't know."[28] This same "I don't know" must be the answer that any Madhyamaka-Realist would supply when pressed to explain how it is that empty things that possess no true causal power still function as conditions.

Where does this leave us? What is the view of the true Madhyamaka Antirealist? In an important contribution to the study of Madhyamaka, Orna Almogi speaks of a divide between two sub-schools of Māyopamavāda and Apratiṣṭhānavāda as the only important distinction within later Indian Madhyamaka. Although to some degree the true positions of these

28. "Eel-wriggling" is one type of view condemned by the Buddha in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (I.24–28), which is founded on an evasive "I don't know."

schools remain obscured,[29] the core of their views is relatively evident. The first of them, Māyopamavāda, or Mayopamādvayavāda (*sgyu ma lta bu gnyis su med par smra ba*, or *sgyu ma lta bur 'dod pa*), "the school that sees (reality) as non-dual and similar to an illusion."[30] This school advocated, at least according to its opponents, a more metaphysical approach to Madhyamaka, which affirms a positive nature to reality, which is said to be similar to an illusion. This school goes so far as to believe that the "illusory (nature of phenomena) is attestable on the basis of logical reasoning" (*sgyu ma rigs pa grub* [*pa*]).[31] Its rival, the Sarvadharmāpratiṣṭhānavāda (*chos thams cadrab tu mi gnas par 'dod pa*, or *rab tu mi gnas pa*), the "strand which maintains that all phenomena have no substratum whatsoever," relinquishes all theses, all positive and negative determinations regarding the absolute nature of things, and while relying on the conventional nature of phenomena, sees them as lacking any ultimate substratum.

I hereby call for the modern revival of the Māyopamavāda Madhyamaka sub-school! Although I do have reservations regarding some of the positions attributed to this tradition,[32] it is comforting to know who you are, even if this entails the possibility of advocating a position that has left the world for at least a millennium, and that possibly never had any supporters.[33] Still, I find this to be the only reasonable Madhyamaka position, unless one wishes to deny what one is explicitly saying. As Mayopamavādins, we[34]

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29. In her detailed study, Almogi gleans the views of these schools from polemical and doxographical treatises, and thus their own views remain beyond our reach to some degree. The sources are also by no means homogenous, and some thinkers, such as Chapa Chogyi Senge, saw the views of these schools as not being in true contradiction (pp. 164–169). Notice also that certain later Tibetan thinkers classified both schools as part of the inferior *Svātantrika* branch (pp. 170–181).

30. Almogi translates the name of the school as the "strand which maintains that [phenomena] are one, in as much as they are like illusions." I disagree with the translation of *advaya* as"one" in a Madhyamaka context.

31. Almogi (2010: 144).

32. For example, I would take issue with a committed definition of the Madhyamaka vision of reality as nondual, and hence as "oneness." Another problem would arise if it is true that Māyopmavādins believe that the absolute can be described conventionally, that is, if they really think there is such a thing.

33. Almogi (2010: 182).

34. I speak in the plural, since, aside from my confidence in amassing a great crowd for this auspicious cause, I believe that the view of "Metphysical Illusionism," presented by MacDonald (2009: 139), following Oetke (2007), fits the *Māyopamavāda* view quite well. At least traces of this position are found also in Scherrer-Schaub (1991: 252–259 [note 492]), Westerhoff (2009, 2011), and even in Burton (1999: ch. 4) and Siderits (2004).

argue that the only way to speak positively about emptiness is to say that phenomena are similar to illusions. Madhyamaka reason teaches us straightforwardly that this is all they can be. Indeed, they have no ontological substratum, but this does not lead only to a skeptical renouncement of all statements, since we discover that to the degree that we can know things—that is, "conventionally"—phenomena are in fact similar to illusions. Not only is there nothing that lacks *svabhāva*, nothing with a substratum, there is nothing that can have *svabhāva* or a substratum in the first place. This does not only recommend a relaxation of further philosophical effort, an apophatic approach to life, but makes a positive claim as well—reality *is* similar to an illusion. This understanding, in turn, leads to a form of nondualism, since there is no longer any ontological distinction between thought, or experience, and the world; that is, between mind and reality. We remain unsatisfied by the pretension to say nothing, and believe this leads Madhyamaka into nihilism. We are also suspicious of the idea that Madhyamaka is a "philosophy of language"; it is our normal intuitions of "the world" and of "reality" that are at stake—these are what we discover to be empty. We have, of course, our inner debates, but we are certain that Madhyamaka must remain free from any trace of realism *and* nihilism, and not pretend to be skepticism. We see ourselves as a confident form of antirealism, ardently battling any notion of the real.

Needless to say, there are many passages in all of Nāgārjuna's main philosophical texts that suggest that phenomena are similar to illusions, dreams, *gandharva* cities, and the like.[35] Furthermore, in my personal brand of Māyopamavāda, one more important thing can be said about what it means for reality to be "similar to an illusion": conventionally speaking, reality is related to, or even nondistinct from, consciousness. Reality is nothing more than ignorant understanding. I have elsewhere discussed numerous verses from the MMK, YṢ and the ŚS that support this understanding.[36] Other verses that fit this statement well are RĀ 1.93–95[37]:

> *sa dang chu dang me dang rlung / ring thung phra dang sbom nyid dang / dge sogs nyid ni rnam shes su / 'gag par 'gyur zhes thub pas gsungs //*

35. See note 12 above.

36. See the section "creative ignorance" in Shulman (2007 [2009]).

37. For the broader context of the argument to which these verses contribute, see Shulman (2011: 321–324).

rnam shes bstan med mtha' yas pa / kun tu bdag po de la ni / sa dang chu dang me dang ni / rlung gis gnas thob[38] *'gyur ma yin //*
'dir ni ring dang thung ba dang / phra sbom dge dang mi dge dang /
'dir ni ming dang gzugs dag kyang / ma lus par ni 'gag par 'gyur //

1.93 Earth, water, fire, wind,
long and short, subtle and coarse, virtue and so forth
are taught by the Sage to cease in consciousness.

1.94 In this limitless consciousness that cannot be taught, the lord
of all, earth, water, fire and wind find no footing.
1.95 Here, long and short, subtle and coarse,
virtue and non-virtue, here name and form as well,
fully cease.

These verses resonate with YṢ 34 and are a synopsis of the Buddha's words in the *Kevaddha-sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. They suggest that material reality is fully dependant on consciousness. Another example would be *Lokātitastava* 19:

LS 19. atas tvayā jagad idaṃ parikalpasamudbhavam /
parijñātam asadbhūtam anutpannam na naśyati //

Hence, you have understood that this world arises from conceptuality (*parikalpa*). Unreal, unarisen, it is not destroyed.

Although Nāgajuna's main efforts are invested in proving the logical necessity of emptiness, there are, we see, instances in which he is willing to say a little more. In these cases he teaches us that the physical world is conditioned by consciousness. Given his employment of the concept of dependent-origination, which in a natural Buddhist context speaks first and foremost of the way conscious acts condition experience,[39] and given the Buddhist notion of karma, we shouldn't have expected otherwise. Nāgārjuna can be seen, in this respect, as providing the logical foundation for karma. In an empty world, all is a manifestation of ignorant

38. I read *gnas thob*—"to find a place" as corresponding to the Pāli *gādhati* of the *Kevaddha-sutta*, against Hahn (1982: 37), who reads *gnas thod* and supplies a variant reading of *thos*.

39. See Shulman (2008).

understanding, of desire, or the conditioning manipulation of our previous, unenlightened deeds.

Let us now move on to see how these themes find expression in the work of Vasubandhu.

II. Vasubandhu the Mādhyamika?

In Māyopamavāda philosophy, at least as I understand it, we find that Nāgarjuna's views find a very sympathetic resonance in the philosophical treatises of Vasubandhu.[40] In discussing Vasubandhu, however, there remain heated debates regarding the precise nature of his views. Mainly, there is a question of whether he is an idealist, and especially if he is a metaphysical idealist.[41] Another important concern is whether his thinking reflects on metaphysical questions; many assume that his discussion is only of experience or of epistemology.[42] I will quickly state my position on these issues so as to be able to proceed to a richer problem—the precise nature of Vasubandhu's antirealist metaphysical views?

To Vasubandhu, it is clear that there is no ultimately real mind or consciousness;[43] thus, he cannot be an idealist in any robust sense. At the same time, there is obviously an idealist inclination to his thinking, and he does appear, at least as a form of expression, to grant the mind epistemological and ontological priority over the objective, physical aspects of experience. Vasubandhu opens the *Viṃśatikā* (V) by quoting a sūtra in which the Buddha says that "the three worlds are nothing but mind."[44] He later restricts and qualifies this statement significantly, but it is clear that our inquiry into his views must reflect on the precise specifications of his

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40. There are questions regarding the identity of Vasubandhu, although these have lost some of their sting (see most recently Franco [2010: 295–297]). Here, in speaking of Vasubandhu, I am referring to the author of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (MAV) as it is presented through its *bhāṣya*, the *Viṃśatikā* (V) as it is presented through its *vṛtti*, the *Triṃśikā* (T), and the *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* (TSN). My discussion will rely mainly on the first two of these texts, but I see the four as expressing the same philosophical vision.

41. A strong claim in favor of idealism has been presented by Garfield (2002: chs. 6, 7). Lusthaus (1999) traces the reading of Yogācāra as idealism to de La Valee Poussin's work. Arguments against idealism appear in Kochomuttom (1999 [1982]) and Lusthaus (2002).

42. For example, Kochomuttom (1982) and Lusthaus (2004).

43. See most clearly MAV 1.3, as well as MAV 1.6–7 (specifically the *bhāṣya* to verse 7), TSN 36, T 17, 28, V 10 and its *vṛtti*.

44. This is a paraphrase of *cittamātraṃ bho jinaputrā yad uta traidhātukaṃ*.

idealist bent, and not on whether he has one. That is, our discussion must clarify in what manner Vasubandhu believes that reality conforms to the mental. The term "idealism" may be out of place, and is indeed better replaced by "antirealism"; but the idealistic inclination of Vasubandhu's thought cannot be denied.

Next, nowhere that I am aware of does Vasubandhu even hint at his thought being concerned only with experience or epistemology; nowhere will he say that he is not discussing ontology. In fact, the presentation of Vasubandhu as interested only in the structure of experience appears quite out of place when one of his most important arguments is an attack on atomism (in V 11–15).[45] Nonetheless, it is true that Vasubandhu's method begins with an analysis of experience, and then proceeds to examine metaphysical problems through the prism of their functioning within experience. Vasubandhu is thus evidently concerned with metaphysics, but he maintains an interest in it and discusses it through its experiential manifestation. It is, however, significant that the main structure of Vasubandhu's argument is a move from experience to ontology and metaphysics; in my mind, this is the key to understanding his system.

The paradigmatic verses for comprehending Vasubandhu's philosophy are *Madhyāntavibhāga* (MAV) 1.1–2:[46]

> abhūtaparikalpo 'sti dvayaṃ tatra na vidyate /
> śūnyatā vidyate tv atra tasyām api sa vidyate //
> na śūnyaṃ nāpi cāśūnyaṃ tasmād sarvaṃ vidhīyate /
> sattvād asattvād sattvāc ca madhyamā pratipac ca sā //
> 1.1 There is unreal imagination. In it there is no duality. But emptiness is there, and it (unreal imagination), too, is in it (emptiness).
> 1.2 Not empty and not non-empty—this is how all is apportioned. From existence, non-existence; and from it again existence—this is the middle-way.

45. Notice also that the examples Vasubandhu uses in this section of the V, such as light and shade, make it clear that he is discussing the nature of the external world.

46. The verses of the MAV are attributed at times to an author by name of Maitreyanātha. Others see Asaṅga or Vasubandhu as the authors of the text. Modern scholars are naturally suspicious of the traditional claim that the text was given by the future Buddha Maitreya to Asaṅga in Tuṣita heaven; they normally accept, however, that Vasubandhu wrote the commentary on the text.

Verses terser than these are difficult to conceive of. Nevertheless, their meaning is relatively straightforward. We will read them in light of the commentary, since this is the part of the text most reliably attributed to Vasubandhu. In the first verse, "Unreal imagination" (*abhūtaparikalpa*), defined as "the conceptualization of grasper and grasped" (*grāhyagrāhakavikalpa*), appears as our initial object of scrutiny.[47] This term refers to the familiar flow of experience, which manifests in the form of a distinction between subject and object. There is no metaphysical commitment in this statement—unreal imagination is a pre-theoretical term in this respect. How then do we know that imagination (*parikalpa*) is mistaken (*abhūta*), surely a statement that has theory behind it? We know this, first, since the Buddha has already taught that experience is conditioned by desire and ignorance; second, since the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras taught us emptiness.[48] Most important, Vasubandhu proceeds, this unreal imagination appears in dualistic form, but this dualism cannot be true—"there is no duality there." Dualism, we notice, is a most problematic conceptualization, since grasper and grasped are notions that dissolve into each other; there can be no true distinction between the two, since one implies, and demands, the other in order to be known. Much in line with Nāgārjuna's logic in RĀ 1.88 earlier, the two cannot exist independently and thus cannot exist dependently, either; no "oneness" of grasper or grasped makes sense when they cannot be truly distinguished to begin with. Emptiness is thus defined as the unreliability of the notions of grasper and grasped.

The first verse of the MAV and its commentary then proceed to speak of the existence of emptiness; the lack of duality exists. This is, undoubtedly, the most significant difference between Vasubandhu and Nāgārjuna; for the latter, emptiness cannot be said to exist in any way.[49] We will later

47. Gold (2006), in an enlightening contribution to the study of Yogācāra thought, has shown that there was an earlier meaning to nonduality than the differentiation between grasper and grasped. For the purposes of the present discussion, which takes the *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya* as an original text of Vasubandhu, the emptiness of the grasper-grasped distinction will be the form of nonduality that will interest us. This type of nonduality is referred to explicitly also in *Viṃśatikāvṛtti*, for example, in the commentary on verse 10, and is hinted at T 26.

48. The Buddha taught emptiness as well, but not emptiness of *svabhāva*. He referred to "emptiness of I and mine" (the *locus classicus* is SN IV.54: *yasmā ca kho, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā tasmā suñño lokoti vuccati*).

49. MMK 13.7–8, 24.18.

return to question whether this claim involves a true distinction between the two thinkers, or whether the divergence is mainly one of temperament and method. This statement on the existence of emptiness is then echoed in the second verse, which speaks of a sequence from the initial existence of unreal imagination, to the nonexistence of duality, to the final existance of emptiness. Here we encounter a defining feature of the MAV's vision of emptiness, which will, later in the same chapter, be defined as the lack of existence of duality *and* as the existence of this nonexistence (verse 1.13).

The question regarding the positive nature of emptiness is important, but let us bracket it for the time being and proceed with our investigation—what does it mean for there to be no reality of grasper and grasped? This appears, at first sight, to be a phenomenological claim, a characterization of experience: experience appears in dualistic form, and the experiential distinction between subject and object is said to be mistaken. But can this understanding encapsulate the whole of the argument? Can the problem only refer to the structure of experience? If there is, in actuality, no truth in the grasper-grasped distinction, this must mean that *the object itself* is not different from the mind that perceives it—if duality is truly unjustified, there can be no object independent of experience. Otherwise, if duality is only an experiential problem, duality should maybe be seen as confusing, but should surely not become any less real. If there is a real object out there, then saying that duality is mistaken is deeply misleading. Equally, without the objective world, "the mental" becomes meaningless as well, since it cannot be distinguished from the objective. Hence, when epistemological duality has been dismissed, so has ontological duality. Otherwise, the claim for nonduality turns into dust.

Vasubandhu's argument in MAV 1.1-2, which is then elaborated and reiterated in the rest of the first chapter, should be construed in the following way: Given that experience is the only a priori condition of "the world," the notion of an external world, independent of experience, is in need of proof. Stated otherwise: when duality is seen to be false, the inevitability of experience renders the externality of the world superfluous. The world is, in fact, a part of experience, and our main argument for its objective nature—duality—contradicts itself. Hence, the objective is most naturally seen as a form of the subjective. But since the objective is already subjective, subjectivity is emptied as well; there can be no subject, and there is no gravitational center of existence in the mental. All succumbs to

experience, which confuses us constantly, since experience appears in dualistic form.

The *Viṃśatikā*, in my mind Vasubandhu's most revealing text, is mainly a spelling out of this argument.[50] This is the text that has normally been read as idealism. Given that there is no reality to the subjective, however, we should probably accustom ourselves to employ the term "antirealism" instead. Although there are statements in V that lend themselves to an idealistic interpretation, there are others that counter them and balance the picture. This text, too, mainly says that, given the experiential primacy of the mental, the intuition regarding an objective, external, totally independent world, does not seem reasonable.

For brevity's sake, I will concentrate only on the most important stepping-stones of the argument. Vasubandhu opens the V with a statement that all is *vijñapti-mātra*, "a mere knowledge event."[51] What this precisely means is a pregnant question, but in introducing the text in the *vṛtti* Vasubandhu speaks explicitly of "refuting objects" (*mātram iti arthapratiṣedhārthaṃ*). Although this sounds like pure idealism, this claim should not be thought of as a thorough refutation of the external world, but rather only as stating that what appears to be external and objective actually depends on subjectivity. The idealist appearance is later countered and refined in the text, which clearly says that it does not deny objects altogether.[52] As Oetke (1992) has argued, the claim that

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50. Note the connection made in T 26, which equates establishing consciousness in *vijñāptimātra*, the defining concept of the V, and the ending of dualistic perception: "So long as consciousness is not established in the state of (knowing) *vijñapti-mātra*, the underlying inclination for dualistic perception will not cease." (*yāvad vijñaptimātratve vijñānaṃ nāvatiṣṭhati / grāhadvayānuśayas tāvanna vinivartate //*).

> See also the *vṛtti* to MAV 6: "Depending on the perception of *vijñapti-mātra*, non-perception of things (*artha*) is born. Depending on the non-perception of things, non-perception of *vijñapti-mātra* is born. This is how one comes to understand the unreal characteristic of subject and object."
>
> *vijñapti-mātropalabdhiṃ niśrityārthānupalabdhir jāyate / arthānupalabdhiṃ niśritya vijñapti-mātrasyāpy anupalabdhir jāyate / evam asal-lakṣaṇaṃ grāhya-grāhakayoḥ praviśati //*

51. This ("reality") is only-a-mental-construction, because of the appearance of unreal things. It is like the seeing of nets of hair by people suffering from eye-impairments.

> *vijñaptimātram evedam asadarthāvabhāsanāt / yadvat taimirikasyāsatkeśoṇḍukādidarśanaṃ //*

52. The *Vṛtti* to verses 10 and 14 is instrumental in this effect.

experiential content is not determined by independently existing material entities does not necessarily imply that there is no external world whatsoever. More important, in a remarkable contribution to understanding *vijñāptimātratā*, King (1998) has shown that the abhidharmic context of the term *vijñapti*, which is assumed by the *vijñaptimātra* texts, employs this term as part of its discussion of karma. Thus, the statement that all is "mere-knowledge-events" is not idealism in a proper sense, since the physical world is not actually denied; rather, the claim is similar to saying that all is a manifestation of karma:

> *Vijñapti* in the Yogācāra context is the manifested fruition (*vipāka*) of traces of past karmic activity (*vāsanā*) in the constructed form (*parikalpita*) of a new experience. . . . *Vijñapti* for the Yogācāra then is not simply the "cognitive-representation of sense-objects" (*vijñaptir viṣayasya, Triṃśikā* v. 2), as is usually understood by the term, but is more fundamentally a representation of the agent's own subliminal karmic predispositions (*anuśaya*).[53]

The claim that all is "mere knowledge events" thus echoes a deeply ingrained Buddhist idea, that the world is responsive to karma; neutral objectivity of an independent reality is not a natural Buddhist intuition. Indeed, the discussion of karma will soon be seen to be of paramount importance to this text.

At this stage of the discussion Vasubandhu introduces an opponent whose realist inclinations lead him to believe that Vasubandhu's refutation of the objective world cannot explain basic features of human reality—spatial and temporal distinctions, the personal determinacy of streams of consciousness, and the results of actions (verse 2). Vasubandhu's reply, in a nutshell, is that these can all be explained by the analogy of the dream (verses 3–5; notice the Māyopamavādins applauding in the background). Moving to a more subtle level of discussion, Vasubandhu raises the problem of the hell-guardians, who cannot be real since they must experience the suffering of hell like any other hell-being. We can easily reply together with the opponent that since hell-guardians have different karma, they

53. King (1998: 10).

experience different results.[54] This is precisely what Vasubandhu was waiting for. He answers, in verses 6 and 7:

> yadi tatkarmabhis tatra bhūtānāṃ saṃbhavas tathā /
> iṣyate pariṇāmaś ca kiṃ vijñānasya neṣyate //
>
> 6. If it is accepted that (their) appearance (*saṃbhava*) there (in hell) is due to their actions, then why is a transformation of consciousness not accepted as well?

If, as we would naturally argue, it is beings' personal actions that cause birth in hell, we cannot deny that we are attributing causal power to consciousness and to its karmic conditioning. Karma functions by molding, or leaving traces in, consciousness. Thus, each personal assemblage of actions generates a change in consciousness, which in turn determines rebirth, in this case as a hell-being or hell-guardian. If this is granted, why do we not accept that a change of consciousness is all that is happening, rather than surmising the existence of an objective, external reality? Vasubandhu continues:

> karmaṇo vāsanānyatra phalam anyatra kalpyate /
> tatraiva neṣyate yatra vāsanā kiṃ nu kāraṇaṃ //
>
> 7. The residues of actions are understood to be in one place, while the fruit (of the action is) in another. For what reason is it not accepted that [the fruit is] in the very same place as the residues are?

These complicated verses are the heart of Vasubandhu's argument. To translate them to the context of our discussion—after all, we are less interested in the populations of Buddhist hells—Vasubandhu is saying that once

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54. *Vṛtti* to verse 5: "For it is through the actions of these hell-beings that they appear there with the specific qualifications of beings who are characterized by color, figure, size and power, and they attain the perceptual faculties of hell-guardians. In this way they transform and are seen doing many different things in order to arouse fear, such as shaking their hands, or they become mountains in the form of rams coming and going, as well as thorns in forests of steel shalmalina trees that turn upward and downward."

> *teṣāṃ tarhi nārakāṇāṃ karmabhis tatra bhūtaviśeṣāḥ saṃbhavanti varṇākṛtiipramāṇabalaviśiṣṭā ye narakapālādisaṃjñāṃ pratilabhante /tathā ca pariṇamanti yad vividhāṃ hastavikṣepādikriyāṃ kurvanto dṛśyante bhayotpādanārthaṃ / yathā meṣākṛtyaḥ parvatā āgacchanto gacchanto 'yaḥśalmalīvane ca kaṇṭakā adhomukhībhavanta ūrddhvamukhībhavantaś ceti /*

that experience is a given, the reality of an "external" world independent of experience is unlikely. This is the less parsimonious explanation; an objective world is not impossible, perhaps, but it must be argued for. When we are speaking of a change of consciousness as the cause of rebirth, Vasubandhu asks why we don't explain the result to occur in the same place as its cause—that is, in consciousness. The objective world, in this case Buddhist hell, only complicates the explanation, without affording any theoretical benefit. Likewise, if we wish to explain differences in the quality of experiences between two people—say, both go to the beach and only one gets robbed, or, say, both are in hell but only one is a hell-guardian—once the result is a part of conscious experience, the same should be true of the cause. Cause and effect are best placed in the same ontological realm, and, due to the inevitability of experience, this must be in consciousness. This claim corresponds fully to the statement we identified in MAV 1.1—given the epistemological primacy of imagination, epistemological *and* ontological dualism cannot be easily justified.

Vasubandhu's next important move in the V is to guarantee that such justification will not be sought. I skip verses 8–10, which are important in order to see that Vasubandhu is not a metaphysical idealist.[55] But this is not our main concern, which is to deny the possibility of a substantial, objective, independent, external world. Vasubandhu argues against the feasibility of such an understanding of the world in verses 11–15. The core of the argument targets the accountability of a world built of atoms; Vasubandhu argues that the world can be neither a holistic oneness nor a collection of atoms. Since it cannot be both, there is no foundation for a world that is thought of as independent of experience. Primarily, the central theory for an objective, independent world—that of matter composed of infinitesimal atoms—collapses when faced with Vasubandhu investigation.[56]

The argument is familiar to most of my readers, so I will not elaborate on it. Its core is the claim that in order to connect to each other, atoms must have sides, and thus they necessarily have parts; therefore, they are not atoms. The definition of an atom is seen to be self-defeating. Although the strength of the argument has been doubted,[57] this is of secondary concern. What interests us

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55. See the illuminating discussion in Kochumuttom (1982: 21–25)

56. It is an important question why both Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu assume that their arguments do reflect the structure of the world. For more on this theme, see Shulman (2012).

57. See Kapstein (1988) for a focused consideration of this question.

is what Vasubandhu wishes to achieve by it—he wants to deny the objective reality of an external, independent world. This does not mean that there is no world, or that there are no things whatsoever, as he makes clear in the *vṛtti* to verse 10—"Now if *dharmas* do not exist altogether, then also *vijñaptimātra* does not exist. How could it be established?!".[58] Rather, it means that the intuition that these things are independent of the mind is mistaken.

It is crucial to notice that the argument in this section of V does not make the claim that there is no external world at all. Rather, the focus, especially in the commentary, is on the negation of *dravya*, substance, or a substantial foundation for reality that is distinct from subjective presentation. As Vasubandhu says when he ends his argument against the atomic theory, in the *vṛtti* to verse 14:

> Why worry, then, if the defining characteristic of forms and so forth is not refuted? What is their defining characteristic? Being an object and being blue and so on. This is maintained. Being the blue or yellow object of the eye, etc. is accepted. But does it have a substantive base (*dravya*) which is one or multiple? What of that?[59]

Neither multiplicity nor oneness can be upheld in face of Vasubandhu's analysis, and thus the important conclusion is reached—there can be no *dravya*, no substantive basis for an independent world. This does not mean that there is no world at all, only that it does not exist with an objective base, with disregard to consciousness.

This last claim seems very close to Nāgārjuna, at least as I presented him in the previous section: There is no ultimate basis for reality, and therefore nothing can be thought of as real. Things do nonetheless appear, however, and thus they are not thoroughly denied. With no objective existence—according to Vasubandhu due to *Vijñaptimātratā* and nonduality of grasper and grasper, according to Nāgārjuna because there is no *svabhāva*—the world cannot be disentangled from consciousness; reality is an extension

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58. *yadi tarhi sarvathā dharmo nāsti tad api vijñaptimātraṃ nāstīti kathaṃ tarhi vyavasthāpyate /*

59. *kim anayā cintayā / lakṣaṇaṃ tu rūpādi yadi na pratiṣidhyate / kiṃ punas teṣāṃ lakṣaṇaṃ cakṣur-ādi-viṣayatvaṃ nīlāditvaṃ ca / tad evedaṃ saṃpradhāryate / yat tac cakṣur-ādīnāṃ viṣayo nīla-pītādikam iṣyate kiṃ tad ekaṃ dravyaṃ atha vā tad anekaṃ / kiṃ cātaḥ / anekatve doṣa uktaḥ /*

of conscious experience, a part of experience that is fully responsive to subjectivity. There is, however, no true subjectivity to fall back on; we may thus only speak provisionally, conventionally, and metaphorically of emptiness, of nonduality, of all being "mere-knowledge-events."

Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu appear to have held similar metaphysical understandings. Both deny a truly existent, objective reality, and they see what remains to depend on subjectivity. Both would make this last statement only "conventionally", while the more analytically inclined Nāgarjuna would add extra words of caution. What are we to do, then, with the positive description of emptiness in the first chapter of the MAV? Does this imply a truly distinct understanding of emptiness from the one entertained by Nāgārjuna? Can we identify a qualitative difference between the two thinkers on this issue, and if so, what does it teach us?

The answers to these questions must ultimately remain a matter of interpretation. Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu share similar metaphysical inclinations, but their philosophical language leads the first to avoid any positive determination of emptiness, and allows the other such positive expression. I submit that this distinction is primarily one of philosophical temperament. Nāgārjuna, uncompromisingly analytic, cannot privilege emptiness over all other empty things. Vasubandhu, on the other hand, prefers to speak affirmatively, and will forsake the demand for full, clear-cut logical certainty in favor of a pragmatic statement that allows him to characterize what he believes experience is really like.[60] This difference in temperament does have a philosophical consequence, however—Vasubandhu's thought makes more conceptual space for nirvāṇa and liberation. Vasubandhu is willing, maybe even eager to keep the empty mind as a desired goal. This maneuver would surely have been criticized by Nāgārjuna, but it should not be taken to imply a distinction between the two thinkers in their ontology or metaphysics; the distinction, if substantial, pertains only to their soteriologies. Whether they did view the empty mind differently will inevitably remain a problem readers will develop their personal answers to, since it cannot be finally decided. The difference in philosophical language may be only one of style, but it may also be more.

60. This interpretation is in line with King (1994).

III. The Middle-way between Realism and Antirealism

The interpretation of Vasubandhu and Nāgārjuna offered in the previous sections, which emphasizes their close relation, is a possible, but not a mandatory one. Other interpretations are clearly available and credible, and have been articulated both in the Buddhist tradition and in modern scholarship. The valuable question is not so much about "the correct interpretation" of these thinkers, but more about the types of attractive readings their philosophies allow for. A rich perspective on the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra systems of thought brings a spectrum of resonant views to light, and the reading I offer here is but one point on the spectrum. From a scholarly viewpoint, we need not attempt a final verdict concerning "what Nāgārjuna or Vasubandhu intended"; their views should probably not be reduced to one static position that can be taken as true or false. We should be more interested in the places to which these forms of thinking take us.

In my mind, the reading of Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu developed here is one of the central ways in which their thought was understood in Buddhist circles of their times; traditional Buddhist philosophers, I believe, had less hesitation than modern scholars do in seeing their arguments as encompassing ontology, and not only epistemology. In closing the presentation of the common ground between these two seminal thinkers, I wish to situate the reading of their works I have offered in the context of the modern debate between realism and antirealism.

Clearly, neither Nāgārjuna nor Vasubandhu are realists. Since they deny the reality of the mind, they cannot be idealists, either. This inevitably positions them in the broad and variegated field of antirealism. But antirealism is first and foremost a negative category; it says what they are not. Among the many forms of antirealism,[61] here we are interested mainly in the bolder, metaphysical shades of this philosophical view. But can we possibly formulate a simple and clear enough position, which will allow us to avoid the "Anti-X" stance? Must we, as echoes of early Indian Mahāyāna philosophers, remain content with stating only the negative? Is there a middle-way between realism and antirealism that would be appropriate for positively describing Nāgārjuna's and Vasubandhu's philosophies?

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61. See Page (2006) for a good summary of a number of possible antirealist positions. See also Cox (2003).

Here, once again, the concept of Māyopamavāda comes to our aid. The world, we may say, is similar to an illusion. It is not totally an illusion, but is similar to one, in the sense that it lacks any truly objective aspects, or at least that these are minimized and marginalized to such a degree that they can never be fully independently real. The world may be external, but it is not categorically, qualitatively, and ontologically distinct from consciousness. This is what Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu most clearly agree on—that the world is a type of illusion, dream, or phantasy.

The middle-way between realism and antirealism—the illusion-like world—may speak not so much of *what* exists, but of *how* things exist. Such a middle-way does not only speak of what is, but intends to explain first and foremost the behavior of what is—things do not act independently of persons; they do not function objectively. It is in this sense that they should be thought of as empty—they are never brought about by causes that have no relation to the subject that experiences them. Ultimately they are un-arisen and uncaused; conventionally, they relate to consciousness.

Seeing this type of Mahāyāna ontology as concerned mainly with how things exist or behave has the merit of connecting to the broader themes of Buddhist philosophy and soteriology. The world is interesting to the Buddhist practitioner and is subjected to analysis mainly as part of the effort to transform the human heart. In this sense, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra systems of thought agree that everything relates to one's actions and perceptions. Primarily, the world cannot be seen as alien to one's karma, a concept that should mean, in this context, subjective conditioning. With no *svabhāva*, when all is *vijñaptimātratā*, all that is relates to karma. In this respect things are perhaps no less full than empty.

Abbreviations

AS	Acintyastava of Nāgārjuna
LS	Lokātītastava of Nāgārjuna
MAV	Madhyāntavibhāga
MMK	Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna
RĀ	Ratnāvalī of Nāgārjuna
ŚS	Śūnyatāsaptati of Nāgārjuna
T	Triṃśikā of Vasubandhu
TSN	Trisvabhāvanirdeśa of Vasubandhu
V	Viṃśatikā of Vasubandhu
VV	Vigrahavyāvartanī of Nāgārjuna
YṢ	Yuktiṣaṣṭikākārikā of Nāgārjuna

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9

Without Karma and Nirvāṇa, Buddhism Is Nihilism

THE YOGĀCĀRA CONTRIBUTION TO THE DOCTRINE OF EMPTINESS

Jonathan C. Gold

What exists not, that non-existent the foolish imagine;
Non-existence as well as existence they fashion.
As dharmic facts existence and non-existence are both not real.
A Bodhisattva goes forth when wisely he knows this.
If he knows the five skandhas as like an illusion,
But makes not illusion one thing, and the skandhas another;
If, freed from the notion of multiple things, he courses in peace—
Then that is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.

PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ-RATNAGUNASAṂCAYAGĀTHĀ
I.13–14[1]

THIS CHAPTER WILL explore the philosophical impetus behind some of the innovations of early Yogācāra texts, specifically the *Scripture on the Clarification of the Sage's Intent* (*Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra*, hereafter SNS) and several works ascribed to Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. These works appeared in the centuries following Nāgārjuna, but if we trust the Madhyamaka tradition since Bhāviveka, this was a backwards step. Supposedly, not only

1. Conze 1994, p. 10.

did the Yogācāra tradition set itself against the Buddha's highest truth—the truth of universal emptiness as expressed by Nāgārjuna—it did so in a way that led to the extreme of eternalism. Mādhyamikas call Yogācāra eternalist because it affirms the unending, unchanging, ultimate reality of the mind. This familiar critique, expounded by Bhāviveka, Candrakīrti, Śāntideva, and others, became bedrock in later, especially Tibetan, scholasticism. Yogācāra, we are taught, is a step ahead of the Śrāvakas because of its Mahāyāna identity, but still a step behind, and below, the Madhyamaka. Among Mahāyāna views, Yogācāra is Madhyamaka's main opponent, which must be countered and transcended.

The claim of a mental, ultimate reality does not appear in early Yogācāra texts. Ueda (1967) has shown that it appears later, within the influential writings of Dharmapāla. It is, of course, unfair to smear the originary Yogācāra works with views their authors did not advocate. There is also little compelling evidence that early Yogācāra intended to make itself an enemy of the Madhyamaka. In fact, as Jan Westerhoff's chapter in this volume shows, there are passages in the writings of Nāgārjuna himself that appear to accept the utility of doctrinal positions generally considered Yogācāra—though there was surely no Yogācāra school during Nāgārjuna's time.[2] I find myself in agreement with Richard King's proposal that early Yogācāra was principally concerned with attempting "to express and reformulate the madhyamaka message" (King 674). The seminal Yogācāra scripture, the SNS, declares that its position represents no real change in doctrine, no cause for disputation. Even in its famous claim to present the "third turning of the wheel," which supersedes and relativizes previous Perfection of Wisdom teachings, the SNS denies that this alters the basic truth of those teachings. As we will see, the early Yogācāra was attempting to establish a synthetic unity of doctrines, and it advocated an equanimious freedom from disputation. Perhaps as a consequence of this view's short-lived success, we find no explicit disavowals of Madhyamaka in Yogācāra writings, or vice versa, until Bhāviveka, some two centuries after Yogācāra's founding.

Eckel (2008) has argued, sensibly, that it was Bhāviveka who constructed the basic architecture of the doxographic distinction between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka that has held ever since. Eckel isolates a crucial passage in which Bhāviveka blames the Yogācārins for starting the

2. Eviatar Shulman's contribution to this volume shares my view of a broad agreement between Madhyamaka and early Yogācāra. See also Ian Harris (1991)

fight. Bhāviveka's *Heart of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakahṛdaya*) contains the following verse, as a counterargument posed by the Yogācāra:

> 5.82 If nothing is real, there cannot be any designation. Someone who holds this view is a nihilist, with whom one should not speak or share living quarters. (Bhāviveka, transl. by Eckel, p. 281)

This verse is clearly a condensation of the following passage from Asaṅga's *Bodhisattvabhūmi* also cited by Eckel:

> When some people hear the difficult and profound Mahāyāna sūtras that deal with emptiness and convey a meaning that needs to be interpreted, they do not discern the correct meaning, they develop false concepts, they have unreasonable views based only on logic (*tarka*), and they say: "All of reality is nothing but designation; whoever sees it this way, sees correctly." For these people there is no real thing to serve as a basis of designation. This means that there cannot be any designation at all. How can reality be nothing but designation? By saying this they deny both designation and reality. Someone who denies designation and reality should be known as the worst kind of nihilist (*nāstika*). Those who are wise and practice a religious life should not speak or share living quarters with this kind of nihilist. (Asaṅga, transl. Eckel, p. 65–66)

Asaṅga has not specifically named the Mādhyamika, but Bhāviveka takes it that they are his target. Bhāviveka is incensed by the claim that he and other Mādhyamikas are nihilists (and so not proper monastic companions), and he compares this critique to vomit. It is clearly an unfair attack, he says, since "We never said that things are completely non-existent" (Eckel 283). He explains that what Madhyamaka does deny is the *ultimate* existence of *dharmas*, not their conventional existence, and that this should not affect the conventional existence of designations.

Eckel believes that Bhāviveka's resentment provides evidence that the passage was intended to target Madhyamaka, and I suppose it does. Tāranātha reports that Mahāyāna was rather unpopular in the centuries following Nāgārjuna, so perhaps Asaṅga wanted to distance himself from the older interpretive tradition. If Asaṅga did, indeed, intend to defame the Madhyamaka with an erroneous, nihilistic interpretation, then surely Bhāviveka was right to be angry about the slur, and we can understand (without justifying) his adoption of similarly misleading tactics in response.

Yet even if the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* passage cited here was used to demonize Madhyamaka during Bhāviveka's time, Asaṅga (fourth century) precedes Bhāviveka (sixth century) by some two centuries. So it is quite possible that Asaṅga *did not* have the Madhyamaka per se in mind when he made his critique. Perhaps Nāgārjuna's was not the only available interpretation of the Mahāyāna scriptures during the centuries of its youth. Perhaps there was a diversity of interpreters of Madhyamaka, within which some, but not all, advocated the view that Asaṅga is here criticizing as a *nāstika* view. Setting aside the question of whether Nāgārjuna himself was a nihilist, it is hardly far-fetched to hypothesize that *some* Mahāyānists—followers of Nāgārjuna or not—came to believe that, in the end, "All of reality is nothing but designation." Nāgārjuna's *pūrvapakṣin* in the opening verses (1–6) of Chapter XXIV of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* seems to assume that Nāgārjuna meant something like this (Garfield 1995: 293–296). If this interpretation was a genuine concern, then Asaṅga's critique may be read as *a repetition* of Nāgārjuna's well-known warnings against interpreting his approach, and Mahāyāna in general, as nihilistic.

Luckily, while Asaṅga's disputational intent may be somewhat unclear, the argument itself is not. He says that some readers, conducting an overly literal, and narrowly logical, reading of the Mahāyāna sūtras, have concluded that while things in the world designated by conventional expressions or designations do not exist, the designations themselves *do* exist. So, according to the view under consideration, we might say that the designation "Buddha" exists, but the Buddha designated by the expression does not exist. Or, the designation "self" exists, but the self does not. Śrāvaka Abhidharma would agree with this argument as it pertains to the self, saying that the "self" is an "empty" designation that properly refers to a constantly changing set of aggregated elements, *dharmas*. As Vasubandhu says in his *Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, AKBh), "[T]he word 'self' indicates only the continuum of aggregates, and does not apply elsewhere."[3] In Mahāyāna scriptures (here the *Heart Sūtra* should suffice), these ostensibly designated *dharmas* are *also* said to be "empty":

> Therefore, O Śāriputra, in emptiness there is no form, nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness; No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; No forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects of mind; No sight-organ element, and so forth, until we

3. AKBh 461.5: . . . *skandhasantāna evedam ātmābhidhānaṃ vartate nānyasminn ābhidheye* . . .

> come to: No mind-consciousness element; There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to: There is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death. There is no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path. There is no cognition, no attainment and no nonattainment. (Conze 2001: 97)

Asaṅga critiques the view that takes a passage like this literally; he says that "some people hear the difficult and profound Mahāyāna sūtras that deal with emptiness and convey a meaning that needs to be interpreted [and] they do not discern the correct meaning, they develop false concepts." Such people conclude that, since there is no thing that is really designated by these terms ("eye," "ear," etc.), there is no "designated" to pair with the designation. Unlike Vasubandhu's AKBh view, which shifts what is designated by the term "self" from an ostensibly substantial self to a group of constantly changing *dharmas*, this view simply *erases* what is designated by the terms in question. Only the terms are left, designating nothing.

This may be a natural, even a direct, interpretation of the sūtra. But it is a fallacious view, Asaṅga says, because it misunderstands the nature of a conventional designation—a *prajñapti*. A designation *just is* something that designates *something*, so if there is no designated thing, there is also no designation. You cannot have designations without the things they designate. This argument, it seems to me (and Willis 1982: 111), takes its moves directly out of the Nāgārjunian playbook. The designation is relative to its designated object. Their mutual dependence means that neither can exist without the other. The opponent here is said to believe in the reality of a dependent thing without believing in the reality of the thing that it depends upon—which is a logical error. Notice that Asaṅga's point here does not impose an unchanging essence upon the designated object (as later interpreters claim he does), but simply indicates that what defines a "designation" *as such* is its designating *something*. Meaning requires reference.

In order to drive the point home, Asaṅga indicates what *does* follow, logically, from the mistaken premise that denies the designated object—which is, of course, that the designation also must be denied. Implicit in the notion that designated things do not exist is that designations, too, do not exist—which means that nothing exists. This is a reductio ad absurdum, because no Buddhist would accept the nihilism of this position. It is only people who accept this *conclusion* that are said to be unsuitable companions, but the reductio implies that the target is a dangerous view to entertain. Perhaps the danger is that by standing, with such a companion, so close to the edge, we might find ourselves tempted to jump. As always

in Buddhist critiques of nihilism, it is not the view itself that is truly dangerous, but rather the fact that it will lead its advocates to disbelieve and ignore the reality of karma and its consequences.[4]

Bhāviveka's response draws upon the distinction between conventional and ultimate truth. Madhyamaka, he explains, does *not* say that things do not exist; it says that they do not exist *ultimately*—and this is a crucial difference, which blocks the accusation of nihilism. Things existing only conventionally is not the same thing as things not existing at all. Things have exactly their conventional existence. Since both designations and what are designated by them exist conventionally, there are no grounds to say a dependent thing is being called real while the thing it depends upon is called unreal. Both are dependent; both are conventionally real, while ultimately unreal.

As satisfying as this response may be to later Mādhyamikas, in truth it fails to take up Asaṅga's critique directly. Remember, the target view is the view that only designations exist. An appropriate response should make clear why this critique misses the mark. Yet Bhāviveka has not made clear the difference—which is not entirely self-evident—between denying the ultimate existence of all things while affirming only their conventional existence, and saying that only designations exist. We want to know the difference between saying that something that is designated by a designation *does not exist*, and saying that the designated thing *exists, but only as a designation*.

It would be easy to fall into nihilism by a literal reading of the *Heart Sūtra* passage alone. But the focus on the reality of designations (*prajñapti*) alone does indeed imply that the holder of the view in question is at least familiar with Nāgārjuna. It would appear that the target view takes its impetus from statements such as Nāgārjuna's famous *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* verse XXIV.18, which equates "dependent origination" (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) with "dependent designation" (*prajñaptir upādāya*). The point of that verse is not just to say that "emptiness" is a dependent designation, but also to say that the emptiness of things *just is* the fact that things are mere designations. It is fair to assume that a reader of this passage could come to the conclusion that designations exist, but the things that are *designated* do not exist. Everything, then, would be only words.

4. This is why falsely believing in nonexistence after death is considered a much more serious and dangerous position than merely believing falsely in a self. See *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXIV.11 (Garfield 1995: 299).

Such a view indeed falls prey to Asaṅga's critique that words without referents are not even words—they are by nature meaningless—and that to say that the only true existents are words that are not even words is to say that nothing exists.[5] Let us call this target view—the view that all that exists are designations—a *nihilistic* interpretation of Madhyamaka.

To name this target view within Asaṅga's work a nihilistic interpretation of Madhyamaka is by no means to stipulate that Asaṅga meant to say that *all* of Madhyamaka was nihilistic in this way. In fact, there may be a solid, substantial (but not ultimate) defense that explains why Madhyamaka should not be taken to be nihilistic in this way. Nonetheless, when Bhāviveka says, as a response to Asaṅga's critique, that the existence of *dharmas* is not denied, because their conventional existence is affirmed, it seems rather tone deaf to the question. Bhāviveka's answer should only prompt the further question whether conventions are designations, and since they are, *What are the* dharmas *designating?* A whole host of unanswered questions follow. When we say that *dharmas* exist conventionally, are we saying that our conventions make *dharmas* what they are? In this way the critique demands an explanation of just what it *means* to say that things *exist conventionally*. When we say that *dharmas* exist as designations, are we saying that our words make *dharmas*? Or, are *dharmas* made of words? So then, will *dharmas* exist in whatever ways we happen to say they do? If so, how is this not moral nihilism? If a tree falls in the forest with nobody there, does it or does it not generate *dharmas* of sound? Is there a difference between our linguistic uses or linguistic conventions, and the *dharmas* that are named by those conventions? Or, is the point that when we say "dependent designation" we don't mean that there is a designation and a designated, but rather just some kind of ongoing stream of designating?

Bhāviveka's reply is not an answer to these questions. Rather, he considers Asaṅga's critique entirely irrelevant and insulting; and he does not accept the point. Perhaps for the Mādhyamika this is indeed a misleading set of questions. If Madhyamaka is intended as a bulwark against speculative theorizing, on the idea that every theory generates misleading projections of the "ultimate," there could be an argument to be made against explaining one's terms overmuch. Perhaps to thematize conventions as in

5. Words that refer to nonexistent entities, such as fictional entities, must still perform some kind of reference for them to be legitimate words and not nonsense. For Yogācāra, words refer neither to things in themselves, nor merely to other words, but to how things appear in the mental stream. See Gold (2007).

the questions above is implicitly to reify them in a way that ossifies conventions into hardened projections of ultimates. Or, perhaps these questions are off the mark because the ultimate denied is defined quite narrowly as an unchanging essence, which means that "conventions" is just the catch-all expression for *everything else*, and it really has nothing to do with linguistic signifiers per se. That would mean that for Madhyamaka there is no claim being made about how language works, or how it is related to reality, except to deny that it could work via unchanging essences. Or, perhaps, the problem is one of self-referential incoherence: The questions in the prior paragraph may be thought to assume that there is some *ultimate* difference between conventions and the ultimate, which would be to impose an ultimate nature just where an ultimate nature is being denied.

Those with expertise in Madhyamaka thought may be poised to indicate a further error here in the interpretation of Nāgārjuna: It is one thing to say that the designatum is *the same entity* as the designation, and something else to say (more sensibly) that the designatum is *another* designation—which refers to another designation, and so on, "all the way down."[6] The latter option does not suffer from the specific problem of mutual dependency at issue in Asaṅga's argument, but it does raise a similar set of questions: If everything is discourse all the way down, what governs the apparently stable structure of discursive reference—for instance, that it is sometimes correct, sometimes incorrect? If there are no objective realities outside of discourse, then why can't we just speak our way into any reality? Or, can we? If not, then doesn't that mean that discourse is something more than just acts of "designation"? If, however, there *are* objective realities outside of discourse that provide for its structures, then what makes a designation "empty"?

Whatever their shortcomings, these questions arise naturally once the doctrine of the two truths—conventional and ultimate—is proposed. If it is said that things exist merely conventionally, but not ultimately, it is natural to wonder about the character of the ultimate that is being denied, and of the conventions that are being affirmed, and in this case, whether the notion of "merely conventional" makes sense. It is natural to ask just how the "conventional truth" differs from ultimate truth on the one hand, and falsity on the other. It is natural to ask what relevance the supposed lack of ultimate nature has to ordinary beings. Do most of us go around thinking that there is such a nature? Without some serious engagement

6. An option suggested to me by Jan Westerhoff (personal communication).

of these issues, the Mahāyāna may maintain some delicate internal consistency, but only at the expense of obscurity. For most, this basic challenge needs to be addressed directly.

Whereas this need is not met by Nāgārjuna, it is addressed in the Yogācāra approach to emptiness. The Yogācāra tradition may be read as a second try at characterizing the emptiness of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras—as a counter to the nihilistic interpretation of Mahāyāna that may have been (surely unintentionally) exacerbated by Nāgārjuna's thesis that everything is *prajñapti*. In answer to the question of the nature of *svabhāva,* the Yogācāra tradition explains that this is not merely linguistic, it is a mental construction. Due to our previous karma, we *think* there is a *svabhāva* where there is not. The Buddhist wisdom traditions are intended to help us free ourselves of these false conceptualizations. In answer to the question of the relation between our conventions and the ultimate nature, the Yogācāra tradition answers that even while we may know, since we have been told, and shown through argument, that all things are free of *svabhāva*, our knowledge is faulty because we are still ensnared by our previous karma. As we shall see, the Yogācāra has worked out the implications of this paradoxical situation. In short, we are incapable of conceiving of things as they really are, free of this nature. Therefore, even according to the Mahāyāna sūtras (which these texts sometimes call the Vaipulya), we can only think and speak of the ultimate nature *through* a false conceptualization. Yet this failure of our conceptual-linguistic constructions does not undermine their conventional utility and truth. To think otherwise is to negate the Buddha's teachings of *nirvāṇa* and *karma*, and to end up courting nihilism. Yet the Buddha's teachings *at every level* are indeed useful and valid (though ultimately false), because they put us on the right path.

To reject this sensible and supremely elegant exposition of the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness because it supposedly reifies the mind is to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Luckily, the main Buddhist traditions of interpretation in India did not reject it. This Yogācāra framework became the foundation for the development of logic and practice for centuries to follow. We should not allow the Madhyamaka rhetoric of the rejection of Yogācāra to prevent us from understanding the Yogācāra's crucial contribution.

Vasubandhu's Critique of Previous Mahāyānists

Contrary to its reputation as a reificationist rejector of Madhyamaka, the early Yogācāra was primarily concerned with resolving disputes among

Buddhists. Early Mahāyāna sūtras are self-aggrandizing and often derisive toward non-Mahāyāna doctrines and practices—they did, after all, invent the term "Hīnayāna" (The Defective Way). Furthermore, Nāgārjuna's philosophy can be interpreted in multiple ways, and, as I have already noted, raises many unresolved questions about the nature of the Mahāyāna. Into the fray steps the originating sūtra of the Yogācāra, the *Clarification of the Intent* (SNS). Central to the *intent* clarified in the SNS is the notion that all of the Buddha's teachings—Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna—are of "one taste" and lead toward the shared goal of Buddhahood (137). A theme in the opening chapters of the sūtra is that there is a great deal of disagreement and dispute among Buddhists—among *bodhisattva*, no less—and the SNS seeks to transcend the disputation and settle all of the arguments. In fact, for the SNS, the basic distinction between fools and the wise is that fools are attached to one view over another, whereas the wise see the fundamental truth behind all Buddhist doctrines, and are therefore beyond all disputations. If there is one, singular *intent* behind all of the Buddha's teachings, then there is no sense in arguing over the relative legitimacy of one doctrinal system or another.

In his Yogācāra-influenced work on scriptural interpretation, the *Proper Mode of Exposition* (*Vyākhyāyukti*, VyY), we see Vasubandhu stake his claim to a view of scripture that maintains the importance and the validity of *both* Śrāvakayāna *and* Mahāyāna. In order to make this work, Vasubandhu argues that all truths, even the truths of the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures, are relative and conventional:

> I exist conventionally as a person but not substantially, because of the imputation of that upon the aggregates. Karma and results exist substantially, conventionally. They do not exist ultimately, because they are objects of mundane knowledge. Supreme (*dam pa*, **parama*) is wisdom beyond the mundane, and its object (*don*, **artha*) is the ultimate (*don dam pa*, **paramārtha*). That object is the specific character of neither, because that object is an inexpressible general character.[7]

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7. VyY 236.18–237.3: *nged ni gang zak kun rdzob tu yod kyi rdzas su ni ma yin te/ phung po rnams la de'i ming gdags pa'i phyir ro/ /las dang rnam par smin pa dag ni kun rdzob tu rdzas su yod/ don dam par ni med de/ 'jig rten pa'i shes pa'i yul yin pa'i phyir ro/ /dam pa ni ye shes 'jig rten las 'das pa yin te / de'i don yin pas don dam pa'o/ /de gnyis kyi rang gi mtshan nyid ni de'i yul ma yin te/ de'i yul ni brjod du med pa'i spyi'i mtshan nyid yin pa'i phyir ro/*

Here Vasubandhu affirms three levels of existence. In the first, the self exists conventionally, but not substantially. Karma and results, however, *do* exist substantially. These compose the second level. Unlike the self, they have a genuine causal basis. These first two levels comprise a view of the self, and its distinction from karma and results, that all Buddhists should accept. But he articulates a third level when he says, further, that karma and results exist conventionally, not ultimately. This is the traditional Mahāyāna claim that all *dharmas* lack an ultimate, inherent nature—a claim that would not be accepted by Śrāvakas. The reason karma and its results are considered conventional, rather than ultimate, is "because they are objects of mundane knowledge." Ordinary beings can know real things, but not *ultimately*. They are real, but they are not *ultimately* real things. He glosses what it means to be "ultimate" (*don dam pa*) as what supreme beings take as their objects of knowledge. For this reason, the nature of the ultimate is inexpressible—that is in fact what it *means* to say that it is ultimate. The three levels of existence, then, are insubstantial conventional existence (the self), substantial conventional existence (karma and results), and ultimate truth (inexpressible).

This passage provides a cogent explanation for the *Heart Sūtra* passage cited in the previous section—a passage that is put in the mouth of Avalokiteśvara speaking while *in the meditative state* of the Perfection of Wisdom. The words spoken out of that "supreme" state (the state that perceives the ultimate) reject mundane, worldly terms of every kind. Everything that is an object of mundane knowledge—everything that the Buddha teaches to ordinary worldlings, which they can understand—is by definition merely conventional. Notice, though, that this fact about worldly terms may be taken to devolve upon the terms *used* by Avalokiteśvara, even from his ultimate state. Under such a reading, all scriptures, of all schools—including the Mahāyāna—are only conventional expressions. This must be true, under such a reading, even when the scriptures are attempting to articulate views that are beyond the conventional—even when the words are spoken from an enlightened perspective.

It is with this view in mind that we must read Vasubandhu's passage from the *Proper Mode of Exposition* that closely resembles Asaṅga's critique of the Madhyamaka nihilist. This passage is widely understood as a criticism of Madhyamaka (Cabezon 1992, Skilling 2000). Yet the point is more decisively about clarifying the way in which Mahāyāna is related to Śrāvakayāna. Vasubandhu is saying that, if all ordinary concepts are at

best conventional, worldly truths, and that therefore even Mahāyāna scriptures are conventional truths, then the Mahāyāna does not have the effect of undermining the conventional truths that Abhidharma philosophers base upon Buddhist scriptures. The Mahāyāna may reject the ultimate nature of all things; but the *dharmas* still exist conventionally:

> Also, for some Mahāyānists who say that whereas all things, in their natures as a specific character, simply do not exist, this argument will also arise: What is being taught, conventionally, in those expressions where the Lord speaks of the existence of a thing just as it is, in the words, "The very existence of dharmas is taught"?[8]

Mahāyāna may speak of a deeper truth, but it does not erase or invalidate the Abhidharma, which persists in the realm of intellection. The criticism of other Mahāyānists, then, is that they deny the existence of perfectly serviceable *dharmas* named in scripture. This argument resonates with Asaṅga's point that "some people hear the difficult and profound Mahāyāna sūtras that deal with emptiness and convey a meaning that needs to be interpreted" but end up taking it literally, thinking that the entities denied really do not exist. The meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras is not a denial of the point of basic Buddhism, that the so-called self is really made up of many distinct, ever-changing entities. It is, rather, to say that, from the ultimate perspective, we really cannot say *anything*. The danger of nihilism is the danger of denying moral distinctions from the *conventional* perspective based upon scriptures that deny things from the *ultimate* perspective.

It is difficult to say whether Vasubandhu is targeting exactly the same view as Asaṅga. Asaṅga's opponent denied the reality of *dharmas* but affirmed their reality as designations (*prajñapti*). Neither passage names the Madhyamaka, but by naming designations, Asaṅga is closer to implicating them than Vasubandhuis. In Vasubandu's formulation, the opponent's view is the simple denial of entities as their "own character" (*svalakṣaṇa*). Vasubandhu's opponent disbelieves the Buddha when he affirms the real existence of a given *dharma*. This is disbelief in a "thing designated" in the Buddha's speech, so there seems to be a parallel here

8. VyY 237.15–19: *yang theg pa chen po pa kha cig thams cad rang gi mtshan nyid du ni med pa kho na yin la / kun rdzob tu ni bcom ldan 'das kyis chos rnams yod pa nyid du bstan to zhes sgra ji bzhin pa nyid kyi don yin par brjod pa gang yin pa de dag la ji skad bstan pa'i rtsod pa 'di yang 'byung bar 'gyur ro //*

with Asaṅga's potential nihilist. This disbelief is the exact view that *leads* to nihilism. But Vasubandhu does not say that his opponent, while denying what is designated here, affirms their designation.

Both views, then, criticize previous Mahāyāna interpreters for an overly literal reading of the negations in the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures, and seek to reaffirm conventional realities that have been inappropriately, and unnecessarily, swept aside. It is unclear to what degree the target was necessarily intended to be Madhyamaka. It is certainly unclear that the accusation matches any form of Madhyamaka we see adduced in the surviving textual record. Yet the target view and the strategies used to correct it are quite consistent. In both the critique of mistaken negativity and the effort to legitimize the conventional reality of the *dharma* categories of the Śrāvakayāna, Vasubandhu and Asaṅga are taking their impetus directly from the ecumenical rhetoric, and the distinctive doctrinal formulations, of the SNS.

The Inconceivable Ultimate as the Intention Behind the Third Turning of the Wheel

The only doctrinal innovation claimed by the SNS, which sets it above previous Mahāyāna scriptures, is the notion that *they*—the scriptures—are subject to interpretation, whereas *it* —the SNS—is the final word. The famous passage from the SNS that describes the Buddha's "three turnings of the wheel"—for Śrāvakas, for Mahāyānists, and (now) for all—uses identical language for the doctrinal systems propounded in the second and third "turnings." The only difference is that one is said to be provisional, the other definitive:

> Then the Bhagavan turned a second wheel of doctrine which is more wondrous still for those who are genuinely engaged in the Great Vehicle, because of the aspect of teaching emptiness, *beginning with the lack of own-being of phenomena, and beginning with their absence of production, absence of cessation, quiescence from the start, and being naturally in a state of nirvāṇa*. However, this wheel of doctrine that the Bhagavan turned is surpassable, provides an opportunity [for refutation], is of interpretable meaning, and serves as a basis for dispute.
>
> Then the Bhagavan turned a third wheel of doctrine, possessing good differentiations, and exceedingly wondrous, for those genuinely engaged in all vehicles, *beginning with the lack of own-being of*

> *phenomena, and beginning with their absence of production, absence of cessation, quiescence from the start, and being naturally in a state of nirvāṇa*. Moreover, that wheel of doctrine turned by the Bhagavan is unsurpassable, does not provide an opportunity [for refutation], is of definitive meaning, and does not serve as a basis for dispute. (SNS 139, 141. Powers' translation, emphasis added.)

The SNS is the basic scriptural source for Asaṅga's and Vasubandhu's Yogācāra, and the SNS's distinction between the second and third turnings of the wheel is widely blamed for causing the division between the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra schools. Yet according to this very passage, the doctrines taught in the second and third turnings are *identical to the word*. If Madhyamaka and Yogācāra propound different doctrines (say, on whether the mind is ultimately real), then the SNS on the three turnings of the wheel of doctrine does nothing to distinguish them. It says quite plainly that the Buddha taught the same doctrine twice. The difference is that the last time through, the meaning is understood.

The main point of the chapter in which we find the "three turnings" laid out is to elucidate the correct meaning of the shared doctrine, as we shall see. Yet first, if we wish to understand the difference between the second and third turnings, there is nowhere to look but the descriptive *frames* that characterize, differently, the two times the Buddha spoke this doctrine. These frames articulate a difference in the *intent* (*saṃdhi*) behind the doctrinal expression for each "turning." We may summarize this distinction by comparing the terms used to introduce and conclude each doctrinal presentation:

Table 9.1 Framing Characteristics for the Doctrine of Emptiness in SNS VII

Second Turning	Third Turning
For teaching emptiness	Possessing good differentiations
More wondrous still (by comparison with the first turning)	Exceedingly wondrous
For those engaged in the Great Vehicle	For those engaged in all vehicles
Surpassable	Unsurpassable
Opportunity for refutation	No opportunity for refutation
Of interpretable meaning	Of definitive meaning
A basis for dispute	Not a basis for dispute

These framing characteristics for the shared doctrine of "the lack of own-being of phenomena" (*chos rnams kyi ngo bo nyid ma mchis pa nyid*) provide a very clear and direct expression of how the SNS understands its own newness as a "third turning." It is "definitive" as opposed to "interpretable," and "unsurpassable" as opposed to "surpassable." These terms self-evidently declare that the earlier mode of interpretation of the doctrine needs to be taken with a grain of salt, whereas its new mode of interpretation does not. The new interpretation is therefore better—but not just better: Best. This new mode of interpretation provides "no opportunity for refutation": Unlike the earlier view, it is final and definitive, and there is no way that it can be refuted.

Related to the third turning's imperviousness to refutation is a still deeper characteristic of invulnerability, which is that it is *not even a basis for dispute*. This means, apparently, that it is not even *possible* to dispute this view. This is a remarkable claim, which highlights for us how different this discussion of a shift in *intention* is from a shift in doctrine. If the doctrines are identical, it cannot be the doctrine that is to be disputed. Under the new *intention,* the very same doctrines that were a basis for dispute become indisputable. It follows that if you find yourself in a doctrinal dispute, you're dealing with the provisional, not the definitive, meaning of the doctrine.

How can this be? An answer is available in the second chapter of the SNS, in which the Buddha explains to the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata that argumentation is dependent upon conventional speech, whereas the ultimate perspective transcends all argumentation and dispute:

> I have explained that the ultimate is realized individually by the Āryas, while objects collectively known by ordinary beings [belong to] the realm of argumentation. Thus, Dharmodgata, by this form of explanation know that whatever has a character completely transcending all argumentation is the ultimate.
>
> Moreover, Dharmodgata, I have explained that the ultimate belongs to the signless realm, while argumentation belongs to the realm of signs . . . is inexpressible, while argumentation belongs to the realm of expression . . . is devoid of conventions, while argumentation belongs to the realm of conventions . . . is completely devoid of all dispute, while argumentation belongs to the realm of controversy. (SNS 27, 29)

Table 9.2 SNS II on the Distinction between the Ultimate and the Disputational

Realm of Argumentation	The Ultimate
Known collectively	Realized individually
. . . by ordinary beings	. . . by Āryas
Signs	Signless
Expression	Inexpressible
Conventions	Devoid of conventions
Controversy	Devoid of all dispute

In line with Wittgenstein's famous dictum that there is no private language, the SNS distinguishes between conventions, which are shared, and the individually realized, inexpressible ultimate reality. What is individually realized and ultimate is not available for dispute because it is signless and inexpressible, and it is therefore unavailable as a shared convention.

We can therefore explain the claim from SNS VII—that the intention behind the "third turning" is impervious to refutation and provides no basis for dispute—to be a claim that this intention is the inexpressible ultimate. The ultimate is the inexpressible object of supramundane wisdom. Where there is only a unified, individual realization of an Ārya, there is no possibility even of signs, let alone disagreements or disputes over the interpretation of signs. As Vasubandhu put it in the VyY, "What is beyond the mundane is only one. The mundane has divisions."[9]

The intention, then, that lies behind the third turning is different from the intention that lies behind the second turning, because in the second turning, *the doctrine expressed* was mistakenly understood as the ultimate reality, whereas in the third turning, the ultimate was understood as inexpressible. The expressed doctrine, therefore, *could not be* an expression of the ultimate. The third turning is claiming to provide a restatement of the same doctrine as one finds in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, with this crucial change in implicit intention: Read the doctrine with the knowledge that the ultimate cannot be expressed in language.

Specialists in Madhyamaka may wish to intervene here and explain that this reading of the Perfection of Wisdom literature is thoroughly consistent with the Madhyamaka tradition, citing, for instance, Nāgārjuna's famous claim to have no thesis (*pratijñā*), or Candrakīrti's defense of "the emptiness

9. VyY 237.5: *gcig kho nar ni 'jig rten las 'das pa yin no/ 'jig rten pa ni dbye pa yod de/*

of emptiness" (Huntington 1995), or perhaps Mark Siderits' felicitous declaration that, for the Mādhyamika, "The ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth" (2003: 157). We are instructed that words are only the finger pointing at the moon of the ultimate. Under such a view the third turning as described here might be entirely unnecessary. Yet even if we do not wish to mount an argument that some Mādhyamikas have fallen into exactly the trap that the SNS derides (I am concerned for Tsongkhapa, but here is not the place to argue it), we must remember that Candrakīrti arrived on the scene many centuries after the SNS. The point articulated here seems to be that *during its time* the interpretation of the Mahāyāna (not necessarily the Madhyamaka) was plagued with those who were *unaware* of the "emptiness" of the Great Vehicle doctrine (and so imagined it to be the ultimate truth itself). The necessary shift in intention is the shift from a view that the doctrine of emptiness is the ultimate to the view that emptiness, like no-self, is a *conventional* doctrine, since the ultimate is inconceivable.

Distinguishing Linguistic Denials from Ultimate Reality

How does this shift in intention save the doctrine from negativity and nihilism and save the Mahāyāna from disputation? And, just as important, how can such a shift be accomplished, using only the tools of conventional language? The answers to these questions may be sought where the SNS describes the third turning as an interpretive scheme "possessing good differentiations"—as opposed to the second turning's being a mere exposition of emptiness (see the first line of Table 9.1). These "good differentiations" are the theme of Chapter VII, of which the "three turnings" passage is the culmination. In differentiating *three kinds of emptiness*—the main topic of the chapter—the Buddha's new interpretation relativizes, and yet affirms, earlier views of emptiness, and sets the doctrine beyond dispute.

Chapter VII of the SNS, which is the chapter from which the passage on the "three turnings" is drawn, is structured as a dialogue between the Buddha and the Bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata on the following question:

> Of what was the Bhagavan thinking when he said, "All phenomena lack own-being; all phenomena are unproduced, unceasing, quiescent from the start, and naturally in a state of nirvāṇa?" (SNS 97)

The reader will recognize the question as a request to explain the intention behind the central doctrine of both the second and third turnings, the

doctrine of "lack of own-being of phenomena," which I am referring to as the doctrine of "emptiness." The Buddha provides the "good distinctions" of the third turning as his answer to this question. He answers that there are three kinds, or aspects (*rnam pa*), to emptiness: The emptiness of character (*mtshan nyid*); the emptiness of production (*skye ba*); and the ultimate (*don dam pa*) emptiness. The chapter explains the three emptinesses twice, before turning to the discussion of why the Buddha has not explained this before, and then culminates in the explanation of the three turnings.

In the first run-through, the Buddha defines the three emptinesses through their "three characters." These have been introduced in the previous chapter, and are to become a crucial set of terms for subsequent Yogācāra theorizing. The first character is the "imputational character," which is designated as the basis of the first emptiness, the emptiness of character, because it is the emptiness of "names and symbols"—so here imputation is linguistic, and the emptiness is the emptiness of linguistic signs. The second character is the "dependent character," which is designated as the basis of the second emptiness, the emptiness of production, because of things "arising by virtue of other forces"—so here the emptiness is the lack of own-being that things have as a result of their being conditioned. The third character is the "thoroughly-established character," which is the basis of the third emptiness, the ultimate emptiness, simply because the "lack of own being" of things *is* the ultimate nature of all things.

There is another reason given for the third kind of emptiness, ultimate emptiness. This is the emptiness that is necessary, the Buddha says, for "visualization for the purification of dharmas."[10] The point, as I take it, is

Table 9.3 SNS VII on the Three Emptinesses

Emptiness of Character	Emptiness of Production	Ultimate Emptiness
Imputational Character	Dependent Character	Thoroughly-established Character
Emptiness of names & symbols	Arising from other things	Lack of own being

10. SNS 100: *chos rnams la rnam par dag pa'i dmigs pa*. Author's translation. Powers (101) has: ". . . object of observation for purification of phenomena . . ." An alternative interpretation of this passage, which would be in line with Vasubandhu's definition of *paramārtha*, would be that it refers to the object seen by those with purified vision—that is, by Āryas.

that the *ultimate emptiness* is necessary for visualization practice. Here we see the pragmatic import of Yogācāra. The text is suggesting that those who wish to cultivate the experience of emptiness in meditation practice, in order to purify their mental continuum, can benefit from having this final nature in mind. As opposed to the other two, which are emptinesses located within specific entities or series, the third emptiness is like a backdrop, an emptiness that is always and everywhere the same.

This point comes through quite clearly in the second run-through, where the Buddha proposes an analogy for each kind of emptiness. The first emptiness is like a sky-flower—not existing at all. The second emptiness is like a magical illusion—produced by causes and conditions. The third, then, is likened to space, since just as space is not just the lack of a particular form in a particular place, but is all-pervasive, so ultimate emptiness is not just the selflessness of specific *dharmas*, but is the emptiness that is all-pervasive (SNS 101-3; see also Tillemans 1997: 161-3).

We may have here a suggestion of a practice that is extremely well attested in tantra, which is the cultivation of an awareness of emptiness by means of the visualization of an endless expanse of empty space. This is only a metaphor, of course—emptiness is not a thing, it is a *lack* of a thing—but the connection to meditative practice implies that the third emptiness is what is sought in meditation on "ultimate emptiness." The goal of such practice would be to approximate as best as possible a Buddha's awareness of the emptiness of all things. This all-pervasive but inconceivable ultimate emptiness is quite close to Vasubandhu's definition of the "ultimate" as the object of awareness of Āryas:

> Supreme (*dam pa, *parama*) is wisdom beyond the mundane, and its object (*don, *artha*) is the ultimate (*don dam pa, *paramārtha*). . . . What is beyond the mundane is only one. The mundane has divisions.[11]

Finally, the Buddha turns to the question of why he has not explained, or designated, these distinct emptinesses before. Here is where he explains the benefit of making the distinctions he has propounded: The failure to understand these distinctions can lead to false views and, ultimately, negative behaviors. What happens is this: The Buddha first gives

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11. VyY 236.21–237.6: *dam pa ni ye shes 'jig rten las 'das pa yin te/ de'i don yin pas don dam pa'o//. . . gcig kho nar ni 'jig rten las 'das pa yin no/ 'jig rten pa ni dbye pa yod de/*

the teaching on the emptiness of production; this helps turn people away from wrongdoing, and allows them to cultivate themselves in merit and wisdom. Then he teaches the emptiness of character and ultimate emptiness; this leads those who have attained merit and wisdom to a correct understanding. Unfortunately, however, this can also lead people in different directions. Among the people who do not have sufficient roots of virtue to understand the intention, some still have faith in the profound teachings, and they *know* they do not understand. The teachings are still good for those people, because they can engage in sūtra-copying and other meritorious practices. Yet for others, this teaching leads them astray, because they understand only the letter of the doctrine, not its meaning. As the reader will have come to expect, this misunderstanding of the true intention of the doctrine leads these people to believe that *dharmas* do not exist. They adopt the view that "all phenomena do not exist and that character does not exist" (SNS 119). This is the mistaken view critiqued by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, which incensed Bhāviveka—the view that supposedly led previous Mahāyānists to court nihilism.

What exactly is wrong with these previous interpreters? Why can't they get the point? In what way do the people who are not sufficiently advanced fail to understand the Buddha's true intention? Why do people who *do not* "make distinctions" think that *dharmas* do not exist? The answer supplied by the SNS is expressed directly, but encoded in the terminology of the three characters:

> Superimposing the own-being of the imputational onto the own-being of the other-dependent and the thoroughly established, sentient beings subsequently attribute conventions of the character of the own-being of the imputational to the own-being of the other-dependent and the thoroughly established. (SNS 105)

The answer, in short, is that they make the mistake of superimposing the characteristics of the first emptiness onto the second and third. This is a conceptual error that leads them to deny the reality of *dharmas*.

In order to decode this answer, let us first review, and expand a bit, on just what these three emptinesses and their three characteristics *are*. In this chapter, the three emptinesses reflect the three "turnings" of the wheel of the law. The first turning was the second emptiness, emptiness of production, the dependent character. The Buddha says that this first teaching leads people away from wrongdoing, and helps them to cultivate merit

and wisdom. As a doctrine, it is the cause-and-effect structure of basic Buddhist teachings: karma and its results, and the path. It is "emptiness" in the sense of being the emptiness of all dharmas because they are conditioned, caused in a series. Most centrally for early Buddhism, the Buddha taught the conditioned nature of the self. Basic Buddhism affirms the unreality of the self based upon a causal story that sees the apparent self as made up of a flux of countless conditioned *dharmas*. This is the second emptiness as listed earlier, but it is the one the Buddha claims he must explain *first*:

> Paramārthasamudgata, I initially teach doctrines starting with the lack of own-being in terms of production to those beings who have not generated roots of virtue. . . . (SNS 107)

Although of course the Buddha's early teachings include a vast range of explanations of dependent origination and the means to cultivate merit and wisdom, for the sake of clarity I'll summarize this kind of emptiness as the teaching of *karma*. This should be taken to include the doctrines of no-self and the conditioned nature of *dharmas*, as well as the eightfold path.

Once these disciples are ready, the Buddha moves on to explain the next two emptinesses. One is the *ultimate* emptiness, which is the third in the list. This emptiness is the background emptiness, the emptiness that is known by all Buddhas. It is the ultimate, incomprehensible nature of all things. Although, of course, there are multiple ways of talking about this inconceivable ultimate, I'll summarize it as the teaching of *nirvāṇa*. The central impetus behind the third turning seems to be to reaffirm this emptiness as the basic intention behind the affirmation of all Buddhist doctrine.

Central to that special intention, though, is that the ultimate emptiness lies behind the first emptiness. This emptiness, then, is the emptiness of "names and symbols"—it is the emptiness of language. As we have seen earlier, the fact that language cannot capture ultimate reality translates, in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, into expressions of the nonreality of each and every linguistically designated thing.

What does it mean, then, to say that those who do not understand the meaning superimpose the first emptiness onto the other two? To risk a reductive summary, it may be decoded to be saying that *they superimpose the emptiness of language onto the teachings of* karma *and* nirvāṇa. It means, I believe, that mistaken interpreters of the Mahāyāna apply the emptiness of *words and signs* to the language that expresses all of the Buddhist doctrines, and so allow this emptiness to call those doctrines into question.

It is quite correct, at the ultimate level, to acknowledge that linguistic signs ("eye," "ear," etc.) fail to refer to things-in-themselves. But this fact is irrelevant to the truth of the Buddha's teachings on morality and the possibility of achieving perfect awareness. It is perfectly fine to say that language is incapable of expressing the truth, but *not if that causes you to abandon your faith in* nirvāṇa *and* karma. It is perfectly fine to accept that language fails to refer; but not if that means that *the things it refers to do not exist*. Once you believe that the things designated in the language of the dharma do not exist, the slide toward nihilism has begun:

> "Having adopted the view of non-existence and the view that character does not exist, they also deprecate everything through [deprecating] all characters. Because they deprecate the imputational character of phenomena, they also deprecate the other-dependent character of phenomena and the thoroughly established character.
>
> Why is this? Paramārthasamudgata, if the other-dependent and thoroughly established characters exist, then the imputational character is also understood. However, those who see the other-dependent character and the thoroughly established character as non-existent also deprecate the imputational character. Therefore, they also "deprecate all three types of character." They perceive my doctrine to be doctrine, but they perceive what is not the meaning to be the meaning. (SNS 121)

The damage, as mentioned earlier, does not come directly from the interpretive mistake itself. Other people hear teachings from these mistaken people of faith, and *they* adopt the same *doctrine-without-the-meaning* perspective. Then still *other* people who hear this from *them* end up denigrating the doctrine as a whole, which leads to great karmic obstructions for *them*. So the danger is very indirect, but nonetheless real.[12]

The purpose of the "third turning," then, is to place the doctrine of emptiness in its proper context. The danger of nihilism arises for those who would allow the doctrine of the emptiness of signs to undermine their faith in the Buddha's teachings overall. Their great mistake is the result of being unaware that the emptiness of signs only makes sense

12. The warning, then, should go out to the roommate of the student who hasn't done his reading before attending his Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy seminar's discussion of emptiness.

against a backdrop of the *affirmation* of the other two emptinesses. Those who have progressed far enough along the path will not be moved by the emptiness of signs to deny karma and its results; they have already seen the benefits of the teachings and the accuracy of the doctrine. The fact that the teacher's words are *ultimately* unreal will not sweep away their experience of the truth of the second emptiness, the truth of dependent origination. What the Buddha describes as causing problems is when people hear the teachings of the emptiness of signs as their *first teachings*, before they have cultivated themselves on the path. In this case, they hear that there is "no eye, no ear," etc.—before they have *used* the teachings that the self is made up of these components to counter their reification of the self. Such persons might *never* adopt the path; they might even ridicule the teachings, using the fact that the elements that make up the self are unreal as disproof of the doctrine of no-self!

For this reason, the failure to distinguish the three kinds of emptiness, which leads to conflating all three into the emptiness of linguistic signs alone, prevents the proper comprehension even of the emptiness of linguistic signs—it prevents the proper comprehension of the doctrine of emptiness as expressed in the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures. By the same token, however, the *acceptance* of the second and third kinds of emptiness inoculates one against this kind of nihilism, and, more important, it makes this emptiness *make sense*. For the true intention behind the doctrine of emptiness is not to negate or undermine the referential capacity of linguistic signs; it is to point the practitioner away from linguistic signs toward the ultimate experience of emptiness, the awareness of a Buddha. "No ear" does not mean that we have no ears. It means that there is a perspective, an enlightened perspective, from which all of our ordinary conventions are seen to be false. The negations of the first emptiness in fact *only* make sense in the light of this implicit reaffirmation of the third emptiness.

Conclusion: The Horizon of the Expressible

What do we know about the ultimate reality for early Yogācāra? We know that it is the inexpressible object of the awareness of Buddhas. Aside from that, what *can* we know? We are not Āryas, so it is by nature unknowable by us. Even for Āryas, what can be said? Only a great deal about what it is not. In fact, anything that can be said, can be said to be something that is *not* the inexpressible ultimate. This is not just a clever language game.

It expresses a very real problem at the center of Mahāyāna, at least as understood by those who seek to counter its potentially nihilistic tendencies. How can the ultimate nature be affirmed in a tradition in which that very nature is known to be empty and hence inexpressible, without suggesting that there is no ultimate nature there at all, or without falling into self-referential incoherence?

Nāgārjuna famously responded to the charge of self-referential incoherence by turning the tables on his accuser. In his *Dispeller of Disputes* (*Vigrahavyāvartanī*, VV 27), Nāgārjuna has an opponent claim that Nāgārjuna's arguments are incapable of disproving the essential nature of things because they, like everything else, must be empty. Nāgārjuna's response is that his arguments are capable of disproving the essential nature of things *because* they are empty. An argument with an ultimate nature (which the opponent claims to have) would be permanent, and could never interact with other views or disprove them. This argument dovetails interestingly with the Yogācāra position on the incomprehensible ultimate. It seems to share with the SNS the view that the ultimate nature cannot be expressed in language. But for Nāgārjuna, does this mean that there is some inexpressible ultimate, or, as many Mādhyamikas take it, that there is *no* ultimate (that our problems arise from the false imagining of *any* ultimate)?

There is a sense in which the question is both central and frustratingly difficult to resolve. For, what difference *is there* between saying that there is *no* ultimate, and saying that whatever can be said *is not* the ultimate? The difference may be considered merely one of framing. If I say that there *is* an ultimate but it is inexpressible (which is what Yogācāra apparently says), then the question may be asked whether, when I say that there is an ultimate, I have *said* anything. If I say I have, then I have contradicted the idea that nothing can be said about the ultimate; if I say I have not, then, well, I haven't said anything. This argument seems damaging to the Yogācārin and anyone else who would like to say that something is ineffable. Yet the same argument, with little modification, can also be leveled at the Madhyamaka option. And here the framing, Yogācāra notion that the negation itself is never a *full and direct expression* of the ultimate, because the ultimate is inexpressible, helps to motivate the argument. If the Mādhyamika says there is no ultimate, it may be asked whether that expression refers to the ultimate itself, or just to *our concept* of the ultimate. That is, is the point being made that *what we think is the ultimate* doesn't exist, or that *the real ultimate* doesn't exist? If it is just *what we think is the ultimate*, then the Mādhyamika is all of a sudden ready to talk

about how our ideas are conditioned, and this is the basic innovation of the Yogācāra. That is, if the claim that there is no ultimate is a claim about *our conceptual-linguistic possibilities*, then Madhyamaka and early Yogācāra are in broad agreement; in that case, early Yogācāra doctrines are simply fleshing out the Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness.

The alternative is for the Mādhyamika to refuse to allow the frame of our own conceptual possibilities to be part of the discussion, and to stand by the claim that the *real ultimate* does not exist. Yet here the problem of self-referential incoherence arises again; such a position claims to describe something that cannot properly be described, even if only by saying that it does not exist. In truth, the Mādhyamika who says that the ultimate *does not exist* has forgotten that the ultimate is not something that you can speak of as existing *or not existing*. As in the epigraph to this chapter, the Bodhisattva is supposed to know that "As dharmic facts existence and non-existence are both not real." Existence and nonexistence are not properly attributable to conceptually constructed entities. To forget this, and apply the *nonexistence* universally, amounts to epistemic overextension—pretending to know more than you know. The result, tragically, is a Mādhyamika who, based upon the clear and accurate Mahāyāna negations of false conceptualizations, has given up on the real possibility of *nirvāṇa*, and the reality of *karma*—which means that she is courting moral nihilism.

What this means is that the early Yogācāra critiques not the Madhyamaka per se, but only the Mādhyamika who would stand on the position that the real ultimate does not exist. The Yogācāra response to this problem is to reframe the language of emptiness so as to constantly remind us that we have no grounds for claiming knowledge about ultimate reality because we are always stuck within our own conceptual frame. The "existence" of the ultimate nature is affirmed, rather than denied, but only with the very words that define the ultimate as equivalent to the emptiness of the first nature, which undermines all language and signs. The Yogācāra never loses sight of the impossibility inherent within language about the ultimate, because the affirmations—which Mādhyamikas since Bhāviveka have claimed to be false affirmations of an unchanging ultimate—are in fact affirmations with nowhere to stand. The famous opening verses of *Distinguishing Between Middle and Extremes* (*Madhyāntavibhāga*, MAV) provide a wonderful example:

> There is construction of what does not exist. Duality there is not real. Emptiness there is real. [The construction of what does not exist] is real there [in emptiness] too. (I.1)

> Thereby, everything is established as neither empty nor non-empty, due to existence, non-existence and existence. This is the middle way. (I.2)[13]

From a naive, introductory standpoint, we might say that emptiness is a lack of duality, a lack of a "dualistic" perspective that sees one thing as existing and another as not existing. What freedom from such dualism would mean is confusing, to say the least. But on the surface, it just means that the illusion of ordinary reality is real *as an appearance*, but unreal in that it is not what it appears to be; we should think of ourselves as being something like brains in a vat, hooked up to a massive computer-generated simulation (as in *The Matrix*). But even such a description is rendered simplistic and unstable once we begin to push on it. As long as you are still stuck within a computer-generated simulation, your *idea* of a brain in a vat is itself a computer-generated idea. Hilary Putnam has pointed out this apparent failure of reference in such a scenario (Putnam 1981). It is with something like this problem in mind that I read these perplexing, but immensely influential, verses as structuring the nature of our existence *recursively*.

The second verse starts with the word "thereby," which seems to me to pick up on the whole of the first verse. What it says, then, is that because of the lack of duality explained in the first verse, everything is established as *neither empty nor non-empty*. This is itself a denial of a duality, so it seems reasonable to say that it is intended as a gloss on the line "duality there is not real" from the first verse. But if the duality denied in the first verse is to be read as the duality of "empty and non-empty," the first verse comes to say the following: Unreal imagination contains both a nonexistent duality between being empty and non-empty, and an existent emptiness in which unreal imagination also exists. Ordinary experience contains a nonexistent thing *and* an emptiness that contains itself. And what is this "itself" that it contains? Well, it is ordinary experience, which is a nonexistent thing and an emptiness that contains itself. And so on.

The compact poetry of these verses rests, at least in part, in how they use and display an impossibly complex appearance of duality between emptiness and non-emptiness to exemplify nonduality. To follow the meaning as far as we can is to recognize the limitations of our own conceptual apparatus. We find ourselves in a vertiginous, recursive

13. MAV 17–18: *abhūta-parikalpo 'sti dvayan tatra na vidyate / śūnyatā vidyate tv atra tasyām api sa vidyate // na śūnyaṁ nāpi cāśūnyaṁ tasmāt sarvvam vidhīyate / satvād asatvāt satvāc ca madhyamā pratipac ca sā /*

self-referentiality, and it is not long before we are forced to let go of the attempt to grasp the meaning. This might indicate a misinterpretation, were this feeling not a familiar one from Mahāyāna sūtra literature such as the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Vajracchedikāsūtra*):

> "Great, O Lord, great, O Well-Gone, would that Heap of merit be! And why? Because the Tathagata spoke of the 'heap of merit' as a non-heap. That is how the Tathagata speaks of 'heap of merit.'" (Conze 2001:34–35)

This kind of self-referential, self-undermining expression—It's a great heap because it's a non-heap?—is justified, explained, and formalized in Yogācāra treatises. It is embedded in the SNS passage on the three emptinesses (see Table 9.3), where each of the three is defined in accordance with its specific "character" (*mtshan nyid*), even as the first emptiness is defined as the *emptiness of character* (*mtshan nyid ngo bo nyid med pa*). This is not an ambiguous hint; it is this emptiness that reflects the emptiness of "words and signs," which we are never to forget (SNS 98–99). The Yogācāra institutionalized this kind of self-referential vortex and placed it at a definite location, just beyond the horizon of the expressible. A whirlpool of ever-changing reference prevents the reader from reifying what is essentially empty, or of imagining that a conceptually constructed, linguistic ultimate is tantamount to true awareness of the ultimate.

Whether we decide to find this kind of self-referentiality brilliant, incoherent, or just confusing, there are clearly no grounds for protesting that it was accidental. Mahāyānists spent considerable energies on issues of self-referentiality. Mādhyamikas who make the critique that Yogācāras are incoherently claiming, in the verses above, that a nonexistent being is said to *exist*, are turning a blind eye to the complexity of the Yogācāra attempts to address this central problematic of Mahāyāna.

Vasubandhu addresses the problem of self-referential incoherence in his commentary to the tenth verse of his *Twenty Verses* (*Viṃśatikā*, Viṃś). Vasubandhu does not claim that all things are only conventions, only *prajñapti*; he argues, instead, that all things are *vijñapti*—they are only apparent, not real as they appear. This is a major change, of course. The Yogācāras rewrote the entire system of causes within the dependent nature—the whole causal system of *dharmas*—as a series of mental events. But the claim, universal in scope as it is, prompts the same critique as from Nāgārjuna's opponent. If everything is only mental appearance, his opponent asks, what about the three characteristics themselves? They

would also have to be only apparent, too. Vasubandhu's response is, like Nāgārjuna's, to accept that his own view is subject to his universal claim. There is no exception for the view itself; it, too, *must* be only apparent. This allows Vasubandhu to maintain consistency, and to diffuse an obvious objection. Vasubandhu clearly has different reasons than Nāgārjuna for casting all things as lacking essential natures, and for characterizing "emptiness" as he does. But the structure of the argument is the same, and it makes plain that the expression "appearance," like Nāgārjuna's "designation," is *not* intended as an expression of things' *ultimate* nature.

The Yogācāra is often accused of having reified the mind as an ultimate, and perhaps later Yogācāra authors are sometimes guilty of this. But for the texts under consideration here, not even the words expressing the ultimate are admitted to be ultimate, let alone the processes of mental construction and its dissolution. As King has shown (1994: 676–677), Vasubandhu's *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* and Asaṅga's *Yogācārabhūmi* both describe the final stages of the path—the attainment of liberation—in terms that leave all ordinary language about mind and world behind. Yes, reality correctly perceived is beyond the ordinary external world, but, more important, the final nature is beyond all conceptualization and the language that attempts to capture it. The fact that our words cannot reach beyond the horizon of the expressible is not an ambiguous Madhyamaka leaning within Yogācāra; it is the core Yogācāra contribution to the interpretation of the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness. To remember it, they say, is to affirm the reality of *nirvāṇa*, and to prevent one's companions from slipping into moral nihilism.

Abbreviations

AKBh = *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Pradhan 1975)
MAV = *Madhyāntavibhāga* (Nagao 1964)
SNS = *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra* (Powers 1995)
Viṃś = *Viṃśatikā* (Lévi, ed. 1925)
VV = *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (Westerhoff 2010)
VyY = *Vyākhyāyukti* (Lee 2001)

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10

Two Topics Concerning Consciousness in Śāntarakṣita's Yogācāra-Madhyamaka Syncretism

James Blumenthal

NOT LONG AFTER the public emergence of sūtras from the so-called third turning of the wheel and the early systematization of Yogācāra thought (c. fourth C.E.), Mahāyāna polemics between Mādhyamikas and Yogācārins began. Sophisticated critiques of one another's philosophical positions have been argued and studied ever since. One of the more unique thinkers in the storied history of these schools of thought was Śāntarakṣita (725–788 C.E.), who, although offering critiques of Yogācāra, also famously wove Yogācāra ideas into his Madhyamaka framework. So prominent was the integration of Yogācāra ideas into his Madhyamaka thought that, in numerous Tibetan doxographies, he is considered to be the quintessential exponent of a view, the name of which appears to have been coined in Tibet and referred to in Tibetan as *rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma rang rgyud pa* (Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka, as it has been translated back into Sanskrit) or simply *rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma* (Yogācāra-Madhyamaka). He, along with his disciple Kamalaśīla, was probably the most prominent philosopher attempting a Mahāyāna syncretism of these two major philosophical trends within the tradition. This chapter will examine two interrelated topics tied to Śāntarakṣita's integration of Yogācāra-like tenets into his overarching Madhyamaka framework, both of which pertain to his descriptions of consciousness: his rejection of objects existing as utterly distinct from the consciousness perceiving them; and his acceptance of reflexive awareness (*svasamvedana, rang rig*). These are two mainline Yogācāra tenets that are broadly rejected by virtually all Mādhyamikas who do not attempt the kind of Yogācāra-Madhyamaka

syncretism that Śāntarakṣita does. While other subsequent Mādhyamikas in both Indian and Tibetan traditions have integrated large dimensions of the epistemological project of Dharmakīrti into their systems, they have either not included or have modified these more overtly Yogācāra dimensions to Dharmakīrti's *pramāṇa* thought. The particular way in which Śāntarakṣita interweaves these is a hallmark of his system of thought and is at the heart of his sophisticated integration of the critical philosophical movements of late Indian Mahāyāna philosophy. With regard to the question posed by the title of the original panel from which this volume springs ("Yogācāra and Madhyamaka: Complimentary or Conflicting Systems?"), Śāntarakṣita seems to fall into the "complimentary" camp, as opposed to those who may see the two major Mahāyāna systems as "conflicting." Nevertheless, while he recognizes the value of Yogācāra systems as a whole and obviously values many of the ideas enough to integrate them into his own philosophical project, Yogācāra thinking still plays a largely subordinate role for Śāntarakṣita, for whom a significant part of their utility is as doctrinal stepping-stones to his final Madhyamaka analysis.

Śāntarakṣita on the Rejection of External Objects

A citation from the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* used to indicate the Yogācāra system's basis in scripture is followed by Śāntarakṣita, in his *Mādhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti* (hereafter, MAV), with preliminary general comments to begin his treatment of Yogācāra thought:

> Since this system is known by means of epistemic instruments (*pramāṇa, tshad ma*) and very clear scriptures, and since it is an antidote to the endless exaggerated grasping of ordinary perceivers, it should be considered to be very pure. Likewise, [it should be considered very pure] because it rejects the existence of subtle particles and so forth and because it shows the contradictions [involved in distinguishing between] the characteristics of the subject and the objects of experience by means of the epistemic instruments previously explained. In addition, this system is very clear and is backed by scriptural quotations. . . . By relying on this system, masters remove the impurities of erroneous dichotomous concepts such as "I" and "mine", and "object" and "apprehender".

It is clear from this quotation that Śāntarakṣita thinks more kindly of his Yogācāra counterparts than did, for example, his fellow Mādhyamika Bhāviveka. But there is more than a conciliatory nod here. Śāntarakṣita, in the last sentence from the preceding quotation, begins to elucidate his own affinity for Yogācāra-type ideas, particularly the rejection of a radical separation between consciousness and its objects. There, in solidarity with his Yogācāra coreligionists, Śāntarakṣita highlights the contradictions present in distinguishing the characteristics of subjects and objects. He describes as "erroneous dichotomous concepts" the sort of subject-object duality, the principal display of ignorance, that is the target to be rejected by Yogācāra philosophical analysis.

Recognition of Śāntarakṣita's integration of this Yogācāra-like rejection of subject-object duality into his presentation of conventional truths has been noted in both Tibetan literature as well as contemporary scholarship, though, with few exceptions, neither have looked closely at how this idea functions within Śāntarakṣita's larger philosophical project. To do so I think it is useful to begin by examining Śāntarakṣita's own way of describing conventional truths (*saṃvṛtisatya, kun rdzob bden pa*). He does so in *Madhyāmakālaṃkāra* (hereafter, MA) after an elaborate application of the neither-one-nor-many argument, in which he rejects (exhaustively, in his opinion) the ultimate existence of an inherent nature (*svabhāva, rang bzhin*) in any object. Then, in the sixty-fourth stanza of MA, he tersely defines conventional truths as follows:

> Those phenomena that are only agreeable when not put to the test of analysis,
> Those phenomena that are produced and disintegrate, and Those that have the ability to function
> Are known to be of a conventional nature.

He elaborates in his auto-commentary by explaining that a conventional truth is known by conceptual thought or designated with worldly conventions. In the ninety-first stanza of MA he elaborates on the mind-only component of this definition:

> That which is cause and result
> Is mere consciousness only.
> Whatever is established by itself
> Is that which abides in consciousness.

"That which is cause and result" refers, at least in part, to conventional truths that earlier are described as impermanent (i.e., that which is produced, disintegrates, and has causal efficacy). Thus for Śāntarakṣita conventional truths are not utterly distinct from consciousness. This equation of conventional truths with mere consciousness is inextricably tied to Śāntarakṣita's epistemology in that he argues in his MAV commentary on this stanza that an immediate cause (*nye ba'i rgyu*) for the establishment of a visual object to the eye consciousness could not exist if that object existed in complete separation from consciousness and thus its existence could not be established by direct perception. As an epistemologist in the line of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, for whom the only two epistemic instruments are direct perception and inference, if direct perception is undermined by a gross separation of consciousnesses and their objects, there is a major epistemological problem. Thus for Śāntarakṣita, allegiance to Yogācāra ideas in his presentation of conventional truths as indistinct from consciousness—an argument he makes within his Madhyamaka framework—is inseparable from his allegiance to Dharmakīrti's Yogācāra epistemology.

Śāntarakṣita's Acceptance of Reflexive Awareness

The role of Yogācāra ideas in the epistemological concerns of Śāntarakṣita become more evident and more extensively elaborated upon in his discussion of reflexive awareness both in MA/V and in his section investigating external objects in his encyclopedic text, *Tattvasaṃgraha,* along with his disciple Kamalaśīla's commentary on it, *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā* (hereafter TS/P when considered together). This discussion begins in MA in the sixteenth stanza. In the immediately preceding stanzas, he had been arguing against certain non-Buddhist and Vaibhāṣika tenets, seemingly as if he were a proponent of Sautrāntika positions. He then appears to switch his perspective of analysis as the positions of these hypothetical Sautrāntikas are then critically examined from a Yogācāra perspective. In particular he is pleased that his coreligionists assert reflexive awareness, but he is perplexed by the Sautrāntika view that holds reflexive awareness, which does so while simultaneously maintaining that objects exist separately from consciousness. Śāntarakṣita, like most Yogācārins including Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, finds holding the two positions—the reflexive nature of awareness, and the externality of objects of perception—to be an untenable pairing.

Śāntarakṣita begins this discussion by defining the very nature of consciousness as that which is reflexively aware or self-knowing, and he distinguishes consciousness from inanimate objects on this ground. He seems to consider this to be a self-evident fact. He writes in the sixteenth stanza of MA:

> Consciousness is produced in the opposite way
> From that which is of an inanimate nature.
> That which is not the nature of being inanimate
> Is the self-knowing of this [consciousness].

Śāntarakṣita then argues in the seventeenth stanza, in response to his Buddhist adversaries who accept reflexive awareness and external objects, that even they must accept reflexive awareness to exist in a non-dual relationship with its object. He makes this argument on the grounds that consciousness, or awareness, is asserted by them to be truly singular. Śāntarakṣita appears to have two aims here: in the context of the neither-one-nor-many argument in which this discussion takes place in MA, he wants to demonstrate that a truly singular mind does not exist; and in the context of establishing the correct way of understanding the reflexive nature of awareness, he wants to demonstrate that objects cannot exist as distinct from consciousness. He attempts to demonstrate this argument by using his hypothetical opponent's own views against themselves by drawing out their illogical conclusions in one terse argument.

> Reflexive awareness could not be an entity
> That exists as agent and action [in relation to its object]
> Because it would be incorrect for that which is of a
> Single, partless nature to be three [i.e., knower, knowing, and known].

Even on his opponent's own terms, in which consciousness is asserted to be of singular and partless nature, claims of objects existing separately from that consciousness are reduced to absurdity since consciousness, the act of being conscious/aware, and the object(s) of consciousness are by definition manifold. Interestingly, Dharmakīrti makes a similar point in the first chapter of *Pramāṇavarttikakārikā* (PV) when he writes:

> [Excepting consciousness itself], there is nothing to be experienced by consciousness,
> And likewise it has no experience other [than self-experience];
> Since consciousness has no knower and object known,
> It is illuminated by itself.

In the *Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti* (MAV) section following this stanza and leading to the first half of the eighteenth stanza of MA, he writes:

> Not relying on others to be illuminated, that which is self-illuminating is called the reflexive awareness of consciousness (*rnam par shes pa'i rang rig pa*).
>
> Therefore, this [consciousness] is capable of self-knowing (*bdag shes*) Since this is the nature of consciousness.

Śāntarakṣita defines reflexive awareness by contrasting it with inanimate objects and proclaims reflexive awareness to be the defining characteristic of consciousness contra that which is not conscious, and because, according to this line of thinking, its object is not other than consciousness. Then, Śāntarakṣita proceeds to question what he believes to be an epistemological error in the presentation of his coreligionists, who assert the reflexive quality of awareness but also hold the objects of awareness to be utterly distinct from consciousness. This qualm comes up in the second half of the eighteenth stanza and in the nineteenth from MA. It is among several issues raised in the section on "Investigation of External Objects" in TS/P. In TS 1998 Śāntarakṣita clearly states that consciousness can never know external objects. Commenting on this passage in his TSP, Kamalaśīla, following Śāntarakṣita closely, states:

> Consciousness cannot apprehend external objects either with or without representations, or with representations that are different from the representation of the object. There is no other kind [of knowledge] aside from those.

The objection from MA reads as follows:

> How could that consciousness cognize
> The nature of objects from which it is distinct?

[Since] its nature does not exist in external objects (*gzhan*),
Given that you assert that objects of consciousness
And consciousness are different,
How could consciousness know objects other than consciousness?

These arguments in MA are made in the context of the application of the neither-one-nor-many argument, in which Śāntarakṣita is simultaneously concerned with rejecting the notion of a truly singular consciousness. Thus his line of questioning highlights the incongruity of a truly singular consciousness knowing a multiplicity of objects other than itself. But the fundamental epistemological point here, which is elaborated upon in further detail in MAV and TS/P, is that according to Śāntarakṣita it would not be possible to know objects directly if they were distinct entities or of distinct natures from consciousness. He acknowledges in the twentieth stanza that proponents of a type of representational theory of knowledge advocate that representations (*ākāra, rnam pa*) are mirror-like reflections that can be "suitably experienced by mere imputation". However, Śāntarakṣita rejects such a position on the grounds that, since such a representational theorist is attempting to posit knowledge (the existence of external objects implied by representations), knowledge extends further than the aggregate of its parts, the representations. Thus it makes no sense to posit externally cognized objects on these grounds. Since objects must not be wholly distinct or external from consciousness, the objects must be of the nature of consciousness and, thus, every moment of consciousness is a moment of reflexive consciousness or awareness, since it is a moment of awareness of its own nature.

This position obviously has deep resonance with Yogācāra thinking on the topic, a line of thinking that engendered spirited criticism from Indian Mādhyamikas such as Candrakīrti and Śāntideva, as well as later Tibetans such as Tsong kha pa. The key difference we find is that Śāntarakṣita applies Madhyamaka analysis to the mind itself and finds that it only exists conventionally, and not ultimately, contra his Yogācāra coreligionists. Thus, he only holds reflexive awareness of consciousness to exist conventionally as well. Whether or not Śāntarakṣita avoids further philosophical problems by qualifying his acceptance of reflexive awareness as *merely* conventional is a question for another paper. The point here is that he is clearly integrating critical aspects of a Yogācāra philosophical orientation into his overarching Madhyamaka project.

A Further Consideration in Śāntarakṣita's Yogācāra-Madhyamaka Syncretism

It seems to me that Śāntarakṣita's consciouness-only description of conventional truths plays two important roles in his thinking: one that is critical in addressing his epistemological concerns (described briefly in the previous two sections); and a second that is central to his soteriological concerns. The latter is relevant, lest we forget that, at the end of the day, the primary concern for any Mahāyāna philosopher is for their work to help facilitate the achievement of liberating wisdom. The soteriological dimension becomes evident in the ninety-second and ninety-third stanzas of MA, where Śāntarakṣita describes the role of Yogācāra ideas in his two truths presentation as part of a dynamic ascent from partial insight to complete insight. Analysis of conventional truths reveals important insights concerning the rejection of external objects. Ultimate (Madhyamaka) analysis reveals that even the mind has no inherent nature. Thus in this respect Yogācāra ideas are integrated as metaphorical stepping-stones on the ascent to perfect wisdom. Śāntarakṣita states as follows in the ninety-second and ninety-third stanzas of MA:

> By relying on the Mind-Only (*cittamātra, sems tsam pa*) system,
> Know that external entities do not exist.
> And by relying on this [Madhyamaka] system,
> Know that no self at all exists, even in that [mind].
>
> Therefore by holding
> The reigns of reasoning
> As one rides the chariots of the two systems (i.e., Yogācāra/Cittamātra and Madhyamaka),
> One becomes a real Mahāyānist.

For some later Mādhyamikas in Tibet, for example Go rams pa bsod nams seng ge (1429–1489), the utility and significance of conventional truths is largely downplayed or even dismissed as a byproduct of ignorance. However, for Śāntarakṣita (and perhaps others), proper understanding of conventional truths plays an important soteriological role in an ascent through increasingly more subtle understandings of reality, toward an accurate understanding of the ultimate. For him, the student's progress through mind-only analysis, in which one eliminates the "exaggerated grasping" at

external entities as inherently existent, is a critical step toward the ultimate elimination of all reification. This is achieved when one applies Madhyamaka analysis to realize that the mind itself also has no inherent existence. Thus, Śāntarakṣita notes the importance of utilizing both systems in his famous ninety-third stanza, quoted earlier. While for Śāntarakṣita the two systems seem to be complimentary in some respects in his two-truths framework, it is the Yogācāra that clearly compliments the Madhyamaka (and not visa versa) in an admittedly somewhat subservient role.

Concluding Remarks

The question of whether or not Yogācāra and Madhyamaka views are conflicting or complimentary is a complicated one for Śāntarakṣita. Clearly in his presentation of the two truths (if we are to bracket epistemological concerns for the time being), Yogācāra is important, albeit a sort of second-class philosophical citizen. Yet, if we are to think of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti as Yogācāras and consider the full impact their epistemological project had on the Madhyamaka project of Śāntarakṣita (not to mention on so many other Mādhyamikas in India and Tibet), then viewing Yogācāra as a second-class philosophical system in the thought of Śāntarakṣita may not be so apt. While other Mādhyamikas tend to deal with Dharmakīrti's epistemology by significantly modifying or eliminating many of its overtly Yogācāra dimensions that have been discussed in this chapter, Śāntarakṣita (and Kamalaśīla) seem almost unrepentant in their appreciation of these Yogācāra views. And yet I say *almost* unrepentant, because, in the end, there is a relegation of the utility of Yogācāra ideas to the arena of the conventional. Conversely, qualifying these positions as *merely* conventional in no way diminishes their importance in the philosophical system of Śāntarakṣita. And so the complication goes on for the quintessential exponent of the so-called Yogācāra-Madhyamaka.

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11

I Am a Brain in a Vat (Or Perhaps a Pile of Sticks by the Side of the Road)

Jay L. Garfield

Introduction: Modern Western Vats and Ancient Indian Apparitions

There are many ways to think through the relationship between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. Here I avoid all of the interesting historical and philological issues, and explore a way to bring to bear insights deriving from Madhyamaka and from Yogācāra on both questions about phenomenology and about the philosophy of mind and language. By using the Madhyamaka *catuṣkoṭi* to explore the interpretation of a metaphor from Vasubandhu's *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* through the lens of a hypothesis discussed by Hilary Putnam, I hope to show that, at least in the context of their deployment in the service of contemporary metaphysics and phenomenology, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are philosophical allies.

Hilary Putnam, in *Reason, Truth and History* (1981), famously argues that the Cartesian hypothesis that I am a brain in a vat is self-refuting, because inexpressible. The argument is disarmingly simple:

> . . . [T]he "sense data" produced by the automatic machinery do not represent trees (or anything external) even when they resemble our tree-images exactly. Just as a splash of paint might resemble a tree-picture without *being* a tree picture, so . . . a "sense datum" might be qualitatively identical with an image of a tree without being an image of a tree. How can the fact that, in the case of brains in a vat, the language is connected by the program with sensory inputs which do not intrinsically or extrinsically represent trees

> (or anything external) possibly bring it about that the whole system of representation, the langue-in-use, *does* refer to or represent trees or anything external?
>
> The answer is that it cannot. . . .[13]
>
> . . . "[V]at" refers to vats in the image in vat-English, or something related (electronic impulses or program features), but certainly not to real vats, since the use of "vat" in vat-English has no causal connection to real vats. . . . It follows that if their "possible world" is really the actual one, and we really are brains in a vat, then what we now mean by "we are brains in a vat" is that *we are brains in a vat in the image,* or something of the kind (if we mean anything at all). But part of the hypothesis that we are brains in a vat is that we aren't brains in a vat in the image. . . . So, if we are brains in a vat, then the sentence "We are brains in a vat" says something false (if it says anything). In short, if we are brains in a vat, then "We are brains in a vat" is false. So it is (necessarily) false.
>
> The supposition that such a possibility makes sense arises from a combination of two errors: (1) taking *physical possibility* too seriously; and (2) unconsciously operating with a magical theory of reference, a theory on which certain mental representations necessarily refer to certain kinds of things. [14–15]

For the statement "I am a brain in a vat" to be true in English, the word "I" must refer to me, the word "brain" must mean *brain,* and the phrase "a vat" must denote the vat I am in. But these words can only have these semantic values if they and I, as their user, bear the appropriate meaning-inducing relations to their referents. If I am a brain in a vat, these relations cannot obtain, and the words I utter (or take myself to utter) when I say "I am a brain in a vat" do not mean what they would in English. If the words are meaningful, they are false, since they can only mean that I am a brain in a vat if I am not a brain in a vat; were I a brain in a vat, these words would mean at most that I am an illusory brain in an illusory vat. I am, therefore, provably, not a brain in a vat. So argues Putnam.

I will sidestep the vast and interesting literature on this argument in order to juxtapose this argument with an equally famous argument from the Indian Buddhist tradition defending what at least appears to be a version of the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis, Vasubandhu's elephant simile at the end of *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*.

In doing so, I would like to stir one more Indian ingredient into this philosophical masala, the *catuṣkoti,* or *tetralemma* of Buddhist logic. This form of analysis partitions the logical space determined by any proposition not only into truth and falsity, but into four possibilities, including the possibility of *both* truth and falsity and *neither* truth nor falsity. This rubric is made famous by Nāgārjuna, who uses it to great effect in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. The juxtaposition of these two arguments through this Buddhist logical rubric will shed some light on the relationship between phenomenology, idealism, and semantics. I hope that this methodology suggests a way to deploy jointly texts from what might be seen to be rival Indian schools, and I hope that it reveals that there is enough common ground to justify this deployment.

The elephant simile in Vasubandhu is introduced at the end of *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* in order to illustrate the relationship among the *parikalpita-svabhāva* (the imagined nature), the *paratantra-svabhāva* (the dependent nature), and the *pariniṣpanna-svabhāva* (the consummate nature). These are the three natures of phenomena articulated in the *Saṃdhimirmocana-sūtra* that form the basis of Yogācāra ontology.

The simile here refers to what appears to be a classical Indian roadside magic show in which (the details are hazy, and my attempts to replicate this feat have failed spectacularly) a magician uses a piece of wood or a pile of sticks as a prop, and somehow—allegedly by the use of a mantra that affects the minds of those in the audience, though it is important to the simile that only the magician really knows how the trick works—causes the audience to see these sticks as a real elephant. On a first, and by now fairly standard exegetical pass (one we will have good reason to reconsider below), in the opening verses of this section (27 and 28), Vasubandhu tells us that our perception of external objects is like the perception of the elephant by the naïve villagers in the show. There is no elephant.

The dagger Macbeth *sees* in act II has an *imagined nature,* namely, as a mind-independent external object; nonetheless, there is no externality or mind-independence in the dagger Macbeth experiences. That imagined nature is purely projected, and is completely unreal, just like the elephant. Macbeth's dagger, however (like that more robust dagger wielded by his lovely wife), has a dependent nature. Its perception depends upon his mind and perceptual apparatus. That nature can either be misperceived as externality, or correctly perceived as ideality (of some kind, to be specified later). This is also the case with the sticks used by the magician: they

can be correctly perceived as a pile of sticks by the side of the road, as a prop for a cool trick, or misperceived as an elephant. The consummate nature of the dagger—that nature Macbeth would see from a fully awakened point of view—is the absence of the imagined in the dependent; that is, the fact that the dagger (again, whether his or hers) exists merely in dependence on mind; it is empty of externality and empty of a dualistic relation to my subjectivity. Just so, the fact that there is no real elephant in the pile of sticks is their actual nature, what is to be understood if one sees through the trick. Now, the (fairly standard) reading I am offering of these verses at this point is patently idealistic, and we shall have reason to complicate it, or even reject it, particularly as we situate these initial verses in the context of those that follow.

There is also a vast literature on Vasubandhu's views, much of which I will also sidestep. But we will need to wade into the complex controversy regarding whether Vasubandhu is best read as an idealist or as a phenomenologist and we will need to consider how to read this complex simile against the background of that dispute. It is by taking seriously his phenomenological side—even if we allow that he may also have been an idealist—that we are able to join the insights of this Yogācārin with those of Madhyamaka.

While I think that it is arguable that in at least some of his work—especially the *Vimśatikā* and the *Triṃsikākārikā*—Vasubandhu defends an idealistic position, it is also plausible that in other texts—particularly the *Trisvsabhāvanideśa*—he does *not,* and that in these texts he can be at least charitably, and maybe even most accurately, read as a phenomenologist. It is, at any rate, this latter reading that I will explore, in the effort to understand how this third-century Indian philosopher can help us to understand the sense in which I am indeed a brain in a vat; the sense in which I am *not* a brain in a vat; the sense in which I am *both* a brain in a vat and not a brain in a vat; and, finally, the sense in which I am *neither* a brain in a vat nor not a brain in a vat. I hope that these readings will provide a way to take Vasubandhu's arguments seriously on their own terms and in the context of contemporary philosophy of mind, epistemology and phenomenology. We will consider each *koti* in turn.

1. I Am a Brain in a Vat

I am a brain in a vat, and obviously so. Let us first consider a perfectly naturalistic reason for this conclusion. We will then extend this to a

phenomenological argument trading on Vasubandhu's analysis in the verses under consideration. What is it to be a brain in a vat? It is for one's brain to be located in a container, hooked up to input devices being controlled by external forces (in Putnam's case, of course, a mad scientist; in Descartes' an evil demon; in Vasubandhu's my karma) that generate my experiences; it is for all of my efferent activity to result in actions or their effects (*karma)* whose reality is only apparent to me through those same afferent pathways; it is to have no *unmediated* access to reality; and it is for all of the *mediation* to be through media *opaque* to my consciousness the veracity of which is impossible to verify independently—as opaque, one might say, as the operations of a magician at a good magic show.

Well, that's what I am, and what I guess you are, too. My brain, as far as I can tell, and as far as the best scientists (real or imagined) tell me, is housed in a vat, often called a *human body*. It is indeed—if I can believe my experience at all—hooked up to input devices (the afferent nerves and blood supply) that are indeed controlled by external forces, including—in Quine's felicitous phrase—sensory irritations, in turn perhaps caused by external objects, the chemistry of my blood, etcetera. And indeed it is only through these afferent pathways that I can have any knowledge of the effects or reality of my own apparent activity. I have no direct *unmediated* knowledge of any reality independent of these sensory inputs, and their actual nature and relation to whatever might lie beyond them is indeed opaque to me. I emphasize that this is not the nattering of nabobs of ontological negativism; it is just plain naturalistic description of the relation between our brains and the rest of the world. So, even on the *least* idealist reading of current science, I am obviously, and uncontroversially, a brain in a vat. And if that is the case, when I say so, I do so *truly*, and if truly, presumably *meaningfully*.

Note—and this is the first reason that Vasubandhu is an important partner in this conversation—that this conclusion is not necessarily idealist. It is neither to deny the materiality of the brain, nor of the vat, nor to deny the reality of the world to which I have only mediated access. There is a tempting way to take this in an idealistic direction: one could argue that the *objects of my experience*—the percepts in my sensory fields, for instance—inasmuch as they are only the inner effects of distal causes about which I know nothing, are purely mental. So, one would argue, in a somewhat Berkeleyan vein—albeit a vein that leads us directly to the more nuanced view articulated by Kant—that nothing I ever know exists externally to consciousness—including, for that matter, my brain, and the vat

that encloses it. And, sowhatever physicality might characterize whatever might exist in some other, unknown way, nothing I encounter is physical.

But we should resist this idealistic temptation, for at least two reasons. First, it begs the ontological question in a subtle but important way. Consider the tulip before me. Even when I grant that the *experience* of the tulip is an inner event, caused proximally by the input to my brain, to argue that the tulip just *is* the experience of it presupposes its conclusion—that perception is not a causal interaction with a distal object but a mere conscious episode. Berkeley may be able to achieve a standoff—maybe—but certainly not victory on this terrain. Second, and more important—and we will have reason to reflect more carefully on this later—as Kant was to argue, what goes for the tulip goes for the percept, too. Just as we cannot treat the external object as a thing known as it is itself, in abstraction from the sensory and cognitive faculties that deliver it to us, we cannot treat our inner experiences as things in themselves known apart from our inner sense, or, as Vasubandhu would call it, our introspective consciousness—*manas-vijñāna*. This, of course, is the central and decisive point made by Kant in the "Refutation of Idealism" in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The asymmetry the idealist needs cannot be established.

The idealist needs a wedge that distinguishes the outer from the inner, giving privileged status to the latter; but all that is forthcoming is a distinction between experience and its object. This distinction is ontologically neutral. Note, for instance, that we can talk in English, as well as in Sanskrit or Tibetan, both of *real* and of *unreal* objects/*artha*/*don* of cognitive or physical acts. One can describe, wish for, or aim at the existent as well as the nonexistent. The act/object distinction instead distinguishes only the subjective from the objective aspects of a cognitive act, enabling an anatomy of experience, but not an investigation of reality. With this distinction between idealistic and phenomenological readings of our vat-confinement, let us return to the initial four verses of the text in question to see what it would be to read Vasubandhu in this way. Moving from plucked tulips to conjured elephants doesn't change much:

27. Like an elephant that appears
Through the power of a magician's mantra—
Only the percept appears;
The elephant is completely nonexistent.

28. The imagined nature is the elephant;
The other-dependent nature is the visual percept;
The non-existence of the elephant therein
Is explained to be the consummate.

29. Through the root consciousness
The nonexistent duality appears.
But since the duality is completely non-existent,
There is only a percept.

30. The root consciousness is like the mantra.
Reality can be compared to the wood.
Imagination is like the perception of the elephant.
Duality can be seen as the elephant.

The deployment of the example in stanza 27 certainly invites an idealistic interpretation of this passage, and I would not want to deny the cogency of that reading. But it does not *force* such a reading. For stanza 27 only sets out the example. In the example, the elephant is nonexistent, because the example is one of a conjuring trick. We need to look further to see how Vasubandhu articulates the analogy. In stanza 28 he tells us that the elephant is analogous to the imagined nature—the *parikalpita-svabhāva/kun brtag rang bzhin*—and so we are to conclude that *that nature* is what is unreal in the same sense that the elephant is unreal in the conjuring trick, and in stanza 30 he specifically identifies the elephant with *duality,* and hence, by transitivity, duality with the imagined nature. So, if we focus specifically on this set of verses, Vasubandhu is arguing only that subject-object *duality* is unreal, and that, just as the mantra causes the elephant to appear, that duality in our experience is caused to appear by our root-consciousness, what we might anachronistically call our neurocognitive processes.

Does Vasubandhu side here with Berkeley in denying that there is *no* reality beyond the imagined, or even beyond its intentional content? Not obviously. Let us parse stanza 30 with care. Part of the causal basis for experience is the root consciousness/our psychological processes, just as part of the basis of the audience's experience of the elephant is the mantra. So far, so good. Nothing idealistic, but nothing on the other side, either. But now we get to reality. To what is it compared? To the pile of sticks. They are certainly material in the analogy, and external to the minds of

the audience. Moreover, they are seen *as sticks* by the magician doing the conjuring—and even by the audience when the spell wears off. Once again, this does not *force* a nonidealist reading. After all, this is only the analogy. Just as the nonexistence of the elephant doesn't force idealism, the existence of the sticks doesn't force materialism.

Nonetheless, if we have not already taken the idealist side, it does open up another possibility, especially in conjunction with the claim that imagination (*rnam rtog/vikalpa)* is like the *perception* of the elephant. Perception has as its material condition, or *de re* object, (*ālambanā/dmigs rkyen) reality* or a pile of sticks, but delivers as its intentional *object (artha/don)* a subject-object duality *absent from reality itself,* or a hallucinated elephant. While the *intentional object* of perception is denied existence independent of the mind, neither perception nor the external world that occasions it is even *interrogated* ontologically. On this purely phenomenological reading, Vasubandhu argues that our ordinary experience involves a confusion of the nature of that experience with the fundamental nature of reality, caused by instinctive cognitive habits of which we are unaware, and leading us to ascribe the subject-object duality we superimpose in consciousness to reality itself as it is independent of that superimposition, thus confusing construction with discovery. This gains further support from a careful reading of stanzas 28 and 29, the verses that link those we have been examining so far:

28. The imagined nature is the elephant;
    The other-dependent nature is the visual percept;
    The non-existence of the elephant therein
    Is explained to be the consummate.

29. Through the root consciousness
    The nonexistent duality appears.
    But since the duality is completely nonexistent,
    There is only a percept.

Here the point to be realized (28) is that there is no elephant at all in reality—that subject-object duality is imaginary, and that it arises (29) through our cognitive processes, in which we confuse a real percept with the unreal structure of subject standing over against object.

Reading Vasubandhu this way, we see him arguing, and indeed arguing persuasively, that I am a brain in a vat. My experience (the dependent

nature, characterized as percepts) is the joint product of a reality that I never directly apprehend (the sticks) and a set of psychological processes that are opaque to me (the mantra, or root consciousness). To the extent that I take my experience to be a direct deliverance of reality, to exist as it appears to me, or to be, *qua* experience, *external to me*, I am simply deceived.

I am, however, to the extent that I am a brain in a vat, *also* a pile of sticks by the side of the road. For, as I have been emphasizing, in foregoing the idealist's distinction of outer versus inner, in turn mapped to real versus unreal, in favor of the phenomenologist's distinction between act and content, my own existence as subject is rendered as problematic as the existence of the object I confuse with an external cause of my experience. Where I seem to come upon a world neatly divided into *me,* the *experiencer,* and *it,* the *experienced,* all I find instead is *experience*. The division into subject and object, and the subsequent reification or deprecation of one with respect to the other, depending on how I take things, is my contribution, not my discovery. So, then, on this view, what am I? I am, independent of my experience, just what the elephant, or the tulip, is: a pile of sticks beside the road that I have never encountered directly, and probably never will.

2. *I Am* Not *a Brain in a Vat*

Putnam, as we have seen, argues that I cannot be a brain in a vat, and does so on semantic grounds, depending specifically on a causal theory of reference. But that argument is unsound, and indeed question-begging. It presupposes that the human body is unlike any vat, and so ignores the fundamental fact of embodiment. It presupposes that the English that Putnam and we speak is not Vat-English, thus taking its very conclusion as a premise. Only a philosophical community befogged by an uncritical realism, and by the view that the only alternative is a mystical idealism, could have been seduced by this particular mantra.

But bad arguments may have true conclusions, and this one does. I am *not* a brain in a vat, but since this conclusion is ontological, we can't get there semantically, a route that, to borrow a phrase from Russell, has all of the advantages of theft over honest toil. Let's first follow the sixth-century Candrakīrti and get there honestly, and then note how Wittgenstein suggests a similar path in *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty*.

In *Madhyamakāvatāra-bhāṣya,* Candrakīrti begins where we left off, noting that any attempt to discredit the reality of external objects yields

arguments that, if cogent, discredit the reality of the self as well. Nonetheless, Candrakīrti does not concede the conclusion he takes the Yogācārins to defend viz., that the mind is *more real* than external objects—that while external objects are entirely imaginary, the mind is *real,* and that it must be, if it is to be that which experiences and imputes reality to an unreal external world. Candrakīrti argues instead that the same arguments that show external objects to be mind-dependent, impermanent, and without any ultimate entity show the mind, or the self, to be mind-dependent, impermanent, and with no entity of its own.

The subject, Candrakīrti argues, is not a unitary thing, but a composite of myriad functions that are themselves composite; not something that can be identified over time independent of our representation of it; and is dependent for its existence and character on innumerable causes and conditions. The self we experience and posit—the referent of the first-person pronoun—he argues, is merely a conceptual, verbal designation on the basis of that causal stream, not even that stream itself. We know ourselves not directly, but only imperfectly, using a conceptually mediated inner sense that is just as fallible as any outer sense. Candrakīrti's refutation of idealism, like that Kant was to write over a millennium later, proceeds, in Kant's words by "turning the game played by idealism against itself," (*Critique* B276) that is, by demonstrating first that idealism is essentially a contrastive doctrine, assigning the mind or the inner world a greater degree of reality than physical objects, or the external world; and, second, that it fails in its attempt to distinguish those degrees of reality.

What does this all have to do with brains in vats? Well, once we see that the essence of idealism is the ontological contrast it draws between mind and the material world, we see that the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis is an idealistic hypothesis par excellence. I, the brain, am real; the world I imagine is just that, purely imaginary. Candrakīrti's analysis bites here just as it does in the context of Buddhist dialectics. On the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis, my access to the external world is dubious, but my knowledge of my immediate cognitive state is secure. I know that I am experiencing a world containing trees and birds, but I do not whether there are indeed trees or birds.

None of this makes sense, though. For if the fact that my knowledge of the external world is mediated makes the epistemic status of the world dubious and renders coherent the claim that it is unreal, then the same goes for my self and my own experience. My knowledge of my own inner states and experience is mediated by my introspective processes. My

representation of myself as a continuing subject of experience requires a conceptual construction of a unity from a multiplicity of cognitive processes and states occurring over time. I have no better knowledge of my inner life than I do of the external world, and no greater assurance of my own reality—if that means the kind of reality that persons have—than I do of that of the external world. So if to be a brain in a vat means to be something assured of its own reality in intimate, veridical contact with its own experience—but with only dubious, mediated access to the external world, which may indeed be nonexistent—I am *not* a brain in a vat.

Of course the resonances of this argument to those of Kant in the *Refutation of Idealism* are strong. But there are also intriguing affinities to important insights of Wittgenstein both in his treatment of self-knowledge in *Philosophical Investigations* and in his discussion of idealism and certainty about the external world in *On Certainty*. In §§305–308 of *Philosophical Investigations,* Wittgenstein notes the ways in which we use our conception of external phenomena as models for understanding the mind, leading us to posit inner mechanisms—mechanisms we neither observe nor whose nature we really understand. The critique of behaviorism and of mechanism in the context of which this observation occurs need not concern us here. But the insight that our self-knowledge is not *immediate,* but is given by an infallible inner sense, is important. We can join this with the Sellarsian insight (1963) that, to the extent that we think of our inner episodes as *significant, as meaningful,* we understand them on the analogy of language. And language, in turn, can only be a public phenomenon, inasmuch as meaning emerges from rule-governed behavior, and rules require communities to constitute them. Therefore, to the extent that we think *anything at all,* or think that we do, we do so in virtue of being members of actual linguistic and epistemic communities. This entails that if I am a mind at all, and if I know myself at all, I am *not* a brain in a vat.

In his consideration of Moore's refutation of idealism in *On Certainty,* Wittgenstein returns to the theme of the social dimension of knowledge. He argues persuasively that, since knowledge is *justified* true belief, and since justification is a social practice that must be learned from others and that is responsible to evidentiary practices and arguments that get their warrant from their reliability and their acceptance by others, knowledge is possible if, and only if, we participate in epistemic communities in the context of a world against which our claims are tested. Moreover, Wittgenstein argues, *doubt* is an epistemic activity that must be learned, and whose felicity conditions are socially and pragmatically determined.

Doubt, moreover, presupposes a background of true beliefs. To doubt a proposition requires one to know how to doubt, what justifies doubt, what it would be for the proposition to be true, and so forth. Genuine doubt is impossible in the context of massive Cartesian error. These epistemic attitudes, like all others, are not individualistically characterized psychological states, but are norm-governed social epistemic practices. Therefore, even to *doubt* that there is an external world presupposes that there is one; and to *know* that I am a brain in a vat presupposes that I am in fact a person among persons whose beliefs are, by in large, true.

So, even to ask whether I am a brain in a vat—an individual nervous system massively deceived into thinking that it is a person among persons, embedded in an external world—presupposes that I am *not* a brain in a vat, that I *am* a person among persons, embedded in an external world. The transcendental *epistemic* conditions of asking the question guarantee that the answer is negative. I am *not* a brain in a vat.

3. I Am and Am Not a Brain in a Vat

So far I have argued soundly that I *am* a brain in a vat and that I am *not* a brain in a vat. So much for the first two *koṭis*. It would seem to follow from this that I *both am and am not* a brain in a vat, and I will now argue that that is so. This conclusion is in fact part of Śāntarakṣita's synthesis of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in *Madhyamakālaṁkāra*. In that text, Śāntarakṣita argues that Yogācāra provides the best analysis of conventional reality, and Madhyamaka the best analysis of ultimate reality. This conclusion is prima facie surprising. It would appear odd to claim that, *conventionally*, the external world does not exist, and that subject-object duality is an illusion. But this is not so odd if we read Yogācāra not as idealism, but as phenomenology. And it might appear odd to contrast this view of conventional reality with a view of *ultimate* reality according to which all phenomena are *conventionally* real, though ultimately empty. Śāntarakṣita writes:

92. On the basis of Cittamātra,
One should understand the absence of external objects.
On the basis of our system,
One should understand that there is also a complete absence of self.

93. Whoever rides the chariot of these two systems,
Guiding them with the reins of logic,
Will thereby attain the goal,
The realization of the Mahāyāna itself.

rGyal tshab rje comments incisively:

> Consider all phenomena comprised under causes and effects. They are not substantially different from consciousness. This is because they exist in virtue of being experienced through authoritative perception. This entailment is valid because given this premise, they necessarily exist substantially as consciousness. These phenomena should be understood conventionally in this way as merely mind, in virtue of lacking any external realty. But ultimately, even mind does not exist. For ultimately, it has neither a singular nor a manifold nature. [599]

rGyal tshab rejects the inconsistency of *cittamātra*—at least as it is deployed by Śāntarakṣita—with Madhyamaka. The former, he indicates, gives us an analysis of our experience of the natural world (all phenomena comprised under causes and effects) as known to us only through consciousness. The latter shows us that neither object nor subject exists ultimately; there is no contrast possible between their ontological status. This is an apposite development of Śāntarakṣita's insight. Inasmuch as the world we experience is only a world delivered by our consciousness, nothing we immediately experience can be substantially different from that consciousness. But that nondifference from consciousness does not in the end give consciousness a privileged position; both the subject and object side are ultimately known in the same way—through perceptual and conceptual mediation—and exist in the same way—as empty of intrinsic identity.

Śāntarakṣita's synthesis would make no sense if we read Yogācāra as idealism, and indeed his analysis might be the best textual case for the claim that Yogācāra was read in India phenomenologically. It is hard to see how one could either take idealism seriously as an analysis of our ordinary view of reality, or join a doctrine according to which the external world is nonexistent and the mind is substantially existent with one according to which they have an identical status. If we read Yogācāra phenomenologically, on the other hand, Śāntarakṣita's project makes much more sense. A lot of sense, in fact. It is important for any Madhyamaka

account of the two truths that both are *truths,* and that they are consistent with one another. And Śāntarakṣita is a Madhyamaka, after all, even if he is also Yogācārin. Let's take Candrakīrti's account of the conventional nature of things seriously—a thing's conventional nature is the way it appears to ordinary people. Let us, with Śāntarakṣita, take that to be the way things are *experienced.* As we have seen, they are experienced, just as is the elephant in the magic show, only as they appear as delivered by our senses, through input channels opaque to us, shot through with subject-object duality. As far as our experience goes, we are brains in vats; the conventional truth—the everyday world—is the world that Yogācāra phenomenology characterizes in such detail.

But there is no ontology there, no account of the nature of the *objects* of our experience, only of the experience itself. Ontology, for a Mādhyamika, comes at the ultimate level—even if that ontology is itself a recusal from the project of ontology itself. And for Śāntarakṣita, it is at the ultimate level that we find that things have no intrinsic nature—not because they are nonexistent, but because they exist only in dependence on causes and conditions, parts and wholes, and conceptual imputation in the familiar Madhyamaka way. That is, we, and the objects and others with whom we interact, are interdependent realities. We are not, at the ultimate level, brains in a vat.

If I take Śāntarakṣita's synthesis seriously, and if I do so in the context of a phenomenological understanding of the Yogācāra of Vasubandhu and a realistic reading of Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka, I see that I am and am not a brain in a vat. It is true that, from a phenomenological standpoint, I am a brain in a vat. The self I experience, and the objects I experience, are nondually related, but dualistically experienced; they are mere appearances caused in ways I can never know. From an ontological standpoint, however, this view is untenable. I can only make sense of the truth even of the claim that I am a brain in a vat if I am not a brain in a vat. The very fact that I *know* that I am a brain in a vat, or even the fact that I *doubt* that I am not a brain in a vat, shows that I am not.

These facts, moreover, are not reducible to one another. Despite their apparent inconsistency, they are both true. Despite being both true, neither is reducible to the other. From the mere fact of emptiness and conventional reality, one cannot deduce the phenomenological character of experience. Moreover, it is not through an analysis of our experience that we gain an understanding of the fundamental nature of reality, but through ontological analysis. Even if, *per impossibile,* we had substantial

selves, and lived in a world of things with essences, our access to them would be mediated; we would still be brains in vats from that point of view.

The fact that phenomenology and ontology are so independent and yet constitute two indispensible levels of analysis appears to me to be one of Śāntarakṣita's deepest and most original insights. It is not only the basis for his own synthesis, but a promising basis for the project of joining a Madhyamaka metaphysics to a Yogācāra ontology as we bring Buddhism to bear on contemporary discourse.

4. I Neither Am Nor Am Not a Brain in a Vat

One *koṭi* to go. I neither am nor am not a brain in a vat. And this one is simple. To accept the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis as Putnam develops it is to accept a radical idealism or Cartesian skepticism with regard to the external world. And this makes no sense at all. The hypothesis cannot, as we have seen, even be asserted coherently.

But I am also not *not* a brain in a vat. And this is so precisely because I am *not* a brain in a vat. How can this be so? Well, as we have seen, the fact that I am not a brain in a vat amounts to a kind of robust realism about other persons and about the world we inhabit. That robust realism also entails accepting a naturalistic and realistic understanding of my own sensory and cognitive apparatus, and so of the fact that my perceptual and cognitive states—including even my apperceptive and reflexively cognitive states—arise in the familiar opaque way adumbrated in contemporary cognitive science. Given that they do, as Śāntarakṣita and rGyal tshab rJe point out, it can't be that I am not *not* a brain in a vat.

To say *only* that I am *not* a brain in a vat would be to deny my embodiment—to deny that my body is indeed a vat containing my brain, and to deny the disjunction between reality as it is experienced and what reality is independent of experience, to succumb, in other words, to the strongest possible version of the Myth of the Given—the view that the world is given directly to consciousness as it is in itself. To say *only* that I *am* a brain in a vat would be to deny the role that my social and natural context plays in my cognitive life. I am therefore neither a brain in a vat nor am I not a brain in a vat. I am a pile of sticks by the side of the road, experiencing itself as a brain in a vat believing that it is not one, and a non-brain-in-a-vat knowing itself to be one.

5. Mu

Anyone familiar with Madhyamaka dialectics knows that the *catuṣkoṭi* comes in two positive and negative flavors: whatever can be asserted in each limb of the positive *catuṣkoti* can be denied in each of the negative *catuṣkoṭi,* underlying the Madhyamaka claim to thesislessness. So it is with the brain-in-a-vat thesis.

It is not the case that I am a brain in a vat. Why not? Because if I was, I couldn't say so. The conditions for the meaningfulness of my own thought and speech would not obtain. It is not the case that I am not a brain in a vat. Were I not a brain in a vat, I would not be embodied; I would not be a perceiver or a conceiver; I would not be connected to the world or to my own experience via the only channels that can connect me to the objects of my cognition and speech. It is not even the case that I am both a brain in a vat and not a brain in a vat. After all, if I am not a brain in a vat, nor am I a brain in a vat, I certainly can't be both.

Moreover, it is not the case that I am neither a brain in a vat nor not a brain in a vat, and this is both the hardest *koṭi* to grasp and the most profound. At any moment in the dialectic of reflection and experience it is impossible either for me to deny that I am a brain in a vat (after all, reason tells me that I am), or that I am not a brain in a vat (after all, reason tells me that I am not).

I find that on reflection, then, I neither can affirm nor deny that I am a brain in a vat. I can't say anything at all on the matter. My relation to this hypothesis, when considered from this standpoint of *Mu,* of absolute Madhyamaka negation, is inexpressible. And there is a reason for this, which is itself a lesson, and part of the lesson Vasubandhu intends by the analogy with which he closes *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*: Both the claim that I am a brain in a vat and the claim that I am not a brain in a vat suffer from profound presupposition failure. They begin by presupposing a referent for the first-person pronoun, and then ask about its status.

Who, or what, is this thing that might either be or not be a brain in a vat? It is at least a metaphysical or epistemic *subject,* posited as distinct from, and related somehow to, its object (*ālambana).* Having taken for granted its identity, reality, and distinctness from its objects, we can then ask about its precise status, and use the law of the excluded middle to assert that it either is or is not vat-bound. The set of presuppositions should remind Mādhyamikas of the negative tetralemmas in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* regarding causation, emptiness, and the Tathāgata. In these contexts Nāgārjuna argues

that none of the four *kotis* makes sense, precisely because of such presupposition failure.

The same presupposition failure obtains in this case. In posing the vat question, we begin with the presupposition of an unproblematic subject, a subject necessarily distinct from its object, and then pose our question. But that presupposition is equivalent to the presupposition of the reality of the self, and of subject-object duality, and these are the very targets of both Yogācāra and Madhyamaka analysis, each of which is aimed at establishing selflessness and nonduality. The very posing of the question, "Am I a brain in a vat?" then *begs* the question against Vasubandhu and, for that matter, Nāgārjuna (and, for that matter, the entire Buddhist tradition). It does so by presupposing an unproblematic unified subject of experience, precisely the subject that is the target of the dialectic of each of these schools. Despite the fact that Candrakīrti tars Yogācāra with the brush of reification of the self, we see that when we read Vasubandhu—at least in the present text—phenomenologically, they are very much in agreement in this analysis. The negative tetralemma constitutes the reductio on the hypothesis they both reject.

The ensuing thesislessness with regard to the self, issuing from the insight that the self in question is merely a nominal posit and has no independent existence, brings us back to *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*. Let us return to the final verses:

The imagined nature is subject-object duality. We take the world to be given to us primordially as structured by this duality, but that duality is a superimposition. Indeed, at one level we experience the world in that way, but a deeper phenomenological analysis of that experience shows it to be an illusion of consciousness, not unlike an optical illusion. Just as at one level we see the two lines of the Müller-Lyer illusion as unequal, we know that at another level we see them as equal in length. The duality, just like the inequality, is illusory, and is nothing more than a percept, a way something is taken, not anything given. Subject-object duality, and with it the kind of subjectivity we posit as the presupposition of the brain-in-a-vat question, is, like the elephant, nonexistent, although experienced.

In the magic show, when the spell is broken, the elephant vanishes, and we just see a pile of sticks; in ordinary life, when the spell of self-grasping and the reification of subjectivity is broken, subject-object duality vanishes, and we inhabit a world of impermanent, interdependent phenomena. The dissolution of the experience of objects as dually related

to the self is also the dissolution of the experience of the self, as it is posited only in relation to its objects. To paraphrase (or to torture) Dōgen:

> Being in the world.
> To what can it be compared?
> Sticks, piled by the road.

Is Vasubandhu's purpose, as most exegetes, following Candrakīrti, would have it, the reduction of the external world to the status of a hallucination and the establishment of the hallucinating consciousness as the only reality? It need not be. On this reading, the external world is not rejected; only its *externality* is rejected. That is, it is not the *world* that is nonexistent, but the duality between mind and world. Our *lebenswelt*—the only world we ever inhabit—emerges in full reality not in spite of, but in virtue of, it emptiness of independence, and in virtue of, not in spite of, its constitution through the operation of our sensory and cognitive apparatus.

Is this realistic reading, as some exegetes of cognitive science would have it (Churchland 1976, Metzinger 2003), the reduction of mind and subjectivity to the status of a hallucination, and the establishment of the physical world as the only reality? Again, not necessarily. On this view, psychological phenomena—all of them, including both hallucination and perception—are real natural phenomena. Just like any real phenomena, we experience them only subject to the conditions of our own *real* cognitive processes. But cognitive processes need not be thought of as any different with respect to their degree of reality from any other natural phenomena. So the *reality* of our inner life is not denied, only its *internality*. Just as the world emerges only from mind, mind emerges only from the world.

6. What the Brain-in-the-Vat Argument Does and Doesn't Show

Consideration of the brain-in-a-vat scenario shows us something, but not as much as one might have thought. In particular, it shows us that we need carefully to distinguish a number of perspectives from which the question can be asked, and to nuance and qualify the question accordingly. And Vasubandhu's approach is helpful here. There is a perfectly good sense in which we are brains in vats, and another sense in which we

can't be. These senses are perfectly consistent with one another, and must be integrated if we are to understand the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, and the relationship between our experience and the world we experience—including, I emphasize, our experience of ourselves, and the objective subjects who do the experiencing.

But no version of the argument can lead to the conclusion that there are no real objects of experience. Nor can any version of the argument get to the conclusion that the world we inhabit and with which our thought and language engage exists as we experience it independent of our minds, thought, and language. The argument has nothing to do with reference, and nothing to do with the reality of subjectivity, but everything to do with the complex reciprocal relationship between experience, reality, and being. Consideration of the possibility that we are brains in vats shows us that we are and are not: were we not brains in vats, we could not know anything; were we only brains in vats, there would be nothing to know.

7. Being in the World: What the Elephant Simile Does and Doesn't Show

Vasubandhu's elephant simile also shows us something, but also less than one might have thought, and Putnam's approach is helpful here. The simile does not show us that there is *no* external world; nor does it show us that there *is* one. It is not even aimed in that direction. Instead it illustrates the complex nature of our subjectivity, a subjectivity in which at the most basic level we inhabit a world in which the distinctions between subject and object, internal and external, are entirely absent; but a subjectivity that also systematically mis-takes that world to be saturated with that very duality in virtue of cognitive processes that, in a kind of cognitive reflex, superimpose that structure at a higher level on an experience that does not present it at a more primordial level. That is the conjuring trick. We systematically deceive ourselves about the nature of our own experience, and hence about the world in which we live. But it is a deception through which we can learn to see.

The point is not that when we see elephants in the street (at least when we do so in *India*) we are really hallucinating; that there are only piles of sticks beside the road and that only our experience—the hallucination—is real. That is the idealistic reading of the simile I urge us to reject. Vasubandhu's point is that when we see elephants in the road, that

experience is multilayered. In naïve introspection, we take both our own subjective state and the objectively presented pachyderm to be presented to us as they exist, related to one another as experiencing subject and experienced object. But this is a mis-taking not only of the elephant, but also of ourselves, and of the structure of the experience at a more primordial level. At that more fundamental level, the elephant we perceive on the road is a conceptual-perceptual construction wrought by our sensory and cognitive apparatus in response to stimulation; our subjectivity is constructed by apperceptual processes, and the duality we project in which we take ourselves simultaneously to be aware of self and other as distinct entities in this experience is itself constructed. That is the *conjured elephant*. We, the elephant, and the moment of experience are all sticks in a pile by the side of the road. This is a conclusion in which Mādhyamikas and Yogācārins happily concur, and on which their analyses nicely converge.

Vasubandhu and Putnam each invite us to interrogate the structure of experience and the structure of Dasein. The figure of the brain in the vat is meant by Putnam to demonstrate the necessity of the existence of the external world as we perceive it; that of the illusory elephant is often taken to deny the external world's existence at all. Instead, I have argued, each calls upon us to challenge neither the reality nor the illusory character of the objects we perceive, but rather our instinctive view that they, we, and our experience of our own being are given to us just in the way that they exist, or that anything ever could be.

Appendix: Final Verses of Vasubandhu's Trisvabhāvanirdeśa (Treatise on the Three Natures)

27. Like an elephant that appears
Through the power of a magician's mantra—
Only the percept appears;
The elephant is completely nonexistent.

28. The imagined nature is the elephant;
The other-dependent nature is the visual percept;
The non-existence of the elephant therein
Is explained to be the consummate.

29. Through the root consciousness
The nonexistent duality appears.
But since the duality is completely non-existent,
There is only a percept.

30. The root consciousness is like the mantra.
Reality can be compared to the wood.
Imagination is like the perception of the elephant.
Duality can be seen as the elephant.

31. When one understands how things are,
Perfect knowledge, abandonment,
And accomplishment—
These three characteristics are simultaneously achieved.

32. Knowledge is non-perception;
Abandonment is non-appearance;
Attainment is accomplished through non-dual perception.
That is direct manifestation.

33. Through the non-perception of the elephant,
The vanishing of its percept occurs;
And so does the perception of the piece of wood.
This is how it is in the magic show.

34. In the same way, through the non-perception of duality
There is the vanishing of duality.
When it vanishes completely,
Non-dual awareness arises.

35. Through perceiving correctly,
Through seeing the non-referentiality of mental states,
Through following the three wisdoms,
One will effortlessly attain liberation.

36. Through the perception of mind-only
One achieves the non-perception of objects;
Through the non-perception of Objects
There is also the non-perception of mind. (Garfield 2002)

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