

An Approach to Vicāra in Mādhyamaka Buddhism Based
on a Consideration of Early Buddhist
Scholasticism and the Prāsaṅgika
form of Polemic

by

David E. Narine

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DAVID E. NARINE

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ABSTRACT

Questions of the purpose and content of the teaching of Nāgārjuna remain elusive to contemporary interpreters. This is due in no small part to the scarcity of original source materials but also due to the convoluted and rhetorical style of argumentation that is the trade mark of his thought.

The present study addresses questions of interpretation by considering the context of scholastic Buddhism prior to and contemporaneous with Nāgārjuna. In this way, a grasp can be made of the philosophical issues that informed the Mādhyamaka philosophy.

The result of this study has been a recognition of seminal teachings to the Mādhyamaka such as the Abhidharma and the Prajñāpāramitā. In addition, the study has been able to focus upon the strictly critical nature of the Mādhyamaka system and therefore stress the prāsaṅgika interpretation of its arguments.

In conclusion, many modern interpretations have been found to mischaracterize the Mādhyamaka philosophy. Undoubtedly, a failure to fully appreciate the complexity of early scholastic Buddhism contributed to many mischaracterizations. Also, a general failure to remain consistent with Mādhyamaka doctrines has marred several interpretations. In the end, the present study has suggested a context for the Mādhyamaka and an approach that reveals its critical nature.

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Introduction

"The Mādhyamika philosophy claims our attention as the system which created a revolution in Buddhism and through that in the whole range of Indian philosophy."¹ Although some Vedāntins--notably Śaṅkara--may disagree with T.V.R. Murti's assessment, few would disagree that the Mādhyamika philosophy engendered controversy from its inception. The nature and purpose of this philosophy have puzzled many interpreters both modern and ancient as is reflected by the many commentators and growing number of publications that have focussed on the philosophy and its founder, Nāgārjuna. To say that we have made strides in our understanding of Nāgārjuna's philosophy since the early translations of his works by Theo Stcherbatsky and L. de La Vallée Poussin, is perhaps generous. A standard line of interpretation has not been established over a half-century later. Questions of the content and objectives of Mādhyamika philosophy are still much debated issues. Moreover, there is the great stumbling block posed by the subtle, almost inexplicable way in which Nāgārjuna has chosen to express his philosophy. His major work, Mūlamadhyamakakārikās has received much attention since it created considerable problems for Nāgārjuna's commentators. Modern writers who have tried to evaluate chief concerns of the philosophy have had great difficulty and have most often simply chosen to translate an existing commentary without including their own views. Thus

contemporary assessments of the Mādhyamaka philosophy have not been adequately developed and have often prematurely criticized the Mādhyamaka system.

My thesis focuses on a central problem: the character of the Mādhyamaka analysis (vicāra). It will show that the Mādhyamaka response to early Buddhist metaphysics, especially those expressed in the Abhidharma, was the elaboration of a purely analytical philosophy whose principal tool was a unique form of analysis (vicāra; sometimes referred to as Prāsaṅgika).

The discussion has been divided into four chapters including a conclusion. The first chapter addresses questions of the historical context of the Mādhyamaka philosophy. Several traditional accounts of the history of Buddhist philosophy will be employed in order to present a broad perspective. I will describe in detail the major philosophical movement in Buddhist scholasticism prior to the emergence of the Mādhyamaka philosophy called Abhidharma. The period of development of the Prajñāpāramitā literature and the bodhisattva doctrine will be shown to have preceded Nāgārjuna and to have issued a new direction for Buddhist philosophy. In addition, I will discuss the question of the biography of Nāgārjuna and the many fables that cast doubt on his existence. Generally, I intend to outline a context for the Mādhyamaka philosophy within specific developments in early Buddhist scholasticism. I

believe that the philosophical climate of Buddhism in Nāgārjuna's era must be established before we can begin to consider his philosophy. Moreover, we must be able to identify sources of his philosophy in order to understand in what sense his thought is Buddhist and where Nāgārjuna as a philosopher stands in the history of Buddhist philosophy. These are all key issues for understanding the Mādhyamaka.

Chapter two of the discussion will focus more directly on the Mādhyamaka philosophy. After the initial study in chapter one has established a context, we will have a better understanding of the concerns and role of the Mādhyamaka in the broader scope of Buddhist philosophy. I will concentrate on three areas: (i) key concepts of the philosophy; (ii) the standpoint of śūnyatā and (iii) and traditions of interpretations within the Mādhyamaka school itself. The goal of this chapter is to distinguish the uniquely analytical character of the Mādhyamaka philosophy. I will discuss several lines of interpretation and will point out one that is consistent with the philosophical concerns of Nāgārjuna as determined by the study in chapter one.

Chapter three will present three modern interpretations of a Mādhyamaka argument. I have chosen to focus on the consideration of the vicāra analysis of gatam and agatam from chapter two of Nāgārjuna's Kārikās in each article. This affords an opportunity to evaluate their interpretations of a paradigmatic Mādhyamaka analysis. Each

of the interpretations will be examined for consistency and general appreciation of the unique nature of Mādhyamaka argumentation. In the end, I hope to expose some common misconceptions of the Mādhyamaka system as well as reinforce the approach to the Mādhyamaka based on pratītya-samutpāda.

Without question, some of the solutions to the interpretation of the Mādhyamaka philosophy lie in an understanding of the maturity of Buddhist philosophy prior to the Mādhyamaka. However, some of the answers to the most difficult questions lie simply in our own ability to remain consistent with the tenets of the philosophy in our interpretations and to appreciate the scope of the Mādhyamaka argument in general. The Mādhyamaka has been from its beginning an academic philosophy; it has been and continues to be focussed on the most abstruse yet fundamental questions of Buddhist metaphysics. I have tried to address the problems of content and objectives of the philosophy by providing both an historical context as well as an approach to a Mādhyamaka argument. In the end, perhaps it is enough to encourage further study of the Mādhyamaka system as we may one day gain a complete understanding of it and in turn of the śūnyatā philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

NOTES

1. Murti, T.R.V., The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, Reprint, (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1980), p.v, Preface.

Chapter One

A Survey of Movements in Early Buddhist Scholasticism prior
to the Mādhyamaka

The object of this chapter is to contextualize the Mādhyamaka philosophy within other major philosophies and doctrinal developments in early Buddhism. I am quite aware that the span of time from the demise of the Buddha to the era of Nāgārjuna (c. second century C.E.) is a lengthy and difficult period. Moreover, the complications created by the absence of a critically accepted history of Buddhism are granted. Nevertheless, a familiarity with the movements and character of Buddhism during that period is essential to an understanding of the philosophical issues that influenced and shaped the Mādhyamaka.

The discussion will be presented in the format of a brief chronology of the fragmentation of the major sects. Key issues will be highlighted and summarily related to the emergence of the Mādhyamaka philosophy.

The First Council at Rājagṛha

There seems to be agreement that the first Buddhist council was held during the first year after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa.¹ The exact date is of course dependent on the given source with essentially two to be considered: the year after 486 B.C.E. or after 368 B.C.E.² The assembly offered

an opportunity for the chief disciples to gather and consolidate the teaching of the Buddha. The elder Kāśyapa is said to have convened the meeting with the request that 500 bhiksus should come to the capital of Magadha to rehearse the Law and Discipline, the Dharmavinaya.

It is not possible to present an accurate account of the meeting as the several sources disagree on key incidents. But two points deserve mention. First, the assembly is said to have produced a formal body of teaching based on a primary oral tradition. All Indian schools of Buddhism appear to possess teachings that refer back to an oral tradition. Many of the traditions have come down through the ages to be preserved as the Tripitaka. That does not imply however that all of what is contained in the Tripitaka was discussed in and around the First Council, in fact most scholars agree that the teachings, especially those associated with the Abhidharma, underwent significant development during Buddhism's early centuries. Étienne Lamotte pointed out that the First Council apparently succeeded in establishing a corpus for all of the branches of the Buddhist Dharma.³ The first was the collection of sermons of the Buddha on various topics; the second, the preservation of the rules of discipline for the saṅgha; the third, a group of related topics from the sermons with commentaries called the Abhidharma. Thus the codification of the Buddha's teaching was of primary importance at this

early stage.

The second point concerns early indications of disagreement over the content of the Buddha's teaching. Both Lamotte and P.V. Bapat note that some monks contested what was generally accepted as the Dharma.⁴ Both scholars mention the names of Purāṇa and Gamvapati who either refused to accept the decisions of the Council or declined invitations to participate. In Lamotte's opinion, Purāṇa refused to accept the Council's determination of the teachings of the Buddha since it was not what "he had heard from the mouth of the Buddha."⁵ It is not improbable that such events occurred. Although the only mention of Purāṇa in the Pali tradition indicated that he had disagreed over minor points of discipline but in the majority of the decisions agreed.⁶

The early controversy over the teaching of the Buddha contributed to later developments. Of course the domain of those issues must be outlined by scholars able to read Pali, Tibetan and Chinese and so on. It is enough to note for purposes of this paper that the seeds of schism were inherent in the early attempts to codify the Buddha's teaching. The fact that there are references to early disagreements in the saṅgha suggest that even in the First Council after the Buddha's passing away debate over the true doctrine had begun. That is of course not surprising as the Buddha himself encouraged his disciples to discern for

]themselves which of the teaching they knew to be true and of which they were unsure:

Like gold that is melted, cut and polished
 So should monks and scholars
 Analyze my words [before] accepting them
 They should not do so out of respect.⁷

Two Early Sects

There are several accounts of the formation of the Mahāsāṃghikas and the Sthaviras. Lamotte lists at least five different traditions giving dates for the first schism that range from one year after the Buddha to 236 years after.⁸ Needless to say, such discrepancies make it difficult to provide a definitive date. However, A.K. Warder made a plausible case for a date sometime after the Second Buddhist Council and sometime prior to the period of Aśoka.⁹

It has been the opinion of some scholars - notably N. Dutt - that the formation of the Mahāsāṃghikas was linked to the Second Council at Vaiśālī and was the outcome of a later gathering of monks and laity.¹⁰ Warder disagreed with the implication that the decisions at Vaiśālī prompted another assembly directly after. He cited the Vinaya of the Mahāsāṃghika, itself school in which there is an agreement

with the ruling of the Elders against the Vaiśālī monks. Therefore, the initiation of the so-called great assembly would not have been made by the same monks who seemed to agree completely with the Elder's decisions. Warder further suggested that, based on the calculations of Eggermont, the schism did not take place in the same period as the Second Council (386 B.C.E. or 376 B.C.E.) but perhaps some twenty or so years later in 349 B.C.E.¹¹ That date is concordant with the Pali Cullavagga in reference to the general time frame and is consistent with the account preserved by the Sammitīya school as recounted by Bhavya.¹²

Lamotte was hesitant in following any specific Buddhist tradition on this historical point. He suggested that while we finally see confirmation of schisms in the reign of Aśoka (272-236 B.C.E.), the seeds of the schism were present for centuries. He noted that we become aware of an intensifying challenge to the early school of the Elders by considering both the issues of discipline and the heresies of Mahādeva.¹³ The incident at Vaiśālī is exemplary of the type of situations that were developing wherever a Buddhist community had been established. Moreover, the critique of the arhat expressed in the heresies give some indication of the progression of ideas since the early disagreements at the First Council. In addition, when we consider that for the most part all monks lived in a harmonious relationship in the saṅgha, there appears to have been ample opportunity

for a free exchange and proliferation of ideas. Thus the first schism is a reflection of the polarization of the Elders and their supporters on the one hand and those who supported the criticisms of the arhat and changes in discipline on the other. The actual break could have taken place at several places in the history of Buddhism as the different sources indicate; what is important is that in the end two factions had emerged. The first, the Sthaviras or Elders comprised the "traditional" school of Buddhism but of course the word has by now lost the connotation of authentic. The second, the Mahāsāṃghikas, were comprised of heretical monks and numerous laity who distinguished themselves from the Sthaviras by concentrating more on the needs of the laity, by operating under democratic conditions and by adhering to a more lenient Buddhist discipline.¹⁴

Secession within the Two Sects during Bindusāra's and Aśoka's Reign

At least two factions had been formed within the first two centuries after the Buddha. However, within the next century the great benevolence of the Maurya king, Aśoka, would greatly accelerate the development of Buddhism. The traditional espousal of Buddhism by a powerful king in combination with the open environment of the saṅgha produced a host of new doctrines and encouraged philosophical sophistication. Thus the issue of an authoritative teaching

became a primary concern in light of the proliferation of the various systems of Buddhist thought.

Both factions of Buddhism underwent schisms during the era of Bindusāra, father of Aśoka (300-272 B.C.E.). A group of Buddhists led by Vātsīputra developed their own Abhidharma according to Bu-ston, and from their findings developed the doctrine of the puḍgala or personal entity (c.286 B.C.E.).¹⁵ Such developments formed further threats to the Sthaviras who had denied that the Buddha's comments or references to a self indicated the existence of an entity other than the five factors of personal existence. They maintained that the Buddha's own refusal to entertain questions such as who feels?; who is conscious? and so on, indicates the irrelevancy of such questions. However, Warder noted that they were still threatened to the point where we see a refutation of the Personalists' doctrine in their Abhidharma.¹⁶ The Puḍgalavādins went on to establish their own school in spite of the Sthaviras' objections and while they disagreed with the Elders they did not accept the Brahmanical position of the existence of the soul or ātman.

The Mahāsāṃghikas also began to feel the pressure of emerging ideas prior to the reign of Aśoka. The points of contention are however, not as well recorded; it is enough to say that during the fifty years subsequent to the Puḍgalavādins, the Mahāsāṃghikas gave rise to the Ekavyavahārika and Gokulika.¹⁷ Sources on the nature of

their teaching are vague and according to what has been preserved by Paramārtha of the Gokulika, they seem to have been specialists in the Abhidharma. The Sthaviras in their account of the school " say that they exaggerated a statement in the Samyukta that the five groups are nothing but cinders, as if it meant that there is no happiness whatever, of any kind, in the world, but only unrelieved unhappiness."¹⁸ How that position was built into a heretical one I am not certain. Bhavya writing on the Gokulikas said that they held that the mind was pure and inaccessible to defilement; perhaps this foreshadowed the later Vijñānavāda theories. Further, he noted that they held that "all phenomena are cognised in one moment" presumably during a satori type experience.¹⁹

Aśoka inherited a Buddhist community struggling within itself to reach agreement over the true teaching of its master. Yet schisms continued to develop in spite of his attempts to maintain peace within the Buddhist community. The first of the breaks involved the separation of the Sarvāstivādins from the Sthaviras. The date of their secession is not generally known but Eggermont and, following his reasoning, Warder made a connection between the Sarvāstivādins and an undated rock edict near the end of Aśoka's reign.²⁰ The concerns expressed in the edict over schisms in the community could be related to the Sarvāstivādins in their opinion and since Aśoka is reputed

to have been closely associated with the Sthaviras it would seem that the schism would have involved them as well. However, the existence of a schism is cast in doubt by a lack of a record in the Sthaviravāda tradition; instead of a schism, it is simply stated that there was: " the expulsion of persons who were not Buddhists, followers of other sects who had joined the favorite community."²¹ Nevertheless, Warder concluded that the schism occurred in 237 B.C.E., one year before the end of Aśoka's reign.

Another series of schisms had occurred in roughly the same period or slightly after the Sarvāstivāda movement. These involved the school of Vātsīputra (Pudgalavādins). It appears that after the venerable teacher had given his followers their own Abhidharma in nine sections, their subsequent efforts produced several more schools.²² Each new school of interpretation formed its own additions to the nine volumes of Vātsīputra to form four new sects: Dharmottariya, Bhadrāyāniya, Sammitiya and Sannāgarika.²³ Very little from these schools, including the teaching of Vātsīputra, has survived and the only work of any of the schools that has been found is a Chinese translation of an Abhidharma text of the Sammitiyas.

The Mahāsāṃghika faction was not spared the disruption of schism and produced at least three more schools before the end of the third century. Although we may not place those schisms within the reign of Aśoka (perhaps those above in

the Pudgala school as well), it may be argued that they occurred within a half-century transition period between his era and the next.²⁴ One of the schools of this period is particularly significant to the development of the Mahāyāna and in turn the Mādhyamaka schools: the Lokottaravāda. Edward J. Thomas in his History of Buddhist Thought, claimed that the Lokottaravadins are the real Mahāsāṃghikas.²⁵ Edward Conze noted that it was the Lokottaravādins who "developed those aspects of the Buddha's teaching about the Absolute which the Sthaviras in their quest for logical consistency had neglected."²⁶ The name of the school means that which surpasses the world or is beyond the world according to Conze's statements. That meaning may be taken in two senses: in reference to the transcendent nature of the Buddha and to the surpassing quality of the Lokottara teaching.

A major extant work of this school is the Mahāvastu. We receive most of the information of the various narratives of the life of the Buddha held by other Mahāsāṃghika schools from this work. In addition, we receive some indication of the Lokottaravādins' own views on the nature of the Buddha:

it states that even the body of the Buddha is not of this world, is transcendental (I 167f.) and his actions, though seemingly those usual among men, are done merely for the sake of convention, not through actual need. (He, or rather in this case) Buddhas,

(plural) (I 168), never feel fatigue, though they conform to the practice of lying down, they wash their feet, though no dust can stick to them, and so on, everything about them is transcendental (I 159)."²⁷

The last schism that is associated with this period falls at the end of the third century. Again it involves the Mahāsāṃghikas. A mention has already been made that the Lokottaravadins developed from the Ekavyavahārikas; similarly, evidence suggests that the two new schools, Bahuśrutīya and Prajñaptivāda, developed from the Gokulikas. The Bahuśrutīyas have one text preserved in Chinese translation called Satyasiddhiśāstra which is the Abhidharma text of Harivarman, a later writer of the school.²⁸ Unfortunately, no text of the Prajñaptivādins remains. Whatever we know of them is through an account by Vasumitra (translated by Bareau) and commentaries by Paramārtha and Ki-tsang.²⁹ It seems that the school developed a system of treatment for the sūtras based on two categories: the paramārtha (surpassing) and the samvṛti (concealing)³⁰. Warder noted the "characteristic doctrine, on which, presumably they seceded was 'the distinction of the real (tattva) phenomena or entities referred to in the Buddha's teaching from mere 'concepts...'"³¹

Buddhism had split into at least thirteen sects shortly after the reign of Aśoka. 1) Patronage provided the security and environment that allowed Buddhist scholasticism to

flourish. 2) However, instead of general agreements over codification, the fervent study of the early teachings produced diverse interpretations and methodologies that were reflected in the different sects. 3) The development of the doctrines of the transcendence of the Buddha and the identification of various levels of meaning within his sermons resulted in clear metaphysical differences between emerging systems and the once dominant early sects. Yet of course, all the schools still claimed to be Buddhist but the exercise called Abhidharma had created rifts between the schools that greatly complicated a general codification of Buddha's teachings. The philosophical landscape leading up to the Mādhyamaka was thus diverse and growing more complex.

Eighteen Sects

At this point it should be made clear that the present study does not intend to trace the development of Buddhist scholasticism of Śrī Lanka or of Tibet. To return to the chronology, there are the contributions of five sects of Buddhism left to discuss if we are to remain with the figure of eighteen major sects of Buddhism (principally derived from Pali tradition).

The history of India subsequent to the death of Aśoka in 231 B.C.E. reveals a shift in power from the Magadha region to the west.³² Further, we see the invasion of Greeks from Bactria and a succession of kings on the Maurya throne

beginning with Kuṇāla or Suyāśas and followed by nine others during the following five decades ending with Br̥hadratha. So closed the period of the Mauryan empire and with it major patronage of Buddhism.³³

Three distinct schools emerged within the above period and shortly thereafter. The first seceded from the Sthaviras about the same time the Mahāsāṃghikas produced the Prajñaptivādins and the Bahuśrutīyas and were called the Mahīśāsakas. The second and third schools, the Kāśyapīyas and the Dharmaguptaka, succeeded afterwards. The Mahīśāsakas bore doctrines in common with the Sthaviras but disagreed with them on points of Abhidharma. The Kāśyapīyas formed a bridge between the Sarvāstivādins and the Sthaviras. The Dharmaguptaka stressed different aspects of devotion such as giving of gifts to Buddha over the saṅgha and the building of stūpas.

The final two schools seceded from the Mahāsāṃghikas. Lamotte suggested the development of the Caitya schools, Aparā and Uttara, began with the teachings of Mahādeva (not the Mahādeva to whom the five heresies are attributed.)³⁴ The period of their origin has been placed shortly after or contemporaneous with the Bahuśrutīyas; although there are discrepancies, a date between the end of the second century and the middle of the first would not be improbable (i.e. 100 B.C.E.).³⁵ The Caityas developed doctrines involving the accumulation of merit from the donation of gifts to

caityas (funeral mounds or stūpas) and the subsequent transfer of such merit to one's friends or relatives.³⁶

The succession of Buddhist sects does not end in the first century B.C.E. but continues for many centuries. However, it is enough to suggest that the eighteen or so sects created in part the philosophical and doctrinal debates from which the Mādhyamaka would emerge.

Geographical Influences on Sectarian Developments

The contribution of regional cultural differences as well as geographical separation to the proliferation of Buddhist sects seems to be self-evident. Warder pointed out in a discussion of the schisms: "At first it was still possible to prevent a schism, because it was still possible to hold a general assembly at which, apparently, all the local communities were satisfied that they were properly represented. Thirty-seven years later, when the First Schism occurred, this condition could perhaps no longer be satisfied."³⁷ The inability to represent all centers greatly reduced the sphere of influence of conciliar decisions. Lamotte broadened the discussion when he noted that the formation of the sects closely followed the dispersion of Buddhism through India.³⁸ Cultural differences between centers of Buddhist studies and distinctive local needs caused communities to develop distinctive slants to their teaching while the nature of the

saṅgha allowed the propagation of these localized idioms through the Buddhist world. In addition, Buddhism was entrenched in a Hindu society and was thus subject to the influences of its religious motifs. Specifically, there were encounters with the Bhāgavata sect in the west, Siva worship, the Upaniṣads as well as the thought of the Persian empire and so on³⁹. All such sociocultural influences compounded by the separation of the communities played a significant role both in contributing to specific monastic rules as well as focusing upon different doctrines. Therefore, Buddhism experienced the influence of the many indigenous religious systems. In the end, we must note however that the problem that confronted Buddhist philosophy remained consistent. Could a general system be developed and would that system deliver the individual to bodhi?

Abhidharma

The Abhidharma exercise demonstrates the level of sophistication that Dharma study had achieved in the quest to answer the above question. I will focus on the most mature of these early Abhidharmas: the Sarvāstivāda system.⁴⁰ But before discussing the system itself some mention should be made of the origin of the sect and a clarification of the meaning of Abhidharma given.

Theo Stcherbatsky has focussed upon what is in his own

words the central conception of Buddhism: Dharma. Conze elaborated: "What others call 'Buddhism', the Buddhists themselves call 'Dharma'. In its essentials the Dharma-theory is common to all schools, and provides the framework within which Buddhist wisdom operates."⁴¹ It is precisely such a theory that is my concern here. Stcherbatsky, when discussing the Sarvāstivāda school, clarified what is implied by their name "everything exists". He noted that the Buddha's statements from which the Sarvastivadin doctrine emerged had specific contexts; for example, a discussion with the Ajīvikas, and that of the term sarvam the Buddha is reported to have said "everything exists means that the twelve āyatanas exist."⁴² The twelve āyatanas were simply another name for the classification of all dharmas in general of which the existence of seventy-five were admitted by the Sarvāstivādins. Therefore the Dharma-theory means, in this instance, a theory of the dharmas of existence.

The Sarvāstivāda, in the opinion of T.R.V. Murti and Stcherbatsky, is one of the schools of Buddhism that may have equal antiquity with the Theravada.⁴³ Takakusu concluded:

...the evidence we have adduced from Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese sources not being conflicting, we are fairly justified in assuming that at an early period of

their separate history, the Sarvāstivādins were in possession of an Abhidharma literature consisting of seven books, one principal and six supplementary, and that these works had been widely studied in Kashmir, the seat of this school, and we can say further that the tradition concerning them is comparatively trustworthy, since it had been preserved in practically the same form in India, Tibet, China and Japan. ⁴⁴

Unfortunately, the original texts written in Sanskrit are lost so we must rely on the Chinese sources. We have a treatment of the entire Sarvāstivāda system by Vasubandhu preserved in Chinese and translated into Tibetan; it is this edition that Stcherbatsky worked with in his discussion of the central conception of Buddhism mentioned earlier. In addition, there are excellent summaries of the doctrines of the school in Tibetan by dKonmchog 'Jigs-med dbang-po (1728-1781) that Herbert Guenther worked with in his Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice. ⁴⁵

The idea of the Abhidharma is an ancient one and has been traced back to the Buddha's sermons. A section of the Tripitaka, as mentioned earlier, consisted of Abhidharma or commentaries on the sūtras. In fact, they were much more than that by the time we encounter the Abhidharma texts of the Sarvāstivādins. It has been pointed out that the Buddha himself from time to time suggested groupings of his teachings such as the seven topics of his doctrine taught at

Vaiśālī.⁴⁶ Moreover, Lamotte related from the Sthavira tradition that certain of the elder monks, notably Śariputra, were charged with research and preservation of Abhidharma treatises.⁴⁷ The nature of these exercises were also indicated earlier: a categorization of topics from the sūtras and an elaboration of their meaning. It can be readily shown however, that in the course of time those treatises developed into sophisticated and lengthy disquisitions. Further, they demanded too much from an individual and in turn encouraged the development of specialized groups. Lamotte noted that the memorization of the Tripitaka eventually fell upon different factions because of its complexity and length.⁴⁸ The Abhidharma treatises consequently, required individuals especially trained in philosophy and dialectics. Yet in the end, we do not see a separation of Abhidharma from the sūtras but rather the emergence of a distinctive and authoritative system of philosophy.

The Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma is the "earliest attempt to work out the implications of the Buddha's teaching..." , in Guenther's opinion ⁴⁹. Moreover, Warder noted: as the level of sophistication of Abhidharma rose, "the schools were now going beyond the doctrines as stated by the Buddha and raising points not clearly covered, even by implication, in his dialogues and discourses."⁵⁰ Of course it is impossible to know precisely to what extent Abhidharma had

developed subsequent to the Buddha's demise but Warder's statement can be elaborated to give some indication: the Buddhists were now involved in the presentation of a comprehensive system that linked together the traditional teaching with a philosophy of the nature of the universe.⁵¹

The Abhidharma of the Sarvāstivādins

A discussion of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma as it is preserved by Vasubandhu calls for the space of an entire chapter or for at least a paper in itself neither of which is possible. This section will discuss only the chief conceptions of the school such as dharmas, the theory of causation and the general relationship of the theory of dharmas to salvation. I hope to present the system in sufficient detail, however, to show the type of philosophy disclosed in the Abhidharma. This is important as the Mādhyamika critiques, especially those by Nāgārjuna, focussed for the most part on the metaphysics of the Sarvāstivāda and similar systems.

The conception of dharma in the Sarvāstivāda system is extremely subtle, so that one may not talk of the nature of dharmas and so on. However, they may be understood within the system itself and may be characterized in four ways.⁵²

1) A dharma could be roughly equated with an element where every element is unique or separated and possesses svabhāva (self-existence), that is, it is not substantially derived

from any other element. 2) Dharmas do not serve as the vehicle for more fundamental substances such as a soul or matter; there is "no Matter beyond the separate sense-data and no Soul beyond a separate mental datum."⁵³ Any apprehension of such entities is based on a misunderstanding and a lack of knowledge of the principal dharmas. 3) "Elements have no duration, every moment represents a separate element; thought is evanescent, there are no moving bodies, but consecutive appearances, flashings, of new elements in new places."⁵⁴ 4) "Elements co-operate with one another", that is, the appearance of one element within close proximity to another is in this sense called co-operation.⁵⁵ Another way of expressing such happenings or events could be combined origination.

The world-process can be completely resolved into dharmas. The simplest classification of them is skandhas and it is the five skandhas: 1) matter 2) feeling) 3) ideas 4) volitions 5) pure sensations or general consciousness that were referred to in the secession of the Pudgalavadins from the Sthaviras.⁵⁶ The personalists held that there existed a separate entity other than the five skandhas that produced the conception of a self, this of course was not accepted by the Sthaviras nor the Sarvāstivādins.

A second, more sophisticated, classification centers around the bases of cognition or the cognitive faculties and their objects, forming the twelve āyatanas. The six

internal bases: the five senses and the faculty of consciousness correspond to the six external bases: color and form; sound; odor; taste; tangibles and non-sensuous objects. The dichotomy of external and internal should not be construed as a foundation for a self however, as the Sarvastivadins make clear, the distinction of external and internal while suggesting a consciousness of a self is merely metaphorical and conforms for the sake of expression to the erroneous ideas of those without understanding of dharmas. The second classification serves as a stage or step to the next category.

The eighteen dhātus constitute a third way of classifying dharmas. They include all twelve bases of cognition with their respective objects and six kinds of consciousness corresponding as well to the objects. In essence, the sixth āyatana simply referred to previously as consciousness has been split into six sensations. The Sarvāstivādins are able to distinguish levels or planes of existence by attributing various levels of consciousness to beings. It is with these levels that the unique features of the Dharma theory shows forth. Stcherbatsky noted: "Buddhist philosophy is an analysis of separate elements, or forces, which unite in the production of one stream of events."⁵⁷ Various beings are understood as streams of dhātus and can be said to inhabit worlds determined by the preponderance of a specific dhātu. For example, beings dominated by kāma-dhātus are said to

inhabit the realm of carnal desire; others might be trapped in a world of form that is dominated by rūpa-dhātus and so on.

The third classification of dharmas contains seventy-five elements, seventy-two of which are involved in the world process while the remaining three tend to bring that process to extinction. All seventy-five elements are arranged under general categories where one category such as "mind" may contain forty-six elements and so on; there are at least six major divisions of elements.⁵⁸ A simple outline comprises both (i) the connection between the elements in the world and (ii) the effect of the three other elements on the liberation from the world process.

(i) A characteristic feature of the first group of elements is their unrest: "the idea underlying it is that the elements--are perpetually in a state of commotion."⁵⁹ Their connection or relationship is described by the law of pratītya-samutpāda, stated succinctly by Vasubandhu as "if something appears, such and such result will follow."⁶⁰ The Sarvāstivādins recognized six different causal relationships that may operate at any given moment. For instance, consciousness occurs concomitantly with mental phenomena and therefore is understood to be governed by the relation of sahabhū (simultaneity). A minimum of ten elements must be connected for any given conscious moment.⁶¹ On the other hand, cognition while closely connected with consciousness

demands a more subtle explanation. Guenther approaches the problem in the following manner: cognition as distinct from perception which is precisely what is meant by the co-ordination of mental phenomena, sense data and a field of consciousness or pure sensation is a "selective and interpretive activity".⁶² Cognition is "an originaive form of activity arising in conjunction with various activities and through them is in contact with the surrounding universe."⁶³ In other words, cognition is a secondary or higher level of activity that constructs ideas and so on from pure sensation. Although on this point, Guenther is interpreting Vaibhāṣika thought, he points indirectly to an interesting problem. The complex phenomena of cognition follows in some fashion from the relationship of the elements involved in pure sensation; exactly how we retain the cognition of color over the cognition of visual sense has been absorbed by the rules of causation within the system. Stcherbatsky noted the ambiguity but he did not resolve the difficulty given the constraints of the system: "this relation(s) exists because it exists, it is required by the system, without this patchwork the system collapses."⁶⁴ In a similar fashion, all the relationships between the ten general elements of consciousness and cognition are subject to criticisms of ambiguity. Such ambiguity became in the end the focus of many Mādhyamaka critiques of the system.

The analysis and classification of elements enabled the Sarvāstivādins to provide formulas for any samtāna (entity). Once one realized the number and relationship between dharmas, all things became resolvable into streams of dharmas. Yet one should not take this to mean that dharmas were in motion. Only the consecutive flashings of dharmas in close proximity to each other produce the illusion of motion.⁶⁵ In addition, the appearance of any dharma implies that there are simultaneously four forces acting upon it: origination, decay, maintenance and destruction. Although the nature of these forces may seem confusing at first, "every element of matter and mind may be called in Buddhism a saṃskāra (force)...the Buddhist idea of a force seems to be that it is the subtle form of a substance..."⁶⁶ The difficulty arises again because the Sarvāstivādins are simply reclassifying the elements in a way that prompts us to speak of new entities (i.e. forces). Stcherbatsky noted, "the order in which the elements appear in the first classification into groups is interpreted as a gradual progress from coarseness to subtlety."⁶⁷ Therefore, all things are understood as a composition of elements that differ in degrees of subtlety ranging from the coarseness of matter to the subtlety of the pure forces prior to the state of nirvāṇa.

(ii) It becomes easy at this point to overlook that the system of dharmas served an essentially soteriological

purpose. Thus it was not an occult "science". However, we would miss the point of the system as a whole, in so doing, as well as fail to fully appreciate the meaning of Dharma. Certainly, the Buddha gave more to sentient beings than a metaphysical structure; he provided: "the knowledge of a method of converting all upatti-dharmas into anupatti-dharmas, i.e. of stopping forever the commotion created by the operation of the forces active in the process of life."⁶⁸ The method of suppression proceeds as follows: first there is a development of knowledge of all existing dharmas that is, of all seventy-five, then there is the concentration upon each one until they are all stopped. The Sarvastivadins focused on the role of the prajñā element, one of the ten present in every conscious moment. They stressed that this particular element has the capacity to restructure the stream of consciousness around itself, in other words, it becomes the dominating force. Once activated in this manner, the prajñā element isolates elements in the streams and prevents them from reoccurring thereby bringing the complex to dissolution. The key realization at the early stage of deliverance is that the self or personality is no other than a complex of dhātus. "Every vicious, or disquieting, 'unfavorable' element has a special antidote in the agency of wisdom; when suppressed it becomes an anupatti-dharma, an element which will never return, a blank is substituted for it; this blank (nirodha)

is called 'cessation through wisdom'".⁶⁹

Gradually dharmas are suppressed until the initial stage of sainthood is reached. After that, successive stages are attained through meditation and trance techniques. The final stages of purification are reached when the saint achieves nirvāṇa; the saint, being comprised of only anupatti-dharmas, has stopped all karma and there is no longer rebirth into worlds dominated by ignorance and suffering. An elaborate theory has also been developed dealing with the kinds of worlds within which beings of pure dharmas will attain but that is outside the scope of this discussion.

The Sarvāstivādins developed an extremely complex system and in their opinion one that interpreted correctly the implications of Buddha's own identification of āyatanas. Yet at no point did a conception of a substance dominate although it remains difficult indeed to separate their notions of coarseness and subtlety from a theory of substance. The path or prajñā-mārga delivered the saint from all karmic bonds by dissipating those dharmas that were actively involved in the construction of the self. In the end however, no definition of a dharma is given apart from the teaching of deliverance. Therefore, while it is possible to maintain that their philosophy evolved into an ontology as Guenther does, this was perhaps inevitable given their general attempt to deliver beings from the experience

of suffering.⁷⁰ The Sarvāstivāda system brought the level of Abhidharma to a high degree of complexity some two or three centuries prior to Nāgārjuna. Without question, systems such as theirs had come to dominate Buddhist scholasticism and solidify the direction of Dharma study.

The Rise of the Bodhisattvayāna

I referred to the appearance of the Caitya schools in the rough chronology of early Buddhist sects earlier, and it is shortly after their appearance that I would like to pick up the discussion. It has been shown that the conception of a saint had come under criticism quite early in the history of Buddhism and that there was an attempt on behalf of the Mahāsāṃghikas to establish a closer relationship with the laity. I would like to discuss the bodhisattva doctrine with those developments in mind and suggest that it may well be as ancient as the Mahāsāṃghika movement though it did not gain substantial articulation and support until several centuries later.

The use of the term bodhisattva can be found within the Pali Nikāyas. In that context, it refers essentially to the life of the Buddha prior to his enlightenment and as such may be translated as "heroic being, spiritual warrior".⁷¹ I have noted previously that as early as the second century after the Buddha some Buddhists were seeking alternatives to the arhat.

The concept of an arhat suffered harsh criticism beginning with the heresies of Mahādeva around the fourth century B.C.E. Yet criticisms did not derive from any inherent inadequacy in the ancient conception but rather from the elitist and self-serving slants put on the conception by the Elders themselves. "They became too self-centered and contemplative, and did not evince the old zeal for missionary activity among the people. They seem to have cared only for their own liberation from sin and sorrow. They were indifferent to the duty of teaching and helping all human beings."⁷² Such tendencies among the Elders were quite a contrast to the stories of the self-sacrifice of the Buddha recorded in the Jātaka tales.

The bodhisattva ideal helped Buddhists refocus upon the early conception of an arhat. The ideal of a bodhisattva, though, was significantly broader in scope than that of an arhat: "Even after he has solved his own personal problems, a Bodhisattva continues to do good for aeons and aeons. The merit from these deeds is of no use to him, but he can transfer it to others, thereby facilitating their ultimate enlightenment."⁷³ The social emotion, as Conze called it, returned to the forefront of the ideal and therefore we are certainly on sound ground when a connection is made between the rise of the bodhisattva ideal and the development of the Mahāsāṃghika sect.

Interesting and significant contributions have been made

by several scholars-- notably Har Dayal and echoed by N.A. Sastri-- to understanding the development of the bodhisattva doctrine.⁷⁴ Overlooking for the moment Har Dayal's argument for the origin of the idea of bhakti among the Buddhist sects, we should note his suggestion that the value of the bodhisattva ideal may be understood within the context of the spiritualization or the deification of the Buddha. Har Dayal pointed out that as the Buddha became more or less a cosmic principle over a historical person he became "an unsuitable and unattractive object for the pious Buddhist's bhakti."⁷⁵ On the other hand, the Buddha as a bodhisattva had been known to give gifts of wealth and knowledge to all who were in need of them, and as such he was a more accessible object of love and devotion. "The bodhisattvas were thus chosen for worship and adoration in order to satisfy the needs of the devout and pious Buddhists."⁷⁶

Recent scholarly attempts to determine a geographical area in which the conception of a bodhisattva developed have focussed on the Āndhra region of the south of India. Warder suggested that in the doctrines of Caitya schools we see the transition within the Mahāsāṃghika movement to the later Mahāyāna movement.⁷⁷ "...sometime after the founding of the Pūrva Śaila school in the last century B.C. certain monks felt the need not simply for new interpretations of the original sūtra--but for wholesale restatements of the doctrine."⁷⁸ These restatements of course entailed the

insertion of different phrases and nuances that served to open the arhat doctrine to new interpretations. Perhaps the strongest evidence in favor of a southern origin theory lies in the Sri-Lankan tradition which attributes the origin of the earliest body of Mahāyāna sūtras, the Ratnakūṭa, to the Āndhra region.

Bapat also suggested that in the doctrine of the Caityas we see the transition from the Mahāsāṃghika to the Mahāyāna. "They were the first to deify the Buddha and the Bodhisattva in the Mahāyāna, which ultimately led to popularization of the religion among the masses."⁷⁹ Further, "their conception of Sambhogakāya led to the Trikāya theory which is one of the prominent features of Mahāyāna."⁸⁰

The bodhisattva vehicle as it formed part of the movement called Mahāyāna can be traced to the Āndhra region. The date of origin if we can ever speak of such a thing, would appear to have been within the first two centuries B.C.E. Thus, we may say that the bodhisattva doctrine was established if not dominant by the first century C.E., as all indications of the rise of the Mahāyāna movement would seem to confirm.

The Prajñāpāramitā Literature

The Perfection of Wisdom literature is the last and perhaps most crucial of the early movements to the

formulation of the Mādhyamaka philosophy. The chief points of interest are whether or not this body of literature existed prior to the era of Nāgārjuna and if so in what form and secondly what was the nature of its teaching. I will focus on the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, the earliest of the Prajñāpāramitā, and outline its philosophy of Śūnyatā.

We can say that era of the bodhisattva had already dawned by the advent of the Prajñāpāramitā as the conception of an enlightenment being is crucial to its philosophy and teaching. Conze, who has spent much of his life translating this body of literature into English, suggested that the Aṣṭasāhasrikā probably reached maturity between the second century B.C.E. and the second century C.E. He provided cogent reasons in support of his argument. The earliest translation of the work was made by Lokashema in 179 C.E.⁸¹ However, parts of the work are probably centuries older; in fact if we consider that the work translated by Lokashema must have existed in that form for some time and that there are no editions of the work nor mention of such works in the literature of the early sects, then the period of formulation between 100 B.C.E. and 100 C.E. is quite possible. Moreover, if we make use of the fact that the Perfection of Wisdom literature in general seems to build on central themes, it may be possible to identify a seminal teaching in the Aṣṭa. Conze did precisely that; he noted that the opening verses of the Aṣṭa

appear to be enclosed by the refrain "and that is the practice of wisdom, the highest perfection."⁸² Of course the references to the perfections immediately recall the six perfections of the bodhisattva whose doctrines had not gained much momentum prior to the second century B.C.E. Conze made a general and tentative suggestion based on his theory: "the 41 verses of the first two chapters constitute the original Prajñāpāramitā which may well go back to 100 B.C.E. and of which all the others are elaborations."⁸³

The Prajñāpāramitā may also have developed in the Āndhra region. This is not universally accepted however. Lamotte in an article "On the Formation of Mahāyāna" argues for an origin in the Khotan region.⁸⁴ Yet his arguments do not receive general support either, as Conze noted, "I believe that he has shown no more than that the Prajñāpāramitā had a great success in the North-West at the Kushāna period, and that, to use his own words (p.392) that region may well be the "fortress and hearth", though not necessarily the "cradle of the Mahāyāna movement."⁸⁵ In spite of Lamotte's objection, the development of the Prajñāpāramitā among the Caityas is contestable to say the least. It had been suggested earlier that in the doctrines of the Caityas there is a transition from the Mahāsāṃghika to the Mahāyāna. Moreover, Conze raised the point that based on the findings of Grousset an illustration may be made of a "Dravido-Alexandrian synthesis" in the Āndhra region. Therefore both

an historical development of ideas as well as a possible link between the Prajñāpāramitā and the Sophia literature of the Mediterranean area can be found in the Āndhra area.⁸⁶ Without question the above argument is sketchy but such findings by Grousset and Conze in addition to the arguments for a southern origin for the bodhisattva doctrine appears to make the southern origin theory still the best working hypothesis.

The general teaching of the Aṣṭa is clearly Mahāsāṃghika if not Mahāyāna. A summary of the teaching, as noted by Conze, is contained in the first 41 verses of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines:

No wisdom can we get hold of, no highest perfection.
 No Bodhisattva, no thought of enlightenment either
 When told of this, if not bewildered and in no way
 anxious. A Bodhisattva courses in the Well-Gone's
 Wisdom... (v.5)

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.(v.13)⁸⁷

The contradictory fashion in which the ślokas present the teaching is indicative of the Prajñāpāramitā as a whole, and is quite similar to the kind of arguments found in the Mādhyamaka treatises.

Scholars generally point out that the subsequent Mahāyāna movement would label the Elder's tradition the Hinayāna or Lower Vehicle. The Aṣṭa illustrated a distinctive Mahāyāna stance in its treatment of some of the principal disciples of the Buddha such as Śāriputra. "Śāriputra was traditionally associated with abhidarmic prajñā, or with analytical knowledge and this the Prajñāpāramitā regards as both his strength and his limitation. No longer the dhamma-senapti, no longer next to the Buddha himself in wisdom, he now becomes the representative of an inferior kind of knowledge."⁸⁸ We are seeing the maturation of a sensibility that had developed in the Mahāsāṃghika tradition in the teaching of the Prajñāpāramitā, in addition we see a clear movement towards criticism of the Abhidharma exercise.

Perhaps there is no better illustration of the divergence in teaching than in the doctrine of Śūnyatā. The Abhidharma as I had outlined in the discussion of the Sarvāstivādins had arrived as a theory of elements. Dharmas were characterized as definable, that is, they could be distinguished; in the words of the commentaries, dharmas

were considered to have their "own nature": svabhāva.⁸⁹ "Own nature" makes it possible to distinguish one dharma from another and then to suppress each in turn. The Prajñāpāramitā declared that all dharmas are empty in as much as beings lack a self; moreover, it defined itself as precisely that which did not possess "own-being" and could not be defined or grasped:

What is the 'perfection of understanding'? 'the perfection of understanding is only a name. "This perfection of understanding cannot be specified or heard or observed... according to the groups, elements and spheres. Why? Because of the separation of all phenomena...Also the perfection of understanding cannot be recognized apart from the groups, elements and spheres. Why? Because it is precisely the groups, elements and spheres which are empty, separated and calmed. Because of this the perfection of understanding and the groups, elements and spheres are not a duality, not a making twofold. The nonperception of all phenomena is called the perfection of understanding."⁹⁰

The Perfection of Wisdom speaks of dharmas in the opposite

sense to the Abhidharma; the teaching of Emptiness is extended to include all phenomena and the way outlined by the Sarvāstivādins is declared to be deluded or ill-conceived at best. The early criticism of the Abhidharma theory of elements from the basis of the teaching of Emptiness can thus be seen in the Aṣṭa.

The Prajñāpāramitā displayed a new and significant development in Buddhist thought. Its date and place of origin within the first century B.C.E. in the Āndhra region of south India is consistent with the view that the bodhisattva doctrine central to its teaching had developed in the same area 100 years before. The Prajñāpāramitā contrasted itself in the area of philosophy with the Abhidharma and we see both the condemnation of an earlier tradition as well as the extension of some generally accepted notions such as the "emptiness of the self." In the end, the bodhisattva doctrine is given support and attached to an overall philosophy of enlightenment that served to integrate old and new teachings under a broader philosophical outlook.

Nāgārjuna

The teaching of the Mādhyamaka school was perfected in one stroke by the philosopher Nāgārjuna in the opinion of Murti, although he was not necessarily the founder of the school (that may have been the work of Rahula and others

⁹¹). Such an accomplishment would be rare indeed given the fact that the Mādhyamaka schools would eventually espouse the principal interpretation of Emptiness as well as the dominant philosophy of the Mahāyāna. I will present some significant aspects of the life of Nāgārjuna, in order to show both possible influences on his philosophy as well as the difficulty presented by various accounts of his life and teaching.

Tradition generally suggested the south of India to be the birth place of Nāgārjuna. Bu-ston explained that he was born in the Vidharbha country in the Mahārastra region of north-western India.⁹² The Chinese biography by Kumārajīva concurs with the biographies of Hui-yuan and Seng-chao on this point.⁹³ Three significant traces of Nāgārjuna remain in India: a reference to Bhadanta Nāgārjunacarya found in an inscription near the stūpa of Jaggayyapta, the site of Nāgārjunikonda named after the venerable master and the work Suhr̥llekha, a letter to one of the Śātavāhana kings in Āndhra.⁹⁴

The date of Nāgārjuna's birth is as difficult a problem as his place of origin. There seem to be three main lines of argument. The first follows from the Letter to a Friendly King (Suhr̥llekha) mentioned above. The Śātavāhana dominated southern India up to the Upper Deccan region from about 30 B.C.E. to 270 C.E. according to Dutt.⁹⁵ However, problems arise when one tries to identify the king to whom

the epistle is dedicated. Lamotte suggested it is Yajnasri.⁹⁶ Murti suggested it is Śātavāhana.⁹⁷ On the other hand, it may well have been Simukta who had managed to extend the kingdom and establish his capital at Dhānyakataka where Nāgārjuna is said to have lived and where the Nāgārjunikonda stūpa was constructed.⁹⁸

The second line of argument stems from the Chinese sources. Lamotte has carefully studied these sources and based on the discussion by Chi-tsang, he interpreted a traditional dating scheme to arrive with a date for Nāgārjuna 880 years A.N. (after nirvāṇa).⁹⁹ This corresponds to 243 C.E.¹⁰⁰ In general, 243 C.E. would fit into the period of the Śātavāhana kings.

The third line of argument is derived from the Tibetan sources. Bu-ston commented that the birth of Nāgārjuna occurred some 400 years after the nirvāṇa of the Buddha, c.83 B.C.E., and that date is supported by Dutt and L.M. Joshi.¹⁰¹ Max Walleser criticized the accuracy of the Tibetan sources in general in that area, and suggested that Nāgārjuna lived in the third century C.E.¹⁰² His argument is based on reports that associate Nāgārjuna with the kings Kaniṣka and Śātavāhana who were roughly of the same period. Again it appears that the date for Nāgārjuna could be placed within the third century. Nevertheless, while a date within the third century seems generally acceptable for Nāgārjuna, this is by no means certain as the accounts of his longevity

suggest a life span of around 150 years thus pushing his date of birth back to the second century, C.E. or even earlier.

The recorded events of Nāgārjuna's life are fantastic to say the least. There is one principal biography by Kumārajīva in addition to several other reports in the Laṅkāvatāra sūtra and the writings of Buddhist scholars such as Candrakīrti, Āryadeva, Bhāvaviveka, and Buddhapālita. But before we consider those sources, some tentative suggestions are possible given the assumed time and place of Nāgārjuna's origin. First, we have seen that the south of India gave rise to doctrines of the bodhisattva and may well have been the seat of development of Mahāyāna some two centuries before Nāgārjuna. If Nāgārjuna had been exposed to such doctrines in early adulthood then it would be safe to say that he was familiar with both the arhat and bodhisattva ideals and the philosophies surrounding them. Second, a large range of Buddhist scriptures would be within reach, Sarvāstivādin doctrines for example, given the extension of the Śātavāhana kingdom into the Upper Deccan. Moreover, Nāgārjuna would have been familiar with not only the dominant Buddhist philosophies of the time but non-Buddhist philosophies as well through the open environment of the saṅgha. Therefore, we can say that Caitya doctrines, the teaching of the Bodhisattvayāna, the doctrines of the Sarvāstivādins as well as the early Prajñāpāramitā were

available to Nāgārjuna.

A general account of Nāgārjuna's life was translated by Kumārajīva in the fifth century C.E. (c.405 C.E.¹⁰³).

" That this biography was actually translated by Kumārajīva is attested by Seng-jui's reference to an Indian Biography, and by Hui-yuan's summary of this biography in his Preface to the Great Perfection of Wisdom Treatise. Ui says that Nāgārjuna lived about 750-850 A.N...the date of the Nirvāṇa held by Kumārajīva and his disciples is 637 B.C. Hence we conclude the following dates: Aśvaghoṣa lived about 13 A.D., Nāgārjuna about 113-213 A.D.--These dates are consonant with the supposition that the biography of Nāgārjuna translated by Kumārajīva was written during the first half of the fourth century, as it mentions the existence of shrines to Nāgārjuna one hundred years after his death."¹⁰⁴

I will not discuss the biography in full here but will note some of the more famous and curious events.¹⁰⁵ Kumārajīva stated that Nāgārjuna was born in the south of India to a Brahmin family and by the age of twenty had become a renowned master of Vedic teachings. His first exposure to Buddhist Dharma came during a stay at a temple also in the south and within ninety days he understood the Tripitaka. Interested in other Buddhist sūtras, Nāgārjuna travelled throughout the south and during another stay near

a Caitya in the mountains (in the Upper Deccan?), he was introduced to the Mahāyāna sūtras. Thus it may well be his endeavor to locate other teachings that supported reports of his travels to Nālanda.¹⁰⁶ Some scholars suggest that it is during the stay at Nālanda that Nāgārjuna became familiar with the Mādhyamaka teaching.¹⁰⁷

Several of the events following Nāgārjuna's arrival at Nālandā are most intriguing. A significant point though is the means by which some of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras were revealed to him. Kumārajīva related that a Mahā-Nāga (a serpent spirit or being) having become aware of Nagarjuna's zeal to find more Mahāyāna sūtras invited him to his abode and showed him several works. "His spirit penetrates deeply into their meaning and obtains true benefit. The Nāga understands his thoughts and asks him:

"Hast thou not yet penetrated the Sūtra which thou seest (there)? He replies: "In thy receptacle there are a great many Sutras, their number is inexhaustible. I must read them again ten times at Jambudvīpa. The Nāga said: "What there is on hand in my palace of Sūtras and law-books, is incomparably more. Then Nāgārjuna understands the uniform meaning of the Sūtras and penetrates deeply into the concentration of the resignation of non-beginning."¹⁰⁸

The exact meaning of that episode will perhaps never be known yet it does suggest the extraordinary nature of

Nāgārjuna's accomplishment and also it connects him to a traditional source of wisdom. The biography related that, from that point onwards, Nāgārjuna spent his life propagating the Mahāyāna according to the superior understanding gained from his stay with the Nāga.

There are several works attributed to Nāgārjuna. Bu-ston mentioned six principal works¹⁰⁹:

- 1) Prajñā-mūla (Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikās): deals with the unreality of origination and decay.
- 2) Śūnyatā-saptati: expounds the relativity of all elements.
- 3) Yukti-saṣṭikā: contains a logical vindication of the śūnyatā doctrine.
- 4) Vigraha-vyāvarttanī deals with the objections of opponents to the Mādhyamaka.
- 5) Vaidalya-sūtra demonstrates the method of argumentation.
- 6) Vyavahāra-siddhi displays the relationship between wordly and absolute truth.

Tāranātha lists five works agreeing entirely with Bu-ston except for the Vyavahāra-siddhi which he does not list.¹¹⁰ A number of other works have been attributed to Nāgārjuna by Kumārajīva and are extant in Chinese only: Suhrillekha, Ratnāvalī, Catuḥ-stava, Pratītya-samutpāda-hṛdaya, Mahāyāna-viṃśaka, Bhivasamkrānti-śāstra, and Prajñā-danda.

The authenticity of several of the above works is still doubted because a number of authors throughout subsequent Buddhist history have called themselves Nāgārjuna. Scholars have had to make general assumptions given the discrepancies in the traditional accounts of Nāgārjuna's works. They have defined Nāgārjuna as the author of the Middle Stanzas (MMK.) and have proceeded to evaluate works attributed to him based on that text. In the end, there is general agreement on the works listed by Tāranātha as well as the secondary texts listed by Kumārajīva with the exception of the Mahāyāna-viṃśaka.

The biography of Nāgārjuna presented by later Mādhyamaka scholars in India add little to what has been compiled already from the Tibetan, Chinese and Korean biographies.¹¹¹ The Indian biographers seem to have been more concerned with the specific insight of Nāgārjuna as a guide to their own understanding of Buddhism than with his biography. Of course, that may only be a reflection of the sources presently available as much has been lost. Nāgārjuna is mentioned many times in the writing of Candrakīrti as well as in the writing of Āryadeva, Śānti-Deva, and Bhāvaviveka. Almost every Mādhyamika following Nāgārjuna discussed his Kārikās and proceeded from them. Thus there is no justification for the extreme scepticism of Walleser who questioned the existence of Nāgārjuna. However, there is a need for critical judgement when

considering the biographical material from all sources. Lastly, the appearance of Nāgārjuna is predicted in the Lañkāvatāra sūtra as well as in several Mahāyāna works but because such references occur much later than Nāgārjuna himself they must be used with discretion.¹¹²

The consensus of opinion among scholars is that Nāgārjuna's birthplace was in the Āndhra region in spite of some Tibetan traditions. His date of birth may be established as early as the first century B.C.E. or as late as the third century C.E., but a date within or around the middle of the second century C.E. is generally accepted. There seems to be ample evidence to suggest that Nāgārjuna was one of the early paṇḍits at Nālandā. Whether or not the principal influence on him was the Nālandā seers cannot be proven. Nevertheless, there is no question that Nagarjuna displayed a most brilliant and penetrating understanding of śūnyatā. Little is known of his death and the biographies repeatedly mention his longevity; some say that he lived three hundred years, others even longer but generally about one hundred years is assumed. Finally, the Mūla-Madhyamaka-kārikās is said to be Nāgārjuna's greatest work; the one by which he has come to be known throughout Buddhist history and through which we must come to an understanding of the Mādhyamaka.

Conclusion

The survey of developments in early Buddhist scholasticism allows for some general comments. 1) From its earliest period, Buddhism was subject to controversies and schisms. However, unlike other religions such as Christianity and Judaism a central body that defined its orthodox positions never fully developed. 2) Given the nature and duration of Buddha's ministry there existed such a wide range of teaching that contradictions could be found within the overall teaching. Any attempt to outline one particular stance or position was met with opposition that could equally employ tradition to support its interpretations. 3) The espousal of Buddhism by King Aśoka accelerated the development of sects because he tolerated differences in doctrine. 4) The proliferation of doctrine and philosophical maturity of a growing number of sects greatly broadened the scope of Buddhist philosophy. The study of Dharma called the Abhidharma attempted to establish a system of philosophy based on the early oral traditions and the works of accomplished teachers such as Vātsīputra and so on. However, new movements such as the Mahayana were highly critical of the approach of Abhidharma and instead founded its emerging philosophy on new sūtras. 5) The emergence of the Prajñāpāramitā issued a formidable challenge to the traditional systems based on its philosophy of śūnyatā.

The Mādhyamaka school closely followed the emergence of the Perfection of Wisdom literature. Nāgārjuna, the schools founder and most insightful exponent, drew upon the great depth and complexity of Buddhist philosophy. Though his school was unique as a system most of its philosophical underpinning had been established in the doctrines and teaching of earlier schools. In spite of the fact that no direct lines of influence have been drawn, Nāgārjuna based his philosophy on the sophisticated use of logic in the Abhidharma and the critiques in the Prajñāpāramitā. Systems such as the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma attempted to establish a metaphysic based on the early dialogues of the Buddha; but they were in turn countered by the teaching of śūnyatā. The Mādhyamaka emerged within this context of philosophical debate and established the logical consistency of the Prajñāpāramitā and therefore elevated it as a system to the level of the Abhidharma.

Other early movements were also incorporated into the Mādhyamaka philosophy. The teaching of two levels of truth by the Prajñāptivādins and the transcendentalism of the Lokottaravāda are reflected in the Mādhyamaka system of two truths and its understanding of the nature of the Buddha and bodhisattvas. Modern scholarship is only now starting to identify these early sources and in time we will certainly have a more detailed history of the school itself. But it is enough to present as this study has done the major

scholastic movements prior to the Mādhyamaka. The specific influences become clear as one begins to work with and interpret the philosophy.

NOTES

1. Lamotte, É., Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien (Louvain: Institut Orientalists, 1958), p.136.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.148f.
4. É. Lamotte, Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien, p.143.
Bapat, P.V., ed., 2500 Years of Buddhism (Delhi: Ministry of Information, 1956), p.86f.
5. Lamotte, p.143.
6. Ibid.
7. Lopez, D.S. Jr., ed., Buddhist Hermeneutics (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), p.5.
8. Lamotte, p.143.
9. Warder, A.K., Indian Buddhism (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), p.214.
10. Dutt, N., Buddhist Sects in India (Calcutta: Firma Klm, 1977), p.16.
11. Warder, p.214.

12. See Thomas, E.J., The History of Buddhist Thought (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1933), p.29., for reference to the Cullavagga.'

See A.K. Warder, Indian Buddhism, p.29 for reference to Bhavya's recount.

13. The five heresies may be briefly stated as 1) Arhats are subject to temptation; 2) they may have a residue of ignorance; 3) they entertain doubts; 4) they may be assisted in their pursuit of knowledge and 5) they may attain the Path through the spoken word.

For a more detailed discussion see Lamotte, pp.300-312.

14. Lamotte, p.317f.

15. Bu-ston, History of Buddhism (Transl. Obermiller, Leningrad: Buddhological Institute, 1931), p.116.

16. Warder. p.241.

17. Ibid., p.242.

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19. Lamotte, pp. 244-283.

20. Warder, p.272.

21. Ibid., p.274.

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24. Lamotte, p.237.
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28. Ibid., p.278.
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30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Lamotte, p.237.
33. Ibid.
34. Lamotte, p.304.
35. Bapat, p.99.
36. Ibid., p.104.
37. Warder, p.290.
38. Lamotte, p.573.

39. Har Dayal, The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1932), p.38.

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40. Murti, T.R.V., The Central Philosophy of Buddhism (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1980), p.41.

41. Conze, p.92.

42. Stcherbatsky, T., The Central Conception of Buddhism, Reprint, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), p.5.

43. See Murti, p.68.

See Stcherbatsky, p.2.

44. Murti, p.68.

45. Guenther, H.V., Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971), preface p.9.

46. Warder, p.82.

47. Ibid., p.219.

48. Lamotte, pp.153-154.

49. Guenther, p.31.

50. Warder, p.275.

51. Ibid.

52. Stcherbatsky, p.74.

See also Edgerton, F., Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary, Reprint, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), p.276.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., p.6.

57. Ibid., p.9.

58. Ibid., p.98.

59. Ibid., p.48.

60. Ibid., p.28.

61. Ibid., p.30.

62. Guenther, p.34.

63. Ibid.

64. Stcherbatsky, 56.

65. Ibid., p.34.
66. Ibid., p.23
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., p.49
69. Ibid., p.51.
70. Guenther, p.35.
71. Har Dayal, p.9.
72. Ibid., p.2.
73. Conze, p.218.
74. Sastri, N.A., in 2500 Years of Buddhism, p.310.
75. Har Dayal, p.31.
76. Ibid., p.34.
77. Warder, p.328f.
78. Ibid., p.354.
79. Bapat, p.105.
80. Ibid.

81. Conze, E., The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary (Bolinás: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), preface, p.11.

82. Ibid., p.10.

83. Ibid.

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85. Conze, E., The Prajñāpāramitā Literature (London: Mouton and Co., 1960), p.12.

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100. Ibid., p.26.

101. Joshi, L.M., "The Life and Times of the Philosopher Nāgārjuna" in The Maha Bodhi, vol,73, no.2, 1965, pp.42-47.

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107. Sankalia, H.D., The University of Nālandā (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1972), p.123.

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111. Walleser, p.30f.

112. See Lopez, D.S., Jr., A Study of Svātantrika (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1987), p.245, for reference to Laṅkāvatāra sūtra.

See Robinson, p.24, for references to other problematic sources.

Chapter Two

Mādhyamaka Vicāra: Reductio ad Absurdum Argumentation

The Mādhyamaka philosophy emerged in the second century C.E. as mentioned. There has been from its conception to the present a discussion although not always in the Buddhist ranks over its standpoint and implications. It would be quite impossible to describe all the interpretations and objections to them in one paper as those are still much debated issues. However, I believe an explanation has been given by the Prāsaṅgika school that effectively illustrated how the Mādhyamaka countered early Buddhist metaphysics. Therefore this study will focus on the Prāsaṅgika treatment of Nāgārjuna's philosophy and will discuss its response to rival Mādhyamika schools. It will show that the Mādhyamaka is essentially a critique of metaphysics based on an analysis of language. In addition, the religious motivation of Nāgārjuna will be shown to reflect the main concern of the bodhisattva.

Key Concepts

The contention over the standpoint of Nāgārjuna's interpretation of śūnyatā have taken several twists and turns. Clearly there has been shifts in the history of interpretation especially in what might be called the contemporary discussion. At first scholars presented the

Mādhyamaka as a form of nihilism perhaps because they depended too heavily on Hindu criticisms of the philosophy.¹ But slowly the subtlety of the teaching emerged and scholars became more appreciative of its scope and purpose. The translation of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikās and the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti, the early work by Poussin and Stcherbatsky, provided the key texts for deciphering Nāgārjuna's philosophy. Subsequently there has been progress towards understanding śūnyatā and this due in no small part to the popular and insightful work by T.R.V. Murti in The Central Philosophy of Buddhism. Moreover, the translation of Tibetan literature has provided, along with Chinese texts, a substantial amount of interpretive material. Those sources in combination with Sanskrit texts have provided a context for our discussion by introducing the later Mādhyamaka philosophies such as Svātantrika and Yogācāra. In sum, we have both the later traditions as well as the earlier philosophies within which Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamaka can be placed. This of course does not make understanding the Mādhyamaka a fait accompli but is encouraging nevertheless.

"The Mādhyamaka system is the systematized form of the Śūnyatā doctrine of the Prajñāpāramitā treatise; its metaphysics, spiritual path (sat-pāramitā-naya) and religious ideal are all present there, though in a loose, prolific garb."² I agree to a great extent with Murti's

findings expressed above; it has been shown that the Prajñāpāramitā had reached maturity prior to Nāgārjuna and that he had access to its teaching through the saṅgha. Therefore it is quite probable and indeed likely that the philosophy which Nāgārjuna represented so cryptically had a long (perhaps two or three centuries) period of development and is not simply a conclusion reached solely by one extraordinary thinker.

Part of the difficulty in clarifying the Mādhyamaka philosophy is the intricate way in which its key aspects are related. Nāgārjuna himself expressed: "We interpret the dependent arising of all things as the absence of being in them [śūnyatā]. Absence of being is a guiding, not cognitive notion, presupposing the everyday. It is itself the middle way."³ Three aspects are related if not equated in Nāgārjuna's explanation: (1) śūnyatā (2) pratītya-samutpāda and the (3) Mādhyamaka. The implication that the three aspects are expressions of one teaching in different spheres or arenas is clear. While seeming to suggest a circular argument, Nāgārjuna is emphasizing the central focus of his philosophy: the relatedness of all concepts.

The term pratītya-samutpāda has already been discussed in the context of the Sarvāstivāda philosophy. It was explained by Vasubandhu in the following manner: "if something appears, such and such result will follow". Vasubandhu's statement refers to things on an empirical

level; the idea was that certain dharmas appeared simultaneously or closely following each other and as such it expressed the Buddhist statement of the law of cause and effect. The Mādhyamikas on the other hand do not need to provide an ontological reference for pratītya-samutpāda as their analysis is quite successful at an epistemological level. "The peak of epistemology courses is the Prāsaṅgikas, the real essence of the ultimate meaning of the Buddha's message. They dispense with all judgements such as existence, non-existence, being (this or that) and non-being (this or that)."⁴ But without an ontology can there be an epistemology? Now we are in the Mādhyamikas homeground since this dilemma illustrates precisely their point. Nāgārjuna takes care to describe the essential relationship between concepts so that his rejoinder may be: without the existence of a thing of what need is an ontology? In other words, if a thing can not be shown to exist without assuming an ontological principle and vice versa how can such a circular argument be proof of anything? The Mādhyamikas do not have recourse to an ontology as the idea of being is refuted through an analysis of the arguments used to support the conception. However, this is not to say that theirs is a one-sided argument as they are capable of employing empirical arguments as well.⁵ In the end, Nagarjuna shows that both the conception of things as well as proofs that employ empirical evidence are subject to pratītya-samutpāda.

Candrakīrti in his Prasannapadā further clarifies the meaning of pratītya-samutpāda by giving the etymology of the word.

The root i means motion; the preposition prati means arrival or attainment. But the addition of a preposition alters the meaning of the root. 'A verbal root is forced, by the addition of a preposition, to alter its meaning...' So, in this case, the pratītya as a gerund, means 'attained' in the sense of 'dependent' or 'relative'. Again, the verbal root pad {to go, to fall} preceded by the preposition samut [out of] means to arise or to become manifest. Samutpāda, then has the meaning 'to arise' or 'to become manifest'. The full meaning of the term pratītya-samutpāda is therefore the arising, or becoming manifest of things (bhāva) in relation to or dependent on causal conditions.⁶

At first glance, Candrakīrti's definition seems to fit Vasubandhu's explanation very well but unlike the Sarvāstivādins, the Mādhyamikas hold that no entities arise and therefore the objects of the arising dependently are illusions. "Dependent origination is thus itself delusive because, in the comprehension of the wise man, nothing self-existent arise in it nor is there actual destruction, and by

the same token, no actual movement."⁷ The entire conceptual scheme of dharmas coming in and out of existence is questioned by the criticism that a self-existent entity can have no relation to another or else it would dependent on it in some way. Therefore dharmas must either be eternal and self-existent or momentary and dependent but not self-existent and momentary as the Sarvāstivādins claim. The significant extension has been as we have seen in the Prajñāpāramitā to the dharmas themselves from objects in general. Pratītya-samutpāda still describes the relationship between entities, however, even the constituents (dharmas) of those entities are declared to be delusive by the Mādhyamikas.

Śūnyatā is perhaps the most difficult aspect of the teaching to explain as explanations are hampered by its relationship to svabhāva. I have chosen simply as a starting point to represent śūnyatā as the absence of svabhāva in things (beings as well) but also I acknowledge Mervin Sprung's translation of śūnyatā as "the absence of being" as one of the best to date. Yet what exactly is svabhāva? J.W. De Jong has given at least four definitions that he himself has taken from an earlier article by Schayer but concludes that only two are valid: (1) that of the "own-being of each thing ("svalakṣaṇa or svo bhāva"), which, incidentally, they [Mādhyamikas] consider unreal, and (2) that of the 'own-being of all things taken together'

(prakṛti or svato bhava)".⁸ It should be noted that "own-being" is not explained by De Jong. However, by implication it appears that it is a two-fold principle that represents both the unique nature of a thing and the nature of all things in general. Conze supported De Jong suggested, that svabhāva may be equated with sva-lakṣaṇa (own-mark).⁹ The own-being of an entity may be called its unique mark or character; if we recall, the Sarvāstivāda discussion of dharmas pointed out that each of the constituents of reality possessed a mark that distinguished it from other dharmas. Furthermore, the sva-lakṣaṇa when considered as "not contingent, not conditioned, not related to anything outside [itself]" can be taken as the Absolute.¹⁰

The teaching of śūnyatā is seen most clearly in the Mādhyamaka critique of the notion of svabhāva. I have said that sunyata means the lack of svabhava. Fredrick Streng, in his discussion of Nāgārjuna's critique of the Abhidharma notion, suggests that, "from his [Nāgārjuna's] point of view, the elements were given the characteristics of substantial and self-sufficient entities, which denied the original intention of the "synergies" as part of the scheme of dependent co-origination."¹¹ Streng's evaluation is quite correct: the Mādhyamikas had to declare the śūnyatā of the notion of dharmas as it did not conform to the general principle of pratītya-samutpāda --that is, the notion of self-existence because it by implication denies the

essential relationships of things is without a validating principle. De Jong describes śūnyatā in another way: "Nāgārjuna's negative dialectic provides a positive apprehension, not of "a thing" but of the insight that there is not [an] independent and absolute thing which exists externally, nor a "thing" which can be constructed."¹² Kamaleswar Bhattacharya explains the content of the insight referred to in De Jong's article: "The things being devoid of an intrinsic nature (prakṛti) they are nothing but the universal and absolute Reality, which is "perfectly appeased" (atyantopasānta) and "by nature isolated" (prākṛtivivikta). That Nature, isolated from its appearances, is not however, an entity that can be determined objectively...By their nature, the things are not a determinate entity. Their nature is a non-nature; it is their non-nature that is their nature. For they have only one nature i.e. no nature."¹³ Bhattacharya, the obvious Advaita influences aside, as well as Streng and De Jong point out that śūnyatā is the outcome of an analysis of dharmas; moreover, it is the declaration of the non-apprehension of the Abhidharmists conception of sva-bhāva. Śūnyatā thus indicates the non-validity of an isomorphic relationship between a concept and thing.

The third aspect of the Mādhyamaka philosophy is the understanding of Mādhyamaka itself. The etymology of the word is quite simple as the root is madhya or middle and the

term generally means relating to the middle or center.¹⁴ Therefore, the Mādhyamikas are philosophers of the Middle or Middle Way and as such they recall the Buddha's famous sermon at Benares in which he outlined the Middle Path.¹⁵ No aspect focuses more precisely the problem of Nāgārjuna's standpoint than the Mādhyamaka; much has been written on what constitutes a middle position if indeed it is a position at all. Nāgārjuna explains: "Those things which are dependently originated are not, indeed, endowed with an intrinsic nature...Likewise it follows that my statement [i.e. All things are empty.] being dependently originated..., is devoid of an intrinsic nature, and hence void."¹⁶ Thus he maintains that "I have no proposition. When all things are void, perfectly appeased and by nature isolated, how can there be a proposition?"¹⁷ In other words, Nāgārjuna's philosophy is not a speculative system. Murti finds that the Sanskrit word prajñā which we may translate as non-dual knowledge or insight, illustrates the standpoint of Nāgārjuna's thought and notes, "Criticism itself is philosophy..."¹⁸ Universality and certitude are reached not by the summation of particular points of view, but by rigidly excluding them; for, a view is always particular."¹⁹ The Middle philosophy consequently does not entertain some middle position between other philosophies but rather attains to a critical position over them or a metaphilosophy.

The three key aspects of Nāgārjuna's philosophy are essentially related and together demonstrate his unique position. An attempt may be made to isolate and define each of the terms but one finds that this may not be done adequately without reference to at least one of the other terms. But this does not mean that Nāgārjuna's thought is circular or rather closed but that it is an expression of the relatedness of all things par excellence. The Mādhyamaka philosophy is derived from an analysis that serves as an opening of a system of thought: the Abhidharma. The lack of what we might call definitions or a thesis follows from the critical nature of the system, for as a critical philosophy, there is no need to offer its own propositions in place of those it criticizes.

The Mādhyamakas questioned the validity of the Abhidharma use of the term pratītya-samutpāda with respect to the self-existent dharmas. Moreover, they stressed that the concept of dharma is an illusion since the arguments used to define relationships between dharmas could not bear analysis. In the end, they espoused a philosophy of the middle position that was unlike the Abhidharma systems. It sought not to define elements of existence but rather attained a self-critical position that could not be used as a starting point for metaphysics. Thus the characterization of their philosophy as śūnya. However, the subtlety of their teaching and solely critical nature of their philosophy

eluded most opposition still.

The Mādhyamaka Analysis: A Question of Methodology

Two major traditions of interpretations of the Mādhyamaka have emerged subsequent to Nāgārjuna.²⁰ The second called the Svātantrika was founded by Bhāvaviveka and has steadily grown in popularity over the centuries shortly after its establishment.²¹ In addition, there are two significant sects or sub-schools called the Yogācāra and Vaibhāṣika that offered new wrinkles to the philosophy in general. Candrakīrti and Buddhapālita are the chief proponents of the earliest line of interpretation called the Prāsaṅgika. I will outline their approach by contrasting it with the Svātantrika. Admittedly, this is not fair to the second tradition but I hope that the following discussion will sufficiently illustrate the pitfalls of Bhāvaviveka's method while explaining the significance of the Prāsaṅgika.

A Prāsaṅgika may be described as: "a person who absolutely denies the notion of an essence and who does not accept that things exist by virtue of a constitutive principle through which they are what they are, even in a nominal sense."²² "The true Mādhyamika cannot uphold a position of his own; he has therefore no need to construct syllogisms and adduce arguments and examples."²³ The above seems quite consistent with Nāgārjuna's statements from the Vigrahavārttani and therefore they seem to support the

view that Nāgārjuna himself initiated the Prāsaṅgika method.²⁴ Of course, no mention of a Prāsaṅgika is found in his writings but this is understandable given that they are the seminal works of the Mādhyamaka school and as such were not involved in the much later debates over methodology.

The fact that Nāgārjuna is seen as the founder of the school however, did not appear to sway many of the later Mādhyamikas such as Bhāvaviveka and Asaṅga. Each found fault with the analytical method and conclusions of the Prāsaṅgika. Bhāvaviveka maintained that a Mādhyamika should argue by virtue of syllogism and counter arguments while Asaṅga denied external objects but accepted a self-validating awareness (Vijñāna).²⁵ The Prāsaṅgikas on the other hand denied both the need for counter arguments as well as the need for a constitutive principle such as Vijñāna. Candrakīrti when defending Buddhapālita against Bhāvaviveka pointed out the following: "It is meaningless for a Mādhyamika, because he cannot accept his opponent's premises, to propound a self-contained argument from his own point of view...²⁶ Our intention is fully satisfied so long as a multitude of logical faults, due to internal contradictions, descend on our adversary."²⁷ Moreover, Candrakīrti noted in response to Bhāvaviveka's claims that commentators should expound Nāgārjuna's argument by way of syllogism: "Nāgārjuna commented on his own Vigrahavyāvarttanī without employing syllogistic

arguments."²⁸ A Mādhyamika does not need to employ syllogisms to either empty an opponent's thesis or to expound Nāgārjuna's philosophy; the very goal of the Kārikās illustrates this: "When the object of thought is no more there is nothing for language to refer to. The true nature of things neither arises nor perishes, as nirvāṇa does not (MMk. 18.7)²⁹...That which, taken as causal or dependent is the process of being born and passing on, is, taken non-causally and beyond all dependence, declared to be nirvāṇa" (MMk.25.9)³⁰. Nirvāṇa is not attained through an understanding derived from concepts but rather can be achieved precisely when such conceptualizations cease. Thus Bhāvaviveka's method although well intentioned cannot fail to introduce a further tendency for conceptualization among those he instructs and therefore it deflects the individual's pursuit of nirvāṇa; even if his syllogisms are logically consistent, they are still inconsistent with the philosophy outlined by Nāgārjuna.³¹

The criticisms of the Yogācāra-svātantrika represented quite a different problem for the Prāsaṅgikas. H.R. Robinson illustrated the difference between the two schools quite early: "no two things could differ more in appearance than a Mādhyamika and a Yogācāra (Vijñānavāda) treatise. The former is dialectical, the latter didactic. The Mādhyamika criticizes Abhidharma, the Yogācāra writes a veritable Mahāyāna Abhidharma, with headings, subheadings,

lists and numbers luxuriantly. Mādhyamika dialectic works contain many negations and few affirmations. Yogācāra works are the other way around."³¹ Asaṅga, an early master of Yogācāra, offered the solution of vijñāna to what he saw was a flaw in the Mādhyamika system outlined by the following: what is the relationship between objects of judgement and objects of sensation? Not so compromising as the Vaibhāṣika who believed that objects of judgement are real, the Yogācāra suggested that "...all objects of judgement are ideally real and empirically unreal."³² The Yogācāra further maintain that all is a projection or construction of the mind, thus the mind only is the true reality.

Constructive Ideation (abhūta-parikalpa) is real...This abhūtaparikalpa is the Transcendent dynamic stream of consciousness which creates from itself all phenomena, substance (ātma), elements (dharma) or rather subject, object etc. All relations are within it, and not between it and some other beside it. Constructive Ideation constructs the phenomenal world of subject-object-relation, which cannot, for that reason, have an independent existence. The constructed subject-object world is unreal; but this does not make the abhūtaparikalpa unreal; for it is the substratum for the unreal subject-object duality. It is however, nonconceptual.

If it were the object of ideation, it would be unreal like any other superimposed (parikalpa) object.³³

The Prāsaṅgika criticism of the Yogācāra is severely uncompromising. Candrakīrti aims his attack at the relationship between vijñāna and objects and asks: how is an object differentiated in consciousness, in other words, by what is it known?³⁴ The Yogācāra maintains that the apparent differentiation of objects in the mind occurs due to: "...ideas regarding the reality of objects--- accumulated from the beginningless past in the mind in the form of impressions (vāsanā or habit energy). We take these impressions as having objective reality owing to our ignorance."³⁵ But this explanation amounts to little; Candrakīrti points out, "Even the sharpest sword cannot cut itself; the finger-tips cannot be touched by the same finger-tips. Citta does not know itself."³⁶ In other words, the Yogācāra does not explain how vijñāna has become its own deceiver nor how one thing can be both knower and the thing known without being separate entities. Moreover, what is the basis for the claim that ideas of the reality of objects are from the beginningless past? All such claims are guilty of arguing without grounds or by infinite regress; in addition, such logical flaws are not acknowledged by the Yogācāra which further illustrates Candrakīrti's criticism that the Yogācāra idealism is untenable.

The Prāsaṅgika criticism of Svātantrika and its subsidiary schools, Vaibhāśika and Yogācāra, attempted to curb the tendency that would return Buddhist philosophy to speculative metaphysics. Both Bhāvaviveka and Asaṅga attempted to articulate new philosophies that stemmed from what they felt were flaws in the Prāsaṅgika method. However, their criticisms on the one hand were due to a failure to understand the implications of any treatment of śūnyatā as a non-critical philosophy and on the other from a misunderstanding of the insight of śūnyatā in general. Bhāvaviveka's insistence that "...the prasāṅgavākya of Buddhapālita remains open to objection from an opponent because it lacks the logical reason and example necessary for valid inference...", reveals his inability to appreciate the character of the Prāsaṅgika analysis.³⁷ There can be no objection to the Prāsaṅgika as he does not provide a thesis and secondly because all logical rules of argument used by him are accepted by the opponent at the outset. Further, a Prāsaṅgika debate is not an argument per se because there is no position to establish, therefore, every debate has one thesis namely, the positive or negative statement of the speculative philosopher. That point cannot be over-stressed as it is at the heart of most misunderstandings. To put it another way, the Mādhyamaka enlightenment consists in part of freedom from speculative philosophy and as such it has no theory to propound. Consequently, it has no need for

syillogistic arguments or buttressing rational arguments.

The fact that a thesis is flawed is demonstrated by the Prāsaṅgika analysis. If in the event a debator is not satisfied that he is attached to an erroneous view, then the Prāsaṅgika has no recourse but to let the debate end or to direct him to a more enlightened view. Perhaps, this is what was meant by Bhāvaviveka when he spoke of a counter-example. But we must note that the Svātantrika has forgotten that the Prāsaṅgikas accept the distinction between the two types of sūtras: "This is precisely why Nāgārjuna composed this treatise on the middle way; he wanted to demonstrate the proper distinction between those sūtras which are for mankind at large and those which are for the initiates."³⁸ All arguments that have recourse to existence or non-existence and so on are for mankind at large; the Prāsaṅgika would not disagree with that, for there must still be a need for such examples mentioned by Bhāvaviveka. However, when one deals with the higher truth such examples are not appropriate and are abandoned:

Whichever sūtras are concerned primarily with liberation characterized by the absence of being in particular things, by the absence of external objects and bigoted views, of willed action, of birth, origination, existent things, inherent natures, by the absence of individual beings, of personal spirits, of the person and of the self---such sūtras are for the

wise initiates.³⁹

Bhāvaviveka would have the teaching for mankind in general be used indiscriminately among the initiates and therefore has collapsed the distinction between the respected spheres of applicability of the two teachings.

The Yogācāra also attempted to return Mādhyamika thought to the fold of speculative metaphysics and in so doing generally mischaracterized the Mādhyamaka as speculative philosophy. "The Vijñānavāda accepts the existence of something (Vijñāna) and denies the existence of others (objects), and therefore it cannot be taken as the denial of both "is and "not is" standpoints which is the real madhyama-pratipad (middle position) of Buddha."⁴⁰ The "mind-only" philosophers are as guilty as the early Abhidharmists of developing a speculative philosophy of the kind criticized by the Buddha in the Brāhma-gala Nikāya. Moreover, their attempts to provide a rational foundation for vijñāna brought them into conflict with a more sophisticated and older Hindu philosophy. Thus the theory of vijñāna resembled the Vedanta conception of Brahman or rather strived after a similar conception of the Absolute but it suffered from the lack of support from the history of Buddhist philosophy. Yogācāra idealism as a form of Absolutism made the full circle from Buddhism back to Brahmanism and as such it became very difficult to maintain an identity:

When the Buddhists made the mistake to physicalize these concepts [viññāna and dharmas]---they entangled themselves in a maze of contradictions in their debates with the Hindus. They forgot the lessons which Buddha taught his disciples, viz., that his teachings concerned only those issues which had a bearing on nirvāṇa and over-looked the agreed upon imperviousness of māyā to rational thought.⁴¹

The Vijñānavādins like the early Svātantrika Bhāvaviveka distorted fundamental features of the Mādhyamaka philosophy, and in so doing falsely characterized it as a speculative philosophy. Undoubtedly, that movement was disastrous for Buddhism as it could not cite a unique goal when the philosophies expounding that goal bore no fundamental difference from Hindu philosophies, Advaita especially. Therefore, it was imperative that the Prāsangikas deny the validity of the direction that the Svātantrika and its subsidiary schools of thought had taken.

The Emptiness of Śūnyatā

"The purpose of writing the Mādhyamakakārikā...was two fold; to destroy adherence to language and secondly to the referents of language."⁴² Paul M. Williams in referring to the commentary by Devaśarman has concisely expressed the goals of the Prāsaṅgika analysis. In his article, Williams makes his case by considering the Mādhyamaka critique of the

Sārvāstivāda system of primary and secondary existents: dravyasat and prajñaptisat respectively. The Sarvāstivādins maintained that there are two types of existents characterized as linguistic (prajñapti) and ultimate (dravya). The first corresponds to an empirically real object that is the referent of language but which is susceptible to analytic dissolution thereby revealing that there is no ultimate referent. Ultimate existents correspond to dharmas that are irreducible and impervious to analysis. As I have suggested, the Mādhyamaka critiqued the existence of dharmas consequently collapsing the relationship between prajñapti and dravya. Once the substratum for the secondary existents had fallen away the Mādhyamikas clarified the range of prajñapti: "Whereas previously the existential status of prajñapti was subordinated to those elements which are the certain result of analysis we now face a situation where all elements are uncertain and so correspondingly all elements retain a status only as prajñapti, linguistic referents."⁴³ By denying the substratum of linguistic referents, the Mādhyamikas have questioned their ontological status.

If the referents of language are questioned, then to what does language refer? The system of two truths must be presented in order to answer this question.

The exhaustive totality of words and transactions based on the distinction between knowing and the thing known,

naming and the thing named and so on, is what is meant by the truth of the everyday world. Such a world could not exist in a higher or surpassing sense (paramāṛthah). Because 'When the object of thought is no more, there is nothing for language to refer to...'⁴⁴

Therefore, the referent of language is an existing thing according to the everyday world but an empty thing according to paramārtha. The reality of the referent of language is maintained by distinctions and associations that we make on a daily basis. In fact, it is because referents cannot be said to exist, not to exist, and so on outside our conceptual systems as such that Nāgārjuna declares them dependent and therefore empty. Language functions on the transactional level where certain presuppositions are in place; the ontological reality of the referents of language is rarely questioned except in the obvious cases such as a chocolate mountain and so on.⁴⁵ However, when one subjects the conception of a thing to an analysis of the Mādhyamaka type, its ontological reality becomes questionable. Indeed, one comes to wonder whether or not there was a thing to question in the first place. Further, one finds that a thing must first be presupposed and then a proof of its existence demonstrated; but the Mādhyamikas have noted time and again that this simply begs the question. On what basis has that thing been assumed to exist?

The Prāsaṅgika method proceeds from an acceptance of the "everyday world" or the realm of language. The Mādhyamikas are quite aware that the referents of language are considered real by people immersed in the "everyday world" and they do not deny their existence but rather declare that such things are not self-existent (svabhāva). This is a very subtle point and it is aimed at avoiding nihilism. A Wise one, "...does not recoil to the belief that things are unreal because he has found no self-existence in them, thinking 'what once was, now is not'" (that is, after emptiness has been understood).⁴⁶ The Mādhyamaka method does not annihilate and it is not pure scepticism; it examines and it is enlightening. The insight of the absence of being in things reveals that things have not existed apart from language. Hence, there has not been the annihilation of anything but rather, the realization of the illusion of such things. The difficulty that many interpreters have had with the Mādhyamaka analysis stems from mistaking the non-apprehension of a thing as the denial of its existence. There is no need for the Mādhyamaka to deny a thing's existence as the thing as it is used or represented in everyday language cannot be found or shown to exist in anyway. Thus Nāgārjuna consistently asks what thing is conceived; how is the existence of two things known separately or concomitantly and so on. Further, when Nāgārjuna declares that no origination of things can be

demonstrated except in relation to each other or that no agent of motion is found and so on, he is speaking from the understanding that words have been used to designate and relationships have been formed based on those designations but what has been designated is not grasped and those relationships cannot bear analysis⁴⁷. We may find that Nāgārjuna's declaration that the everyday world is illusory to be impossible even preposterous but this is precisely because we have accepted its existence without analyzing just what it is we accept.

The Mādhyamikas have further called the goal of their analysis the cessation of named things (designations). "The afflictions and karmic action arise from hypostatizing thought and this from the manifold of named things. Named things come to an end in the absence of being."⁴⁸ Nāgārjuna suggests that those things commonly accepted as real are only rarified thought. We have forgotten the relatedness of all things and come to conceive of a thing in isolation. Thus we have a conception of a horse but forget that no such thing is observed apart from its environment, or in relation to another animal such as a cow, or outside the conceptual scheme of animals and human beings in general and so on. Language as it is used encourages distinctions and associations between independent entities that cannot be found and that are essentially only imagined.

The Prāsaṅgikas employ analysis to demonstrate the untenability of not only referents but also of the more general philosophical views that precede and proceed from the discrimination of such referents. Any conceptual framework that attempts to explain things presupposes their existence in a certain fashion. For instance, the progress philosophies of India or Greece are all dependent on the conception of becoming or movement and so on and as such they have chosen a particular conceptual scheme that is exclusive.⁴⁹ The Mādhyamikas have to simply demonstrate that such conceptions are dependent on antithetical conceptions for meaning in order to show the biased position or presupposition that lies at the root of the philosophy, as well as its debt to other philosophies. One may define an internally consistent philosophy based on a particular view but it must always fall victim to criticisms of its initial assumptions. Moreover,

"...no statements generatable within that framework [F] can fail to refer to entities which are constituted and individuated by the principles of F. Equivalently, the principles of F are incorrigible relative to F but are not incorrigible without qualification. In other words, the transcendental deduction of framework F cannot be but circular. The supposed deduction and justification are always internal."⁵⁰

In the end, any framework must declare its initial assumptions and thereby declare that it is limited by those assumptions as well as subject to their arbitrariness.

Once both a thing and its conceptual framework are understood to be empty or dependent on another thing and its conceptual framework, the Mādhyamikas declare their untenability as a universal framework and so on. The Prāsaṅgika strive to free individuals of their attachment to language; they have declared that because the everyday world consists of things devoid of being it should be viewed as illusory by the wise. Furthermore, they have demonstrated their insight by analysis of commonly used identities and of conventional speech in general as well as the arguments that are inevitably articulated within everyday language. They conclude that things as such cannot be found and that through hypostatizing thought have been given the illusion of reality.

The Mādhyamikas have no need of a philosophy per se nor an explanation of things since no things remain to be explained. This is not reductionism though it has been called positivism for want of a better word; it is quite simply enlightenment. It is the expression of the freedom that one attains after the realization of the self-deception of speculative philosophies. But one may argue that philosophy is necessary and that scientific speculations are productive. The Mādhyamikas have no disagreement with such

claims as long as it is understood that philosophy as an explanation of things and scientific theories each have givens and arbitrary positions that essentially characterize and limit their spheres of validity. The Mādhyamaka on the other hand is fundamentally a vehicle that steers clear of the pitfalls of speculative philosophy not by blindly grasping at certain dogma but by analyzing the very claims and content of speculative philosophies. Its goal as I have attempted to outline is deliverance of individuals to nirvāṇa: a state characterized by the cessation of speculation based on the existence or non-existence of things. Thus it is very much a Buddhist vehicle. For that reason, the Prāsāṅgikas following in the line of the Prajñāpāramitā have refused to grant the goal may be conceived or that it is the result of the accumulation of views and so on.

The spiritual conquerors have proclaimed the absence of being in things to be the exhaustion of all theories and views; those for whom the absence of being is itself a theory they declared to be incurable.⁵¹

Nāgārjuna's Karuṇā

Perhaps the feature of Nāgārjuna's philosophy that most clearly distinguishes it from western philosophies is the role of karuṇā. Moreover, the religious motivation behind

the Kārikās established Nāgārjuna as a Buddhist saint in the eyes of many fellow Buddhists. Unlike the many sceptics and philosophers with which he is compared not to mention the dialecticians and logicians, Nāgārjuna has a unique soteriological purpose. He wishes not to leave his disciples and fellow Buddhists in a state of confusion and helplessness but rather to shed light on the Dharma that he considered to be a precious gift to mankind.

The Perfect Buddha

The foremost of all Teachers I salute.

He has proclaimed

The Principle of Universal Relativity

'Tis like blissful Nirvana

Quiescence of Plurality.⁵²

Nāgārjuna offers the above dedication to the Buddha at the beginning of his Kārikās. His praise is for a supreme teacher who has outlined the path of salvation for all but who has not done so without sacrifice: "O you who have gone beyond the world, homage to you versed in pure knowledge who have suffered pain, out of compassion, during long time, only for the benefit of all living beings."⁵³ The Buddha's teaching of Dharma is seen as an act of pure compassion (karuṇā), but more specifically, it is seen as the fruition of a long and difficult setting forth. Clearly, the understanding of a bodhisattva dedicated to time and again helping sentient beings reach nirvāṇa is reflected in

Nāgārjuna's praise. That of course is quite consistent with the characteristics attributed to bodhisattva's throughout the Prajñāpāramitā literature. In what might be called an uncharacteristic show of emotion for Nāgārjuna, we see further examples of his religious sentiment: "Let all living beings be liberated from the bonds of what has characteristics through the merit I have obtained by praising you, receptacle of praise."⁵⁴ Nāgārjuna demonstrates that he is willing to appeal to the grace of the Buddhas and by this he encouraged belief in the Mahāyāna.

Candrakīrti, in his explanation of the ultimate concern of Nāgārjuna's treatise, suggests the role of karuṇā in Nāgārjuna's endeavors: "...Nāgārjuna, knowing unerringly how to teach transcendent insight, developed this treatise [the Kārikās] out of compassion and for the enlightenment of others."⁵⁵ Nāgārjuna was more than a philosopher of śūnyatā, he was, "...born of the ocean of wisdom of the perfectly enlightened one.."; moreover, he acted in a way that "...compassionately brought to light the hidden truth of the treasury of Buddhism in Buddha's sense."⁵⁶

Although Nāgārjuna did not explicitly state his reason for writing the Kārikās, it is obvious given the hymns quoted above as well as Candrakīrti's own dedication that sympathy for those trapped in saṃsāra was a key factor. Nāgārjuna was not simply a clever dialectician; he was

primarily a Buddhist and a follower of the Dharma. We cannot presume from the analytical style of his treatise that there were no compassionate emotions behind it. Certainly a man of Nāgārjuna's abilities and accomplishments could not turn his back on the world, indeed, the very nature of his enlightenment included a perception of the suffering incurred from self-deception and delusion. Thus his achievement would not be complete until he had helped disperse the ignorance that still plagued mankind and that had preceded his own setting forth. The fact that Nagarjuna did not herald the Mādhyamaka as a new philosophy but rather as part of the true tradition of interpretation of the Buddha's teaching shows his concern for preserving the Way for his fellow Buddhists. Moreover, his demonstration of the fullness of an enlightened one, of both prajñā and karuṇā, aligned him with the Bodhisattvayāna.

Thus the essential nature of all Bodhisattvas is a great loving heart (mahākaruṇācitta), and all sentient beings constitute the object of its love. Therefore, all the Bodhisattvas do not cling to the blissful taste that is produced by the diverse modes of mental tranquilization (dhyāna), do not covet the fruit of their meritorious deeds, which may heighten their own happiness...Their great heart of sympathy which constitutes the essence of their being never leave suffering creatures behind [in their journey towards

enlightenment]. Their spiritual insight is in the emptiness (śūnyatā) of things, but [their work of salvation] is never outside the world of sins and suffering.⁵⁷

NOTES

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24. See notes 18 and 19.

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26. Sprung, p.37.

27. Ibid., p.38.

28. Ibid., p.39.

29. Ibid., p.177

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31. For a more detailed account of the prāsaṅgika svātantrika debate see: Iida, Shotaro, Reason and Emptiness (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1980), pp.277-298.

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45. But note that even such entities are placed under the domain of the everyday and so too are other objects of fancy as well as hallucinations and so on. The Mādhyamikas do not compromise and make a distinction between things that are real in the everyday and things that are non-real; all things as they are part of the everyday are considered illusory and therefore subject to the lower truth.

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Chapter Three

Some Modern Views of Nāgārjuna's Arguments

I would like to discuss a strong objection to Nāgārjuna's so-called claims of refutation voiced by both R.H. Robinson and R.H. Jones. In addition, I would like to present a more appreciative and interesting treatment of the Mādhyamaka analysis by M. Siderits and J.D. O'Brien. It will be shown that Nāgārjuna's Kārikās have been misunderstood both in a positive and in a negative sense and that each compromises its function as a Mādhyamaka śāstra.

R.H. Robinson's article "Did Nāgārjuna really refute all Philosophical views?" apart from its obvious misunderstanding of Nāgārjuna's intention, is fairly typical of the criticisms of Nāgārjuna. Robinson declared that his intention is to account for that feeling of suspicion one encounters (presumably himself) upon hearing or reading Nāgārjuna's analysis.¹ A comparison is made between Nāgārjuna's analysis and a shell game where a pea is hidden in one of three shells. Robinson suggests that like the operator of the shells Nāgārjuna is adept at lightning quick manipulations; but because the participant cannot follow the movements his conviction that he is being tricked is reinforced. I suggest that there is no trick where Nāgārjuna is concerned and that the sense of being tricked derives from the participant's belief that he is too sharp

to be tricked therefore when the outcome is unexpected the assumption is trickery.

I will be concerned mainly with the section of the article related to or directly involved with the analysis of chapter two of the Kārikās as it affords an opportunity to focus on a paradigmatic Mādhyamaka analysis. Robinson has set down what he calls axioms of Nāgārjuna's analysis; none of which include rules of logic or grammar and so on.² It should be noted, however, that at no time has Nāgārjuna declared such axioms. Secondly, Robinson's premise that Nāgārjuna is setting out to prove the thesis "that all entities are empty" is misguided.³ The verse that he has translated in support of his interpretation is not verse 24.19 as he maintained but 24.14, even so his translation is poor.⁴ The verse does not say "nothing exists for him who does not hold emptiness is valid" but rather nothing makes sense or is intelligible for whom emptiness does not hold.

Axiom five of Robinson's list deals with the reflexive type of statement considered in Nāgārjuna's analysis of gatam and agatam, namely, "a goer goes". Robinson has maintained that "Nāgārjuna is refusing to allow, as ordinary language does, that reflexive statements are either pseudo-reflexive or pseudo-transitive."⁵ For instance, "I saw myself in the mirror" is an example of a pseudo-reflexive statement but the question of the meaningfulness of the statement is the significant one. Clearly, it does not make

sense; for example, one does not see oneself in a mirror but rather a reflection of oneself and part of oneself at that. Further, one cannot even begin to examine the concept "myself" without referring to self-existence, the concepts of identity, the belief in an ātman and so on and so on. Therefore the situation is not so easily resolved as Robinson would suggest, in fact his solution has pointed out the superficiality of his own thinking not the "sheer quibble" of Nāgārjuna's.

Robinson has taken up the problem again later on in the article and referred to the example of rain. He has suggested that in the sentence "Rain rains rain", the subject and object are dummies.⁶ Therefore, Nāgārjuna is simply creating a straw argument by transforming statements to this form and then treating the objects and subjects as if they were not dummies.⁷ Again it should be pointed out that Robinson has misunderstood the analysis. For instance, the example "rain rains rain" begs the question: what makes the recognition of rain possible in the first place. If one says the recognition of rain makes the perception of raining possible then one must ask by what act has the identification of rain as such been made and if it was from an act not involving raining then it follows that rain is possible without the act of raining! Moreover, if it occurred in conjunction with an act of raining, how can the identification of either be made, in other words, on what

basis has the differentiation of rain from raining been accomplished? I can continue along a Mādhyamaka argument but the point is that Robinson does not appreciate the dependent nature of the concepts involved in the arguments and chooses instead to read some kind of trick into them.

Robinson's conclusion states the inevitable outcome of his misreading of the analysis: "The nature of the Mādhyamika trick is now quite clear. It consists of (a) reading into the opponent's views a few terms which one defines for him in a self-contradictory way, and (b) insisting on a small set of axioms which are at variance with common sense and not accepted in their entirety by any known philosophy."⁸ Again, Robinson is essentially accusing the Mādhyamikas of creating straw arguments. I have maintained that his identification of axioms is not supported by the text and further his interpretations of the Kārikās show a lack of understanding of its subtlety and purpose. Nāgārjuna's analysis involves no trick apart from the tricks that we play on ourselves when using identities based on concepts and concepts in turn substantiated by the identification of such entities. Robinson's obligatory comment that criticism is good for philosophy rings of contradiction given his own uncritical reading.

Nāgārjuna's attempt has never been to refute "all philosophical views" as there are as many views as there are philosophers, and each new era produces its own version or

variation (depending on what school you ascribe to) and so on. The refutation of all views would never be accomplished as they can be created ad infinitum. Quite to the contrary, Nāgārjuna has tried to reveal the self-deception involved in views; that is why the Mādhyamaka is a metaphilosophy or a critique of metaphysics. Robinson's last comment that Nāgārjuna is dogmatic and that his critique fails to do justice to the categories of thought commonly employed in thinking of the phenomenal realm reveals his uncritical and superficial treatment of the Kārikās.⁹ First of all, dogmatic metaphysics is the object of the analysis not its substance; secondly, it is our categories of thought that fail to do justice to the so-called phenomenal realm¹⁰; and thirdly, his example of the Savage's criticism of a philosopher is inappropriate¹¹. Nāgārjuna has never tried to define what is in heaven and earth but has thoroughly criticized others for doing so. One might say that for Nāgārjuna the nature of what is in heaven and earth is far too much or too subtle to be captured in philosophies.

The second article I would like to consider is R.H. Jones' "The Nature and Function of Nāgārjuna's arguments". Unlike Robinson, Jones has made a serious attempt to deal in depth with Nāgārjuna's arguments and that is reflected in the fact that his article is double the length of Robinson's with a fraction of the derisive comments. The conclusions are however similar.

Jones has declared that he is aware of the soteriological intent of Nāgārjuna's work at the onset of his article.¹² Moreover, he has made a workable assessment of the purpose of Nāgārjuna's analysis: "His analysis attempts to show that what our terms denote lack what is essential for them to be considered real and desirable."¹³ The fact that the arguments do not necessarily require a knowledge or an experience of Buddhist trance/meditational techniques is also recognized by Jones.¹⁴ In addition, he has pointed out that the criticism that Nāgārjuna contradicts the laws of excluded middle and noncontradiction is unfounded.¹⁵ Moreover, he has done a competent job of dealing with the important terms of Mādhyamika thought and has focused on the subject of relationships which is an important aspect of the analysis.

Much of what Jones has considered to be background for his study has already been covered by the previous chapters of this thesis. Therefore, my concern is with the last section in which he has given an assessment of Nagarjuna's analysis. Jones has framed the parameters of the assessment with two questions: (1) "Does he [Nāgārjuna] succeed in establishing the dependent origination of things?" (2) "Does his technique 'still' or 'pacify' our mental fabrications?"¹⁶ On both counts he found Nāgārjuna lacking: "What he has done is to fabricate, for those who accept own-nature, a world view which is obviously incompatible with

ordinary experience and then merely pointed that out."¹⁷
 "Nāgārjuna's scheme reduces to a paradox---He cannot use observations to attack the possibility of real entities and then use the lack of real entities in turn to attack what is observed without a circularity becoming involved which destroys his position."¹⁸

Jones has based his assessment on interpretations of analyses of reflexive statements mentioned previously. For instance, he interpretes the conclusion of the analysis of the seer and the seen in chapter three of the Kārikās to be that neither exist because they cannot be said to exist together or separately.¹⁹ Readings of the declaration of a thing's existence or nonexistence by Nāgārjuna is a misreading. Moreover, the seer and the seeing and that which is seen is not found or known by Nāgārjuna in a similar way the goer, the act of going and destination to be gone to was not found in the analysis of gatam and agatam. Secondly, Nāgārjuna does not declare a thing's nonexistence because it does not conform in some way to the idea of total independence but because to maintain a thing exists in no way derived or in no way accompanied by other things to which it is essentially related does not make sense. The teaching of pratītya-samutpāda emphasizes things are related, thus it makes no sense to speak of a goer apart from a destination and an act of going; similarly, it makes no sense to speak of a seer apart from seeing and what is

seen. Therefore Nāgārjuna's arguments do not involve a paradox other than the implied paradox of how an object makes sense or is viewed as truly existing apart from those things on which its identification is dependent.

Jones follows his initial criticism with a more sustained attack against what he sees as Nāgārjuna's attack on reified concepts. "Showing that the reality lies not in the conceptual understanding or that there is a linguistic basis to the idea of identity does not entail that what is labeled by our concepts is "unreal" in any normal sense of the term. To go from saying that no words denote independent, unchanging, eternal entities to saying that they are without referent cannot be done."²⁰ The above shows the trap Jones is susceptible to given his initial interpretation of Nāgārjuna's intent. Certainly Nāgārjuna is attacking the view that independent entities cannot be found; but he does not say that all words do not have referents because such entities cannot be found but because the dependent nature of language resists proof of the existence of those referents. Moreover, he points out that terms have meaning in relation to one another so to suggest that in isolation they represent an entity or thing is nonsense. It is to those instances in which we make an identification of a thing apart from those others to which it is related that Nāgārjuna points. The kind of blanket or general statements ascribed to Nāgārjuna by Jones are poor interpretations of

the text and betray a misunderstanding of the two levels of truth in the Mādhyamaka teaching.

But let us continue with Jones' criticism further. A second point is made with respect to the critique of language by Nāgārjuna: "In attacking the reification of "loose and separate" words into a world of loose and separate entities, he attacks one form of grammatical realism with another: he relies upon a parallelism between a conceptual mutual interdependence and ontological reciprocal interdependence among entities."²¹ Jones has considered the comments of G.Tucci on the relationship between cause and effect in Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī when making the above statement. He then suggested that Nāgārjuna's criticisms of reified concepts may be invalidated by the instance in which the real or physical reality exists prior to an identification in concepts: "..the cause may physically exist before the conceptual rearrangement involved by the process it enters into".²² In other words, the identification is made of something that is real then grasped in a conceptual scheme. But Jones has strayed from the analysis here. Nāgārjuna does not say that there is no physical reality or entity but rather is asking how could one maintain the existence of such a reality or entity apart from its conception. The cause exists for Jones before it has been identified as such but how does one come to identify it as a cause at all? What is the basis of

the concept of a cause if it can exist apart from any correspondence to a really existing thing? Moreover, Jones has assumed some thing called physical reality but how has such a thing been identified apart from the concept? If the conceptual scheme can simply be applied, to what is it applied? If Jones must speculate about nebulous entities that exist apart from concepts he must be prepared to defend upon which grounds he has made an identification of them. That type of speculation is not what Nāgārjuna strove for, in fact, it is the relinquishing of such speculation that is the goal of the analysis. Nāgārjuna does not attack concepts to deny the existence of things but rather to show that concepts are mutually dependent and that to maintain the existence of something conceived as outside or apart from a relationship to other things is unreasonable. Further, the postulate that things exist outside of concepts begs the question: on what basis can those things be known to exist?

The concluding remarks of Jones give an indication of the extent to which he has been misled by his assumption that Nāgārjuna denies the existence of things on the grounds of Emptiness. He says of the analysis in general: "But behind all these arguments lies the mistaken premise that relational properties dependent upon more than one object (for example, up/down) must be treated as distinct objects."²³ That has been a complete misreading of

Nāgārjuna not to mention a misunderstanding of the critique of the Sarvāstivādin's use of lakṣaṇa. Nagarjuna does not declare a thing's nonexistence because it does not conform to a trumped up definition of self-existence or as Jones calls it dependent existence but rather Nāgārjuna questions the validity of a thing whose proof cannot be established apart from the other things in which its existence is implied. Jones' final remarks above expresses the unfortunate circumstance of a misreading, namely, the efficacy of the Kārikās is cast in doubt.

The last article I would like to discuss is completely opposite to the previous two in opinion. Mark Siderits and J. Dervin O'Brien have realized that the profundity and subtlety of the Kārikās is formidable indeed, therefore, they have not looked for tricks which might invalidate the analysis. However, their approach like Jones' and Robinson's has led them away from fully appreciating the nature of the argument.

The premise of their article entitled "Zeno and Nāgārjuna on Motion " is interesting.²⁴ They have based their comparison on Brumbaugh's analysis of Zeno which in their opinion afforded striking parallels to be drawn between Nāgārjuna's and Zeno's arguments both in methodology and objective.²⁵ "Our aim is to show that some of Nāgārjuna's arguments against motion, like Zeno's Paradoxes, exploit the atomist's assumption about the continuity and discontinuity

of space and time."²⁶ I contend that while this type of comparison is perhaps valuable in principle, the Kārikās of Nāgārjuna are too often the victim of an imposed critique of motion.

Aside from the premise of the argument itself the authors make some insightful comments. In what seems to be a contradiction of the criticism of Robinson, Siderits and O'Brien find that Nāgārjuna's analysis is more balanced and less dogmatic than previously thought: "That is to say that he is arguing against a strict correspondence theory of truth and is in favor of a theory of meaning which takes into account such things as coherence and pragmatic and contextual considerations. We may say that Nāgārjuna seeks to demonstrate the impossibility of constructing a rational speculative metaphysics."²⁷ They maintain that Nāgārjuna's analysis shows the nonviability of accounts of motion that make absolute distinctions or which assume a relationship between the terms of the analysis and reals "that is, any analysis which is not tied to a specific context or purpose but is propounded as being universally valid."²⁸ Siderits and O'Brien note Nāgārjuna does not make general claims of the type Robinson has mentioned. Indeed, he pays close attention to grounding the examples in specific examples. Moreover, in what is a direct contradiction of Jones' comment that Nāgārjuna denies the reality of referents of language, Siderits and O'Brien point out: "...he [Nāgārjuna]

is not arguing against the possibility of real motion but only against the possibility of our giving any coherent universally valid account of motion."²⁹

The exposition of chapter two of the Kārikās by Siderits and O'Brien is consistent with their view that Nāgārjuna's arguments are Zeno-like. Their reading of the first śloka, keyed by an interpretation by Kajiyama, is very much in the vein of a Zenocratic argument. They see the mapping out or pointing out of three spaces: what has been gone to; what has not yet been gone to; and what is being gone to. However, they point out that by using a line segment that the last space mentioned cannot find representation for any time (t).

A-----B-----C

(t)

A-B = the segment already traversed.

B-C = the segment not yet traversed.

But for any time (t) there is no discernable duration for that which is being traversed, in other words, the line segment is completely exhausted by (A-B)+(B-C).³⁰

They then employ Candrakīrti's commentary in support of their interpretation and for the most part do so successfully. "The place before the infinitesimal atom at the tip of the toe is the locus of the gone-to. And the

place beyond the atom at the end of the heel is the locus of the not-yet-gone-to. And apart from this infinitesimal atom there is no foot."³¹ It should be pointed out however, that their interpretation has failed to make use of the principle of pratītya-samutpāda and because it focuses on motion at the onset, the significance of Nāgārjuna's analysis of gatam and agatam over gati is overlooked.

Siderits and O'Brien create an ingenious explanation of the third śloka in an attempt to remain consistent with their initial reading of śloka one. They have defined at least two terms in addition to those mentioned by Nāgārjuna thus far: an object of length "s" where "s" is an indivisible unit of space; and "d" an indivisible unit of time.³² Such definitions are supported by the assumption that Nāgārjuna is working with models of time and space that are discontinuous, and therefore are parallel to Zeno's arguments. Given that an object of length "1s" occupies position A on the number line above at time t:0 and at time t:1 occupies space C. The object between the times t:0-t:1 has displaced "2s" units of length. Thus its displacement velocity is $v = 2s/d$. The question now is: when has the object occupied position B? It must be at t:0 + 1/2d but that is impossible given that "d" is an indivisible unit. Therefore they conclude that the occupation of position B is a fabrication and represents an

imagined act of going (that is, that which is being gone to).

Although this is a clever application of Zeno's dialectic to the Kārikās, it is problematic. First of all, Nagarjuna does not need to refer to indivisible units in order to analyze gatam and agatam. Secondly, the conception of indivisible units in a Greek sense (i.e. Democritian atoms and so on) need not conform to the Sarvāstivādin conception of a dharma, therefore the parallel may not be as valid as our authors have assumed. But the question remains whether or not such an interpretation is valuable.

The weakness of Siderits' and O'Brien's explanation surfaces in their interpretation of verse four. They have pointed out throughout the first three verses how the analysis is Zeno-like however, for verse four their exposition switches to a discussion of lakṣaṇa as the analysis in the Kārikās becomes less accessible through traditional Greek concepts and more like an Indian philosophical debate of the concept of a defining mark.³³ Such inconsistency is the result of the imposition of the Greek style of argument where the text allows and the return to a Buddhist philosophical critique where it does not. Such an exposition is misleading in the sense that it is really dealing with two unique analyses and that while one may be able to read one type into another or as in this case

draw parallels, we must be careful not to misrepresent either analysis.

Siderits and O'Brien continue to draw parallels between Nāgārjuna's argument and Zeno's paradoxes throughout the remainder of their translation of chapter two of the Kārikās. But as their translation and subsequent commentary develops one becomes more aware that the parallels that are drawn may be misleading. That is, by stressing a critique of motion, the authors have overlooked the value of the linguistic analysis and have instead substituted a mathematical analysis. In addition, they have thus inadvertently obscured that the analysis illustrates the dependent nature of linguistic referents and concepts. That of course does not mean that their illustrations are invalid but rather that they are tangential.

The concluding remarks of Siderits and O'Brien reveal that they are aware that the Mādhyamaka analysis is approaching a larger problem than that of motion.³⁴ However, they have missed the general manner in which Nāgārjuna demonstrates that "metaphysics is a fundamentally misguided undertaking " by choosing to interpret the analysis of chapter two as a critique of motion.³⁵ Though their analysis of motion is quite consistent even within the Mādhyamaka analysis one must ask if that is all that is demonstrated by the analysis of gatam and agatam. Consider their conclusions: "Nāgārjuna concludes instead that it is

impossible to give an intelligible account of motion because to do so is to attempt to make a description or analysis designed to cope with a certain limited practical sphere apply far beyond its sphere of competence."³⁶ Further: "The nature of "reality", which is just our experience of a constructed world, is determined by the nature of the language in which it is described--and that varies according to the task at hand."³⁷ Both a critique of metaphysics and the limitation of conceptualizations of "reality" are noted by Siderits and O'Brien yet they do not fully explain how Nāgārjuna's analysis accomplishes those goals. Nāgārjuna is doing more than criticizing metaphysical views through the analysis of an account of motion (i.e. those that presume to be accounts); he is also demonstrating the mechanics or the linguistic structures that are guilty of logical fallacies and which support the belief in concepts such as motion and so on. Once the realization is made that language is key to the fabrication of the existence of entities thus supported by the belief system, linguistic frameworks and philosophical arguments in support of the systems, one is freed of one level of abstraction namely, from that of speculative metaphysics, and becomes focussed on another, language itself, so that in the end one may be free of that also. It is this progression from abstraction to insight that is the enlightening experience brought about by the analysis and it is that aspect that has perhaps been

underemphasized by the treatment of the analysis as a critique of motion.

NOTES

1. Robinson, R.H., "Did Nāgārjuna really refute all Philosophical Views" in Philosophy East and West, 22, 1972, p.325.

2. Ibid., .327.

3. Ibid., p.326.

4. Ibid., p.329.

5. Ibid., p.330.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p.331.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Consider the developments in physics with respect to observation, complete definition and so on.

11. Ibid., p.331.

12. Jones, R.H., "The Nature and Function of Nāgārjuna's Arguments" in Philosophy East and West, vol. 28, 1978. p. 485.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p.486.

15. Ibid., p.487.

16. Ibid., p.496.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p.497.

20. Ibid., p.498.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Siderits, M., and J.Dervin O'Brien, "Zeno and Nāgārjuna on Motion" in Philosophy East and West, 26, 1976, pp.281-298.

25. Ibid., p.281.

26. Ibid., p.288.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p.289.

30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., p.291.
33. Ibid., p.293.
34. Ibid., p.298.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

In summary, let me recapitulate the conclusions of the preceding chapters. Chapter one showed that codification of the Buddha's teaching prompted the development of a sophisticated philosophy. Although there were many different Abhidharma systems, the tendency towards speculative metaphysics increased as the philosophies strove for more comprehensive visions. The Prajñāpāramitā philosophy of śūnyatā heralded a departure from traditional Abhidharma and severely criticised the early systems for straying from the true Dharma. It was during this period of philosophical debate that Nāgārjuna was born. His Mādhyamaka philosophy elaborated and systematized the mystical śūnyatā doctrine of the Prajñāpāramitā. Nāgārjuna's major work called the Mūlamadhyamakakārikās demonstrated the methodology of his analytical arguments and elevated the Emptiness philosophy to a level of subtlety and complexity comparable to the Abhidharma treatises.

Chapter two discussed in detail the central themes of Nāgārjuna's philosophy: śūnyatā; pratītya-samutpāda and Mādhyamaka. The essentially critical nature of his philosophy was discussed and different interpretations were presented. The superiority of the Prāsaṅgika interpretation was demonstrated over other lines of interpretation such as

the Svātantrika. This assessment was based on the initial context of the Mādhyamaka detailed in chapter one. Clearly, Nāgārjuna's concern had been with the development of speculative metaphysics such as those exhibited in the Abhidharma. Thus the Mādhyamaka philosophy was tailored to counteract the speculations of the Abhidharma and similar systems.

Chapter three considered some modern interpretations of Mādhyamaka arguments. This was done in detail in order to demonstrate interpretations that have both falsely accused Mādhyamaka philosophy for logistic shortcomings as well as imposed extraneous problems on the Mādhyamaka. In addition, an argument was made for an apprehension of the deeper linguistic analysis as well the broader philosophical nature implied by such an analysis.

In conclusion, I would like to simply make some suggestions of the ramifications of the Mādhyamaka analysis. How it acts as a foundation for the religious insight of prajñā and to what extent it has accomplished this will also be discussed.

The obvious question that arises after one encounters Nāgārjuna's treatise is in what sense is it a part of a religious insight? Aside from the religious motivation behind the work, the answers to that question are difficult. I believe the crux of the problem to be: how does vicāra establish prajñā? Peter Fenner has provided a partial

answer to that question.¹ Fenner suggested that the Mādhyamaka analysis delivers a Buddha consciousness by the eradication of the substratum responsible for ontologizing conceptions.² Murti further explains that in critical philosophy of the Mādhyamaka type, "...the possibility of intellectual intuition is not only accepted but is taken to be the very heart of reality. It is the truth. In intuition, Knowledge and Real coincide; essence and existence are identical."³ Therefore only a mind free from discursive and deluded conceptualization can apprehend reality.

Vicāra, noted Fenner, can serve the function of delivering prajñā as it does not encourage investigation "...it is a type of analysis that tends not to proliferate and perpetuate itself..."⁴ Analyses such as the vicāra of gatam and agatam is valuable for establishing prajñā as they do not prompt an investigation of concepts such as motion or of the foundation of conceptualization but rather shows that the very things about which we speculate resist any determination of an ultimate basis. The outcome of a vicāra analysis is therefore the abandonment of the speculations which assume concepts such as motion and so on and an understanding of the misguided direction of such metaphysics.

Once vicāra has established a perception of the illusion or deception of speculative views, prajñā becomes available. But we must note that insight is not brought into being by analysis that would involve a return to a deluded view but rather it is discovered so to speak once vicāra has stopped the discursive mind. In that sense, it seems that the Zen koans are particularly effective for shocking the mind; so too are the dialectics of the Prajñāpāramitā since both defy the intellect with apparent contradiction and subtle logic. Nāgārjuna's arguments also bear the unique character of vicāra as they tend to still the discursive mind not because they are non-sensical but because they reveal deception.

The Mādhyamikas were able to accomplish their eradication of speculative tendencies as they perfected the method of vicāra. Although their arguments are not always understood, the very precision with which they are formulated shows a penetrating insight. Of course we are not really able to attest to the validity of their method without first achieving the liberating insight of prajñā; but we are able to examine the ramifications of interpretations and determine whether they are consistent with the tenets of the philosophy and if they too are not guilty of delusion. Mādhyamaka is a litmus paper for all our views and it requires an understanding of the subtle logic of self-deception as well as the particular historical context of the early Abhidharma philosophies.

I do not believe that the Mādhyamikas were guilty of sophistry nor were they guilty of an attempt to undermine scholastic Buddhism. They were quite simply arguing for the critical spirit of Buddhist philosophy. Moreover, the question of what extent they have been successful in deflecting speculative tendencies in Buddhist philosophy is partially answered by history. Clearly, speculations did not cease after Nāgārjuna and the Mādhyamikas presented their critical philosophy but of course that does not vitiate their philosophy. The task of successfully representing the Mādhyamaka system will continue and must continue in order for it to remain relevant as well as an effective counter to speculative metaphysics. I hope therefore, that this study has contributed in a small way towards outlining sources for the solution to the problem of its interpretation as well as clearing the ground of some of the misconceptions that have arisen.

NOTES

1. Fenner, Peter, "A Study of the Relationship between Analysis (vicāra) and Insight (prajñā) Based on the Mahyamakāvatāra" in Journal of Indian Philosophy vol.12, 1984, pp.139-197.

2. Fenner, p.142.

3. Murti, T.R.V., The Central Philosophy of Buddhism (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1980), p.83.

4. Fenner, p.143.

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