DISCOURSE ON EMPTINESS:
A COGNITIVE MODEL OF THE TWO TRUTHS DISTINCTION IN THE MADHYAMAKA PHILOSOPHY OF NĀGĀRJUNA AND CANDRAKĪRTI

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Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Doctorate in Philosophy degree in Philosophy

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis supervisor, Professor Catherine Collobert, for everything she has done to change my life for the better, both personally and academically. For many years, she has shown me remarkable patience, understanding, and encouragement. Her advice, her suggestions, and her knowledge have been invaluable in shaping not only this work but also my experience with Buddhist philosophy and its practice. With any other supervisor, this dissertation would have taken an entirely different direction; this would have been a disadvantage to both myself and, I would like to think, to Madhyamaka scholarship.

Secondly, I would like to thank my committee members, Professors Sonia Sikka, Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel, and Patrice Philie for taking the time and effort to engage with my project and for offering insightful comments and suggestions. I would like to thank my external committee member, Professor Mattia Salvini, for the great care with which he read my project, offering me numerous suggestions for additions and points of clarification that ultimately improved my project. His profound knowledge of both the Sanskrit language and the Madhyamaka texts of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti proved to be a great asset for strengthening my own understanding of the material. I sincerely hope his influence and impact are reflected in the interpretation I offer to the reader.

Thirdly, I would like to thank all the friends and colleagues I have made throughout my time in academia for their companionship, conversation, and influence. I would especially like to thank my friend Puthi, my colleague in Madhyamaka studies, for all his help and companionship. Alongside Professor Collobert, we have spent many hours discussing Madhyamaka philosophy and translating Sanskrit texts, translations which formed the backbone of this dissertation. I would not have been able to do this without you, and I hope that we continue collaborating in the future.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, I would like to thank all my friends and family for their unrelenting support over these years, without whom I would not be the person I am today, even if most of them still don't know what I am talking about when they ask me about my work. Hopefully this document, now in its final form (should they choose to read it), expresses it more clearly than I ever have.

I would foremostly like to dedicate this dissertation to my greatest feline friend, who sat with me nearly every step of the way, providing me untold comfort, emotional support, companionship, and cuddles, and who helped me see this writing process to its end but, unfortunately, was unable to see the final results. I would secondly, though no less importantly, like to dedicate this dissertation to the love of my life, Stephanie, for always believing in me, supporting me, and encouraging me when I needed it most. I would thirdly, though again no less importantly, like to dedicate this dissertation to my family, my parents in particular, without whose support and encouragement I never would have attended graduate school, no less completed this project. You all know how much you mean to me, but let this be another testament.

ABSTRACT

I treat the two truths distinction of the Madhyamaka school of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism as a hermeneutic device for interpreting the philosophy of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti: I use the distinction to decipher what in their texts is conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*) and what is ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*). Accordingly, the thesis I argue is that the two truths distinction correlates to a cognitive divide: I apply a cognitive reading to each of the two truths wherein each corresponds to a different mode of cognitive experience, and I formally differentiate the two through the criterion of the presence and absence of language and conceptuality therein. Candrakīrti defines a "conventional truth" and an "ultimate truth" each in terms of being an "object". How each object is "seen" I correlate with distinct cognitions. The conventional truth (defined as comprising the objects of the valid cognition of ordinary experience) correlates with a conceptual, dualistic form of cognition; the ultimate truth (defined as comprising the "object(s)" of the valid cognition of *extra*-ordinary experience), correlates with a non-conceptual, non-dualistic form of cognition. Regarding its application, the formal differentiation corresponds to a twofold soteriologization. There is an interdependence between the cognitive reading of the two truths and their respective soteriological functions insofar as the cognitive distinction should be predicated by a twofold soteriologization. That is, beyond their formal differences, a difference in soteriological application distinguishes two modes of cognition. Each "truth" or form of cognition functions in its respective way as a soteriological device for attaining liberation and awakening. This cognitive-*qua*-soteriological distinction is significant for only through the realization of the ultimate is liberation attained. The conventional truth is insufficient to attain the soteriological goal; nonetheless, it is the means to achieving the ultimate and, therefore, that goal. This instantiates a specific relation between the two truths as one of means and goal. Any comprehensive model of the two truths must explain this progression in not only philosophical but soteriological terms.

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TEXTS & ABBREVIATIONS

Madhyamaka Texts

AS — Nāgārjuna's *Acintyastava*. Sanskrit text and English translation by Christian Lindtner (*Nagarjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1990: 140-60) and Fernando Tola & Carmen Dragonetti (*On Voidness: A Study on Buddhist Nihilism*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1995: 101-33).

BCA — Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Sanskrit text in P.L. Vaidya (*Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva with the Commentary Pañjikā of Prajñākaramati*, Mithila Institute, 1960a: 1-287). Translations in English are available by The Padmakara Translation Group (*The Way of the Bodhisattva: A Translation of the Bodhicharyāvatāra*, Shambhala, 2011), Vesna A. Wallace & B. Alan Wallace (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Bodhicaryāvatāra) by Śāntideva*, Snow Lion Publications, 1997), and Kate Crosby & Andrew Skilton (*The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Oxford University Press, 1995).

BCAP — Prajñākaramati's *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā*, a commentary on the BCA. Sanskrit text in Vaidya (1960a). Translations in English of chapter 9 are available by Peter Oldmeadow (*A Study of the Wisdom Chapter* (Prajñāpāramitā Pariccheda) of the Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā of Prajñākaramati, Doctoral Dissertation, Australian National University, 1994) and Mattia Salvini (*Convention and Agency in the Philosophies of the Mahāyāna*, Doctoral Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2009).

BV — Nāgārjuna's *Bodhicittavivāraṇa*. Tibetan text and English translation by Christian Lindtner (*Revelation of Bodhicittam*, Angkor Verlag, 2015; 1990: 121-7).

CŚ — Āryadeva's *Catuḥśatakaśāstrakārikā*. Tibetan text and Sanskrit fragments in Karen Lang (*Āryadeva's Catuḥśataka: On the Bodhisattva's Cultivation of Merit and Knowledge*, Akademisk Forlag, 1986); Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya (*The Catuḥśataka of Āryadeva: Sanskrit and Tibetan Texts with Copious Extracts from the Commentary of Candrakīrti*, Visva-Bharati, 1931). English translations are available by Lang (1986) and Ruth Sonam (*Āryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, Snow Lion Publications, 2008). A partial English translation of Candrakīrti's commentary is available by Karen Lang (*Four Illusions: Candrakīrti's Advice to Travelers on the Bodhisattva Path*, Oxford University Press, 2003).

MĀ — Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*. Sanskrit text of root verses in Li Xuezhu ("*Madhyamakāvatāra-kārikā* Chapter 6", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 43.1, 2015: 1-30). English translations are available by The Padmakara Translation Group (*Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara*, Shambhala, 2002), C.W. Huntington Jr. (*The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mādhyamika*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), Kelsang Gyatso (*Ocean of Nectar: The True Nature of All Things*, Tharpa Publications, 2007), and Thupten Jinpa (*Illuminating the Intent: An Exposition of Candrakīrti's* Entering the Middle Way, Wisdom Publications, 2021).

MĀB — Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, the autocommentary accompanying the MĀ. Tibetan text of verses and autocommentary in Fredrik Liland

(*Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya: Candrakīrti's Auto-Commentary to Entering the Middle Way,* Bibliotheca Polyglotta, 2020: 9-441). English translations of the root text and autocommentary are available by Liland (2020) and George Churinoff & Thubten Jampa (*Supplement to the 'Middle Way' (Madhyamakavatara) & Explanation of the 'Supplement to the Middle Way'*, N.P., 1994).

MĀ(B) Both Candrakīrti's root verse(s) and autocommentary.

MMK Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Sanskrit text in P.L. Vaidya (*Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna with the Commentary: Prasannapadā by Candrakīrti*, Mithila Institute, 1960b: 1-260). English translations from either the Sanskrit or its Tibetan translation are available by Mark Siderits & Shōryū Katsura (*Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārika*, Wisdom Publications, 2013); Jay Garfield (*The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Oxford University Press, 1995); David Kalupahana (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1986); Kenneth Inada (*Nāgārjuna: A Translation of his Mūlamadhyamakakārikā with an Introductory Essay*, Sri Satguru Publications, 1993); The Padmakara Translation Group (*The Root Stanzas of the Middle Way: The Mulamadhyamakakarika*, Shambhala, 2008); and Frederik Streng (*Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning*, Abingdon Press, 1967). Other translations are available as embedded in the published translations of various commentaries on this pivotal text.

MMV Buddhapālita's *Mūlamadhyamakavṛtti*, a commentary on the MMK. English translation available by Ian Coghlan (*Buddhapālita's Commentary on Nāgārjuna's Middle Way* (trans. Ian Coghlan), Wisdom Publications, 2021).

PSP Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*, a commentary on the MMK. Sanskrit text in P.L. Vaidya (1960b: 1-260). Partial English translations are available by Mervyn Sprung (*Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti*, Prajñā Press, 1979) and Anne MacDonald (*In Clear Words: The Prasannapadā, Chapter 1: Annotated Translation, Tibetan Text* (Vol. 2/2), Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015b). MacDonald's edition includes both the Sanskrit and Tibetan text. A partial French translation is available by Jacques May (*Candrakīrti Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti*, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1959).

RĀ Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī*. Sanskrit text in P.L. Vaidya (1960b: 296-310); Tibetan and Sanskrit texts in Sara McClintock & John Dunne (*Nāgārjuna's Precious Garland: Ratnāvalī*, Wisdom Publications, 2024). English translations are available by McClintock & Dunne (2024) and Jeffrey Hopkins (*Nāgārjuna's Precious Garland: Buddhist Advice for Living and Liberation*, Snow Lion Publications, 2007).

ŚS Nāgārjuna's *Śūnyatāsaptatikārikā*. Tibetan text of root verses in Fernando Tola & Carmen Dragonetti ("*Śūnyatāsaptati*: The Seventy *Kārikā*s on Voidness (According to the *Svavṛtti*) of Nāgārjuna", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 15, 1987: 1-55; 1995: 53-99), Christian Lindtner (1990: 31-69), and David Komito Ross (*Nāgārjuna's "Seventy Stanzas": A Buddhist Psychology of Emptiness*, Snow Lion Publications, 1987). Two Tibetan translations of the original Sanskrit (not extant) exist of this work, both included in Lindtner (1990). The Tola & Dragonetti edition corresponds to the second Lindtner lists, which is also the one I have used. English translations are available by Tola &

Dragonetti (1987: 1-55, 1995: 53-99); Lindtner (1981: 31-70); and Ross (1987: 79-95).

VP — Nāgārjuna's *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*. Tibetan text of root verses and autocommentary in Tola & Dragonetti (*Nāgārjuna's Refutation of Logic (Nyāya): Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*, Motilal Banarsidass, 2004). English translations are available by Tola & Dragonetti (2004) and Westerhoff (*Crushing the Categories: Vaidalyaprakaraṇa by Nāgārjuna*, Wisdom Publications, 2018a).

VV — Nāgārjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartanī*. Sanskrit text of root verses and autocommentary in Yoshiyasu Yonezawa ("Vigrahavyāvartanī: Sanskrit Transliteration and Tibetan Translation", *Journal of Naritasan Institute of Buddhist Studies* 31, 2008: 209-333). English translations of the root text and autocommentary are available by Westerhoff (*The Dispeller of Disputes: Nāgārjuna's Vigrahavyāvartanī*, Oxford University Press, 2010a) and Bhattacharya (*The Dialectical Method of Nāgārjuna (Vigrahavyāvartanī)*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1972). An English translation of just the root text is available by Streng (1967: 221-9).

YṢ — Nāgārjuna's *Yuktiṣaṣṭikākārikā*. Tibetan text of root verses and Candrakīrti's commentary in Cristina Anna Scherrer-Schaub (*Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti: Commentaire à la soixantaine sur le raisonnement* ou *Du vrai enseignement de la causalité* par le Maître indien Candrakīrti, Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, 1991: 1-98) and Joseph Loizzo (*Nāgārjuna's Reason Sixty (Yuktiṣaṣṭikā) with Chandrakīrti's Commentary (Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti)*, American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2007). The surviving Sanskrit fragments of this work are collected by Li Xuezhu & Ye Shaoyong (*Yuktiṣaṣṭikākārikā: Editions of the Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese Versions, with Commentary and a Modern Chinese Translation,* Zhongxi Book Company, 2014) alongside their Tibetan and Chinese translations. English translations are available of the root text in Tola & Dragonetti (1995: 19-51), Lindtner (1990: 102-120) and Loizzo (2007). Scherrer-Schaub (1991)'s translation of the root text and Candrakīrti's commentary is in French.

YṢV — Candrakīrti's *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, a commentary on the YṢ. Tibetan text and English translation available by Loizzo (2007); Tibetan text and French translation by Scherrer-Schaub (1991: 1-98). The surviving Sanskrit fragments are collected by Li & Ye (2014).

- *Of these root texts (exempting the* MMV*), I have produced my own translation, when needed, from either the Sanskrit or Tibetan (as available, sometimes in consultation of both) in consultation with the above published translations.*
- *If the text is divided into chapters, references in the style of* X:YY *refer to chapter (*X*) and verse (*YY*) numbers.*
- *A verse may be followed by the letters* a, b, c, or d *(or a combination thereof) in reference to each of the four* pāda*s of its metre. This is how only a specific section is referenced.*

Pāli Canon (*Sutta Piṭaka*)

AN — *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Pāli text in R. Morris & E. Hardy (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* (5 vols.), Pali Text Society 1885-1900 (reprint 1976-1979). English translation available by Bhikkhu Bodhi (*The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Wisdom Publications, 2012).

Dhp — *Dhammapada*. Pāli text in O. von Hinüber & K.R. Norman (*Dhammapada*, Pali Text Society, 1994-1995). English translation available by Acharya Buddharakkhita (*The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path to Wisdom*, Buddhist Publication Society, 2019).

DN — *Dīgha Nikāya*. Pāli text in Rhys Davids & Carpenter (*Dīgha Nikāya* (3 vols.), Pali Text Society, 1889-1995 (reprint 2008-2020). English translation available by Maurice Walsh (*The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, Wisdom Publications, 1995). DN contains the *Brahamjāla Sutta* (DN 1), available in English translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi (*The All-Embracing Net of Views: The Brahmajāla Sutta and its Commentaries*, Buddhist Publication Society, 2007b).

MN — *Majjhima Nikāya*. Pāli text in V. Trenckner & R. Chalmers (*Majjhima Nikāya* (3 vols.), Pali Text Society, 1888-1899 (reprint 1977-1979). English translation available by Bodhi (*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, Wisdom Publications, 1995a).

Sn — *Sutta Nipāta*. Pāli text in D. Anderson & H. Smith (*Suttanipāta*, Pali Text Society, 1913). English translation available by Bhikkhu Bodhi (*The Suttanipāta: An Ancient Collection of the Buddha's Discourses*, *Together with Its Commentaries*, Wisdom Publications, 2017).

SN — *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Pāli text in L. Feer (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* (5 vols.), Pali Text Society, 1884-1898 (reprint 1975-2006). English translation available by Bhikkhu Bodhi (*The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Wisdom Publications, 2000).

Ud — *Udāna*. Pāli text in P. Stenthal (*Udāna*, Pali Text Society, 1885 (reprint 1982, 2017). English translation available by Peter Masefield (*The Udāna*, Pali Text Society, 1997).

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a work in the history of philosophy concerning the Madhyamaka school of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism as represented by two of its chief members, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. The namesake of this school is the "middle" (*madhyama*; as in the "middle way" (*madhyamā pratipad*)).[1] I investigate a vexing philosophical problem in the works of these two authors, the two truths distinction (*satyadvaya*) as comprised of the conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*) and ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*). The problem springs from one essential question: how can there be two truths if the truth is singular? Once accepting that there are indeed two truths according to this tradition, several avenues of investigation open, the most obvious of which are philosophical concerning the nature of truth, its role in any philosophical project, and, most important to Buddhist philosophy, its soteriological function. In these contexts, subsequent questions are practical in orientation: what do we do with these two truths, and what purpose does the distinction serve? Broader questions such as these are often overlooked in Madhyamaka scholarship, for countless reasons not limited to the various philosophical temperaments of its scholars. I address these while nonetheless entertaining the hardcore philosophical questions. I do so by characterizing Madhyamaka philosophy specifically as a philosophical-soteriological project insofar as any philosophizing therein is ultimately conducted for soteriological purposes.

This soteriological context distinguishes the general trends of Indian and Western philosophy (at least post-Platonic Western philosophy, exempting some like the Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics, Platonists, and Neoplatonists). Insofar as philosophy the world over asks the timeless question 'what is truth?', Indian philosophy (Buddhist especially) carves it a unique soteriological niche. The question is not posed in a disinterested manner for its own sake but always in the context of liberation: what is it about the truth that is liberating, what is the truth that effectively brings liberation? For the Madhyamaka, that answer is

[1] I use the term "Madhyamaka" to refer to the name of the school and as an adjective of what belongs thereto and the term "Mādhyamika(s)" to refer to the members of that school. This is more or less an established convention in Madhyamaka scholarship, even if at times inconsistently applied. For an overview of Bhāviveka's etymological analysis of the term "Madhyamaka", its derivatives, and its application across various Madhyamaka *śāstra*s, see Hideyo Ogawa, "The Term *Madhyamaka* as Explained by the *Tarkajvāla*", *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 70.3, 2022: 1115-22.

twofold insofar as there are two truths. In the case that liberation (*mokṣa*) is liberation from suffering (*duḥkha*), the liberating truth is contrasted with the ignorance (*avidyā*, *ajñāna*) at its heart. Overcoming that ignorance and supplanting it with valid cognition is liberating. However, there is the important caveat that there is not solely an intellectual ignorance responsible for suffering but a behavioural and spiritual one; hence, there is recourse to two truths (i.e., two forms of cognitive experience) to address both.

As I explain it, the two truths distinction is vexing because, according to its formal parameters, it requires the most difficult tasks: to challenge every intellectual presupposition, both conscious and unconscious; to analyze every facet of cognitive experience and the operations of the mind, including the disposition towards the cognitive defaults of selfhood and thinghood and the roles of subjectivity and objectivity as they configure therein; to confront the limits of conceptual thought and yet to force a breakthrough beyond them; and, finally, to enact a radical change in the nature of cognitive experience itself in a way transformative of ignorance and suffering into wisdom (*prajñā*) and liberation. Subsequently, it demands this liberating insight be compassionately and indiscriminately shared with others in a digestible and actionable way for the sake of their own liberation.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT & ITS CONTRIBUTIONS

In this dissertation, I treat the two truths distinction as a hermeneutic device for interpreting the philosophy of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti: I use the distinction to decipher what in their texts is conventional truth and what is ultimate truth. Accordingly, the thesis I argue is that the two truths distinction correlates to a cognitive divide: I apply a cognitive reading to each of the two truths wherein each correlates with a different mode of cognitive experience, and I formally differentiate the two through the criterion of the presence and absence of language and conceptuality therein.

Candrakīrti defines a "conventional truth" and an "ultimate truth" each in terms of being an "object" (*viṣaya*; cf. MĀ 6:23).[2] How each object is "seen" (√DṚŚ) I correlate with distinct cognitions. The

[2] MĀ 6:23: "All phenomena (*sarva-bhāvāḥ*) bear two aspects (*rūpadvayam bibhrati*): the phenomenon grasped through correct or incorrect cognition (*samyak-mṛṣā-darśana-labdha-bhāvam*). The object correctly seen (*samyak-dṛśām yaḥ viṣayaḥ*)

conventional truth is defined as comprising the objects of the valid cognition of ordinary experience. I differentiate conventional objects by the metric of conventional truth and falsity, the former as the object of the valid cognition of ordinary experience and the latter of its invalid cognition. I correlate the "seeing" of these objects with a conceptual, dualistic form of cognition. The "conventional truth" as a general category is schematized by the threefold relation of the object (i.e., the seen), subject (i.e., the seer), and act of cognition (i.e., the seeing). The primary condition differentiating conventional truth from falsity is the validity of the perception of its object, as evidenced by Candrakīrti's cataracts analogy. However, since for him this perception always has a conceptual component, this distinction is better understood in terms of conceptualization via the broader semantic framework in which the perception is situated. These can be either validly or invalidly cognized. Accordingly, the object of the conventional truth is the dependently originated phenomenon, the valid cognition of appearances as appropriately contextualized within the conventional truth's unique semantic framework.

On the other hand, the ultimate truth is defined as comprising the "object(s)" of the valid cognition of *extra*-ordinary experience. I correlate the "seeing" of these "object(s)" with a non-conceptual, non-dualistic form of cognition, an alternative cognitive mode explicated via the negation of the conventional predicates of cognition. This becomes complicated when this is sometimes called a non-cognition, but I take that as evidence of the methodological negation of ordinary cognition (accomplished via apophasis: a tetralemmic, non-implicative negation), thus establishing the formal differentiation of the two truths as correlated with formally distinct cognitive modes. Because the realization of the ultimate still occurs mentally, I use the term "cognition" with heavy qualification. The "object" of that valid cognition of *extra*-ordinary experience is variously called emptiness (*śūnyatā*), *tattva*, or suchness (*tathātā*), which refers to a peculiar kind of *non-object* through the lack of certain qualities in how it is cognized

is *tattva*; the conventional truth is said (*saṃvṛtisatyam uktam*) to be the wrongly seen (*mṛṣā-dṛśām*)"; *samyagmṛṣādarśanalabdhabhāvaṃ rūpadvayaṃ bibhrati sarvabhāvāḥ | samyagdṛśāṃ yo viṣayaḥ sa tattvaṃ mṛṣādṛśāṃ saṃvṛtisatyamuktam* || (Li 2015: 7). This interpretation of the conventional truth as referring to an "object" is confirmed by Prajñākaramati (see Oldmeadow 1994: 14 and Salvini 2009: 267).

ultimately. No concepts apply to that "object" when cognized non-dually. Marked only by non-implicative negation, it is only directly experienced. Only in conventional terms is there an "object" posited in relation to the "subject". Unfortunately, conventional terms are all we have to discourse about the non-conceptual ultimate, and this is the cause of much confusion. Framing the cognitive model with this formal criterion permits exploring the texts' use of negation for discoursing about the ultimate.

Regarding its application, the formal differentiation of the two truths corresponds to a twofold soteriologization. There is an interdependence between the cognitive reading of the two truths and their respective soteriological functions insofar as the cognitive distinction should be predicated by a twofold soteriologization. That is, beyond their formal differences, a difference in soteriological application distinguishes their respective cognitive modes. Each "truth", or the form of cognition with which each correlates, functions in its respective way as a soteriological device for attaining liberation and awakening (*bodhi*). This cognitive-*qua*-soteriological distinction is significant for only through the realization of the ultimate is liberation attained. The conventional truth is insufficient to attain that soteriological goal; nonetheless, in decrying *two truths* the Mādhyamikas are unequivocal about the instrumental role the conventional truth plays in this project: it is the means to achieving the ultimate and, therefore, that goal. If it could be attained without the conventional truth, the ultimate (as defined) would devolve into pure mysticism and there would be no need for philosophy. This is not what the two truths distinction intends. This therefore instantiates a specific relation between the two truths as one of means and goal.

Any comprehensive model of the two truths must explain this progression in not only philosophical but soteriological terms. The very existence of Madhyamaka philosophy depends on the two truths distinction (cf. MMK 24:8-10), but the same distinction effectively contextualizes philosophy in its rightful place in a *philosophical-soteriological project*. A careful balance must be struck—a *middle way* between the formal antagonism of the two truths—with a model accommodating at once the respective convergences and divergences of their hermeneutical, philosophical, cognitive, and soteriological implications. Just that is what this dissertation offers: in terms of scope, I seek a big-picture investigation

of the two truths distinction's philosophical, cognitive, and soteriological implications. This then requires more narrow applications of the two truths as they respectively and concomitantly feature in a philosophical-soteriological project. I investigate such narrower implications in the fields of epistemology and metaphysics as they relate to the operations and structure of cognitive experience itself.

While this is a work in the history of ancient philosophy, it is a work on neither the historical reception of the Madhyamaka nor of the two truths. Rather, I propose a novel philosophical interpretation of the two truths as featured in the corpuses of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti regarding both their hermeneutical, philosophical, cognitive, and soteriological applications, each of which are inextricably linked. Although I characterize my project as participating in the history of philosophy, I acknowledge that there must be a considerable degree of interpretation in its execution. The goal of this dissertation was not to offer a literature review but to systematize and synthesize these arguments in a novel way while dialoguing with contemporary interpreters. In this dialogue I find much common ground, but I distinguish and justify my interpretation primarily by juxtaposing it with the current dominant interpretation, the "semantic interpretation of emptiness" regarding its interpretation of and application to the ultimate truth, which, in a way, does an injustice to the two truths when it denies the ultimate. In opposition, I propose an alternative, the cognitive reading, preserving the distinction.

The Mādhyamikas, historically and contemporarily, have provoked a variety of interpretations, some of which unfairly tag them as metaphysical and/or epistemological nihilists or philosophical charlatans. Naturally, the two truths are at the centre of this controversy, with the conception of the ultimate and its attendant negative rhetoric the usual suspect in their misinterpretation. At the same time, the relation to convention they espouse, if it sometimes appears somewhat unfavourable, is also embroiled in the controversy. Synopses of the various interpretive models that have been applied to the Madhyamaka are available; for the Madhyamaka's historical reception, see Ruegg (1981; 2000) and Lindtner (1981).[3]

[3] David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, Otto Harrassowitz, 1981: 1-9; *Three Studies in the History of Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka*, Universität Wien, 2000: 1-104. Christian Lindtner, "Atiśa's

For Western scholarship, there are several axes of interpretation to consider. Firstly, Tuck (1990) and Westerhoff (2009a) identify three general phases of interpretation of the Madhyamaka generally:[4] i) a transcendental idealism on the basis of the appearance–reality distinction corresponding to the conventional–ultimate distinction, as in Stcherbatsky and Murti;[5] ii) a logical positivism wherein the verses of the MMK are to be transcribed as logical formulas, as in Robinson and Potter;[6] and iii) a post-Wittgensteinian anti-philosophy concerned with the limits of conceptual thought, as in Streng, Gudmunsen, Thurman, and Katz.[7] For overviews of interpretative models that have been specifically applied to the two truths distinction, and to the ultimate in particular, see the "Introduction to PART II".

I do not specially align my interpretation along any of these axes but propose something novel. In this

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Introduction to the Two Truths, and Its Sources", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9.2, 1981: 161-4. I discuss in more detail the models that specifically interpret the ultimate truth in the "Introduction to PART II".

[4] Andrew Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nāgārjuna*, Oxford University Press, 1990: v-vi. Tuck (1990: 94) insists that i) this is not an attempt at a comprehensive survey of Nāgārjunian scholarship and ii) rather than reductively painting each thinker with the same brush, each category stands "as a major representative of a *type* of scholarship or as indicative of a significant methodological shift". See also Jan Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka*, Oxford University Press, 2009a: 9-12.

[5] Referring to Theodore Stcherbatsky (*The Central Conception of Buddhism*, Royal Asiatic Society, 1923; *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1968) and T.R.V. Murti (*The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, George Allen & Unwin, 1955). E.g., according to Murti (1955: 321), "The Absolute (Śūnya) is the universal impersonal reality of the world" (1955: 280)" and it is "transcendent, totally devoid of empirical determinations […]. The Absolute is immanent too, being the reality of appearance. The Absolute is but the phenomena in their essential form". See Tuck 1990: 31-53. Westerhoff (2009a*:* 10) criticizes: "To conceive of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka as a theory whereby an indescribable Absolute grounds the world of appearances means reading assumptions into it that Nāgārjuna does not share".

[6] Referring to Richard Robinson ("Some Logical Aspects of Nāgārjuna's System", *Philosophy East and West* 6.4, 1957: 291-308) and Karl Potter (*Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, Prentice-Hall, 1963). This approach is not terribly concerned with the two truths or soteriology. Because Robinson is concerned with the logical structure of Nāgārjuna's refutations of opponents' positions, he says that MMK 24:8's appeal to the two truths is "dogmatic and serves little purpose in the destructive dialectic", considering this appeal a departure from Nāgārjuna's "avowed method", making "an existential statement about an exegetical principle" by basing "his argument on an axiom not acceptable to his opponent" in order to escape the charge that he has contradicted the Buddha's more positive canonical teachings ("Did Nāgārjuna Really Refute All Philosophical Views?", *Philosophy East and West* 22.2, 1972: 330-1). See Tuck 1990: 54-73. Westerhoff (2009a*:* 10) criticizes: "Neither the attempt to develop a logically perfect language for describing the world nor to ground our knowledge of the world on the supposedly secure foundation of sense-data could find much favor with Mādhyamikas".

[7] Referring to Frederik Streng (*Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning,* Abingdon Press, 1967), Chris Gudmunsen (*Wittgenstein & Buddhism*, Macmillan, 1977), Robert Thurman ("Philosophical Nonegocentrism in Wittgenstein and Candrakīrti in their Treatment of the Private Language Problem", *Philosophy East and West* 30.3, 1980: 321-37), and Nathan Katz ("Nāgārjuna and Wittgenstein on Error", *Buddhist and Western Philosophy* (ed. Nathan Katz), Sterling, 1981: 306-27). See Tuck 1990: 74-93. Westerhoff (2009a: 11) discusses these as "reflecting the underlying idea of a Wittgensteinian philosophy of language according to which language, and in particular the language of philosophical statements, could not be regarded as independent of the interrelated nature of conceptual thought and conventional language. Words were not supposed to gain their meaning by referring to something outside the system of language; the relation of words to their referents is not seen as being indicative of ontological status but is solely of practical value". Additional overtures to Wittgenstein are made by Joshua William Smith ("'Snakes and Ladders' – 'Therapy' as Liberation in Nagarjuna and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*", *Sophia* 60.2, 2021: 411-30; see p. 412 for an overview of such attempts by others); Garfield also makes frequent comparisons between the Mādhyamikas and Wittgenstein (e.g., *Empty Words*, Oxford University Press, 2002: 3-23, 48-50).

dissertation, I identify and address three gaps in Madhyamaka scholarship:

(1) I apply the two truths distinction as a hermeneutic device for interpreting Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. This in itself is not novel but grows from established methodologies; I recognize that many have studied the two truths, but I am not aware of any work that i) treats the distinction systematically across the corpuses of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti *and* that ii) offers a comprehensive interpretation addressing not only the philosophical ramifications of the distinction but its practical application.

The hermeneutic value of the two truths distinction requires that any Madhyamaka claim be contextualized via the two truths. Accordingly, I categorize every affirmation and denial by this metric. However, from the formal differentiation of the two truths a significant consequence arises cementing the hermeneutic status of the distinction: given the restriction of language and conceptuality to the conventional level (established in PART I) and their inapplicability to the ultimate (established in PART II), every argument in the texts, including every appeal to emptiness, reveals either various aspects of the conventional truth or the indirect, apophatic presentation of the ultimate. This restriction has bifurcated implications concerning my approach to each of the two truths.

i) For the conventional truth, its significance increases a thousandfold as that becomes our philosophical arena. As I explain in PART I (chapters 1 and 3) and in PART II (chapter 7), it is critical to the project's methodology (and to the two truths distinction as exemplary thereof) that the conventional truth is not denied, that ordinary experience can be validly cognized, and therefore that the distinction between conventional truth and falsity be defended on robust argumentative grounds.

ii) For the ultimate truth, this restriction does not mean that there is no ultimate truth, as claimed by some Madhyamaka scholars. Rather, it means that the ultimate has no conceptual, propositional content, and it follows that this lack cannot be directly transmitted or positively appear in the texts. I explain this indirect transmission through a model of apophasis demonstrating only what the ultimate is *not*. I argue how this apophatic negation, which in its full form is tetralemmic and non-implicative and demonstrates what the ultimate *is not*, is methodologically significant to the conditions of realizing the ultimate.

I address this gap by clearly stating at the outset how the two truths distinction should be interpreted: a hermeneutic device the key to unlocking the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. I then apply that interpretation throughout this dissertation.

(2) My interpretation offers a formal distinction between the two truths as correlated with distinct forms of cognition through the criterion of the presence or absence of language and conceptuality therein. It does not make sense to take a position on the two truths or assess their hermeneutic and practical value without establishing the conditions differentiating them. For this reason, I establish the formal parameters of the conventional truth in PART I (chapters 1, 2, and 3). In PART II (chapter 5), I establish the formal parameters of the ultimate truth in contrast with the conventional, justifying the distinction.

My interpretation's novelty stems particularly from my treatment of the ultimate's formal and cognitive characteristics, the feature for which I have the strongest evidence. I am not the first to note the inapplicability of language and conceptuality to the ultimate; however, the uniqueness of my interpretation comes from its systemized demonstration and the sketch I offer of i) what this ultimate cognition might entail via its connection to non-duality; ii) its soteriological implications via the non-dual dissolution of the subject–object dichotomy; and iii) the practical implications of non-dual cognition, especially in its relation to ordinary, dualistic cognition.

I tackle these issues in the three chapters of PART II. I make my case by first presenting the textual evidence for the inapplicability of language, conceptuality, duality, and the ordinary mind to the ultimate. I juxtapose this with the contemporary interpretation called the "semantic interpretation of emptiness", as presented by Siderits, Westerhoff, and Garfield, as it interprets and applies to the ultimate truth. I am also not the first to critique this interpretation, but the way I engage with it towards the affirmation of the ultimate in a cognitive context is novel. While accepting its arguments for inferring the philosophical ramifications of emptiness and applying them to define the conceptual limits of the conventional truth, I disagree with its conclusion to deny the ultimate; instead, I explain how the same arguments lead to a different conclusion: that ultimate cognition can have no propositional content. I offer an alternative that

i) does not contradict the texts by denying the ultimate and that ii) proposes a systematic exposition of the ultimate in the context of non-dual cognition.

Thus, the value of my interpretation lies in its middle way approach between the metaphysical models the semantic interpretation critiques, which in various ways reify the ultimate in either an absolute or in nothingness, and the semantic interpretation's denial of it, leaving only the conventional truth. The cognitive reading I offer accomplishes this insofar as the ultimate is i) not made into a mind-independent metaphysical object and is ii) also not denied.

I address this gap by not dancing around the fact that the conditions differentiating the two truths and the reason for the distinction need to be clearly established. My interpretation's strength lies in its attempt to validate and incorporate each of the two truths and their respectively correlated cognitive modes into a larger philosophical-soteriological project, without privileging or downgrading one or the other, while at the same time respecting for the formal and practical conditions of their differentiation.

(3) I characterize the Madhyamaka as a *philosophical-soteriological project*, and I demonstrate the two truths as the evidence for and program of that project. This means that I demonstrate how Madhyamaka philosophy serves its soteriological goal through the two truths. For this reason, one of my main questions asks, 'what do we do with the two truths?'. I critique the soteriology of the semantic interpretation via its inquiry of "what one needs to know in order to attain liberation", largely reducible to the knowledge there is no ultimate truth/reality. This formula, notwithstanding its denial of the ultimate, privileges liberation's intellectual component over its experiential one. I counter this via the appeal to non-clinging (*anupādāna*) to the conventions framing ordinary cognition, the dissolution of which is the necessary condition of attaining non-dual cognition. I tie this to the Buddhist critique of the self, informed by the emptiness of both self *and* phenomena, as it concerns the dissolution in non-dual cognition of the subject–object dichotomy framing ordinary cognition and the experience of suffering.

I address this gap by stating that philosophy and intellectual understanding are not the terminus but serve as the vehicle to that end. Taking soteriology and the ultimate seriously, without a narrow approach

to "truth" privileging the conventional over the ultimate, opens new horizons of investigation. The methodology the Mādhyamikas prescribe through their call for the cessation of conceptualization (*prapañca-upaśama*) assigns to the ultimate a soteriological capacity *more than* philosophical because it does not solely rely on concepts, argumentation, and intellection to achieve the soteriological goal—without discounting the role that philosophy plays therein. I explain this in a philosophical context through the development of a systematic exposition of its philosophical merits in sketching how we can envision the change in cognitive experience accomplished by the realization of *both* truths.

Towards that end, I argue the two truths distinction corresponds to a twofold soteriologization such that, beyond their formal differences, a difference in soteriological application distinguishes the two cognitive modes correlated with each of the two truths. Each "truth", or the form of cognition with which each correlates, functions in its respective way as a soteriological device for attaining liberation and awakening. Concepts, argumentation, and intellection (as comprise the conventional truth) play a critical role; nonetheless, these alone are not the soteriological solution, for which reason there is recourse to non-conceptual, non-dual ultimate cognition, wherein a transformation towards an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging realizes the cessation of suffering both *on* and *off* the cushion (intra- and post-meditation).

As such, I present the Mādhyamikas' philosophical-soteriological project in terms of a methodological progression from the valid cognition afforded by the conventional truth (in reaction against conventional falsity) to the valid cognition afforded by the ultimate (in reaction against the pitfalls of conceptuality in the perpetuation of the sense of self, i.e., clinging (*upādāna*)), to, finally, its culmination in the non-clinging through which the world is (post-meditatively, post-attainment) re-engaged. That I characterize as the fruit of the philosophical-soteriological project indicating, finally, what one is supposed to do with it. This is the dialectical progression I argue the two truths require, the final stage that is the goal towards which the entire project is oriented.

OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS & THEIR ARGUMENTATIVE THREAD

This dissertation is structured in two parts, each with its own introduction. It is structured in a way that

the argument builds across its chapters, requiring frequent references to material previously discussed. I indicate this progression with an outline of the chapters and the line of argumentation connecting them.

PART I, consisting of chapters 1-4, investigates the conventional truth. It is critical that an appropriate foundation for the two truths distinction be established, and this consists of the conventional truth acting as both the groundwork of the philosophical-soteriological project and the means to the ultimate. PART II, consisting of chapters 5-7, investigates the ultimate and its relation to the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project necessarily comprising both truths. In my final chapter (chapter 7), the distinction is examined synergistically, its practical and soteriological value investigated towards its actionability.

I begin PART I with chapter 1's examination of the "convention" on which the conventional truth is based. It methodologically relies on convention (*saṃvṛti*, per Candrakīrti's threefold etymology) as the means to articulate the valid cognition of ordinary experience to ordinary beings. That valid cognition is schematized through the mind–world model of cognitive experience, a model I appeal to throughout this dissertation as the cognitive template of the conventional truth and its valid cognition. This chapter establishes in a general way the scope of the conventional truth and its role in the two truths distinction.

In chapter 2, I assess the function of language and discourse in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project as it is restricted to the conventional truth. That is, when the conventional truth is the truth of dependent origination (determined by dependence relations), the dependence relations inherent to language and discourse make them conventional. In other words, the nature of language and discourse is itself conventional. This investigation of a Madhyamaka philosophy of language is critical to the formal criterion differentiating the two truths and, relatedly, the distinction between the two truths as two modes of cognitive experience formally differentiated in terms of the presence or absence of language and conceptuality. This chapter is therefore concerned with the relation of language and discourse to both cognitive experience (more generally) and the conventional truth (specifically).

In chapter 3, I examine the conditions differentiating conventional truth (as the object of the valid cognition of ordinary experience) from conventional falsity (the object of the invalid cognition of the

same). This is critical to the cognitive reading of the conventional truth, which specifically correlates the conventional truth with the valid cognition of ordinary experience. I discuss that ordinary experience as conceptual and dualistic in form, but ordinary experience can be cognized validly (according to the philosophical baseline of dependence relations and emptiness in the conventional truth) or invalidly (a variety of positions cover conventional falsity, the most important of which to the Madhyamaka is the *svabhāva* doctrine, the reification of phenomena as inherently existent by their own nature). The goal of this chapter is the establishment of the philosophical value of the conventional truth in defence of interpreting it as correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience.

In chapter 4, I apply the parameters of the conventional truth in two philosophical arenas: epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism. The importance of this chapter is that it constitutes robustly argumentative applications of philosophy, as it is classically understood, in the Madhyamaka presentation of the conventional truth, thus demonstrating the conventional truth's philosophical value and the Mādhyamikas' philosophical temperament. I argue that epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism constitute the valid cognition of ordinary experience. This chapter concludes PART I on the conventional truth, after which I address the ultimate.

In PART II, chapter 5, I examine the Madhyamaka ultimate. I correlate the ultimate truth with a non-conceptual and non-dual experiential form of cognition, in contrast with the form of the cognition with which the conventional truth correlates, conceptual, dualistic, and intellectual. This indicates a formal criterion of differentiation of the two truths as correlated with distinct modes of cognitive experience. I offer an account of the Madhyamaka's apophatic strategy presenting the ultimate, a method indicating only what it *is not* (evident in its negative characterization as *non*-conceptual and *non*-dual). Given its conditions of differentiation, the ultimate truth requires a distinct mode of *extra*-ordinary cognitive experience (distinct from the conceptual nature of the conventional truth's ordinary cognitive experience) to be realized (i.e., "seen"). I use this account to differentiate my interpretation from the popular contemporary account, the "semantic interpretation of emptiness", that denies the ultimate truth and

therefore the possibility of this non-dual cognition.

In chapter 6, I explore the implications of correlating the ultimate with a distinct mode of cognitive experience (referred to as the valid cognition of *extra*-ordinary experience, *extra*-ordinary understood in contradistinction from ordinary experience) in its soteriological context, as this ultimate cognition is, by definition, free from suffering. Ultimate cognition accomplishes this by uprooting not only the philosophical element of suffering (i.e., intellectual ignorance) but its experiential element as well, the sense of self (in the sense of the identity of the sufferer suffering from X). This chapter explores non-dual cognition as the cultivation of an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging. In terms of personal accomplishment, this is where the project ends. However, personal accomplishment is never in itself the project's complete design, which necessitates bringing liberation to all sentient beings. For this reason, the post-attainment re-engagement of the world, the centrepiece of the following chapter, is required.

In chapter 7, this dissertation's final chapter, I discuss the two truths distinction synergistically in the role that each truth plays in the larger Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. I argue that the formal differentiation of the two truths corresponds to a twofold soteriologization. There is an interdependence between the cognitive reading of the two truths and their respective soteriological functions insofar as the cognitive distinction should be predicated by a twofold soteriologization. That is, beyond their formal differences, a difference in soteriological application distinguishes two modes of cognition. Each "truth", or the form of cognition with which each correlates, functions in its respective way as a soteriological device for attaining liberation and awakening. This cognitive-*qua*-soteriological distinction is significant for only through the realization of the ultimate is liberation attained. I demonstrate three stages of progression through the conventional truth and ultimate truth, culminating in the post-meditative re-engagement of the world post-attainment by means of the wisdom attained by the mastery of the two truths. At this point, the distinction collapses into one mode of cognitive experience. This indicates at last the synergy defining the two truths distinction insofar as the cognitive experience of the *ārya*s is suffused with the wisdom of each of the two truths.

In that way, in this dissertation I schematize the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project according to the two truths distinction insofar as both truths configure, therein.

BIOGRAPHICAL & HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Typical of ancient philosophy, biographical information on Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti is scant.[8] Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Madhyamaka, lived in India c. late second/early third century CE. Candrakīrti lived in India several centuries later, c. seventh century CE. Although other Mādhyamikas flourished both before and after Candrakīrti,[9] my investigation focuses on these two for several reasons.

Firstly, no investigation of the Madhyamaka is complete without Nāgārjuna, the one to whom all Mādhyamikas pay homage, since his texts form the tradition's foundation. As such, the study of Nāgārjuna in this context warrants no further justification. Secondly, Candrakīrti is Nāgārjuna's most prolific Indian commentator with his own standalone work expounding the same system. He is the preeminent figure in the lineage of Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas (in opposition to Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas

[8] For an overview of problems in the historiography of Nāgārjuna, including the possibility of multiple Nāgārjunas, see Ian Mabbett, "The Problem of the Historical Nāgārjuna Revisited", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118.3, 1998: 332-46. For a further biography of Nāgārjuna and his grounding in a historical context, see Joseph Walser, *Nāgārjuna in Context: Mahāyāna Buddhism and Early Indian Culture*, Columbia University Press, 2005: 59-88. There is even less biographical information on Candrakīrti, and he may have been confused with one or another later Candrakīrti; see Tom J.F. Tillemans, *Materials for the Study of Āryadeva, Dharmapāla, and Candrakīrti*, Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 1990: 13-4; see also Ruegg 1981: 71- 81 for an overview of Candrakīrti's thought and works. See Mattia Salvini, "Candrakīrti: Gardener of Sky-Flowers", *The Routledge Handbook of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (eds. William Edelglass, Pierre-Julien Harter, & Sara McClintock), Routledge, 2023: 404-7, 418 for an overview of Candrakīrti and his place in the Madhyamaka project. See Kevin Vose, *Resurrecting Candrakīrti: Disputes in the Tibetan Creation of Prāsaṅgika*, Wisdom Publications, 2009: 1-62 on Candrakīrti's place in Indian Madhyamaka history and the importation of his work into Tibet; see Anne MacDonald, *In Clear Words: The Prasannapadā, Chapter 1: Annotated Translation, Tibetan Text,* Vol. 1, *Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 2015a: 3-6 for a criticism of his interpretation. On the "clash" of methodologies between traditional Buddhist historians and Western concepts of the philosophy of history, see Westerhoff, *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2018c: 24-34. For legendary accounts of Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and other Indian masters, see Losang Norbu Tsonawa, *Indian Buddhist Pandits from "The Jewel Garland of Buddhist History*", Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1985.

[9] See Ruegg, *The Buddhist Philosophy of the Middle: Essays on Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka*, Wisdom Publications, 2010: 13-36 for a detailed survey. After Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti's lineage traces back to Āryadeva (c. third century CE) and Buddhapālita (c. fifth century CE). Concurrent developments against which Candrakīrti reacts are the logico-epistemological school of Dignāga (c. fifth century CE) and Dharmakīrti (c. seventh century CE) and the Yogācāra as represented by Asaṅga (c. 4th century CE) and Vasubandhu (the same, his younger half-brother). After Candrakīrti, Madhyamaka popularity in India wanes. Nonetheless, the school is well-represented by Śāntideva (c. late seventh-early eight century CE) and his commentator Prajñākaramati (c. 10-11th century CE). Additionally, a trend of Yogācāra-Madhyamaka synthesis emerges in the likes of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla (c. eight century CE). This material, among other Buddhist texts, in various stages is then imported into Tibet. On the waves of dissemination of Madhyamaka Buddhism in Tibet, see Vose 2009: 1-62. As it is beyond my scope, I have not considered its reception in China and other East Asian countries.

such as Bhāviveka (c. sixth century CE; also known as Bhāvaviveka or Bhavya)).[10] Candrakīrti has many qualms with Bhāviveka, the majority of which are methodological in nature. I do not much concern myself with these details but do expound the *prasaṅga* methodology of using *reductio ad absurdum* style argumentation to undermine an opponent's position vs. Bhāviveka's preferred method of independently valid syllogisms (called *svātantra*) in establishing the philosophical validity of emptiness.[11]

Since my project offers a systematic exposition of the two truths in Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, certain restrictions were placed on its scope, perhaps to the detriment of their larger cultural and philosophical contexts. Other contexts, such as the interpretation of the two truths by Buddhists from other schools; the relation of the Madhyamaka to these schools; the historical development of the Madhyamaka lineage post-Candrakīrti; the historical development of the two truths post-Candrakīrti; some of the opponents' Candrakīrti critiques and the context of those debates taking place in the centuries between Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti; the larger Tibetan interpretation of the philosophy of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti; or the synthesis of Madhyamaka thought with other strands of Buddhist philosophy remain outside my purview because only tangential to any systematization of the two truths in Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti specifically. Nonetheless, I have had reason to sometimes mention some of these in passing without deeper investigation since not mentioning them would do my reader a disservice.

I base my project on Nāgārjuna's corpus and on Candrakīrti's elaborations of this corpus, focusing on Candrakīrti *as he interprets Nāgārjuna in the context of the two truths*. More specifically, I appeal to Candrakīrti to fill certain gaps in Nāgārjuna's works. It is my position that there is not always enough

[10] See *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction* (eds. Georges Dreyfus and Sara McClintock), Wisdom Publications, 2003; see also David Seyfort Ruegg, "The *Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika* Distinction in the History of Madhyamaka Thought", *Indo-Iranian Journal* 49.3/4, 2006: 319-46. This doxographical distinction is a later Tibetan invention (where the Tibetan terms are *rang rgyud* (=*svatantra*; *rang rgyud pa* =*svātantrika*) and *thal 'gyur* (=*prasaṅga*; *thal 'gyur ba* = *prāsaṅgika*). The introduction of Dreyfus & McClintock states: "One temptation to be resisted at all costs is the use of the terms Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika as if they referred to well-established and self-evident Indian subschools (avoiding this use is not as easy to achieve as it sounds). In fact, most of the time what are really indicated by these terms are not Indian subschools per se but rather particular Tibetan interpretations of Indian Madhyamaka, interpretations that are often interesting and well-informed but not necessarily accurate and nearly always a matter of great dispute. Thus, far from having any degree of transparency, immediacy, or even clarity, the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction is highly problematic and in great need of clarification" (2003: 5). Both Candrakīrti and Bhāviveka base themselves on the work of Nāgārjuna, for which reason both are considered Mādhyamikas.

[11] I discuss this distinction further in PART I (chapter 4) in the section on Madhyamaka epistemology (§4.1).

information from Nāgārjuna alone to make an appropriate determination of the complete import of the two truths distinction. Any work concerning the two truths that would solely rely on Nāgārjuna would have an incomplete picture thereof owing to the scarcity and terseness of his references thereto: although present across his corpus, the distinction is not elaborated in the same breadth that Candrakīrti provides. This is not demonstrative of a lack of importance for Nāgārjuna but perhaps an underdevelopment, which may be the reason Candrakīrti insists on the two truths throughout his corpus if he feels Nāgārjuna's point has been misunderstood.[12] Even further, relying instead on some other Mādhyamikas (see fn. 9 above) might still be insufficient to paint a full picture of the two truths and their role in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project, for this is one of Candrakīrti's specific concerns.

I need not assume that Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti in every way align, that Candrakīrti is the best interpreter of Nāgārjuna, or that his interpretations are faultless. However, I do take the two truths as the most important instance of their alignment. When assuming a shared philosophical temperament striving towards establishing a coherent middle way position on the grounds of the philosophical baseline of dependence relations (covered by dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and conditionality (*idaṃpratyayatā*)) and universal emptiness, I need not assume that Candrakīrti perfectly understands the full context and import of all Nāgārjuna's arguments.[13] Rather, I demonstrate a congruence in the arena of the two truths insofar as Candrakīrti's characterizations thereof support well Nāgārjuna's, especially with reference to their formal differentiation and cognitive aspects. Nāgārjuna offers a skeletal structure of the two truths to which Candrakīrti adds flesh; both stress the soteriological core of the project. Consequently, if and where Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti diverge is of lesser concern to me than their

[12] This could specifically refer to the contemporary Buddhists with whom Candrakīrti finds fault, such as Bhāviveka, the Yogācāra, or the logico-epistemological school (see fn. 9 above). This gap Candrakīrti's work attempts to fill is pointed out by Jeffrey Hopkins (*Meditation on Emptiness*, Wisdom Publications, 1996: 404).

[13] Some scholars, such as Tillemans ("Mādhyamikas Playing Bad Hands: The Case of Customary Truth", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47.4, 2019b: 635-44) and Eviatar Shulman ("The Commitments of a Madhyamaka Trickster: Innovation in Candrakīrti's *Prasanna-padā*", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 38.4, 2010: 379-417) attempt to uncover philosophical discrepancies between Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. I address the former in chapter 1 (§1.2) in defence of Candrakīrti's presentation of the conventional truth. Discrepancies that do not concern the two truths are irrelevant to my project.

convergence if my goal is to present a coherent account of the two truths. If there are areas Candrakīrti misinterprets Nāgārjuna, my research concludes they do not concern the two truths or the overall characterization of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project.

TEXTUAL METHODOLOGY & SOURCES

My methodology is to interpret Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti towards a systematization of their arguments illuminating the two truths distinction in its hermeneutical, philosophical, cognitive, and soteriological contexts. As this is a work in the history of ancient Buddhist philosophy, I take seriously the mandate to foremostly judge these texts according to their own context and merits. Methodologically, I neither expressly compare them to modern philosophical trends nor use Buddhist philosophy to address contemporary philosophical issues. Rather, I catalogue and interpret the evidence Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti offer about the two truths towards presenting it in a systematic manner to expose these implications to a modern, philosophically trained audience. While it may be advantageous to allude to the ideas of some of the giants of Western philosophy as explanatory aids to the Madhyamaka (both *pro* and *contra*), this is not a work in comparative philosophy. Afterall, Ruegg has wisely warned scholars of Buddhist philosophy that we

> must certainly beware of anachronistically transposing and arbitrarily superimposing on modes of thought which originated in their own particular, and quite specific, historical and intellectual settings the concepts and methods of modern philosophy and semiotics since the latter have evolved, mostly in the West, in the course of distinct historical developments. The Indian and Tibetan philosophical doctrines and methods have first to be understood ‘emically' in their own right, in other words within the frame of the concerns of the Indian and Tibetan thinkers and of the ideas they have developed over the centuries.[14]

This methodology means that the interpretation I offer is the one I believe best accommodates the nuances and intricacies (with respect to both the minutiae and the bigger picture) that the evidence found in the corpuses of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti together offers concerning the two truths. I do so by attempting to strike a careful balance between the judicious use of contemporary philosophical vocabulary that

[14] Ruegg 2000: 227-8.

would be familiar to my reader and the specific technical vocabulary used by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti in composing their treatises. I seek to extrapolate the philosophical, hermeneutic, cognitive, and soteriological import of the two truths as it applies to an audience familiar with the Madhyamaka.

I attempt to remain as faithful to the original texts as possible while nonetheless establishing an internal coherence therein, as well as with the general common principles of Buddhist philosophy (namely, its core principle in dependent origination, which is then subsequently applied towards selflessness (*anātman*) and emptiness). In that vein, I sometimes appeal to the largest extant collection of early Buddhist material, the Pāli Canon. Although unlikely that Nāgārjuna or Candrakīrti had contact with any Pāli literature, they would have had access to its Sanskrit counterparts or parallels, which they sometimes reference. The Sanskrit versions do not exist as compiled in Pāli. There is thus occasion for me to reference the Pāli Canon to lend legitimacy and coherence to the Madhyamaka project, as its coherence with the *Buddhadharma* (the canonical teachings of the Buddha) and its reception amongst a Buddhist audience was an important issue to the early Mahāyāna writers of *śāstra*s (philosophical treatises outside the canonical material (*buddhavacana*) supplementing it). In these cases, when appropriate, I cite certain passages in translation; otherwise, I merely indicate the relevant *sutta*.

The Mādhyamikas sometimes appeal to the body of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s (the dating of which is problematic; some may precede Nāgārjuna, such as (some of) the Prajñāpāramitā literature). These are not included in the 'first wave' of Buddhist literature (the first turning of the *dharma* wheel), of which all pre-Mahāyāna literature, including the Pāli Canon, is representative. These *sūtra*s are authentic and authoritative for the Mahāyāna but not for the non-Mahāyāna. Nāgārjuna does not much engage in this referential practice but it is a frequent tactic of Candrakīrti.[15] For this reason, I sometimes appeal to these Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, again towards lending legitimacy and coherence to the Madhyamaka but, further, because they hold immense explanatory value insofar as their longer form and poetic expressions paint

[15] See Ruegg 1981: 7.

a colourful picture of certain philosophical points and meditative experiences. Nonetheless, these texts are only supplementary. I firmly root my project in the corpuses of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti.

For Nāgārjuna, this comprises the "*yukti* corpus" (*dbu ma rigs tshogs*), the "collection of middle way reasoning" texts. I take no position on their authenticity.[16] I consult six Nāgārjunian texts: the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK), *Śūnyatāsaptatikārikā* (ŚS), *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (VV), *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa* (VP), *Yuktiṣaṣṭikākārikā* (YṢ), and the *Ratnāvalī* (RĀ; sometimes included in this collection, sometimes in the "collection of advice" (*gtam tshogs*) texts). Among these, the VV and VP have autocommentaries reliably attributed to Nāgārjuna. Occasionally, texts not always considered authentic and certainly outside the *yukti* corpus, such as the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* (BV) and the *Acintyastava* (AS), are referenced.

I consult Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* (PSP, a commentary on the MMK), *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti* (YṢV, a commentary on the YṢ), and the standalone *Madhyamakāvatāra* (MĀ) with its autocommentary, the *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* (MĀB).

To further lend legitimacy and coherence to my project, I sometimes reference other Mādhyamikas such as Buddhapālita (his *Mūlamadhyamakavṛtti* (MMV), a commentary on the MMK), Āryadeva (his *Catuḥśatakaśāstrakārikā* (CŚ), a standalone work on which Candrakīrti wrote a commentary, the *Bodhisattvayogacaryācatuḥśakaṭīkā*), and Śāntideva (his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (BCA), with its commentary by Prajñākaramati (his *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* (BCAP) that frequently cites and interprets Candrakīrti alongside Śāntideva).

While this is a large number of root texts with which to work, given that some of these address a wide range of topics, the systematic application of the two truths in this range is a testament to its importance and to the very hermeneutic value of the distinction. This consistent distribution makes the two truths distinction a hermeneutic device applicable when reading every Madhyamaka text.

[16] See Lindtner 1990: 9-17; Westerhoff 2009a: 6-9; Ruegg 1981: 8-26, 2010: 19-22.

Although I compare with published translations, I produce my own translations of the root texts and their commentaries, unless indicated otherwise.[17] All my translations are made from Classical Sanskrit or Classical Tibetan. The original language of the texts of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti is Classical Sanskrit; however, sometimes only Sanskrit fragments survive. The historical trend of Tibetan interest in Indian Buddhism means that they collected and translated many texts, especially including those of Madhyamaka; sometimes, only a Tibetan translation survives of a root text. This is the case for the ŚS, VP, YṢ and YṢV (of which some Sanskrit fragments survive), and MĀ and MĀB (past chapter 6), for which reason my translations thereof are made from the Tibetan. Sometimes there are multiple Tibetan translations made at different times by different translators. There is also an extensive collection of Chinese and other East Asian language translations of Buddhist works, but this exceeds my scope. Sometimes, scholars reconstruct a Sanskrit edition based on these translations, and these reconstructions may have been consulted in conjunction with their Tibetan translations. Where possible, I prefer the original Sanskrit over a Tibetan translation (although, in the case of ambiguities, a Tibetan translation may still be consulted), and I prefer a Tibetan translation over a Sanskrit reconstruction. I did not conduct any manuscript work but rely on published critical editions of the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts.

Additionally, I consult Tibetan commentaries on the root texts in the context of their being

[17] On the great difficulties associated with this task, which is not to be taken lightly, Anne MacDonald ("The Quest for an English-Speaking Nāgārjuna", Review of *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* by Mark Siderits & Shōryū Katsura, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 58, 2015c: 358) writes that "Translating Indian philosophical works is not an easy matter. The linguistic requirements and challenges can be daunting, and great effort must be expended in attempts to penetrate the conceptual world of authors who are separated from us by many centuries and by the dense and all too often unrecognized mesh of our cultural and ideological screens. Any endeavour to reproduce a text in another language inevitably displaces and decontextualizes it, endows it with new syntactical constructions and lexical elements, and, much as the translator might strive to maintain semantic correspondence, this can prove elusive when the target language lacks the linguistic receptors or cultural, social and/or conceptual structures necessary for facilitating an undisturbed transfer of meaning. Where linguistic features, literary styles or meaning cannot be duplicated, or can only be approximated, the translator is often forced to choose between integrating foreign elements—which will subsequently be filtered and interpreted by the target culture—and "domesticating" them, i.e., assimilating and accommodating them to the styles and discourses of the target language and the ideologies of the receiving audience. The cross-cultural communication can never be complete because both alternatives invariably result in a certain loss for the source text and a certain gain, often of an interpretative nature, for the translation. The translator's task of negotiating the linguistic and conceptual differences of the source text and signaling these, within a different cultural environment, in the registers and discourses of the target language is risky business. The fact that classical Indian philosophical works present serious conceptual challenges and are additionally easy targets for projection and superimposition from the side of modern interpreters demands that we approach them with great care".

Madhyamaka commentaries. Because this is not a work on Tibetan Madhyamaka or the Tibetan reception of the Madhyamaka, I do not consider the philosophies of those authors outside of that context. However, when appropriate, I appeal to Tibetan Mādhyamikas supporting my interpretation and, sparingly, in opposition. Noteworthy are several Tibetan commentaries on the MMK, such as by Tsong Khapa (1357-1419, founder of the Geluk (*dge lugs*) tradition),[18] Mabja Jangchub Tsöndrü (c. 12th century CE), teacher of both the Kadam (*bka' gdams*) and Sakya (*sa skya*) traditions,[19] and Tsültrim Gyamtso (1935-2024, of the Kagyu (*bka' brgyud*) tradition).[20] I also consult a commentary on Nāgārjuna's ŚS by Geshe Sonam Rinchen (1933-2013)[21] and commentaries on the MĀ by Tsong Khapa,[22] Jamgön Mipham (1846-1912, a Nyingma (*rnying ma*) master involved in the Rimé (*ris med*) non-sectarian movement),[23] and Kelsang Gyatso (1931-2022, of the Geluk tradition).[24] I did not produce my own translations of these.

Lastly, I contextualize my work amongst modern scholars of the Madhyamaka, such as Mark Siderits, Jan Westerhoff, Jay Garfield, Sonam Thakchöe, Tom Tillemans, C.W. Huntington Jr., Mattia Salvini, Anne MacDonald, Paul Williams, Jeffrey Hopkins, Thupten Jinpa, etc. Enumerated in no particular order, this list is not at all exhaustive. Many of these scholars have produced both translations of and commentaries on the texts of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti I discuss, and they have published many books and academic articles bearing on various aspects of the subjects I treat in this dissertation, all of which I

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[18] Tsong Khapa, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (trans. Geshe Ngawang Samten & Jay L. Garfield), Oxford University Press, 2006.
[19] Mabja Jangchub Tsündrü, *Ornament of Reason: The Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's* Root of the Middle Way (trans. The Dharmachakra Translation Committee), Snow Lion Publications, 2011.
[20] Tsültrim Gyamtso*, The Sun of Wisdom: Teachings on the Noble Nagarjuna's* Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way (trans. Ari Goldfield), Shambala, 2003.
[21] Sonam Rinchen (Ross 1987).
[22] Tsong Khapa, *Illuminating the Intent: An Exposition of Candrakīrti's* Entering the Middle Way (trans. Thupten Jinpa), Wisdom Publications, 2021. Tsong Khapa also has a standalone work I consulted (*The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: lam rim chen mo* (trans. Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee), Snow Lion Publications, 2002).
[23] Jamgön Mipham, "The Word of Chandra: The Necklace of Spotless Wisdom", *Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakirti's* Madhyamakavatara (trans. Padmakara Translation Group), Shambhala, 2002. Other relevant commentaries of Mipham are on Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṅkāra* ("A Teaching to Delight My Master Manjughosha: A Commentary on the Madhyamakalankara", *The Adornment of the Middle Way: Shantarakshita's* Madhyamakalankara *with Commentary by Jamgön Mipham* (trans. Padmakara Translation Group), Shambhala, 2005) and Śāntideva's BCA ("The Ketaka Jewel", *The Wisdom Chapter: Jamgön Mipham's Commentary on the Ninth Chapter of The Way of the Bodhisattva* (trans. Padmakara Translation Group), Shambhala, 2017).
[24] Kelsang Gyatso, *Ocean of Nectar: The True Nature of All Things* (trans. and comm. by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso), Tharpa Publications, 2017.

have extensively consulted. Finding both support and opposition amongst them (more of the former than the latter), I nonetheless consider my interpretation novel insofar as I take seriously both their work and conclusions *and* the root texts themselves where they indicate other possible philosophical avenues. Although these scholars by no means collectively paint a uniform picture of the Madhyamaka, any departures therefrom largely pertain to i) my interpretation of the appropriate conception of the ultimate truth and the unique soteriological application of its formal parameters (although I nonetheless also have support in that arena) and, relatedly, ii) the broader-scaled practical questions about the two truths distinction itself. Regardless of support or opposition, I situate my work in the context of the established Madhyamaka scholarship without which I would have been unable to complete it.

PART I: CONVENTIONAL TRUTH & FALSITY

For the purposes of this dissertation on the two truths in the Madhyamaka philosophy of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, a "conventional truth" (*saṃvṛti-satya*) is defined as referring to an object of the valid cognition of ordinary experience (in contrast with that of its invalid cognition, conventional falsity). How the object is "seen" I correlate with a particular mode of cognitive experience. I deem this the cognitive reading of the conventional truth, the first half of my thesis that the each of the two truths correlates with a distinct mode of cognitive experience. Formally, the conventional truth's cognition is restricted to a conceptual, linguistic, dualistic form of cognitive experience, an intellectualized form of cognition. In the cognitive reading, the "conventional truth" as a general category is schematized by the threefold relation of the object, subject, and act of cognition. The philosophical parameters of its valid cognition (i.e., what makes it *valid*) are its coherence in every aspect with the philosophical baseline of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*),[1] conditionality (*idaṃpratyayatā*),[2] and emptiness (*śūnyatā*).[3]

In "ordinary experience", "ordinary" means *un*awakened (*abuddha*), as opposed to awakened (*buddha*, *bodhi*); "experience" refers to the phenomenological apprehension of an object of experience by a subject (consciousness). The concerns of this ordinary experience stretch from such mundane

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[1] In the Pāli Canon where the teaching originates (e.g., SN 12.2, *Paticcasamuppadavibhanga Sutta*), dependent origination refers to a phenomenological analysis of the conditions of the arising of suffering (*duḥkha*; Pāli: *dukkha*) through 12 links (*nidāna*s). This series, which is not necessarily linear but better understood interdependently, comprises the following: from ignorance (*avidyā*; Pāli: *avijjā*) arise volitional formations (*saṃskāra*; Pāli: *saṅkhāra*), consciousness (*vijñāna*; Pāli: *viññāṇa*), name-and-form (*nāma-rūpa*), the six sense-bases (*ṣaḍāyatana*; Pāli: *saḷāyatana*), feeling (*vedanā*), attachment (*tṛṣṇā*; Pāli: *taṇhā*), clinging (*upādāna*), existence/becoming (*bhava*), birth (*jāti*), and, lastly, old age/decay and death (*jarā-maraṇa*). The first link being "ignorance" is crucial for understanding the arising of suffering and the epistemological, cognitive, and wisdom aspects of the two truths, as are the 8th and 9th links regarding their relationship with the sense of self at the heart of suffering.

[2] The Madhyamaka appeal to conditionality (*idaṃpratyayatā*) is none other than the appeal to the ubiquity of dependence relations against the principle of self-establishment or causal independence. The formula of conditionality as it frequently appears in the Pāli Canon (e.g., AN 10.92, *Vera Sutta*) is "When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases; *iti imasmiṃ sati idaṁ hoti | imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati | imasmiṃ asati idaṁ na hoti | imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati* (trans. Bodhi 2012: 595-6; Morris & Hardy (vol. 2) 1888: 95). At RĀ 1:48a (48a), Nāgārjuna uses a shortened formula: "with respect to that existing (*asmin sati*), this exists (*idam sati*); *asmin satīdaṃ bhavati* (Vaidya 1960b: 299; McClintock & Dunne 2024: 181). At MĀB 6:115, Candrakīrti also uses a shortened formula, "Based on this, that arises"; *'di las brten nas 'di 'byung ngo zhes bya ba* (Liland 2020: 274). The point of this injunction is the thorough imbuing of all phenomena with conditionality.

[3] At MMK 24:18 (see chapter 2, §§2.2.1, p. 90; chapter 3, §§3.4.3), there is the effective synonymization of emptiness and dependent origination insofar as what is dependently originated is empty and what is empty is dependently originated. Emptiness and its generally negative rhetoric have a specific object of criticism in *svabhāva* (variously understood as "inherent existence" or "intrinsic nature", depending on the context). In either case, it is *independence from dependence relations* towards which the philosophical baseline is addressed.

trivialities as the nature of cups, pots, chairs, people, etc. (i.e., objects of ordinary experience) to the nature of suffering (*duḥkha*) and the realization of its cessation. Most important in this investigation is how these phenomena are cognitively experienced. The "cognition of ordinary experience" means the mental activity consisting of the apprehension of appearances by consciousness leading to the knowing and understanding of the phenomenal world in the conceptual medium by which ordinary cognition is defined.[4] In that case, what is conventionally true only applies to phenomenal sphere (*contra* noumenal: the world that is perceived), the objects of ordinary cognitive experience.

The primary condition differentiating conventional truth from falsity for Candrakīrti is the validity of the perception (*pratyakṣa*—the first of four *pramāṇa* (the "epistemic instruments") accepted by the Madhyamaka; see chapter 4, §4.1) of its object, as evidenced by his cataracts analogy (see chapter 3, §3.3). However, since for him this perception always has a conceptual component, this distinction is better understood in terms of conceptualization via the broader semantic framework in which the perception is situated.[5] Accordingly, insofar as the object of the conventional truth is the dependently

[4] Huntington (1989: 84-5) characterizes the Madhyamaka occupation with ordinary experience as follows: "It is assumed that a practical examination of everyday experience will not only reveal certain fundamental inconsistencies in one's preconceptions about the world, but will at the same time lead to a basic dissatisfaction with all attempts to account for everyday experience in a priori terms. The average person operates within a maze of unexamined belief, inherited in the observational language and natural interpretations passed along from one generation to the next as the ground of all experience. Under the influence of this network of hereditary beliefs that are built into thought and language and perception, the average person is almost entirely governed by self-centered considerations, and he is alternately attracted to or repelled by a world that threatens his fragmented, isolated self. Buddhist wisdom stands in direct opposition to this pattern of behavior and to the attitude underlying it, for one develops wisdom by not taking for granted this self-centered view of the world and by deconstructing the grip of prejudices and presuppositions that give shape to all our experience".

[5] It was explained to me by Mattia Salvini (the external examiner of this dissertation) in his comments on this dissertation that "Candrakīrti specifically refers to perception (not linguistic structures) as the primary matrix of valid conventions". This is true and is explained with reference to *pratyakṣa* ("perception"), the first and most important of the four *pramāṇa*s ("epistemic instruments"; see chapter 4, §4.1) Candrakīrti lists as conventionally valid. However, the specific way Candrakīrti defines this "perception" (cf. PSP 70-1; see MacDonald 2015b: 268-71) is relevant in making the jump from a reliance on perception to linguistic structures. Candrakīrti critiques Dignāga's definition of *pratyakṣa* by arguing that, at the conventional level, perception cannot be unmediated and direct (i.e., non-conceptual). There is no such thing as an unperceived pot that could be known apart from this very perception and then be perceived (i.e., "In the case where "the pot is perceptible" (*ghaṭaḥ pratyakṣaḥ iti*), there is not anything named "pot" (*na ghaṭaḥ nāma kaścit*) which is imperceptible (*yaḥ apratyakṣaḥ*) apart from the perception of that (*pṛthag-upalabdhaḥ yasya*)"; *ghaṭaḥ pratyakṣa ityatra tu- na hi ghaṭo nāma kaścidyo 'pratyakṣaḥ pṛthagupalabdho yasya* […] | (Vaidya 1960b: 24). Candrakīrti's alliance of the perception of a pot with the name "pot" (i.e., *ghaṭaḥ nāma*) demonstrates the conceptual nature of perception. Siderits (*Studies in Buddhist Philosophy,* Oxford University Press, 2016: 227-32) discusses this debate at length. Given the conceptual nature of perception, it is not much of a stretch towards discussing a methodological reliance on the conventional, linguistic matrix in which these perceptions are articulated. That is the subject of chapter 1; this same emphasis on the role of language and linguistic analysis continues in chapter 2 with much scholarly support.

originated phenomenon, I focus on the conditions of its valid cognition. Due to the formal parameters of the ordinary, conceptual cognition with which correlates the conventional truth, my investigation thus begins with the roles played by language, discourse, conceptuality, designation, and semantic frameworks in conventionally valid cognition, the valid cognition of ordinary experience. In this way, I shall demonstrate how the conventional truth and its valid cognition are products of conventional discourse and linguistic structures insofar as it utilizes conventional discourse as the structure of its presentation, as the repository of its nominal contents, and, as such, as its means or its vehicle.

I am firstly concerned with the formal parameters of this cognition in the context of the conventional truth (chapters 1 and 2). Secondly, I am concerned with the conditions of its validity (chapters 3 and 4). In the first case, because linguistic and conceptual in form, it is therefore subject to the formal parameters of conventional discourse: the "convention" in "conventional discourse" is the same "convention" (*saṃvṛti*) in the "conventional truth". There is much to say about the role of "convention" in Madhyamaka philosophy. "Discourse" refers to the linguistic and conceptual medium of the cognition and articulation of that ordinary experience. Ordinary experience is intersubjectively cognized and communicated through conventional discourse. In that case, to determine what the Mādhyamikas hold to be conventionally true, as distinguished from conventional falsity, we must examine how they discourse about ordinary cognitive experience, the conventional truth, and the ultimate.

In the second case, the overriding concern of the conventional truth is the cognitive framework by which ordinary experience is cognized, and, thus, discoursed about, either validly or invalidly. In addition to this metric, its concern with the "valid cognition of ordinary experience" is to be contrasted with the cognitions associated with the ultimate truth, the "awakened" cognition of the *yogī*s, *ārya*s, *bodhisattva*s, and *buddha*s. The latter is *extra*-ordinary, in the sense of atypical of the ordinary (i.e., *un*conventional as formally distinct therefrom). This reveals a cognitive distinction correlated with the two truths phrased in terms of a formal differentiation. I begin with how the Mādhyamikas address the cognition of ordinary experience in PART I on the conventional truth insofar as they address ordinary experience in ordinary,

conventional language. On the other hand, when discussing the cognitive experiences correlated with seeing the ultimate and the relation of that "seeing" to what is "seen", its respective cognitive object, and its "seer", the language of "*extra*-ordinary", by means of overcoming the ordinary, is topical. That discussion is reserved for PART II.

The critical element of ordinary cognitive experience—and precisely the condition which formally differentiates it from *extra*-ordinary cognition—is the discursive medium in which its cognitions are asserted, and so the relation of this discourse to both the conceptualizing mind and the phenomenal world (as well as the interrelation of the latter two) is presented as a chief Madhyamaka concern. I argue there is an intimate relation for the Madhyamaka between investigating the world and the domain of conventional discourse insofar as conventional discourse circumscribes the conditions of the cognition and articulation of that ordinary experience therein by encompassing all conceptual distinctions concerning that world (e.g., "existence" and "non-existence", "true" and "untrue", and "good" and "bad" as the "categories of conventional discourse" applied in various combinations in all cognitions).[6]

The specific concern with language and discourse is that our discourse about phenomena and our experiences thereof mirror how we internally cognize the same. These categories are engrained patterns of conceptual thought offering a cognitive template for the schematization of ordinary cognitive experience. Thus, ascertaining how the Mādhyamikas specifically employ these categories is demonstrative of how they conceive of ordinary experience's valid cognition. This is the topic of chapters 1 and 2 in developing both the mind–world model of cognitive experience and the semantic framework necessary to the conventional truth and its correlated valid cognition. These are applied throughout the dissertation as conceptual templates for the valid cognition of ordinary experience.

If conventional discourse articulates the cognition of ordinary experience, then the conventional truth (taken in its most general sense as indicative of the threefold relation of cognition, cognized, and

[6] See the discussion of such "categories" in chapter 1 (§1.1).

cognizer) only emerges as a product thereof and is therefore conditioned by it. For this reason, I begin the investigation with an exploration of the boundaries of "convention" and its relation to ordinary experience (that is, "convention" in the sense of conventional discourse, the medium of articulating ordinary cognitive experience), as well as the Mādhyamikas' pedagogical reliance on such "convention".

The crucial point of the formal restriction advocated by the cognitive reading is that all acts of discourse and all cognitions articulated therethrough could only ever function at the conventional level (that is, either at the level of conventional truth or falsity—in contradistinction with the conception of the ultimate from which they are barred). This conclusion, developed in the following chapters of PART I, is critical to the model of the two truths for which I argue. Insofar as there is a cognitive division of the two truths themselves, that cognitive division has a formal criterion in the respective presence or absence of language and conceptuality. This, in turn, has profound implications for Madhyamaka epistemology, metaphysics, and what we would call philosophy of language that must be uncovered. Thus, if there is a restriction of language and conceptualization, and so of ordinary cognitive experience, to the conventional level, then every act of conceptualization and discourse as constitutive of that ordinary cognitive experience must be thoroughly conventional; further, that which is conceptualized and discoursed about in ordinary cognitive experience must likewise be thoroughly conventional.

I present the case as follows: after, in chapter 1, I establish the exemplary conceptual model of the dependence relations integral to the conventional truth via the mind–world model of cognitive experience and, thereafter, the Mādhyamikas' methodological reliance on convention, in chapter 2 I explain the conventional nature of this discourse. What makes discourse conventional is, of course, dependence relations, in this context explained by means of i) the codependence of any dependent designation (*prajñaptir upādāya*) and its basis of designation and ii) the Mādhyamikas' non-standard, conventional semantic framework based thereon. Following these dependence relations, the cognition of ordinary experience is determined by i) the mind–world interdependence, and, as an extension of this, ii) the designation–designated interdependence. These dependence relations serve as conceptual templates of

the valid cognition of ordinary experience by means of the conventional truth.

From this conventional basis, in chapter 3 I bifurcate the cognition of this ordinary experience into two streams: conventional truth and conventional falsity, which means that there are both *correct* and *incorrect* (per MĀ 6:23)—or *valid* and *invalid*—ways of cognizing and therefore discoursing about the objects of ordinary experience. In the case that both valid and invalid cognitions occur through this same formal medium, the conventional truth is specifically correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience and conventional falsity with its invalid cognition. The difference is not strictly the content of any particular cognition (the nominal presence of, e.g., chairs, people, or suffering) but the philosophical underpinnings of the cognition itself: the particular semantic framework (in metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological senses) correlated with these cognitions is the condition of their differentiation. This is because a semantic framework (see chapter 2, §§2.1.2) is determinative of cognitive experience itself by supplying the meanings of such essential, structural concepts as "existence" (metaphysics), "truth" (epistemology), and "goodness/value" (axiology). A divergence in semantic commitments (i.e., incongruent semantic frameworks) is the central criterion I employ to both i) differentiate the Madhyamaka from the various opponents they critique and ii) sketch the Madhyamaka-specific account of the valid cognition of ordinary experience. For this reason, I offer a roadmap of the development of that argument: in chapter 1, it begins with the establishment of the formative role of a semantic frameworks in cognitive experience itself; it continues in chapter 2 with the differences between standard semantic frameworks (the category to which belong all the Madhyamaka's opponents in one way or another, invariably summarized as one mode or another of realist semantics) and non-standard, conventional semantic frameworks (belonging strictly to the Madhyamaka, the semantic framework of the conventional truth); that distinction is consequently applied in chapters 3 and 4 to firmly establish the conditions differentiating conventional truth and falsity. Understanding their specific semantic framework is key to understanding any claims the Mādhyamikas make towards the valid cognition of ordinary experience and, therefore, for understanding the conventional truth.

By means of a justification of a translation choice, I set the stage of PART I with introductions to conventional truth and falsity. On the basis of Candrakīrti's tripartite etymology of *saṃvṛti* (see chapter 1, §1.2), there are several translations of *saṃvṛti-satya*, such as "relative truth", "conventional truth", "customary truth", "the truth of the screen", "truth-for-the-concealed", "fictional truth", "obscurational truth", "la vérité de surface", "la vérité contingente", etc. "Conventional truth" and "relative truth" appear most frequently. I prefer "the conventional truth" for the following reason. Whereas "relative truth" is the term most often chosen by translators of Tibetan texts from its Tibetan equivalent, *kun rdzob bden pa*, it can convey an acceptable meaning only in the case it is understood that its truth is always relative to a certain conceptual framework and, thus, to a certain cognitive perspective (in reference to a set of linguistic conventions and its attendant semantic framework operative in the cognizing mind) and not arbitrary relativism where anything goes. I shall demonstrate how the Mādhyamikas' methodological reliance on convention must still operate under the firm direction of normativity and regularity at the conventional level that the general appeal to relativism does not immediately invoke. As such, some relation to convention must still be the primary sense of "relative", for which reason the appellation "conventional truth" better cuts to the chase. The "conventional truth" also offers a strong contrast with the "ultimate truth" when "convention" has connotations of "mundane" and "ordinary" and "ultimate" has connotations of "final" and "definitive" associated with awakened cognition.

There are two preliminary aspects of the conventional truth to bear in mind. Firstly, as the conventional truth correlates with the valid cognition of ordinary experience, this ordinary experience must not be invalidated for several reasons, the most important of which are twofold: i) the pedagogical initiative and the instrumental role assigned to the conventional truth in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project requires a solid foundation in its valid cognition, which I take as a defensible account of Candrakīrti's exposition of the conventional truth; and ii) the avoidance of a nihilism that nullifies this ordinary experience, a position incompatible with i).

For the second aspect, at the same time that the conventional truth is "ordinary" there must nonetheless

be normative criteria for its differentiation from conventional falsity and the invalid cognitive with which the latter is correlated. Such conditions of differentiation include both empirical and philosophical criteria; the former refers to defects in sense perception and the way it is cognized, the latter to philosophical views and semantic commitments to which conventional falsity is beholden. The semantic commitments of the conventional truth in all ways cohere with the central *Buddhadharmic* philosophical baseline of dependence relations and emptiness, with which the semantic commitments of conventional falsity fail to cohere. A delineation of this second criterion accounts for the philosophical value of the conventional truth and its valid cognition as the grounds on which it is normatively differentiated from conventional falsity and its invalid cognition.

As an extension and application of the *Buddhadharma* in lived life, the conventional truth must circumscribe entirely mundane affairs: it entails an account of all aspects of ordinary experience couched in the language of conventional discourse that is entirely coherent with the *Buddhadharma* precisely because the *Buddhadharma* presents a coherent account of such ordinary experience by means of the philosophical baseline of dependence relations and emptiness. Insofar as it circumscribes the totality of conventions in the context of their valid cognition, the conventional truth must necessarily encompass the mundanity of thoroughly ordinary experiences such as the determination of the veracity of the basic phenomenological assertion that "there is a cup on the table" *iff* there is indeed a cup on the table—the normative conditions establishing both the empirical and philosophical validity of this perception are addressed in chapter 3. Though on the surface seemingly trivial, the correct modelling of the mechanics of this most basic sort of cognition is critical to ordinary experience's valid cognition. For this perception to cohere with the philosophical baseline as constituting the cognitive architecture of the conventional truth's valid cognition, it must be understood how both the concepts of "cup" and "table", the copula asserting the existence of the "cup" and the "table" on which it rests, and the consciousness in which the cognition occurs are all subject to and the product of dependence relations and therefore empty. Without such an understanding, the same perception, as situated in a different semantic framework incompatible

with such dependence relations, leads to conventional falsity.

Thus, both the empirical and philosophical criteria differentiating conventional truth from falsity establish the conventional truth as correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience. These criteria circumscribe the purview, reach, and semantic commitments of the conventional truth, the specifics of which are elaborated across the chapters in PART I.

Conventional falsity, in contradistinction with the conventional truth, likewise has the same two criteria cementing its invalidity. Both are covered by Candrakīrti's famous "cataracts" (*taimira*) analogy (discussed in chapter 3, §3.3). Conventional falsity comprises firstly, in a straightforward manner, the "empirical falsity" that Candrakīrti explains as faulty sense perception but which, secondly, with respect to the criterion of "philosophical falsity", also hinges on false inferences, either based on those faulty sense perceptions or the misconceptualization of otherwise functioning sense perceptions via their situation in an invalid semantic framework. This philosophical falsity refers to the incorrect, deluded way of cognizing ordinary experience through the lens of conceptuality precisely because it eschews the philosophical baseline of dependence relations and emptiness—this is the invalid cognition of ordinary experience. Such invalid cognition is an account of ordinary experience committed to philosophical views (i.e., wrong views) incoherent with the *Buddhadharma*, unable to withstand the rigorous investigations of the conventional truth's analysis. In chapter 4, the two chief examples of conventional falsity against which the Mādhyamikas argue are epistemological foundationalism and metaphysical realism, both critiqued as incoherent with the philosophical baseline. This critique, which yields epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism in the conventional truth, is advanced on the basis of the same pattern of conceptual interdependence (the same exemplary conceptual model of the conventional truth established in chapter 1 with the mind–world model of cognitive experience and applied throughout this dissertation).

To be more specific, for the claim "there is a cup on the table" to be considered conventional falsity there is, firstly, the empirical condition of there not being any cup on the table (as verified through correct

perception),[7] but, secondly, of misunderstanding the metaphysical and epistemological import of this assertion in thinking that, if there indeed appears to be a cup on the table, then there is thereby a real, substantial, mind- and convention-independent cup on a real, substantial mind- and convention-independent table, as perceived by a real subject, each of which is not subject to dependence relations but exist extracognitively as they immediately and uncritically appear. No cognition of ordinary experience incoherent with the philosophical baseline is admitted to the conventional truth. Conventional falsity in all cases fails this test of coherability insofar as its semantic commitments generally represent either of the two extreme positions or philosophical views against which the philosophy of the middle way reacts: realism (the view of the total mind- and convention-independent existence or reality of all phenomena) and nihilism (the view of the total non-existence or unreality of all phenomena). The Mādhyamikas are more concerned with addressing the former beliefs for they are more frequently encountered but, when they themselves are frequently accused of adopting the latter (given the nuances of the negative rhetoric of *śūnyatā*, which, by the denial of *svabhāva*, they are adamant does not mean non-existence *tout court*), this misunderstanding must also be disproved as nongermane to the middle way between extremes and thus to the conventional truth.

This, critically, means that the conventional truth can by no means be a robust, realist type of correspondence truth as requiring correspondence with real, substantialized, mind- and convention-independent entities. Nonetheless, it is still possible to rescue some form of weakened form of correspondence for the conventional truth, as a nonetheless robust form of philosophical normativity and validity, insofar as the basic formula of truth (in reference to a true statement) is that <*p*> (the proposition '<*p*>') is true because *p* (the state of affairs '*p*') remains the standard. This is an essential criterion of the normative epistemological conditions that produce the conventional truth in differentiation from

[7] The specifics of "correct perception" for the Madhyamaka, which are connected with the conventional truth, are elaborated in chapter 3, and likewise for "incorrect perception" and its relation to conventional falsity. The "correct/incorrect" dichotomy of perception has both empirical and philosophical components.

conventional falsity. The crucial difference, which weakens the form of correspondence, consists in the specific relation between a proposition and that to which it refers, which can obtain for the conventional truth only in the Mādhyamikas' non-standard, conventional semantic framework as an artifact of cognitive experience itself. These conditions are elaborated in chapter 3 in defence of the philosophical validity of the conventional truth.

In summary: because I argue in chapter 1 that the conventional truth relies on conventional discourse for the articulation of the valid cognition of ordinary experience and in chapter 2 that language and discourse (i.e., the medium of ordinary cognition) are only valid at the conventional level, it will be evident that both conventional truth and falsity share the common denominator of language and discourse (that is, *conventional* discourse) but with incompatible, incommensurate semantic commitments. In chapter 3, the validity of the former and the invalidity of the latter are demonstrated in normative terms of both empirical and philosophical criteria. In chapters 2-4, I outline more clearly the specific semantic commitments of the Mādhyamikas' conventional truth, culminating in chapter 4 with a presentation of the Madhyamaka arguments for the epistemologically anti-foundationalist and metaphysically anti-realist characteristics of the conventional truth (from the critiques of epistemological foundationalism and metaphysical realism, respectively). These critiques and their counterpositions are established from applying this investigation to the semantic framework becoming of the conventional truth based on the philosophical baseline of dependence relations and emptiness.

CHAPTER 1: THE ROLE OF "CONVENTION" IN MADHYAMAKA PHILOSOPHY

In this chapter, I address the role of "convention" in Madhyamaka philosophy, the conventional truth, and the two truths distinction. I demonstrate how Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's exposition of the conventional truth relies on convention (i.e., conventional discourse) to articulate the valid cognition of ordinary experience.[1] I derive an exemplary conceptual template of the dependence relations integral to the conventional truth and the valid cognition of ordinary experience via the mind–world model that determines cognitive experience as it is articulated through the medium of conventional discourse.

I indicated in the "Introduction to PART I" why this investigation must begin with language.[2] On that basis, in §1.1 I outline the mechanics of the Mādhyamikas' methodological reliance on conventional discourse (the linguistic and conceptual medium of ordinary cognitive experience and the conventional truth). The "categories of discourse" are indispensable structural elements of the kind of discourse in which the Mādhyamikas engage at the level of the conventional truth insofar as the specific meanings such categories are afforded determine the semantic commitments of that discourse. I introduce these categories' formative role in cognitive experience through an investigation of their resultant mind–world models. The cognitive experience schematized by this mind–world model is the kind of cognitive experience to which the conventional truth refers. In §1.2, I bolster this analysis with an extensive examination of Candrakīrti's threefold etymology of *saṃvṛti* (i.e., "convention") predicating the conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*; but also predicating conventional falsity). This etymology is crucial for both understanding the scope of the "convention" on which the Madhyamaka rely and for defending the philosophical validity of the conventional truth. Lastly, in §1.3 I offer evidence attesting the instrumental role of conventional discourse in the two truth's pedagogical strategy, confirming the scope and context of the convention on which the Mādhyamikas methodologically rely.

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[1] "Ordinary" and "experience" are defined in the "Introduction to PART I" (pp. 23-4 above) and elaborated in chapter 3 (§3.1) in the context of the cognitive reading of the conventional truth as the valid cognition of ordinary experience.
[2] See pp. 23-7 above (especially fn.5).

Each of the following points—i) that there is a methodological reliance on conventional modes of discourse; ii) that all three senses of *saṃvṛti* are necessary to understanding the context of the Madhyamaka reliance on this conventional discourse; and iii) that this conventional discourse plays an instrumental role in the two truths distinction itself—are necessary ingredients for the correct apprehension of the conventional truth, especially concerning its role in the two truths distinction. In that case, in this chapter I lay the foundations of the conceptual framework through which the conventional truth must be understood. In subsequent chapters, more concrete applications of that framework follow.

§1.1 RELATING CONVENTIONAL DISCOURSE & COGNITIVE EXPERIENCE

Nāgārjuna's ŚS opens with an explicit declaration I interpret as a categorical scheme of predicates applicable at the level of conventional truth in contradistinction with the ultimate. This restriction, which is critical to my thesis concerning the conditions of the formal differentiation of the two truths and the hermeneutic value of their distinction based on this formal differentiation, requires explanation. Using ŚS 1 in this way is a novel interpretation insofar as it is one of the lesser studied texts of Nāgārjuna, especially as integrated into the explication of the two truths distinction. Nāgārjuna says:

> [ŚS 1:] "Enduring" (*gnas pa*), "production" and "destruction" (*skye 'jig*), "existence" and "non-existence" (*yod med*), "inferiority" (*dman pa*), "equality" (*mnyam pa*), and "superiority" (*khyad par can*)—the Buddha (*sangs rgyas*) spoke of these on account of worldly convention (*'jig rten snyad dbang gis*), not on account of the ultimate (*yang dag dbang gis min*).[3]

"On account of worldly convention", Nāgārjuna lists a series of concepts I interpret as referring to some "conventional categories of discourse"—that is, to some core structural concepts of conventional

[3] ŚS 1: *gnas pa'am skye 'jig yod med dam dman pa'am mnyam pa'am khyad par can | sangs rgyas 'jig rten snyad dbang gis | gsung gi yang dag dbang gis min ||* (Tola & Dragonetti 1987: 10). What I have translated here as "the ultimate" (*yang dag*) is not necessarily the typical term found in Tibetan translations of Madhyamaka texts (usually *don dam = paramārtha*). Other translations are in the same ballpark (i.e., "true existence" (Ross 1987: 97), "an absolute sense (*tattvavaśāt*)" (Lindtner 1990: 35), and "true reality" (Tola & Dragonetti 1987: 24). Evidently, Lindtner reconstructs the Sanskrit in the vein of *tattva*, a synonym of the ultimate. Similar occurrences are frequent in the Tibetan translations of Madhyamaka texts, and *yang dag* is a polysemic term frequently used as an augmentative prefix to add meanings of "authentic", "correct", and "right" (Hopkins, *Tibetan-Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Tibetan Studies Institute, University of Virginia, 1989: 460). However, Hopkins does include *tattva* as a possible Sanskrit equivalent thereof (1989: 461). In that case, so long as context permits it (meaning, allowing the possibility that some contexts do not permit this reading), I will read *yang dag* as implying ultimacy. MĀB 7:1 (chapter 5, p. 233 below) and ŚS 60 (chapter 6, p. 289 below) are such occasions.

discourse acting as elementary predicates for cognizing the phenomenal world. This refers to the conceptual framework used for cognizing the ordinary experience, whose valid cognition is the purview of the conventional truth but whose invalid cognition is that of conventional falsity. All ordinary experiences are cognized on the application of one or more of these conventional categories of discourse, but the validity or invalidity of that cognition depends on what exactly is meant by these categories.

I sort the categorical predicates structural to ordinary cognitive experience in three sets: i) "existence" (*asti*) and "non-existence" (*nāsti*) or "real" (*satya*, *tathya*) and "unreal" (*asatya*, *atathya*) are the paradigmatic categories of metaphysical discourse; ii) "true" (*satya* again) and "untrue" (*asatya* again) of epistemological discourse; and iii) "good" (*śubha*) and "bad" (*aśubha*) of axiological discourse. In demarcating the categorical framework of ordinary cognition, these also indicate the basic structure of the cognitive framework of Madhyamaka philosophy framed in the language of conventional discourse. The Mādhyamikas, too, phrase their conventional claims using these distinctions: certain phenomena conventionally exist (and others do not), certain claims are conventionally true (and others are not), and certain phenomena are conventionally good (and others are not).

All categories of discourse are concepts, but not all concepts serving to predicate phenomena comprise this elementary class and thereby attain the rank of "categories of discourse". That is because such categories attain an elementary, structural sense in conventional discourse insofar as they operate as the scaffolding supporting other concepts and, by extension, cognitive experience as articulated by these concepts. Where perception and conceptualization take place within a categorical, classificatory schema, the categories of discourse form the *structure* of perception and conceptualization in general, in various combinations underlying every act of cognition. Conceptualization (*prapañca*) in this context is the most basic necessary condition of the cognition of ordinary experience.[4] I underscore that from categorical

[4] *Prapañca*, frequently translated as "conceptualization" or "conceptuality", can be preliminarily defined as "concept-formation", the marriage of a name (an entity) with its predicates (its qualities) into a phenomenal identity. It therefrom takes on negative connotations of reification as "thing-making". The semantic commitments (i.e., metaphysical, epistemological, axiological commitments) of any such identity are just what the Mādhyamikas investigate. See chapter 2 (§§2.2.1, pp. 94-5 below) for more analysis of *prapañca*.

predication we engage in further classificatory schemes employing concepts assuming the validity of these categories. Nonetheless, the essential point remains that, for the Madhyamaka, *all* concepts as linguistic and cognitive artifacts are conventional concepts because products of dependence relations. ŚS 1 indicates this with their restriction to convention.[5] If all concepts are conventional, there are no *non*-conventional (i.e., ultimate) concepts. This has profound implications for Madhyamaka epistemology, metaphysics, and what we would call their philosophy of language via the two truths differentiating the conventional truth from the ultimate in terms of the presence or absence of such concepts.

Naturally, ŚS 1's list of predicates is quite basic and non-exhaustive. However, regarding the three categories, existence and non-existence are indirectly attested with production, enduring, and destruction being modes thereof in metaphysical discourse; inferior and superior are analogues of good and bad in axiological discourse; and truth and untruth in epistemological discourse are implied insofar as by any category's invocation its truth is already presumed. I single out the three sets of categorical concepts (i.e., existence–non-existence, truth–untruth, and good–bad) as primordial categories of discourse because of their elementary role as integral to framing any conventional discourse; in turn, conventional discourse, so framed, conditions the cognition of the world on the application of these categories. In this context, conventional discourse, comprising the totality of conventional concepts schematizing ordinary cognition as structured by these categories, could furnish both conventional truth and falsity in different semantic contexts. However, because there is this very distinction (the conditions of which are elaborated in chapters 2 and 3), it is necessary to distinguish the Madhyamaka model of conventional discourse and its role in the valid cognition of ordinary experience from invalid models and invalid cognitions.

One condition of differentiation is the semantic commitments associated with these categories of discourse. Interpreted as the "formal condition" of cognition,[6] the categories of discourse could imply a

[5] I explain this in chapter 2 (§2.2) as a consequence of the mental operations of dependent designation (*prajñaptir upādāya*).
[6] Kant in his *Prolegomena* describes the *formative* role the pure concepts of understanding play as the "formal conditions" of *phenomenal* (*contra noumenal*) experience: "[The pure concepts of the understanding] serve as it were only to spell out appearances, so that they can be read as experience; the principles that arise from their relation to the sensible world serve our understanding for use in experience only" (*Prolegomena to Any Further Metaphysics* §30 [4:313] (trans. Gary Hatfield,

variety of different semantic frameworks (per the specific categories outlined, in the areas of metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology) as determined by the underlying philosophical view (*dṛṣṭi*) associated therewith.[7] For example, the metaphysical category of "existence" could be supported by views pertaining to conventional existence or existence as substance, or, even further, primary and secondary substances (an Aristotelian distinction), to which production, enduring, and destruction may or may not apply. In epistemological discourse, the category of "truth" requires corroboration with a specific type thereof, such as a pragmatic and deflationary account, but could also be predicated by, e.g., direct realism. Likewise, in axiological discourse the categories of "good" and "bad" could refer to different types of qualities and valuations, such as intrinsic or instrumental value. Narrowing down the Madhyamaka-specific semantic framework is critical to understanding how they utilize conventional discourse for presenting the conventional truth.

1.1.1 CONTRASTING MODELS OF THE MIND–WORLD RELATION

In what follows, I discuss the conditions in which the Madhyamaka model of categorical predication is distinguished from the Aristotelian and Kantian models, each treated as foils for the Madhyamaka.[8] I establish the connection between these categorical models and their resultant mind–world relations as models of cognitive experience itself (the Madhyamaka model as the valid cognition of ordinary experience, the Aristotelian and Kantian models as examples of its invalid cognition). This is a novel investigation insofar as Madhyamaka scholarship has not specifically investigated and explicitly posited

Cambridge University Press, 2004: 64). Despite this superficial commonality, significant differences with the Kantian model should be established.

[7] *Dṛṣṭi*, translated as "view", refers to a philosophical view or a worldview typically concerning the nature of reality. It is therefore usually a metaphysical theory describing how phenomena exist in the world and in a Madhyamaka context is criticized pejoratively as intending realist metaphysical views. At the same time, it also pertains to the other two kinds of semantic commitments mentioned above (i.e., epistemological and axiological commitments). *Drṣṭi*s and their attendant semantic frameworks are discussed at length in chapter 2 (§2.1).

[8] The Mādhyamikas are not interested in entirely discounting categorical frameworks but are deeply concerned with the semantic import of such categories. That is why the Mādhyamikas do not argue against categories in general (for example, the dialectical categories (*padārtha*) of Nyāya philosophy treated in Nāgārjuna's VP. These are not the same kind of categories of predication here discussed but do consist of a certain classificatory scheme applied to dialectical debate). Instead, the Mādhyamikas critique a certain semantic conception of these categories' self-establishment or their complete objectivity. This is why, in a philosophical context, the models of Kant and Aristotle can be employed as *foils* for the Madhyamaka.

the Madhyamaka mind–world relation as a model of cognitive experience itself by means of these categories and their role in that cognitive experience, which I argue is critical to the cognitive reading of the conventional truth.[9] Nonetheless, it is possible to extrapolate such a point from the Madhyamaka insistence on mind-dependence, which is an established feature of Madhyamaka scholarship.[10]

The purpose of this exercise is not to define "mind" and "world" as they function for the Mādhyamikas specifically but to demonstrate precisely the would-be Madhyamaka position on the mind–world relation as Western philosophers might understand it in the context of cognitive experience. I specify that "mind" and "world" as structural categories of cognition are employed here with a distinctly Western flavour that does not necessarily fully capture their Madhyamaka/Buddhist senses, but this will all be well in the end insofar as the Madhyamaka mind–world model I reveal does not draw any substantial (metaphysical) distinction therebetween. In the context of cognitive experience, "mind" and "world" respectively correspond to its aspects of 'interiority' and 'exteriority'. Mind–world relations are topical in this context because their relation to one another is mediated by the linguistic and cognitive categories of discourse: i.e., the epistemological and metaphysical categories of "truth" and "existence", in particular, mediate the relation of mind to world and world to mind in the context of cognitive experience.[11]

The examination of these competing models has explanatory value for demonstrating the indispensability of the categories of discourse to cognitive experience insofar as they demonstrate across philosophical traditions their necessity and utility for discoursing about the world and our experience of it. The commonality of all cases is that a categorical model indicates the architecture of the cognitive

[9] Westerhoff's treatment of the conventional categories ("Mādhyamika: Conventional Categories in Mādhyamika Philosophy", *Categorisation in Indian Philosophy: Thinking Inside the Box* (ed. Jessica Frazier), Oxford University Press, 2014: 115-32) makes no mention of the Aristotelian or Kantian models in discussing Madhyamaka categories, especially insofar as these categories have profound implications for their respective philosophers' mind–world models. I, however, include them as foils for the Madhyamaka because of their explanatory utility.

[10] E.g., scholars such as Siderits have briefly touched on the Madhyamaka relation between cognition and world (2016: 20-1) in the context of metaphysical anti-realism but, again, this treatment does not specifically concern a mind–world model of cognitive experience itself, especially in the context of the conventional truth as the valid cognition of ordinary experience.

[11] In chapter 4, I address the Madhyamaka model's epistemological and metaphysical implications through an epistemologically anti-foundationalist and metaphysically anti-realist account of the mind–world relation.

experience itself (that is, a schematization of the categories through which the mind experiences the world). Hence, these are positioned as competing mind–world models insofar as they each schematize the relation of mind to world and world to mind differently. The Madhyamaka mind–world model, presented in contrast, will serve as the exemplary cognitive model throughout this dissertation. The difference is the Mādhyamikas' insistence on the necessity of dependence relations (particularly, the interdependence of mind and world), which the other models lack; lacking such, the mind–world relations resulting from their models of categorical predication fail to account for the valid cognition of ordinary experience. The Mādhyamikas, on the other hand, through the groundwork of dependence relations, offer a mind–world model adequately accounting for it.

Kant and Aristotle are obviously not the Mādhyamikas' target, but their resultant mind–world models can be construed as would-be opponents, typifying the kinds of positions against which the Madhyamaka do react. Subsequently, extending the same kind of critique levied against both, I introduce Candrakīrti's criticism of the mind–world model of *cittamātra* ("mind-only", an actual opponent). Without conflating them, I treat all three as revealing parallel categorical faults, and I do this towards offering my own interpretation of the Madhyamaka mind–world model. Insofar as the fault in each boils down to a universalizable critique of independence from dependence relations, I treat all three models as instances of one-way causality and frame the Madhyamaka critique as a "chicken vs. egg" conceptual problem. The Madhyamaka mind–world model established in contrast becomes the exemplary model of dependence relations (in contrast, a two-way causal model of interdependence) integral to the valid cognition of ordinary experience and the conventional truth with which it is correlated.

Because of its semantic commitments to the philosophical baseline of dependence relations, the Madhyamaka model is unlike the others. If the Aristotelian model is supported by metaphysical realist semantic commitments, the Kantian model by transcendental idealist ones, and the Cittamātrin model by metaphysical idealist ones, the Madhyamaka model instead yields an epistemologically anti-foundationalist and metaphysically anti-realist formula of the mind–world relation derived from the

categories' capacity to frame only the conventional truth (in contradistinction with the ultimate).[12] This restriction via the two truths differentiates the Madhyamaka model from all others. When it is not clear which specific categorical framework (as correlated with which semantic commitments) is being applied in a discourse (e.g., realist, idealist, or anti-realist mind–world), the Mādhyamikas suggest deconstructive conceptual analysis to expose that framework's presuppositions. This analysis requires that, each time a category like "existence" is applied to a certain phenomenon (e.g., "mind" or "world"), we examine the semantic commitments underlying this application, whether it is meant, e.g., conventional existence (as supported dependence relations) or existence as substance (as supported by a substantialist notion like *svabhāva*, meaning "inherent existence" or "intrinsic nature").[13]

Nāgārjuna's position on conventional discourse can be gleamed from an explicit restriction like ŚS 1 stressing its conventionality and extrapolated from an offhand remark in the autocommentary to his *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (VV 28): "All things (*sarva-bhāvāḥ*) are empty (*śūnyāḥ*) like my speech (*mad-vacanavat*)".[14] It is critical that he exempts from emptiness no phenomenon whatsoever and specifically includes linguistic phenomena. At MĀ 6:201, in discussing the 16 different aspects of emptiness, Candrakīrti specifically lists the "emptiness of defining attributes" (*svalakṣaṇa-śūnyatā*) as applicable to *all* phenomena (*sarva-dharmāṇām*). This I interpret as a reference to the empty (which means dependent, conditioned, and therefore conventional) act of predication. Emptiness, in this case referring to the lack of the *svabhāva* of predication and what is predicated, therefore pervades the acts of conceptualization (*prapañca*) and designation (*prajñapti*) essential to conventional discourse and ordinary cognitive experience; conventional discourse in consequence must be empty.[15] To be an empty conventional category of discourse or an empty conventional concept is the contrary of a self-established category or concept (or, in other words, a mind- and convention-independent concept, an objective concept, a non-

[12] See chapter 4 for investigations of Madhyamaka epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism.
[13] *Svabhāva* and its attendant semantic implications are the chief object of Madhyamaka criticism addressed in chapter 3 in the context of conventional falsity and in chapter 4 in the context of metaphysical realism.
[14] VV 28 (autocommentary): *tasmāt madvacanavat śūnyāḥ sarvabhāvāḥ* […] (Yonezawa 2008: 266).
[15] The conventional nature of language and discourse is addressed in chapter 2, including the elaboration of these terms.

empty concept, a *svabhāvic* concept, an ultimate concept, etc.). According to the Madhyamaka, the categories and concepts are never absolute and objective because they are empty and conventional: no concepts, as products of dependence relations, ever attain any ultimate status or independence from dependence relations. This conceptualist *qua* linguistic context is the chief context in which the Madhyamaka categorical model should be differentiated from others lacking emptiness and conventionality and clinging to their (false) objectivity.

My approach to the Madhyamaka model of conventional discourse and categorical predication reflects (superficially) a Kantian conceptualist approach better than Aristotelian realism. Like the former, the Madhyamaka categories comprise the formal condition of cognitive experience as mental operations the elementary conditions thereof. Nonetheless, there are the following significant differences from both.

Firstly, the Madhyamaka categorical model is similar to the Aristotelian model as the highest possible genera of predicates (in the sense of the most elementary).[16] Nonetheless, the realism of the Aristotelian model is rejected on the same grounds as realism generally.[17] "Realism" in the context of categorical models means that the semantic commitments and validity of such categories as "truth", "reality", "existence", etc. (necessarily including that to which they are applied) are allegedly established independently of both mind and convention, as if belonging to the things in themselves "out there" and not conceived as products of the mind or emergent features of conventional language and conceptualization. In criticism of this, rather than categories belonging to "things" *per se*, they are better understood as mental tools of schematization and therefore mere categories of *discourse* (i.e., products

[16] Given that for Aristotle the categories represent the highest genera of classification, they are alleged to provide a classificatory framework of ontological predicates for everything that exists. His realism is evident insofar as these categories are understood in all cases as predicates intrinsic to existent things out there in the world (categories of "Being") and not just a classificatory scheme belonging to the mind. He furnishes this list of 10 categories (*Categories* 1b25): "substance" (what), "quantity" (how large), "quality" (what sort), "relation" (related to what), "place" (where), "time" (when), "posture/position" (in what attitude), "state/condition" (how circumstanced), "action" (what doing), and "affection" (how passive, what suffering) (*Categories* (trans. Harold Cook), The Loeb Classical Library, 1962: 17-8). Evidently, each presupposes (and necessarily relies on) some model of "existence" and "truth" (and are inimical to "non-existence" and "untruth"). Nonetheless, it is unavoidable that the categories are an emergent feature of language and conceptual thought. This is the crux of the Madhyamaka criticism.

[17] This realism is taken up further in chapters 3 and 4 in a metaphysical context in the critique of the *svabhāva* doctrine, i.e., substantialism, emptiness' chief object of negation).

of discursive acts based on conventional models of cognitive experience).

Secondly, while, as with Kant, concepts for the Madhyamaka may analogously constitute "concepts of the understanding" and so play a formative role in the cognition of experience,[18] they can be neither pure nor transcendental nor innate. If, for Aristotle, the categories reflect reality itself, for Kant it is reality that must reflect the categories. When responding to Hume on the establishment of the mental connection between cause and effect, Kant says that the possibility of the *a priori* origin of these concepts of understanding "has its ground merely in the relation of the understanding to experience, however, not in such a way that they are derived from experience, but that experience is derived from them, a completely reversed kind of connection".[19] It is the one-way causal implications of this premise I identify as unsuitable for the Madhyamaka model.

I also argue that the Aristotelian model of the categories likewise requires one-way causality. In that context, I contrast both with the Madhyamaka model having perfected two-way causality—or, if you prefer, mutual establishment, mutual entailment, or interdependence.[20] "One-way causality" means the causal relationship goes in only one direction: the paradigm of one-way causality is that A necessarily precedes B as its cause and therefore exists independently of the effect. The one-way causality inherent to both the Aristotelian and Kantian models is the following: whereas for Aristotle things themselves (the cause) determine the categories (the effect), for Kant the concepts of the understanding (the cause) determine the experience (the effect). Translated in terms of mind–world relations, whereas for Aristotle the world determines the structure of the mind's cognitive experience of it, for Kant the structure of the

[18] Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, elaborates the *mental* condition of the categories (as the condition of possibility of experience) and produces a list of 12 (in four classes of three) (*Critique of Pure Reason* A80/B106): i) "quantity" (comprising unity, plurality, and totality); ii) "quality" (comprising reality, negation, and limitation); iii) "relation" (comprising inherence and subsistence, causality and dependence, and community); and, iv), "modality" (comprising possibility and impossibility, existence and non-existence, and necessity and contingency) (*Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. Paul Guyer & Allen Wood), Cambridge University Press, 2000: 212).

[19] Kant 2004: 64.

[20] Mutual establishment is the only kind of "establishment" the Madhyamaka accept (especially *contra* self-establishment and other-establishment, the latter in particular following the paradigm of one-way causality. Mutual establishment, in turn, follows the paradigm of *two-way* causality because each is in a way a cause of the other). I discuss it extensively in chapter 4 vis-à-vis epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism.

mind determines the cognitive experience of the world. So contrasted, these models each constitute the extremes of one-way causal relationships in the context of mind–world relations. The Madhyamaka model, in contrast, underscores the valid cognition of causality and the cause–effect relation as the highest importance to a mind–world model. This is why causality features in the first chapter of Nāgārjuna's MMK and is the key consideration in the philosophical baseline of dependence relations.

The categories of discourse and their role in the mind–world relation indicate a specific but critical application of the Madhyamaka causal model conceived through dependence relations. In particular, the *conceptual relation* established between cause and effect is critical. In the Madhyamaka model, both the categories of discourse (including the concepts they furnish) and cognitive experience itself (the object of ordinary cognition cognitively experienced through the medium of conventional discourse) can only be appropriately conceived as *interdependent* (that is, conceptually interdependent, one of the three dependence relations enumerated in chapter 2 (§2.2)).[21] That there are no categorical predicates without the experienced objects to which they are applied, just as there is no cognitive experience of objects without the categorical predicates through which they are cognized, means that both the categories and cognitive experience themselves are conceptually interdependent (i.e., cannot be valid cognized separately from this mutual establishment). On one hand, this interdependence, understood in this context as the mutual establishment of cognitive experience and its conceptual framework, indicates the fault with the above models. On the other, conceptual interdependence as a model of causal relations (i.e., the relation of cause and effect reduced to a conceptual interdependence) will indicate the conceptual architecture of the Madhyamaka-specific mind–world model of cognitive experience.

Against one-way models prioritizing either cognition itself (i.e., Kant) or its object (i.e., Aristotle), in the Madhyamaka model concepts must be both *immanent to* cognitive experience and at the same time *formative of* it. Being both "immanent to" and "formative of" cognitive experience indicates the

[21] Westerhoff (2009a: 26-7) calls this "notional dependence" and Walser (2005: 244) "reciprocal designation".

interdependent relation of cognitive experience and conceptual frameworks. "Immanent to" means that such concepts are acquired through experience because language and concept are learned behaviours and therefore causal phenomena.[22] Such concepts must be causally acquired if the scheme of dependent origination concerning the arising and cessation of any phenomenon—and, by extension, the exhortation of the dedicatory verses of the MMK towards the cessation of conceptualization (*prapañca-upaśama*)—are to be realized. An *acausal* phenomenon (the fourth lemma in the tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*) of production found at MMK 1:1)[23] has no causal condition of arising or cessation and so is completely contrary to the philosophical baseline. This is why the Mādhyamikas spend so much time fomenting the adequate understanding of dependence relations against a position of acausal existence like substantialism. If the "innateness" of the concepts of the understanding for Kant means a strict *a priori* orientation of the mind, it is difficult to understand such innateness *a*causally.[24] No concepts as products of dependence relations can be *a priori* in this strict acausal sense. At the same time, that concepts are "formative of" cognitive experience means that they determine the quality thereof, dependent upon which concepts and which

[22] If the argument about *a priori* concepts just means to underscore that there are "universal" abstract concepts that could readily be applied in novel concrete circumstances (e.g., the application of the concept of "quantity" to calculate the present number of yet-unidentified objects), this is not a strong objection to the fact that at some time the concept of "quantity" and the ability to count was a learned, acquired phenomenon. There is, contrary to this insistence on the necessity of the "concept", good reason to think that a variety of animal species have this capacity to count in some basic way (that is, "not in a precise way, but approximately"), all without the acquisition of the specific "concept" of "quantity"; cf. Andreas Nieder, "The Adaptive Value of Numerical Competence", *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 35.7, 2020: 605). In the Kantian vocabulary, this behaviour would more readily fall under the category of "intuition" because of its relation to particular instances and not its intentional deduction from a "general concept" (i.e., "quantity") being applied to that particular situation. See fn. 24 below situating this debate in Buddhist philosophy. I introduce this point and counterpoint to show that not all mental operations can simply be reduced to "concepts", but that concepts and conceptual learning play a central and unique role in complex behaviour, the capacity to apply these behaviours in novel situations, and the capacity to explain this reasoning in an abstract manner to others. It does not matter whether these are solely human endeavours.

[23] MMK 1:1: "Neither from self (*na svataḥ*), from another (*na parataḥ*), from both (*na dvābhyām*), nor causelessly (*na api ahetutaḥ*) do any arisen phenomena (*utpannāḥ bhāvāḥ*) exist anywhere at all"; *na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṃ nāpyahetuto | utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kvacana kecana ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 4). See the discussion of tetralemmas in chapter 3 (§§3.4.2).

[24] In that case, "innateness" would perhaps be better explained by something like "psychological nativism" and the appeal to genetic programming (which is not acausal). However, this would be difficult for historical Buddhist philosophers to accept (anachronistically speaking) because of their unwillingness to reduce the mind to the brain (or the body). At the same time, no Buddhist could reasonably be expected to hold a theory of the mind as a *tabula rasa*. Peter Della Santina ("The Mādhyamika and Modern Western Philosophy", *Philosophy East and West* 36.1, 1986: 43-4) has an interesting discussion about the role that *a priori* and *a posteriori* distinctions play in Madhyamaka philosophy. The doctrine of rebirth, if viable, complicates this matter insofar as it may provide an occasion for the persistence of these habitual conceptual tendencies (these may be called *saṃskāra*s or *vāsanā*s), but this merely pushes the formative role of experiential learning further back into previous lives. This 'beginninglessness' is a product of a Buddhist cosmology that sees an indeterminate beginning to *saṃsāra*. The causal implications of this of course require interpretation.

semantic framework are used to cognize experience.

The interdependence of ordinary experience (regarding the objects of cognition) and the concepts by which the mind cognizes it (and therefore either's inextricability from this conceptual calculus) can be addressed by appeal to the following verse. I somewhat clumsily pluck it from the greater context in which it is entrenched[25] (concerning selfhood and agency) to extract the conceptual relation it espouses and apply it towards the Madhyamaka mind–world model characterized by the causal and conceptual interdependence of mind and world:

> [MMK 8:12:] The agent (*kārakaḥ*) occurs in dependence (*pratītya*) on the action (*karma*), and that action occurs (*pravartate*) in dependence on the agent. We see (*paśyāmaḥ*) no other (*na anyat*) cause of establishment (*siddhi-kāraṇam*) [for either].[26]

For the purposes of this argument, the same mutual relation of "agent" with respect to its "action" can be repurposed to fit a specifically cognitive context with reference to the mutual establishment of the "subject" and its "object". This relation offers a clear example of interdependence *qua* mutual establishment, though it may seem unintuitive when considered from causality's standard, linear

[25] This was pointed out to me by Salvini in his comments on this dissertation. He comments that "Cognition is only a specified instance of *kartṛ*/*karman* relationship, and the mutual establishment (as explained by Candrakīrti) is dependent on the fact that something is a *karman* due to being most wished to be pervaded by the agent through the action—as per the grammatical commentaries on Pāṇini's *karmakāraka sūtra*". See also May 1959: 413 for explanatory notes on Candrakīrti's citation of this passage. As MacDonald's notes on Candrakīrti's PSP citation thereof indicate (2015b: 203n.404; see also the following footnote), Candrakīrti also cites it in the MĀB (6:114) in the context of not only the refutation of causelessness but, more importantly, the interdependence of a plethora of mutually reliant dualities, such as eternalism and nihilism, permanence and impermanence, existent and non-existent phenomena, and so forth (see Liland 2020: 273-4; Churinoff 1994: 115-6). Candrakīrti's MĀB commentary then directly leads into MĀ 6:115 demonstrating the universality of interdependence and its capacity to deconstruct all false views of causality contrary to it. This is one such instance of applying dependence relations to deconstruct false views of causality.

[26] MMK 8:12: *pratītya kārakaḥ karma taṃ pratītya ca kārakam | karma pravartate nānyatpaśyāmaḥ siddhikāraṇam ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 19). See the relevant pages of the PSP where Candrakīrti's cites this (MacDonald 2015b: 203-4), wherein this verse is used as a general indication for the formula of conditionality. MacDonald (2015b: 203n.404) cites evidence that Candrakīrti applies this formula of the interdependence of agent and action to the gamut of cognitive experience, including such relations as appropriated and appropriator, originated and originator, what is seen and sight, the means of valid cognition and what is cognized, etc. as instances of mutual establishment. She notes that "Candrakīrti's commentary on the following *kārikā* (MMK XII.9) makes clear that the mutual reliance deemed by him to allow for a so-called establishment of the surface level [(= conventional level)] is to be related to mutually reliant pairs; it in no way implies dependence on a "causal nexus" or even the *inter*dependence of all things, an idea that is bereft of any textual support but still propagated by a number of scholars—and applied to the ultimate level(!)" (*Ibid*.). Whereas the "causal nexus" to which she refers would be a one-way causal continuum, the interdependence of mutually reliant pairs offers a conceptualist approach towards establishing a conceptual interdependence of two related phenomena that, naturally, has causal implications with regard to their establishment; in chapter 4 (§4.1), these causal implications are explained to consist of anti-foundationalist establishment insofar as, because mutually reliant, neither one constitutes the foundation establishing the other. Two-way causal relations of interdependence remain the cognitive template by which the objects of the conventional truth are validly cognized.

interpretation. In the standard Aristotelian model, the "object" (i.e., the "world") causes the mind's cognitive experience of it, while in the standard Kantian model, the "subject" (i.e., the mind" causes the same. Setting aside for now the causal and existential implications of this, this relation of interdependence suggests the mutual establishment of the concepts of "subject" (the cognizing mind) and its "object" (the world cognitively experienced, the objects with which the agent interacts). This strongly suggests the Mādhyamikas understand the mind–world model to require the conceptual interdependence of subject and object and, thus, of mind and world. In causality's linear interpretation, we are accustomed to ask, 'which causes which, the mind or the world?'. Yet, in attempting to think otherwise than through their conceptual interdependence we are perniciously caught in the trap of a 'chicken vs. egg' scenario marked by the search for temporal precedence and causal priority (the paradigm of one-way causality). The realist would object that this appears like a vicious circle without solid ground. However, this is an acceptable consequence for the metaphysical *anti*-realist as proponent of both conceptual interdependence and the incoherence of the mind-independence inherent to the realist model.[27]

Though the Aristotelian and Kantian mind–world models are only *would-be* opponents, the Mādhyamikas face an actual opponent in this arena: the model of *cittamātra* ("mind-only"). Candrakīrti similarly criticizes that the Cittamātrin appeal to the *ālayavijñāna* (the "storehouse consciousness") falls prey to this same trap of 'chicken vs. egg' when prioritizing the mind as the causal source of all phenomenal experience. His criticism at MĀ 6:92ab says, "When form is non-existent (*rūpa-abhāve*), do not grasp at the existence of mind (*mā grahīḥ citta-sattām*), and when the mind exists (*citta-sattve*), do not grasp at the non-existence of form".[28] "Form" here refers to the world in contrast with the mind

[27] Siderits (2016: 49 n.14) makes a very important note about this point: "To say that something is conceptually constructed is not to say that it is created *ex nihilo* by the mind. It is to say instead that, because the mind has played a role in its individuation, it does not possess the kind of mind-independent nature and ontological status that the metaphysical realist hankers after. The anti-realist is not a linguistic idealist. The anti-realist simply holds that the notion of how things are completely independent of all conceptualizations is incoherent". See chapter 4 (§4.2) for my discussion of Madhyamaka metaphysical anti-realism.

[28] MĀ 6:92ab: *rūpābhāve mā grahīścittasattāṃ rūpābhāvaṃ cittasattve ca mā gāḥ* | (Li 2015: 15). In the surrounding context of this verse and of Candrakīrti's criticisms of *cittamātra*, he does not quite describe an altogether *symmetrical* relation between mind and world as I have presented it insofar as there is affirmed a distinctive creative ability of the mind, in concert

cognitively experiencing it. In this instance, the dependencies predicating the Madhyamaka mind–world model are explicit regarding the category of "existence" for the objects of cognitive experience and their relation to the mind: firstly, the *existential interdependence* of mind and form is established when their very existences are inseparable; secondly, their *conceptual interdependence* is invoked in the case the concept of "mind" requires the concept of "form" (in the sense of the mind's intentionality, its objects of cognitive experience) just as the concept of "form" requires the concept of "mind" (in the sense of the mind that cognitively experiences the form). The relation is grounded in cognitive experience, and the medium expressing that relation is conventional discourse (i.e., its categories and concepts). The most extreme form of the Cittamātrin "mind-only" model denies the existence of the external world (i.e., metaphysical idealism).[29] In criticism of this, Candrakīrti does not affirm the world's extramental reality but insists on the inconceivability of the cognition of any world apart from its interdependence with the cognizing mind.[30] Relatedly, the complete inconceivability of the mind apart from its interdependence

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with the operations of *karma* in the context of rebirth (vis-à-vis the various states of existence or cosmological planes into which sentient beings are born), that form specifically lacks (cf. MĀ 6:85-90). The argument in that context takes on distinctly cosmological overtones more than strictly being an argument about the schematization of cognitive experience via a mind–world relation. If, in that regard, Candrakīrti is perhaps right to insist that the mind has a more primary, creative role that form does not, I do not believe that this invalidates establishing the mutual entailment, in terms of the existential/causal and conceptual interdependence required of the mind–world relation, that this verse implies. If, in a certain sense, the two are perhaps not completely equal, their relationship asymmetrical in certain contents, it remains the case that in an anti-realist metaphysical sense in the vein of the middle way they must be conceptually interdependent and mutually established (see chapter 4). This is why they repeat the same conceptual template of interdependence. I am thankful to Salvini for encouraging me to make this clarification. It is, furthermore, worthwhile to note that any overt insistence on mind-only and the apparent denial of external form that can be found in some Buddhist scriptures (see the following footnote) Candrakīrti insists are a pedagogical device for undermining any sense of attachment that ordinary beings have to form (cf. MĀ 6:94).

[29] This is a reference to a teaching found in, e.g., the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (mentioned in MĀ 6:85) and the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* (referenced in the autocommentary; e.g., MĀB 6:88) about the formative status of the mind that some proponents of *cittamātra* take to a metaphysical extreme (the affirmation of the primary existence of this mind at the expense of the denial of the external world; i.e., metaphysical idealism; see chapter 4, §§4.2.3). I avoid attributing this model to the Yogācāra specifically for the validity of this attribution or of the characterization of this teaching is contentious. I offer only Candrakīrti's reading of *cittamātra* and not a vindication of it. Rather, his counters are useful for revealing the Madhyamaka mind–world relation.

[30] We must understand the very first verse of the *Dhammapada* (to wit: "[Dhp 1:] Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought" (trans. Buddhakkharita 2019: 51; von Hinüber & Norman 1994-5: 1) in this same way. See further the concluding remarks of the *Rohita Sutta* (AN 4.45): "It is in this fathom-long body endowed with perception and mind that I proclaim (1) the world, (2) the origin of the world, (3) the cessation of the world, and (4) the way leading to the cessation of the world"; *apicāhaṃ āvuso imasmiṃ yeva byāmamatte kalebare saññimhi samanake lokañca paññāpemi | lokasamudayañca lokanirodhañca lokanirodhagāminiñca paṭipadanti |* (trans. Bodhi 2012: 435; Morris & Hardy (vol. 2) 1888: 48). These verses stress the mind-dependent nature of the experience of the world as restricted to *cognitive experience* but without the necessary reification of the existential status of the mind as metaphysically independent of what it precedes/creates. The only avenue of understanding this dichotomy of phenomena and mind is their mutual establishment as conceptually interdependent, confirmed by Candrakīrti in the above verses and in MĀB 6:87. See the discussion of the basis of designation in chapter 2 (§§2.2.2) for how to adequately conceptualize "form" in this model. Per the analyses of chapter 4

with form (i.e., the "world") and vice versa follows, the two of which together comprise the heart of Candrakīrti's argument. Thus, this mind–world relation of interdependence circumscribes the Madhyamaka mind–world model in contrast with any other's lack thereof.

This mind–world interdependence modelling cognitive experience is critical to the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project insofar as their argumentative strategy requires the universal application of such dependence relations to every aspect of ordinary cognitive experience. This is, indeed, the only way it is validly cognized. The ubiquity of conceptual interdependence and mutual establishment is further established in the MMK in a variety of contexts, in each case the pattern of relationality remaining the same. There is, e.g., the conceptual interdependence of fire and fuel (MMK 10:8-12) following the same pattern as both the agent–action and mind–world relations.[31] Further, at MMK 23:10-11 a simpler relational interdependence is explained in terms of the relative evaluations of "good" and "bad", again following the same pattern of conceptual interdependence and mutual establishment.[32] By analogy, the same pattern applying to the agent –action, subject–object, and mind–form relations therefore applies to the relation of conceptualization itself to cognitive experience. This is confirmed in the verse following MMK 8:12 (MMK 8:13cd): "The remainder of existents (*śeṣān bhāvān*) should be considered (*vibhāvayet*) by means of [the interdependence of] agent and action (*karma-kartṛbhyām*)".[33] This is why my analysis used this template of interdependence as a launchpoint for the Madhyamaka mind–world model. This same pattern is weaponized by the Madhyamaka in a variety of contexts to

(§§4.2.3), this is best understood as metaphysical anti-realism between the extremes of realism and idealism.

[31] MMK 10:12ab: "Fire is not (*agniḥ na*) dependent on fuel (*apekṣya-indhanam*), [but] neither is fuel independent of fire (*na anapekṣya-agniḥ*)"; *apekṣyendhanamagnirna nānapekṣyāgnirindhanam* || (Vaidya 1960b: 90).

[32] MMK 23:10: "Independent (*anapekṣya*) of the "good" (*śubham*), the "bad" (*aśubham*) does not exist (*nāsti*), [the "bad" being] that dependent on which (*yat pratītya*) we would conceive (*prajñapayemahi*) the "good". Therefore (*tasmāt*), the "good in itself" (*śubham … eva*) does not follow"; *anapekṣya śubhaṃ nāstyaśubhaṃ prajñapayemahi | yatpratītya śubhaṃ tasmācchubhaṃ naivopapadyate* || (Vaidya 1960b: 200). MMK 23:11 repeats the same phrasing for the dependence of the evaluation of the "bad" in dependence on the "good", thus cementing their conceptual interdependence. The conceptual relativity of good and bad making a dualistic pair is the same conceptual relativity evidenced in the other categories of discourse themselves: existence and non-existence and truth and untruth are conceptually relative dualistic pairs constituted by the same pattern.

[33] MMK 8:13cd: […] *karmakartṛbhyāṃ śeṣān bhāvān vibhāvayet* || (Vaidya 1960b: 80). See also MMK 10:15 for the same relation to fire–fuel.

refute the confused notion of independence from dependence relations every which way. This was introduced in a way explicating the mind–world model as meditated by conventional discourse (i.e., the categories of discourse). Insofar as the Mādhyamikas wield conventional discourse in a way demonstrative of the conventional truth, the mind–world relation offers an exemplary conceptual template of the dependence relations integral to the valid cognition of ordinary experience.

1.1.2 CAUSALITY IN THE MADHYAMAKA MIND–WORLD MODEL

At the heart of any conceptualist approach to the mind–world model of cognitive experience is the investigation of causal dependence *in terms of a conceptual relation*. This requires a recontextualization of the concept of "dependence" itself away from the old model of one-way causality via temporal and conceptual precedence towards the more complete two-way model of conceptual interdependence and mutual establishment.[34] Consider the following example that confirms the same conceptual template of dependence relations and mutual establishment:

> [MMK 10:8:] If fire is dependent on fuel (*yadi indhanam apekṣya agniḥ*) [and] if fuel is dependent on fire (*apekṣya agnim yadi indhanam*), which of the two is arisen first (*katarat pūrva-niṣpannam*), fuel [or] the fire that is dependent on that (*yat apekṣya agniḥ indhanam*)?[35]

This is analogous to the "chicken vs. egg" scenario of mind vs. world because, in establishing their relation via conceptual interdependence, there can be no true priority. For this reason, MMK 10:10d implores us to earnestly investigate: in such cases, "what is dependent on what?" (*kam apekṣya kaḥ*)—more to the point, it should ask: "which really causes which?". By rhetorically asking which of the two exists first (and therefore has causal and temporal priority as the substantial cause) in a case of a

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[34] To that effect, Candrakīrti makes an offhand remark at MĀB 6:58 of crucial significance to the recontextualization of the meaning of the "dependence": Though all phenomena are necessarily dependent, "[…] a dependent phenomenon (*gzhan gyi dbang gi ngo bo* = lit. an other-powered entity) is itself non-existent (*yod pa nyid ma yin*)"; […] *gzhan gyi dbang gi ngo bo yod pa nyid ma yin* | (Liland 2020: 202). The root verse states in less clear, more paradoxical terms that "[MĀ 6:58cd: Phenomena] established (*siddhiḥ*) in mutual support (*parasparāya-āśrayaṇī*) are thusly not established (*asiddhiḥ eva*)", the wise have said (*vadanti santaḥ*)"; *parasparāyāśryaṇī ca siddhirassidhireveti vadanti santaḥ* || (Li 2015: 11). It is helpful that the autocommentary specifies this in terms of existence. This is interpreted to refer to a lack of independent existence outside dependence relations, not having "true (*svabhāvic*) existence" from their own side. Phenomena are hence empty.

[35] MMK 10:8: *yadīndhanamapekṣyāgnirapekṣyāgniṃ yadīndhanam | katarat pūrvaniṣpannaṃ yadapekṣyāgnirindhanam* || (Vaidya 1960b: 88).

conceptual interdependence and mutual establishment as related in cognitive experience, Nāgārjuna refutes the possibility of adequately answering that question.[36] The point is that, in the context of cognitive experience, understanding causation from a substantialist perspective, wherein causality proceeds only linearly from the substantialized antecedent, is doomed. Instead, the overarching point is that it is the *concept* of "fire" is dependent on the *concept* of "fuel" in the very same way and at the same time that "fuel" is dependent on "fire": because they are mutually entailing concepts, one cannot be said to exist or be coherent without the other—exactly as in the Madhyamaka mind–world model. There is no fire without fuel, and no fuel without fire; there is no subject without object, and no object without subject, just as there is no mind without world, and no world without mind.

The argument I make at its core does not concern the specific chemical or (meta)physical properties of fire, fuel, mind, world, or anything else; instead, it is *cognitive* and *conceptualist*, applying generally to the conceptual relation of any two interrelated, mutually reliant, and therefore interdependent concepts in the context of cognitive experience.[37] Narrowly, the fire–fuel relation is an analogy for the conceptual interdependence of the concepts of "cause" and "effect" instrumental to the schematization of causality in cognitive experience. As seen, the cause–effect relation is itself the same conceptual relation linking mind and world in any mind–world model. In every way, the pattern of conceptual interdependence, regardless of its application, is an argument against any model of one-way causality.

In terms of dependence, an effect, strictly speaking, depends on a cause. Yet, a cause without an effect

[36] Commenting on these verses concerning fire and fuel, there is support in this point from Walser (2005: 244): "[…] neither priority nor simultaneity can be established in a case where each thing has its basis in the other reciprocally". At YṢ 14, Nāgārjuna poses another relevant rhetorical question: "If a beginning exists (*rtsom pa yod na*), then definitely a [realist] view (*lta ba*) is thoroughly grasped (*yongs su 'dzin*). What priority or posteriority (*sngon dang tha ma ci*) [could there be] from that which arises [inter]dependently (*rten cing 'brel par gang 'byung ba*)?"; *rtsom pa yod na nges par yang lta bar 'byur ba yongs su 'dzin | rten cing 'brel par gang 'byung ba de la sngon dang tha ma ci ||* (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 10).

[37] It is nonetheless the case that at the purely physical level there are of course still causal relationships of priority, as in the classic Buddhist example of the seed from which the plant and the fruit arise (e.g., MMK 17:7). However, the refutation of that causal chain in general was never the purpose of the argument since, exactly in the same way as with fire and fuel, the very concepts of seed and fruit are likewise interdependent and mutually established, the one incoherent without the other. This conceptual dependence subsumes causal/existential dependence insofar as the argument addresses conceptualization (i.e., cognition) itself, not what is conceptualized (i.e., what is cognized), insofar as what is conceptualized becomes subsumed under the category of conceptualization itself and cannot be conceptualized otherwise than as an object of cognitive experience (see chapter 2, §2.2.1, pp. 96-100 below).

is, on the Madhyamaka model, an incoherent concept for it requires an effect to be considered a cause in the first place. This argument establishes the conceptual interdependence of cause and effect.[38] In other words, no phenomenon is inherently identified as a cause, independently of its effect, just as no phenomenon is inherently identified as an effect, independently of its cause; the two are, by definition, mutually established because conceptually interdependent.[39] This relation is why the same pattern of conceptual interdependence applies equally well to the agent–action, subject–object, mind–world, and fire–fuel relations. The conceptual relativity of a pair of intertwined concepts establishes conceptual patterns analogous to the interdependence of conceptual frameworks (i.e., the cognizing mind) and the world cognized thereby—neither being the substantial, preceding cause of the dependent but both only conceivable interdependently. This is how the Madhyamaka mind–world model fits the same conceptual pattern: the cognizing mind and the world it cognizes by means of conventional discourse and its categories are interdependent and therefore mutually entailing—therefore, it is reasonable to meditate on the rhetorical question 'which causes which?'. In the context of cognitive experience, neither is extricable from this relation of interdependence and neither is truly the cause of the other. Returning to MMK 8:12, mutual establishment is the only way to make sense of this relationship.

Because this discussion of the categories of discourse and the Madhyamaka mind–world relation as a model of cognitive experience in the conventional truth presented only an abstract investigation of the "convention" on which the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project relies at the categorical level, it is necessary to further explore this relationship of reliance (i.e., dependence) in more concrete

[38] Candrakīrti says, "[PSP 55:] When [phenomena] are assented to in their mere conditionality (*idaṃpratyayatāmātra-abhyupagame hi sati*) on account of the mutual dependence (*anyonya-apekṣavāt*) of cause and effect (*hetu-phalayoḥ*), there is no establishment of inherent existence (*nāsti svābhāvikī siddhiḥ*). [Therefore], there is no [true] doctrine relating to inherent existence (*nāsti sasvabhāva-vādaḥ*)"; *idaṃpratyayatāmātrābhyupagame hi sati hetuphalayoranyonyāpekṣatvānnāsti svābhāvikī siddhiriti | nāsti sasvabhāvavādaḥ |* (Vaidya 1960b: 18); cf. MĀ 6:168 on the interdependence of cause and effect.

[39] See the development of this argument, with textual evidence from Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, in chapter 4 (§4.1) in the context of this mutual establishment being anti-foundationalist. That argument is there applied to develop an account of Madhyamaka conventional epistemology as being anti-foundationalist in characteristic with respect to the interrelation (i.e., mutual establishment) of the *pramāṇa* (the epistemic instruments) and *prameya* (the epistemic objects). This epistemological anti-foundationalism is then demonstrated to parallel metaphysical anti-realism concerning the ontological status of both the knower and the objects that are known.

contexts. This will occur, firstly, in §1.2 with the examination of Candrakīrti's tripartite etymology of *saṃvṛti* and, secondly, in §1.3 with the examination of the evidence concerning the methodological reliance on convention for the correct understanding of the two truths distinction itself.

§1.2 CANDRAKĪRTI'S TRIPARTITE ETYMOLOGY OF *SAṂVṚTI*

Typical in my reading of Candrakīrti, I underscore the fact that certain of his passages appear to denigrate the conventional truth while others discuss its methodological and soteriological importance. Even further, other passages instead address it from the ultimate perspective in non-dual terms. I rank these three categories in that order from least to most important: i) least important are the apparent denigrations, to be appropriately contextualized by the overall view of the role of the conventional truth in the philosophical-soteriological project of the two truths; ii) of middle importance is the methodological and soteriological importance of the conventional truth; and iii) of most importance, overriding especially i), is the non-dual retrospective in which it cannot be considered either true or false. The first rank is addressed in this section via the first sense of Candrakīrti's tripartite etymology of *saṃvṛti*; the second rank is addressed in the other two of Candrakīrti's senses and in the following section on the methodological reliance on convention (§1.3). Thereafter, I demonstrate various aspects of the philosophical validity of the conventional truth in chapters 2, 3, and 4. Lastly, the third rank is reserved for discussion in chapter 7 (§7.2) in presenting the *ārya*s' retrospective on convention post-attainment of ultimate cognition. In this way, I think it is necessary to offer a defence of Candrakīrti's conventional truth, the validity of which I insist is vital to the integrity of the two truths distinction as a philosophical-soteriological project. His tripartite etymology of *saṃvṛti* is such an occasion for launching this defence.

At PSP 492, commenting on Nāgārjuna's appeal to the two truths (MMK 24:8), Candrakīrti lists three meanings of *saṃvṛti*: "concealment", "convention", and "dependent origination". Crucially, I must underscore Candrakīrti here provides an etymology of *saṃvṛti* but not necessarily of *saṃvṛti-satya* proper, meaning the application of one or all these senses to the conventional truth specifically requires interpretation. I argue that, in contrast to some interpretations of Candrakīrti, all three etymological

senses are necessary for properly understanding the role of "convention" in the conventional truth and the valid cognition of ordinary experience. More broadly, all three are necessary to realize the methodological reliance on "convention" in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project, including conditions where "convention" both is and is not conducive to the valid cognition of ordinary experience. Most importantly, I demonstrate how dependence relations, as conducive to the valid cognition of ordinary experience, are explicitly built into the etymology of *saṃvṛti*.

The first sense, "concealment", is necessary to understanding the difference between conventional truth and falsity and the deficiencies of conventional discourse in general; the second sense, "convention", addresses the reliance on conventional concepts as instruments for valid cognitive experience; and the third sense invokes dependence relations because the conventional truth always reflects this philosophical baseline as the means of validly cognizing ordinary experience. However, since there is also the invalid cognition of ordinary experience (i.e., conventional falsity), the key to this interpretation, especially for the first sense, is that not all that is *saṃvṛti* is necessarily *saṃvṛti-satya*.[40]

A frequent synonym for *saṃvṛti*, especially in this second sense of "convention", is *vyavahāra* (cf. MMK 24:10 and VV 28 in §1.3). In that case, *vyavahāra-satya* is a synonym of *saṃvṛti-satya*. *Vyavahāra* straightforwardly means "convention" (like *saṃvṛti*'s second sense). However, the term Nāgārjuna uses at MMK 24:8 for introducing the two truths and the conventional truth is *saṃvṛti-satya*. I propose not overlooking this synonymization by hyperfocusing on *saṃvṛti* in its first and direct etymological sense to the point of neglecting the second and third senses. Further, both Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti make frequent appeals to dependent origination (the third sense of *saṃvṛti*) in the form of their philosophical baseline. If the appeal to the other equally important senses should apply evenly for understanding the scope of "convention" in the conventional truth, then the meaning of *saṃvṛti* in the context of *satya*

[40] In the reverse of this, Tsong Khapa (2006: 480) writes in his commentary on Nāgārjuna's MMK that "not *all* conventions are said to be concealers". If not all that is *saṃvṛti* is necessarily *saṃvṛti-satya*, then not all that is *saṃvṛti-satya* is necessarily concealment (*saṃvṛti*). Tsong Khapa's interpretation is known for preservation of the validity of the conventional truth, which I insist is significant to the two truths distinction.

becomes clearest in combination of all three (as surely was Candrakīrti's intent in providing this threefold etymology). I translate the passage in full and provide a breakdown of each meaning presented within:

> [PSP 492:] *Saṃvṛti* [in the first sense means] complete obscuration (*samantāt varaṇam*). It is said that *saṃvṛti* is ignorance (*ajñānam*) [arising] from the complete obscuration of the ultimacy of all phenomena (*samantāt sarva-padārtha-tattva-avacchādanāt*). [In the second sense,] *samvṛti* means arising in mutual dependence (*paraspara-saṃbhavanaṃ*) or by means of [being] based in each other (*anyonya-samāśrayeṇa*). Or [in the third sense] *samvṛti* means the conventional world (*loka-vyavahāraḥ*) [and] conventional designation (*saṃketa*). That is, it has the characteristic (*lakṣaṇaḥ*) of [comprising] a name (*abhidhāna*) and what is named (*abhidheya*), a cognition (*jñāna*) and what is cognized (*jneyam*), and so forth.[41]

1.2.1 SENSE ONE: "CONCEALMENT"

The first sense is faithful to the standard definition of *saṃvṛti* (Tib: *kun rdzob*) as "covering", "concealing", or "dissimulation".[42] It is synonymous with *varaṇa* (also *āvaraṇa*), an "obscuration", and *avacchādana*, a "covering". Candrakīrti associates this "concealment" with ignorance (it is *avidyā* in the context of dependent origination, but he here uses *ajñāna*). Since this is not a qualification typically predicating "truth", it has caused a lot of confusion.[43] *Saṃvṛti*'s association with ignorance has led certain commentators to understand Candrakīrti's conventional truth as only "widespread error […] that the Buddhist should do little more than duplicate",[44] "a rather dumbed down truth, with no demand for

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[41] PSP 492: *samantādvaraṇaṃ saṃvṛtiḥ | ajñānaṃ hi samantātsarvapadārthatattvāvacchādanātsaṃvṛtirityucyate | parasparasaṃbhavanaṃ vā saṃvṛtiranyonyasamāśrayeṇetyarthaḥ | athavā saṃvṛtiḥ saṃketo lokavyavahāra ityarthaḥ | sa cābhidhānābhidheyajñānajñeyādilakṣaṇaḥ |* (Vaidya 1960b: 215). Note that I transpose the order of the second and third senses for explanatory purposes. Other translations are found in Sprung 1979: 230–3 and Tillemans 2019b: 639. See Sonam Thakchöe, *The Two Truths Debate: Tsongkhapa and Gorampa on the Middle Way*, Wisdom Publications, 2007b: 46–62; Garfield 1995: 297 n.109; Guy Newland and Tom J.F. Tillemans, "Introduction to Conventional Truth", *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy* (eds. The Cowherds), Oxford University Press, 2011: 11–15; and Salvini 2009: 160-1 (which also discusses Prajñākaramati's interpretation, which follows Candrakīrti) and "Etymologies of What Can(not) be Said: Candrakīrti on Conventions and Elaborations", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47.4, 2019: 672-3 for further discussion of Candrakīrti's threefold etymology; see Salvini 2019: 690 for his translation of the same.

[42] Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1986: 1116.2.

[43] It should be a concern for Madhyamaka scholars that one sense of Candrakīrti's tripartite etymology of *saṃvṛti* inevitably gets privileged above the others. E.g., some traditions will emphasize the "concealment" sense and others the "conventional" sense. Tillemans (2019b: 640) also argues for this same methodological consideration, but he seems intent to underscore the "error" aspects of Candrakīrti's philosophy (without mention of Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti's main source). At the same time, speaking more generally about the conventional truth, Newland and Tillemans (2011: 14) write that, "if *saṃvṛtisatya* is not true at all but only mistakenly thought to be true, then it carries no normative force, collapsing the important distinction between what is true and what is merely thought to be true. There would then be little of interest to say about such "truth" beyond simply describing what people believe". Just that would be the unfortunate consequence of privileging the "concealment" aspect of *saṃvṛti* over and above the normative content its other senses suggest. I believe my interpretation accommodates all three senses without under- or over-valuing any one.

[44] Tillemans 2019b: 635.

expertise, and accessible easily to all",[45] and even a "trivialization of the idea of truth".[46] Candrakīrti may be responsible for such an interpretation when, in, e.g., MĀ 6:166d, he says without much qualification that the Buddha "did not quarrel (*na vivadati*) with the world (*lokena sārddham*)".[47] However, ultimately this concession to the world is a matter of pedagogic necessity explainable by the second sense of *saṃvṛti*.

Without discounting this admission, the interpretation of a "populist" conventional truth is problematic in terms of i) an invalidation of the normativity inherent in the distinction between conventional truth and falsity (see chapter 3); and ii) a jeopardization of the instrumental, pedagogical, and soteriological role of the conventional truth in the two truths distinction (see §1.3). Both considerations are overlooked when hyperfocusing on the essential meaning of *saṃvṛti* as "ignorance" or "concealment by ignorance". This interpretation is unable to adequately account for how *saṃvṛti* should rightly be predicated to *satya* ("truth") in the context of the conventional truth while maintaining its normative force to differentiate itself from conventional falsity.

In comparing a certain passage invoked by Candrakīrti in both the PSP and the MĀB (traced by Tillemans to the *Ratnakūṭasūtra* and compared with its Pāli counterpart, both of which concern quarrelling (or not) with the world),[48] Tillemans identifies two key discrepancies in Candrakīrti's interpretation concerning the authoritativeness of truth in its conventional sense: i) where the Pāli recession includes a concession to the knowledge of the wise (*paṇḍitānam*), Candrakīrti's Sanskrit does not, leaving ambiguous if the world's account is to be accepted wholesale or solely on the basis of an enlightened perspective;[49] ii) based on Edgerton's etymological analyses, where the key Pāli term was

[45] Tillemans 2019b: 641.
[46] Tillemans, "How Far Can a Mādhyamika Buddhist Reform Conventional Truth? Dismal Relativism, Fictionalism, Easy-Easy Truth, and the Alternatives", *Moonshadows*, 2011: 152.
[47] MĀ 6:166d: *vivadati sa munīndro yanna lokena sārddham* || (Li 2015: 24). Candrakīrti is well-aware this position is canonically precedented. See Liland 2020: 333 n. 307, where there is reference to the Mahāyāna *sūtra Trisaṃvaranirdeśaparivarta*. There is also a precedent in the Pāli Canon (see the following footnote).
[48] The passage in question is found at PSP 370 ad MMK 18:8 and MĀB 6:81. Candrakīrti himself does not name the source, but Tillemans (2019b: 637) identifies in this *Ratnakūṭasūtra* similarities and discrepancies with SN 22.94 (*Puppha Sutta*; see Bodhi 2000: 949). The parallels are quite convincing for this identification. See Salvini 2019: 663-4 and John Newman, "Candrakīrti on *lokaprasiddhi*: A Bad Hand, or an Ace in the Hole?", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 52, 2024: 75-83 for alternative interpretations to Tillemans'.
[49] Tillemans (2019b: 636-7) translates the passage of the Sanskrit *Ratnakūṭasūtra* in question as follows: "The world (*loka*)

saṃmuti ("consensus" or "agreement"), for the Madhyamaka the key term somehow morphs into *saṃvṛti*, with these two terms having distinct etymological roots: the former is derived from √*MAN* ("to think") with the prefix *sam-* ("all together"), while the latter appears derived from √*VṚ* ("to cover, conceal").[50] I offer no special insight into why this lexical occurrence appears in Madhyamaka texts and whether it is indeed a corruption or misinterpretation of an original *sutta*/*sūtra*, but I disagree that the conventional truth for Candrakīrti (or the Madhyamaka) is a "dumbed down truth" lacking in philosophical normativity. However, Tillemans' argument is that this corrupted sense of *saṃvṛti*, through the works of Candrakīrti, becomes disseminated in Tibetan Buddhism as *kun rdzob* (literally, "all concealing"), which, because of his threefold etymology, may have the same three senses as *saṃvṛti* but, exactly like it, etymologically traces the "concealment" aspect. Thus, we find a common translation like "all-concealing truth" for *kun rdzob bden pa* which, although etymologically correct, is philosophically ambiguous.

It is unfair to blame Candrakīrti[51] for this feature of Madhyamaka philosophy since he is only following Nāgārjuna, who specifically utilizes *saṃvṛti-satya* in his invocations of the two truths (alongside its synonym *vyavahāra-satya*). It is, further, uncontestable that the terms of the two truths, *saṃvṛti-* and *paramārtha-satya*, are found everywhere in the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s.[52] From this, it is evident

argues with me. I don't argue with the world. What is agreed upon (*saṃmata*) in the world to exist, I too agree that it exists. What is agreed upon in the world to be nonexistent, I too agree that it does not exist"; *loko mayā sārdhaṃ vivadati nāhaṃ lokena sārdhaṃ vivadāmi | yalloke 'sti saṃmataṃ, tanmamāpyasti saṃmatam | yalloke nāsti saṃmataṃ, mamāpi tannāsti saṃmatam* || (Vaidya 1960b: 157). The difference between the Sanskrit and the Pāli recensions is just the addition/omission of *what is agreed upon in the world by the wise* (*saṃmataṃ loke paṇḍitānam*).

[50] Tillemans 2019b: 639; Newland & Tillemans 2011: 13.

[51] Tillemans (2019b: 640) writes, "Perhaps […] Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika might have been a somewhat different, possibly a more sophisticated philosophy, if the Mahāyānist sūtra text Candrakīrti cited had spoken of "wise people in the world," as did the *Saṃyutta* [(i.e., SN 22.94)], instead of just "the world." Candrakīrtians might have promoted, in some areas at least, more of a qualitative hierarchy of opinions and thus criticism by optimally qualified, insightful individuals, the opinions of a kind of ideal audience, rather than those of a purely actual one". In contrast, Salvini (2019: 669) understands Candrakīrti to do just that: what is accepted as "existent" or "non-existent" in the conventional context and how it is accepted as such "must include what is highly regarded (*saṁmata*) to be so by the Noble Ones (*ārya*). This means that, while it is true that Candrakīrti reads the *Ratnakūṭa* passage as implying that the Buddha took as a starting point the conventional perception of an audience that is not quite omniscient, it is also clear that Candrakīrti does not restrict the audience as being 'immature ordinary people' (*bālapṛthagjana*), and implicitly offers a more nuanced reading of the sense of 'highly regarded in the world' (*loke saṁmatam*)". My task is to demonstrate that Madhyamaka philosophy does not lack this philosophical sophistication; that there are normatively robust conditions differentiating conventional truth from falsity; and that there are many such concessions to the wise, such there is no global relativism of 'whatever the world uncritically believes, I too believe'.

[52] Though concrete historical data about the authorship and dating of the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s is lacking (it is not always clear whether Nāgārjuna influenced the writing of these *sūtra*s, including the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*s, or they influenced him), this

that, although Candrakīrti provides a threefold etymology to explain Nāgārjuna's use of *saṃvṛti*, he is by no means the term's originator; in all likelihood, neither is Nāgārjuna, since it is a Mahāyāna development from early Buddhist *sutta*s/*sūtra*s and the Abhidharmas. Thus, for this criticism to be valid it would have to apply to the entire Mahāyāna tradition, but that is not Tillemans' argument.

Tillemans' attack on Candrakīrti also fails specifically because of the other senses Candrakīrti ascribes to *saṃvṛti*. It is not so much that they invalidate the first sense but temper it: because that etymological investigation is tripartite, the sense of "concealment" and its associated ignorance, even if desired by the Madhyamaka because repeatedly invoked, cannot be the principal sense in the wedding of *saṃvṛti* to *satya*.[53] Given the specific interpretation of the two truths for which I argue vis-à-vis the formal differentiation of a conventional conceptual, dualistic cognition and an ultimate non-conceptual, non-dual cognition, it can only foremostly be in the context of the relation of the conceptual conventional truth to the non-conceptual ultimate that the conventional truth is concealing (notwithstanding the manner in which conventional falsity is concealing of the truth simply because it is false, given that *saṃvṛti* predicates both). My interpretation of *saṃvṛti*'s "concealment" aspect in that context stems from a slight difference in translation and interpretation of the following verse:

> [MĀ 6:28:] Delusion (*mohaḥ*), because concealing nature (*svabhāva-āvaraṇāt hi*), is *saṃvṛti*. What appears as true through it [(=*saṃvṛti*)] (*satyam tayā khyāti*) is fabricated (*kṛtrimam*). The Sage speaks of that as a certain *saṃvṛti-satya*. A phenomenon (*padārtham*) that is fabricated (*kṛtakam*) is *saṃvṛti*.[54]

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same terminology is found everywhere therein. E.g., there is the *sūtra* entitled "The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra Called "Teaching the Conventional and the Ultimate Truths"" (*Āryasaṃvṛtiparamārthasatyanirdeśanāmamahāyāna Sūtra*) which uses these same terms. They also appear throughout the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, a work frequently cited by Candrakīrti.

[53] This is how Tsong Khapa understands the matter in contrast to Gorampa (see Thakchöe 2007b: 48-52). According to Newland (*The Two Truths in the Mādhyamika Philosophy of the Ge-luk-ba Order of Tibetan Buddhism*, Snow Lion Publications, 1992: 83), "When the Ge-luk-bas [(such as Tsong Khapa)] say that all phenomena are conventionally existent (*kun rdzob tu yod*), they do not at all mean that phenomena exist only from the standpoint of the concealing ignorance. Rather, they mean that phenomena exist interdependently [(i.e., sense three of *saṃvṛti*)], and that phenomena exist in conventional terms (*tha snyad du yod*) [(i.e., sense two)]". In this way, for Tsong Khapa, there is no legitimate reason to discount the epistemological validity of the conventional truth *at the conventional level*, while, for Gorampa, all conventions (whether true or false) are in all cases obscurations (Thakchöe 2007b: 52). The latter interpretation invalidates Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's methodological reliance on convention.

[54] MĀ 6:28: *mohaḥ svabhāvāvaraṇāddhi saṃvṛtiḥ satyaṃ tayā khyāti yadeva kṛtrimam | jagāda tat saṃvṛtisatyam ityasau muniḥ padārthaṃ kṛtakañca saṃvṛtiḥ ||* (Li 2015: 7). I leave *saṃvṛti* untranslated because of the problem of prioritizing one of its three senses above the others, each of which might cause a different interpretation of this verse. Obviously, this first line of Candrakīrti's verse alludes to delusion (*mohaḥ*) or the ignorance (*avidyā/ajñāna*) that is the first link in the twelvefold chain of *pratītyasamutpāda*. However, nowhere in this passage does it directly say that what is *saṃvṛti* is false; it merely

The passage equates a phenomenon that is *kṛtaka* ("fabricated") with its being *saṃvṛti* ("conventional" or, more specific to this sense, "concealing"). Despite this, Candrakīrti allies both fabrication and concealment with *saṃvṛti-satya*, which is explained as the conventional truth *in the context of being fabricated*. This is the key to my interpretation, since convention being "fabricated" is critical to understanding the scope of the Mādhyamikas' appeal to conventional concepts established above. Such fabricated conventional concepts are explained as meaning conventional, dependent products of artifice nonetheless germane to the conventional truth. Consequently, Nāgārjuna says at ŚS 41cd that "Whatever exists is mere fabrication (*rtog pa tsam*)".[55] Insofar as "existence" is a conventional category, Nāgārjuna validates my interpretation concerning the role of fabrication and provides further evidence of the mind–world model of cognitive experience in the context of the mind that does the fabricating of the objects it cognizes. Existence as "mere fabrication" is not the predication of the mind- and convention-independent existence of the realist metaphysical category but of a mere conventional existence steeped in empty dependence relations, as with the subject–object, fire–fuel, and mind–world relations. This conclusion is crystallized in ŚS 42cd: "Whatever exists as mere fabrication is empty of *svabhāva*".[56]

The critical issue in interpreting MĀ 6:28 is determining the precise sense of what kind of "nature" (*svabhāva*) it is that "delusion" (*moha*) and *saṃvṛti* conceal. As seen, Candrakīrti defines *saṃvṛti* (not the conventional truth as *saṃvṛti-satya*, only the concept that will later come to predicate that truth) in this first sense as "ignorance [arising] from the complete obscuration of the ultimacy of all phenomena". This distinction between *saṃvṛti* and *saṃvṛti-satya* is crucial just because of the confusion wrought by

states that what is *saṃvṛti* is fabricated (*kṛtrimam*/*kṛtakam*). The difference in translation I propose is as follows; it is not based on a difference between the Sanskrit and the Tibetan concerns the interpretation of the Sanskrit compound *svabhāva-āvaraṇāt* (Tib: *rang bzhin sgrib phyir*). The Padmakara Translation Group translates this first line as "The nature of phenomena, enshrouded by our ignorance, is "all-concealed"" (2002: 72); Huntington: "Delusion is a screen (*saṃvṛti*) precisely because it obstructs [awareness of the] intrinsic nature [of all things]" (1989: 160); Kelsang Gyatso: "Because confusion obstructs nature it is conventional" (2017: 568); Thupten Jinpa: "Because delusion obscures the true nature, it is a *concealer*" (2021: 234); Liland: "It's relative, delusion, when the real is masked" (2020: 164). Evidently, my translation is closest to those of Gyatso and Jinpa (theirs from the Tibetan), but the question remains what "nature" (*svabhāva*) is concealed.

[55] ŚS 41cd: *rtog pa tsam gang ci yang rung* […] *yod pa yin* || (Tola & Dragonetti 1987: 18).

[56] ŚS 42cd: *rang bzhin gyis ni stong pa yin rtog tsam gang ci'ang rung bar yod* || (Tola & Dragonetti 1987: 18).

predicating any sense of "truth" to a product of ignorance. Elsewhere, at PSP 374, Candrakīrti, commenting on MMK 18:9, writes that "fabrication (*vikalpaḥ*) is the behaviour of the mind (*citta-pracāraḥ*). From the forsaking of that (*tat-rahitatvāt*), *tattva* is unfabricated (*tattvam nirvikalpam*).[57] There is, thus, in the mental act of fabrication a natural (perhaps even ignorant) habituation, a certain obscuration occurring because, firstly, only in its absence is *tattva* (the ultimate) seen; secondly and more importantly, following the first, *tattva* is *un*fabricated (as in not subject to fabrication). Many Madhyamaka passages exhort the necessity of the cessation of fabrication, a necessary condition of realizing the ultimate.[58] Consequently, *paramārtha*, *tattva*, and *nirvāṇa* all are of the same flavour of *non*-fabrication, while *saṃvṛti* and its products are fabricated. This is significant because the realization of the ultimate truth (i.e., via ultimate cognition) is often called (a form of) *jñāna*;[59] ignorance thereof is therefore its negation, *a-jñāna* (the term Candrakīrti uses above). Accordingly, it is "the ultimacy of all phenomena" (*sarva-padārtha-tattva*) obscured by *saṃvṛti*'s ignorance.

I posit three related contexts in which to understand *saṃvṛti* as "concealment": i) as Candrakīrti says, *moha* and *saṃvṛti* conceal a specific sense of *svabhāva* (*svabhāva-āvaraṇa*): the primary sense intended, as revealed by PSP 492 (and confirmed by Prajñākaramati's interpretation),[60] is the ultimate (the "nature" of the ultimacy of all phenomena, i.e., emptiness) being concealed, but the further references in the verse to fabrication *also* suggest that it is *saṃvṛti*'s fabrication (i.e., "a phenomenon that is fabricated is *saṃvṛti*") being concealed. As I configure it, each other context of "concealment" proceeds from the initial occurrence of the concealment of that sense of fabrication, which also accounts for the concealment

[57] PSP 373: *vikalpaścittapracāraḥ | tadrahitatvāt tat tattvaṃ nirvikalpam |* (Vaidya 1960b: 159). A more poetic though nonetheless correct reading of *citta-pracāra* could be "the playground of the mind". I discuss MMK 18:9 in PART II (chapter 5, §5.1) vis-à-vis taking *tattva* as a synonym of the ultimate, for which reason I translated it as such in PSP 492 above.
[58] E.g., at MĀ 6:117ab, the "cessation of fabrications" (*kalpanām vinivṛttiḥ*) is called the "fruit of analysis" (*phalam vicārasya*) (Li 2015: 28). PSP 522 (commenting on MMK 25:3) is instructive: "As long as these fabrications proceed (*yāvat etāḥ kalpanāḥ pravartante*) proceed, *nirvāṇa* cannot be attained (*nāsti nirvāṇa-adhigamaḥ*). Only from the cessation of all conceptualization (*sarva-prapañca-parikṣayāt*) can it be attained"; *yāvaddhi etāḥ kalpanāḥ pravartante, tāvannāsti nirvāṇādhigamaḥ, sarvaprapañcaparikṣayādeva tadadhigamāt |* (Vaidya 1960b: 228). This process is further explored in PART II (chapters 5 and 6).
[59] See in chapter 5 (§5.1, pp. 234-6 below) the various epithets of ultimate cognition, many of which are based on *jñāna*.
[60] See Oldmeadow 1994: 14-5 and Salvini 2009: 266. Commenting on BCA 9:2, Prajñākaramati cites MĀ 6:28 among other Buddhist sources.

of the ultimate as *un*fabricated. Conventional concepts (including the categories of discourse and their referents, the objects of cognitive experience) are all instances of fabrication. Conventional concepts (as fabrications) are integral to the construction of the phenomenal identities encountered in ordinary cognition. If conventional discourse, as populated by these concepts, constitutes the medium of cognitive experience, then fabricated conventional concepts in this sense are the tools, the bricks of the cognition of that ordinary experience (hence, as I argued above, are *formative of* cognitive experience). This fabrication is something that only becomes apparent through the realization of dependence relations (referring to the dependence relations to which conceptualization itself is subject; see the investigation of this feature of a Madhyamaka treatment of what we would call a "philosophy of language" in chapter 2). The *un*concealment of that fabricated nature through overcoming the ignorance responsible for its concealment, it follows, is therefore conducive to the valid cognition of that ordinary experience *qua* fabricated. Being conventional concepts subject to dependence relations, such fabricated conventions must be adequately conceived under the comprehensive umbrella of *saṃvṛti*, as the remaining senses of the tripartite etymology intend.

ii) Although not explicitly mentioned by Candrakīrti in this context (but Nāgārjuna does at ŚS 42cd), that phenomena are fabricated entails their emptiness. This is because, by way of being fabricated, there is the lack of any self-establishment because subject to dependence relations. Therefore, when fabrication is concealed so is the emptiness of the fabricated; at the same time, the *un*concealment of any fabrication is the *un*concealment of its emptiness.

iii) *Tattva* (i.e., the ultimate) is doubtlessly concealed when there is the concealment of both fabrication and emptiness. *Tattva* itself is obscured by the veil of conceptualization: if *tattva* is only to be realized non-conceptually and non-dually, then any conceptuality and duality (regardless of its truth or falsity, though not ignoring the validity of that distinction given the instrumental role of the conventional truth in its differentiation from conventional falsity) would necessarily conceal it. The dualistic nature of fabrication and conceptualization (i.e., X v ¬X, as with the categories of discourse

taking this binary form), without the cognisance thereof, conceals any realization of non-duality and non-fabrication.[61] This is exactly why the ultimate truth must be formally differentiated from the conventional, why *saṃvṛti* is fabricated, and why *tattva* is *un*fabricated. This is, further, why the conventional truth plays an instrumental role in the attainment of that ultimate realization (see §1.3). Crucially, this means that the conventional truth is not valid independently of the two truths distinction—that is, it should not be considered as a truth in isolation of this relation. As such, to dismiss the conventional truth as mere obscuration with no discernible truth- or use-value discounts this interplay integral to the two truths themselves and the wisdom and liberation attainable therethrough.

Nonetheless, ignorance is still relatable to "convention" even if it cannot be the primary sense of the conventional truth.[62] The general Buddhist position is that there is much ignorance in ordinary cognitive experience pertaining to a misperception between appearances and 'reality', wherein, in ordinary cognition, appearances are generally taken as 'reality'.[63] This is the primary reason Candrakīrti can associate anything conventional *qua* ordinary with ignorance; however, the link between ignorance and convention must primarily concern conventional falsity, not the conventional truth and the valid cognition of that ordinary experience. Ignorance is, strictly speaking, only the root of conventional falsity in the following way: what appears, in its mode of presentation, conceals its nature of fabrication/emptiness when appearing as actual, given, immediate, and mind- and convention-

[61] I carefully note that taking the conventional truth as *concealing* the ultimate is not the same as taking the position that the conventional truth is *false* from the perspective of the ultimate. In a way, this would be like the interpretation of Gorampa above (fn. 53 above), but this nonetheless requires further interpretation insofar as the conventional truth is demonstrated to have truth- and use-value in conventional terms. I revisit this idea in the context of defending my interpretation of the conventional truth's validity in PART II (chapter 7, §7.2).

[62] Mipham frequently underscores that ignorance is the root of delusion and the misapprehension (that is, invalid cognition) of ordinary experience, e.g., in his commentary to MĀ 6:104-5 (2002: 266) and BCA 9:59 (2017: 133). Such ignorance, delusion, misapprehension, and invalid cognition must refer to conventional falsity; see chapter 3 for further discussion of the valid and invalid cognition of ordinary experience and the conditions of their differentiation, especially with respect to the roles of ignorance and delusion therein.

[63] Strictly speaking, there is no 'reality' in Madhyamaka Buddhism insofar as the ultimate truth refers to no objective 'reality'. This would require a metaphysical interpretation of the ultimate, which I reject. While the conventional truth can be associated with mere appearances (insofar as conventional appearances are validly cognized as such in the conventional truth), there are no metaphysical pretentions regarding ultimate cognition, emptiness, or *tattva* (see PART II (chapter 5, §§5.3.2) against any metaphysical interpretation of the ultimate. See chapter 7 (§7.2) for a discussion of how what is ultimately "mere convention" for the *ārya*s is erroneously mistaken for the ultimate by ordinary beings.

independent. This is the invalid cognition of ordinary experience.[64] In the direct etymology of *saṃvṛti*, there is a certain sense of error invoked by the appeal thereto in the case of the liability of what is merely *saṃvṛti* being accepted *prima facie* without a second thought given to its conventional and ultimate contexts (i.e., via the differentiation of the two truths). In that sense is *saṃvṛti* liable to concealment and, therefore, delusion and ignorance when it presents itself as definitive and unquestionable (the opposites of *kṛtaka*) because it obscures its nature as mere fabricated, empty convention. These cognitive defects the conventional truth must *un*conceal, and it must use this knowledge of fabrication to its advantage. This plays out in the synergistic relation of the two truths in the transition from ignorance (conventional falsity) to the knowingly fabricated conventional truth and, finally, to the unfabricated ultimate.

The take-away from Candrakīrti's appeal to *saṃvṛti*'s first sense of "concealment" is that not all that is *saṃvṛti* as concealing is admitted in *saṃvṛti-satya*. When it conceals the ultimate, emptiness, and its own fabrication, it cannot be the conventional truth. In *that* mode of ignorance and concealment, *saṃvṛti* yields only conventional falsity. Yet, when this fabrication is made transparent, there is the correct, self-aware apprehension of the conventional truth as an instance of fabrication and emptiness. This is the conventional truth's advantage ty: lucidity of its own fabricated, dependent, empty nature.

1.2.2 SENSE TWO: "CONVENTION"

The second sense of *saṃvṛti* denotes the Mādhyamikas' object of methodological reliance. Candrakīrti explains this *saṃvṛti* as "worldly transactions" (*loka-vyavahāra*), what is understood by terms like

[64] Cf. PSP 45: "The one who (*yaḥ*), from a distorted approach (*viparyāsa-anugamāt*), is devoted to the inherent existence (*svabhāvam abhiniviśate*) of dependent phenomena (*pratītya bhāvānām*) does not understand (*na avagacchati*) [the meaning of] falsity (*mṛṣātvam*)"; *yastu viparyāsānugamānmṛṣātvaṃ nāvagacchati, pratītya bhāvānāṃ svabhāvamabhiniviśate* | (Vaidya 1960b: 15). The falsity to which Candrakīrti here appeals refers to conventional falsity comprising his opponents' positions. Later in this passage, Candrakīrti again uses the term *idaṃsatyābhiniveśa* to refer to the world's "attachment to the truth/reality of this [(anything)]". The sensory data itself, assuming the unerring functioning of the sense organs (per Candrakīrti's cataracts example; see chapter 3) is incontrovertible, but the interpretation of that sensory data is what is debatable, especially with respect to the specific view (*dṛṣṭi*—i.e., the opponent's view of *svabhāva*) invoked on that basis. This view is false for the Madhyamaka and cannot constitute the conventional truth, but the opponent, assuming their position, will be unable to understand from the Madhyamaka perspective *why* this position is false and *how* the conventional truth of dependent origination is true in a conditional, mind/convention-dependent way. Having a different understanding of truth and falsity that is not amenable to the two truths distinction, that opponent reasons "from a distorted approach".

"conventional", "ordinary", "mundane", or "worldly".[65] In that vein, as mentioned, *vyavahāra-satya* is a synonym of the conventional truth invoking this transactional sense without *saṃvṛti*'s primary sense of "concealment".[66] Yet, as Edgerton notes, *vyavahāra*'s connotations indicate, "with implication of superficiality, lack of substance", that it is only a "manner of speech",[67] which reconnects it under certain conditions with *saṃvṛti* as "concealment" if it conceals its own superficiality as mere fabrication. This interpretation accommodates the superficiality *qua* conventionality of the concepts introduced above from ŚS 1: the categories of discourse function best conventionally when known as empty "manner[s] of speech" "on account of worldly convention" rather than as ultimate pieces of reality carved at the joints.

It is significant that, in passages establishing the instrumental role of convention, it is generally *vyavahāra* and not *saṃvṛti* as the term demarcating the object of reliance of the two truths.[68] That is, the Mādhyamikas do not strictly rely on ignorance, as *saṃvṛti*'s first sense suggests. This is significant because it is difficult to see how it would be fruitful to rely on what, at first glance, appears as delusion and ignorance when indicating the means (*upāya*) to attaining the ultimate and, thereby, liberation (the goal, *upeya*). If that were the case, it would make the *Buddhadharma* and the conventional truth something like an *untruth*, an oxymoronic and incoherent truth predicated nonsensically by ignorance and delusion. I do not believe this is the point of Candrakīrti's conventional truth, the two truths distinction, or the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. Instead, the conventional truth, when properly differentiated from conventional falsity, plays a robust, philosophically normative, and

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[65] This is the sense Edgerton (*Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit,* Motilal Banarsidass, 1970: 541) underscores by providing such glosses for *saṃvṛti* as "convention, general (popular) acceptance or belief; 'common sense'; conditioned, exoteric, dependent, limited truth or knowledge". Monier-Williams (1986: 1034.1) provides "usage, custom, wont, ordinary life, common practice" but also "commerce" and "mercantile transaction, traffic", showing its rather mundane connotations.

[66] Either *saṃvṛti-satya* or *vyavahāra-satya* may be prefixed by the term *loka-*, which means "the world", or "ordinary life, worldly affairs, common practice or usage" (Monier-Williams 1986: 906.1), demarcating the limit of "convention" as pervasively encompassing the entire contrived phenomenal world ("contrived" like "fabricated" in the first sense of *saṃvṛti* above, like MĀ 6:28). Similarly, *lokata* means "as usual or customary in the world" (1986: 906.2). This also ties back to what was said above about the Buddha "not quarreling with the world" (see p. 56 above). I discuss *loka* more extensively in chapter 3 (§3.2) via the conditions differentiating it into conventional truth and falsity.

[67] Edgerton 1970: 516.

[68] I.e., MMK 24:10 and VV 28 (plus autocommentary); Candrakīrti repeats the terminology indicating *vyavahāra* is the means and not necessarily *saṃvṛti* at MĀ 6:80. See the discussion of these passages in §1.3 below.

pedagogical role in that project.

Tillemans argues that, since Candrakīrti glosses this second sense as *saṃketa* ("convention-governed symbols", "agreed upon usage"),[69] this sense is much closer to the original sense of √*MAN* ("to think"), which is then, for some unknown reason, allegedly corrupted.[70] However, if one ignores the first sense of "concealment" and hyperfocuses only on this second sense, this too would yield something like an unsophisticated, populist interpretation of *saṃvṛti-satya*; this too would be shortsighted if it means that the conventional truth wholesalely accepts what the conventional world (ignorantly) believes. As I argue, we in fact require the first sense of "concealment" in the context of fabrication, emptiness, and the ultimate to understand the mechanics generating the conventional truth (this is the theme of chapter 2 vis-à-vis what makes language conventional). Further, we also require the third sense of dependent origination (discussed below), which is doubtlessly philosophically normative, to understand the conditions conducive to the differentiation of conventional truth from falsity, if it is the case that conventional falsity is incoherent with the dependence relations the third sense invokes.

Saṃvṛti's second sense indicates the locus of the conventional concepts utilized in the conventional truth's methodology. To that effect, Candrakīrti says the worldly conventional truth's scope encompasses "the entire totality (*sarvah aśeṣaḥ*) [of] conventions (*vyavahāraḥ*) [comprising, for example,] a name (*abhidhāna*) and what is named (*abhidheya*), a cognition (*jñāna*) and what is cognized (*jneyam*), etc.".[71] This sense therefore subsumes the basic function of conceptuality since it comprises all conceptual relations that structure cognitive experience. "Convention" as the Mādhyamikas appeal thereto therefore refers to the store of the inherited socio-cultural linguistic structure, the repository of communally

[69] PSP 492: "Or (*athavā*), *samvṛti* means (*saṃvṛtiḥ arthaḥ*) the conventional world (*loka-vyavahāra*) [and] conventional designation (*saṃketa*)"; *athavā saṃvṛtiḥ saṃketo lokavyavahāra ityarthaḥ* | (Vaidya 1960b: 215). See p. 55 above.
[70] Tillemans 2019b: 639-40.
[71] PSP 493: *sarva evāyamabhidhānābhidheyajñānajñeyādivyavahāro 'śeṣo lokasaṃvṛtisatyamityucyate* | (Vaidya 1960b: 215). Earlier in this same passage, seen above in the initial definition of the three senses of *saṃvṛti*, using nearly identical terms Candrakīrti defines it having "the characteristic (*lakṣanaḥ*) of [comprising] a name (*abhidhāna*) [and] what is named (*abhidheya*), a cognition (*jñāna*) [and] what is cognized (*jñeya*), etc."; *sa cābhidhānābhidheyajñānajñeyādilakṣaṇaḥ* | (Vaidya 1960b: 215).

engineered concepts, categories, labels, discriminations, etc. from which to classify the objects of ordinary cognitive experience, the overlapping ordinary and philosophical lexicons.[72]

This is a concession to the use-value of conventional discourse, the denial of which would invalidate and jeopardize the conventional truth, just as not quarreling with the world intends a pedagogical methodology. I discuss this further in §1.3 in the context of the role of the conventional truth vis-à-vis the two truths. The current discussion only concerned the second etymological sense of *saṃvṛti*. In other words, the conventional world of *saṃvṛti* on which Madhyamaka philosophy methodologically relies means just the world as it is populated by concepts—of chariots, pots, people, etc., as perpetuated by surface-level conceptual relations supported by the conventional categories of discourse—when validly cognized. This is the case only so long as the proponent of the conventional truth is heedful to strictly use these conventional concepts in a manner coherent with the philosophical baseline of dependence relations in the attempt to bring such cognitive features to light in conventional discourse. This is the lucidity required by reliance on convention in the valid cognition of ordinary experience.

1.2.3 SENSE THREE: "DEPENDENCE RELATIONS"

The requirement of the conventional truth's coherence with the philosophical baseline of dependence relations is explicitly built into *saṃvṛti*'s third sense, which is directly associated with dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Candrakīrti's explanation does much develop this aspect, perhaps because it should be obvious that the conventional truth must reflect a profound understanding of dependence relations for the valid cognition of ordinary experience. As seen, this third of sense is defined as meaning "arising in mutual dependence (*paraspara-saṃbhavanaṃ*) or (*vā*) by means of [being] based

[72] According to Salvini (2009: 19-20), "Within a widely accepted Buddhist perspective, the very structure of the world as a lived environment (*bhājanaloka*) is dependent upon a collective history of past intentions (shared *karman*). We may tend to understand a convention as an utterly arbitrary stipulation dependent from a set of historical accidents. Accepting the formative role of *karman*, though, gives a different bent to what a Buddhist author may understand as 'history': the arbitrary character of conventions is discarded, without necessarily considering them ultimately founded. It is in other words possible to be a convention, and yet to remain a reliable regularity (as in the case of causal processes). Here, language too, and phonemes, may be treated as responding to and closely participating in the very fabric of the world and its sentient beings".

in each other (*anyonya-samāśrayeṇa*)".[73] This mutual dependence is the same conceptual interdependence as in the examples of the subject–object, fire–fuel, and mind–world relations.

This alliance of *saṃvṛti* and *pratītyasamutpāda* should be further contextualized by *saṃvṛti*'s second sense of "convention" when it is generally understood in conventional contexts that certain phenomena depend on and are conditioned by certain other phenomena. For example, a common-sense consequentialist intuition of conditionality is evident in ordinary discussions about the weather: if this happens because of such conditions, we will need to do this and that; when that happens, we must react in such and such a way; etc. MĀ 6:99 argues that ordinary beings are already vaguely enough aware of dependence relations in a local, limited fashion to succeed in agriculture. "Based on this, that arises", the basic formula of conditionality,[74] is an elementary consequentialist intuition familiar to everyone, if only superficially, that is no less integral to the valid cognition of ordinary experience. As this formula is exemplary of the dependence relations critical thereto, the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project is concerned with cultivating this basic common-sense intuition at the level of a profound, transformative realization and, thereafter, applying it against all cognitions contrary to it (especially against metaphysical commitments to substantialist accounts that buck this causal requirement).

To be clear: this appeal to dependence relations constitutes only a method for describing the phenomenological process of the causal arising of phenomenal appearances *as objects of cognitive experience*. The formula of conditionality itself is only indexical; as such, entailing no determinate content, it always requiring adaptation to a specific circumstance. In the context of the conventional truth, fabrication, and concealment, dependence relations must be utilized to reveal the conditions generating the conceptual architecture of ordinary experience's valid cognition and, more specific to the concealment of the ultimate, the conditions of its cessation. That is, the conventional truth as such must demonstrate that conventional discourse itself is a product of dependence relations. Given that

[73] PSP 492: *parasparasaṃbhavanaṃ vā saṃvṛtiranyonyasamāśrayeṇetyarthaḥ* | (Vaidya 1960b: 215). See p. 55 above.
[74] See "Introduction to PART 1", p. 23 fn. 2.

dependence relations circumscribe the conditions generating concepts and discourse,[75] the dependent nature of conceptualization means it only ever fabricates concepts operative at the conventional level (either conventional truth or falsity). In that vein, as conditionality outlines the causal conditions of any phenomenal arising, so it (more importantly to the philosophical-soteriological project) also indicates a causal condition of its cessation (the second half of the formula of conditionality). The realization of this conceptual framework of dependent origination in the context of arising *and* cessation is critical on the soteriological path if the realization of the conditions of cessation is necessary for attaining the ultimate (when characterized apophatically in the context of the cessation of conceptualization).

From *saṃvṛti*'s tripartite etymology, it is more than fair to understand conventional concepts as *saṃvṛtic* concepts because of ticking all three boxes of Candrakīrti's senses: i) under certain conditions (certain *incoherent* frameworks), conceptuality is deceptive when concealing fabrication and the ultimate; ii) concepts are entirely derivable from conventional practices and customs but are nonetheless instrumental to facilitating conventional discourse, the medium articulating the conventional truth; iii) under certain conditions (a coherent framework and their valid cognition), conventional concepts are encompassed and constituted by dependence relations. This is how Candrakīrti's tripartite etymology reveals that not all that is *saṃvṛti* equates to the conventional truth, but that the conventional truth is nonetheless constituted by *saṃvṛti* in these three senses *so long as it is validly cognized as such*.

In the following section, I investigate the evidence demonstrating the instrumental role of "convention" (in all three senses of *saṃvṛti*) and, therefrom, the role of the conventional truth in the two truths. This demonstrates the method by which the ultimate truth is best approached, through the correct understanding of the conventional truth and the valid cognition of ordinary experience.

§1.3 THE METHODOLOGICAL RELIANCE ON CONVENTION

When the Mādhyamikas discuss the two truths in a methodological context, the conventional truth is

[75] This is the subject of chapter 2.

given an instrumental role in the attainment of the ultimate. By situating the conventional truth alongside the ultimate at the outset, the scope of the conventional truth and its overall importance for the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project is established. Nonetheless, the present discussion is restricted to the context of methodology and the use-value of the conventional truth towards that goal. This instrumental role makes sense insofar as, if the conventional truth teaches dependence relations, then the wisdom and liberation to be realized by the Mādhyamikas' distinction of the two truths are not themselves immune from this causal network. If the development proceeds in stages (as the project of two truths intimates) and liberation does not arise *ex nihilo* (i.e., causelessly), Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti spell out this process: it directly relies on the conventional truth. Nāgārjuna explicitly says that without relying on the conventional the ultimate cannot be taught or realized. This means that the ultimate truth is dependent on the conventional truth for its realization. More specifically, it is necessary to the cognitive reading of the two truths that, insofar as the two truths are formally differentiated, the ultimate is dependent on first grasping the conventional truth at the intellectual level of cognition towards its deepest realization at the experiential level of cognition.

Insofar as the previous sections of this chapter have demonstrated the connection between the conventional truth and conventional discourse (in the specific context of its valid cognition), the methodological consideration I here make explicit is that the conventional truth skillfully exploits conventional discourse towards its ends. This means that conventional discourse, in a specific context, has a certain pedagogical value as the medium of the conventional truth critical to unlocking the wisdom of the two truths. Significantly, the pedagogical role and instrumental value assigned to the conventional truth means that it is impossible to separate the goal (the ultimate) from its means (the conventional truth), which is why a little discussion of the ultimate is relevant at this time. Here, Nāgārjuna explains the two truths in a methodological context:

> [MMK 24:10:] Without relying on the conventional (*vyavahāram anāśritya*), the ultimate cannot be taught (*paramārthaḥ na deśyate*). Without having ascertained the ultimate

(*paramārtham anāgamya*), *nirvāṇa* cannot be attained (*nirvāṇam na adhigamyate*).[76]

This clearly demonstrates that the methodological reliance is not on just the conventional truth as *vyavahāra-satya* but *convention* (*vyavahāra* unqualified, like *saṃvṛti*'s second sense), which I take to refer to conventional discourse more generally. Other passages (below) do stress that it is specifically in reliance on the conventional truth, which, again, must be interpreted as comprising that same conventional discourse as *correctly* apprehended and yielded accordingly—i.e., the conventional truth.

However, it would be a lesson *un*learned to conceive of this methodological progression *qua* dependence relation in a strict relation of one-way causality, whereby either i) the correct understanding of the conventional truth in itself directly constitutes the attainment of the ultimate truth or ii) the conventional truth is an adequately valid kind of truth independent of the ultimate. Rather, the admission of this specific dependence relation necessitates the interdependence of the very concepts of "conventional" and "ultimate" truths. This requires both that i) the conventional truth is only what it is (only conventionally true in the three senses of *saṃvṛti*) because there is an ultimate truth from which it is formally differentiated, and, further, ii) the ultimate cognition with which the ultimate truth is associated is what it is (a non-conceptual, non-dual experiential cognition) because it is formally differentiated from a conceptual, dualistic, theoretical, conventional cognition.[77] Despite the two truths being formally defined so contradistinctly, the same template of dependence relations is invoked again explain their conceptual interdependence.

Candrakīrti says at MĀ 6:80ab that "The conventional truth (*vyavahāra-satyam*) is the proper means (*upāya-bhūtam*) [and] the ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satyam*) is the proper goal (*upeya-bhūtam*)".[78]

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[76] MMK 24:10: *vyavahāramanāśritya paramārtho na deśyate | paramārthamanāgamya nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 216).

[77] I make this same argument again in PART II (chapter 7) vis-à-vis the relation of the two truths to each other when I comprehensively contextualize the distinction *à propos* the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project.

[78] MĀ 6:80ab: *upāyabhūtaṃ vyavahārasatyam upeyabhūtaṃ paramārthasatyam |* (Li 2015: 14). Notice again that Candrakīrti, just like Nāgārjuna, uses *vyavahāra-satya* instead of *saṃvṛti-satya*, which, etymologically, does not invoke the "concealment" and ignorance associated with *saṃvṛti* in the first sense. This is further support for that object of reliance of the two truths distinction *not* being equated with total error and falsity but just with conventional discourse in general in its valid conception, which is then adapted to suit the pedagogical needs of the conventional truth and the *Buddhadharma*.

Nāgārjuna writes plainly at VV 28 that "We do not teach (*vayam na … kathayāmaḥ*) without assenting to (*anabhyupagamya*) conventions (*saṃvyavahārān*)".[79] His autocommentary elaborates:

> […] It is not the case that we, [either] without assenting the conventional truth [or] by rejecting the conventional truth (*vyavahāra-satyam pratyākhyāya vyavahāra-satyam anabhyupagamya*), teach that "all things are empty" (*śūnyāḥ sarva-bhāvāḥ iti*). This is because it is not possible (*na hi śakyā*) to perform the instruction of the *Dharma* (*dharma-deśanā kartum*) without assenting to the conventional truth (*vyavahāra-satyam anāgamya*).[80]

Maintaining the validity of the two truths distinction, the conventional truth is clearly stated to serve as the intellectual vehicle delivering one to the experiential ultimate without itself becoming or exhausting it. Significantly, Nāgārjuna admits that even the *Dharma* itself (i.e., the *Buddhadharma*) is only communicated in terms of the conventional truth and never without it. In other words, to express the methodological constraint that the ultimate cannot be arrived at without this sojourn through the conventional truth, the path and goal are phrased in a way of intellectual understanding grounded in the conventional truth expounded through the medium of conventional discourse.[81] For the Madhyamaka, this is a methodological necessity. So that the *Buddhadharma* is presented in the most efficacious way by casting as wide a net as possible, it must be understandable to the widest audience. This concern for the liberation of the general populace is in keeping with the Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* ideal of bringing

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[79] VV28cd: *saṃvyavahārāñca vayaṃ nānabhyupagamya kathayāmaḥ* || (Yonezawa 2008: 266). I note that in Classical Sanskrit, many verbs of motion take on epistemological/cognitive connotations. This linguistic phenomenon occurs frequently in passages I cite.

[80] VV 28 (autocommentary): *api ca na vayaṃ vyavahārasatyaṃ pratyākhyāya vyavahārasatyam anabhyupagamya kathayāmaḥ | śūnyāḥ sarvabhāvā iti | na hi vyavahārasatyam anāgamya śakyā dharmadeśanā kartuṃ* || (Yonezawa 2008: 266). In the other translations there is a discrepancy surrounding the distribution of the negation in the first sentence. Whereas Westerhoff (2010a: 29) reads "rejecting the conventional truth" for *vyavahārasatyam pratyākhyāya*, Bhattacharya (Bhattacharya 1978: 22) reads "by not rejecting the conventional truth" for the same, extending the negation of the main verb to *pratyākhyāya* and saying that it is by *not* rejecting the conventional truth that the doctrine is taught. I prefer the latter interpretation for it better coheres with the unambiguous meaning of the MMK verse the autocommentary cites (MMK 24:10).

[81] There is a citation at Candrakīrti's PSP 264 attributed to the Buddha (of unknown origin): "What hearing and what teaching is there of a *Dharma* without words (*anakṣarasya dharmasya*)? And yet, the wordless [emptiness, ultimate truth presented indirectly] is heard and thought [only] on account of imputation (*samāropāt*)"; *anakṣarasya dharmasya śrutiḥ kā deśanā ca kā | śrūyate deśyate cāpi samāropādanakṣaraḥ* || (Vaidya 1960b: 115). Prajñākaramati (BCAP 365.6) utilizes the same citation in the same context in his commentary on BCA 9:2 (see Oldmeadow 1994: 28; Salvini 2009: 277). "Imputation" (*samāropa*) is a critical concept having a causative sense of "placing in or upon" and "attribution" in the imputation of qualities onto phenomenal appearances producing the fabrication of a phenomenal identity (*nāma-rūpa*). It generally has a negative connotation, but in this context of pedagogy it is a synonym for fabrication. These fabrications can be healthy/correct in the context of the conventional truth and unhealthy/incorrect in the context of conventional falsity as dependent on the semantic implications (in the form of *dṛṣṭi*) associated with the imputation/fabrication. See chapter 2 (§2.2) on "imputation".

liberation to all sentient beings. In that context, the reliance on convention is the methodological adaptation of a pre-existent conceptual framework (nominally, not semantically) for pedagogical and, ultimately, soteriological purposes. For this reason, Candrakīrti cites the following from Āryadeva:

> [CŚ 8:19:] Just as a barbarian (*mlecchaḥ*) is unable to be guided (*na … śakyaḥ grāhayitum*) in another language (*anyayā bhāṣayā*), so the world (*lokaḥ*) is unable to be guided without the worldly (*laukikam ṛte*).[82]

That is, the teachings must be phrased in the terms of conventional discourse already familiar to ordinary beings. However, this clearly cannot be a blanket, uncritical endorsement of conventional semantics. Rather, the specialized Buddhist philosophical context of the conventional terms in the conventional truth must be further elaborated for attaining the valid cognition of ordinary experience therethrough.[83]

There is a second, related reason for this methodological adaptation, confirming the methodological reliance on conventional discourse: the creation of new concepts could suggest a novel philosophical view (a *dṛṣṭi* taken to concern the nature of reality), but this is not the Madhyamaka mission.[84] The creation of a novel philosophical lexicon is more than likely to be mistaken to refer to an ultimate reality instead of being just an instrument based in pre-established conventional discourse.[85] The full weight of this critique will shine through the analyses of the dependent and conventional nature of language and conceptualization in the following chapter, a realization which certainly contributes to the valid utilization thereof and valid cognition therethrough. Rather than forcing novel concepts onto the world and perhaps confusing them even more, the *Buddhadharmic* teachers generally adapt what is already

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[82] CŚ 8:19 (194): *nānyayā bhāṣayā mlecchaḥ śakyo grāhayituṃ yathā | na laukikaṃ ṛte lokaḥ śakyo grāhayituṃ tathā ||* (Lang 1986: 84). Candrakīrti cites this passage at MĀB 6:35.

[83] On the Mādhyamikas' specific semantic framework, see chapter 2 (§§2.2.3); on the distinction between ordinary and philosophical discourses and their convergence in the conventional truth, see chapter 2 (§2.3); see chapter 3 (§3.2) for discussion of the semantic framework resulting from dependence relations as it applies to conventions.

[84] This is the case for "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*), which is not (per MMK 13:8) the true nature of reality as a positive quality of things but a universal lack. In ordinary connotations, *śūnyatā* (or the adjective *śūnya*) refers to "a lack" "a void", or "an absence" (a connotation the Mādhyamikas skillfully exploit), even being the name for the mathematical "zero" (neither a positive nor negative integer). This already-entrenched term is then imbued with further philosophical connotations as referring to the lack of a self-established and mind/convention-independent nature (i.e., *svabhāva*). By analogy, this is the same method concerning the very concept of "dependence", per MMK 10:8 and 10:10d (see pp. 50-1 above).

[85] This occurs when emptiness is said to indicate the ultimate truth, but this must be taken to mean the *meditation on* and *realization* of emptiness and not the *concept* of emptiness itself. This is the difference between a mere intellectual understanding and an experiential realization with transformative effects, a distinction addressed in PART II (chapter 7).

there to their needs. This exploitation is known as "skillful means" (*upāya kauśalya*), referring to the capacity and prerogative of *buddha*s and *bodhisattva*s to phrase the *Buddhadharma*'s presentation in the way most congenial to their audience. In the conventional truth's pedagogy, this makes its presentation fit established norms so that it becomes digestible to the widest audience.

§1.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I analyzed the conventional truth through its use of conventional discourse towards the valid cognition of ordinary experience (§1.1). Ordinary cognitive experience is structured by conventional discourse, and so the conventional truth seeks to utilize it in a way becoming of the valid cognition thereof (in contrast with its invalid cognition, conventional falsity). To that effect, I established the Madhyamaka mind–world model of cognitive experience to demonstrate the interdependence of cognition and its conceptual structure as integral to that valid cognition. The valid cognitive experience of the conventional truth is cognitive experience as schematized by the interdependence required by the Madhyamaka mind–world model. I introduced the distinction of conventional truth from falsity via *saṃvṛti*'s tripartite etymology (§1.2). Its first sense, "concealment" is the primary condition of this distinction since not all that is *saṃvṛti* is necessarily *saṃvṛti-satya*. Significant from this is both the fabricated nature of concepts and conventions typically concealed therein and the concealment of the ultimate that all conventionality affords. Through this lens, the scope of the "convention" on which the Mādhyamikas rely is confirmed (especially by the second sense; the third confirms the model of dependence relations). I used this occasion to launch a defence of Candrakīrti's conventional truth, the validity of which is critical to the integrity of the two truths distinction. Lastly, I established that the Mādhyamikas assign to the conventional truth an instrumental role in the two truths distinction, with the methodological reliance thereon integral to their philosophical-soteriological project (§1.3). This served to introduce the two truths in a methodological context with reference to their formal differentiation.

There is evidently in this material a specific connection being drawn between the two truths distinction, pedagogy, soteriology, and conventional discourse that I will further unravel in the following

chapters. From this methodological reliance on conventional discourse, in chapter 2 I demonstrate how all acts of language and discourse (referring to the medium of articulating ordinary cognitive experience) are only applicable at the conventional level. This is the conventional nature of language and discourse, which requires that language and discourse are generated and structured by dependence relations. The relegation of language and discourse to the conventional level is necessary to the formal condition differentiating the two truths.

CHAPTER 2: THE CONVENTIONAL NATURE OF LANGUAGE & DISCOURSE

In this chapter, I demonstrate how, for the Madhyamaka, all acts of language and discourse (referring to the medium of articulating ordinary cognitive experience) are applicable only at the conventional level. This refers to the conventional (i.e., *saṃvṛtic*) nature of language and discourse, which requires that language and discourse be generated through and structured by dependence relations. This relegation to the conventional level is necessary to my thesis on the formal differentiation of the two truths.

My argument in §2.1 is twofold: i) although phenomenal reality is cognitively experienced as a conceptual reality, there is a semantic conditionality in the language and discourse employed in that cognitive experience (§§2.1.1); and ii) there is a critical structural role for assertions (*pratijñā*s) and their underlying views (*dṛṣṭi*s) in the formation and articulation of cognitive experience (§§2.1.2). I explain in §2.2 the conventional nature of language and discourse by arguing in §§2.2.1 that dependent designation (*prajñaptir upādāya*), the linguistic aspect of dependent origination, is the best explanation for why all acts of language and discourse are only applicable at the conventional level. The premises of the argument from dependent designation concluding with the conventional nature of language and discourse are as follows: (a) because cognitive experience is reducible to its conceptual expression, which is a product of language and discourse; (b) because all concepts are generated by the process of dependent designation; (c) because dependent designation is one subcategorization of dependent origination; and (d) because dependent origination is a definition/gloss on *saṃvṛti* (as seen in chapter 1, §§1.2.3), all products of language and discourse are necessarily *saṃvṛtic*. This confirms that the cognition of ordinary experience is only valid at the conventional level. I address in §§2.2.2 the basis of designation required for any designation. Most discussions of dependent designation focus on the designation itself rather than that on which the designation depends, which I relate back to the previous discussion of the Madhyamaka mind–world model of cognitive experience (see chapter 1, §1.1). In §§2.2.3, I address Buddhist nominalism in consequence of dependent designation and the conventional nature of language and discourse, concluding that it refers to the complete lack of any extralinguistic or extracognitive reality

afforded to the objects of cognitive experience. Lastly, I investigate in §2.3 the implications of the conventional nature of discourse in two contexts: ordinary and philosophical discourses. The conventional truth seeks the convergence of philosophical discourse and ordinary experience (as articulated in ordinary discourse) toward the latter's valid cognition. This convergence explains how the conventional truth operates in the domain of ordinary experience.

I thus in this chapter establish the relation of language and discourse to both cognitive experience (more generally) and the conventional truth (specifically) by underscoring their conventional nature.

§2.1 LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE, & SEMANTIC FRAMEWORKS

Together, language, discourse, and the semantic frameworks which underlie them make possible the articulation, in conceptual form, of ordinary cognitive experience (i.e., the kind of cognitive experience to which the conventional truth refers, in contradistinction with the *extra*-ordinary cognitive experience to which the ultimate refers. Everything that follows in this chapter refers strictly to ordinary cognitive experience—i.e., the domain of conventional truth). Cognitive experience addresses not only the way we speak (in the context of its articulation in a discourse) but, more importantly, how we think. As how we both speak and think is structured by language and a given conceptual framework (i.e., the concepts that make up a language), the two are intimately related.

Language, the primary member of this relation, is a conceptual framework shaping a discourse because a discourse manifests a linguistic, conceptual structure.[1] Language is a conceptual medium that is structurally prescriptive of cognitive experience. Discourse consists of the articulation of that cognitive experience through the application of language (as structured by it). Discourse is universal and can occur in any language, which may or may not instantiate differences in that discourse.[2] On the other hand, both

[1] A developmental metaphor of children learning a language explains the difference between language and discourse. This process' first step begins with learning basic concepts (constructing a conceptual framework). Next, the child learns to string those concepts together to articulate a complex idea. The first step engages in language through the acquisition of a basic conceptual framework, and the second engages in discourse through the articulation of conceptual relations.

[2] I am hesitant to say these definitions mirror any singular theory in the philosophy of language for the Mādhyamikas are not doing constructive philosophy of language. However, there may be similarities between these definitions and the structuralist theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. "Language" (what he calls *la langue*, "un principe de classification" and "une convention")

language and discourse are supported by an underlying semantic framework, which consists of the specific meanings assigned to the contents of any language's conceptual framework and which the speakers of any discourse presuppose. Speakers may share a common language and mutually engage in discourse, but without a shared semantic framework the efficacy of that communication is minimal. This is a difficulty the Mādhyamikas frequently encounter when discoursing with their opponents (typically non-Buddhists, but even non-Madhyamaka Buddhists), since each of them is seemingly using the same terms in vastly differing semantic contexts. This is evident regarding the categories of discourse (chapter 1, §1.1), for the Mādhyamika's semantic framework comprising the conventional truth and the meanings they supply for these categories evidently differ from their opponents' semantic frameworks and meanings of the same. Therefore, the Mādhyamikas and their interpreters are tasked with justifying the unique semantic framework through which they engage in discourse with the world.

2.1.1 A MADHYAMAKA PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE RE: COGNITIVE EXPERIENCE

Many Madhyamaka scholars remark that a significant portion of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's philosophical investigations must be understood as implied critiques of language.[3] In one way, Madhyamaka philosophy should be approached as the critical analysis of how language (a conceptual framework) prescribes cognitive experience in accordance with its semantic commitments (its underlying semantic framework). This interpretation follows the discussion in chapter 1 (§1.1) of the formative role of conventional discourse in cognitive experience and readily extends to the cognitive reading of the conventional truth (addressed fully in chapter 3 (§3.1) in the context of distinguishing conventional truth from falsity). I propose the following reductive consequences for the conventional nature of language

is juxtaposed with "speech" (*le langage*/*la parole*, which belongs "encore au domaine individuel et au domaine social") or the "speaking-circuit" (*le circuit de la parole*) (*Cours de linguistique générale*, Payot, 1995: 25-27). The former is a system of signs and the latter certainly communicative. The nature of the study of Madhyamaka texts means that we are more concerned with communication in general and writing more specifically than speech. More than communication, the concern is really with cognition and the formative role of language and discourse in cognitive experience and its articulation.

[3] Cf. Salvini 2023: 407-8; Westerhoff 2009a: 183-198); "Some Remarks on a Problem in Madhyamaka Philosophy of Language", *Ratio* 31.4, 2018b: 415-23; and "Nāgārjuna and the Philosophy of Language", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47.4, 2019: 779-93; Garfield 2002: 46-63 and *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2015: 242-277; Douglas Berger, "Acquiring Emptiness: Interpreting Nāgārjuna's *MMK* 24:18", *Philosophy East and West* 60.1, 2010: 40-64; and Chien-hsing Ho, "Nāgārjuna's Critique of Language", *Asian Philosophy* 20.2, 2010: 159-74.

and discourse from the thesis that the cognition of ordinary experience is structured by a conceptual framework: i) phenomenal reality is cognitively experienced as a conceptual reality; and ii) language and discourse determine that cognitive experience of conceptual reality. Both are well-documented features of the Madhyamaka with much support.[4] The broadening of the investigation to encompass language, discourse, and semantic frameworks as determinative of cognitive experience deepens the previous discussion of conventional discourse as the object of methodological reliance of the two truths.

Candrakīrti explains the mind-dependent nature of cognitive experience as follows:

> [YṢV 34:] When consciousness apprehends the aspect of whichever object (*rnam par shes pas dmigs pa gang gi rnam pa 'dzin cing*), there is the production of that object (*skye pa'i dmigs pa*) [in cognition]. Having attained its essence as acquired by its aspect in consciousness (*rnam par shes pa la rnam pa nye bar bsgrubs pa'i rang gi dngos po thob nas*), the primary elements and so forth are imagined as being real existents (*dngos po'i don gyi ngo bo nyid kyis 'byung ba chen po la sogs par yongs su brtags*). When it cannot be established as an aspect in any consciousness (*rnam par shes pa la 'gag' zhig gi rnam par ma bzhag pa la ni*), it is unable to be established as existent by the worldly (*'jig rten gyis yod pa nyid du rnam par gzhag mi nus*), since there would be the consequence of the existence of even the son of a barren woman and so forth (*mo gsham gyi bu la sogs pa yang yod par thal bar 'gyur ba'i phyir*) [(referring to other non-existent phenomena without any such aspect apprehended in consciousness)].
>
> Therefore, the elements and what arises from the elements (*'byung ba dang 'byung ba las gyur pa*), the mind and mental factors (*sems dang sems la byung ba*), as well as non-sentient factors (*sems dang ldan pa ma yin pa*)—because of being causal [components] of the [appearance] of the aspect in consciousness (*rnam par shes pa'i rnam pa'i rgyu can yin pa'i phyir*)—all these (*de dag thams cad*) [factors] suitably explained (*bshad pa ci yang yung ba*) as such and such primary element and so forth (*byung ba chen po la sogs pa gang dang gang*) come together and are comprehended within consciousness (*rnam par shes par yang dag par 'du zhing khongs su chud*).[5]

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[4] E.g., Westerhoff 2009a: 207, 220-1; Ho 2010: 164, 169; Hopkins 1996: 37; Huntington 1989: 52-3; and Sonam Thakchöe, "Reification and Nihilism: The Three-Nature Theory and its Implications", *Madhyamaka and Yogācāra: Allies or Rivals?* (eds. Garfield & Westerhoff), Oxford University Press, 2015, 97; "Prāsaṅgika's Semantic Nominalism: Reality is Linguistic Concept", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40.4, 2012: 427-52. See some references in the following pages; see further the cognitive reading of the conventional truth in chapter 3 (§3.1).

[5] YṢV 34: *rnam par shes pas dmigs pa gang gi rnam pa 'dzin cing skye pa'i dmigs pa de | rnam par shes pa la rnam pa nye bar bsgrubs pa'i rang gi dngos po thob nas dngos po'i don gyi ngo bo nyid kyis 'byung ba chen po la sogs par yongs su brtags so || rnam par shes pa la 'ga' zhig gi rnam par ma bzhag pa la ni 'jig rten gyis yod pa nyid du rnam par gzhag mi nus te | mo gsham gyi bu la sogs pa yang yod par thal bar 'gyur ba'i phyir ro || de bas na 'byung ba dang 'byung ba las gyur pa dang | sems dang sems las byung ba dang | sems dang ldan pa ma yin pa rnams ni rnam par shes pa'i rnam pa'i rgyu can yin pa'i phyir 'byung ba chen po la sogs pa gang dang gang bshad pa ci yang rung ba de dag thams cad ni rnams par shes par yang dag par 'du zhing khongs su chud do |* (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 74-5; see also the translations of Scherrer-Schaub (1991: 259-61) and Loizzo (2007: 185)). A partial Sanskrit fragment of this verse is documented: *vijñānaṃ yad ālambanākāraṃ bibhrad utpadyate tad vijñānākāropārjitam ātmabhāvam āsādya mahābhūtādikaṃ padārtharūpatvena parikalpyate | na hi vijñāne 'nāropitākārasya kasyacil lokaḥ śakto 'stitāṃ vyavasthāpayituṃ | vandhyāputrādīnām apy astitvaprasaṅgāt | tasmād vijñānākār ...* (Li & Ye: 2014: 142). This may be translated as follows: "Whichever aspect of the support/object (*yat*

This should not be taken as promoting a form of metaphysical idealism that prioritizes the existence of mind above form: as at MĀ 6:92, there is no mind without form and no form without mind (see chapter 1 (§1.1.1, pp. 47-9 above; see also chapter 4 (§§4.2.3)). This should rather be interpreted to mean that there is no form conceivable without its cognition by the mind. This demonstrates that cognition (the conceptual apprehension of the "aspect" (Skt: *ākāra*; Tib: *rnam pa*)[6] of an object by consciousness) is a distinctively mind-dependent activity (i.e., "When it cannot be established as an aspect in any consciousness, it is unable to be established as existent by the worldly"). This means that consciousness (i.e., conscious apprehension) and what appears before it together are both *immanent to* and *formative o*f cognitive experience (the same language used in chapter 1 (§1.1) regarding the categories, echoing the same mind–world model of cognitive experience). I investigate how consciousness apprehends such appearances, whose ordinary cognition occurs conceptually.[7] The approach I take is the same as when

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ālambana-ākāram) consciousness (*vijñānam*) bears (*bibhrat*) when it arises (*utpadyate*), that [support/object] is acquired by the aspect in consciousness (*tat vijñāna-ākāra-upārjitam*). It is by having attained (*āsādya*) its essence (*ātmabhāvam*) as acquired by the aspect in consciousness (*vijñāna-ākāra-upārjitam*) that the primary elements and so forth (*mahābhūta-ādikam*) are fabricated/imagined (*parikalpyate*) in the form of phenomena/existents (*padārtha-rūpatvena*). But when consciousness does not impose whichever aspect (*hi vijñāne anāropita-ākārasya kasyacit*), the world is unable to conventionally exist (*na … lokaḥ śaktaḥ astitām vyavasthāpayitum*)". The Sanskrit informed the above translation but, given that it is incomplete, could not form the basis of the full translation of the passage.

[6] This technical term in Buddhist philosophy has little explication in a specifically Madhyamaka context. According to Buswell & Lopez's dictionary entry (*The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, Princeton University Press, 2014: 25), "In Sanskrit, "aspect," "mode," "form," or "image"; a polysemous term that is notably employed in discussion of epistemology to describe an image cast by an object, which serves as the actual object of sense perception". Their discussion lists Abhidharmic and Yogācārin interpretations of the term but does not mention the Madhyamaka. In that vein, Dan Arnold (*Brains, Buddhas, and Believing: The Problem of Intentionality in Classical Buddhist and Cognitive-Scientific Philosophy of Mind*, Columbia University Press, 2012) discusses *ākāra* in various contexts of the epistemological phenomenology of Dharmakīrti; e.g., he writes that "Dharmakīrti urges, then, that mental representations—variously referred to as "aspects" (*ākāra*), "reflections" (*pratibimba*), and "appearances" (*pratibhāsa*)—provide the necessary link between perceptual and conceptual content. While these representations can be thought to exhibit the property of intentionality—surely after all, mental representations should be said to "mean or represent or be about" other things—they themselves are *particulars* that are causally produced by perceptual cognitions" (2012: 135); see 2012: 25 for a brief exhibition of the metaphysically idealist direction Dharmakīrti takes this theory. Given Candrakīrti's criticisms of Dharmakīrti and Dignāga in the PSP, it seems unlikely he would uphold their interpretation of *ākāra*, at least with respect to its metaphysical implications. This is evident in the PSP (cf. MacDonald 2015b: 231-9) in the context of Candrakīrti's critique of the positing of the reflexive nature of awareness of the mind (i.e., its self-awareness; *svasaṃvedana*, *svasaṃvitti*). Further deliberation on this subject is irrelevant to the current context. The contexts in which Candrakīrti does use the term *ākāra* in the PSP always refer to an "object-condition" of consciousness (e.g., MacDonald 2015b: 281-2).

[7] See my previous discussion ("Introduction to PART I", pp. 24-5 above, especially fn.5) of Candrakīrti's critique of Dignāga's definition of perception (*pratyakṣa*). Candrakīrti argues that, at the conventional level, perception cannot be unmediated and direct (i.e., non-conceptual). There is no such thing as an unperceived pot that could be known apart from this very perception and then be perceived.

Thakchöe explains that "Candrakīrti argues that all determinate categories, sensory faculties, and phenomenological experiences are dependent on conceptual constructs, which in turn depend on the terminology of everyday language".[8] According to Westerhoff,

> It is not that there are some objects within the grasp of our cognitive capacities as well as some beyond them, but rather that the very concept of an object is something established by these capacities. It is not that parts of the world might not correspond to our linguistic and conceptual frameworks but that the idea of a structure of reality independent of these practices is incoherent. Our ability to grasp the world by concepts is acquired by our knowledge of language (or, as some might argue, is the very same thing as that knowledge).[9]

> There is no way of investigating the world apart from our linguistic and conceptual practices, if only because these practices generate the notion of the "world" and of the "objects" in it in the first place.[10]

Similarly, according to Ho,

> In the world of ordinary experience, […] we cannot cognize things independently from words and concepts. Every empirical cognition is a recognition that involves the presence of words or concepts. As a consequence, we cannot bypass the relationship of conceptual causality (i.e., dependence) and focus solely on that of existential causality in order to attend things in the world.[11]

Likewise, Huntington says that

> The nature of an object's existence cannot be meaningfully expressed as an independently valid or entirely objective "fact," for any object is defined as existent only in dependence on its being conceived and designated in an essentially linguistic act.[12]

Because ordinary cognitive apprehension is formally conceptual, the role of language, discourse, and semantic frameworks therein should be analyzed. As I interpret the Madhyamaka, this is a special concern of their vis-à-vis the conventional truth and its formal parameters.

In expounding the formative role of language, discourse, and semantic frameworks in cognitive experience *and* in denouncing the necessity of strict determinism in this scheme, Candrakīrti introduces language's *instrumental* and *conditional* nature, which I call "semantic conditionality", a feature of

[8] Thakchöe 2015: 97.
[9] Westerhoff 2009a: 207.
[10] Westerhoff 2009a: 220.
[11] Ho 2010: 164.
[12] Huntington 1989: 52.

language integral to differentiating the conventional truth from falsity:

> [PSP 24:] Words (*śabdāḥ*) do not subjugate speakers (*na … vaktāram asvatantrayanti*) like ones armed with sticks and rope (*dāṇḍapāśīkāḥ iva*). On the contrary, when they have their proper capacity (*satyām śaktau*), they conform to the intention of the speaker (*vaktuḥ vivakṣām anuvidhīyante*).[13]

Candrakīrti underscores semantic conditionality when the capacity (*śakti*) of words is established in conformity with the intention of the speaker (or, more abstractly, the thinker, the cognizing subject): the meaning of words is conditional to the context of the semantic *intentions* (*vivakṣā*, what is wished to be expressed) of a speaker in a discourse and is, therefore, a product of that discourse. The *proper capacity* of words and their meaning is to be semantically conditional, malleable according to that context. That they are malleable means they are not fixed, static, or determined. This is significant for the move from invalid semantic frameworks to valid ones. To be analyzed in any linguistic act is the intention of the speaker and therefore the meaning and semantic commitments underlying their every assertion because *that* semantic framework is both formative *and* articulative of the speaker's cognitive experience.

The point is the following: the specific meanings assigned to concepts in any discourse's semantic framework are formative of the cognitive experience articulated thereby. Although language, discourse, and semantic frameworks play prescriptive and formative roles therein, Candrakīrti says that *that* role, which is based on the meaning of words established by the intentions of the speaker, is not strictly deterministic. Words do not subjugate us "like ones armed with sticks and rope"; they do not in themselves, from their own side, determine any cognitive experience; they do not actively and objectively supply static meaning but are passively and subjectively given it. From that, there arises a certain capacity to transform their prescriptive and formative roles based on the semantic context they are provided. A shift in semantic context elicits a shift in the prescription of cognitive experience, a requirement for any development on the *Buddhadharmic* path. This semantic conditionality resurfaces in §2.3 when I

[13] PSP 24: *na hi śabdāḥ dāṇḍapāśikā iva vaktāramasvatantrayanti, kiṃ tarhi satyāṃ śaktau vakturvivakṣāmanuvidhīyante* || (Vaidya 1960b: 7).

examine Madhyamaka-specific discourse insofar as the same words in different semantic contexts are utilized by the Mādhyamikas, their opponents, and ordinary beings in general.

2.1.2 THE STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF DISCOURSE

I explain the structural elements of language, discourse, semantic frameworks, and, therefore, the cognitive experience thereby articulated in a way that underscores the conventional nature thereof. This theoretical structure is built with common terms in Indian philosophy also employed by the Madhyamaka: it consists of i) "assertions" (*pratijñā*s), which are essentially propositions declaring conceptual relations, and ii) "views" (*dṛṣṭi*s), which I gloss as "worldviews" and which invoke the semantic commitments of a discourse insofar as representative of its underlying semantic framework. These 'layers' comprise the schematic condition of ordinary cognitive experience's discursive articulation, for any cognitive experience is only meaningfully expressible according to this structure.

Although these terms are used by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti in various contexts (often privatively), I insist on the fact that they are *not* schematized in this way to positively establish any structure of language and discourse. However, that is not to say that this absence precludes the possibility of any such establishment. I am stretching the terms from their technical sense and extrapolating some more ordinary implications for general discourse. The argument is constructed on the assumption that Madhyamaka conventional discourse is not radically unique and so operates via the same general structure, only with a different semantic framework. Westerhoff supports this possibility when differentiating "standard" and "non-standard semantics",[14] which differentiation is specifically semantic and not formal or structural. Standard semantics (see §§2.2.3) cover a variety of realist positions, as in epistemological and metaphysical contexts, which require reference to something standing independently of dependence relations; as we shall see, Nāgārjuna critiques standard semantic frameworks but upholds a non-standard one, i.e., the conventional semantics of the conventional truth baked in dependence relations.

[14] Westerhoff 2009b: 35.

However, the proposed structure is only general; all acts of discourse are theoretically structured in this way, though not all acts of discourse are so explicitly structured. While I do not discount unstructured, senseless discourses because not all are necessarily coherent and semantically consistent, I do contend that Madhyamaka discourse is so structured, coherent, and semantically consistent. As far as I am aware, no comprehensive attempt at delineating the structure of Madhyamaka discourse has been made, but I maintain that such an analysis is critical to the two truths, especially in the way the linguistic conventional truth acts as the means to the non-linguistic ultimate. Insofar as that structure is generated by dependence relations, lucidity of the conventional nature of language and discourse is to be included in the valid cognition of ordinary experience occurring in the medium of such language and discourse.

Distinguishing an "assertion" (or a proposition) from a "view" strictly in terms of *function* is supported by both Westerhoff and Ruegg in the context of the specific relation of views to "metaphysical commitments", particularly regarding the Madhyamaka refutation of *svabhāva* (in reference to a realist semantic framework).[15] However, I maintain (per ŚS 1) that the semantic commitments of views should be classified more generally via the categories of discourse in metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological contexts. Even if a proposition (in the sense of basic predication, such as in the proposition "X is Y") does not make explicit reference to its philosophical commitments and need not be read as making such commitments, some sort of semantic framework is nonetheless implied at every turn. For views, on the other hand, such philosophical commitments are explicit (i.e., a proposition making explicit metaphysical, epistemological, or axiological claims about X).[16] However, on that basis, I establish only a functional distinction between these two elements regarding the structure of discourse itself insofar as

[15] Westerhoff 2009a: 196-7; 2009b: 35 ("The No-Thesis View: Making Sense of Verse 29 of Nāgārjuna's Vigrahavyāvartanī", *Pointing at the Moon: Buddhism, Logic, Analytic Philosophy* (eds. Mario D'Amato, Jay Garfield, & Tom Tillemans), Oxford University Press, 2009b). He cites Paul Sagal ("Nāgārjuna's Paradox", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 29.1, 1992: 83). Likewise, in analyzing VV 29, Ruegg ("The Uses of the Four Positions of the "Catuṣkoṭi" and the Problem of the Description of Reality in Mahāyāna Buddhism", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 5.1/2, 1977: 49-50) identifies a difference between a *pratijñā* as a regular kind of sentence (which the Mādhyamikas obviously employ, what I call an "assertion" and whose function I am here underscoring) and as a "thesis (e.g., of an inference or a syllogism) which seeks to establish something", or, more specifically, a "proposition claiming probative force concerning the (positive or even negative) own being (*svabhāva*) of anything".

[16] See Westerhoff 2009b: 35-6.

both take the same basic form of a proposition.

Pratijñā is variously translated as "assertion", "thesis", "proposition", "declaration", etc.[17] These carry a certain philosophical and argumentative weight insofar as it is with a *pratijñā* (or several) that a philosophical "view" (*dṛṣṭi*) is staked in a discourse. However, the term also has more ordinary senses of "admission, acknowledgement, assent, agreement, promise, vow, etc.".[18] I consider here its more ordinary application, which is also covered by terms like *vacana* or *vākya* that Candrakīrti uses to refer to the sayings of other Mādhyamikas.[19] Taking the general form of a propositional statement (i.e., "X is Y"), assertions in that context are the most pedestrian structural element for establishing conceptual relations. One might make hundreds of such assertions daily; they are the factual statements and value judgments about cognitively experienced objects that aggregately make a discourse. In that sense, assertions structure discourse insofar as they are responsible for the basic acts of identification and predication by relating at least two concepts together in an associative or dissociative manner (e.g., "there is smoke on the hill", "phenomena lack permanence").[20] As such, they are a fundamental structural element in the formation of a basic conceptual identity that becomes associated with other concepts.

A *dṛṣṭi* is a "view" that situates assertions about the contents of cognitive experience in a specific semantic framework. *Dṛṣṭi*, a common word in various ordinary contexts, is frequently fitted to a narrower philosophical sense. The root from which the noun *dṛṣṭi* is derived, √DṚŚ, refers to vision, seeing, sight, etc., whose derivatives often refer to the eyes, glances, etc. In a philosophical context it refers to a way of "seeing" the world (and its contents) with heavy cognitive, epistemological, and metaphysical connotations. Hence, I more generally gloss these "views" as being "worldviews", for the

[17] Monier-Williams (1986: 665.3) defines *pratijñā* as "a statement, assertion, declaration, affirmation". *Pratijñā*s as they are typically construed as structural elements of debate (in such contexts, "theses", "propositions", "probandums") play a pivotal technical role in philosophical discourse (see §2.3).
[18] Monier Williams 1986: 655.3.
[19] See Ruegg 2000: 108.
[20] "Identification" is the recognition by name of a phenomenon ("this is a tree"), while "predication" attributes a certain quality, property, or attribute to that identification ("this tree is an evergreen"). "Association" means a positive (attributive) conceptual relation and "dissociation" a negative (privative) relation.

"world" at large as we experience it and situate ourselves within it is precisely what they target. As I explain in §2.3 and, further, in chapter 3 (§3.3-4), there is both "right view" (*samyak-dṛṣṭi*) and "wrong view" (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*) as correlated with incompatible semantic contexts; the context of the current discussion is merely the structural and functional role of views in general discourse.

The link of such views to ordinary cognition is that *dṛṣṭi*s prescribe a mode of cognitive experience by supplying the specific semantic commitments underlying any assertion marking a cognitive experience.[21] This refers to the semantic context in which the categories of discourse are invoked (even if only implicitly) in ordinary cognition. I discuss "prescription" because views express (or are a condition of) the mind's cognitive orientation towards the world; it is prescriptive because cognitive experience is shaped by the specific semantic framework underlying its every assertion.[22] Considering the previous discussion of the categories in chapter 1 (§1.1), such views broadly encompass the semantic commitments of the categories of "existence", "truth", and "goodness" (and their negations) insofar as specific views provide the specific meanings thereof in a discourse. As such, views structure cognition and discourse in a critical way. Even if only implicitly, every speaker/thinker presupposes a worldview wherein there underlies the semantic commitments of their assertions by means of these categories. E.g., in the proposition "the cup is on the table", it is presumed that both the cup and the table "exist" in some way (implied by the copula), meaning that some form of "existence" is assumed in any assertion about the objects of cognitive experiences (and likewise about the experiencer), even in the negative.

[21] Accordingly, this is why Huntington (1989: 53) says that "A word or a concept is necessarily *prescriptive* in that its meaning derives from its application within a particular context. That is, the meaning of a concept derives not from its reference to some independently real object, but rather through the circumstance that it recommends to us a particular way of looking at the world and suggests a certain appropriate form of behaviour on that basis". That is why his explanation of *dṛṣṭi* (1989: xii, 55) underscores a *patternization* of the mind rooted in the tendency to conceptualize phenomenal experience by forcing experience to fit certain conventionally established cognitive molds.

[22] In that vein, Paul Fuller (*The Notion of Diṭṭhi in Theravada Buddhism,* Routledge Curzon, 2005: 2) discusses clinging to the worldviews as objects of attachment: "Views [*diṭṭhi*] entail mental rigidity and are potential objects of attachment. Buddhism teaches that one should not indulge in objects of sensual desire, and in a sense, Buddhist philosophy is a warning against becoming attached to objects of cognition. In the same way that the Buddha is said to have passed beyond attachment to sensual desire, he is also said to have 'passed beyond' (*samatikkanta*) the 'bondage, tie, greed, obsession, acceptance, attachment and lust of view' (*diṭṭhi-rāga-abhivinivesa-vinibandha-paligedha-pariyuṭṭhānajjhosāna*, A I 66)". Clinging (via cultivating an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging (*anupādāna*) is the chief subject of PART II (chapter 6).

Notwithstanding the possibility of lying, it is also generally assumed that the speaker/thinker of any assertion presumes its "truth". Likewise, lurking behind every assertion is a value judgment about its contents (even if neutral). Per the formative role of views in ordinary cognition, there is necessarily an appeal to one or more of these categories at every turn. It is the specific belief(s), structural to discourse, that the world consists of phenomena that exist/non-exist in a specific way, are good/bad in a specific way, and that the statements about these phenomena are true/false in a specific way that makes ordinary cognitive experience both possible and communicable.[23] It is generally assumed in discourse that we participants share the same worldview, knowing what the other means when the categories are invoked, but the differences between standard and non-standard semantic frameworks and between ordinary and philosophical discourses (see §2.3) demonstrate that, in practice, this is not really the case.

Apply now the notion of semantic conditionality to worldviews, semantic frameworks, and the categories of discourse: the semantic frameworks within which the categories manifest are thereby malleable, by reason of which the conditions circumscribing the cognition of ordinary experience are themselves malleable and, hence, can transform invalid into valid cognition. Understanding the specific semantic commitments of various worldviews and the prescriptive power they hold for shaping cognitive experience is necessary for the conventional truth's program for adopting the right semantic framework for the valid cognition of that ordinary experience.

In the relation of the Madhyamaka mind–world model of cognitive experience and this discussion of the formative role of language and discourse therein, the specific semantic framework in which are situated the categories of discourse is dependent on the mind while, at the same time, the mind's cognitive faculties operate in dependence on these categories, views, and their attendant semantic framework. By extension, because ordinary cognitive experience is apprehended conceptually, the tools of that cognitive

[23] The general intuition is that *of course* both I and phenomena I experience in the world exist, *of course* suffering is bad, and *of course* all these assertions are true. However, precisely how these categories can be correctly applied in the conventional truth is not yet established. I address the criteria differentiating valid and invalid views in chapter 3 (§§3.3-4).

experience (referring to the conceptual framework of language and discourse comprising the assertions declaring the contents of the phenomenal world and the views articulating the semantic framework of those assertions) will also be mind-dependent in the same way. Hopkins specifically says that "'existing in dependence on a designating consciousness' is the special meaning of dependent-arising in the Prāsaṅgika system";[24] this mind-dependence should be readily applied to the very *structure* of cognitive experience by understanding a mind-dependent, semantic framework as formative of cognition itself.

This analysis demonstrates the structural role of both assertions and their underlying views in ordinary cognitive experience. The general features of language and discourse having been sketched with respect to i) the semantic conditionality of the language and discourse employed in cognitive experience and ii) the structure of the discourse articulating cognitive experience itself whose contents are shaped by this plastic capacity, the Madhyamaka-specific interpretation of the conventional nature of language and discourse can now be elaborated.

§2.2 WHAT MAKES LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE CONVENTIONAL

The best explanation of why language and discourse (or conceptuality in general) are to be restricted to the conventional level is their conventional (*saṃvṛtic*) nature. What makes them conventional is the inherency therein of dependence relations (hence, a *saṃvṛtic* nature, per the tripartite etymology of *saṃvṛti* (chapter 1, §1.2)). Such conventionality critiques the attribution of any nature to language and discourse independent of mind and/or convention, independent of dependence relations. This, in turn, also applies to their contents (and therefore, by association, the contents of cognitive experience) likewise being subject to dependence relations.

It follows from the interrelation of assertions and views that discourse is necessarily structured by the following dependence relations: i) worldviews depend on several corroborating assertions about the world to flesh out their content; ii) all assertions depend on concepts ordered to produce a series of

[24] Hopkins 1996: 167.

conceptual relations; and iii) these concepts themselves depend on, firstly, the act of designation (i.e., on the designating mind), and, secondly, on the presumption of the categories of discourse and their attendant semantic framework postulated once more at the level of worldviews structuring them and the conditions of their designation. These dependence relations run full circle like interdependence (or mutual establishment, mutual entailment) intends. However, in addition to language and discourse themselves being structured by dependence relations, the Mādhyamikas equally insist that language and discourse (including its contents in concepts, assertions, and views) are more importantly generated by dependently. The dependent generation of conceptual content is the purview of dependent designation (*prajñaptir upādāya*), the linguistic branch of the core teaching of dependent origination.

In what follows, I use the frequent Madhyamaka terms "conceptualization" (*prapañca*), "fabrication" (*vikalpa*, *kalpanā*), "imputation" (*samāropa*), and "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) to schematize ordinary, conceptual cognitive experience. These indicate how the tools of cognitive experience, i.e., concepts, are generated and situated in a semantic framework, a worldview. For explanatory purposes, I differentiate fabrication and imputation as 'layers' of conceptualization; I do not necessarily intend for these definitions and applications to perfectly mirror the Madhyamaka usage. "Fabrication" occurs in the act of conceptualization (i.e., concept-formation) because there is thereby the construction of the identity of a given phenomenon by means of a designation on condition of the basis of designation. "Imputation" occurs when that identity is asserted (identified and predicated) in a discourse as situated within a specific semantic framework. The identity is what is fabricated by the act of designation; the semantic framework is what is imputed onto the fabricated identity insofar as it supplies that identity with contextual meaning by situating it within a worldview. An identity is a set of properties, qualities, and attributes subsumed under a designating name. It is a conceptual identity fabricated by the attribution of properties and so forth to a phenomenal object of cognitive experience (e.g., a "cat" is a small carnivorous mammal with large eyes, four legs, pointy ears, retractable claws, variable demeanor, etc. A "cat" is thus a fabrication, a fabricated identity). "Fabrication" refers to the denotational aspect of conceptualization, but

"imputation" to its deeper semantic import; fabrication has local implications for cognitive experience insofar as it is responsible for assertions like "this is a cat", but imputation's implications are global insofar as it determines cognitions like "cats, like other phenomena, exist in X way".

I offer an example of the interrelation of fabrication and imputation: for any given fabricated identity there is predicated to it both essential and accidental properties; e.g., a cat is essentially a mammal (without which it ceases to be what it is) but the colour of its fur is accidental to its identity.[25] This distinction differs from intrinsic and extrinsic properties since intrinsic properties assume the possession of essential properties in a mind- and convention-independent way, but dependent designation and the fact of fabrication counter this notion. Consequently, in the Madhyamaka semantic framework of dependence relations (see §§2.2.3), all properties, whether essential or accidental, are extrinsic insofar as they are conditionally attributed only in relation to a conceptual framework by means of the twin acts of fabrication (of an identity) and imputation (of a semantic framework). All conceptual frameworks are therefore products of this tandem, and dependent designation confirms that both conceptual frameworks and their contents are generated by and subject to dependence relations. This is critical to the Mādhyamikas' specific semantic framework I elaborate below.

2.2.1 DEPENDENCE RELATIONS & DEPENDENT DESIGNATION

Dependent designation has three concerns: i) applying the mind–world model of cognitive experience to the domain of language and discourse; ii) analytically reducing cognition and its contents to their conceptual expression at the conventional level; and iii) explaining the conventional nature of language and discourse. Significantly, there is no loss in any meaningful sense via this conventional nature; however, the conventional truth is necessarily lucid of being a product of dependent designation.

Nāgārjuna introduces dependent designation by applying it to emptiness in the denial of any inherent

[25] This is a distinction common in several works of Aristotle (e.g., in the *Posterior Analytics*, Book I, §6). We must be careful in the Madhyamaka context to not attribute any metaphysically charged reification of phenomena based on these essential characteristics. Essential means "essential to any identity", but such essence is not conferred in a mind- and convention-independent way but only conceived within the conceptual framework of the conventional nature of language and discourse. We cannot escape the conceptual interdependence built into the mind–world model of cognitive experience.

existence or nature (*svabhāva*) in any phenomenon, especially including linguistic phenomena. Said differently, dependent designation is the denial of independence from dependence relations in the linguistic domain. Nāgārjuna claims emptiness itself is nothing more than a dependent designation:

> [MMK 24:18:] That which is dependent origination (*yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ*), that we declare as emptiness (*śūnyatām tām*). That [emptiness] is dependent designation (*sā prajñaptir upādāya*), [and] that indeed is the middle way (*pratipat sā eva madhyamā*).[26]

Dependent designation has two etymological components: *prajñapti* is a "making known, a declaration" and a "designation"; *upādāya* means "on the basis of", implying dependence.[27] Hence, *prajñaptir upādāya* is translated as "dependent designation".[28] This relation is important because through *prajñapti*s we objectify phenomenal appearances and crystallize them into a fabricated identity in the act of their designation, a critical aspect of conceptual expression (this is concern ii) of dependent designation above). Referring to the nominative form of a concept, a *prajñapti* (as a designation) is a necessary condition of ordinary cognitive experience since it is that by which its content is identified. In this way, a *prajñapti* as a "designation "is not entirely dissimilar from a *pratijñā* in reference to an "assertion",

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[26] MMK 24:18: *yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tām pracakṣmahe | sā prajñaptirupādāya pratipatsaiva madhyamā ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 219). Various differing translations of this verse have been offered, many of which are taken up by Salvini ("Upādāyaprajñaptiḥ and the Meaning of Absolutives: Grammar and Syntax in the Interpretation of Madhyamaka", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 39.3, 2011: 229-44); see also fn. 28 below. He translates: "Whatever is dependent arising, we call that 'emptiness', the latter is the act of designating after relying (upon something), and is itself the middle path" (2011: 242). His explanation adds that "We can also of course rephrase 'designating after relying' simply as 'dependent designation', or even 'designating in dependence upon taking up as a reference' […]. This is in line with Candrakīrti's remark, that emptiness, dependent designation and the middle path are specific names for dependent arising" (*Ibid*.).

[27] Edgerton 1970: 348 and 145, respectively.

[28] Jacques May (1959: 161 n.494 and 238 n.840) translates *prajñaptir upādāya* (or *upādāya prajñapti*) as "une désignation métaphorique". Siderits & Katsura (2013: 277-8) gloss *prajñapti* as a "conceptual fiction"; that is, "a useful way of conceptualizing experience". Likewise, it is loosely rendered by Sprung (1979: 238) as "a guiding, not a cognitive notion". There is no direct etymological reason for translating in these ways, but such glosses are explanatory in the sense that a "story" is spun about any given object of cognition in its identification. Berger (2010: 47) proposes an alternative translation in the context of MMK 24:18c, taking *sā prajñaptir upādāya* as "this notion [(*sā prajñaptiḥ*)], once acquired [(*upādāya*)]". It is central to Berger's argument that this group of words is not taken as a technical term (and Berger blames Candrakīrti and the Tibetan Mādhyamikas following him for this predicament). Garfield & Westerhoff wrote a rebuttal dismissing Berger's proposed etymology ("Acquiring the Notion of a Dependent Designation: A Response to Douglas L. Berger", *Philosophy East and West* 61.2, 2011: 365-7) and it is also discussed by Salvini (2011: 241), himself also not convinced. Berger is of course correct to extrapolate that Nāgārjuna implies with MMK 24:18cd's evocation of *prajñaptir upādāya* and the middle way that "If we have understood that when Nāgārjuna uses the term "emptiness" it means not "absence" or "privation" or "non-existence," as the immediate denotations of *śūnyatā* might conjure up, but means instead "conditioned co-arising [(i.e., dependent origination)]," then we will "have gotten" (*upãdãya*) the notion right and therefore will find ourselves on the middle path" (2010: 48). However, this should not invalidate the point that both Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti make about the *dependent* and *conventional* nature of the very concept of "emptiness".

"thesis", or "proposition". Both have these epistemological and phenomenological connotations derived from the common √*JÑĀ*. They are clearly linked in the sense that the conceptual relations assertions establish consist of the relations of various designations (i.e., concepts).

The Madhyamaka tradition identifies three subsets of dependence relations that schematize cognitive experience: i) "dependent arising" (*prāpya-samutpāda*, i.e., causal/existential dependence), ii) "dependence on parts" (*apekṣya-samutpāda*, i.e., mereological dependence), and iii) "dependent designation" (*prajñaptir upādāya*, i.e., conceptual dependence).[29] Each is critical to my analysis as three aspects of the coherability of the conventional truth with the philosophical baseline of dependence relations. Nonetheless, as we shall see, the other two relations are each further reducible to conceptual dependencies (as, again, in concern ii) of dependent designation). Each relation *qua* conceptual dependence I specifically apply to the conceptual interdependence of the designation and its basis.

i) Causal/existential dependence affirms that phenomena only arise and cease under causes and conditions (and therefore never causelessly). This is the meaning of the causal dependence inherent to both dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and conditionality (*idaṃpratyayatā*) evident in the shortened formula "based on this, that arises".[30] It applies universally without exception.

ii) Mereological dependence means that wholes (i.e., composite phenomena like selves and chariots) exist only in dependence on their parts. These parts are explained below as the basis of designation on which the designation (the whole) is established. As we shall see, the chariot is Candrakīrti's stock example for dependent designation insofar as the designation "chariot" refers to a collection of certain parts arranged in a functioning way, analogous to the Madhyamaka account of the identity of the self, a designation fabricated in the same dependence on the five aggregates (*pañcaskandha*), its parts.

iii) Conceptual dependence, "the subtlest meaning of dependent-arising",[31] explains the dependent

[29] Cf. Westerhoff 2009a: 26-7; Hopkins 1996: 166-73. Westerhoff notes this is specifically a Geluk interpretation.
[30] See "Introduction to PART 1" (p. 23 above) on the philosophical baseline of dependence relations.
[31] Hopkins 1996: 170. Coincidentally or not, the core concepts of dependent designation are already found in the paracanonical *Milindapañha*, providing a further element of legitimacy to Madhyamaka philosophy insofar as it extends threads already present in the earliest strata of Buddhist literature. However, on that basis, the Mādhyamikas are not the only ones concerned

nature of all concepts and, by extension, the conventional nature of language and discourse as products of dependent designation. It imbues all acts of language and discourse—together which, with their underlying semantic frameworks, schematize ordinary cognitive experience—with dependence relations and emptiness. The hallmark of dependent designation is its insistence on conceptual dependence—that is, both i) the dependence of the cognition of any experience on the conceptual framework through which it is cognized; and ii) the fact that all concepts arise in dependence on other concepts (the exact relation, though more universally applied, of conceptual interdependence seen with the examples of the subject–object, mind–world, fire–fuel, and cause–effect relations).[32]

Dependent designation reduces any cognitive experience to the conditions of its conceptual expression, which requires ordinary experiences to be investigated in the context of their cognition (via their linguistic content) and not posited in any way distinct therefrom. Because conceptual expressions are generated under the conditions of dependent designation, it automatically subsumes both other varieties of dependencies under its wing: mereological dependence is subsumed by making the dependence of the concepts of "parts" and "wholes" a conceptual interdependence; it is likewise for causal dependence making the concepts of "cause" and "effect" a conceptual interdependence.[33] In that way, any cognition relying on the whole–part and/or cause–effect relations is subject to conceptual dependence because the identity of one half of the scheme is mutually established with the other and

with the investigation of *prajñapti*. There is a doctrine of the Mahāsaṃghika known as *Prajñaptivāda*, of which little is certainly known. This doctrine has an intimate though uncertain relation to the two truths since the designation/*prajñapti* will constitute one level of truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*) but fail in the act of designation to denote any ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*). For more information on this possible connection, see Ian Charles Harris, *The Continuity of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism*, E.J. Brill, 1991: 98-99.

[32] See chapter 1 (§§1.1.2). Westerhoff (2009a: 26-7) would call these examples of "notional dependence" and Walser (2005: 244) "reciprocal designation".

[33] Salvini says that, per MMK 24:18 and Candrakīrti's commentary thereon, "there are good reasons to understand *pratītsamutpādaḥ* and *utpādāya prajñaptiḥ* as grammatically (and syntactically) identical expressions" (2011: 230) and that this verse "identifies notional and existential dependence; and such a feature sets Madhyamaka apart from other systems of Buddhist thought in India" (2011: 244). He adds in his comments to this dissertation that "What is unique about Madhyamaka is the way the relationship between conceptual and existential dependence is understood". When Salvini says that "Mādhyamikas are the only Indian Buddhist thinkers (that [he is] aware of) to assert that the first type of dependence [(i.e., notional dependence)] entails the second [(i.e., existential dependence)] and to imply that notional dependence is the most *fundamental* type of *pratītyasamutpāda*" (2011: 243), an explanation of just this feature is what I attempt here.

unestablished without it.

Dependent designation requires that any phenomenon's designation be a fabrication contingently produced under causes and conditions. There are three necessary ingredients for this fabrication: i) the conceptualizing, designating mind that cognizes the world conceptually; ii) the basis of designation, i.e., what is fabricated into an identity, the referent of a designation without which designation is impossible; and iii) the conventional practices, such as naming conventions and the semantic framework in which such designations appear, that shape the conceptual framework applied in any designation. This last criterion introduces one of the primary reasons for the conventional nature of language and discourse because of its dependence on convention: within a certain conceptual framework (within a given language, the framework that prescribes general naming conventions, the conditions of meaningful designation), there is certainly a referential criterion for the truth/falsity of names. E.g., when speaking to my veterinarian, I cannot call my cat a dog and expect to receive adequate care, but among my family I could so long as they were all 'in' on my intended meaning—that is, if they shared my conceptual framework and naming conventions. There is undoubtedly normativity within a conventional conceptual framework, but it is a normativity relative to that specific framework.[34] In consequence, no conceptual framework is absolute and definitive of discourse *in toto*, and any designation is appropriately conceived only in the context of the conventional nature of discourse. Hence, in this scheme there is the application

[34] See Westerhoff (*Crushing the Categories:* Vaidalyaprakaraṇa *by* Nāgārjuna, Wisdom Publications, 2018a: 209) on naming conventions insofar as it is not necessary for referents to actually have the attributes their names describe. In Plato's *Cratylus*, Hermogenes' conventionalism holds that the linguistic conventions of naming are arbitrary or accidental, given that, so long as the speakers of a discourse are all in agreement, anything could be called anything (*Cratylus*, 384d-e). Socrates makes an objection about an extreme case of relativism with respect to naming by inquiring if there is any truth/falsity therein (385b-d), but this is not what nominal contingency entails (Hermogenes in fact rejects the extreme relativism of Protagoras (386b)). On the other hand, Cratylus' naturalism, in realist fashion, holds that there is an intimate though natural connection of description between a name and the entity it describes. The key feature of this debate (and of the naturalist position specifically, requiring it be rejected by the Madhyamaka on account of emptiness) is the assumption of an independent essence belonging to entities (368e) that a name may or may not adequately capture. This is important for the naturalist because of how names are supposed to distinguish different aspects of being (388c)—in an extreme form, different "substances". However, the conventionalist is not trying to make light of the importance of names for the functional linguistic distinction of the myriad phenomenal appearances, only to critique their connection with the things they name. Socrates' own position is not definitively settled (according to David Sedley, "Plato's Cratylus", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Winter 2020 Edition (ed. Edward N. Zalta)). The semantic framework espoused by conventionalism is therefore contextualist and thusly highly indicative of the conventional nature of discourse.

of the same template of the mind–world model of cognitive experience, here taking the form of the designator/designation–designated relation, as entangled with the conventional practices of designation acting as the bridge between them; this is exactly what concern i) of dependent designation states.

In the Madhyamaka lexicon, the mental operations of conceptualization and designation (referring to the conceptualizing mind as a necessary ingredient) are covered by the term *prapañca* ("conceptualization"). *Prapañca* (Tib: *spros pa*; Pāli: *papañca*) denotes the mental process by which there is an "expansion" or "amplification" of the raw, immediate sense-data, and therefore a "proliferation" of conceptual content.[35] As concept-formation, *prapañca* encompasses the subjective acts of both fabrication and imputation because there is the fabrication of a phenomenal identity from an appearance (as fabricated from the basis of designation) as belonging to a given semantic framework (as imputed onto that fabricated identity).[36] This operation is vital to cognitive experience because all concepts are generated in this way and then attain intersubjective validity in the act of discourse. The

[35] Where *prapañca* means "amplification, prolixity, diffuseness, copiousness" and "deceit, trick, fraud, error", it also comprises the more basic sense of "appearance, phenomenon" or "expansion, development, manifestation" (Monier-Williams 1986: 681.3). Since it seems to cover a basic cognitive process under a wide umbrella of circumstances, Edgerton (1970: 380) notes the vexing nature of this term in both Pāli and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit but still catalogues various negative connotations in which "the state of freedom from *prapañca* is always praised". *Prapañca* has been variously translated by scholars as "conceptualization", "hypostatization", "proliferation", "conceptual proliferation", "conceptual diffusion", "objectification", "manifoldness", "the manifold of named things", etc., though always with a negative connotation. Salvini ("A Clear and Learned Guide in Reading Candrakīrti's Prasannapadā", Review of *In Clear Words: The Prasannapadā, Chapter One* by Anne MacDonald, in *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 102, 2016: 421) comments that "This is translated [by Macdonald (2015b)] as "manifoldness." I am not certain that this is the best rendition of *prapañca*, here or in other Buddhist contexts. The term is derived from the root *pañc* (*pac*), its two possible meanings being "making manifest/clear" (*vyaktīkaraṇe*) or "speaking at length" (*vistāravacane*). The *Amarakośa* explains *prapañca* as either "distortion" (*viparyāsa*) or "lengthening/elaboration" (*vistara*). The main idea in *prapañca* is to take something simple and make it more complex, elaborate, or extended; and, perhaps, to do so through speech/conceptualization (sometimes, implying an element of deception). I would therefore prefer other available translations, such as "elaboration", or even venture to use "prolixity" given the link to "speaking at length".

[36] In her explanatory notes, Macdonald (2015b: 42n.98) explains, citing Lambert Schmithausen (*Der Nirvāṇa-Abschnitt in der Viniścayasaṃgrahāṇi der Yogācārabhūmiḥ*, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1969: 140f.), that "*prapañca* as mental activity denotes a subjective act which is characterized by the fact that the subject does not remain calmly in the direct vision of reality but rather elevates above it or expands over it by reflecting and naming; depending on the context, some passages set the content-oriented aspect of proliferation or transference of manifold or false qualifications in the foreground, others the formal aspect of mental activity or restlessness". Citing Candrakīrti's PSP commentary on MMK 18:9, she writes that "Candrakīrti takes as his focus the subjective side of *prapañca* by defining it as speech, explaining that it diversifies the objects perceived" (*Ibid*.). Citing Schmithausen again (1969: 140n.a), she also writes (*Ibid*.) that "speech as a mental act is often equated with *prapañca* but that speech is also often considered the means of expression of the mental *prapañca*. In his commentary on MMK XVIII.5, Candrakīrti describes *prapañca* as having the characteristic of *jñānajñeyavācyavācakakartṛkarmakaraṇakriyāghaṭapaṭamukuṭaratharūpavedanāstrīpuruṣalābhālābhasukhaduḥkhayaśo 'yaśonindāpraśaṃsādi*, thus all possible conceptualizing diversification connected with speech, which provides the basis for and gives rise to inappropriate conceptuality (*ayoniśo vikalpa*)".

sense of "proliferation" is integral to the operation of *prapañca* in all forms of language and discourse because of how the process snowballs, agglomerating more concepts in increasingly complex relations: concepts are explained in terms of other concepts, such that, at the theoretical level, it is concepts all the way down. Hence, concepts are the "stuff" of language through the establishment of conceptual relations; discourse further proliferates this conceptualized cognitive experience of a conceptualized world. That is the "net" of *prapañca* (*prapañca-jāla*) that encircles the mind–world model of cognitive experience; its snares are difficult to escape when there is no conceptual avenue for an exit.[37]

Since we ordinarily know no other cognition than conceptual, we ordinarily experience the world as a conceptual reality. The point of analyzing *prapañca* in the context of language and discourse is its entrenchment therein, from which its formative role in cognitive experience is confirmed. However, the main Madhyamaka concern with *prapañca* insists on its being subject to dependence relations (hence, per the formula of conditionality, the possibility of its cessation). This is why dependent designation insists on the dependent (i.e., conditional) nature of designation and therefore of fabrication, imputation, and, finally, conceptualization *in toto*. If every concept is a product of these mental processes, then every concept is a product of dependent designation, subject to dependence relations and conditioned to arise *and* cease under certain causes and conditions.[38] Lucidity of the conditions of such arising belongs to the valid cognition of the conventional truth; likewise, such cessation belongs to ultimate cognition.

2.2.2 THE BASIS OF DESIGNATION

Because concepts are necessarily, by design, referential, every concept (every designation) depends on its referent, the basis of designation (i.e., what is designated). Madhyamaka scholars investigating *prajñaptir upādāya* have been more concerned with the meaning of *prajñapti* than that to which

[37] Mipham (2017: 107) describes this scenario (and the ubiquity of *prapañca*) as follows: "Once again, we are caught in the webs of thought—like elephants washing themselves in mud. How can we ever put a stop to conceptual activity? It will never happen [by means of conceptual activity]!". Mipham is not as defeatist as this passage would suggest, which is why I add the rider "by means of conceptual activity" as a methodological consideration for the formal differentiation of the two truths.
[38] See PART II (chapter 5) on the ultimate's non-conceptual form, which thus requires the cessation of conceptualization.

*prajñapti*s refer.[39] For this reason, I address the conditions of the basis of designation's valid cognition. The discussion is foremostly *cognitive* and not metaphysical insofar as it eschews a metaphysical positing of the basis of designation in favour of its being strictly an object of cognitive experience.

For explanatory purposes, two kinds of concepts are posited: i) concrete, empirical concepts (referring to things, phenomena, entities, etc.) and ii) abstract concepts, such as philosophical or scientific concepts (referring to ideas, properties, attributes, etc. that quantify or qualify those empirical concepts). A stock example of the former is the concept "chariot" (*ratha*); the concept "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) is exemplary of the latter. In both cases, there will be the same necessity of the concept's dependence on its basis of designation, that to which it refers (designates). The chariot's basis of designation is its constituent parts (the axle, the wheel, and so forth); emptiness' basis of designation is the chariot itself when "the chariot is empty of *svabhāva*" is said. Candrakīrti explains the basis of designation and its relation to emptiness:

> [PSP 504:] That which is this emptiness of *svabhāva* (*yā ca iyam svabhāva-śūnyatā*), *that* is a dependent designation (*sā prajñaptirupādāya*); *that* emptiness indeed (*sā eva sūnyatā*) is established (*vyavasthāpyate*) on the basis of a designation (*upādāya prajñaptiḥ*). [For example, it is as when,] on the basis of the parts of a chariot (*upādāya ratha-aṅgāni*), the wheels and so forth (*cakra-ādīni*), a chariot is designated (*rathāḥ prajñapyate*). That to which such [designation refers] (*tasya yā*), designated on the basis of its own parts (*sva-aṅgāni upādāya prajñaptiḥ*), *that* is not inherently produced (*sā svabhāvena anutpattiḥ*); and that which is not inherently produced (*yā ca svabhāvena anutpattiḥ*), *that* is emptiness (*sā śūnyatā*). Indeed, *that* emptiness, which is characterized as not inherently produced (*sā eva svabhāva-anutpatti-lakṣaṇā śūnyatā*), is established as the "middle way" (*madhyamā pratipad iti vyavasthāpyate*).[40]

This confirms that, conventionally speaking, any designation depends on a basis of designation (i.e., is "established on the basis of a designation"), just as with a chariot and its constituent parts. Candrakīrti underscores the *emptiness* of the basis of designation to validly cognize ordinary experience in any

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[39] See, e.g., Berger 2010: 40-64. Conversely, see Westerhoff ("The Merely Conventional Existence of the World", *Moonshadows*, 2011: 202-4) for a discussion in embryonic form of the "basis of construction". Salvini (2011: 236) in fact does discuss the "basis for designation" in the context of Candrakīrti's chariot analogy (cf. PSP 504) as being the parts of the chariot and in the context of the Tathāgata (cf. MMK 22) and the person more generally as being the five aggregates. He also briefly discusses the notion of "feasibility" (2011: 243) insofar as specific phenomena act as the basis for specific designations, an inherently normative and causal relationship that precludes just anything from meaningfully designating anything at all.

[40] PSP 504: *yā ceyaṃ svabhāvaśūnyatā sā prajñaptirupādāya, saiva śūnyatā upādāya prajñaptiriti vyavasthāpyate | cakrādīnyupādāya rathāṅgāni rathaḥ prajñapyate | tasya yā svāṅgānyupādāya prajñaptiḥ, sā svabhāvenānutpattiḥ, yā ca svabhāvenānutpattiḥ, sā śūnyatā | saiva svabhāvānutpattilakṣaṇā śūnyatā madhyamā pratipaditi vyavasthāpyate |* (Vaidya 1960b: 219-20).

discourse and thereby to arrive at the conventional truth. To validly cognize the emptiness predicated to this basis, it must be approached through all three sets of dependence relations: causal/existential, mereological, and conceptual dependence, the former two subsumed under the latter.

(1) Concerning causal/existential dependence, the following argument from Nāgārjuna applies to the necessity of a basis of designation:

> [MMK 4:2:] When there is a form that is separate from the cause of form (*rūpa-kāraṇa-nirmukte rūpe*), it follows that that form would be uncaused (*rūpam prasajyate āhetukam*), but there is no object whatsoever in any context that is uncaused (*na ca asti arthaḥ kaścit āhetukaḥ kvacit*).[41]

"Form" (*rūpa*), generally referring to one of the primary elements (*mahābhūta*) in Buddhist cosmology and to one of the five aggregates (*pañcaskandha*, the material aggregate), also refers to an appearance (that is, an appearance to consciousness, as in YṢV 34). Taken most generally in that latter sense, it refers to the conceptualized identity identified by the act of designation whose appearance as such must be causally conditioned. The cause of that appearance as an entity, a thing, or an object of ordinary cognitive experience is the basis of designation. This implicates the conceptual interdependence of "cause" and "effect" in the context of form and its cause. Candrakīrti addresses that basis of designation causally as "not [being] inherently produced" (*svabhāvena anutpattiḥ*). This refutes the realist imputation of the basis of designation postulated in mind- and convention-independence as existing unconditionally to (i.e., independently of) the operations of dependent designation and conceptualization. This realist imputation would reify the basis as existing intrinsically without the designation of which it is the basis, in specific contradiction of dependent designation. It is chiefly the realist reifying that basis of designation towards whom the kindred teachings of emptiness and dependent designation are directed

[41] MMK 4:2: *rūpakāraṇanirmukte rūpe rūpaṃ prasajyate | āhetukaṃ na cāstyarthaḥ kaścidāhetukaḥ kvacit ||* (Vaidya (1960: 48). Candrakīrti's commentary specifies that by *rūpa*, Nāgārjuna refers to material forms (*bhautika rūpa*) and their "material" causes (*kāraṇa*), which, in traditional Buddhist metaphysics, refers to the "four elements" (*catvāri mahābhūta*): earth, air, fire, and water (cf. PSP 124). Regardless of whether that scheme is to be adopted by us, the same arguments apply insofar as we conceptualize the "material" causes of "material" forms. Also noteworthy is that this is the same "form" (*rūpa*) to which Candrakīrti appeals in the mind–world relation (MĀ 6:92). According to YṢV 34, it is what is "apprehended" by consciousness.

because the basis of designation can only be identified as such in the act of designation (within a conceptual framework in the act of cognition). Without the act of designation fabricating an identity (and with it the imputation of existence), it is incoherent that the basis exists in any cognizable, experienceable manner. This requirement effectively jettisons the question of the mind- and convention-independent existence of *anything* cognitively experienced as nonsensical and incoherent. For this reason, I said the argument was foremostly cognitive and not metaphysical. As in the model of conceptual interdependence, dependent designation now establishes the conceptual interdependence of the designation–designated relation, not allowing either's extrication from this calculus.

Candrakīrti also addresses misunderstanding the emptiness of the basis of designation *nihilistically* with respect to the other extreme, its non-existence. It is a frequent criticism by Yogācārins like Asaṅga[42] and Sthiramati[43] that the Mādhyamikas deny the existence of the basis of designation, in which case the Mādhyamikas would be unable to offer a coherent account of designation and, therefore, of ordinary cognitive experience. The Mādhyamikas rebut that, per the conceptual interdependence of the

[42] Asaṅga in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* does not specifically name any Mādhyamika as his target, but scholars have taken this as criticizing them (e.g., Westerhoff ("On the Nihilist Interpretation of Madhyamaka", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44.2 2016: 346); Artemus B. Engle (*The Bodhisattva Path to Unsurpassed Enlightenment*, Shambhala, 2016: 82, n.298). Westerhoff (2016: 349) also discusses a short though similar comment by Vasubandhu. Asaṅga's accusation is that the Madhyamaka will claim that all things are mere designations while at the same time denying there is anything to which these designations refer (their basis—there called the *prajñaptivāda-nimitta-adhiṣṭhānam* or the *prajñaptivāda-nimitta-sanniśrayam*, the basis (*adhiṣṭhāna*) or the support (*sanniśraya*) of the sign (*nimitta*) of the designating words (*prajñaptivāda*)). For Asaṅga, what must exist in an ineffable manner outside of the designation–designated relationship is the *vastu* (the substance), even though it is ineffable (*nirabhilāpya*), meaning it is postulated outside of the conceptual framework (see Paul Williams, *Altruism and Reality: Studies in the Philosophy of the Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Curzon, 1998a: 58; Huntington 1989: 64-5). This pertains to the Yogācārins' specific understanding of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*), the further discussion of which is not pertinent.

[43] Sthiramati, like Asaṅga, does not see how there can be a basis of designation for the Madhyamaka on account of their insistence on the emptiness of convention: "convention without a basis (*nirādhāra* or *nirupādāna*) does not make sense" (*na hi saṃvṛtir nirupādānā yujyate*), The Mādhyamikas agree insofar as they do not posit convention without any basis, only that such a basis in itself is not approachable from outside conventional means of conceptualization and the consideration of dependent designation (per dependent origination and emptiness). On the other hand, for Sthiramati and the Yogācārins, that very basis is neither extramental nor extralinguistic but the "transformation of consciousness" (*vijñāna-pariṇāma*) on the basis of the theory of the seeds (*bīja*) and the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). This is the classic confrontation between the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka on the ontological priority status of consciousness, which does not stand for the latter. We saw Candrakīrti's criticism of this at MĀ 6:92; see chapter 1 (§1.1, pp. 47-9 above). For more information on Sthiramati's objection, see Roy Tzohar, *A Yogacara Buddhist Theory of Metaphor*, Oxford University Press, 2018: 159, 173-77; Tzohar & Jowita Kramer, "Sthiramati: A Yogācāra Commentator and Innovator", *The Routledge Handbook of Indian Philosophy* (eds. William Edelglass, Pierre-Julien Harter, & Sara McClintock), Routledge, 2023: 389 ns.22, 28; and Hartmut Buescher, *Sthiramati's Triṃśikāvijñaptibhāṣya: Critical Editions of the Sanskrit Text and its Tibetan Translation*, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007: 42.

designation–designated relation just established, there must *necessarily* be a basis of designation for any designation (and vice versa) in the same way that any effect conceptually requires a cause;[44] with this the Yogācārins would also agree.[45] I revisit this argument in §§2.2.3.

Situating conceptual interdependence between the metaphysical extremes of realism and nihilism is how both Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti (at MMK 24:18 and PSP 504, respectively) predicate to the emptiness of the basis of designation the epithet "the middle way" (*madhyamā pratipad*) between the realist, reificationist existence and nihilistic non-existence of that basis. Both misapprehensions are precluded because, since designation and fabrication occur entirely within the confines of cognitive experience, the products of these processes also cannot exist independently of cognition and yet must somehow exist dependently in some cognitive reduction thereto.

(2) Concerning mereological dependence, a mereological whole–parts relation is assumed in the act of designation wherein the designation is analogous to the whole and the basis its part(s). This relation was explained above as also entailing a conceptual relation. The conceptual interdependence required by the whole–parts relation is the same conceptual interdependence required by the cause–effect relation: a part is not identified as a part except in relation to a whole (and vice versa), just as a cause is not identified as a cause except in relation to its effect. This conceptual interdependence means these concepts are mutually entailing; this mutual entailment of the whole (the designation) and the parts (the basis of designation) is an essential relation to any identity fabricated according to this formula.[46] Again,

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[44] This is a case of what Walser (2005: 244) calls "reciprocal designation" in response to groundlessness (when misinterpreted as nihilism): "*Rūpa* and so forth are designated on the basis of *kārya*/*kāraṇa*. But because these two are designated based on each other, like two sheaves of reeds leaning one against the other (to use a metaphor commonly associated with dependent-origination) there is no regress. This is not a temporal relationship of causal dependence [(as is one-way causality; see chapter 1 (§§1.1.1)] but an atemporal relationship of conditional necessity [(as in two-way causality; see §§1.1.2)]. No further element is necessary".

[45] See Jonathan Gold 2015b: 216-7 in fn. 81 below.

[46] This mereological relation in the Madhyamaka and the Abhidharma literature (e.g., Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* §9) is called "mereological reductionism". Insofar as wholes only exist in relation to their parts, wholes are thereby reduced to their parts (see Siderits, "Buddhist Reductionism", *Philosophy East and West* 47.4, 1997: 469-72). However, conceptual interdependence likewise means that parts only exist in relation to their whole. As neither part nor whole stands apart from this relation, neither is said to "exist" in itself (this is addressed in chapter 4 with respect to mutual establishment (§4.1) and metaphysical anti-realism (§4.2)). At VP 33, for example, this reasoning is applied in the extreme to demonstrate that there are neither "real" wholes nor parts: "Because the whole does not exist (*yan lag can med pa'i phyir*), the parts are [also] non-

dependent designation establishes the conceptual interdependence of the whole–part relation, not allowing either's extrication from this calculus.

Evidently, on the aggregative reconfiguration of causal and mereological dependencies as conceptual dependencies, there is the conceptual interdependence of the designation and its basis that conditions either's cognition. The formula of conceptual interdependence reduces the objects of experience to this cognitive scheme of conceptual relations with causes, parts, bases, and the world as analogues on one side and effects, wholes, designations, and the mind on the other. Insofar as these are schematic identities essential to the structure of cognitive experience, that no identity is conceivable apart from these templates is the very meaning of conceptual dependence and dependent designation. In that way, dependent designation confirms the conventional nature of language and discourse via these dependence relations since they affect every facet thereof. Neither concepts nor their referents are extricable from this network in which their identities are generated. Hence, conceptualization and ordinary cognitive experience themselves are products of dependent designation.

I understand the dependence relations necessary to dependent designation in a twofold manner.[47] It is necessary that these two factors apply equally well to the exemplary concrete and abstract concepts of "chariots" and "emptiness". The argument takes the two ingredients of *nāma-rūpa* ("name and form")[48] essential to any conceptual identification and establishes their conceptual interdependence:

i) Every concept depends on the linguistic designation itself, whatever name designates a certain phenomenon (e.g., "*ratha*/chariot*"* or "*śūnyatā*/emptiness"). This *nominal dependence* is a necessary

existent (*yan la yod pa ma yin*)"; *yan lag can med pa'i phyir yan lag yod pa ma yin no* | (Tola & Dragonetti 2004: 35).

[47] I believe this is a novel interpretation only insofar as I have related what is in Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti into a systematic explanation of the basis of designation. I am not aware of any scholarship arguing the same point because scholars are generally more concerned with *prajñapti* than with that on which it is based. The cited scholars have established the absurdity and non-cognizability of a mind/convention-independent basis but are light on the explanation of how that basis should instead be appropriately cognized.

[48] See a discussion of *nāma-rūpa* by Mathieu Boisvert (*The Five Aggregates: Understanding Theravāda Psychology and Soteriology*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995: 132-3). Though in many contexts it refers to the psychophysical self, it can also apply more generally to encompass the entire phenomenal world. In the latter sense, the *rūpa* of *nāma-rūpa* means something like "matter" in the senses of "generic matter" and "what is visible" (1995: 31-2). That is the context in which I discuss the basis of designation.

condition of any designation because it identifies the expressive form of what is designated (i.e., *nāma*).[49]

ii) The designation's content depends on the parts comprising the whole. This *material dependence* is the referent of a designation (i.e., *rūpa*). No matter the referent, it means the basis (the parts) of that designation (the whole).[50] Insofar as I identified the mind's formative role in the act of conceptual fabrication, Candrakīrti identifies the basis of designation as the "objective support" (*ārambaṇa*, *ālambana*), a causal condition of any consciousness/mental factor (*citta-caitta*).[51] The critical distinction in the second criterion is this: it is worth reiterating that, despite my deliberate use of the term "material" (from *rūpa*), the basis for Candrakīrti cannot be conceived in a materialist sense as "matter" in any realist, reificationist mode of possessing its properties and causal powers intrinsically in a mind- and convention-independent way.[52] It can only be conceived *within* the mind–world model of cognitive experience of two-way causality. It is not, strictly speaking, the linear cause of the designation when the designation itself is also the cause of the identification of that basis *as basis*. If any causal relation is established therebetween, it is only of the two-way variety—that is the conceptual interdependence of "cause" and "effect" and "designated" and "designated", each concept conditioning the other's cognition.

This is the argument of MMK 5 (the chapter on the *dhātu*s, the Abhidharmic "material elements").

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[49] Cf. PSP 70-1 (see "Introduction to PART I", p. 24 fn. 5 above), where Candrakīrti associates the perception of a phenomenon with a name, a concept. This name belongs to naming conventions derived from the store of the inherited socio-cultural linguistic structure, a repository of communally engineered (that is, fabricated) concepts, categories, labels, discriminations, etc. This is the nominal material out of which conventional designations are fabricated. See the debate between conventionalism and naturalism with respect to naming conventions in fns. 34 above and 67 below.

[50] Candrakīrti argues the same point in MĀ 6:158c, repeating the same phrase *sva-aṅgani upādāya*, "designated on the basis of its own parts". At MĀB 6:113, Candrakīrti offers another series of examples of the basis of designation, always in a context of imputation: "Thus, for example, based on a collection of imputedly existent things (*brtags par yod pa … tshogs pa la brten nas*) [such as] a face and so forth (*bzhin la sogs pa*), one apprehends (*dmigs pa*) a merely imputed reflection in a mirror (*me long la gzugs brnyan brtags pa tsam*). Based on an imputedly existent pillar and so forth (*brtags par yod pa ka ba la sogs pa brten nas*), one imputes a house (*khyim du brtags pa*). Similarly, one imputes a forest (*nags brtags pa*) in support of a tree (*shing gi rten can*). […] It is reasonable (*rigs*) for all imputedly existent things (*dngos po brtags par yod pa thams cad*) to also be the support for imputedly existent things (*dngos po brtags pa yod pa'i rten can du*)"; *de'i phyir de ltar dper na brtags par yod pa bzhin la sogs pa'i tshogs pa la brten nas me long la gzugs brnyan brtags pa tsam dmigs pa dang | brtags par yod pa ka ba la sogs pa la brten nas khyim du brtags pa dang | de bzhin du shing gi rten can nags brtags pa dang |* […] *dngos po brtags par yod pa thams cad kyi brtags pa yang dngos po brtags pa yod pa'i rten can du rigs te |* (Liland 2020: 271).

[51] Cf. PSP 456 discussing the sixfold basis (*ṣaḍvidham vastu*) of objects of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental objects as the basis of affliction; see MacDonald 2015b: 330-1.

[52] The closest term in the Madhyamaka lexicon to "matter" is *rūpa*, or, more precisely, "the cause of *rūpa*" (*rūpa-kāraṇa*; cf. MMK 4:1-2), the former term being used by Candrakīrti at MĀ 6:92 in the mind–world relation. *Rūpa*, usually translated as "form" in the context of the five aggregates, is a versatile, polysemic term referring to both what appears and of what that appearance consists (see fn. 41 above for Candrakīrti's discussion of material objects; see Boisvert in fn. 48 above.

Space (*ākāśa*) is Nāgārjuna's exemplar, only conceivable within the conceptual interdependence of the characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) and the characterized (*lakṣya*), here analogous to the designation–designated relation. A characteristic in this case is a defining, essentialized property (as discussed on pp. 88-9 above).

> [MMK 5:1-2ab:] There is not any space existing (*na ākāśam vidyate kim cit*) prior to the definition/characteristic of space (*purvām ākāśa-lakṣaṇāt*). If it [existed] prior to [its] definition/characteristic (*pūrvam yadi lakṣaṇāt*), it follows that it would exist without definition/characteristic (*alakṣaṇam prasajyeta syāt*). Moreover, [there is] no phenomenon whatsoever (*na kaścit ca bhāvaḥ*) that exists in any context (*saṃvidyate kvacit*) without [its] definition/characteristic (*alakṣaṇaḥ*).[53]

MMK 5:4-5 flesh this out. MMK 5:4ab says that "The defined/characterized (*lakṣyam*) does not exist (*na … upapadyate*) with respect to the non-appearance of the characteristic (*lakṣaṇa-asaṃpravṛttau*)",[54] MMK 5:5cd that, "No phenomenon exists (*na eva bhāvaḥ api vidyate*) separate from definition/characteristic or what is defined/characterized (*lakṣya-lakṣaṇa-nirmuktaḥ*)".[55]

Meanwhile, Candrakīrti's analogization of the concepts of "emptiness" and "chariots" means that *all* concepts—whether concrete or abstract—are understood analogously to wholes designated on the basis of their parts, exactly as are chariots. This just is the same universal interrelation of concepts, as dependent designations, and their referents. Because it is all the same subject to the conditions of requiring both a name and a basis of designation, "emptiness" is an instance of dependent designation in the same way as chariots and selves. Given i) that emptiness addresses a mode of validly cognizing ordinary experience through the conditionality of all phenomena from the denial of *svabhāva*; ii) that dependence relations and emptiness pervade all acts of predication/designation; and iii) that emptiness itself is a dependent designation, at MĀ 6:186 Candrakīrti introduces the brilliant Madhyamaka dictum

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[53] MMK 5:1-2ab: *nākāśaṃ vidyate kiṃcit pūrvam ākāśalakṣaṇāt | alakṣaṇaṃ prasajyeta syāt pūrvaṃ yadi lakṣaṇāt || alakṣaṇo na kaścicca bhāvaḥ saṃvidyate kvacit* || (Vaidya 1960b: 51). Salvini (2009: 142) comments that "Any translation that decides to render *lakṣaṇa* as *either* definition or characteristic will fail to capture an essential ambiguity (or rather, richness) of the argument, which could be read as implying a close link between conceptual and linguistic determination (definition) and ontological identification (characteristic). Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti speak in terms of succession (does the *lakṣaṇa* come before the thing it refers to, or *vice-versa*?), which may be taken as chronological or logical. Succession through time occurs only in the present attempt to determine *lakṣya*s and *lakṣaṇa*s, to which the reader might assent; while priority, in this argument, is fundamentally of a logical kind. The reference to chronological succession is therefore, at once, literal and metaphorical".

[54] MMK 5:4ab: *lakṣaṇāsaṃpravṛttau ca na lakṣyamupapadyate |* (Vaidya 1960b: 52).

[55] MMK 5:4cd: *lakṣyalakṣaṇanirmukto naiva bhāvo 'pi vidyate ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 52).

of "the emptiness of emptiness" (*śūnyatā-śūnyatā*). If "emptiness" is merely a dependent designation, *emptiness must itself be empty*: the very *concept* of "emptiness" must be affected by its own emptiness. Only if "emptiness" were empty could it be a dependent designation in the same way as are chariots and selves. If "emptiness" is a dependent designation while dependent designation itself implies emptiness, the emptiness of emptiness means both the emptiness of dependent designations and the dependent designation of emptiness. The concept of "emptiness", whose significance to the Madhyamaka project is in no way undermined, is, in the end, another product of the dependence relations inherent to language and discourse; hence, the concept of "emptiness" is conventional (*saṃvṛtic*). As such, it belongs in that context to the conventional truth, wherein "emptiness" is a philosophical concept applied towards the valid cognition of ordinary experience via the conventional truth. Linguistically, as a concept like any other, "emptiness" functions no differently insofar as it is conditioned by dependence relations.[56] In this way, the concept of "emptiness" offers a conceptual understanding thereof, but this is not tantamount to its *realization*, a deeper, more profound, and penetrative transformative experience correlated with the ultimate truth. That is not reducible to the concept "emptiness" but only indirectly indicated by it.[57]

This analysis reveals that when cognitive experience is structured and generated by dependence relations, so is the discourse that articulates it. This confirms the universal emptiness of conventional discourse: it produces only empty conceptual expressions failing to stand independently of dependence relations, especially with respect to the basis of designation.[58] From this inextricability, Candrakīrti says the identities of designation and designated (or any other identities) are merely conventional characteristics: that is, "this definition/characteristic is [only] conventional (*saṃvṛtam etat lakṣaṇam*),

[56] Similarly, Thakchöe (2012: 441) presents the non-privileged, empty status of the concept of "*nirvāṇa*" that, when analyzed in its linguistic, conceptual form, is reducible to a "linguistic utterance based on linguistic convention, understood, and made sense, only within the bound of linguistic convention". The same applies to "emptiness".

[57] This distinction between the *concept* of "emptiness" and its *realization* is further addressed in PART II (chapter 7).

[58] Since emptiness is a *universal* concept for the Mādhyamikas predicated on dependence relations, and since there are no phenomena escaping such dependence relations, there are no empirical phenomena to which emptiness fails to refer: all cups, chariots, people, and so forth—all designations and their bases—are empty. This is also further evidence for Nāgārjuna's synonymization of emptiness and dependent origination at MMK 24:18 (p. 90 above) and 24:36, especially when dependent designation, which Candrakīrti at PSP 504 associates with emptiness (p. 96 above), is a subset of dependent origination.

not ultimate (*na pāramārthikam*). There is no fault (*adoṣaḥ*) [in this]".[59] To that effect, I emphasize the final line from MĀB 6:113: "it is reasonable for all imputedly existent things to also be the support for imputedly existent things".[60] This underscores not only the inescapability of dependence relations and, hence, the groundlessness of designation, but also the rationality and coherence that Candrakīrti finds in merely conventional semantics. This *groundlessness* is symptomatic of interdependence and mutual establishment insofar as, therein, no priority is established. I revisit this requirement in §§2.3.4 below.

Given that both designation and designated are only conventional identities, and, given further that language and discourse are determined by conceptual relations, the conventional nature of language and discourse means that language and discourse (including that to which they refer) are conceivable only within the conceptual model of dependence relations. From this reduction, language and discourse are only applicable at the conventional level—exactly as Nāgārjuna first said at ŚS 1.

2.2.3 "MERE NAMES", "MERE FABRICATIONS"

In consequence of the conventional nature of language and discourse, Nāgārjuna concludes that phenomena are "mere names" (*nāmamātra*) and "mere fabrications" (*kalpanāmātra*). His argument requires that phenomenal identities, as cognitive objects, are reducible to their conceptual expression. As stated, this reduction investigates phenomena in the context of cognitive experience and does not allow them to be posited in any way distinct therefrom. In that vein, when cognitive experience is reduced to its conceptual expression, it is reduced to a "mere name" and "mere fabrication".[61] In that regard, it has no true metaphysical input insofar as nothing is posited outside the scope of the mind–world model of

[59] Candrakīrti clarifies that, though there is a denial of the mind- and convention-independent existence of either the basis or that which is designated on that basis, there is "no fault" (*adoṣaḥ*) in this characterization of conditionality and mutual dependence as conventional and not ultimate; *sāṃvṛtametallakṣaṇaṃ na pāramārthikamityadoṣaḥ* (Vaidya 1960b: 29; see MacDonald 2015b: 330-1). This echoes the language of ŚS 1 restricting conceptuality to the conventional level.

[60] See p. 101 fn. 50 above.

[61] It might be tempting to also apply here a term like *prajñaptimātra* ("designation only, mere designation"—the same *prajñapti* of dependent designation) to Nāgārjuna's philosophy, as this term is frequently also used in a Yogācāra context. There is no evidence of Nāgārjuna ever having used this term, though that does not mean that it could not readily be applied in this same context of dependent designation. Similarly, there is the notion of a *prajñaptisat*, an "existence as designation", a term frequently found in Abhidharma philosophy associated with the conventional truth (but distinct from any kind of "existence as substance" (*dravyasat*)—see Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, Routledge, 2000: 94, 114, 150). Though I find no record of Nāgārjuna using the term *prajñaptisat*, Candrakīrti uses it once at PSP 28.

cognitive experience and the designation–designated dependence relation. There may be a good reason to call this position "nominalism". According to Cabezón, Buddhist nominalism is not like that of Western Medieval Scholasticism, so one must carefully differentiate them.[62] In some cases of Buddhist philosophy, there are similar concerns over the ontological status of universals, but this is not so for *nāmamātra*.[63] Cabezón defines Madhyamaka nominalism as "the philosophical position that relates the existence of objects to their names".[64] This is what we see Nāgārjuna do in the following verses:

> [AS 35-6:] "The entire world is mere name" (*nāmamātram jagat sarvam iti*), it was powerfully declared (*uccaiḥ bhāṣitam*) by you [(the Buddha)]. What is named (*abhideyam*) does not exist (*na vidyate*) apart from [its] name (*abhidhānāt pṛthagbhūtam*). From that, all phenomena are illuminated (*sarva-dharmāḥ prakāśitāḥ*) as "mere fabrication" (*kalpanāmātram iti*). Even the fabrication (*kalpanā api*) by which emptiness is fabricated (*yayā śūnyam vikalpyate*) is called "non-existent" (*asatī proktā*).[65]

First, Nāgārjuna predicates "the entire world" and "all phenomena" as "mere names" and "mere fabrications". Then, he posits the interdependence of a "name" and "what is named" (like the designation–designated relation). Lastly, those designations are called "non-existent". In another context:

> [VP 74:] Designations (*mngon par brjod pa*) are non-existent (*med pa nyid*). Because identity (*gcig nyid*), difference (*gzhan nyid*), and both [together] do not exist (*gnyi ga med pa'i phyir*), all phenomena (*dngos po thams cad*) are asserted as non-existent (*med par khas blangs pa yin*). Therefore, when phenomena do not exist (*dngos po med pa*), referents and designations

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[62] José Ignacio Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism*, State University of New York Press, 1994: 153.

[63] Other works, such as Siderits, Tillemans, & Chakrabarti, *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*, Columbia University Press, 2011 and Siderits, *How Things Are: An Introduction to Buddhist Metaphysics,* Oxford University Press, 2022: 93-109 treat Buddhist nominalism in the context of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti (who are not Mādhyamikas but allied with the Yogācāra) with respect to universals. However, this is again not the same Madhyamaka concern regarding language in the sense of conventional semantics. The *apoha* theory explained in those works (where *apoha* literally means "exclusion") is that universals are just mental constructs superimposed over a collection of particulars. In that case, universals are just mere names referring to an otherwise diverse collection of particulars. To explain *that* nominalism, *apoha* theorists appeal to the fact that all pots refer to the collection of particulars that are not non-pots—i.e., pots are identified from their exclusion from the classes of cows, chairs, people, etc. (see Siderits, Tillemans, & Chakrabarti 2011: 12). Whether this theory is compatible with Madhyamaka nominalism is beside the question save for its relation to the two truths but may be possible so long as the *apoha* theory conforms to the Madhyamaka-specific notion of the conventional truth. It is not immediately clear that Dignāga or Dharmakīrti understand the two truths as do the Mādhyamikas, especially given certain criticisms by Candrakīrti in the PSP. The relation of that *apoha* nominalism to the Madhyamaka is underexplored, perhaps because there is no direct connection save through the two truths distinction. I do not address the issue further.

[64] Cabezón 1994: 153. The evidence he gives for the fact that phenomena can exist as "mere names/designations" (*ming tsam*) is "the linguistic formulation of emptiness" that relates to the two kinds of analysis in which the Mādhyamikas engage, conventional and ultimate analysis (1994: 154-5, 161-5). His reading stems from the Geluk interpretation of the Madhyamaka, which indeed does assert these two forms of analysis, though there is good textual evidence to infer this from Candrakīrti's writing. I treat this distinction in chapter 3 (3.4).

[65] AS 35-6: *nāmamātraṃ jagat sarvam ityuccaih bhāṣitaṃ tvayā | abhidhānāt pṛthagbhūtamabhidheyaṃ na vidyate || kalpanāmātraṃ ityasmāt sarvadharmāḥ prakāśitāḥ| kalpanāpyasatī proktā yayā śūnyaṃ vikalpyate ||* (Lindtner 1990: 132).

> (*mgnos par brjod bya ba dang mngon par brjod pa*) are [also] non-existent (*med pa yin*).[66]

Because of the non-existence of *some sense* of identity, difference, and both together, phenomena are asserted as non-existent *in that same sense*. Nāgārjuna specifically relates the existence of referents and designations with the existence of phenomena, meaning that the kind of existence afforded (or not) to phenomena determines the kind of existence attributable to their corresponding referents and designations (as Cabezón defines Madhyamaka nominalism). This relation is the key to the argument; the specific kind of existence denied is still undetermined. In a third case, existence itself (significantly, not the kind of existence previously denied) is correlated with emptiness and mere fabrication:

> [ŚS 42cd:] Whatever exists as mere fabrication (*rtog tsam gang ci'ang rung bar yod*) is empty of *svabhāva* (*rang bzhin gyis ni stong pa yin*)".[67]

I now establish an argumentative thread linking each verse. In the "standard picture" of semantics, the relation of "the existence of objects to their names" is denotative and representational because the referential nature of language is standardly assumed to refer to real entities whose existence is not determined by the name but adequately represented by it;[68] hence, there is the relation of the existence of phenomena to the referentiality of their names. Phenomena do not exist without names but, more importantly, named phenomena consequently exist. Nāgārjuna applies this relation privatively in VP 74, but the probative portion of the above definition of the standard picture is refuted at VV 57; Nāgārjuna says that the Madhyamaka (and, by extension, the conventional truth) do not use names in this way:

> [VV 57 autocommentary:] A name (*nāma*), on account of the non-existence of intrinsic

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[66] VP 74: *mngon par brjod pa ni med pa nyid do | gcig nyid dang gzhan nyid dang gnyi ga med pa'i phyir dngos po thams cad med par khas blangs pa yin no | de lta bas na dngos po med par mngon par brjod par bya ba dang | mngon par brjod pa yang med pa yin no* || (Tola & Dragonetti 2004: 95).

[67] ŚS 42cd: *rang bzhin gyis ni stong pa yin rtog tsam gang ci'ang rung bar yod* || (Tola & Dragonetti 1987: 18).

[68] So says the proponent of realist semantics at VV 9cd (i.e., "there is no name (*nāma … nāsti*) without referent (*nirvastukam*); *nāmāpi nirvastukannāsti* || (Yonezawa 2008: 238). This kind of referring name is also referred to as *sadbhūtam nāma*. See Westerhoff' 2010a: 24; 2019: 782-5 and Ho 2010: 164-5. For Westerhoff (2009a: 17; see also pp. 191-2), this is the "standard picture" of the semantic relation of names and phenomena, assuming that "the world of referents is endowed with a mind-independent structure and that our language manages to latch onto the world not just by force of convention, but by the existence of some objectively existent structural similarity between language and the world". The role of names in the case of the realist position is an *ontological* question insofar as the position says that names must denote something real but does not necessarily specify *what it is* that any name must directly denote. This bears relevance to the ancient debate between linguistic conventionalism and naturalism (as, e.g., found in Plato's *Cratylus*), which concerns *proper names* and their relationship to the entities they purportedly describe. See fn. 34 above.

> nature (*svabhāvasya abhāvāt*), [i.e.,] devoidness of inherent nature (*niḥsvabhāvatvāt*), is empty (*śūnyam*); on account of [its] emptiness (*śūnyatvāt*), [a name] is non-referring (*asadbhūtam*) [in such a realist, representationalist manner].[69]

Expanding on the relation established in VP 74, when phenomena persisting on account of an intrinsic nature do not exist, so such corresponding designations and their referents do not exist. For Nāgārjuna, those kinds of referents and designations do not exist, and so names do not refer in that way. VV 57 denies that names referentially capture the essence or intrinsic nature of phenomena (indicated by the denial of *svabhāva*), and so names referring in that way specifically do not exist, for they have no referent.

Tangentially, the same kind of semantically privative argument as VP 74 Nāgārjuna employs in the infamous VV 29, where he denies that he has any "thesis" (*pratijñā*): "I have no thesis (*nāsti ca mama pratijñā*), so there is no fault for me (*na eva asti me doṣaḥ*)".[70] According to Westerhoff, it is not theses in general (which would be incoherent given the sizeable argumentative corpus belonging to the Madhyamaka) but specifically theses in the context of realist (standard) semantics that Nāgārjuna denies in the case the opponent understands theses to refer to substantially existent phenomena.[71] Those theses

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[69] VV 57 autocommentary: […] *svabhāvasyābhāvānnāma niḥsvabhāvatvācchūnyaṃ śūnyatvādasadbhūtam* | (Yonezawa 2008: 308).

[70] VV 29cd: *nāsti ca mama pratijñā tasmānnaivāsti me doṣaḥ* || (Yonezawa 2008: 268). "Thesislessness" or "positionlessness" is a vexed issue in Madhyamaka scholarship with this verse at its centre; I revisit the issue again in PART II (chapters 5-7) in its ultimate context. In the present context, I am discussing this verse vis-à-vis the conventional truth and the possibility of a Madhyamaka philosophy of language. While this verse may have implications for the ultimate, it can also be interpreted solely in the context of the conventional truth and the denial of a specific kind of realist semantics.

[71] Westerhoff 2010a: 64. Matthew Williams-Wyant ("Nāgārjuna's No-Theis View Revisited: The Significance of Classical Indian Debate Culture on Verse 29 of the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*", *Asian Philosophy* 27.3, 2017: 271-2) offers not an argument *contra* parameterization but *contra* the argument that VV 29 specifically is intended to provoke such parameterization. He rather situates Nāgārjuna's VV in the context of the Nyāya rules of debate, within which three kinds of debate are identified: *vāda*, where two opponents earnestly seek the truth through thesis and counter-thesis; *jalpa,* "wrangling", where victory at any cost is the desire; and *vitaṇḍā*, the style of the "caviler" who seeks only to refute an opponent without offering their own thesis; see Westerhoff 2018a: 197-202, 222-3. Williams-Wyant identifies Nāgārjuna as engaging in third type, mere refutation, under which rules he *cannot* offer his own thesis but must merely refute the thesis of another, and cites Walser to demonstrate that Nāgārjuna is largely stereotyped by his non-Buddhist counterparts as such a *vaitaṇḍika*, a "philosophical pugilist refuting all views and having no thesis of his own" (Walser 2005: 225). Williams-Wyant's point is to establish that, in VV 29 specially, Nāgārjuna is making no reference to any other thesis he has held at another time in any other work (specifically referring to the thesis of emptiness); i.e., he argues (2017: 275) that "its association with *śūnyatā* in the MMK is unfounded. For this reason, the intention of the VV cannot be understood to further develop Nāgārjuna's notion of emptiness". For my own part, I note, firstly, that *vitaṇḍā* debate ends up looking quite like the argumentative style of *prasaṅga* attributed to Nāgārjuna via Candrakīrti (see chapters 3 and 4, wherein I argue that refutational analysis (*vicāra*) is not the entirety of the Mādhyamikas' argumentative strategy). Secondly, I note that i) other verses in the VV (such as VV 57 above) support this parameterization and the non-standard semantics for which Nāgārjuna argues and ii) Nāgārjuna's other work addressing the Nyāya, the VP, has many verses supporting the same (such as VP 74 above). As interesting as his analysis is, I think it is fair to say that Williams-Wyant has lost the purpose of Nāgārjuna's refutation of Nyāya standard semantics and the role of that refutation in

and their referents in the context of realist semantics do not exist and so are denied. Dan Arnold, Garfield & Priest, Tillemans, and Ruegg take similar positions on this parameterization of Nāgārjuna's claim.[72] This parameterization sorts the opponent's standard semantic framework (which Nāgārjuna here denies regarding theses) from the Mādhyamikas' non-standard semantic framework (wherein the Mādhyamikas affirm conventionally valid theses).

This is a parameterization of Nāgārjuna with which Stepien is uncomfortable, given his thesis of Nāgārjuna's radical project of the complete disavowal of *all* theses (all views (*dṛṣṭi*s)).[73] Stepien specifically links such efforts towards parameterization with Tsong Khapa.[74] However, I consider that a defence thereof can be formulated on the basis of the two truths distinction that allows i) the denial of a specific kind of thesis while admitting a different kind (i.e., referring to different semantic frameworks) and ii) the complete disavowal of *all* theses as pertaining to the ultimate. The defence of such parameterization in this context is unique to my interpretation of the ultimate; however, as Arnold notes, without this parameterization, Nāgārjuna opens himself to the charge of incoherence.[75] With this I agree, and, since I do not think Nāgārjuna's texts are incoherent, I also apply this parameterization. Thus, the denial must be considered to take place in a different semantic framework than Nāgārjuna's own assertions (at the conventional level), as Garfield & Priest and Westerhoff confirm.[76] In all these cases,

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the larger Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. As such, whether VV 29 specifically supports parameterization or not, that Madhyamaka project nonetheless requires it.

[72] See Dan Arnold, *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief*, Columbia University Press, 2005a: 133; Garfield & Priest, "Nāgārjuna and the Limits of Thought", *Empty Words*, 2002: 98; Tillemans, ""How do Mādhyamikas Think?" Revisited", *Philosophy East and West* 63.3, 2013: 421; and Ruegg 1977: 49-50; 2000: 132, 220.

[73] See Rafal Stepien, "Abandoning All Views: A Buddhist Critique of Belief", *The Journal of Religion* 99.4, 2019: 548 on parameterization; see p. 530 on abandoning *all* views. He considers (2019: 549) this an "exegetical fallacy according to which the evidence presented by the text itself is deliberately skewed so as to support a foreclosed philosophical presupposition". Arguably, there is equal textual evidence supporting the notion that Nāgārjuna and the Mādhyamikas *do* have positions at the conventional level while nonetheless remaining positionless in the ultimate. As such, the parameterization Stepien rejects could nonetheless serve his ultimate goal. See such an attempt in PART II (chapters 5-7).

[74] Stepien 2019: 548 n.57. He notes how this practice *does* differ from other Tibetan Madhyamaka schools, in particular the Nyingma. Nonetheless, this Tibetan doxographical schism has no bearing on the argument at hand.

[75] According to Arnold (2005a: 133), "The characteristically Mādhyamika claim not to have any thesis forces [... an] interpretive choice: One can take it at face value and convict the Mādhyamika either of self-referential incoherence or of making a vacuous statement, or one can work to understand "thesis" as specifically referring to some particular kind of thesis"; see also Westerhoff 2018a: 203.

[76] According to Garfield & Priest (2002: 98), "Nāgārjuna's reply [at VV 29] does not deny that he is asserting anything. How could he deny *that*? Rather, he asserts that his use of words does not commit him to the existence of any convention-

it is, as Westerhoff says, that Nāgārjuna is at one time refuting a certain kind of realist, representationalist language (i.e., the standard semantic framework) while also reducing the entirety of cognitive experience to another kind, a language predicated by fabrication and dependence relations.[77]

Madhyamaka nominalism means the complete lack of any extralinguistic (extracognitive) reality afforded to the referents of assertions, which are consequently reduced to being validly conceived only as objects of cognitive experience; as such, they are consequentially restricted to the conventional domain. This position is well-supported by Thakchöe and Westerhoff.[78] Given that dependent designation teaches the designation–designated relation in the same pattern as the whole–parts, cause–effect, and mind–world relations of conceptual interdependence, that phenomena are mere designations means that wholes and effects are only such in name, just like parts and causes are the same. The argument is, again, as with the basis of designation, more cognitive than metaphysical; rather, it subordinates metaphysical inquiry under the purview of cognitive experience. Accordingly, Ho says that "The world of everyday experience does not exist independently of language. Language considerably permeates and conditions our experience of the world".[79] For these reasons, Hopkins summarizes Buddhist nominalism with four realizations: i) "names do not exist inherently in the objects they denote";

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independent phenomena (such as emptiness) to which those words refer. What he denies is a particular semantic theory, one he regards as incompatible with his doctrine of the emptiness of all things". For Westerhoff, see the following footnote.

[77] Westerhoff 2018b: 415, 422-3. E.g., "The claim that language does not exist has to be understood as a rejection of the widely accepted Nyāya view of an objective structure in the world to which the structure of linguistic entities somehow manages to connect. It does not mean that the Mādhyamika rejects the existence of language altogether. Rather, he has an alternative understanding in mind, one in which meaning and truth do not result from a set of objective word-world relations, but one where the entire language is generated by a set of shared speaker conventions" (2018b: 422).

[78] According to Thakchöe (2015: 99), "All things are entirely empty of extralinguistic identity, and exist not individually and apart, but, necessarily, in dynamic webs of causal interdependence". The emphasis is placed on "empty of extralinguistic reality"—or extracognitive reality apart from the designation–designated relation—to explain how phenomenal identities are mere designations. Westerhoff ("Nāgārjuna's Yogācāra", *Madhyamaka and Yogācāra*, 2015: 172) phrases the issue differently: "Thus when Nāgārjuna notes in verse 35 of the *Acintystava* [(see p. 105 above)] that "the whole world is a mere name" (*nāmamātraṃ jagat sarvam*), he does not regard this as a statement of ultimate truth. It is rather specifically intended for those who assume that the expressible (*abidheya*), what the system of conventions speaks about, can exist independent of the expressions (*abhidhāna*), the conventions themselves. But if everything expressible is dependent in this way, it cannot be that the philosophical theory that everything is a mere name (*nāmamātraka*), which is also expressible, exists as an independent and fundamental truth". That "everything expressible is dependent in this way", referring to the dependent nature of designation, means all acts of conceptual expression and discourse are relegated to the conventional realm (to either conventional truth or falsity). That *nāmamātra* counts as a conceptual expression subjects it to dependence relations, which means the conceptual interdependence of the designation–designate relation. *Nāmamātra* is therefore the denial of any extralinguistic reality, but not the total denial of semantic validity.

[79] Ho 2010: 169. This rather metaphysical anti-realist position is addressed in chapter 4 (§4.2).

ii) "objects do not exist inherently as the bases of the designation of names"; iii) "the designation of entities based on the relationship of names and objects does not exist inherently"; and iv) "the designation of qualities does not exist inherently".[80]

If "mere designation" were taken literally to suggest that everything is only designation and nothing more, a nihilistic interpretation of the unreality of the basis of designation would follow. However, we have seen how the Mādhyamikas cannot be nihilists denying the reality of the basis while affirming the validity of the designation itself.[81] As always, mere names, like dependent designation, must be tempered with the middle way between extremes, as we see Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti do at MMK 24:18 and PSP 504. Both realist and nihilist extremes are avoided by dependence relations precluding i) the designation or the designated existing independently of one another and ii) the non-existence of either.

Nāgārjuna explains this nominalism of dependence relations best when saying "what is named does not exist apart from [its] name" (AS 35) and "whatever exists as mere fabrication is empty of *svabhāva*" (ŚS 42). Combining these, whatever is "mere fabrication" exists only in the context of the interdependence of the name–named relation; it exists from the predication of "existence" (the imputation of this quality in the fabrication of a conceptual identity) but cannot be meaningfully said to exist without such a cognition.[82]

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[80] Hopkins 1996: 371.

[81] Jonathan Gold affirms this in relation to Asaṅga by alluding to Nāgārjuna's conceptual interdependence, confirming a parallel between the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka about the interdependent designation–designated relation. See Gold, "Without Karma and Nirvāṇa, Buddhism is Nihilism: The Yogācāra Contribution to the Doctrine of Emptiness", *Madhyamaka and Yogācāra*, 2015b: 216-7. Commenting on Asaṅga's conception of *prajñapti* (a designation), he says (2015b: 217), "A designation *just is* something that designates something, so if there is no designated thing, there is also no designation. You cannot have designations without the things they designate. This argument, it seems to me (and Willis [*On Knowing Reality: The* Tattvārtha *Chapter of Asaṅga's* Bodhisattvabhūmi, Motilal Banarsidass,] 1982: 111), takes its moves directly out of the Nāgārjunian playbook. The designation is relative to its designated object. Their mutual dependence means that neither can exist without the other".

[82] In a quasi-modification of Berkeley's idealist formula "to be is to be perceived", for the Madhyamaka to exist *requires* being designated as such. This highlights the necessity of the prior designation (that is, imputation) of "existence" to any identify *before* it can be considered "an existent". This is what is meant by "phenomenal reality is *experienced cognitively* as a conceptual reality". However, the mind–world model is not idealist in any Berkeleyan sense (or any other metaphysical idealist sense) that prioritizes the designating mind over that which is designated. Accordingly, Hopkins (1996: 37) says that "Phenomena depend on thought in the sense that only if the thought that designates an object exists, can that object be posited as existing (conventionally), and if the thought that designates an object does not exist, the (conventional) existence of that object cannot be posited. Since this applies to all objects, nothing exists inherently".

This does not suggest that just anything designated as "existing" therefore exists; it only underscores the necessity of the imputation of "existence" in the fabrication of any 'existing' conceptual identity. There is thus recourse to conventional practices and empirical verification (via the basis of designation) for determining which specific phenomena exist or not—chairs, pots, people, etc. exist; the horns of a rabbit or the sons of barren women do not.[83] Accordingly, if a phenomenon conventionally exists, it is only validly cognized when schematized by the three dependence relations—this is the architecture of the conventional truth.[84] It follows that the Madhyamaka semantic framework baked in dependence relations underscores the conventional nature of language and discourse from the dependent nature of designation. This is the semantic framework the Mādhyamikas endorse for the conventional truth, in consequence of which there is only *conventional* existence, *conventional* truth (in linguistic form), and *conventional* value.[85] This is, above all, a semantics baked in dependence relations.

2.2.4 THE OBJECTION OF GROUNDLESSNESS

It can be objected that the conventional nature of language and discourse engenders an inescapable infinite regress of groundlessness insofar as there is no ground of one-way causality from basis to name or name to referent. What foothold can be gained? For any discourse to be possible, there must already be a general framework of communication (an established set of conventions acting as the common ground of discussion, the rules of the game).[86] However, any analysis of that framework presumes its existence because it must necessarily occur within that medium. In this way, one can never step outside the conventional nature of language and discourse to objectively examine it, and there can be no non-

[83] See both the empirical and philosophical conditions differentiating conventional truth from falsity in chapter 3 (§3.4).
[84] According to Garfield (1995: 305), "Whatever is dependently co-arisen is verbally established. That is, the identity of any dependently arisen thing depends on verbal convention. To say of a thing that it is dependently arisen is to say that its identity as a single entity is nothing more than its being the referent of a word. The thing itself, apart from conventions of individuation, has no identity. To say of a thing that its identity is a merely verbal fact about it is to say that it is empty. To view emptiness in this way is to see it neither as an entity nor as unreal—it is to see it as conventionally real". See also Garfield 2002: 52-3. Garfield is here discussing conventional existence in the context of conceptual dependence, which I said above subsumes the causal/existential and mereological senses under its wing (see chapter 2, §§2.2.1).
[85] I specifically investigate this semantic framework in its epistemological and metaphysical contexts in chapter 4, concluding with *conventional* epistemological anti-foundationalism and *conventional* metaphysical anti-realism as the direct consequences of a semantic framework baked in dependence relations.
[86] Westerhoff discusses this objection in connection with one raised by Kumārila, an 8th c. Mīmāṃsā thinker (2018b: 418).

circular ground thereof on which it could be established.[87] If there were, there would be the strict language–world relation where language matches objects in the world that the semantic realist desires. According to Westerhoff,

> We live in a world of merely conventionally existent objects, but their conventional nature does not entail that we can unilaterally opt out or modify the world independently of the necessities the existence of the object entails. The reason that we cannot fill an empty cup with water just by imagining it to be filled is the same as the reason we cannot win a game of chess by picking up our opponent's king from the board and declaring ourselves the winner. As long as we play chess we can win or lose only by sticking to the rules. Similarly, while we are bound by the conventions of cyclic existence we can change the world around us only by paying heed to the necessities the objects in the world bring about: To fill the cup we have to go to the tap. This is the reason why Candrakīrti claims that the Mādhyamika does not argue with the world. The Mādhyamikas do not deny that there is a tree outside of my window, that 7 + 5 = 12, or that water is H_2O. What they deny is the claim that there is anything to these true statements that we do not make ourselves, based on an ongoing and intricate process of conceptual construction. Their existence as merely conventionally existent objects is the only existence objects could have.[88]

He further disarms the objection with an appeal to David Lewis,[89] wherein the ground of conventionalism is neither language itself nor its referents but behaviour. The coordinated behaviour of two (pre-linguistic) individuals (such as in hunting) allows for the organic genesis of a system of signs coordinating expected or desired behaviours (e.g., coordinating a certain behaviour as a sign for "stop" and another for "go", one for when a "deer" is spotted and another for a "rabbit", etc.). From there, the process takes on increasingly complex developments until a "language" (a system of signs) is developed. At no point does this process assume that any sign inherently matches any phenomena in the world. A sign signifies deer or rabbit strictly within the system but says nothing about them as they are outside this system of conventions. There is nonetheless an element of causal efficiency in this:[90] if we're looking

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[87] Westerhoff (2011: 203) says the realist assumption of a grounding is "incompatible with Candrakīrti's claim that it is utterly incoherent to envisage the existence of something beyond our conceptual abilities, whether this is an inexpressible noumenon or a mysterious something that makes sure some of our interactions are successful or not". Here, Westerhoff is discussing objections against the purely fabricated nature of phenomenal experience in terms of the success of some fabrications over others, arguing that we do not have to (in fact, cannot) step outside the fabricated to assess it. Any criterion of assessment is itself a product of fabrication; see also Westerhoff 2011: 205-6.

[88] Westerhoff 2011: 205.

[89] David Lewis, *Convention: A Philosophical Study*, Harvard University Press, 1969; see Westerhoff 2018b: 418-9.

[90] This argument resurfaces in chapter 3 (§3.4) via the philosophical validity of the conventional truth for furnishing an adequate account of the valid cognition of ordinary experience.

for venison, hunting rabbits won't do; if we're looking for a vessel for water, a strainer won't do. That constraint is imposed by any objects' properties that still does not require stepping outside the system. As Westerhoff explains, "That something can fulfill its functional role is a fact about its relation to other objects, as well as about its relation to the mind, which is, according to the Madhyamaka understanding, the constructor of all causal relations".[91] It is ultimately human, conventional concerns that determine this process, not things as they are in themselves.

On the other hand, a Mādhyamika might reply to this objection with i) universal emptiness, such that there is not-anything extralinguistically identifiable to which language could refer (hence Nāgārjuna saying that names do not refer in that way; hence Candrakīrti's emptiness of emptiness diagnosing emptiness from within the system); ii) the dependent and conventional nature of language and discourse (from dependent designation); and iii) the mind–world model of cognitive experience invalidating speculation about anything independently from the mind that speculates. This disarms the objection of the groundlessness by rendering the very idea of any such ground incoherent.

This contrasts how Berger understands the nominalist or conventionalist position, for him taken to the extreme that "no words at all have a meaningful referent of any sort".[92] As such, dependent designations would make "no reference whatsoever to the way the world works"[93] because they are "only ideas (*prajñapti*) or metaphysical fabrications (*prapañca*)".[94] I counter that such an interpretation smacks of realist pretensions in lamenting the lack of realist "ground"—this is in fact one of Garfield & Westerhoff's rebuttals.[95] Berger is at pains to demonstrate that this is not Nāgārjuna's position, though he claims it is Candrakīrti's.[96] I agree that that is not Nāgārjuna's position, as demonstrated, but would also insist that this is a bad reading of Candrakīrti. It is not clear why Berger thinks such an extreme

[91] Westerhoff 2011: 207.
[92] Berger 2010: 60 n.1.
[93] Berger 2010: 24.
[94] Berger 2010: 40.
[95] Garfield & Westerhoff 2011: 367.
[96] Berger 2010: 52-6.

position must be attributed to Candrakīrti, since he admits that the implication of Candrakīrti's argument is that designations "do not refer to anything ultimately real, and we use them only as convenient fictions to facilitate our social and religious praxis".[97] Nonetheless, his qualm is a question of efficacy and how some designations can be more "truthful" than others.[98] I contend the difference is precisely between right and wrong view, including the semantic commitments each entails (which I explain below in §2.3 and further in §3.3-4), and the questions of causal efficiency and function. Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti both demonstrate that the conventional nature of language and discourse is the only reasonable explanation of how they could function at all. Consequently, it is reasonable for them and for us to conclude that phenomenal reality is cognitively experienced as a conceptual reality, and that language and discourse determine that conceptual reality.

§2.3 TYPES OF DISCOURSE (ORDINARY & PHILOSOPHICAL)

The conventional nature of language and discourse reduces them both to the conventional domain. Although their *saṃvṛtic* nature levels them in this way, it need neither negatively connote an unsophisticated discourse nor mean that there can be no normative hierarchies therein: this conventional nature addresses the medium of language and discourse generally, not their contents specifically. However, regarding that content, there is a hierarchy differentiating ordinary discourse (i.e., ordinary conversations had by ordinary people about ordinary experiences) and philosophical discourse (i.e., complex, theoretical discussions about philosophical topics). Discourse's conventional nature in no way diminishes the unique value of philosophical discourse, which can be validly differentiated from false and unsophisticated discourses (a category to which ordinary discourse may belong, but not necessarily) according to its content. The conventional truth, as it functions in the Madhyamaka project, compels the *convergence* of philosophical discourse and ordinary experience (the uncritical object of ordinary discourse) towards the latter's valid cognition. Insofar as valid cognition is a product of philosophical

[97] Berger 2010: 53.
[98] Berger 2010: 57.

discourse, such a discourse (i.e., ordinary experience's valid cognition) is the conventional truth.

Madhyamaka philosophy distinguishes valid and invalid cognitions as articulated in discourses whose contents are thusly also valid or invalid, a distinction critical to differentiating conventional truth from falsity. Because "conventional" is their common predicate, the conventional nature of language and discourse belongs to both. While ordinary and philosophical discourses have distinctive features, they also have two significant (related) similarities facilitating this convergence. Despite ordinary and philosophical discourses differing in purpose and criteria of validity, all discourses partake in the established general structure of assertions and worldviews—their formal commonality. There is also a commonality in content concerning ordinary cognitive experience. Ordinary discourse articulates ordinary experiences through matter-of-fact assertions and value judgments about objects of experience such as the furniture of the world like chairs, chariots, pots, people, etc. Although typically not an explicit feature, ordinary discourse nonetheless presumes a worldview: it takes for granted that these phenomena exist in some way, that there is truth and knowledge, goodness, value, beauty, etc. in some way in the world; it discourses about these in an uncritical way using discourse's categories naïvely, generally without validating or interrogating its underlying semantic framework.

This naïveté is where Madhyamaka philosophical discourse finds fault; consequently, it interrogates and specifically validates a non-standard semantic framework. This is the key condition differentiating it from ordinary discourse: it investigates—not assumes—the nature and possibility of cognitive experience itself. It requires explicit argumentation concerning the three categories of discourse insofar as it consists of metaphysical discourse concerning the nature and possibility of "existence", what exists, and how; epistemological discourse the same for "truth", what is known, and how; and axiological discourse the same for "goodness", value, beauty, etc., what is good, etc., and how. Such an investigative mode directly challenges the worldviews and semantic frameworks otherwise implicitly underlying ordinary cognition as articulated in ordinary discourse, dragging them from the dark, unilluminated depths to the surface and subjecting them to the penetrating light of philosophical inquiry.

More specifically, Madhyamaka philosophical discourse investigates the formative role of such views in the valid or invalid cognition of ordinary experience because of how these views (consciously or not) determine the mind's cognitive orientation toward the world. For example, realist views underpinning the categories in discourse supply realist semantics thereto; a Madhyamaka *dṛṣṭi* (or a *madhyamaka-darśana*) only validly cognizes these categories by means of dependence relations in a non-standard, conventional semantic framework.[99] Buddhist philosophy normatively categorizes *dṛṣṭi*s in two camps: "right view" (*samyak-dṛṣṭi*) and "wrong view" (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*).[100] Both count as modes of discoursing (in both ordinary and philosophical contexts) about the world. This is the metric by which discourses that validly or invalidly cognize ordinary experience are differentiated on philosophical grounds. As the conventional truth is right view and conventional falsity wrong view, right view is the discourse articulating ordinary experience's valid cognition. To that end, Madhyamaka philosophical discourse offers normative arguments refuting wrong views and exposing right views, the two of which together constitute the valid cognition of ordinary experience.[101] Right view as such, therefore, constitutes Madhyamaka philosophical discourse as differentiated from the wrong views of other discourses.

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[99] Although it is controversial to say that the Mādhyamikas subscribe to any *dṛṣṭi*, Candrakīrti discusses a *madhyamaka-darśana* (cf. PSP 25 and 275). Ruegg (1981: 3) distinguishes *dṛṣṭi* (which he takes to be a "speculative view or dogmatic opinion" implying hypostatization) from *darśana* (for him, a "philosophical theory" without such implications). If the difference is chiefly semantic, whether the Mādhyamikas offer a *dṛṣṭi* or a *darśana* is very much like Nāgārjuna's denial of *pratijñā* at VV 29—it depends on what exactly is meant by the term (see pp. 107-9 above). If either reflect dependence relations, there is no fault. Admittedly, this terminological distinction is not as consistent as I would like; e.g., at MMK 15:14, "annihilationism" (referring to the non-existence of a once truly existent phenomena), for the Buddhists a wrong view, is called *uccheda-darśana*. Meanwhile, Candrakīrti and Śāntideva (in BCA 9) use *darśana* to characterize the Madhyamaka position, whereas *dṛṣṭi*s are generally criticized. Nonetheless, "right view" (*samyak-dṛṣṭi*) is common terminology in Buddhist philosophy as, e.g., one limb of the noble eightfold path (*ārya-aṣṭāṅga-marga*), suggesting there is a place for certain *dṛṣṭi*s in a specific semantic framework, naturally restricted to the conventional level.

[100] A *dṛṣṭi* as the Madhyamaka criticize it assumes a worldview bearing on the nature of that world as it is *in itself*, independent of mind/convention. This is wrong view. The context in which Nāgārjuna proscribes understanding emptiness as a *dṛṣṭi* (MMK 13:8; see Siderits & Katsura 2013: 145-6 and Garfield 1995: 212-5) plays on this sense and the mistaken reification of emptiness as an intrinsic property of the way things really are (see PART II, chapter 5, §5.3). This is to say that, when speaking to an opponent, Nāgārjuna refuses to admit that emptiness functions as a *dṛṣṭi as the opponent understands the term* (this is, again, the same type of argument from parameterization seen in VP 74 and VV 29 (see pp. 105-9 above) against standard semantics. The point remains that the negative connotations of *dṛṣṭi* (i.e., wrong view) cannot stand in all cases when there is also right view (*samyak-dṛṣṭi*) at the conventional level.

[101] The specific contents of right and wrong view are elaborated in chapter 3 (§§3.3-4) as the distinction between conventional truth and falsity. The Madhyamaka arguments employed towards accomplishing this (the double-edged sword of conventional reasoning (*upapatti*) and analysis (*vicāra*)) are explained in chapter 3 (§3.4). What could be called *specimens* of Madhyamaka right view, epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical realism, are investigated in chapter 4.

2.3.1 CONVERGENCE

Although this differentiation in types of discourse is required in a critical context, the function of the conventional truth in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project specifically requires the convergence of philosophical discourse and ordinary experience towards the latter's valid cognition. Madhyamaka philosophical discourse is situated in a specific pedagogical, edificatory context towards the eventual awakening of ordinary beings (per the Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* ideal of delivering all sentient beings from ignorance and suffering). As the conventional truth is uniquely concerned with the means of validly cognizing ordinary experience (from investigating the ordinary mind's cognitive architecture), the conventional truth is a philosophical discourse in which nests the means of validly cognizing ordinary experience. It has the specific aim of bringing itself back down to earth and engaging in the most mundane of contexts for their valid cognition. The convergence of Madhyamaka philosophical discourse and ordinary experience (i.e., the conventional truth) is anterior to the ordinary–*ārya* cognitive distinction[102] insofar as I am presently concerned with the preliminary stages of how the conventional truth acts as the means to the ultimate. That means getting right the conventional truth in correlation with the valid cognition of ordinary experience for attaining the appropriate understanding of the operations of the ordinary mind and its mode of cognitive experience (and not yet the overcoming of that ordinary mind required for the *āryan* cognition of the ultimate).[103] The conventional truth, as such, can be schematized as a tool for ordinary beings to valid cognize their own ordinary experience.

To that effect, the convergence of philosophical discourse and ordinary experience consists of the correction of ordinary discourse from the uncritical (if not invalid) cognition thereof toward its valid cognition.[104] While ordinary and philosophical discourses may retain their distinctive features, in their

[102] On this distinction, see PART II (chapter 7, §7.2).
[103] For a discussion of the latter and its retrospective on convention, see PART II (chapter 7, §7.2).
[104] One could argue this is always in some sense philosophy's goal, but its effectiveness therein is debatable. If this is a common goal of philosophy, it is one the Mādhyamikas make their primary target. The difference is that the conventional truth does not seek truth for its own sake but for bringing about a certain soteriological effect. The so-called valid cognition of ordinary experience, beyond its philosophical value, is soteriological insofar as the ordinary cognitive experience of the world, originally rooted in ignorance (*avidyā*—as Candrakīrti's first sense of *saṃvṛti* suggests), instead becomes rooted in

convergence the ordinary experiences addressed in ordinary discourse become suffused with the valid cognition of the conventional nature of such cognition, of the dependence relations underlying and generating every aspect of that cognitive experience, the both of which are products of Madhyamaka philosophical discourse. This effectuates a transformation not, strictly speaking, of ordinary discourse itself but of the cognitive experience articulated therethrough: the content of ordinary discourse remains nominally the same, but its semantic context transforms by aligning with the semantic framework of the conventional truth. Semantic conditionality (as in §2.1 above) is required to instantiate this convergence, wherein the semantic framework of ordinary discourse takes on the characteristics of the semantic framework of the philosophical discourse of the conventional truth. This requires none other than the adoption and universal application of dependence relations to every aspect of ordinary cognition. The conventional truth thus transforms cognitive experience when replacing wrong view with right view. This is the role played by Madhyamaka philosophical discourse.[105]

This convergence accounts for how the conventional truth operates in the domain of ordinary experience. Without convergence, the conventional truth could not operate therein and there could thereby be no valid cognition of ordinary experience. Without convergence, the conventional truth would be ineffectual in transforming an invalid mode of cognitive experience to a valid mode. Inversely, if the conventional truth is specifically correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience, it cannot be an 'ivory tower' philosophical discourse detached from ordinary contexts. While valid cognition is a product of philosophical discourse, what must be validly cognized is ordinary experience itself. This is why we see the Mādhyamikas frequently take commonsense examples as revealing the ubiquity of dependence relations necessary to its valid cognition (like the fire–fuel relation).[106]

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truth (*satya*—that is, *saṃvṛtisatya*). The cessation of that ignorance is integral to the path to the end of suffering. This pragmatic-soteriological utility of the conventional truth is elaborated in PART II (chapter 7, §7.1).

[105] While this is the case, this is not the entire picture painted by the two truths. Philosophy may have the power to produce a transformative cognitive shift effectuated by the conventional truth, but it must also be supported by the practice of meditation for the final experiential transformation in ultimate cognition. This means that philosophy and the conventional truth are not the terminus but the vehicle and gateway to the ultimate. I revisit this argument in PART II (chapter 7).

[106] E.g., MMK 10:15: "The explanation of [the interdependence of] fire and fuel (*agni-indhanābhyām vyākhyāta*) is the way

§2.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I argued for the conventional (*saṃvṛtic*) nature of language and discourse, concluding with the restriction of all acts of language and discourse to the conventional level from the dependence relations necessary to their generation and function. This is significant for determining the scope and applicability of the conventional truth as a product of these forces and for differentiating it from the ultimate on the basis of this formal criterion. I established in §2.1 that, although phenomenal reality is cognitively experienced as a conceptual reality, there is a semantic conditionality in the language and discourse employed for its cognition (§§2.1.1); I also established a general structure of language and discourse towards elucidating a Madhyamaka philosophy of language (§§2.1.2). Consequently, I expounded in §2.2 the conventional nature of language and discourse. The conceptual framework that cognizes ordinary experience is structured and generated by dependence relations (from dependent designation (§§2.2.1)). No concept escapes these dependence relations, which is precisely what makes them *saṃvṛtic*. This was established by bringing the basis of designation into the fold of a relation of conceptual interdependence with its designation in the context of cognitive experience (§§2.2.2). This established that the Madhyamaka critique standard semantics and supplant them with their own non-standard, conventional semantics, which resulted in Buddhist nominalism (§§2.2.3). In §§2.2.4, I addressed the objection of groundlessness that may arise from the conventional nature of language and discourse and the Mādhyamikas' non-standard semantic framework, accomplished by dismissing the very idea of any such ground as incoherent. Lastly, I sketched in §2.3 the conventional truth as requiring

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(*kramaḥ*) [to understand] everything, without remainder (*sarvaḥ niravaśeṣeṇa*), [such as] clinging and the self [that clings], (*ātma-upādānayoḥ*) [up to] including pots, cloths, and so forth (*sārdham ghaṭa-paṭa-ādhibhiḥ*).”; *agnīndhanābhyāṃ vyākhyāta ātmopādānayoḥ kramaḥ | sarvo niravaśeṣeṇa sārdhaṃ ghaṭapaṭādibhiḥ ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 91-2). Candrakīrti's commentary (PSP 213-4) discusses the relation of the self to what that self appropriates (the five aggregates), stressing that not only is this relationship analogous to fire–fuel but also to subject–object (per MMK 8:12-3—see chapter 1 (§1.1. pp. 46-50 above)). As does Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti expands the argument to include *everything*, meaning every aspect of ordinary experience: “What is to be known (*veditavyaḥ*) is explained (*vyākhyātaḥ*) with reference to all phenomena in every way without exception (*niravaśeṣaiḥ padārthaiḥ sarvathā*)”; *niravaśeṣaiḥ padārthaiḥ sarvathā vyākhyāto veditavyaḥ |* (Vaidya 1960b: 92). On that basis, he discusses pots, cloths, etc. in relation to their parts, characteristics, attributes, etc. in the same way relation as the self to its parts, characteristics, attributes, etc. He specifies this relation as “being endowed with the requirement of mutual dependence” (*paraspara-apekṣikī*).

the convergence of philosophical discourse and ordinary experience towards the valid cognition thereof by means of dependence relations. Semantic conditionality is required to effectuate the convergence of ordinary and philosophical discourses insofar as the semantic framework of ordinary discourse takes on the characteristics of the non-standard semantic framework of Madhyamaka philosophical discourse (i.e., the conventional truth), which requires none other than the adoption and universal application of dependence relations to the valid cognition of ordinary experience. This project thusly applies the above results to ordinary experience and the discourse that articulates it towards its valid cognition.

Having been relegated to the conventional level, any discourse can apply conventional concepts in ways producing either conventional truth or falsity, per its semantic commitments (subject to semantic conditionality). The semantic framework reflecting a profound understanding of universal dependence relations amounts to the discourse articulating the valid cognition of ordinary experience (i.e., the conventional truth), while those discourses failing to reflect it amount to the invalid cognition of ordinary experience (i.e., conventional falsity). In chapter 3, I examine the Mādhyamikas' argumentative strategies defining this distinction.

CHAPTER 3: DIFFERENTIATING CONVENTIONAL TRUTH & FALSITY

In this chapter, I investigate the cognitive and epistemological differentiation of the conventional truth from conventional falsity. The cognitive aspect of this distinction concerns the conditions comprising the cognition of ordinary experience; its epistemological aspect concerns which of those cognitions are (conventionally) valid and which invalid. I have termed this interpretation the *cognitive reading* of the conventional truth insofar as the conventional truth is specifically correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience. Several features of it have already been explained in previous chapters, such as the formative role of the conventional categories of discourse unto the mind–world model of cognitive experience in chapter 1; the reduction of phenomenal reality to an object of cognitive experience, the conventional nature of language and discourse in chapter 2; in this chapter, I offer this cognitive reading in the context of the cognitive conditions differentiating conventional truth from falsity. All true statements the conventional truth includes therefore contribute to that valid cognition, and all false statements it excludes as ordinary experience's invalid cognition. In that vein, I seek to demonstrate the conventional truth's philosophical value. This requires arguing that the distinction between conventional truth and falsity is a normative epistemological distinction, the differentiating factor of which is the former being cognizant of the philosophical baseline of dependence relations and the latter not.

In §3.1, I outline the parameters of the cognitive reading of the conventional truth regarding the normative conditions differentiating it from conventional falsity: the conventional truth is correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience and conventional falsity with its invalid cognition. This is then contrasted with other interpretations of the conventional truth. In §3.2, I establish the normative conditions differentiating the "convention" predicated to both conventional truth and falsity, demonstrating how some conventions in specific contexts are accepted for the conventional truth while others are rejected. This is significant insofar as it differentiates my interpretation from others not permitting such nuance in the conventional truth. The conditions of this acceptance or rejection correspond to the same conditions differentiating conventional truth from falsity, thus indicating the

normativity integral to the distinction. In §3.3, I investigate Candrakīrti's exposition of conventional falsity and the various arguments refuting it via his cataracts analogy. Lastly, in §3.4 I establish and investigate two related goals of the conventional truth: i) the refutation of conventional falsity and ii) the furnishing of a positive account of the valid cognition of ordinary experience. In that respect, I identify two argumentative strategies employed by the Mādhyamikas in exposition of the conventional truth: conventional reasoning (*upapatti*) and analysis (*vicāra*). From each of these pieces is a robustly normative distinction between conventional truth and falsity established, and thusly is the conventional truth's philosophical value recognized.

§3.1 THE COGNITIVE READING OF THE CONVENTIONAL TRUTH

The cognitive reading of the conventional truth establishes a categorical distinction between conventional truth and falsity insofar as it applies the epistemological categories of truth and falsity to the cognition of ordinary experience.[1] In that way, conventional truth and falsity are two modes of cognizing ordinary experience, validly or invalidly, respectively. This validity criterion defines the conditions of the conventional truth's cognitive differentiation from conventional falsity. Where the conventional truth is correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience, this validity is essential to the two truths since the conventional truth is the means to the ultimate.[2] In that context, I argued it would be incoherent to posit a methodological reliance on what is wholly delusion, error, etc.[3] This therefore presumes some

[1] Some proponents of the cognitive reading (even if not by name) are Salvini ("Language and Existence in Madhyamaka and Yogācāra", *Madhyamaka and Yogācāra*, 2015: 37-8; 2019: 666; "Dependent Arising, Non-arising, and the Mind: MMK 1 and the Abhidharma", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 42.4, 2014: 489-90, 2019: 680, 683); Thakchöe ("Prāsaṅgika Epistemology in Context", *Moonshadows*, 2011: 45-6); and Catherine Collobert ("*Upādāna* and *Svabhāva*: Their Coagency in the Entrapment of the Mind. A Madhyamaka Perspective", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 45.1, 2022: 1-34, which specifically investigates *svabhāva* as an *invalid* cognition). Generally, all Tibetan Mādhyamikas are proponents of the cognitive reading in some form: I specifically name Tsong Khapa and Mipham; Gorampa takes a cognitive reading of the two truths but does *not* understand the conventional truth as *valid* cognition (only the ultimate). Garfield attributes a cognitive interpretation to both Candrakīrti and Tsong Khapa ("Taking Conventional Truth Seriously", *Moonshadows*, 2011: 26, 34-5), though it is unclear if he himself would advocate it; as I discuss in PART II (chapter 5, §5.2), Garfield is among the proponents of the semantic interpretation of emptiness, which does not allow this cognitive differentiation of the two truths. However, it is not clear if the semantic interpretation regarding the ultimate (where I find fault) necessarily precludes taking any cognitive approach to the conventional truth.

[2] Per MMK 24:8-10 and MĀ 6:80; see chapter 1 (§1.3).

[3] See chapter 1 (§§1.2.1) for the context of the passages of Candrakīrti in question.

normativity in the conditions under which the conventional truth is contrasted with conventional falsity.

In the "Introduction to PART I", "ordinary" and "experience" were defined cognitively and phenomenologically.[4] The "cognition of ordinary experience" refers to the mental activity consisting of the apprehension of appearances by consciousness (the subject) leading to the knowing and understanding of the phenomenal world (its object).[5] This phenomenological model of cognitive experience addresses the valid cognition of both subject and object from within mind–world model of cognitive experience. This model defines the valid cognition of ordinary experience with which is correlated the conventional truth. On that basis, "ordinary cognition" refers to the conventional mode of conceptually cognizing the objects of experience (e.g., the experience of empirical objects like cups, pots, chariots, selves, causes, effects, etc. configured as cognitive objects). Any such conceptual apprehension is an ordinary cognitive experience (as opposed to the *extra*-ordinary cognitive experience of ultimate cognition, which does not occur in the same ordinary, conceptual mode).[6]

Ordinary cognition has two aspects serving as the criteria differentiating conventional truth from falsity: i) an empirical, perceptual criterion via empirical and mundane concepts identifying the objects of ordinary cognition and ii) a philosophical criterion via reasoning and analysis about the views (*dṛṣṭi*s) qualifying those objects in a specific semantic framework. For i), Candrakīrti's definition of *pratyakṣa* ("perception") insists that this perception, formally speaking, is necessarily conceptual (i.e., perceptions always take a propositional form like the assertion "this is a pot").[7] For ii), as mentioned in discussing *dṛṣṭi*, underlying any such perception/assertion is a worldview (e.g., presuming "this pot *exists* in X way") invoking the semantic framework through which the categories of cognitive experience are given specific meanings, those meanings being prescriptive of that cognitive experience.[8] Both aspects, separately and

[4] See pp. 23-4 above.
[5] See YṢV 34 (see chapter 2, §2.1, p. 78 above).
[6] See PART II (chapters 5 and 6).
[7] PSP 70-1, noted in "Introduction to PART I", p. 24 fn. 5 above. See further chapter 4, §4.1, pp. 177-8 below.
[8] On semantic frameworks (via views (*dṛṣṭi*s) generally, see chapter 2 (§2.1); on the differing semantic frameworks of the Mādhyamikas and their opponents (construed as non-standard vs. standard, respectively), see chapter 2 (§§2.2.3).

concomitantly, offer criteria normatively differentiating valid from invalid cognitions. Accordingly, in the same vein as these criteria, Salvini concludes that "Candrakīrti defines conventional truth (*saṁvṛtisatya*) in terms of valid perception, explicitly excluding the distorted conceptualization of the non-Buddhist from its scope"[9] and that "Candrakīrti does not define valid conventions as what people *say*; valid conventional truth is what people (or rather, non-faulty observers) *perceive*; it is not what is spoken about and agreed upon, but what is perceived by a non-faulty consciousness".[10]

Under its cognitive reading, the conventional truth satisfies two tandem goals serving to secure its normative differentiation from conventional falsity, the accomplishment of which firmly demonstrates its philosophical value. The conventional truth is responsible for i) clearing cognitive obscurations (i.e., refuting invalid cognitions and wrong views by means of rigorous argumentation) and ii) furnishing a positive account of the valid cognition of ordinary experience (by means of argumentatively supported right view). The two are complementary: one cannot be not accomplished without the other, for which reason any model of the conventional truth is incomplete without accounting for both tasks. It is a common interpretation of Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka (of which lineage Candrakīrti is the figurehead) that it is solely interested in the first task (which is the reason for its name, "*prasaṅga*", referring to its employment of consequentialist reasoning in the style of *reductio ad absurdum* argumentation to refute opponents' positions without offering its own).[11] Without denying this strategy's prevalence, I will demonstrate how this is not all the conventional truth is good for.[12] Conversely, conventional falsity fails

[9] Salvini 2019: 666.
[10] Salvini 2014: 489.
[11] The Prāsaṅgika branch of the Madhyamaka is so named in contrast with its opponent, Svātantrika-Madhyamaka (as figureheaded by Bhāviveka). This distinction is not relevant at this time, but I address it in chapter 4 (§4.1). Rather, I employ *prasaṅga* methodology in §§3.4.2. *Prasaṅga* has been defined as "arguments that proceed from the opponent's own premises, either through a consequence (*prasaṅga*, *thal 'gyur*) or through an inference whose elements are accepted by the opponent alone (*gzhan grags ky rjes dpag*, **paraprasiddhānumāna*)" (Dreyfus & McClintock 2003: 7).
[12] Tillemans ("Philosophical Quietism in Nāgārjuna and Early Madhyamaka", *Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy* (ed. Jonardon Ganeri), Oxford University Press, 2017: 116-7) agrees with this methodological point: "many Consequentialists (*prāsaṅgikas*) of different stripes—in one way or another following Candrakīrti—also thought it was impossible for a serious thinker to use an *exclusively* Consequentialist method with *no* claims of any sort whatsoever (although they certainly did not go so far as to embrace the positions of the Autonomists [(*svātantrikas*)]). […] The followers of Candrakīrti then only use consequences in philosophical debates with adversaries who do not construe the subject of debate at all as the Buddhist does. It is only *in situations where there is incommensurability between views on the terms of debate* that they argue purely within

both tasks: i) it instantiates the very cognitive obscurations for which the conventional truth is the remedy and ii) it furnishes an invalid account of ordinary experience. Its invalidity concerns the above perceptual and philosophical aspects but, more significant to the Buddhist project, a soteriological aspect insofar as the invalid cognition of ordinary experience perpetuates suffering.

My position on the conventional truth's philosophical validity contradicts some scholars (historical and contemporary) who would read into it tendencies of irrationalism and excess conventionalism. These interpretations generally have to do with the two truths distinction as a whole, but this naturally also colours the perspective taken on the conventional truth. Some scholars take VV 29[13] and other similar passages to apply to the conventional truth for the denial of any philosophical position at that level. E.g., Huntington says that "Candrakīrti maintained that the purpose of the *Madhyamakaśāstra* [(the MMK)] has nothing to do with "commanding rational assent", with demonstrating, proving, or disproving anything" and that "It is the nature of the Mādhyamika trick not to argue, explain, command, or demonstrate – all of which would be self-defeating—but rather to *conjure*".[14] Siderits adopts a parallel position when saying that Candrakīrti's "Conventional truth is not to be seen as a theory, or as giving us the materials with which to construct a theory".[15] Both imply that the tendency to think otherwise (that is, to think systematically and establish argumentatively anything normative, even strictly at the conventional level) is a product of the commentaries of Bhāviveka (of whom Candrakīrti is, to be sure, in certain contexts quite critical). Adjacent is an interpretation like Tillemans' "error theory", that it is all, according to Candrakīrti, just "make believe" for the unawakened without attaining any philosophical value or rigour in itself: "a kind of global error theory and a dismissal of sophistication in the discovery of truth", "a fool's gold that only seemed to be gold to mistaken minds".[16]

On the other hand, others agree with me concerning the conventional truth's internal validity. E.g.,

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the adversary's system using *reductio ad absurdum.* The use of *reductio* is not generalizable to all contexts".
[13] As discussed in chapter 2 (§§2.2.3, pp. 107-9 above).
[14] Huntington, "The Nature of the Mādhyamika Trick", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 35.2, 2007: 122, 128.
[15] Siderits 2016: 34.
[16] Tillemans 2019b: 640, 642; see previous discussion in chapter 1 (§§1.2.1).

Garfield staunchly rejects the "irrationalism" in Huntington's reading.[17] It is no surprise that Garfield, an erudite scholar of Tsong Khapa, reads in Candrakīrti the same tendency as the former. Tsong Khapa refers to conventional truth in the contexts of "conventional valid cognition"[18] or "empirically valid cognition".[19] These are normative categories to be contrasted with invalid cognitions. The evidence also leads me to the same conclusion with respect to the conventional truth, allowing me to underscore its philosophical value. Salvini (see above) takes a parallel position for Candrakīrti without relying on Tsong Khapa. Similarly, Li is concerned with "how conventional reality can be spoken of positively in terms of what it is, rather than how it is fictitious and devoid of any substance".[20] In such cases, all agree that the valid cognition dependent origination affords secures the conventional truth's philosophical validity.[21] On such grounds, I maintain that the conventional truth is a robust philosophical doctrine presenting an argumentatively defensible account of the phenomenological conditions of ordinary experience's valid cognition. In other words, the conventional truth is the necessary condition of the valid cognition of ordinary cognitive experience. I argue, further, that this valid cognition is a critical feature of the two truths, although I am presently concerned with strictly the conventional dimension thereof.

Countercurrents to this reading may collectively be termed "transactional interpretations"; this is not a view endorsed by name but culled from certain themes consistently predicating to the conventional

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[17] See Garfield, "Turning a Madhyamaka Trick: Reply to Huntington", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36.4, 2008: 519-22.

[18] Tsong Khapa 2002: 178. It is not my intention to defend his interpretation of either the conventional truth or Candrakīrti *per se* but to demonstrate such an interpretation is the correct vision of the Madhyamaka. Tsong Khapa is judicious in demonstrating evidence from Candrakīrti to this effect. His Madhyamaka interpretation is rather mainstream (although, for some there is a distinction between a "typical" Prāsaṅgika like Candrakīrti and an "atypical" one like Tsong Khapa (see Priest, Siderits, & Tillemans, "The (Two) Truths about Truth", *Moonshadows*, 2011: 147; Tillemans 2019b: 640-1). I am not convinced this distinction has any merit. For what it's worth, Tillemans (2011: 165) also considers Gorampa and his error theory a "typical" Prāsaṅgika.

[19] Thakchöe 2007b: 19.

[20] Shenghai Li, "Dimensions of Candrakīrti's Conventional Reality", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47.1, 2019: 51.

[21] E.g., According to Salvini (2019: 666 n.12), "The point that needs to be stressed is that dependent arising is the touchstone of valid conventions, and what contradicts it is not valid even as a convention, whether it is held to be true by a handful of people or by a vast majority"; according to Li (2019: 55), "In asking the question, "What is conventional reality?" I am interested in ways of conceptualizing and understanding conventional reality in positive terms. One way in which the Mādhyamikas has often spoken about conventional reality is to describe it as dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). […] It allows them to incorporate the general Buddhist notion of causality into the Madhyamaka thought and to use it to account for how conventional things function. It is also on the ground that they accept dependent origination and causality, in spite of their rejection of intrinsic nature of conventional things, that the Mādhyamikas deny that they are nihilists".

truth some form of indiscriminate acquiescence to custom (i.e., convention) and, therefore, a lack of normative force. I pose three questions in objection: why are the Madhyamaka texts full of arguments against mistaken positions, positions which are often customary? Why do such arguments invariably fall back on the truths of dependent origination and emptiness as the standard of their rationality? How could such arguments not present a normative force? That the conventional truth has philosophical validity means it serves more than just "transactional" (as merely acquiescing to conventional practices) or "pragmatic" (as merely providing practical advice on how to live one's life or achieve mundane success) purposes. For example, Siderits generally defines the conventional truth in an Abhidharmic context as "A statement is conventionally true if and only if it is acceptable to common sense and consistently leads to successful practice".[22] More specific to Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka, he says,

> On the Prāsaṅgika view, conventional truth is a set of brutely given practices which must be taken at face value. To seek to analyse these practices is to introduce the standards of philosophical rationality, standards which the Mādhyamika believes to be thoroughly discredited. If the only truth is that which accords with conventional practices, then we must resist all temptation to analyse and explain these practices.[23]

I reply that the conventional truth is not just "a set of brutely given practices" when normatively differentiated from conventional falsity. It is not simply a truth "which accords with conventional practices" indiscriminately, as I demonstrate in §3.2. Instead, there are such "standards of philosophical rationality" that are only conventionally valid (that is, solely valid at the level of the conventional truth). There is a strong tendency in the work of Siderits holding to the conclusion that, if there is no ultimate truth in the sense of knowability because all is empty (see the semantic interpretation in PART II (chapter 5, §5.2)), then there are no standards from which to ultimately judge whether the conventional truth is indeed true. As he acknowledges, this runs the risk of devolving into relativism, a frequent objection that fictionalists face (see below).[24] However, the two truths do not require any ultimate standard by which

[22] Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, Hackett, 2007: 56. This Abhidharmic model frequently informs his reading of the Madhyamaka (see PART II, chapter 5, §5.2).
[23] Siderits 2016: 32-3.
[24] See Siderits 2016: 35-6. As Siderits (2016: 245) admits, in this system "what makes a given belief true can only be its functional role within a set of conventional human practices, not its relation to the ultimate nature of reality". While a

to judge the conventional truth because, when examined through the phenomenological lens of cognitive experience, it can coherently justify itself internally by its own conventional standards. This objection of groundlessness was already dealt with by Westerhoff.[25] This is critical to the conventional truth's cognitive reading for there is no possible means of cognizing anything outside of this context. The internal, conventional standards become the only standards, no less normative, which are nevertheless not uncritically accepting of "conventional practices". Those standards, per the conventional truth's non-standard semantics, correspond to the philosophical baseline of dependence relations and emptiness.

As another example of a faulty interpretation, consider Dreyfus's explanation of the interpretation of Patsab Nyimadrak (1055-1145?; one of the Madhyamaka's first translators in Tibet):

> The two truths should not be construed as a doctrine endowed with some intrinsic validity and opposed to that of other schools. This schema is not meant to create a place for constructive philosophy on the basis of the validity that worldly practices have, for it is merely a skillful means of providing pragmatic guidelines on how to go on living one's life. It is also a way to clear away metaphysical confusion.[26]

This is taken to its extreme when Dreyfus explains that, for Patsab Nyimadrak, "the value of the doctrine of the two truths is pragmatic and hence devoid of normative force. It simply points to the force and value of common sense […]".[27] This practical impetus should in no way be denied; however, it is this lack of normativity with which I disagree, with such normativity to be derived from the conditions differentiating conventional truth from falsity. In that way, the clearing away of "metaphysical confusion" only comes about in refuting wrong views, a significant but no less normative goal of Madhyamaka argumentation. Similarly, "guidelines on how to go on living one's life", though invoking mundane and ethical considerations, nevertheless address that ordinary experience's valid cognition. This requires none other than a "constructive philosophy" at the level of conventional truth, which the Mādhyamikas expressly

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"functional role" determined by "human practices" is certainly a relevant consideration for the conventional truth with *some* normative capacity, this is not enough to satisfy the criteria the Mādhyamikas employ to differentiate conventional truth from falsity. See also Priest, Siderits, & Tillemans 2011: 145.

[25] See chapter 2 (§§2.2.4).

[26] Dreyfus 2011a: 104 ("Can a Mādhyamika Be a Skeptic? The Case of Patsab Nyimadrak", *Moonshadows,* 2011).

[27] Dreyfus 2011a: 104.

predicate "on the basis of the validity that [*some*] worldly practices have", namely the valid cognition of ordinary experience via the philosophical baseline of dependence relations and emptiness.

On similar grounds, I reject any fictionalist account of the conventional truth reducing its truth to a kind of make-believe *pseudo*-truth. Such accounts are found in Garfield[28] and in Tillemans, summarized by the latter as "an approach that enables people to reject commitment to some or even all kinds of entities by adopting a type of *pretense* or *make-believe*. They might see talk of such entities as metaphorical or might even add to truth claims like "*p* is true" a disclaimer that *p* is true "in such and such a story" or "for such and such (mistaken) people".[29] While fictionalism accommodates the conventional truth's *fabricated* nature (as in chapters 1 and 2), fiction, as an explanatory model, lacks the *normativity* necessary to its differentiation from falsity. If anything goes in fiction, this is not the case in the conventional truth. These problems become obvious in Garfield's treatment: firstly, "fiction" is inseparable in connotation from its opposite, "fact", as when Garfield says, "As a fiction, conventional truth is, in an important sense, wholly false and is seen to be false by anyone who takes a standpoint outside of the fiction".[30] The comparison of the conventional truth as fiction to "a standpoint outside of the fiction" is problematic because, as in the same rebuttal against Siderits above, due to its formal requirements and the cognitive interpretation thereof, there is no possibility of a standpoint *outside* the conventional truth.[31] Secondly, while Garfield does not discuss the nature of that standpoint, he still thinks there is the possibility of truth and falsity *within* the fiction itself (hence his earlier concession to internal validity), and therein lies (according to him) the merits of the interpretation. This is a well-known distinction in the philosophy of literature insofar as within the fictional universe of Kerouac's *On the Road* there are true and false statements about Dean Moriarty; accordingly, for fictionalists, within the

[28] Garfield, "Reductionism and Fictionalism: Comments on Siderits's *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*", *APA Newsletters* 6.1, 2006a: 1-7.
[29] Tillemans 2011: 158.
[30] Garfield 2006a: 3.
[31] The ultimate truth, if non-conceptual and non-dual, cannot provide this standpoint this for therein there would be *nowhere to stand*; see PART II (chapter 5).

fiction of the conventional truth there would be true and false statements about conventional phenomena. This is also *not* like the conventional truth, since these fictional truths are contingent, if not arbitrary, and lack any normative force outside the fictional world of the author. The conventional truth is much more epistemologically normative than this, such normativity evident in the pragmatist *qua* consequentialist leaning of Madhyamaka philosophy (see below) because the conventional truth is supposed to make palpable, tangible differences in cognitive experience itself insofar as *a*soteriological ignorance is supplanted with soteriological knowledge. Thirdly, neither the Buddha, Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, nor "convention" are *authors* of the conventional truth as Kerouac authored *On the Road*. Instead, those masters discovered by means of intellectual investigation and meditative realization the cognitive template of dependence relations, which they then apply to pre-existent conventions in a manner corrective of their semantic commitments to reflect the valid cognition of ordinary experience.[32] Cognitive experience's fabricated nature is not tantamount to fictionalism. Nonetheless, the fictionalist interpretation has merit insofar as, in that same vein, it "requires us to see the conventional truth as merely convention"; however, it does not therefore require us to see it as "entirely false".[33]

None of these accounts provide enough epistemological normativity in the differentiation of conventional truth from falsity, from which they all, in their respective ways, undermine its philosophical validity. While there is a certain "conventional" element of the conventional truth (as demonstrated in chapters 1 and 2), there is no uncritical, blanket acceptance of "convention" (see §3.2). If there were, there would be no cause to differentiate conventional truth from falsity, and the conventional truth would be no "truth" at all normative of ordinary experience's valid cognition.

At the other end of the spectrum is Gorampa's interpretation, which finds no philosophical value in the conventional truth *whatsoever*, no "truth" in it *at all*, and in conventional existence only *non-*

[32] See chapter 2 (§2.3). I called this the *convergence* of philosophical discourse and ordinary experience in its valid cognition.
[33] Garfield (2006a: 4). I revisit this argument in PART II (chapter 7, §7.2) in a post-attainment retrospective on convention.

existence.[34] This leaves no transactional, pragmatic value for the conventional truth insofar as it would be wholly error, delusion, and erroneous cognition serving to perpetuate the sense of self and the reification of the objects of ordinary experience.[35] Herein, the only "truth" is the ultimate truth.[36]

Given that Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti explicitly claim the conventional truth's pedagogical importance, overemphasizing its transactionality *qua* pragmatic success, its untruth *qua* fictionalism, or error-theory downplays its philosophical and, ultimately, soteriological force. Instead, without invalidating all transactional and pragmatic aspects (because "transactional" still has pedagogical connotations and "pragmatic" soteriological connotations), my interpretation focuses on the conventional truth's argumentative force and, consequently, its philosophical validity derived therefrom.

In counter to the above, it can be argued that the normativity, regularity, robustness, and validity that the conventional truth demands (and the cognitive conditions by which it differentiates itself from conventional falsity) naturally afford to it certain epistemological requirements that require explanation. This normativity has been variously explained by Madhyamaka scholars via pragmatic or deflationary accounts of truth. However, such proponents have run into problems when attempting to distribute the *same* sense of truth (and epistemological requirements) across *both* truths.[37] However, given the propositional form of truth required by these accounts and the non-conceptual (i.e., non-propositional, experiential) form of the ultimate truth for which I argue,[38] naturally these accounts can only apply to the conventional truth. For that reason, I restrict the present discussion to the conventional truth.

On the one hand, a pragmatic account of the conventional truth would stress normativity

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[34] See fn. 120 below.
[35] On this aspect of Gorampa, see Garfield & Thakchöe, "Identifying the Object of Negation and the Status of Conventional Truth: Why the *dGag Bya* Matters So Much to Tibetan Mādhyamikas", *Moonshadows*, 2011: 83-6. See PART II (chapter 6) on clinging and reification.
[36] Chris Rahlwes ("Nāgārjuna, Madhyamaka, and Truth", *Asian Journal of Philosophy* 2.2, 2023: 19-20), while conceding the above characterization of Gorampa's conventional truth, nonetheless attempts a justification of Gorampa's "weak pragmatism" insofar as any success derived from the conventional truth counts only if it leads to the ultimate truth.
[37] See Priest, Siderits, & Tillemans 2011: 147-50 for an attempt to resolve this difficulty with a two-tier semantics. I diagnose in PART II (chapter 5, §5.2) how this *semantic* approach to the ultimate is insufficient.
[38] See PART II (chapter 5, §5.1) establishing the formal parameters of the Madhyamaka ultimate truth.

consequentially in terms of the effects that arise from taking any statement as true.[39] However, it is not that the *nature* of the conventional truth is, strictly speaking, pragmatic, but it is reasonable for it to have some pragmatic aspects because it clearly has consequentialist concerns for the results its truth(s) bring. This is not about making pragmatism the *essential property* of the conventional truth but admitting it as *a* criterion of the truth's justification. The difference is, essentially, between successful practice *making* a statement true (and thus that bringing such success is the essential property of true statements) and successful practice *justifying* any statement as true.[40] The conventional truth's utility may (if only partly) be justified consequentially,[41] but, for the Madhyamaka, that is not necessarily what makes it true.

On the other hand, a deflationary account of truth stresses normativity on the basis of explicitly admitting a *weakened* form of the correspondence principle per Tarski's T-schema (<*p*> is true iff *p*, a most basic and neutral schematization of what makes a statement true).[42] In this scheme, <*p*> is a statement/proposition referring to *p*, a fact or a state of affairs.[43] If *p* obtains, then <*p*> is true. If <*p*>

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[39] See, e.g., Rahlwes 2023: 1-24; Brook Ziporyn, "A Comment on "The Way of the Dialetheist: Contradictions in Buddhism" by Yasuo Deguchi, Jay L. Garfield, and Graham Priest", *Philosophy East and East* 63.3, 2013: 344-52; The Cowherds (*Moonshadows*, 2011 (chps. 8, 11 in particular); and Huntington 1989: xiv, 8-11, 43-7, 133-6; 2007: 112-3. Several of these attempts have strong ties to fictionalism, linking the conventional truth's utility to make-believe in fictitious entities (e.g., Priest, Siderits, & Tillemans 2011: 143-4). See fictionalism above.

[40] This distinction is drawn by Priest, Siderits, and Tillemans 2011: 135, citing Richard L. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction*, MIT Press, 1995: 212, 215. Kirkham (1995: 212-3) defines the former as "(*t*)(*t* is true iff *t* is useful to believe)" and the latter as "Truth correlates positively with usefulness and it is relatively easy to determine when a proposition (sentence, or belief, etc.) has this characteristic", thus demonstrating how the former presupposes the latter. William James' account of pragmatism seems to blend these two together (as regarding theology, religion, and absolute; cf. *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, Longmans, Green, & Co., 1907: 72-3) but tends to favour the second via empiricism and verificationism: "True ideas are those we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot. That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as" (1907: 201).

[41] Insofar as James characterizes pragmatism specifically as a *method*, this is fitting (1907: 51, 53). Kirkham points out some difficulties with instrumentalism as a theory of justification (1995: 215) that are convincing for making it *a* criterion of truth but not its *sole* criterion. There is nonetheless a requirement of appeal to other factors in a comprehensive justification, such as to the facts themselves (e.g., "if my belief that a life vest will keep me from drowning proves useful, this is probably because it is a fact that life vests prevent drowning") or to coherence with other beliefs (e.g., "a useful belief per se does not seem much more likely to cohere with other beliefs or to be eventually agreed to by everyone with sufficient relevant experiences than a useless belief" (1995: 215)).

[42] A deflationary account is provided by Priest, Siderits, & Tillemans 2011: 132-50 and Tillemans 2019a: 80-96 ("Deflating the Two Images and the Two Truths: *Bons baisers* du Tibet", W*ilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy: Freedom from Foundations* (ed. Jay Garfield), Routledge, 2019). The above accounts struggle with deflationism regarding the ultimate truth (via the Abhidharmic model, not the apophatic Madhyamaka model I suggest in its place) insofar as, if ultimate statements satisfy the T-schema, they do so in contradiction of the conventional truth (see Priest, Siderits, & Tillemans 2011: 139, 148). On the other hand, if the ultimate truth is non-conceptual and non-dual in form, then none of this can apply to it.

[43] As anteceded in the Aristotelian definitions of truth: i) "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, whereas to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true" (*Metaphysics* Γ.7, 1011b25 (trans. C.D.C. Reeve),

referred to statements in the conventional truth and *p* were conceived via epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism as strictly referring to a mind-dependent objects of cognitive experience (taken in the broadest sense to accommodate abstract objects, facts, events, processes, etc.),[44] this account is plausible for the Madhyamaka, as it would be for pragmatists like James.[45] Thus, truth's most basic scheme (the correspondence principle),[46] when adapted to the Mādhyamikas' non-standard semantic framework, could be satisfied without any epistemologically foundationalist, metaphysically realist pretensions of correspondence with a mind-independent reality. This is, effectively, another way of describing "contact" (*sparśa*, the sixth link in the chain of dependent origination): contact occurs from the conjunction of a sense organ (e.g., the eye), a form (e.g., a visual form), and a sense-consciousness (e.g., eye-consciousness, a conscious visual perception), each inconceivable apart from this phenomenological interrelation. Seeing as this is a canonically established position, admitting the weakened correspondence principle as restricted to this phenomenological and cognitive context should not be troublesome.[47]

That the Mādhyamikas are necessarily critical of any strong (tinged by metaphysical realism) form of the correspondence principle has been duly noted by scholars.[48] Siderits admits that the Mādhyamikas

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Metaphysics, Hackett, 2016: 65); ii) "What is affirmed or denied in a statement is a matter of fact" (*Categories* 12b11, 1938: 87); iii): "The existence of a man, for example, necessitates the truth of the statement wherein we assert his existence. The converse is also the case. For if he exists, then the statement asserting that fact will be true. If the statement, conversely, is true, then the man referred to must exist" (*Categories* 14b14, 1938: 101).

[44] Epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism in the conventional truth are the subject of chapter 4.

[45] According to James (1907: 198), "Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their 'agreement,' as falsity means their disagreement, with 'reality.' Pragmatists and intellectualists both accept this definition as a matter of course. They begin to quarrel only after the question is raised as to what may precisely be meant by the term 'agreement,' and what by the term 'reality,' when reality is taken as something for our ideas to agree with". This basic correspondence principle upheld, the great debate can then proceed.

[46] Johannes Bronkhorst (*Language and Reality: On an Episode in Indian Thought* (trans. Michael S. Allen & Rajam Raghunathan), Brill, 2011) has carried out extensive work on the role and development of the correspondence principle in Indian philosophy, including Nāgārjuna's role therein. He says (2011: 39), "Primarily representing an intuition, the correspondence principle was not immediately subjected to logical analysis. On the contrary, only rarely do we find a more or less explicit formulation of it in the literature of the period. Even so, this does not warrant our rejecting it as something unexpressed and logically implausible". Nāgārjuna, of course, contributes to this development without himself explicitly stating any version of the correspondence principle.

[47] Salvini (2016: 416) defends Candrakīrti's notion of the conventional truth based on the notion of contact, which he explains as being presented in Abhidharmic terms: "This scheme, as Candrakīrti's commentary clarifies, is closely connected with the analysis of causality: in this case, the object (visible entities) and the sense-faculty (the eye) are the cause for the arising of a specific cognition (visual consciousness)" (2016: 416).

[48] See Huntington 1989: 31; Garfield 2002: 25, 52, 66; Westerhoff 2009a: 219-20; 2010a: 12; Siderits 2016: 14-24, 29, 41-2,

could only permit "an *ersatz* correspondence, not the correspondence of metaphysical realism" that specifically makes connections at the level of the conventional truth with no reference to any ultimate level (in the sense of mind-independent reality).[49] Seemingly contrary to his previous comment about an unanalyzed set of "brutely given practices", he says that Nāgārjuna would agree that

> one would be justified in holding any belief that was induced through some causal route that was identified by the theory as a means of knowledge. Such beliefs would constitute knowledge. What Nāgārjuna denies is that such beliefs in any way 'mirror' or 'correspond to' a mind-independent existent. […] Such beliefs may well deserve the title 'knowledge' […]. But we cannot then claim that a belief induced by one of the causal routes we have identified as means of knowledge corresponds to reality.[50]

That much must be certain if the conventional truth is to possess any normative distinction from conventional falsity.

How deflationism differs from pragmatism with respect to correspondence is not clear. James' own account admits this basic criterion of correspondence but is likewise somewhat skeptical of this "reality", reducing it to an object of cognitive experience.[51] MacKenzie's account blends features of both, settling on what he calls "weak deflationism".[52] There are features of both pragmatic and deflationary accounts of truth amenable to the Mādhyamikas' conventional truth: pragmatism *qua* consequentialism mirrors

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52-62, 244-5. On the other hand, Bronkhort's work on Nāgārjuna's investigations of the correspondence principle seems to indicate that, while Nāgārjuna *may* have held some version thereof, reading many of his arguments (such as his enigmatic chapter on goer and going (MMK 5)) in the context of the *inability* to satisfy the strong version thereof is illuminating (cf. Bronkhorst, "Nāgārjuna's Logic", *Bauddhavidyāsudhākara: Studies in Honour of Heinz Bechert on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (eds. Petra Kieffer-Pülz and Jens-Uwe Hartmann), Swisttal-Odendorf, 1997: 29-36.

[49] Siderits 2016: 245. The reason for this contradiction may be that Siderits is strictly discussing Candrakīrti in that Prāsaṅgika context, an interpretation he may not distribute to Nāgārjuna.

[50] Siderits 2016: 29. I discuss what such "means of knowledge" consist for the Madhyamaka in chapter 4 (§4.1).

[51] James' account of this "reality" is vague but decidedly anti-realist in its reduction to cognitive experience: "*In the relative sense*, then, the sense in which we contrast reality with simple *un*reality, and in which one thing is said to have *more* reality than another, and to be more believed, *reality means simply relation to our emotional and active life*. This is the only sense which the word ever has in the mouths of practical men. *In this sense, whatever excites and stimulates our interest is real*" (*Principles of Psychology*, Harvard University Press, 1983: 924—*emphasis original*); "By 'realities' or 'objects' here, we mean either things of common sense, sensibly present, or else common-sense relations, such as dates, places, distances, kinds, activities" (1907: 206) and "Realities mean, then, either concrete facts, or abstract kinds of things and relations perceived intuitively between them. They furthermore and thirdly mean, as things that new ideas of ours must no less take account of, the whole body of other truths already in our possession" (1907: 212).

[52] Matthew MacKenzie, "Ontological Deflationism", *Contemporary Buddhism* 9.2, 2008: 204-5. This is contrasted with what he calls a "strong deflationism" eschewing making any ontological claims: "It would be best to interpret Madhyamaka as a form of weak deflationism. Some ontological claims can and should be affirmed, but to do so does not require a commitment to the ontological foundationalism that animates the project of Ontology. Indeed, according to the Mādhyamikas, the core claims of Buddhist ontology, properly understood, are empty, dependent designations, just like all other claim"" (2008: 204). These are consequently reduced to the conventional truth (2008: 204).

the conventional truth's concern for the consequences (both philosophical *and* soteriological) that the valid cognition of ordinary experience will have in cognitive experience itself in the transformation of invalid cognition into valid cognition, while deflationism specifically addresses the misconception of substantialism regarding the nature of truth and its relation to the world.[53] However, if deflationism is *dismissive* about truth in suggesting there is nothing more to it than this tautological schema, investigating no further,[54] then pragmatism *qua* consequentialism (adapted to the weakened correspondence principle) in cognitive experience would be a better model for the Madhyamaka in the case that that pragmatism *qua* consequentialism is configured as pragmatic-soteriological utility (with special attention paid to the soteriological consequences of the valid cognition of ordinary experience the conventional truth affords).[55] While the Mādhyamikas are specifically concerned with deflating any realist epistemological and metaphysical pretensions in the conventional truth, they are nonetheless deeply concerned with *how* and *why* the conventional truth *is true* and how it is to be differentiated from false theories of the truth.

To that end, I need not necessarily endorse either a pragmatic or deflationary account of the conventional truth since it has no true analogue in Western philosophy, but I do note how both accounts together can be used to justify the normative standards it requires to be differentiated from conventional falsity. With regard to the truth's factuality, insofar as the weak form of correspondence concerns the connection between statements and that to which they refer, that criterion is a significant philosophical

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[53] As Tillemans (2019a: 89) characterizes deflationism, "A deflationary approach, as the term suggests, is thus to be contrasted with accounts of reference, truth, meaning, and existence that involve "substantive" properties that one should discover and investigate". Given the specific contrast with substantialism, deflationism is a natural corollary of the Madhyamaka critiques of such insofar as it provides "a level playing field with no substantial positions on the real sense of "existence" or the real sense of "truth"" (2019a: 90).

[54] According to Bardley Armour-Garb, Daniel Stoljar, & James Woodbridge, "The common mistake is to assume that truth *has* a nature of the kind that philosophers might find out about and develop theories of. The main idea of the deflationary approach is (a) that all that can be significantly said about truth is exhausted by an account of the role of the expression 'true' or of the concept of truth in our talk and thought, and (b) that, by contrast with what traditional views assume, this role is neither metaphysically substantive nor explanatory. For example, according to deflationary accounts, to say that 'snow is white' is true, or that it is true that snow is white, is in some sense strongly equivalent to saying simply that snow is white, and this, according to the deflationary approach, is all that can be said significantly about the truth of 'snow is white'. Philosophers looking for some underlying nature of some truth property that is attributed with the use of the expression 'true' are bound to be frustrated, the deflationist says, because they are looking for something that isn't there" ("Deflationism About Truth", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2023 Edition; eds. Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman); available here; accessed April 2025).

[55] I return to this characterization of the conventional truth in terms of *pragmatic-soteriological utility* in chapter 7 (§7.1).

and epistemological axiom to which the conventional truth is nonetheless beholden, but only in the Mādhyamikas' non-standard, conventional semantic framework. We have already seen this principle at work in embryonic form insofar as that to which those conventionally true statements refer is the basis of designation (the objective support (*ārambaṇa*/*ālambana*)).[56] Likewise, the semantic framework in which those statements are situated and through which the correspondence criterion is contextualized (i.e., the context in which they have meaning and validity) is the Mādhyamikas' non-standard, conventional semantic framework of dependence relations, the mind–world model of cognitive experience. Given *that* restriction, the form of correspondence is weakened to correspondence strictly within the mind–world model, as an artifact of cognitive experience. I will demonstrate in this chapter how the Mādhyamikas critique the most prevalent forms of conventional falsity eschewing or misconstruing this criterion (discussed below as the "causal condition of perception"), thus demonstrating its necessity in the conventional truth. At the same time, the semantic framework in which to situate the weakened form of correspondence is further elaborated in chapter 4 to consist of epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism by means of the same mind–world model of cognitive experience, meaning that any correspondence obtains strictly within that model.

Insofar as Buddhist philosophy concerns understanding the nature of the mind and its cognitive experience in the specific soteriological context of suffering and its alleviation, the conventional truth's purpose is not *just* crafting a tool to better transact with or function in mundanity, though this may indeed be a consequence thereof. The conventional truth is not about, e.g., finding the best material with which to build a bridge but the conditions of the valid cognition of ordinary experience leading to the end of suffering. Buddhist pragmatism in that sense of its cognitive interpretation must ultimately be tinged with soteriological concerns. In that respect, the conventional truth has loftier pedagogical, philosophical, and soteriological intentions and consequences insofar as the valid cognition of ordinary experience becomes

[56] See the discussion of the basis of designation in chapter 2 (§§2.2.2).

a philosophical tool for an ultimately soteriological end. This is how it is to be thoroughly differentiated from any of its Western philosophical counterparts.

§3.2 CONVENTION CATEGORIZED AS TRUTH & FALSITY

Given two epistemological categories (conventional truth and falsity), when discussing "convention" it is sometimes the conventional truth to which the Mādhyamikas refer; in other contexts, it is rather conventional falsity. Not making this distinction clear leads to confusions regarding their orientations towards "convention", including invalidating the conventional truth's philosophical value. I examine the term "*loka*" (the *loka* of *lokasaṃvṛti, lokavyavahāra*, *lokasaṃvṛtisatya*, and *alokasaṃvṛti*) to secure the conditions of this distinction. *Loka* stands for the world at large and everything, including the ordinary beings, found therein; it is a stand-in for the ordinary mind and its ordinary mode of experience. As it encompasses both the subject and objects of cognitive experience, it is thus subject to the twofold division of conventional truth and falsity. It includes all sentient beings and their experiences, but, in the context of the conventional truth, prioritizes the world as cognized by the *ārya*s.[57] On this reading, the *ārya*s are not a separate ontological class but are differentiated from ordinary beings in terms of attainment, their mode of cognitive experience.[58] This is because they engage the world through its valid cognition (via the conventional truth) and not its invalid cognition (via conventional falsity).

Candrakīrti is both critical (e.g., MĀ 6:30, 104) and laudatory (e.g., MĀ 6:82-3, 166) of *loka*; this

[57] Thakchöe (2011: 43) explains that *loka* is "(1) the aggregates and (2) the person designated dependently upon the aggregates. Hence, according to commentators such as Tsongkhapa, *loka* applies to all sentient beings that are *persons*. Not only ordinary confused beings but also enlightened beings—*āryas, arhats*, *bodhisattvas*, and *buddhas* are, on this characterization of *loka*, "mundane", "worldly", or "ordinary"". By discussing these beings in the context of the aggregates, their mundanity must be in reference to their embodiment in physical form. However, *loka* cannot be so narrowly restricted to only refer to persons and the aggregates on which they depend, for it surely must also include the worldly phenomena with which they interact.

[58] In that vein, the distinction between ordinary perceptions and the perceptions of the *ārya*s (those who have realized or attained the ultimate truth) is a distinction of the utmost significance for the two truths (cf. MĀ 6:30-1, especially MĀB 6:31ab). I am not presently concerned with the differences between conventional truth in the mind of the ordinary folk and in the mind of the *ārya*s (later in PART II (chapter 7) I discuss this under the distinction Candrakīrti makes between *saṃvṛtisatya* and *saṃvṛtimātra* (the "merely conventional")). The contrast between *ārya*s and the ordinary mind shows that the two truths distinction is not just a dilletante philosophical distinction between right/wrong or even two competing kinds of truth but rather an experiential and cognitive distinction of soteriological attainment. At this point in my argument, the conventional truth must first be approached in the terms of the ordinary mind (as opposed to a retrospective of the conventional truth post-attainment of the ultimate, though Candrakīrti himself mixes their explication, contributing to the confusion).

must be because its criticism refers to conventional falsity and its laud to conventional truth. For this reason, any "populist" understanding of his acquiescence thereto (as Tillemans might hold for Candrakīrti)[59] is not appropriately reflective of his nuanced take. What Candrakīrti accepts as "established in the world" or "true for the world" is not the totality of conventions but only a specific subset thereof associable with the conventional truth. Salvini shows that Candrakīrti under no circumstances advocates a blanket acceptance of worldly conventions: what is accepted as "existent" or "non-existent" in the conventional context and how it is accepted as such

> must include what is highly regarded (*saṁmata*) to be so by the Noble Ones (*ārya*s). This means that, while it is true that Candrakīrti reads the *Ratnakūṭa* passage [(discussed in chapter 1, §§1.2.1)] as implying that the Buddha took as a starting point the conventional perception of an audience that is not quite omniscient, it is also clear that Candrakīrti does not restrict the audience as being 'immature ordinary people' (*bālapṛthagjana*), and implicitly offers a more nuanced reading of the sense of 'highly regarded in the world' (*loke saṁmatam*).[60]

Those who are "highly regarded in the world" thusly validly cognize *loka* and the sphere of ordinary experience in contrast with those "immature ordinary people" who invalidly cognize it. Insofar as i) the teaching of the ultimate rests on convention (MMK 24:10, VV 28), ii) the conventional is the means to the ultimate (MĀ 6:80), and, on that basis, iii) the Mādhyamikas do not quarrel with the world (MĀ 6:166), what must therefore be rejected is only conventional falsity. Thus, against any populist interpretation, "those who perceive or think of things wrongly, which could very well be the majority of

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[59] Tillemans (2019b: 641) describes the populist interpretation of Candrakīrti's *lokaprasiddha* and *saṃvṛtisatya* in the following ways: Candrakīrti's conventional truth is "a rather dumbed down truth, with no demand for expertise, and accessibly easily to all". Further, "customary existence and truth are somehow copies, or reflections, of what the average worldlings in fact think across time and culture, or perhaps just what the sixth century Indian *hoi polloi*, or at least most of them, did think" (2019b: 637). Conversely, Tillemans (2019b: 642) emphasizes in the same article that this is decidedly not the position taken by later interpreters such as Tsong Khapa. He squarely blames Candrakīrti for this interpretation of the conventional truth. See my discussion chapter 1 (§§1.2.1) of the context of Tillemans' description from a certain passage cited by Candrakīrti.

[60] Salvini 2019: 669. It is important to underscore that any time a phenomenon, though "highly regarded in the world", is considered as "existent", this could only ever mean *conventionally* existent (that is, valid only at the level of the conventional truth; see chapter 4 (§4.2) on metaphysical anti-realism). Salvini (2019: 662) observes how "Nāgārjuna and his Indian commentators […] take Abhidharma (minus ultimate *svabhāva*) as the basic, valid framework of conventions (i.e., as *saṃvṛtisatya*)". The note to this passage adds "If Candrakīrti accepts conventionally what the 'world' accepts, this is unlikely to mean that he accepts whatever the majority says to be the case, without any consideration of its cogency (as we will see, Candrakīrti excludes incoherent conceptualization from the scope of conventional truth). If that were the case it would be difficult to make sense of Candrakīrti's constant engagement with the most refined sets of conventions available to him, i.e., the Abhidharma, *vyākaraṇa*, etc." (2019: 662 n.5).

people, are not what is meant by 'the world' (*loka*)" in the conventional truth.[61]

At the same time, Li notes that the world on which Candrakīrti bases the conventional truth is "largely unreflective on philosophical matters".[62] I relate this to the previous discussion of ordinary discourse *pre*-convergence with Madhyamaka philosophical discourse (chapter 2, §2.3), as a matter of pedagogy. This refers to the ordinary, conventional ontology of which the Buddhists make extensive use (in a weakened, deflated form), the conventional contents of the world such as people, pots, chariots, etc. of conventional discourse. Nonetheless, I stress that this methodological reliance does not make the conventional truth itself "largely unreflective on philosophical matters" for there is a clash in how ordinary beings and *ārya*s cognize ordinary experience through different semantic frameworks. It is for this reason that the canon contains extended discussions of the *four noble truths*, the *five aggregates*, *dependent origination*, *conditionality*, etc. to present a cognitive template suitable for the valid cognition of such conventional phenomena, despite the fact that these are not typically 'ordinary' notions. On the contrary, these are precisely notions the *ārya*s consider and share with the untutored *loka* for their benefit.

I add further that, for all the derisive talk of ignorance (e.g., YṢ 28-9, 37; MĀ 6:30-1) nearly always accompanied by a comparison to the wise, it is difficult to conclude that the Mādhyamikas should uncritically accept the worldly view just as it is when the ignorance it contains is the very reason for bondage in *saṃsāra*. At the same time, as they attempt to avoid being misunderstood as nihilists who deny the world,[63] a *middle way* between its blanket acceptance and total rejection should be sought. That middle way is also the conventional truth as differentiated from conventional falsity in either extreme, both of which are "conventional" but one the valid and the other the invalid cognition of that world.

The scope of *loka* having been explained in the context of the division of conventional truth from falsity, the Madhyamaka treatment of each epistemological category can now be examined.

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[61] Salvini 2019: 664.
[62] Li 2019: 60.
[63] At PSP 360-70, Candrakīrti launches a comparison of the Madhyamaka with the nihilists and defends the Madhyamaka position in contradistinction with the latter. MĀ 6:159d emphatically states: "Do not destroy (*mā … nāśaya*) the conventions established in the world (*saṃvṛtim … lokaprasiddhām*); *mā saṃvṛtiṃ nāśaya lokaprassidhām* || (Li 2015: 23).

§3.3 CONVENTIONAL FALSITY

I demonstrate the scope of conventional falsity through two aspects: i) perceptual error or an empirical falsity, explained via false sense perception, and ii) wrong conceptualization or a philosophical falsity, which is related to "wrong views" (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*). Both are considered elements of the invalid cognition of ordinary experience and, hence, correlated with conventional falsity. The more philosophically relevant of the two is the latter. Wrong view comes in many shapes and forms,[64] which Paul Fuller has broadly categorized as "views that deny that actions have consequences" and "views of self".[65] All permutations of wrong views are rooted in views about the existence (or non-existence) of the self (i.e., "the view of the transitory collection" (*satkāyadṛṣṭi*; Pāli: *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*; Tib: *'jigs tshogs la lta ba*), an identity view)—"the seed out of which all speculations evolve".[66] That is, from the belief in the existence (or not) of the self, the belief in the existence (or not) of the world it inhabits follows.

The Mādhyamikas' specific treatment of wrong view will focus on the intellectual ignorance at its centre, its philosophical incongruity with the philosophical baseline of dependence relations, its inability to account for the valid cognition of ordinary experience, and, in the wider context of their philosophical-soteriological project, the *a*soteriological consequences of holding to wrong views.[67] My concern here is

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[64] The *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1; see Bodhi 2008b) lists 62 wrong views rejected by the Buddha, which is likely the most comprehensive list of wrong views found in any Buddhist literature. According to Bodhi (2008b: 5), "The scheme of sixty-two cases is a net cast out by the Buddha upon the ocean of human thought, designed to catch and contain all possible philosophical theories on the nature of the self and the universe". The text is not always transparent in its argumentative strategies, but the Buddha's refutations ultimately resort to dependent origination in some form but also, on "clinging" to these views and their contents (see PART II, chapter 6). In a Mahāyāna context, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* (13:28) also treats categories of wrong views. Cf. Gelongma Karma Migme Chodron (trans.), *The Treatise on the Great Virtue of Wisdom of Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñaapāramitāśāstra)* (vol.1)), N.P., 2001: 340-1.

[65] Fuller 2005: 16-24, 25-39. The first category includes wrong views such as the view of moral nihilism and the denial of causality in a *karmic* context; the second includes views such as the personality view and annihilationist views about the self. Bodhi (2008b: 4) classifies wrong views in three general categories: i) "wrong views with fixed consequences (*niyatamicchādiṭṭhi*)", ii) "speculative views (*diṭṭhigata*)", and iii) "personality view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*)".

[66] Bodhi 2008b: 4. On the same page, he writes, "Speculative views [(i.e., the second of Bodhi's classification; see above footnote)] include all metaphysical theories. Religious creeds, and philosophical tenets concerning issues that lie beyond the reach of possible experiential verification. These views are not necessarily an obstacle to rebirth in the higher worlds, but in every case act as impediments to the path to liberation. All such views arise out of the personality view, the fundamental belief in a self or ego-entity which, as the root of its more sophisticated philosophical elaborations, is reckoned separately".

[67] Bodhi (2008b: 6) offers the following context for the views critiqued in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, which must be restricted to strictly refer to *wrong* views: "[Wrong] Views proceed from ignorance and blindness rather than knowledge. They involve misinterpretations of experience stemming from subjective distortions of the actual experiential data. They proclaim a part of the truth to be the whole, as in the sale of the mind men who take their own limited conceptions of the elephant to represent the animal in its fullness. [Wrong] Views lead to conceit, to extolling oneself and disparaging others who hold different views.

specifically the philosophical and cognitive aspects thereof. More than just critiquing wrong views about the nature of selfhood and the experience of subjectivity, the Madhyamaka (and the Mahāyāna more generally) extend the critique of selflessness/non-self (*anātman*, *pudgalanairātmya*) to the selflessness of *all* phenomena (*dharmanairātmya*) via the mind–world model of cognitive experience.

Its textual basis comes from the "twofold" (*dvividhā*) aspects Candrakīrti prescribes to convention, associated with the correct/incorrect functioning of the sense organs (*indriya*) and the true/false knowledge (*jñāna*) derived therefrom.[68] It is also what Prajñākaramati calls "false convention" (*mithyā-saṃvṛti*).[69] It may carry the same implications of "worldly" (from *loka*) in the negative: when convention or the conventional world is *lokasaṃvṛti*, its negation is *alokasaṃvṛti*, meaning loosely what is non-mundane or untrue for the world (i.e., conventionally).[70] Thus, the conventions to which the Mādhyamikas appeal exclude conventional falsity so marked. This occurs every time there is the denial of any particular position or assertion, such as when saying "that is not the case" (*etat ca nāsti*, *na upapadyate*), that is "not suitable" (*na yuktaḥ*), or "does not exist" (*na vidyate*). For the Mādhyamikas to be in any way consistent in their argumentation, they must deny such positions as incompatible with the valid cognition of ordinary experience (the collection of which positions constitutes conventional falsity). These denials suggest a position better suited to its valid cognition: the conventional truth.

They result in *dogmatic clinging*, when one takes what one believes to be the only truth and declares everything else to be false. […] And finally, the adherence to views maintains the forward movement of the round of becoming [(i.e., *saṃsāra*)] by obstructing the acceptance of the right view that leads to the cessation of the round and by condition kammic accumulations that precipitate renewed existence. It is the last-mentioned danger that is especially emphasized in the Brahmajāla Sutta".

[68] MĀ 6:24-5: "The wrongly seen (*mṛṣā-dṛśe*) [(i.e., the conventional truth of MĀ 6:23 juxtaposed with the "correctly seen" ultimate)] is understood twofoldly (*dvividhā matā*) [via] the correctly functioning sense-organs (*spaṣṭa-indriyāḥ*) and incorrectly functioning sense-organs (*doṣavat-indriyāḥ*). With reference to the knowledge derived from the correct senses (*sadindriya-jñānam apekṣya*), it is understood (*matam*) that there is the false knowledge (*mithyā jñānam*) of the faulty sense-organs (*doṣavat-indriyāṇām*). That which the world grasps (*grāhyam avaiti lokaḥ*) by the six sense-organs without defect (*vinā upaghātena yat indriyāṇām ṣaṇṇām*), that is true for the world (*satyam hi tat lokataḥ*). The remaining fabrication[s] (*śeṣam vikalpitam*) for the world are consequently false (*lokataḥ eva mithyā*)"; *mṛṣādṛśe 'pi dvividhā matā hi spaṣṭendriyā doṣavadindriyāś ca | sadindriyajñānamapekṣya mithyā jñānaṃ mataṃ doṣavadindriyāṇām || vinopaghātena yadindriyāṇāṃ ṣaṇṇāmapi grāhyamavaiti lokaḥ | satyaṃ hi tallokata eva śeṣaṃ vikalpitaṃ lokata eva mithyā ||* (Li 2015: 7). See also Newman 2024: 85 for commentary on this passage.

[69] BCAP 353.7: *sā ca saṃvṛtirdvividhā lokata eva, tathyasaṃvṛtirmithyāsaṃvṛtiśceti |* (Vaidya 1960a: 171; see Oldmeadow 1994: 15 and Salvini 2009: 266).

[70] Thakchöe discusses *aloka* in 2011: 42 and *The Two Truths in Indian Buddhism*, Wisdom Publications, 2023: 167; Salvini (2019: 662-7) discusses what cannot be authoritative *loka* for Candrakīrti and is hence *aloka*; see his translation of PSP 492 (2019: 690).

It is called "*conventional* falsity" because it concerns ordinary experience and it has conventional characteristics, neither of which allow it to attain the status of *saṃvṛtisatya*. *Saṃvṛti*'s second etymological sense ("convention, worldliness")[71] presents the conditions of the conventional falsity's *conventionality* (though in a semantic context differing from the conventional truth). This references objects of ordinary experience like persons, chariots, pots, etc., though in this context these objects are invalidly cognized as "real" in a certain erroneous way (i.e., by means of wrong view); as such, their cognition fails to attain the status of the conventional truth (i.e., right view). This invalid cognition allows for conventional falsity's "conventional" aspect from *saṃvṛti* without predicating to it *satya*. It is rather *saṃvṛti*'s third sense ("dependence relations")[72] that is the difference maker: it admits *no correlation* with conventional falsity, indicating a metric for its differentiation from the conventional truth.

There are two avenues from which to diagnose conventional falsity: perceptual and philosophical.[73] Both are required insofar as any given cognitive experience has these two criteria. Candrakīrti's cataracts analogy, the centrepiece of his critique of conventional falsity, combines both in demonstrating the scope and contents of its cognitive invalidity. The Mādhyamikas use the term "cataracts" (*timira*/*taimira*) loosely, in a non-medical sense, to refer to a variety of visionary defects;[74] such defects stand for defects in sensory organs in general but, more importantly, how those sensations (impaired or not) are cognized. Conventional falsity's perceptual criterion discusses actual sense impairments leading to false perceptions; its philosophical criterion investigates wrong view. Both, separately and concomitantly,

[71] See chapter 1 (§§1.2.2).
[72] See chapter 1 (§§1.2.3).
[73] Cf. Salvini 2023: 410, 416; 2019: 664, 666, 669 on these distinctions. E.g., "Candrakīrti distinguishes between the perception of the illusory referent (*upalabhdam*) and the conceptual misconstruction of their being truly existent (*satyataḥ parikalpitam*)" (2019: 669). Likewise, Li (2019: 52) identifies four conditions of conventional falsity that could be re-organized under these two categories: "(1) when sense faculties are defective, (2) when the mind is adversely affected, (3) when external conditions producing the experience of the unreal such as [a] mirage, dream, echo, moon in the water, magic show, and reflection are present, or (4) when one is influenced by incorrect philosophical perceptions".
[74] At times it appears to refer to the perception of "black lines" or "hairs" (*keśa*) in the field of vision, at others to the perception of a "double moon" (double vision, or the reflection of the moon in water) when there is in fact only one moon. The analogy is originally found in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (3.51; see Vaidya, *Saddharmalaṅkāvatārasūtram*, Mithila Institute, 1963: 69), which Candrakīrti cites at PSP 262. It frequently appears in the MĀ at, e.g., 6:29, 41, 54-5, 105, and 108 and is further discussed in the PSP (in the context of the tripartite etymology of *saṃvṛti* at PSP 493).

make for the invalid cognition of ordinary experience. Given the focus on the latter (from the anecdote at MĀB 6:29),[75] "cataracts" function mainly as an analogy for philosophical falsity in the sense of an erroneous cognition of phenomena operative in general perception (i.e., "the eye-disease of ignorance" (*avidyā-taimirika*)).[76] There can be thus cataracts on the *mind's eye*, an obscurant to valid cognition.

Insofar as conventional falsity is correlated with the invalid cognition of ordinary experience, its perceptual criterion applies to ignorance of a sensory defect with cognitive undertones, such as a sense impairment (like a cataract in the eye) causing the afflicted to think they see hairs, black lines, etc. that exist *out there* in the world. This malcognition is a consequence of the belief that the eye itself is not defective because what is seen indeed exists externally. Its philosophical criterion applies to ordinary phenomena, such as persons, chariots, etc. that, although they certainly appear as such to those with unimpaired senses, are likewise wrongly cognized as existing externally in a mind- and convention-independent way. This is how the cases are analogous, for both concern the cognition of *appearances*: ignorance of a sensory defect serves as an analogy for ignorance of a cognitive defect. Both are equated with conventional falsity for reifying the perceived, for uncritically believing in the immediate reality of perceptions in the way they appear, and both are critiqued from the perspective of the conventional truth as invalid cognitions on that basis.

This reificationist malcognition in both cases can be summarized as "default realism",[77] as uncritically

[75] At MĀB 6:29, Candrakīrti recounts the story of the one who suffers from cataracts but does not understand that such defective eyesight is an *internal* phenomenon rather than externally present; see Liland (2020: 166-7) and Churinoff (1994: 65) for a full translation of the passage since paraphrasing suffices for the present purposes. Believing the "hairs" to be really present in the bowl, the afflicted unsuccessfully tries to scrape these hairs from the bowl in front of them, while the one with unafflicted sight might wonder why this person is continuously scraping and upending the empty bowl to no avail.

[76] Cf. Salvini 2019: 669.

[77] "Default realism" is associated with the *svabhāva* doctrine the Madhyamaka critique (see chapter 4 (§4.2) for its discussion in the philosophical context of metaphysical realism). Currently, its more ordinary aspects are relevant. Westerhoff (2009a: 47-8) says that "*svabhāva* is here not regarded as a theoretical posit, as something an ontologist or a semanticist might postulate when investigating the world or its representation in language. The underlying idea here is rather that seeing objects in terms of *svabhāva* is a kind of cognitive default which is criticized by Madhyamaka arguments against *svabhāva* […]. It is important to realize that *svabhāva* is seen here as playing a fundamental *cognitive* role insofar as objects are usually conceptualized in terms of *svabhāva*. This conceptualization (which the Mādhyamika tries to argue is also theoretically deficient) is taken to be the ultimate cause of suffering". This "default realism" is a reification of the objects of perception. Accordingly, Collobert (2022: 13 n.32) argues this reification is not "automatic" in the sense of innate and uncontrollably determined precisely because the cognition arises under certain mental conditions (such as ignorance and clinging (*upādāna*)); likewise, for this reason, it can cease. Arising and cessation as such are the hallmark of dependent origination.

taking all perceived phenomena to have *extralinguistic*, *extracognitive* reality.[78] At MĀB 6:23, Candrakīrti describes this ignorance, this erroneous cognition, as it

> finds its existence (*bdag gi yod*) through the power of the false perception (*mthong ba brdzun pa'i stobs las*) of the complete obscurations *(ma lus par khebs pa rnams kyi*) of the mind's eye (*blo'i mig*) of the ordinary person (*so so'i skye bo'i*) by the clouded vision of cataracts (*ma rig pa'i rab rib kyi ling thog gis*). The objects perceived by childish beings (*byis pa rnams kyi mthong ba'i yul du*) in this way are not self-established (*rang gi ngo bos grub pa ni ma yin*)".[79]

Ordinarily, phenomena *do* appear to exist out there, irrespective of my perception insofar as when I close my eyes the world does not disappear. Neither such appearances nor the perception thereof should be denied, only their malcognition.[80] The exercise rejects neither the experience of the afflicted by denying the appearance of these hairs *from their perspective* nor the ordinary appearance of external objects for the unafflicted *from their perspective*. Rather, it investigates the conditions of those appearances' valid/invalid cognitions by interrogating the existential status of the object in its phenomenological relation to the perceiver (the subject).

To demonstrate the analogical nature of Candrakīrti's argument (who is certainly not an ophthalmologist), we must consider its context and to whom it is directed. It is not likely directed at those literally suffering from cataracts, whom he could not fix save for telling them that the hairs are not really there. Instead, the argument refutes an opponent's philosophical position by analogy to cataracts. In that case, the argument's versatility is its applicability to both metaphysical realists and idealists. As a philosophical argument, the analogy demonstrates the empirical necessity of what may be called the *causal condition of perception* in a conventional context,[81] but this is not a strong form of one-way

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[78] See Thakchöe 2015: 99; discussed in chapter 2 (§§2.2.3, p. 109 fn. 78 above).

[79] MĀB 6:23: […] *so so'i skye bo'i ma rig pa'i rab rib kyi ling thog gis blo'i mig ma lus par khebs pa rnams kyi mthong ba brdzun pa'i stobs las bdag gi yod pa rnyed pa yin te | byis pa rnams kyi mthong ba'i yul du 'gyur pa ji lta ba de lta bu'i rang bzhin du rang gi ngo bos grub pa ni ma yin no* | (Liland 2020: 160; cf. Churinoff 1994: 62). Examples of malcognition, according to MĀ 6:26, are the "self" as it is imagined by *Tīrthika*s (non-Buddhists), mirages, and other such illusions.

[80] I.e., as Śāntideva says succinctly at BCA 9:26, "The manner in which [a phenomenon] is seen, heard, or known (*yathā dṛṣṭam śrutam jñatam*) is not here negated (*na eva iha pratiṣidhyate*), but [that] the fabrication is *real* (*satyataḥ kalpanā*) is denied (*nivāryate*), [as that belief is] the cause of suffering (*duḥkha-hetuḥ*); *yathā dṛṣṭaṃ śrutaṃ jñataṃ naiveha pratiṣidhyate | satyataḥ kalpanā tvatra duḥkhaheturnirvāryate* || (Vaidya 1960a: 193).

[81] In §3.1, this was characterized as a weakened form of correspondence (i.e., Tarski's T-schema) necessary to establishing the relation of truth in the connection between a sentence/proposition (<*p*>) and its referents (*p*, a state of affairs).

causality with mind-independent entities in any realist fashion. Consider the following:

> [MĀ 6:55:] If cognition (*buddhiḥ*) indeed could exist without an object of cognition (*jñeyam vinā syāt*), even for someone unafflicted by an eye-ailment, when their eye looks towards the location of the hairs, there would be the cognition of the hairs. This is not the case.[82]

If the perception of the cataracts did not require an object perceived (the cataracts' presence in the eye), then the unafflicted would also be able to perceive it. However, because this is not the case, a perception requires a corresponding object acting as its cause.

As with the mind–world model of cognitive experience, understanding this relation of interdependence between perception (i.e., the subject) and its object (or form and its cause, the basis of designation) is necessary for ordinary experience's valid cognition. Thus, there is both a mutual causal and conceptual interdependence therebetween. This appeals to the dependence relations (the three established in chapter 2, §§2.2.1) necessary to the valid cognition of both what appears to consciousness and of what that appearance consists. This causal condition has strong philosophical implications for both the cognizing mind and its cognitive objects with respect to the mind–world relation. Given the mind–world interdependence required by this model, the causal condition is none other than exemplary of *two-way causality* therebetween.[83]

There are four possible targets of the cataracts analogy evenly sorted in two categories, per conventional falsity's two criteria. The first category applies to perceptual misconceptions, and the second to philosophical. Each in its own way diagnoses some facet of conventional falsity. One additional case derives not from its direct relation to this analogy but conventional falsity more generally.

(1) The first perceptual case addresses those who legitimately suffer from cataracts and, therefrom, naïvely believe the perceived hairs exist externally. The afflicted implicitly acknowledge the causal condition of their perception but misunderstand the nature of that cause. The confusion is alleviated by

[82] MĀ 6:55: *jñeyaṃ vinā syādyadi nāma buddhistatkeśadeśānugalocanasya | vitaimirasyāpi ca keśabuddhiḥ syādeva na tvevamato 'sti naitat ||* (Li 2015: 11). MĀ 6:41 echoes a similar point.
[83] See chapter 1 (§§1.1.2).

pointing out that their sensory faculties are impaired by a specific, local cause (the cataract), such that their vision is not haunted wherever they look by an externality. Just like their perception, their confusion has a causal condition (and, given sufficient medical knowledge, the malady may be treated). This case's weakness as exemplifying the more profound philosophical aspects of conventional falsity is strong evidence of the exercise's analogical function; however, it does display a potent pedagogical motif if, out of compassion, there is a duty to alleviate suffering from whatever ailment in any possible way.

(2) Like the afflicted uncritically believing in the reality of appearances, the second perceptual case addresses ordinary beings who, though their senses are *un*impaired, similarly naïvely believe in the *extracognitive* reality of their perceptions. Analogously, phenomena are perceived as existing externally, reified in a mind- and convention-independent way much like the afflicted reify their impediment. Like the first case, this one also implicitly acknowledges but malcognizes the causal condition of a perception by reifying the correspondent phenomenon (this need not be done consciously and deliberately but is rather the "default" cognition of ordinary experience; in both cases, there is the cognition of whatever appears as "real" (*svabhāvic*), thus invoking parallel default realist semantic frameworks). However, unlike the first case, the unimpaired perception of the bowl is veridical (insofar as all those with healthy eyes agree there is a bowl there) but nonetheless its cognition is faulty because *svabhāvic*. This second case reveals that sense impairment itself is not the exercise's true target but the faulty cognitive conditions of perception (i.e., the "default realism" common to ordinary cognition), for which sense impairment acts as an analogy.[84] That we ordinarily behave analogously to the afflicted is exactly what the cataracts analogy intends to demonstrate. We thus ordinarily perceive (i.e., cognize) through a wrong view.

(3) In a specifically philosophical context, the exercise firstly applies against the proponents of the

[84] Per Salvini, the typical culprits identified by the Madhyamaka in this case are the commonly reified phenomena frequently discussed in the canon (the five aggregates, the six sense bases, etc.). Reifying the five aggregates as the constituent parts of the self (and on whose basis the self exists) is the aforementioned personality view. Salvini (2019: 669) writes, "[…] although ordinary people *are* looking at the transitory collection of the aggregates, they do not quite *see* them as a transitory collection. Not unlike someone who is actually looking at vitreous floaters but sees them as an externally floating hair". Although ordinarily the sensory faculties may be unafflicted, ordinary people generally still do not cognize those perceptions validly.

svabhāva doctrine (or a kindred metaphysical realism) who deliberately articulate the perceived as existing independently of all causes and conditions, especially as independently from the mind (i.e., extracognitively). This is the philosophical manifestation of the default realist cognitive orientation. Whereas its advocates take the causal condition of perception to an extreme by explicitly reifying the corresponding phenomenon, in critique the Mādhyamikas' mind–world model of cognitive experience specifically requires that the valid cognition of that world (the causal condition, the basis of designation) is only coherent within that specific cognitive framework. This implies in no way *any* possibility of the cognitive experience of the mind- and convention-independent existence of any phenomenon because it would be outside the scope of cognition, since the Mādhyamikas hold that it is incoherent from the perspective of cognition to seek what lies outside it for that would make it an object of cognition. There is no escape from that vicious circle. Nonetheless, insofar as this critique equally insists that the basis (the causal condition) is a necessary postulate at the conventional level, it thereby affirms a *minimized* (i.e., weakened) version of the causal condition but undermines this requirement's invalid cognition, which must be coherent with the Mādhyamikas' non-standard conventional semantic framework.

(4) Although I argue for its versatility, textually speaking, the following is the exercise's true target. Inverting the previous case that posited the causal condition independently of the mind's cognitive activity, against proponents of the *cittamātra* doctrine who posit the existence of the mind independently of any phenomenal basis[85] Candrakīrti establishes the dependence of the cognizing mind on that basis. In this way are the two critiques mirror images: the mind–world model of cognitive experience means that, against the Cittamātrin's postulate of the *ālaya* (cf. MĀ 6:46; MĀ 6:94 discusses *citta* in the same context), the mind can only cognize and itself be validly cognized within this same conceptual matrix and cannot cognize or be validly cognized without it. That is, the existence of the mind in the way the Cittamātrin postulates the *ālaya*, as without requiring any external element or causal condition, is

[85] See chapter 1 (§§1.1.1, p. 48 fn. 29 above).

incoherent on account of the dependence relations necessary to cognition itself. This critique further confirms the *minimized* version of the causal condition by insisting that for every perception there must be some phenomenon by which the perception is causally conditioned (or else, like at MĀ 6:55, we all could perceive these black lines or anything else at anytime, anywhere).

Because of these malcognitions of the dependence relations integral to the mind–world model of cognitive experience, invalid cognitions that through wrong views reify either the mind or the world belong to conventional falsity. Applying the valid cognition of the causal condition (i.e., the mind–world model of cognitive experience) to each case should be understood as a catch-all strategy comprising the universal appeal to the dependence relations endemic to every facet of cognitive experience.

(5) A fifth case, not directly attested in this context, nonetheless relates to the causal condition and the lack thereof in conventional falsity. Referentless expressions (i.e., expressions without empirical correlate, without any causal condition of perception, and without any experienceable basis, such as the son of a barren woman, the horns of a rabbit, or the *Tīrthika*s conception of the self) cannot withstand this basic reasoning of establishment by means of dependence relations and therefore cannot in any way be reasonably established, conventional or otherwise. For this lack of establishment, so long as such expressions have any conventional context, they are reasonably considered conventional falsity.

All cognitions unable to withstand the conventional reasoning of dependence relations, including the above cases only resolved by appeal thereto, are relegated to conventional falsity. This "conventional reasoning", the cognitions that can withstand it, and the phenomena they establish are the subject of §3.4, since this is how the conventional truth and the valid cognition of ordinary experience are demonstrated. Having examined conventional falsity as a cognitive obscuration thereto (as wrong view), evident from this critique is the necessity of dependence relations to refute invalid cognitions lacking such. Exposing such dependence relations is the conventional truth's purview in the context of its two established goals.

§3.4 VALID COGNITION IN THE CONVENTIONAL TRUTH

This final section addresses the conventional truth as correlated with a valid mode of cognitive experience

in the context of its argumentative strategies demonstrative thereof; therefrom, it addresses the conventional truth's philosophical value. Because the conventional truth satisfies two goals (to wit: i) the clearing of cognitive obscurations (i.e., the refutation of the wrong views of conventional falsity) and ii) the furnishing of a positive account of the valid cognition of ordinary experience (i.e., demonstrating the right view of the conventional truth)), I investigate the rigorous argumentation the conventional truth performs towards these ends. Conventional falsity is always refuted at the level of the conventional truth, meaning that the former's refutation occurs entirely within the framework of the latter (without relying on the ultimate). This is significant for the conventional truth's philosophical value.

As conventional falsity correlates to "wrong view", the conventional truth correlates to "right view" (*sammā-diṭṭhi*; Skt: *samyak-dṛṣṭi*). Fuller likewise categorizes right view in two: "views that affirm that actions have consequences" and "views of not-self".[86] Right view's methodology can be differentiated in two aspects: philosophical (as it prescribes the conditions of the valid cognition of ordinary experience) and soteriological (as right view, from that valid cognition, is conducive to the cessation of suffering). The canonical teachings cannot be cleanly divided by such aspects insofar as dependent origination, the five aggregates, the four noble truths (including the noble eightfold path), selflessness/non-self, etc. equally participate in both domains.[87] Without discounting its soteriological element, my present concern is restricted to right view's philosophical methodology. In that respect, I argue that, insofar as the conventional offers a right view in counter of wrong view and conventional falsity, it must do so by presenting itself in a different (i.e., conventional, non-standard) semantic framework than is situated the

[86] Fuller 2005: 42-57, 58-76. Nonetheless, Fuller's thesis regarding the specifics of right view, while in a sense amenable to being interpreted as valid cognition by means of "the dependent nature of all views, of all *dhammas*" as "impermanent, suffering and not-self" insofar as "they rise and fall", is rather a no-view: he defines it as "a radically different order of seeing which transcends all views. I am arguing that the nature of right-view is such that it should not be regarded as a view. It is the opposite of wrong-view in the sense that non-attachment is the opposite of grasping and attachment" (2005: 146). This is rather an interpretation that, to be applied to the Madhyamaka analysis, would require parsing via the two truths. Regarding the lack of views in the *ultimate truth*, see PART II (chapter 5). Regardless, I argue that there remains a context—the conventional truth—to discuss right view as offering a view (a worldview) situated in a *different* semantic context than the worldview of wrong view.

[87] Cf. MN 9, DN 22, or AN 10.104 for *sutta*s on 'right-view'. DN 22 (see Walsh 1995: 335-50) likens right view to the knowledge of the four noble truths of suffering, which collectively apply the knowledge of dependent origination and conditionality to this specific context.

wrong view it critiques.[88] As I shall demonstrate, we will see this confrontation of incompatible semantic frameworks manifest in the conventional truth's various argumentative strategies.

I underscore *saṃvṛti*'s third etymological sense ("dependence relations")[89] as establishing the philosophical baseline on which depends conventional argumentation:

> [PSP 368:] For the Mādhyamikas are proponents of dependent origination (*pratītysamutpādavādinaḥ hi mādhyamikāḥ*): because it is arisen having obtained, that is, depending on causes and conditions (*hetu-pratyayān prāpya pratītya samutpannatvāt*), they describe all [phenomena] in this world and the next (*sarvam eva ihaloka-paralokam*) as lacking *svabhāva* (*niḥsvabhāvam*).[90]

Because of this standard, which sorts dependent origination and the conventional truth from *svabhāva* and conventional falsity, not just anything "conventional" can be uncritically accepted but instead must be conventionally established, i.e., "established in the world" (*lokaprasiddha*) in a specific context to attain the status of conventional truth. MĀB 6:35 specifically qualifies this acceptance with the criterion of conditionality: the conventional truth admits only "what is seen thoroughly by the world *('jig rten pas yongs su mthong ba*) [as in] "when this exists, that arises" ('*di yod na 'di 'byung ngo zhes bya ba*)".[91] This basic formula of conditionality carries immense normative weight. This significant qualification concerning the terms of acquiescence to worldly conventions circumscribes the conditions differentiating the conventional truth from falsity (the latter of which, as demonstrated above via the refutation of conventional falsity, lacks the cognizance of such dependence relations in key areas, a lack which amounts to ordinary experience's invalid cognition).

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[88] On these different semantic frameworks, see chapter 2 (§§2.2.3).

[89] See chapter 1 (§§1.2.3); see again Li (2019: 64), who argues that this "positively identifies what conventional reality is".

[90] PSP 368: *pratītyasamutpādavādino hi mādhyamikāḥ hetupratyayān prāpya pratītya samutpannatvāt sarvameva ihalokaparalokaṃ niḥsvabhāvaṃ varṇayanti* | (Vaidya 1960b: 156).

[91] MĀB 6:35: *'jig rten pas yongs su mthong ba 'di yod na 'di 'byung ngo zhes bya ba* […] (Liland 2020: 175). There is good reason to apply a Humean interpretation to this picture of causality insofar as there is ordinarily observed this pattern of regular causal succession (i.e., "when this exists, that arises"), from which there the occurs theorization thereof (i.e., the projection of a "necessary connection"). That connection can take many forms, whose cognition can be valid or invalid. The Mādhyamikas may be Humean insofar as they take this observance as the starting point and discuss the imputation required to force a connection, though their position is their own insofar as they resist the reification what is connected. See Siderits 2022: 86-8. Additionally, Westerhoff ("Nāgārjuna on Emptiness: A Comprehensive Critique of Foundationalism", *Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy* (ed. Jonardon Ganeri), Oxford University Press, 2017: 95) says, "For the Mādhyamika causation essentially involves the conceptualizing mind, due to the fact that either the cause or effect fails to exist at the present moment, and thus had to be supplied by the mind".

Despite his frequent appeals to conditionality as a normative force in the differentiation of the valid from the invalid cognition of ordinary experience, this is, as has been seen, not necessarily the *de facto* interpretation of Candrakīrti's conventional truth. Alongside such explicit mentions are also more ambiguous passages that may give a contrary impression. I specifically have in mind a passage like MĀ 6:35 (the verse to which the above is the autocommentary, cementing that such a qualification is significant to understanding this verse): "No analysis is performed (*na … vicāraḥ kāryaḥ*) with respect to the worldly conventional truth (*loka-vyavahāra-satye*)".[92] Passages like this are largely responsible for any controversy surrounding the conventional truth (or, more specifically, Candrakīrti's version thereof); on account of his proscription of analysis (*vicāra*), *some* scholars have attributed a lack of philosophical rigour to his Madhyamaka.[93] That is a position with which Tsong Khapa disagrees insofar as it misses the greater context of this analysis' role in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project.[94] Rather, despite a *certain kind* of analysis being unsuitable for the establishment of conventional phenomena, conventional phenomena are nonetheless conventionally establishable in the Madhyamaka system by a normative metric of valid cognition ("conventional establishment" is defined below in §§3.4.1). The workaround is that this conventional establishment requires a different argumentative strategy than this proscribed analysis. Untangling this contrast between the establishment of conventional phenomena as dependently arising and ceasing and the proscription of analysis regarding the same is the key unlocking the conventional truth's philosophical value and argumentative strategies.

I address the ambiguity arising from analysis' proscription with a hermeneutic strategy vaguely embryonic in Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti but made explicit by Tsong Khapa. Accordingly, there are two

[92] MĀ 6:35cd: […] *na tato vicāraḥ kāryo hi lokavyavahārasatye* || (Li 2015: 8).
[93] See some examples in §3.1.
[94] Tsong Khapa (2002: 178) discusses how ordinary cognition is "non-inquisitive" with respect to analysis but refuses to admit that it has no critical aspects whatsoever (i.e., "It is not the case that it is utterly non-inquisitive"). It only lacks the critical or aspects of a strict form of analysis (i.e., "It operates within the context of how things appear, how they are known, to a worldly or conventional consciousness. It does not operate via analysis of how things actually exist" (2002: 178; see my explanation below). If it is inquisitive in *some* sense to be established, it nonetheless requires critical thought—i.e., valid cognition. Due to the conventional nature of language and discourse, critical thought and theorization belong to the conventional realm, so it is nonsensical to say that the conventional truth proceeds without rigour.

styles or forms of "reasoning" or "argumentation" (*yukti*) found in the conventional truth: "conventional reasoning" (often called *upapatti*) and "analysis" (*vicāra*).[95] As I argue, there are both conditions to differentiate them *and* to demonstrate their synergy (in the sense they work in tandem). Candrakīrti offers evidence of this nuanced relation, suggesting a general category of *yukti* with dual application, conventional and ultimate. Here, it is applied to a specific kind of production reserved for analysis:

> [MĀ 6:36:] According to reasoning in relation to the ultimate (*tattva-adhikāre hi yayā eva yuktyā*), production from self and other is not suitable (*svasmāt parasmāt ca na janma yuktam*). According to that reasoning, even conventionally it is not suitable (*yuktyā tayā eva vyavahārataḥ api na yujyate*). By what [reasoning then] will there be, for you, production (*kena tava astu janma*)?[96]

This is a specific case from which I extrapolate a general rule. Candrakīrti does not suggest any incompatibility between reasoning in relation to the ultimate and reasoning conventionally, though a *functional* condition of their differentiation is suggested. He states that *svabhāvic* production (i.e., the production of *svabhāvic* entities) in any of these modes is not a viable model on either level of the two truths. Rather, because both strategies serve to refute *svabhāvic* production in their own ways, a certain synergy is suggested for them. Establishing this synergy while respecting their division is my present concern insofar as this demonstrates the conventional truth's philosophical validity in the case that both forms are required to accomplish each of the conventional truth's two goals.

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[95] Given Candrakīrti's specific choice of terminology, "analysis" is not an appropriate term for this "reasoning" occurring solely at the level of the conventional truth since "analysis" (*vicāra*) is specifically proscribed to it by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti (cf. YṢ 42 or MĀ 6:35). For example, Newland ("Weighing the Butter, Levels of Explanation, and Falsification: Models of the Conventional in Tsongkhapa's Account of Madhyamaka", *Moonshadows*, 2011: 59) does discuss "conventional analysis", though this suffers from the above defect. It is pertinent to juxtapose *vicāra* with what Candrakīrti calls *lokasaṃvyavahāreṇa upapattiḥ* (Vaidya 1960b: 19), "reasoning by means of worldly conventions", suggesting "conventional reasoning" to be an appropriate label that preserves this distinction.

[96] MĀ 6:36: *tattvādhikāre hi yayaiva yuktyā svasmāt parasmācca na janma yuktam | yuktyā tayaiva vyavahārato 'pi na yujyate kena tavāstu janma* || (Li 2015: 8). This passage requires some contextualization, since it is a very specific application from which I am extrapolating a general rule. Candrakīrti in this case is discussing inherent production—that is, the arising of a *svabhāvic* entity. This is an absurd notion because, given the definition of *svabhāva* as an entity devoid of causes, conditions, and alteration, the possibility of its transformation from a state of non-existence to existence is illogical. The general rule establishes that there are statements or cognitions invalid at both conventional and ultimate levels (i.e., MĀ 6:38cd specifically says that "[Phenomena] are neither destroyed nor eternal (*na ucchedinaḥ te na ca śāvatāḥ ca*) on account of the non-existence of an original nature (*prakṛteḥ abhāvāt*) in either of the two truths (s*atyadvaye*)"; *nocchedinaste na ca śāśvatāśca satyadvaye 'pi prakṛterabhāvāt* || (Li 2015: 9). RĀ 1:47 (47) and MĀ 6:104 also discuss the same kind of production, while 6:113-4 again parallel the "neither destroyed nor eternal" idea and conclude that phenomena are conventionally established as dependently originated. 6:93 and 6:160 have the same conclusion). Such invalidity amounts to conventional falsity.

Candrakīrti's differentiation of argumentation in relation to the ultimate or convention suggests that some phenomenon could withstand conventional reasoning (i.e., be conventionally established) but still not be ultimately established (because not-anything is ultimately established for the Madhyamaka). It further suggests there is no other kind of reasoning than ultimate or conventional by which any theory could be viable (in reference to non-standard vs. standard semantics; see below). This passage alludes to the two truths distinction and the comprehensive exclusion of the theory of *svabhāvic* production and its arguments therefrom by means of its relegation to conventional falsity. Left then is the differentiation of reasoning in relation to the ultimate and the conventional to be explained.

As Tsong Khapa differentiates the two, "[Conventional cognition] operates within the context of how things appear, how they are known, to a worldly or conventional consciousness. It does not operate via analysis of how things actually exist".[97] The investigation of "how things appear" is the purview of *conventional reasoning* (i.e., *upapatti*, reasoning in relation to the conventional) and the investigation of "how things actually exist" (i.e., a mode of being) is the purview of *analysis* (i.e., *vicāra*, reasoning in relation to the ultimate). Under these terms, it should be uncontroversial to say that reasoning in relation to the ultimate concerns the universal demonstration of emptiness from the denial of *svabhāva* in every context, in contrast to which reasoning in relation to the conventional concerns the more affirmative establishment of conventional phenomena from the demonstration of dependence relations. In terms of the greater picture, it is methodologically significant to the Madhyamaka project that there be an avenue to leave conventionally established phenomena untouched *as conventionally established*.

However, despite divergent orientations, the distinction is not resolved by saying "reasoning" is conventional and "analysis" ultimate, for certain common formal properties confer a distinct conventional nature to all forms of argumentation. This refers to their shared medium of language and discourse, which is conventional insofar as subject to and generated by dependence relations.[98] The

[97] Tsong Khapa 2002: 178.
[98] See chapter 2 (§2.2) on the conventional nature of language and discourse in which all forms of argumentation participate.

appearance of divergent orientations does not buck this formal commonality. However, as central to the arguments of PART II, there is a significant difference between the *conceptual understanding* of emptiness and its *realization*, as differentiates the two truths cognitively. The arguments concerning emptiness, and even those indirectly indicating the ultimate must belong to the former but nonetheless contribute to the latter (just as the conventional truth is the means to the ultimate). Argumentation and conceptual understanding can be directed towards the ultimate (taking the ultimate as their subject) without equalling the ultimate truth. Currently, I am concerned only with the conventional implications of this; in that context, there is a *functional* differentiation of the two styles of argumentation.

Insofar as conventional reasoning and analysis are differentiated by their mode of investigation, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by an investigation of "appearances" instead of "existence" (a mode of being). Incontrovertibly, the phenomena encountered in ordinary cognition *appear* to consciousness,[99] and they specifically appear *as if they exist*, which is cause for the confusion of the two: they may appear to exist in either cognitive mode of conventional truth or falsity which, respectively, are determined by the underlying view of the "existence" applied to appearances (the imputation of whichever worldview (*dṛṣṭi*) determining the semantic framework in which those appearances are cognized). The difference between the investigations of appearances and existence is the respective semantic frameworks revealed by each investigation: "appearances" are investigated by means of *conventional reasoning* in the Mādhyamikas' non-standard semantic framework of the conventional truth of dependence relations; "existence" is investigated by means of *analysis* in the opponents' standard semantic framework in conventional falsity. Given *that* criterion of differentiation, conventional reasoning finds conventionally established phenomena conventionally existent, validly cognized as such by means of this non-standard semantic framework; analysis, on the other hand, comes up *empty*, it finds not-anything, and it establishes not-anything, serving only refutational purposes of the opponents' standard semantic framework.

[99] Below (§§3.4.1, p. 156), this necessity of appearance is Tsong Khapa's first criterion of conventional establishment.

3.4.1 CONVENTIONAL REASONING

Candrakīrti says the following about conventional reasoning:

> [PSP 36:] Out of kindness for the trainees who are unacquainted with that [profound philosophical investigation such as *vicāra*] (*tat-anabhijña-vineyajana-anugrahāt*), the buddhas [aid/instruct them] by means of reasoning according to that which is established for them (*yathāsva-prasiddhayā upapattyā*).[100]

What can be established for the trainees is what can be validly established in the world (*lokaprasiddha*); per §3.2, it is not just anything "conventional" but only what is included in the conventional truth (excluding conventional falsity). As at MĀB 6:35,[101] Candrakīrti understands this acquiescence in the vein of conditionality: insofar as the conventional truth establishes conventional phenomena through the philosophical baseline of dependence relations, it is strictly through *that* cognitive template that ordinary beings are instructed about the kinds of conventional phenomena admitted in the conventional truth, its conventional, non-standard semantic framework. This is a significant qualification concerning the terms of acquiescence that can be explained via conventional reasoning, the argumentative strategy by which conventional phenomena *are* conventionally established. The normative criterion validating conventional establishment at every turn is the congruity of ordinary cognition and dependence relations.

Every argument to the effect that "X depends on Y" (and vice versa in interdependence) for its existence, arising, cessation, etc. is an instance of conventional reasoning insofar as it is only through these dependence relations that conventional phenomena are conventionally established (as so dependent) in valid cognition. For any phenomenon to be "established" in the context of "conventional

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[100] PSP 36: […] *yathāsvaprasiddhayā upapattyā buddhaistadanabhijñavineyajanānugrahāt* | (Vaidya 1960b: 11). This is largely an aside, a digression, in Candrakīrti's work that nonetheless bears methodological weight. As Salvini notes in his comments on this dissertation, the greater context (cf. MacDonald 2015b: 136-9) bears on the necessity or not of stating technical definitions in terms of debate (*tarka-lakṣaṇa*). However, overall, the same overriding principle still stands that, with regard to the pedagogical and, ultimately, soteriological approach taken to discoursing with ordinary beings for the sake of *their* liberation, that "the buddhas [aid/instruct] them by means of reasoning according to that which is established for them". That is, such communication could only occur when there is some common ground of understanding, such that employing technical terms of debate in a context unknown to ordinary beings would be useless for their edification. The difference can be extrapolated as the same difference between conventional reasoning and analysis. Conventional reasoning via the establishment of dependence relations remains the first step in the edification of ordinary beings; only later, once there is sufficient familiarity with the spirit of the *Buddhadharma*, is there instruction in analysis via deconstruction. Only at that later point can the synergy of such forms of argumentation be truly realized.

[101] See p. 150 above.

establishment" means for it to be validly cognized as subject to and generated by dependence relations (the semantic framework of the conventional truth in which is situated the linguistic "conventions" to which the Mādhyamikas appeal, especially with regard to the three dependence relations: causal/existential, mereological, and conceptual).[102] Examples of such establishment in the conventional truth are too numerous to list, many of which have already been seen.[103] It is not my task, nor is it any Mādhyamikas', to provide a tally of *everything* conventionally established in the conventional truth but, more generally, to sketch the parameters of valid cognition therein. Rather, the Mādhyamikas discuss some general list of objects of ordinary cognitive experience that they accept as conventionally established in the conventional truth's semantic framework as templates for the valid cognition thereof because only by such dependence relations could *any* such object be validly established at all. Because their examples all follow the same cognitive template, Nāgārjuna says that all phenomena must be understood therethrough, meaning that therethrough any object of ordinary cognitive experience can be validly cognized.[104] Insofar as this is a product of the Mādhyamika's non-standard, conventional semantic framework of dependence relations, the worldview this cognitive template affords *is* right view.

Tsong Khapa establishes three criteria of conventional establishment in an epistemological context leading to "mundane knowledge" requiring "conventional valid cognition":[105]

> How does one determine whether something exists conventionally? We hold that something exists conventionally (1) if it is known to a conventional consciousness; (2) if no other conventional valid cognition contradicts its being as it is thus known; and (3) if reason that accurately analyzes reality—that is, analyzes whether something intrinsically exists—does

[102] In chapter 4 (§4.1), the question of conventional establishment is tackled at length in the context of its refutation of a foundationalist model of establishment. There, this definition of conventional establishment as subject to and generated by dependence relations is upheld insofar as conventional establishment for the Mādhyamikas means nothing more than mutual establishment (e.g., of subject and object, of mind and world, of epistemic instrument and object, etc.).

[103] There are attestations of i) causal/existential dependence in, e.g., MĀ 6:99, MĀB 6:156's example of sprouts arising from seeds and VV 49-50, RĀ 4:55 (355) of sons from fathers); of ii) mereological dependence in, e.g., MĀ 6:159, 166 on pots and chariots in dependence on their parts; and of iii) conceptual dependence in, e.g., MMK 8:12 , MĀ 6:128, 137, 165, and PSP 55 on subject and object, MMK 10:12 on fire and fuel, MMK 9:11-2, 14:5-6, MĀ 6:168, and PSP 376 on cause and effect, ŚS 27 , MMK 5:1-5 on the characteristic and the characterized, and RĀ 4:54 (354) on subject and object.

[104] MMK 8:13cd: "The remainder of existents (*śeṣān bhāvān*) should be considered (*vibhāvayet*) by means of [the interdependence of] agent and action (*karma-kartṛbhyām*)"; *karmakartṛbhyāṃ śeṣānbhāvān vibhāvayet* || (Vaidya 1960b: 80). See also MMK 10:15 for the same relation to the fire–fuel template.

[105] See Tsong Khapa 2002: 178-81.

not contradict it. We hold that what fails to meet those criteria does not exist.[106]

I explain (1) in the context that the object of knowledge must be an *appearance* before ordinary consciousness (i.e., be an object of cognitive experience); (2) is the coherentist criterion that any valid conventional cognition must not be contradicted by other established valid perceptions by the general consensus of unimpaired senses (e.g., cognitions such as the perception of a rope as a snake or of a mirage as water that are known to be false by other valid cognitions); and (3) that, if analysis were applied to a conventionally established phenomenon, it could not invalidate it. This is only possible given the synonymity of dependence relations and emptiness,[107] such that the unfindability of any phenomenon under analysis does not contradict its valid cognition via dependence relations. On this point, Tsong Khapa is adamant because, were this restriction *not* in place, no conventional establishment would be possible and nihilism would follow.[108] As he explains, "it is wrong to confuse (1) not being contradicted by a reasoning [(analytical)] consciousness and (2) being established by a reasoning consciousness".[109] Conventional establishment consists of the former, *not contradicted* by analysis but *neither established* thereby; conventionally established objects are instead conventionally established only by conventional reasoning. That appearances are validly cognized only under the cognitive template of dependence relations secures that the valid cognition of such appearances and the means therethrough of investigating how phenomena appear to consciousness are supported by normative arguments demonstrating the dependence relations accounting for such appearances and their valid cognition. This is conventional

[106] Tsong Khapa 2002: 178.
[107] This was originally argued in chapter 2 (§§2.2.1) via MMK 24:18 and dependent designation; see §§3.4.3 for this argument in the context of the relation of conventional reasoning and analysis.
[108] I.e., as Tsong Khapa (2006: 23) says in his commentary to the MMK, "The conventional existence of phenomena such as action and result and so forth cannot be undermined by any authoritative cognition. Therefore, the assertion of the nonexistence of these objects and the subject that grasps them as nonexistent are, respectively, the extreme of nihilism and the mind grasping nihilism". In the *lam rim chen mo* (2002: 161), he writes, "This master [(Candrakīrti)] did not at all intend to use reason to refute conventional forms and such. […] I hold that there is no one from any Indian Buddhist tenet system, Madhyamaka or otherwise, who says, "In my own presentation of the two truths, reasoning directed at the ultimate eradicates conventional objects"". These can be read as an important warning against overextending Candrakīrti's proscription of *vicāra* for the conventional truth by not letting conventional phenomena be conventionally established by dependence relations. Tsong Khapa, like Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, is quite concerned with avoiding the pitfalls of metaphysical and axiological nihilism from misunderstanding emptiness and the two truths distinction.
[109] Tsong Khapa 2002: 179.

reasoning. Insofar as that is Tsong Khapa's position with respect to the conventional truth, it is also that of several historical Madhyamaka commentators unanimously stating that, though it is "without analysis", the conventional truth is characterized by i) dependence relations and ii) causal efficiency.[110]

The evidence supporting these characteristics is, firstly, as demonstrated, the global cognitive template of dependence relations (e.g., the formula of conditionality, the mind–world model of cognitive experience, the conceptual interdependence of subject–object, etc.). This strategy is evident in YṢ 48ab: "if it is asked, "by what (*kena*) is there the knowledge of this (*praijñā tasya*)? [We reply:] It is from seeing dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda-darśanāt*)"[111], to which I append MĀ 6:115cd: "That reasoning of arising in dependence (*pratītya-udaya-yuktiḥ eṣā*) cuts entirely the net of false views (*kudṛṣṭi-jālam sakalam chinatti*)".[112] Nāgārjuna reveals one of the conventional truth's goals in furnishing a positive account of ordinary experience (i.e., knowledge as the valid cognition thereof) by means of dependence relations; Candrakīrti reveals the other as the clearing of cognitive obscurations (i.e., cutting "the net of false views") by means of the same. Evidently, conventional reasoning contributes to both goals.

Secondly, conventional reasoning validates the conventional knowledge derived from the specific causal efficiency of local causal relations explainable via this global template (wherein, e.g., sprouts arise from seeds and not darkness, light arises from flame and not seeds, etc.). Because the Mādhyamikas reject within the cognitive template of dependence relations that anything could arise from anything,[113] *causal efficiency* in this sense of deriving functional causal relations is a critical factor in validly

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[110] Malcolm David Eckel, "The Satisfaction of No Analysis: On Tsong kha pa's Approach to Svātantrika-Madhyamaka", *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction*, 2003: 190-1. This includes Jñānagarbha, Śrigupta, Śāntarakṣita, and Atiśa.

[111] YṢ 48ab: *parijñā tasya kenêti pratītyotpādadarśanāt* | (Li & Ye 2014: 98); *gang gis de shes 'gyur snyam na brten nas 'byung mthong ba ste* | (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 16). Tola & Dragonetti (1987: 39-40 n. 124) note that the question refers to Nāgārjuna's previous statements in YṢ 46-7. Candrakīrti's commentary (YṢV 48) confirms the same. For how the "seeing of dependent arising" provides knowledge for the Mādhyamikas, see chapter 4 (§4.1) on the interdependence of the *pramāṇa* ("epistemic instruments") and the *prameya* ("epistemic objects"). This conceptual interdependence is the key to the conventional truth's epistemological wing.

[112] MĀ 6:115cd: *tasmāt pratītyodayayuktireṣā kudṛṣṭijālaṃ sakalaṃ chinatti* || (Li 2015: 18).

[113] See pp. 163-4 below.

cognizing ordinary experience. The criterion of efficiency is further discussed by Westerhoff and Li;[114] it is related to Candrakīrti's examples of dependent designations insofar as chariots (cf. MĀ 6:159 and his other examples in MĀB 6:113),[115] designated in dependence on their parts, are functioning entities (functioning because of the collocation of their parts in a functioning arrangement) in conventional contexts, as opposed to referentless expressions and non-functional entities without conventional import. The conventional truth preserves this function and efficiency insofar as, pertaining to the common objects of ordinary experience, it consists of the valid cognition thereof. This reintroduces the "transactional" or "pragmatic" elements discussed in §3.1 that were not entirely discounted. This also relates to Tsong Khapa's second, coherentist criterion of conventional establishment insofar as efficiency is derived from the lack of the contradiction of any specific valid cognition by general conventions.

Conventional reasoning as such is the typical *positive* form of the conventional truth's argumentation for ordinary experience's valid cognition. Analysis' proscription (further explained in §§3.4.2) did nothing to tarnish the conventional truth's capacity to furnish this positive account. Nevertheless, conventional reasoning via dependence relations is not the only form of argumentation in the conventional truth. In addition to showing the conditions of ordinary experience's valid cognition, the Mādhyamikas also more comprehensively demonstrate why their opponents' cognitions are invalid *in their own terms* (i.e., *their* semantic framework), why what *they* seek cannot be found. Although this analysis is a more advanced stage of the Madhyamaka curriculum, it is nonetheless integral to the valid cognition of ordinary experience insofar as the phenomena conventionally established as products of dependence relations can nonetheless be reified, serve as objects of attachment, and be clung to. For these reasons, analysis is performed to undermine and uproot these subtler habituations.[116]

[114] See Westerhoff 2011: 204-7; see also Li 2019: 51-6. I addressed this notion of causal efficiency in the context of the objection of groundlessness to the merely conventional nature of language and discourse (see chapter 2, §§2.2.4).
[115] See chapter 2 (§§2.2.2 p. 101 fn. 50).
[116] See PART II (chapters 6 and 7) about *clinging* to these conventions.

3.4.2 ANALYSIS

Analysis, in contrast to conventional reasoning's investigation of appearances, investigates a *mode of being*[117] in a specific context of metaphysical realism, the opponents' semantic framework of *svabhāva* (which supplies the specific meaning of *svabhāvic* existence). It looks deeper than mere appearances and investigates how anything could *truly* exist (if it does). This restricts analysis to a specific, standard semantic framework differing from the Mādhyamikas' own non-standard, conventional semantic framework of dependence relations. The specific kind of analysis proscribed, which I contrast with the use of conventional reasoning for the conventional establishment of phenomena, for the Madhyamaka is typically associated with the ultimate (even if only as a means thereto). I have argued (without denying the former claim) that this restriction belies its conventional characteristics and capacity to aid in staking the full scope of the conventional truth.[118] This may be because, of the conventional truth's two goals, analysis is singularly concerned with the clearing of cognitive obscurations (i.e., wrong view) by means of a unique style of argumentation reminiscent of a *reductio ad absurdum*. That is, in analysis the opponents' positions are forced to reveal their absurd consequences (i.e., their incoherence, deriving such absurd consequences from *svabhāva* as, e.g., the inability to account for change and impermanence, the result that anything could come from anything at all, or the causelessness of phenomena). The diagnosis of these absurd consequences/incoherencies reveals the inadequacy of this account (the standard semantic framework) for the valid cognition of ordinary experience. This is classic *prasaṅga*

[117] Kris McDaniel ("Abhidharma Metaphysics and the Two Truths", *Philosophy East and West* 69.2, 2019: 439) observes how the Ābhidharmikas two truths investigates two modes of being: a conventional mode of existence for conditioned phenomena and an ultimate mode of existence for the partless *dharma*s. This is a metaphysical interpretation of the two truths, which is not the model I present for the Madhyamaka (see PART II). However, for the Madhyamaka, though analysis searches for that latter mode of being, it never finds it. Based on the ultimate non-dual rejection of both existence and non-existence (e.g., at MMK 9:12; 15:5, 7; 25:17; YṢ 1-2, 12, 22, 39-40), it becomes difficult to say that the conventional truth constitutes a "mode of being" in any meaningful way (see YṢ 12 and MĀ 6:81cd in particular, the latter of which says, "Out of compliance with the world (*loka-anurodhāt*), though said "non-existent" (*tu asati iti)*, for the sake of the result (*kārya-artham*), among them (*amīṣām* = the world) I say "existent" (*sati iti … aham bravīmi*)"; *lokānurodhāttvasatītyamīṣāṃ satīti kāryārthamahaṃ bravīmi* || (Li 2015: 14)). This is instead why "mode of appearance" describes conventional reasoning's fruits. Further, because analysis never finds the ultimate mode of being, neither does the ultimate truth for the Madhyamaka ever constitute one. This means that the ultimate is not a metaphysical affirmation of any mode of being; see PART II (chapter 5).

[118] E.g., it is called "ultimate analysis" by Newland (2011: 59-60) because that term is used by Tsong Khapa (*mthar thug dypod pa*). I do not invalidate any such ultimate context for this analysis but insist on its conventional characteristics.

argumentation seeking to undermine an opponent's position; hence, it clears cognitive obscurations and negates wrong views *at the level of the conventional truth*. Accordingly, analysis has both conventional and ultimate aspects. I am currently concerned strictly with its conventional wing, the refutation of wrong view; its ultimate wing is addressed in PART II (chapter 5, §§5.1.2).

This refutational analysis must be strictly understood as a specific kind of *non-implicative negation* (*prasajyapratiṣedha*) that does not imply anything beyond the denial; it automatically discounts the affirmation of the other extreme of a dualistic spectrum (i.e., if X is negated, ¬X is not therefore affirmed; if ¬X is negated, X is not therefore affirmed).[119] This style of argumentation by itself does not allow any affirmative conclusion from the denial of its subject; rather, a non-implicative negation consists entirely of this denial. Because analysis is a non-implicative negation in that way, it does not automatically imply the conventional establishment of phenomena insofar as different argumentation applies to that purpose; however, neither does it invalidate it, as Tsong Khapa's third criterion of conventional establishment requires (p. 156 above). To make sense of this, analysis and conventional reasoning therefore cannot take the same subject or operate on the same semantic level: the conventional establishment of phenomena does not, strictly speaking, follow analysis because analysis does not concern conventionally established phenomena; it is for this reason that Candrakīrti proscribes analysis with respect thereto (cf. MĀ 6:36, p. 152 above). Rather, it should be demonstrated how clearing cognitive obscurations works in *synergistic tandem* with cognitive clarity (i.e., valid cognition), the product of the above conventional reasoning. Analysis' kind of argumentation is compatible with the Madhyamaka system, especially with respect to the conventional truth, because it takes a unique subject (*svabhāva*) and, by means of non-implication,

[119] PSP 13: "[It may be objected:] Is it not the case that, when "not indeed is it arisen from itself" (*na eva svataḥ utpannā iti*) is ascertained (*avadhyāryamāṇe*), the undesired (*aniṣṭam*) [conclusion] "it is arisen from another" (*parataḥ utpannāḥ iti*) obtains? [We reply that no,] it does not obtain (*na prāpnoti*) because a non-implicative negation is intended [thereby] (*prasajyapratiṣedhasya vivakṣitatvāt*) and because there is also arising from another being negated (*pratiṣetsyamānatvāt*)"; *nanu ca- naiva svata utpannā ityavadhāryamāṇe parata utpannā ityaniṣṭaṃ prāpnoti | na prāpnoti prasajyapratiṣedhasya vivakṣitatvāt, parato 'pyutpādasya pratiṣetsyamānatvāt* | (Vaidya 1960b: 5); see MacDonald 2015b: 50-1 n.113; Hopkins 1996: 49-50; and Huntington 1989: 58. Tsong Khapa (2006: 50) discusses this negation (and its counterpart, implicative negation). See PART II (chapter 5, §5.3) on the application of non-implicative negation to the ultimate.

offers no alternative *on that same semantic level*.[120] Insofar as it searches only for *svabhāva* and fails to find it, it comes up *empty*.

There are, consequently, two aspects of analysis to be carefully differentiated: i) its philosophical, argumentative function concerning the refutation of *svabhāva* (and thus, in that respect, its synergy with conventional reasoning); this is its *conventional aspect*. Insofar as analysis in its first, conventional aspect refutes *svabhāva*, it serves as the intellectual understanding of emptiness (defined as the lack of *svabhāva* in all phenomena). Additionally, there is ii) a soteriological function via accomplishing the freedom from conceptualization (*prapañca*), fabrication (*kalpanā*), and clinging (*upādāna*) to conventional forms by means of the cognitive ramifications of non-implicative negation; this is its *ultimate aspect*. In that respect, analysis's second, ultimate aspect serves more like a meditative exercise towards the realization of emptiness (i.e., not merely its intellection from its refutational aspect but the complete cessation of any cognitive appearance of *svabhāva* from the cognitive ramifications of the negation thereof being non-implicative).[121] In the present context, I focus on the first aspect; I return to the second at the end to fully differentiate analysis from conventional reasoning.

As its sole target, analysis investigates and deconstructively exhausts the logical possibilities of *svabhāva*'s semantic framework in various contexts. One application, spelled out in MĀB 6:35, investigates whether *svabhāvic* entities are produced in self- or other-production. These are the first two lemmas of Nāgārjuna's tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*) of production. I take this tetralemma of production as an

[120] This is a major divide between Tsong Khapa and Gorampa. That the object of negation is *svabhāva* as *inherent* existence is Tsong Khapa's position; that it is existence *tout court* is Gorampa's. Garfield & Thakchöe (2011: 75) summarize: "Tsongkhapa's position on the object of negation leads to an understanding of conventional truth as in an important sense a *truth* and of conventional existence as a kind of *existence*, whereas Gorampa's account leads to a view of conventional truth as entirely *false* and of conventional existence as a kind of *nonexistence*". This implies that Tsong Khapa makes room for the conventional validity of conventional reasoning establishing dependence relations for the valid cognition of conventional phenomena, while Gorampa rejects it. If I may attempt an adjudication in one sentence, Gorampa appears to make this denial from the attainment of the non-dual ultimate perspective (cf. Garfield & Thakchöe 2011: 85-6) while Tsong Khapa makes his concession within the context of ordinary cognitive experience on the path *to* awakening in the ultimate. As I am dealing in this chapter with the conventional truth as it functions on the way to the ultimate, I side with Tsong Khapa in that context.

[121] In PART II (chapters 5 and 6), those cognitive ramifications of non-implicative negation, the cessation of conceptualization, of fabrication, and of clinging with respect to the ultimate truth (i.e., ultimate cognition) are established.

explanatory template for analysis, although many others follow the same format:[122]

> MMK 1:1: Neither from self (*na svataḥ*), from another (*na parataḥ*), from both (*na dvābhyām*), nor causelessly (*na api ahetutaḥ*) do any arisen phenomena (*utpannāḥ bhāvāḥ*) exist anywhere at all.[123]

Per *svabhāva*'s realist semantic framework, there are specific meanings for "production", "self" and "other". "Self" and "other" strictly refer to discrete, ontologically substantial entities conceived under the *svabhāvic* model of existential identity; everything that is not "self" *per se* is strictly "other" thereto. "Production" refers to the manner of a *svabhāvic* entity's arising, the way it comes to exist. "Self-production" refers to a *svabhāvic* entity being solely produced under its own power, independently of any "other" phenomenon.[124] "Other-production" refers to a *svabhāvic* entity being necessarily produced by a phenomenon substantially "other" to it. Candrakīrti critiques these two possibilities at the outset of MĀ 6. MĀ 6:8cd-9 and 12-3 address self-production; MĀ 6:10-11 and 14-7 address other-production. Candrakīrti takes the common example of the relation of seeds to sprouts, which, under the *svabhāvic* model, would each have to be discrete substances. Therefrom, analysis's tetralemma of production seeks to reveal the absurd consequences (i.e., incoherencies) following this model's application to this relation.

For self-production, if seeds produced only seeds, then the alteration required for a seed to transform into a sprout, as it is observed and ordinarily known to do, would be impossible (MĀ 6:12 specifically says that both ultimately (*na tattvataḥ*) and conventionally (*na lokataḥ*) this theory fails, foreshadowing MĀ 6:36). Under no circumstances could this theory constitute the valid cognition of ordinary experience; it specifically disaccords therewith because thereby "there is not anything gained" (*na guṇaḥ asti kaścit*; MĀ 6:8c), meaning none of the transformations and alterations ordinarily observed could

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[122] See PART II (chapter 5, §§5.3.1) on tetralemmic negation vis-à-vis the ultimate.

[123] MMK 1:1: *na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṃ nāpyahetuto | utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kvacana kecana ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 4). At MĀB 6:35, Candrakīrti specifically relates analysis (*vicāra*/*rnam par dypod pa*) by means of self- and other-production to this style of argumentation.

[124] Commentators (such as Liland 2020: 141 n.8) identify the target of this criticism as the orthodox Saṃkhya theory of the "pre-existent effect", *satkāryavāda*. This holds that there is the latent potentiality of the effect in every cause, not allowing a substantial difference between the two. As Candrakīrti points out, this requires in some sense the ontological identity of cause and effect. There is no good reason to establish such an identity between the sprout and the seed for they have such vastly different properties and characteristics. Not even in the most uninformed worldly cognition are seeds and sprouts identical.

obtain under this model.[125] In self-production, "there would be the sameness of producer and the produced" (*syāt aikyam janaka-janyayoḥ*; MMK 20:20b).[126] Thus, an incoherence is revealed.

For other-production, Candrakīrti argues that, if in some entity X was produced by some entity Y otherwise radically distinct from it, then anything could be produced by anything: "then pitch darkness [could arise] from a flame (*tarhi bahulaḥ śikhinaḥ andhakāraḥ*) and the birth of anything could be from anything at all" (*sarvasya janma ca bhavet khalu sarvataḥ*).[127] Candrakīrti cites MMK 20:19-20 to refute the substantial difference in identity of cause and effect: "there would be the equality of a cause and a non-cause" (*syāt tulyaḥ hetuḥ ahetunā*; MMK 20:20d).[128] In the case wherein anything could be produced from anything, the definitional distinction of a cause from a non-cause collapses because anything could be a cause for anything. This invalidates both the causal regularity ordinarily observed in the world with the consequent loss of causal efficiency. Thus, a further incoherence is revealed.

However, the most comprehensive refutation of *svabhāvic* production that analysis provides must address all four tetralemmic limbs. Lemmas one and two are refuted as above, on which basis the third (both self- and other-production) is refuted by the combination of those critiques. If either one fails (or both), it follows that so does their conjunction. The fourth lemma (neither self- nor other-production, causelessness) is rejected because there are no phenomena *un*caused for this contradicts every ordinary intuition of causality and the philosophical baseline. Having so negated all the logical possibilities of

[125] MĀ 6:8c: *na guṇo 'sti kaścit* | (Li 2015: 5). This is quite like a poignant line of argumentation taken up by Nāgārjuna in the VV and the MMK. Not specifically concerning inherent production but the *svabhāvic* conceptual framework in general, the argument says that the insistence on dependence relations is to say that appearances can only appear as they do because of their fundamental lack of *svabhāva*: if phenomena existed *svabhāvically*, they could not and would not appear to the senses to be impermanent, changeable, etc. Per Nāgārjuna's definition of *svabhāva* (MMK 15:2), they would instead consistently appear as discrete, permanent, unchangeable entities. The conclusion of the argument is that ordinary experience does not make sense on the *svabhāvic* model. Under that conceptual framework, appearances are distorted and invalidly cognized as existing *svabhāvically*—ergo, conventional falsity. Cf. MMK 15:9, 24:16, 20-40; and VV 54-5.

[126] MMK 20:20b: *syādaikyam janakajanyayoḥ* || (Vaidya 1960b: 174). Candrakīrti cites MMK 20:19-20 refuting the identity of cause and effect (with identity conceived in *svabhāvic* terms). This sameness/non-difference is not conducive to the valid cognition of ordinary experience because the cause–effect relation is schematically necessary thereto. Hume launched a similar criticism about the simultaneity of cause and effect in the sense that, in that case, the succession of causality would not be observed.

[127] MĀ 6:14bc: […] *tarhi bahulaḥ śikhino 'ndhakāraḥ* | *sarvasya janma ca bhavet khalu sarvataśca* […] (Li 2015: 6).

[128] MMK 20:20d: *syāttulyo heturahetunā* || (Vaidya 1960b: 174).

svabhāvic production without further implication, the tetralemma offers no alternative. Insofar as the negation of each lemma is non-implicative of anything *outside* the tetralemma, it is neither the case that denying inherent existence affirms inherent non-existence nor that denying inherent non-existence affirms inherent existence. It is non-implicative within that sense, thereby seeking to totally exhaust and dissolve all logical possibilities therein. The only conclusion this tetralemmic non-affirming negation affords is to entirely jettison the model of *svabhāvic* production (and its metaphysical commitments from its realist semantic framework).

Nonetheless, tetralemmas are not exhaustive of analysis' scope insofar as they are not analysis' only form.[129] Candrakīrti utilizes another called the "sevenfold reasoning" (*saptadhā*; MĀ 6:151-8).[130] His argument is reminiscent of MMK 22:1 on the relation of the *Tathāgata* (the Buddha) to the aggregates, though Nāgārjuna discusses and rejects five possible relations (as in the Pāli *sutta*s; cf. the *Yamaka Sutta* (SN 22.85; see Bodhi 2000: 931-6) and the paracanonical *Milindapañha*) while Candrakīrti treats seven (an original innovation). In either case, this style of argument examines the mereological relation of wholes to parts to investigate the various relations wherein a whole could be *truly* established on the basis of its parts. The seven relations Candrakīrti lists at MĀ 6:151 concern the identity of a chariot (which, as discussed in chapter 2 (§§2.2.2) is his exemplar of a dependent designation) as being i) identical with its parts (*sva-aṅgebhyaḥ ananyaḥ*; ii) other than its parts (*sva-aṅgebhyaḥ anyaḥ*); iii) the possessor of its parts (*tadvān*); iv) in the parts (*aṅgeṣu*); v) the parts [contained] there [in it] (*aṅgāni api tatra*); vi) the mere collection of the parts (*saṃghātamātra*); and vii) the mere shape of the parts (*sanniveśa*/*saṃsthānamātra*). This exercise establishes that no inherently existent whole (or, for that

[129] According to Hopkins (1996: 61), "In the Prāsaṅgika system, the sevenfold reasoning, dependent arising, and the diamond slivers are the three main forms of reasoning for establishing selflessness. Three other forms are the refutation of the four extreme types of production, the refutation of the four alternative types of production, and the reasoning establishing the lack of being one or many" (see Hopkins 1996: 125-96 for the elaboration of each). Each method follows a similar pattern, though with differing applications. I would like to underscore in this list the presence of "dependent arising"—that is, the appeal to dependent origination—*on par* with these forms of analysis. This is the synergy developed in the following section.

[130] Dhivan Thomas Jones ("Candrakīrti on the Use and Misuse of the Chariot Argument", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 51.4, 2023: 453-72) connects Candrakīrti's chariot analogy to (non-)self in the *Milindapañha*. Candrakīrti's analogy is an elaborate metaphor of the relation of the self (the analogous whole) to the five aggregates (the analogous parts).

matter, no inherently existent parts) is found amongst these relations.[131]

By way of these two exemplary forms of analysis, it is evident that inquiring into the *mode of being* of existents (for the tetralemma of production, how it is that a *svabhāvic* entity is produced or, for the sevenfold reasoning, the mereological relation of the existence of *svabhāvic* wholes to their parts), thus attempting to establish how something properly exists as a discrete ontological entity instead of merely how it may appear to consciousness, is the chief difference between analysis and conventional reasoning. In terms of the refutation of the opponent's position of *svabhāva* (and the more pernicious default realism of which this position is the philosophical manifestation), analysis as Candrakīrti describes it is specifically fashioned for this task. It has no other concerns but staunch refutation.

The universal lack of *svabhāva* is the very definition of the emptiness of all phenomena. Unable to ever find such a mode of being and therefore any *svabhāvic* production or existence, analysis always turns up *empty*. That is to say, because of its specific object of inquiry (and the patent absurdity thereof), analysis never finds anything onto which it can grasp. For this reason, the objects of this analysis are called "unfindable" or it is said that the object "dissolves" without any remainder.[132] This emptiness, this unfindability, and this dissolution of cognitive obscuration are all consequences of rigorous meditation on this non-implicative *reductio ad absurdum*. For this reason, the negation employed in analysis must be understood as non-implicative because, in both these examples, a *svabhāvic* model of both production

[131] At this point in the autocommentary, Candrakīrti says that most of these cases have already been previously dealt with. I.e., i) the relation of identity is refuted in the same way as the substantial identity of cause and effect in the tetralemma of production. ii) The relation of difference is refuted in the same way as the substantial difference of cause and effect. iii) Being the possessor of the parts is addressed at MĀ 6:143-4: the argument is that, colloquially, there is a difference between the possession of a body and the possession of a cow due to the differences between bodies and cows. However, as above, since there is neither identity nor difference of the whole and the parts, the same kind of colloquial talk of possession does not apply in this case (cf. Liland 2020: 311; Siderits & Katsura 2013: 242-4). iv) and v) are treated together since, from i) and ii), the chariot and its parts are neither identical nor distinct from one another, so neither relation can hold. vi) The chariot is not the mere collection because a disorganized mass of chariot parts does not in any meaningful sense constitute a chariot. vii) is like vi), though I find the argument opaque. Tsong Khapa's commentary on MĀ 6:155 (2021: 459) reads, "For you, just as shapes exist in each of the individual chariot parts such as the wheels previously, before being assembled, if these very shapes that previously existed were to persist later when the chariot is perceived or formed, then, just as there is no chariot in the unassembled parts, in the assembled parts too, there could be no chariot. This is because you define the mere shapes of the individual parts to constitute the chariot, and insofar as their shapes are concerned, there is no difference between those of the earlier and later temporal stages".

[132] This is language used in Mipham's MĀ commentary (2002) and Geshe Sonam Rinchen's ŚS commentary (Ross 1987).

and mereology was discounted with no alternative offered. Analysis and cognitive dissolution are significant for the realized experience of the ultimate truth (when arrived at by such non-implicative negation and so characterized only apophatically by the cessation of conceptualization).

3.4.3 RELATING CONVENTIONAL REASONING AND ANALYSIS: NON-CONTRADICTION

Analysis as non-implicative negation is obviously unsuitable for furnishing a positive account of the valid cognition of ordinary experience by means of conventional establishment and the affirmation of conventional existence required therein because that is not its subject. That unsuitability (the reason for its proscription for conventional phenomena; cf. MĀ 6:35) is not necessarily as problematic for the conventional truth as it may seem. Candrakīrti adds the following stipulation, clarifying both the scope and intellectual possibilities afforded by this method of investigation:

> [MĀB 6:158:] When searching (*btsal ba na*) through the sevenfold reasoning (*rnam par bdun du*), such as not accepting that the chariot is distinct from its own parts (*shing rta rang yan lag las gzhan 'dod min*) and so forth, the chariot will not be established (*shing rta 'grub par mi 'gyur*) either ultimately or conventionally (*don dam pa dang kun rdzob tu*).[133]

Candrakīrti states that analysis (here conducted through the sevenfold reasoning) is unable to establish a *svabhāvic* chariot either conventionally or ultimately; such an entity is unfindable ultimately and cannot withstand conventional reasoning. This is the difference Tsong Khapa established between *not being refuted* by analysis and *being established* by analysis (pp. 156-8 above). The *svabhāvic* chariot fails both these conditions: it is evidently not *established* by analysis because analysis always comes up empty; however, it is equally important to also understand that neither is the conventionally established chariot thereby *refuted*. Admittedly, Candrakīrti himself does not *here* make the qualification of discussing specifically a *svabhāvic* chariot but it follows from the reference to the sevenfold reasoning, since *that* kind of chariot is what analysis would investigate; it is therefore implied. However, were that qualification not made, he would be contradicting himself and thereby destroying the conventions of the

[133] MĀB 6:158: *shing rta rang yan lag las gzhan 'dod min | zhes bya ba la sogs pa'i tshul 'di de rnam pa bdun du btsal ba na | don dam pa dang kun rdzob tu shing rta 'grub par mi 'gyur* […] | (Liland 2020: 322).

world—elsewhere he has himself specifically forbidden this practice (see MĀ 6:159d)![134] Despite this ambiguity, Candrakīrti proceeds to admit at MĀ 6:160bcd the following qualification incontrovertibly demonstrating the *non-contradiction* of analysis and conventional reasoning:

> [MĀ 6:160bcd:] The *yogī* does not find [any] of that [inherent] existence (*asya sattām labhate na yogī*); [consequently], there is an easy entrance into the ultimate (*tattva-avatāraḥ api sukhena*). [Yet,] the establishment of that [as demonstrated] here (*iha asya siddhim*) should be accepted (*iṣyatām*).[135]

"Not finding any of that inherent existence" refers to the realization of emptiness correlated with entering the ultimate, which means not its mere intellection but the complete cessation of the cognitive appearance of *svabhāva* in any form. Nevertheless, conventional establishment remains true.

Rather, the point I think Candrakīrti makes at MĀB 6:158 is that some cognition (i.e., a *svabhāvic* cognition) being validated in neither of the two truths (or invalidated by both) is the hallmark of conventional falsity, the refutation of which is the conventional truth's prerogative. In that way, analysis (in its conventional context, restricted to the conceptual understanding of emptiness established only through the intellection of the lack of *svabhāva*) plays its own significant strategic, instrumental role in the conventional truth concerning its capacity to refute conventional falsity. Consequently, with MĀ 6:160, Candrakīrti reveals that there can be no contradiction between (ultimate) unfindability and conventional establishment, or else the two truths would exclude one another. By this it is meant that, if analysis were to undermine conventional establishment, then there could be no conventional truth. This would be the death of Madhyamaka philosophy, and the Mādhyamikas consequently would rightfully deserve their criticism as skeptics, nihilists, sophists, charlatans, etc.

This non-contradiction is confirmed when Candrakīrti says that the semantic framework of *svabhāva* is not at all how phenomena could be (conventionally) established:

> [MĀB 6:157:] A chariot is not feasibly [found] (*shing rta mi 'thad*) when searching (*btsal ba na*) by means of the sevenfold reasoning (*tshul du rnam pa bdun gyis*). Yet, according to

[134] See p. 139 fn. 63 above.
[135] MĀ 6:160bcd: […] *asya sattāṃ labhate na yogī | tattvāvatāro 'pi sukhena vāta itīṣyatāmevamihāsya siddhiḥ* || (Li 2015: 24).

> [your] analysis (*rnam par dpyad nas*), another method of establishment (*grub pa'i thabs gzhan*) for presenting a phenomenon as established (*dngos po grub par rnam par 'jog par byed la*) is not even claimed (*yang kha ma blangs*) by you (*khyod kyis*).[136]

The opponent knows only a *svabhāvic* semantic framework and therefore knows no model capable of accommodating any other mode of existence (for which reason they frequently misunderstand emptiness as non-existence, since emptiness denies the only mode of existence they know). On the contrary, another model (in fact, the only method) for establishing conventional phenomena is claimed by the Madhyamaka: the conventional reasoning of conventional establishment in their non-standard, conventional semantic framework of dependence relations. Candrakīrti confirms this in his explicit move from analysis' tetralemmic negation of *svabhāvic* production to the dependent existence of phenomena because *dependent production* (or conventional establishment) is the only valid alternative to account for what appears in ordinary cognitive experience:

> [MĀ 6:114:] Because phenomena are not produced (*utpadyamānāḥ na hi santi bhāvāḥ*) from self (*svasmāt*), from another (*parasmāt*), from both (*dvayataḥ*), causelessly (*ahetutaḥ*), nor are caused by Īśvara and so forth (*īśvara-kāraṇa-ādeḥ*), it follows [by inference] that they emerge [instead in] dependent production (*tasmāt pratītyaprabhavam prayānti*).[137]

This confirms that the unfindability and emptiness of analysis in no way occludes the conventional establishment of phenomena in the semantic framework of dependence relations—the clear light of the conventional truth. That non-contradiction paves the way for a specific methodological synergy of refutational analysis and affirmative conventional reasoning in the conventional truth.

Despite serving different functions via affirmation and refutation, respectively, these two modes of argumentation ultimately lead to congruent understandings in the conventional truth via the synonymity of dependence relations and emptiness. These congruent understandings establish a synergy of analysis and conventional reasoning concerning their argumentative goal *strictly in terms of their relation to the conventional truth*. The synergy of conventional reasoning and analysis in the conventional truth *is* the

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[136] MĀB 6:157*:* […] *btsal ba na shing rta mi 'thad ching khyod kyis kyang rnam par dpyad nas dnogs po grub par rnam par 'jog par byed la | grub pa'i thabs gzhan yang khas ma blangs pa* […] (Liland 2020: 322).
[137] MĀ 6:114: *ahetutaśceśvarakāraṇādeḥ svasmāt parasmāt dvayataśca yasmād | utpadyamānā na hi santi bhāvāstasmāt pratītyaprabhavaṃ prayānti ||* (Li 2015: 18).

same synonymity of dependence relations and emptiness, an incontrovertibly well-attested feature of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti (e.g., MMK 7:16ab, 24:18; VV 22; MĀ 6:38 and PSP 491).[138] In these cases, dependence relations are presented alongside and synonymized with emptiness and the lack of *svabhāva* as if they were mutually established conclusions. Conventional reasoning establishes dependence relations that supplant *svabhāvic* cognitions via the correction of ordinary cognition's semantic framework; analysis, because it specifically refutes *svabhāvic* cognitions and an invalid semantic framework, establishes the emptiness of all phenomena. Because dependence relations and emptiness are synonymous, conventional reasoning and analysis are therefore synergistic.

As a methodological program of philosophical argumentation, first dependence relations and the dependent existence of conventionally established phenomena are taught; then, any unconscious bias towards *svabhāva* (via default realism and the reification of conventionally established phenomena) is demolished in subsequent stages. These graded teachings come from another Nāgārjunian tetralemma:

> [MMK 18:8:] All is real (*sarvam tathyam*) or unreal (*na vā tathyam*), [all is both] real and unreal (*tathyam ca atathyam eva*), and [all is] neither real not unreal (*ca na eva atathyam na eva tathyam*)—this is the [graded] teaching of the Buddha (*etat buddha-anuśāsanam*).[139]

The first stage consists of teaching the "reality" of the basic *Buddhadharmic* elements that are conventionally established, such as the five aggregates (*pañca-skandha*), by means of conventional reasoning and dependence relations. The second stage teaches their compoundedness, impermanence, selflessness, emptiness, etc., and therefore their "unreality" as "real" (*svabhāvic*) entities, by means of

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[138] See my discussion of MMK 24:18 above (p. 90 above). VV 22 and PSP 491 are explicit about the relation, so I include a translation of those. VV 22: "That which is the dependent existence of phenomena (*yaḥ ca pratītya bhāvaḥ bhāvānām*) is said to be emptiness (*śūnyatā iti sā hi uktā*) since the phenomenon that exists dependently (*yaḥ tu pratītya bhāvaḥ bhavati hi*) [exists] lacking *svabhāva* (*asvabhāvatvam*); *yaśca pratītya bhāvo bhavānāṃ śūnyateti sā hyuktā | yastu pratītya bhāvo bhavati hi tasyāsvabhāvatvam* || (Yonezawa 2008: 252). PSP 491: "Thus, that which is the meaning of the term "dependent origination" (*pratītyasamutpāda-śabdasya yaḥ arthaḥ*) is the meaning of the term "emptiness" (*saḥ eva śūnyatā-śabdasya arthaḥ*). Moreover, that which is the meaning of the term "non-existence" (*abhāva-śabdasya yaḥ arthaḥ*) is not the meaning of the term "emptiness" (*na … saḥ śūnyatā-śabdasya arthaḥ*); *evaṃ pratītyasamutpādaśabdasya yo 'rthaḥ, sa eva śūnyatāśabdasyārthaḥ, na punarabhāvaśabdasya yo 'rthaḥ sa śūnyatāśabdasyārthaḥ* | (Vaidya 1960b: 214).

[139] MMK 18:8: *sarvaṃ tathyaṃ na vā tathyaṃ tathyaṃ cātathyameva ca | naivātathyaṃ naiva tathyametadbuddhānuśāsanam* || (Vaidya 1960b: 157). *Tathya* has the same connotations of real/true as *satya*; in this case, I chose to go with "real" instead of "true" because the context suggests we are discussion conventional existence. On taking these schematic declarations as grades/stages in a progression, see Siderits & Katsura 2013: 201-2, who call this call "the graded teaching of the Buddha".

refutational analysis. The third stage combines these two in the conventional truth: phenomena are "conventionally real" as instances of dependence relations but, because of this, also "really unreal" (with "really" taken in the ignorant sense of "real") because empty. In the fourth stage, as a means of seeing *tattva* (*tattva-darśana*) and the ultimate truth, both alternatives are rejected in attaining the cessation of conceptualization (*prapañca-upaśana*) in non-dual ultimate cognition.[140]

With this synonymization of dependence relations and emptiness, these two forms of argumentation in one important context of the conventional truth say the same thing. Although Tsong Khapa does not go so far as to say these two forms of investigation "say the same thing" (and I argue for this synergy only in the context of the conventional truth), their non-contradiction is his third criterion of conventional establishment (see p. 156 above). This is only possible given the synonymity of dependence relations and emptiness, such that the unfindability of a phenomenon under analysis does not contradict its valid cognition via dependence relations. Emptiness, insofar as it denies *svabhāvic* existence, means that empty phenomena, if they were to exist at all, must be dependent phenomena (and vice versa). The synergy of conventional reasoning and analysis therefore concerns their philosophical value as kindred arguments towards synergistic conclusions *at the conventional level*. Therefore, the evidence reveals that both conventional reasoning and analysis comprise the conventional truth as approached from two different argumentative angles reflecting different two argumentative methodologies: conventional establishment is its positive wing furnishing the valid cognition of ordinary experience (i.e., "it is *this*"), with the specific refutational analysis of *svabhāvic* cognition its negative wing disproving conventional falsity, its invalid cognition (i.e., "but *this* is *not that*"). Together, both paint a comprehensive picture of the conventional truth's argumentative strategies for accomplishing its two goals.

Candrakīrti is also clear that in *soteriological function* conventional reasoning and analysis differ. Analysis' explicit proscription was initially explained twofoldly as i) analysis and conventional reasoning

[140] I revisit this important pedagogical point regarding the non-dual ultimate in PART II (chapter 5).

taking different subjects and operating in different semantic frameworks, the former taking uniquely *svabhāvic* cognitions and the latter uniquely conventional phenomena; and ii) this analysis alone, because strictly refutational, being unsuitable for furnishing a positive account of the valid cognition of ordinary experience but serving solely the refutation of invalid cognitions. In that second context, if their distinction is misunderstood and no conventional reasoning is also applied, there would be nothing left for the valid cognition of ordinary experience and the conventional truth. However, Candrakīrti further indicates analysis' proscription in a third context because, insofar as functioning further like a meditative exercise, it has as its ultimate effect the cessation of conceptualization or fabrication (as related to the fourth stage just mentioned). This follows its direct result of non-implicative negation and the full realization of emptiness. Candrakīrti says:

> [MĀ 6:117-8ab:] That which is cessation of fabrications (*yā kalpanānām vinivṛttiḥ*), that is the fruit of analysis (*etat phalam vicārasya*), the wise say (*budhāḥ vadanti*). Ordinary people (*pṛthagjanāḥ*) are fettered by fabrication (*kalpanayā eva baddhāḥ*); without [such] fabrication (*akalpayan*), the *yogī* is set free (*muktim upaiti yogī*).
>
> Analysis is not performed out of fondness for disputation (*na vādalobhāt vihitaḥ vicāraḥ*), but, in the [*Madhyamaka*]*śāstra*, the ultimate (*tattvam*) is explained for [the sake of] liberation (*kathitam vimuktyai*).[141]

I relate this back to the two truths distinction and the reintroduction of analysis' ultimate parameters since the cessation of fabrication (the "fruit of analysis") is associated with the formal conditions of the ultimate but not the conventional truth (which is subject to fabrication). In chapter 2 (§2.2) the cognizance of this fabrication was associated with the conventional truth as part and parcel of the valid cognition of ordinary

[141] MĀ 6:117-8ab: *yā kalpanānāṃ vinivṛttiretat phalaṃ vicārasya budhā vadanti | pṛthagjanāḥ kalapanayaiva baddhā akalpayan muktimupaiti yogī || na vādalobhādvihito vicārastattvaṃ tu śāstre kathitaṃ vimuktyai |* (Li 2015: 18). Jones (2023: 470) comments, "Candrakīrti's attitude here seems to be that some engaged philosophical argument is a healthy part of the soteriological aim of the whole enterprise. It could even be said to be necessary, because human beings tend to be attached to views. […] Therefore, the investigation of the self that Candrakīrti undertakes is not only a philosophical meditation. This very meditation necessarily also involves the refutation of rival views, and perhaps even involves debate. However, the purpose of this theoretical activity remains liberation, not the establishment of a view or theory as correct". I interpret this to mean that the purpose of *vicāra specifically* is not the establishment of a view or theory because, in relation to the conventional truth, it refutes only conventional falsity. However, as a meditative exercise, it accomplishes much more than this: the realization of emptiness. The establishment of a view or theory, on the other hand, is the purview of conventional reasoning (via conventional semantics); the view it establishes *is* right view, and the intellectual understanding this right view affords is the bridge to realizing emptiness by means of analysis' non-implicative negation.

(fabricated) experience. In PART II (chapter 5, §5.1), the ultimate is defined as "unfabricated" (*nirvikalpa*) is contrast with the form of the conventional truth. Thus, the fruit of analysis has ultimate repercussions (evident from Candrakīrti's alliance of analysis, the ultimate, and liberation) over and above its conventional characteristics, which was the context of establishing the relation of this analysis and conventional reasoning. More than its argumentative capacities, analysis in this newfound soteriological context functions as a vehicle for the experiential realization of emptiness (which differs from its conceptual understanding, the conventional level at which emptiness and dependent origination are functionally synonymous). Any further discussion of that realization is beyond the purview of the conventional truth and therefore exceeds the scope of the present discussion; it is reserved for PART II.

§3.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I exhibited Madhyamaka argumentation's conventional implications towards demonstrating the conventional truth's philosophical value. It was necessary to demonstrate analysis' conventional implications to explain away its proscription concerning ordinary experience, which has been used to invalidate that value. I instead demonstrated that, although the conventional truth as a positive account of ordinary experience typically consists of conventional reasoning establishing conventional phenomena by means of the right view of dependence relations, there is a synergy of conventional reasoning and refutational analysis stemming from the synonymization of dependence relations and emptiness. This entails analysis' conventional aspect, from which analysis and emptiness certainly play a significant role in the conventional truth. This synergy strengthens the conventional truth's capacity for furnishing a positive account of ordinary experience in the phenomenal world since conventional reasoning and analysis present simultaneous fronts for refuting conventional falsity.

I demonstrated this as follows. In §3.1, I outlined the cognitive reading of the conventional truth, taking the conventional truth as correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience and conventional falsity with its invalid cognition. I differentiated it from competing accounts of the conventional truth that do not respect its normative conditions of differentiation from conventional

falsity. Such normativity is the backbone of this epistemological distinction. In §3.2, I demonstrated the conditions under which "convention" is either categorized as conventional truth or falsity, establishing the normativity integral to this differentiation. Candrakīrti's refutation of conventional falsity through the cataracts analogy was the subject of §3.3, confirming conventional falsity as correlated with the invalid cognition of ordinary experience. In §3.4, I assessed the various argumentative forms of the conventional truth, establishing two goals: the refutation of conventional falsity and the furnishing of a positive account of ordinary experience's valid cognition. The conventional truth's philosophical value lies in the strength of its argumentation and the normative epistemological differentiation thereof from conventional falsity.

In chapter 4, this philosophical value is explicitly demonstrated with the exposition of Madhyamaka epistemological anti-foundationalism and ontological anti-realism, two philosophical products of the conventional truth which are based in tandem on the argumentative strategies appealing to both dependence relations and emptiness.

CHAPTER 4: EPISTEMOLOGICAL ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM & METAPHYSICAL ANTI-REALISM

In this chapter, I align Madhyamaka epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism by establishing their interdependence in constituting the conventional truth. As correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience, the conventional truth is both epistemologically anti-foundationalist and metaphysically anti-realist from the arguments criticizing epistemological foundationalism and metaphysical realism. Insofar as the same pattern of arguments applies in both cases, the Mādhyamikas' counterarguments invariably appeal to the philosophical baseline of dependence relations, which are here applied to the interrelated domains of epistemology and metaphysics as essential aspects of cognitive experience. Both epistemological foundationalism and metaphysical realism should be categorized as conventional falsity; consequently, their refutation belongs to the conventional truth.

In §4.1, I address the critique of epistemological foundationalism through the core problem of the "establishment" (*prasiddhi*) of the epistemic instruments (the *pramāṇa*s). Epistemological foundationalism is characterized by Stoltz as a "*pramāṇa*-based epistemology"[1] holding that the *pramāṇa*s are the foundation on which the *prameya*s (the epistemic objects) are established. This is foundationalist epistemology's fundamental premise. However, the broader question of the establishment of the *pramāṇa*s themselves remains unanswered. This is Nāgārjuna's major concern in both the VV and VP; it is consequently his ingress to undermine epistemological foundationalism. Nonetheless, this anti-foundationalism does not invalidate conventional epistemology since Nāgārjuna presents an alternative model wherein the existential and conceptual interdependence of the *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s permits their mutual establishment. This model, which is necessarily anti-foundationalist, affords the valid cognition of the *mechanics* (that is, the constituent parts) of conventional epistemology via the *pramāṇa–prameya* scheme. The critique is *cognitive* insofar as it reduces epistemology to an aspect of cognitive experience when any cognitive experience is validly cognized as the product of an epistemic instrument

[1] Jonathan Stoltz, *Illuminating the Mind: An Introduction to Buddhist Epistemology*, Oxford University Press, 2021: 153.

and its object conceived in mutual establishment. In §4.2, I address metaphysical anti-realism as the mirror of epistemological anti-foundationalism by applying the same pattern of arguments concerning the valid cognition of ordinary experience in a metaphysical context. The Mādhyamikas critique metaphysical realism through the core problem of *svabhāva*, the foundationalist premise of realist metaphysics. Like anti-foundationalism, the anti-realist critique, too, is *cognitive* where it concerns the mind-dependent nature of the cognition of the phenomenal world and the reduction of the furniture of that world to cognitive objects. Developing a *conventional* metaphysic of interdependence (by invoking the mind–world model of cognitive experience), I situate Madhyamaka anti-realism between metaphysical realism and idealism, thus defining the Madhyamaka position as the *middle way*.

The essential relation integral to the valid cognition of the epistemological and metaphysical wings of ordinary cognitive experience is that epistemological anti-foundationalism is equally anti-foundationalist about the existence and nature of the *pramāṇa*s as it is about the *prameya*s; in turn, metaphysical anti-realism is equally anti-realist about the existence and nature of the mind as it is about the world. This is a balance essential to the philosophy of the middle way. In this way, the two mirror one another.

§4.1 MADHYAMAKA CONVENTIONAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Nāgārjuna critiques the foundationalist *pramāṇa*-based epistemology standard in Indian philosophy, wherein the epistemic instruments (the foundation) establish the epistemic objects.[2] This requires, per Garfield, a differentiation of a "foundationalism of *content*" (taking certain beliefs as foundational of other beliefs) and a "foundationalism of *method*" (taking certain faculties or methods (i.e., the *source* of the content) as foundational); the foundationalism the Mādhyamikas critique is the latter.[3] In this standard account, the epistemic objects are of secondary importance to the instruments, the primary element. It is against this prioritization that anti-foundationalist arguments gain traction. Matilal defines a *pramāṇa* in

[2] All Indian epistemology is centred on the discussion of the *pramāṇa*s. However, the contents of the list of accepted *pramāṇa*s differs between schools, mostly of the orthodox (Vedic) variety, although both Buddhist and Jain philosophers also engage in discussions of the *pramāṇa*s. I restrict the discussion of the *pramāṇa*s to the four accepted by the Nyāya and that configure in both Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's discussion of conventional epistemology.

[3] Garfield 2011: 27 n.8; see also fn. 50 below.

three senses: i) "a means for (or a way of) knowledge"; ii) "an authoritative source for making a knowledge-claim"; and iii) a "'proof', a way of proving that something exists or something is the case".[4] Each is consistent with the Mādhyamikas' understanding of *pramāṇa*s: they do not deny them these epistemological roles, only the foundationalist premise. The Mādhyamikas work nominally within this framework, endorsing the four *pramāṇa*s of perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), analogy (*upamāna*), and authority (*āgama*). Given this endorsement, I disagree with Siderits that "in [the] *Vigrahavyāvartanī* Nāgārjuna denies the possibility of giving a coherent account of the *pramāṇas*".[5] Rather, Nāgārjuna denies *pramāṇa*-based epistemology, not the epistemological roles of the *pramāṇa*s themselves. His account is the interdependence (i.e., mutual establishment) of *pramāṇa* and *prameya*. Others, such as Thakchöe, agree that the Mādhyamikas do offer an account of *conventional* epistemology grounded in dependence relations and emptiness.[6] To that effect, Candrakīrti defines each *pramāṇa* as follows, though it is important to understand that his context differs from Nāgārjuna's initial critique.[7]

(1) Perception (*pratyakṣa*) is the conceptual identification of the objects of experience from sense-data (e.g., "this is a jar"). It is defined as "established (*vyavasthāpyate*) by that object (*tat viṣayeṇa*)

[4] Bimal Krishna Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*, Clarendon Press, 1986: 36. Stoltz (2021: 15; see also p. 17) also defines a *pramāṇa* in three ways as "[1] a source of knowledge or [2] an instrument for attaining knowledge or [3] an instrument by which one accurately measures reality". According to Monier-Williams (1986: 685.3), a *pramāṇa* is a "measure, scale, standard" and an "authority".

[5] Siderits 2016: 13. He continues, "Nāgārjuna does not do this in order to show the possibility of universal doubt. Rather, his motivation is anti-realist: he seeks to show the impossibility of a theory of the *pramāṇas* in order to close off one common route to metaphysical realism". While I agree with the broad strokes of this characterization, in particular its allusion to metaphysical realism (see §4.2), I would not say that Nāgārjuna denies the possibility of giving a coherent account of the *pramāṇa*s without specifying that he denies *pramāṇa*-based epistemology but not the *pramāṇa*s themselves.

[6] Thakchöe 2011: 51: "The heart of Candrakīrti's epistemology is the claim that only because they are empty can cognitions be epistemically efficient" and "According to Candrakīrti, cognitions are epistemically efficient just because they are utterly empty of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), even conventionally". The same should be extended to Nāgārjuna.

[7] Candrakīrti faces a different opponent than Nāgārjuna, his critiques addressing the later Yogācāra-leaning logico-epistemological school of Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, and their followers (including Bhāviveka, who is not strictly a member but is nonetheless influenced by them). Two related considerations detail his need to (re)define the *pramāṇa*s: i) The logicians only accept two: a purely non-conceptual perception and a purely conceptual inference, each of which corresponds to a particular type of epistemic object: perception to the real/unique particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) and inference to the fictional universal (*sāmāṇyalakṣaṇa*). This makes Dignāga a nominalist about universals who posits an ultimate existent only accessible by non-conceptual perception, associating the latter with "conventional existence" (*saṃvṛtisat*) and only the former with "ultimate existence" (*paramārthasat*); see his *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV) III.3. Candrakīrti objects to this narrow and "unconventional" definition of perception (see below) and its association with the ultimate. ii) Candrakīrti does not feel Dignāga's philosophical project of explaining the conventional truth by means of conventional practices is conventional *qua* ordinary at all, using stilted language in *unconventional* ways (cf. PSP 74; Arnold 2005a: 152; Siderits 2016: 231-2; and Stoltz 2021: 60).

together with the knowledge [of it] (*jñānena saha*)".[8] It is a sense-perception (i.e., the necessity of the presence of that object to the senses) together with its conceptualization (i.e., the necessity of the knowledge of it). This perception is therefore specifically conceptual in form.[9]

(2) Inference (*anumāna*) applies when perception is not directly possible, as when fire on a distant hill is only inferable from the perception of smoke. Perception in that sense is a precondition of inference insofar as inferences are made based on perceptions about things that are non-present (or intangible). Candrakīrti defines it as "knowledge (*jñānam*) of a non-present object (*parokṣa-viṣayam*)" (that is, of a perspectival non-presence for the perceiver, not that it must be something imperceptible).[10] Inference, because responsible for deductions beyond the immediate possibility of sense-perception, is the cornerstone of abstract thinking and philosophical inquiry; as such, it is indispensable to the Madhyamaka philosopher. Inference in that narrower philosophical context is the central concern in the *Svātantrika–Prāsaṅgikaa* distinction, an alleged intra-Madhyamaka schism; the distinction's viability is itself questionable,[11] but the fact that Candrakīrti criticizes Bhāviveka concerning inference is not. Candrakīrti favours *prasaṅgic* argumentation[12] and discredits Bhāviveka's *svatantric* reasoning (independently valid syllogisms).[13] I Introduce this point as a matter of context; this debate's minutiae

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[8] PSP 75: […] *pratyakṣaṃ vyavasthāpyate tadviṣayeṇa jñānena saha* | (Vaidya 1960b: 25).
[9] See "Introduction to PART I", p. 24 fn. 5 above for how his definition differs from Dignāga's.
[10] PSP 75: *parokṣaviṣayaṃ tu jñānaṃ* […] *anumānam* || (Vaidya 1960b: 25).
[11] Although this doxographical distinction is a later Tibetan invention (the corresponding terms are reconstructed into Sanskrit from Tibetan *rang rgyud* (=*svatantra*; *rang rgyud pa* =*svātantrika*) and *thal 'gyur* (=*prasaṅga*; *thal 'gyur pa* =*prāsaṅgika*)). According to Dreyfus and McClintock (2003: 5), "One temptation to be resisted at all costs is the use of the terms Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika as if they referred to well-established and self-evident Indian subschools (avoiding this use is not as easy to achieve as it sounds). In fact, most of the time what are really indicated by these terms are not Indian subschools per se but rather particular Tibetan interpretations of Indian Madhyamaka, interpretations that are often interesting and well-informed but not necessarily accurate and nearly always a matter of great dispute. Thus, far from having any degree of transparency, immediacy, or even clarity, the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction is highly problematic and in great need of clarification".
[12] This was explained in chapter 3 (§§3.4.2) as consequentialist reasoning in the style of *reductio ad absurdum* argumentation in the context of "analysis" (*vicāra*) and a non-implicative negation.
[13] The critique of Bhāviveka takes up significant space in the first chapter of the PSP. Highlights are PSP 19, 25, and 30. Candrakīrti's qualms with Bhāviveka about inference concern not so much its nature (as in how it is generally defined) but how it is formally applied in the argumentation of the two truths distinction (in particular, concerning the arguments employed in convincing an opponent (most likely non-Buddhist) of the philosophical merits of emptiness; cf. PSP 19. These "independently valid syllogisms" (*svatantra-prayoga*, *rang rgyud kyi sbyor ba*) refer to a formal three-membered syllogism consisting of i) a subject (*dharmin*) with a predicate (*sādhya*), i.e., together which constitute the thesis (*pratijñā*) to be established; ii) the reason (*hetu*); and iii) the example (*dṛṣṭānta*). See William Ames, "Bhāvaviveka's Own Views of His Differences with Buddhapālita", *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction*, 2003: 45. Huntington (in the same volume) demonstrates Bhāviveka's influence from the logico-epistemological tradition of Dignāga ("Was Candrakīrti a Prāsaṅgika?",

should not invalidate the necessity of inferential arguments more generally (i.e., less formally) in Madhyamaka philosophy. As demonstrated, the Mādhyamikas endorse two styles of argumentation (as species of inference more generally) towards the conventional truth: conventional reasoning (*upapatti*) and analysis (*vicāra*).[14] If the latter corresponds to *prasaṅgic* argumentation insofar as wrong views are demolished by their own commitments and nothing else is thereby found, the former does not correspond to *svatantra* argumentation (see fn. 13 above).

(3) Analogy (*upamāna*) Candrakīrti defines as "knowledge of objects unexperienced (*ananubhūta-arthādhigamaḥ*), such as a gayal (*gavayaḥ iti yathā*), on account of its similarity/likeness (*sādṛśyāt*) [to something known], like a buffalo (*gauḥ iva*)".[15] Built into this definition is the comparison of two otherwise different phenomena through the establishment of resemblance.[16] However, this narrow application cannot exhaust all the ways the Mādhyamikas employ analogies in argumentatively establishing the valid cognition of ordinary experience: they frequently make analogical arguments indicating a universal conceptual template of dependence relations analogically applicable towards the valid cognition of all phenomena. It is reasonable to take analogical reasoning as a subspecies of the inferences the Mādhyamikas frequently employ: they argue that this dependence relation X is like dependence relation Y. Several of these templates appear in this chapter or have been seen elsewhere.

(4) Lastly, authority (*āgama*) usually refers to scriptural authority. Though many orthodox and heterodox schools accept *āgama* as a *pramāṇa*, they disagree about which texts constitute authorities.

The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction, 2003: 74-5). The *conventional* status of this reasoning for both should not be understated. Huntington frames Candrakīrti's fear as if Bhāviveka's *svatantric* syllogisms give the appearance of "reality" and "reality-referentiality" in the conventional truth. This blurs the conventional–ultimate distinction. Thus, Candrakīrti does not want his conventional truth to model the logicians and epistemologists of the surrounding traditions (see Huntington 2003: 80-1). Nonetheless, Candrakīrti's repudiation of *svatantra* or his favouring of *prasaṅga* does not invalidate the possibility of offering a positive account of the valid cognition of ordinary experience (as I stressed in chapter 3 (§3.4)).

[14] See chapter 3 (§3.4).

[15] PSP 75: *sādṛśyādananubhūtārthādhigama upamānaṃ gauriva gavaya iti yathā* || (Vaidya 1960b: 25).

[16] Although the intention is a comparative argument, whether *upamāna* should be considered analogies, metaphors, or similes is a matter of interpretation. The comparison, more than just a rhetorical device, makes a philosophical point: X and Y are related by a certain predicate (e.g., impermanence, selflessness, emptiness), though this quality is usually much more obvious in one than the other. Such analogies are frequent in the Pāli canon, as in SN 22.95 for the five aggregates and MN 22 for the perilous nature of sensual desire.

I.e., for Buddhists the Vedic scriptures are not authoritative, yet for Vedists neither are the Buddhist scriptures. For the former, all that is *Buddhavacana* (the alleged words spoken by the Buddha) is scripturally authoritative, though that does not mean they agree about which texts are *Buddhavacana* (see the Hīnayāna–Mahāyāna schism and the issue of the authenticity of the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s).[17] Nonetheless, a defining feature of *Buddhadharmic* philosophers is the unquestionable invocation of Gautama Buddha's authority (as represented canonically). *Āgama* also includes deference to non-scriptural authorities, i.e., certain accomplished masters (*ārya*s and *ācārya*s); this is captured in Candrakīrti's definition, "the declarations (*vacanam*) of trustworthy ones (*āptānām*) directly knowing matters beyond the senses (*sākṣāt atīndriya-artha-vidām*)".[18] This refers to the masters' extrasensory cognitions (i.e., *extra*-ordinary cognitions related to the ultimate). Candrakīrti frequently cites Nāgārjuna (and to a lesser extent Āryadeva and Buddhapālita) as a *Buddhadharmic authority*.[19] Furthermore, Candrakīrti's scholastic efforts citing corroborating Mahāyāna *sūtra*s are also textbook examples of *āgama.*

The Nyāya school (an orthodox branch of Indian philosophy mostly concerned with logic and epistemology) lists these same four *pramāṇa* (cf. *Nyāyasūtra* (NS) 1.1.3).[20] Its epistemological

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[17] See Salvini 2023: 412 on Candrakīrti's pan-Buddhist (i.e., not restricted to the Madhyamaka, or even the Mahāyāna) interest in Buddhist scriptures as supporting his own interpretations (what Salvini calls an "inclusive hermeneutics"). Salvini also notes how Candrakīrti appeals to a canonical hermeneutic approach that differentiates texts based on their "provisional" (*neyārtha*) or "definitive" (*nītārtha*) meaning (cf. MĀ 6:95; Salvini 2023: 412).

[18] PSP 75: *sākṣādatīndriyārthavidāmāptānāṃ yadvacanaṃ sa āgamaḥ* || (Vaidya 1960b: 25).

[19] Candrakīrti names Nāgārjuna at MĀB 6:2-3; MĀ 6:79, 11:42, 54-6 and more frequently cites his corpus. Cf. Vose ("Authority in Early Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 38.6, 2010: 554) and Ruegg ("Pramāṇabhūta, *pramāṇa (bhūta)-puruṣa, pratyakṣadharman" and "sākṣātkṛtadharman" as Epithets of the "ṛṣi, ācārya" and "tathāgata" in Grammatical, Epistemological and Madhyamaka Texts", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 57.2, 1994: 303-4) on taking *pramāṇa*/*tshad ma* as an epithet for the Buddha or a master like Nāgārjuna. Ruegg (1994: 304, 309) interprets *pramāṇa-bhūta*/*tshad mar gyur pa'i skyes bu* as "a person who is (like) (a means of) correct knowledge". Similarly, Vose (2010: 559) discusses Jayānanda's advocation (11th c. writer of the only Indian commentary on the MĀ) of the authority of Nāgārjuna's philosophy "as the sole means by which one can come to understand emptiness". Furthermore, this deference to Nāgārjuna transcends the *svatantra-prasaṅga* schism: Bhāviveka critiques Buddhapālita's repetition of Nāgārjuna's style of argumentation (largely consisting of *prasaṅga*) in his MMK commentary but does not apply the same criticisms to Nāgārjuna because a commentator has different duties and responsibilities than the original author (see Ames 2003: 49-50, 54, 56). I say this to underscore the Mādhyamikas' unwavering deference to Nāgārjuna as an *authority*. Candrakīrti says that, even in his own autocommentaries, Nāgārjuna favours *prasaṅga* (cf. PSP 25).

[20] MacDonald and others are of the opinion that this list of four *pramāṇa*s may be a borrowed from Buddhist material consulted by Candrakīrti with his own interpretation (2015b: 289-91 n. 541; see also Vose 2010: 556) and, therefore, presumably not from the Nyāya. She compares Candrakīrti's definitions with those of the NS, showing how they differ. Her discussion is silent on Nāgārjuna's earlier employment of the same four terms and if Candrakīrti only elaborates this list. It is left unresolved if there was ever a borrowing between these two traditions, though a mere coincidence seems unlikely.

foundationalism is usually identified as Nāgārjuna's target through parallels found in his VV and VP with the NS.[21] However, a closer study reveals his concerns stretching wider, with the Nyāya position being only one limb of his tetralemmic negation of foundationalist positions.[22] Although the self-establishment principle of Nyāya epistemological foundationalism takes the brunt of his criticisms, investigating the *pramāṇa*s' establishment more globally is Nāgārjuna's true concern. After rejecting the four logical possibilities of *pramāṇic* establishment, he presents an alternative (outside the tetralemma), consistent with his universal appeal to dependence relations and emptiness, of the existential and conceptual interdependence of the *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s. From rejecting *pramāṇa*-based epistemological foundationalism, anti-foundationalism follows. It solves the foundationalist problem of establishment via *mutual establishment*, within which there is no proper foundation.

4.1.1 THE QUESTION OF ESTABLISHMENT RE: THE EPISTEMIC INSTRUMENTS

If, as in standard *pramāṇa*-based foundationalist epistemology, the *pramāṇa*s establish the *prameya*s, the question remains of what establishes the *pramāṇa*s: what principle validates the epistemic instruments as capable of establishing the epistemic objects?[23] If the epistemic instruments are analogous to instruments of measurement, like a scale establishes an object's weight,[24] what establishes the scale's

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[21] Nāgārjuna does not name his opponent, but at VP 01 he addresses "those intent on debate" (*rtsod par mngon 'dod pa*, **tarkajñānabhimāna*)" (cf. Westerhoff 2018a: 28; Tola & Dragonetti 2004: 21). There are sufficient parallels between the NS and VV/VP that there is little doubt some early version of the former is the source of (some of) Nāgārjuna's objector's ideas. It is unlikely coincidental that these texts mirror each other, so there is reason to suppose some interaction. However, the delineation of what development occurred when is unknown since there is evidence of the NS responding to Nāgārjuna's (or similar) critiques. Kuppuswami (*A Primer in Indian Logic,* The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute*,* 1951: xiv-xv) notes we need not assume Nāgārjuna is the originator of *śūnyavāda* (the doctrine of emptiness) given its presence in the earliest *suttas* (or in the earliest Mahāyāna strata), which means that he may not be the first to critique self-establishment. See also Matthew Dasti & Stephen Phillips, *The Nyāya-sūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries,* Hackett, 2017: 54, 60-1, 97-8.

[22] This is the insight taken from chapter 7 ("Skepticism") in Stoltz 2021. Other (such as Siderits and Westerhoff) hyperfocus on Nāgārjuna's critique of a specific Nyāya-flavoured epistemological foundationalism (the self-establishment of the *pramāṇa*; see §§4.1.1) but this constitutes only one limb of his tetralemma. If instead he investigates more globally the various ways the *pramāṇa*s could be established as an epistemological foundation, then foundationalism as *pramāṇa*-based epistemology in all these ways fails, from which follows a more comprehensive anti-foundationalism.

[23] VV 31: "If there is the establishment of these objects (*prasiddhiḥ arthānām*) from these epistemic instruments (*pramāṇataḥ teṣām*), you must explain how there is the establishment of these epistemic instruments in turn"; *yadi ca pramāṇatasteṣāṃ teṣāṃ prasiddhirarthānām | teṣāṃ punaḥ prasiddhiṃ brūhi kathaṃ teṣāṃ pramāṇānāṃ* || (Yonezawa 2008: 272).

[24] As noted above in fn. 4 above with one definition of *pramāṇa* being a "measure", Matilal (1986: 36) provides the following etymology: "The verbal root *mā* from which both words *pramāṇa* and *prameya* are derived with the prefix *pra*, means also 'to measure' (apart from meaning 'to cognize'). The analogy based upon this ambiguity of *mā* works very well here. What is to be measured is the *prameya*, and that by which it is to be measured, the measuring stick as it were, is the *pramāṇa*".

validity? VV 51 presents the tetralemma of the establishment of the *pramāṇa*s:

> [VV 51:] The establishment of the epistemic instruments (*prasiddhiḥ … pramāṇānām)* occurs [1] neither from themselves (*na eva svataḥ*), [2] nor mutually by [other] epistemic instruments (*na parasparataḥ pramāṇaiḥ vā*), [3] nor by the existence of the epistemic object (*bhavati na ca prameyaiḥ*), [4] nor without cause (*na ca api akasmāt*).[25]

"Establishment" is foundationalism's core concept; it invokes a causal and temporal priority: in the foundationalist model of an epistemic episode (i.e., an epistemological product such as a cognition, belief, knowledge claim, etc.), the epistemic instruments must firstly exist (be established) to themselves establish the epistemic objects, not the inverse. Stoltz differentiates two senses of "establishment": i) "knowing these four instruments to exist" and ii) "recognizing, of these four instruments, that they are genuine *pramāṇa*s".[26] The second is more relevant to Nāgārjuna's query since that the four *pramāṇa*s exist (in the first sense) is assumed; only the validity of foundationalist, *pramāṇa*-based epistemology is questioned. The tetralemma exhausts these four limbs: i) the *pramāṇa*s' self-establishment; ii) their mutual establishment (i.e., one *pramāṇa*'s establishment by another and so on); iii) their establishment by the *prameya* (the inverse of *pramāṇa*-based epistemology); and iv) their causeless establishment. Evident in this tetralemma is a *global* concern for the *pramāṇa*s' "establishment" from every possible avenue, not restricted to self-establishment, which one could reasonably refute without refuting the other possibilities and therefore remain a foundationalist in *pramāṇa*-based epistemology (especially through options two and four). However, this does not apply to Nāgārjuna as he refutes each possibility in turn.

(1) Self-establishment assumes the independent and self-validating power of the *pramāṇa*s to illuminate the existence and provide knowledge of the *prameya*s at the same time they illuminate themselves. Their self-establishment is their self-validation. This is illustrated with an analogy of self-illumination: the *pramāṇa*s are analogous to a lamp illuminating both itself and other objects, meaning that the *pramāṇa*s are the foundation of their own validity in the same way a lamp is the source of its

[25] VV 51: *naiva svataḥ prasiddhirna parasparataḥ pramāṇairvā | bhavati na ca prameyairna cāpyakasmāt pramāṇānām ||* (Yonezawa 2008: 298).
[26] Stoltz 2021: 151-2. In the analogous case of the measuring instrument, (1) entails "verifying that a scale was used" and (2) "verifying that the scale used is an accurate instrument" (2021: 151).

own light, not requiring another source to be illuminated (tantamount to another *pramāṇa*, as in the second lemma). While illuminating itself it also illuminates surrounding objects; hence the *foundational* role afforded to the lamp in illumination and the *pramāṇa*s in epistemology.[27] As a lamp illuminates both itself and other objects, a *pramāṇa* could function as both an epistemic instrument and its own unique kind of epistemic object when it illuminates itself. Since a second lamp is not required to illuminate the first, such would also be the case for the *pramāṇa*s. In this way, the *pramāṇa*s self-establish without reliance on anything else, including any other *pramāṇa* (thus avoiding an infinite regress of justification, the problem of the second lemma).[28] The *pramāṇa*s' alleged ability to inherently self-establish is critical for the first type of *pramāṇa*-based epistemology insofar as there is a clear foundation: one self-validating *pramāṇa* acts as the foundation of an epistemic episode establishing a corresponding epistemic object.[29] Nāgārjuna critiques this image in at least three places: VV 33-41, VP 06-11, and MMK 7:8-12, evincing this as a common tactic in various contexts for the justification of a certain phenomenon's independence from dependence relations.[30] Therein lies the problem: the *pramāṇa*s' self-establishment means that they are established and function in a way independently of the *prameya*s of which they are the epistemic instrument (cf. VV 40).[31] I return to this counter after discussing the remaining lemmas since it also

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[27] NS 2.1.19: "The means of right knowledge are established like the illumination of a lamp"; *pradīpaprakāśasiddhivat tatsiddheḥ* (trans. Mahāmahopādhyāya Satiśa Chandra Vidyābhuṣana, *The Nyāya Sutras of Gotama*, Pāṇini Office, 1913: 28). It is further elaborated in the NS commentaries that "just as a lamp illumines itself and other objects, the means of right knowledge establish themselves and the objects of right knowledge. Hence, perception establishes itself and the objects of sense" (1913: 28). However, Matilal (1986: 59-60) has expressed reservations that this accurately captures the whole of Nyāya epistemology (see also fn. 44 below). It is not my intent to determine if Nāgārjuna does accurately characterize the Nyāya but to discuss the problem of the establishment of the *pramāṇa* as he frames the issue.

[28] Westerhoff (2018a: 55) elaborates the analogy: "The epistemic instruments are similar to a light, since as a light illuminates non-perceived objects and thereby makes them manifest, epistemic instruments make non-cognized objects manifest. For this reason, the opponent argues, the epistemic instruments are self-manifesting or self-establishing (*svayaṃsiddha*), thereby avoiding an infinite regress". The infinite regress concerns the second lemma (see below).

[29] Nonetheless, for the Nyāya an object may be known through multiple *pramāṇa*s. Vātsyāyana's NS commentary gives multiple examples: the self (*ātman*) is known from scriptural authority, inference, and a special kind of meditative perception; fire is known from a reliable authority, inference, or perception. Uddyotakara's commentary discusses the preeminence of perception in the list of *pramāṇa*s on which all other *pramāṇa*s ultimately depend; see Dasti and Phillips (2017: 19-20).

[30] Westerhoff 2010a: 74. Nāgārjuna's critique of self-establishment across differing contexts in the MMK, VV, and VP demonstrate that a similarly faulty position in both ontological and epistemological contexts is consistently critiqued on parallel lines. Ontologically, the lamp's self-illumination is a disguise for the causal self-production or self-affectation of a phenomenon; epistemologically, it is a disguise for the self-establishment of the *pramāṇa*. The same alleged independence from dependence relations is refuted in parallel fashion. Though not directly invoked in this context, Candrakīrti launches a similar critique about the alleged independent nature of the Yogācāra theory of *cittamātra* (cf. MĀ 6:86-8).

[31] VV 40: "If according to you there is the self-establishment of the epistemic instrument (*svataḥ pramāṇa-siddhiḥ*), the

pertains to the other forms of foundationalist establishment.

(2) The second lemma, wherein one *pramāṇa* justifies another and so on, relates to the first insofar as it is a situation the first clearly tries to avoid. By this method of establishment, the tidy picture of self-establishment is undone since more than one *pramāṇa* is required to validate any epistemic episode. It is indeterminate how many *pramāṇa*s are required for the layers of validation run infinite (cf. VV 32a).[32] This infinite regress is to be avoided in the Nyāya account (cf. NS 2.1.17-9) because then the security of the foundation is questioned: if every epistemic instrument is only established by another, what justifies the establishment of the establishing instrument? That instrument would require establishment by another, and that by another, *ad infinitum*; or the justification circles back to a previous establishing instrument, in which case establishment would be circular.[33] In these cases, although any *pramāṇa* can act as the foundation of an epistemic episode, the *pramāṇa*s themselves are without a secure foundation.

(3) The third lemma, establishment by the *prameya*s, is not a position in the vein of *pramāṇa*-based epistemology but is nonetheless foundationalist insofar as the foundation becomes the epistemic objects—i.e., *prameya*-based epistemology. No example in the text is given, and Nāgārjuna's autocommentary is terse.[34] This is philosophically unsound in the context of *pramāṇa*-based

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epistemic objects would exist independently of the establishment of the epistemic instruments (*anapekṣya* […] *prameyāṇi bhavati pramāṇa-siddhiḥ*) since [self-]establishment is not dependent (*na aparāpekṣā hi siddhiḥ*)"; *yadi ca svataḥ pramāṇasiddhiranapekṣya te prameyāṇi | bhavati pramāṇasiddhiḥ nāparāpekṣā hi siddhiriti ||* (Yonezawa 2008: 286).

[32] VV 32a: "If there is the establishment of the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa-siddhiḥ*) by other epistemic instruments (*anyaiḥ … pramāṇaiḥ*), there would be an infinite regress (*anavasthā*; lit. endlessness)"; *anyaiḥ yadi pramāṇaiḥ pramāṇasiddhirbhavatyanavasthā syāt |* (Yonezawa 2008: 274). As Westerhoff (2018a: 55) notes (fn. 28 above), this elicits the recourse to self-establishment.

[33] Stoltz (2021: 156) refers to this as "epistemic coherentism". Garfield (2011: 28 n.11) likewise calls this "epistemological coherentism" with an important caveat: it is not a coherentism of beliefs being mutually supportive but wherein "the warrant of mechanisms of attaining knowledge and the warrant of the beliefs they deliver are mutually supportive". However, Nāgārjuna's argument has a more profound concern than beliefs since it specifically addresses the "mechanisms of attaining knowledge", whose constituent, complementary factors are the epistemic instruments and their objects, which, Nāgārjuna argues, both epistemically and ontologically, are mutually established. Dasti & Phillips (2017: 57) address this not in terms of establishment (since the Nyāya position is self-establishment) but of "certification": "Our need to act requires us to trust cognition if there aren't good reasons to doubt, or else we would hardly achieve anything. Then if there is reason to doubt, we look to other knowledge sources for support, and such certification can restore confidence and return us to default trust. This trust is demanded on pragmatic grounds. Here, we may say that Nyāya has a foundationalist element to its epistemology, in that such default trust serves as a basis for thought and action that is secure, so long as there are no good grounds for doubt. But it is a "soft" foundation, always reviewable and revisable in principle, should the need arise".

[34] See the translations of Westerhoff (2010a: 35) and Bhattacharya (1978: 34).

epistemology as it requires the preexistence of the *prameya*s without any correlation to the *pramāṇa*s determining the *prameya*s as such. As the inverse of *pramāṇa*-based epistemology, the question of the establishment of the *prameya*s themselves remains unanswered. This position can therefore be critiqued in the same fashion as self-establishment. My explanation of this lemma differs from Stoltz's, who understands this as the *pramāṇa* being "established, but not by *any* epistemic instruments".[35] The problem is that this formulation does not refer to the *prameya*s, yet Nāgārjuna specifically does. Stoltz understands this to lead to a vicious circle because the *pramāṇa*s establish the *prameya*s at the same time the *prameya*s establish the *pramāṇa*s.[36] However, this is not what VV 51 says, making no reference to mutual establishment. Instead, Stoltz's interpretation begins to look very much like Nāgārjuna's counterproposal (see §§4.1.2), which does not make sense since Nāgārjuna denies this option.

(4) The final lemma is "without cause" (*akasmāt*). Its soundness is also unclear since there is no explanation of the *pramāṇa*s' establishment; they are just assumed established in some unknown way, from which they act as the foundation of a *pramāṇa*-based epistemology. However, causelessness is untenable in Buddhist philosophy because of the philosophical baseline of dependence relations, for which reason the *pramāṇa*s' causeless establishment is automatically invalid for Nāgārjuna.[37] I suspect this position is included to cover the gamut of all logical possibilities, just as causelessness is included in MMK 1:1's tetralemma of production.[38] My explanation here also differs from Stoltz's, who understands this as the *pramāṇa* being "not established";[39] this is, again, not how Nāgārjuna presents the case. All his lemmas concern establishment, and neither the Sanskrit nor Tibetan mention "non-establishment" but instead being *without cause*. Stoltz justifies his position through a form of strong externalism: "one could maintain that everything known or knowable must be established by some epistemic instrument, but that the existence of these epistemic instruments is not something that is known

[35] Stoltz 2021: 152.
[36] Stoltz 2021: 153.
[37] See MMK 4:2 in chapter 2 (§§2.2.2 p. 97 above).
[38] See MMK 1:1 in chapter 3 (§§3.4.2 pp. 162-3 above).
[39] Stoltz 2021: 152.

or perhaps even knowable".[40] This denies the epistemological requirement of knowledge or awareness of the *pramāṇa*s; although Nāgārjuna presents no strong evidence to ascribe either an internalist or externalist epistemological criterion,[41] I speculate that the awareness of causal relations integral to valid cognition requires introspection about how some epistemic episode was experienced (i.e., through which *pramāṇa*), thus requiring knowledge of the *pramāṇa*s in some form. This would then be why there is any discussion of them by the Madhyamaka at all in furnishing an account of conventional epistemology.

4.1.2 NĀGĀRJUNA'S COUNTER

Must the tetralemma's fourfold refutation of establishment consequently mean that the *pramāṇa*s are *unestablished*? Any response depends on the semantic weight of the concept of "establishment" for they cannot be established in any of the fourfold ways and therefore cannot be established as the foundation of epistemic episodes (as in *pramāṇa*-based epistemology). Nonetheless, it need not follow that Nāgārjuna denies either the *pramāṇa*s or epistemology when there is an alternative anti-foundationalist framework accounting for Madhyamaka *conventional* epistemology. Although Nāgārjuna refutes the basic foundationalist premise of *pramāṇa*-based epistemology, he identifies the key to conventional epistemology in the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation more holistically; his position is their *mutual establishment*, an *anti*-foundationalist form of establishment. His counter rises from the critique of independence from dependence relations. By focusing on the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation, his objections address both the existential and conceptual relations necessary thereto. He critiques positing the *pramāṇa*s independently of the *prameya*s (the former as the foundation of the latter), and he equally critiques positing the *prameya*s independently of the *pramāṇa*s:

> [VP 02:] The epistemic instruments (*tshad ma = pramāṇa*) and the epistemic objects (*gzhal bya dag = prameya*) are both mixed (*gnyi ga 'dres*).[42]

This idea of "mixing" is interesting for it supposes a lack of separation, an inextricability. It is

[40] Stoltz 2021: 154.
[41] Cf. Stoltz 2021: 163-4 and Siderits 2016: 16.
[42] VP 02: *tshad ma dang gzhal bya sag gnyi ga 'dres so* | (Tola & Dragonetti 2004: 22).

immediately a counter to *pramāṇa*-based epistemology because that position assumes the independent existence of the *pramāṇa*s before they have established the *prameya*s (insofar as they themselves are established independently of the *prameya*s). Nāgārjuna's autocommentary goes on to establish both their existential and conceptual interdependences as central to his argument.[43] His explanation of this interdependence nonetheless requires this notion of "mixing" from the inability to clearly differentiate the *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s; as such, a corollary of this "mixing" *is* their interdependence (i.e., mutual establishment). He explains this as follows: the epistemic instruments necessarily require something about which they provide epistemic information (the epistemic object), without which they fail to satisfy the identity requirements of being *pramāṇa*s; likewise, the epistemic objects fail to be identified as such without the epistemic instruments so identifying them. Insofar as an epistemic instrument is the means of identifying an epistemic object, in that process it becomes both an epistemic instrument (as the means of identification) and itself an epistemic object (when identified as *pramāṇa*). Clearly, these identities are mixed. In the same way, when the epistemic object acts as the means of identifying an epistemic instrument, it also acts as an epistemic instrument.[44] Neither can exist without the other (i.e., existential interdependence), nor does one concept make sense without the other (i.e., conceptual interdependence).

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[43] VP 02 (autocommentary): "If the epistemic object exists (*gzhal bya yod na*), the epistemic instrument (*tshad ma*) becomes that very epistemic instrument (*tshad ma nyid du 'gyur*) and if the epistemic instrument exists (*tshad ma yod na*), then the epistemic object (*gzhal bya*) becomes that very epistemic object (*gzhal bya nyid du 'gyur*). Thus, from the epistemic object the epistemic instrument is established (*grub pa*) and from the epistemic instrument the epistemic object is also established. Because the epistemic instrument becomes the epistemic object of the epistemic object (*gzhal bya'i gzhal byar 'gyur*) and the epistemic object also becomes the epistemic instrument of the epistemic instrument (*tshad ma'i tshad par 'gyur ba*), they attain their essence/nature (*bdag nyid thob par 'gyur ba*) in dependence on one another (*phan tshun ltos nas*). For that reason, since the epistemic instrument becomes both (*gnyi gar 'gyur*) and the epistemic instrument also becomes both, both [identities] are mixed (*gnyis ka 'dres pa*)"; […] *gzhal bya yod na yang tshad ma nit shad ma nyid du 'gyur zhing | tshad ma yod na yang gzhal bya ni gzhal bya nyid du 'gyur ro | zhes ghzal bya las tshad ma grub pa dang | tshad ma las kyang gzhal bya grub par byas nas | tshad ma ni gzhal bya'i gzhal byar 'gyur la | gzhal bya yang tshad ma'i tshad mar 'gyur bas phan tshun ltos nas bdag nyid thob par 'gyur ba de'i phyir tshad ma yang gnyi gar 'gyur la | gzhal bya yang gnyi gar 'gyur bas na gnyis ka 'dres pa'o* | (Tola & Dragonetti 2004: 22).

[44] Following fn. 27 above, Matilal (1986: 60) argues the same for the full meaning of self-illumination: "Vātsyāyana explains that the light (of the lamp) becomes a 'means' when it is an aid to an act of perception of a visible object, but the same lamplight becomes itself an 'object' of another perception caused by its contact with the sense of sight. In this way, the light plays the role of a 'means' when it helps us to see an 'object', and that of an 'object' when it is itself seen by the sense of sight. The 'means' and 'object' of knowledge are therefore not two distinct types of entities forming two ontological categories. The same entity (the same thing or the same substance) may play different roles—that of an 'instrument' or a 'means' as in 'I see the table by the light', and of an 'object' as in 'I see the light by the sense of sight'. Ontologically, the same light doubles as a 'means' and as an 'object', depending upon different linguistic descriptions".

Because of this interdependence, the *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s are necessarily "mixed" existentially, in identity, and in function; they are neither separate elements nor different variables in an equation but mutually entailing, constituent factors of epistemic episodes. Candrakīrti's PSP 75 parrots this with phrasing echoing the formula of conditionality: when there is a *pramāṇa* there must also be a *prameya* (and vice versa).[45] The synonymization of dependence relations and emptiness means that the epistemic instruments and objects, because interdependent, are therefore necessarily empty. This is how the philosophical baseline of dependence relations and emptiness applies to the valid cognition of the mechanics of conventional epistemology.

This interdependence does not mean that the case of a *pramāṇa* becoming its own epistemic object is necessarily dissimilar to the case of the lamp illuminating itself;[46] debatable is the comparison's philosophical merit and its viability in defence of the self-establishment of a *pramāṇa*. While it is equally the case that a lamp illuminates itself and a *pramāṇa* may make itself an epistemic object, this is not proof of self-establishment since the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation remains intact.[47] As when the lamp illuminates itself as an object its self-illumination supports this same necessity, the analogy does not support self-establishment but inadvertently confirms the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation. The fact that an epistemic instrument becomes its *own* epistemic object only proves this relation's necessity. The

[45] PSP 75: "They are established in mutual dependence (*tāni ca parasparāpekṣayā sidhyanti*): when there are epistemic instruments there are epistemic objects (*satsu pramāṇeṣu prameyārthāḥ*), [just as] when there are epistemic objects there are epistemic instruments (*satsu prameyeṣu artheṣu pramāṇāni*). However, certainly there is no establishment of the epistemic instruments or objects with inherent existence (*svabhāvikī*)"; *tāni ca parasparāpekṣayā sidhyanti- satsu pramāṇeṣu prameyārthāḥ, satsu prameyeṣvartheṣu pramāṇāni | no tu khalu svābhāvikī pramāṇaprameyayoḥ siddhiriti* | (Vaidya 1960b: 25).

[46] As noted by Stoltz (2021: 159). Nāgārjuna presents a lengthy and obtuse argument about this metaphor when it requires the premise that the lamp and the *pramāṇa* inherently and intrinsically effectuate this capacity for self-illumination/self-establishment and, more to the point, that they have this power entirely independently of anything else. Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti launch their criticism with an appeal to the existential and conceptual interdependence of light (*pradīpa*) and darkness (*tamas*), meaning that neither light nor darkness are independently existing substances capable of making contact; see MMK 7:9-10/VV 37-9/VP 07-10 and PSP 124.10. For light to inherently have the capacity to illuminate, darkness would equivalently have the inherent capacity to obscure. For light to be self-illuminating, it would first require this quality of darkness which is then reflexively dissipated by its own illumination. But the lamp is not a special kind of object that harbours darkness, which would grant it some special power of self-illumination in an otherwise dark world. See Westerhoff's commentary (2018a: 71-2). The argument shows that the metaphor fails to validate self-establishment, not that lights do not in some trivial sense illuminate themselves.

[47] With this Matilal would agree; see fn. 44 above.

argument leans heavily on the inability to coherently define a *pramāṇa* without reference to a *prameya* (and vice versa). This interdependence clearly demonstrates how these identities are "mixed". The argument for their interdependence questions: if the instruments were self-established and therefore could stand independently of anything else, especially an epistemic object, what possible relation could they have to epistemic objects?[48] VV 41 concludes that, given this independence, they would essentially not be instruments *for any objects* insofar as they would neither definitionally nor constitutionally require them.[49] Nāgārjuna objects: without epistemic objects, in what sense are they even *epistemic* instruments?

Stoltz objects to Nāgārjuna by differentiating the *pramāṇa*s' *epistemic* and *ontological statuses*, holding that Nāgārjuna's argument successfully undermines the second but not the first.[50] Nāgārjuna clearly undermines their (independent) ontological status by revealing their existential and conceptual interdependence with the *prameya*s. However, the *pramāṇa*s' epistemic status refers to the foundationalist premise that epistemic instruments establish epistemic objects. Neither Nāgārjuna nor Candrakīrti reject outright this basic mechanical premise of epistemology but supplement it with the

[48] VV 33: "But, [if you say], these [objects] are established without the epistemic instruments (*pramāṇaiḥ vinā prasiddhiḥ*), then [your] argument is lost (*vihīyate vādaḥ*). There is an imbalance therein (*vaiṣamikatvam tasmin*) whose special reason (*viśeṣahetuḥ*) must be addressed (*vaktavyaḥ*)"; *teṣāmatha pramāṇairvinā prasiddhiḥ vihīyate vādaḥ | vaiṣamikatvaṃ tasmin viśeṣahetuśca vaktavyaḥ ||* (Yonezawa 2008: 276). The "special reason" is the privileged status of the *pramāṇa* requiring an explanation of how there could be an epistemic instrument without any epistemic object. Matilal (1986: 52) comments: "The *pramāṇa* theorist has to account for the fact that why out of all items in the world certain items do not stand in need of being established or revealed to us by a 'means', while others necessarily do. What accounts for this difference in character?".

[49] VV 41: "If for you the establishment of the epistemic instruments (*yadi te pramāṇa-saṃsiddhiḥ*) is independent of the epistemic objects (*anāpekṣā hi prameyān arthān*), then those epistemic instruments are not [epistemic instruments] for anything (*na bhavanti kasyacit evam*)"; *anāpekṣā hi prameyān arthān yadi te pramāṇasaṃsiddhiḥ | bhavati na bhavanti kasyacidevamimāni pramāṇāni ||* (Yonezawa 2008: 286). Typically, *prameya* is translated as epistemic object (literally, the "to be known"), but here it is couple with *artha* ("object"). Literally, the construction means "the object to be known".

[50] Stoltz (2021: 160) launches a digressional counter involving self-justifying (or incorrigible) beliefs as a parallel for the self-establishment of the *pramāṇa*: a self-justifying belief (such as the belief that I exist) is ontologically dependent on certain epistemic objects but nonetheless epistemologically foundational insofar as it is the ground for further beliefs about the world (especially from a Cartesian perspective wherein, on that basis, it is accepted that other objects also exist) without itself requiring justification. I am not of the opinion that *self-justification* and *self-establishment* are equivalent but rather two separate issues (see p. 176 above for the difference between *foundationalism of content* and *foundationalism of method*). A self-justifying belief is itself an epistemic episode; however, Nāgārjuna's inquiry dissects the *elements* of such an episode, i.e., *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s. He does not investigate what makes a given epistemic episode true; he investigates the *mechanics* of such an episode, its constituent parts, in response to others' explanations. Further, I am not of the opinion that Nāgārjuna would accept self-justifying beliefs because of the very discussion of the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation, specifically requiring analysis of i) the objects such beliefs concern and ii) the source of that belief (i.e., the four *pramāṇa*s, the appeal to any of which in specificity would act as a *source* of the justification of that belief). It is less a matter of *what* is believed but *how* that concerns him, and this requires lucidity about the role of conventional epistemology in ordinary experience. What is to be believed (i.e., the valid cognition of ordinary experience) follows from this philosophical baseline.

same argument of interdependence: while epistemic instruments establish epistemic objects, epistemic objects *equally* establish epistemic instruments. This shows the same inability of the *pramāṇa*s to be established independently of the *prameya*s as the inability of the *prameya*s to be established independently of the *pramāṇa*s. Given this reciprocity, they instead are each *mutually established*. Naturally, this affects both the epistemic and existential statuses of the *pramāṇa*s by wedding them to the *prameya*s and not allowing any epistemic efficacy without them.

If the *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s are mutually established, what does this "establishment" mean, and how does it configure with Nāgārjuna's tetralemma? He argues (VV 46-8) that if X is established by Y at the same time Y is established by X, then neither is in fact "established" in any *foundationalist* sense because the unilateral establishment of neither is possible.[51] Rather, it is absurd to identify in such conceptually interdependent factors any foundationalist priority, just as with fire and fuel. Thus, if the opponent understands "establishment" in the standard semantic framework (invoking one-way causality), the Mādhyamikas' "mutual establishment" only makes sense in their non-standard, conventional semantic framework (invoking two-way causality).[52] It is therefore the case that existential and conceptual interdependencies fix the conditions of anti-foundationalist establishment, yielding mutual establishment as establishment's only coherent avenue.[53]

Nāgārjuna undermines any causal and temporal objections with his father–son analogy (VV 49-50).[54]

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[51] VV 46: "However, [if] there is the establishment of the epistemic objects through the establishment of the epistemic instruments (*pramāṇa-siddhyā prameyasiddhiḥ*) and there is the establishment of the epistemic instruments through the establishment of the epistemic objects (*prameyasiddhyā ca bhavati pramāṇa-siddhiḥ*), [then] there is the no establishment of either (*nāsti ubhayasya … siddhiḥ*); *atha te pramāṇasiddhyā prameyasiddhiḥ prameyasiddhyā ca | bhavati pramāṇasiddhiḥ nāstyubhayasyāpi te siddhiḥ* || (Yonezawa 2008: 292). See Westerhoff (2010a: 82-94).

[52] See chapter 2 (§§2.2.3) on standard vs. non-standard semantic frameworks; see chapter 1 (§1.1.2) for one- and two-way causal relations. Dependence relations of this sort to which Nāgārjuna invariably appeal are always of the two-way variety. Westerhoff (2018a: 106) confirms: "The dependent relations between epistemic instruments and objects run both ways: the two players in the epistemic game form a mutually constitutive pair". I return to the same relation below in a metaphysical anti-realist context (§4.2).

[53] Stoltz (2021: 163) concedes this point: "To endorse the idea that an epistemic instrument (which is itself an object) could be established by something that is not itself an epistemic instrument is to give up on the fundamental tenet of *pramāṇa*-based epistemology that all objects must be established by epistemic instruments". This abandonment is what Nāgārjuna wants.

[54] VV 49-50: "If the son is to be produced by the father (*pitrā yadi utpādayaḥ putraḥ*) and if by that very son the father is to be produced (*yadi tena ca eva putreṇa utpādyaḥ saḥ yadi pitā*), you must then say (*vada tatra*) who produces whom (*utpādayati kaḥ kam*). In that case (*tatra*), you must explain (*tvam brūhi*) which is the father and which is the son (*kaḥ ca pitā kaḥ putraḥ*). Since both bear the characteristics of father and son (*tau ubhau api ca pitṛ-putra-lakṣaṇa-dharau yataḥ*), in that

A father is established in *identity* as a father only in relation to his son, just as a son is established in *identity* as a son only in relation to his father. If each has the characteristic of both establisher and established, then neither father nor son is the foundation of the other's identity; consequently, neither is the unilateral establisher of the other's identity. The two identities are rather "mixed" as being relative to and inextricable from one another. To borrow again from the MMK (10:10d): in such cases, "what is dependent on what?" (*kam apekṣya kaḥ*); more to the point it should be asked: which really establishes which? Apply this to the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation: epistemic instruments have the characteristics of both instrument (as the establisher of epistemic objects) and object (as established as epistemic instrument); epistemic objects likewise have the same two characteristics as both instrument (as establisher of epistemic instruments) and object (as established as epistemic object).[55] As in both cases, without a clear division between the identities of establisher and established, neither should be identified as unilaterally establishing either. As the identities are strictly relational, they are mutually established.

4.1.3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM

Epistemological anti-foundationalism is a well-established position in Madhyamaka scholarship.[56] It means that neither epistemic instruments nor epistemic objects alone provide a solid foundation for knowledge. This argument is *mechanical*, concerning a conceptualist investigation of the architecture of epistemology itself. It is, consequently, not skeptical. The key to epistemological anti-foundationalism

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case there is uncertainty about them [(their identity)] (*naḥ tatra saṃdehaḥ*); *pitrā yadyutpādyaḥ putro yadi tena caiva putreṇa | utpādyaḥ sa yadi pitā vada tatrotpādayati kaḥ kaṃ || kaśca pitā kaḥ putraḥ tatra tvaṃ brūhi kathaṃ tāvubhāvapi ca | pitṛputralakṣaṇadharau yato nastatra saṃdehaḥ ||* (Yonezawa 2008: 294, 296). See Westerhoff's commentary (2010a: 90).

[55] Westerhoff ("Nāgārjuna on Emptiness: A Comprehensive Critique of Foundationalism", *Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy* (ed. Jonardon Ganeri), Oxford University Press, 2017: 100) calls these "dispositional properties": "The property of being an epistemic instrument is dispositional: when an epistemic object of the right kind comes along, the instruments make the object known to us. This shows us that the very nature of an epistemic instrument cannot be made sense of without the presence of an epistemic object". Similarly, Thakchöe (2011: 41, 51) relates anti-foundationalism to the status of the epistemic instruments: "Being an epistemic instrument is a status that is conditioned and acquired and therefore lacks real foundations. Conventional epistemic instruments (*tha snyad pa'i tshad ma)* meet only the standards of the Prāsaṅgikas' conventional epistemic practices"; "Cognitions are epistemically efficient just because they are utterly empty of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), even conventionally".

[56] Madhyamaka epistemological anti-foundationalism has been treated by, e.g., Westerhoff 2010a: 14, 82; 2017: 93-107; Siderits 2016: 181-248; Thakchöe, "Candrakīrti's Theory of Perception: A Case for Non-Foundationalist Epistemology in Mādhyamika", *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia* 11.1, 2010: 93-124; 2011: 39-56; and Arnold, "Materials for a Madhyamika Critique of Foundationalism", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28.2, 2005b: 411-67.

is its being equally anti-foundationalist about the existence and nature of the epistemic instruments as it is about their objects. It argues that mutual establishment is the only way to validly cognize the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation. Their mutual establishment belongs to anti-foundationalism because i) it cannot be called *pramāṇa*-based foundationalist epistemology for the *pramāṇa*s have no priority status in the establishment of *prameya*s; ii) from this lack of priority, their mutual establishment (in both existential and conceptual contexts) allows no singular factor of the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation to be the foundation (the establisher) of the other; iii) from their interdependence, both the epistemic instruments and objects are empty; iv) emptiness, defined as the lack of inherent existence (*svabhāva*) and synonymous with dependent origination, is incompatible with foundationalism.[57] If there is no conceivable way that the Madhyamaka is epistemologically foundationalist, it is contrarily defined as anti-foundationalist.

The Mādhyamikas' acknowledgement of *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s (as necessary ingredients jointly constitutive of any epistemic episode) only through a scheme of mutual establishment discounts epistemological nihilism or skepticism. While Stoltz ultimately argues that Nāgārjuna is a skeptic,[58] Westerhoff, Garfield, and Thakchöe argue otherwise.[59] That is, Madhyamaka epistemology's emptiness is not its own undoing. The Mādhyamikas' opponents misunderstand the emptiness of the *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s, a claim which refers to nothing more than their interdependent, conditional nature, as their non-existence.[60] This is, again, the difference between the opponents' standard semantic framework and the Mādhyamikas' non-standard, conventional semantic framework that must deny the former. In this context, this plays out as follows: in a palpable sense, Nāgārjuna *is* arguing for the non-existence of the *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s *as the opponent understands them* in the standard semantic framework they

[57] For iterations of iii) and iv), see Thakchöe 2011: 54.
[58] Stoltz (2021: 161, 164) discusses epistemology in his chapter on skepticism, claiming that Nāgārjuna aims to undermine epistemology's tenability. While Matilal may label Nāgārjuna a skeptic, he means that Nāgārjuna is skeptical of the epistemological project of *pramāṇa*-based epistemology (1986: 49). His true position comes later: according to Matilal, Nāgārjuna is truly skeptic from the apophatic nature of the ultimate truth where epistemology cannot apply (1986: 311).
[59] See Westerhoff (2017: 101); Garfield (2011: 29); Thakchöe (2011: 55).
[60] NS 4.1.37-40 presents a position very much akin to Nāgārjuna's objections. E.g., NS 4.1.39: "Some say, that entities are not self-existent in as much as they exist in relation to one another"; *na svabhāvasiddhirāpekṣikatvāt* || (Vidyābhuṣana 1913: 117). The autocommentary to VV 5 presents the objection that the pronouncement that "all things are empty" (*śūnyāḥ sarvabhāvāḥ*) is akin to their denial. See more on VV 5 and the response to its objection below.

uphold, yet not for their non-existence *in toto*. The correct understanding of this subtle point is critical to grasping the Mādhyamikas' epistemological anti-foundationalism. Such nuance is required for deciphering the following verse:

> [VV 30:] If there were something to be apprehended (*yadi kiṃcit upalabheyam*) by the objects of perception and so forth (*pratyakṣa-ādibhiḥ arthaiḥ*), then that could be affirmed or denied (*pravartayeyam nivartayeyam vā*). Because of the non-existence of that [(i.e., something so apprehended)] (*tat-abhāvāt*), there is no fault for me (*me anupālambhaḥ*).[61]

This responds to a misunderstanding of i) the motive of the denial of *pramāṇa*-based foundationalist epistemology (i.e., the denial of the opponents' standard semantic framework) and ii) the consequent emptiness of the *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s from this denial (their affirmation in Madhyamaka non-standard semantics). Nāgārjuna needs it clear that there can be no affirmation of any foundationalist epistemological model (represented by the tetralemma's four limbs); he also needs to be sure this denial is not understood as a claim made from within the opponent's semantic or epistemological model.[62] Consider the following objections he entertains; their clarification is critical to the Madhyamaka position.

(1) VV 05 has the opponent object that an epistemic object apprehended via an epistemic instrument cannot be negated by that same instrument.[63] Nāgārjuna is not disputing this but denying that this fallacy

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[61] VV 30: *yadi kiṃcidupalabheyaṃ pravarteyaṃ nivartayeyaṃ vā | pratyakṣādibhirarthaistadabhāvānme 'nupālambhaḥ ||* (Yonezawa 2008: 270). Candrakīrti (PSP 30) cites this verse in support of the following: "Thus, when through distortion (*viparyāsena*) the non-existent (*asat*) is grasped as real (*sattvena gṛhyate*), like [when] the one afflicted by cataracts [falsely perceives] hairs and so forth (*taimirikeṇa iva keśādi*), then how [could there be] the perception of even a trace (*leśasya api upalabdhi*) of a real phenomenon (*sadbhūta-padārtha*)? And when from the lack of distortion (*aviparyāsāt*) the unreal (*abhūtam*) is not falsely superimposed (*na adhyāropitam*), like the hairs and so forth [not perceived] by the one unafflicted by cataracts (*vitaimirikeṇa iva keśādi*), then how [could there be] the perception of even a trace of an unreal phenomenon (*asadbhūtapadārtha-leśasya api upalabdhiḥ*), by which the conventional (*saṃvṛtiḥ*) could exist at that time (*yena tadānīm … syāt*)?"; *tadyadā viparyāsena asatsattvena gṛhyate, taimirikeṇeva keśādi, tadā kutaḥ sadbhūtapadārthaleśasyāpyupalabdhiḥ? yadā ca aviparyāsādabhūtaṃ nādhyāropitaṃ, vitaimirikeṇeva keśādi, tadā kuto 'sadbhūtapadārthaleśasyāpyupalabdhiḥ, yena tadānīṃ saṃvṛtiḥ syāt?* (Vaidya 1960b: 9). Applying this to the present case, the first conditional applies to the opponent, wherein grasping the non-existent as real occurs through a fatal cognitive error; this error the Mādhyamikas do not make. The second applies to the Mādhyamikas, in which case there is no such superimposition of the unreal. Nāgārjuna's denial of an object of perception is the denial of perceiving such an unreal object (i.e., the "real" of the opponent). Finally, Candrakīrti remarks that the conventional truth consists of neither the non-existent grasped as real nor the superimposition of the unreal.

[62] I.e., as Westerhoff (2010a: 69) comments on VV 30, "Nāgārjuna sets out to demonstrate that the very notion of substantial epistemic instruments is incoherent. […] He rejects the idea that he would affirm or deny any object as existing substantially, after having apprehended them by one of the epistemic instruments *as understood by the opponent* [(the objection at VV 5; see below)]. Nāgārjuna does not accept the substantial existence of epistemic instruments, while the opponent does". For this reason, Nāgārjuna must differentiate his affirmation of the *pramāṇa*s from the opponent's model.

[63] The opponent's objection in VV 5 is summarized as follows: the opponent questions by which epistemic instrument is the emptiness of all phenomena established (further understanding emptiness as the denial of the existence of some phenomenon; see Westerhoff 2010a: 66). If emptiness denies the existence of the epistemic instruments, there is no epistemic instrument

applies to him (hence, "no fault for me"). Rather than denying any epistemic object apprehended through any epistemic instrument, he denies the foundationalist model of epistemology entirely (i.e., this very apprehension and the kind of epistemic objects thereby apprehended *as the opponent understands them*). Nāgārjuna has not used any *pramāṇa* as conceived in and established by a foundationalist model in standard semantics (whether self-established, other-established, etc.) to establish *pramāṇa–prameya* interdependence or their emptiness. He demonstrates this when he says in VV 30 that there could not be anything perceived *in the foundationalist model* that could then *by that method* be affirmed or denied. This at once denies both the *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s as conceived by that model.

(2) At VV 11, the opponent thinks that negation is only of real existents, as the negation "there is no pot in the house" applies to a real pot absent from this house but still allows such pots to be present elsewhere (i.e., the negation of a "local absence").[64] Since the opponent takes emptiness as the negation of something real (as if it were applied in *their* system), this is the kind of negation they attribute to it. However, this is not the negation Nāgārjuna employs to deny the opponent's epistemological framework; he says so directly at VV 63.[65] On one hand, his negation is not local but *global* of a type of "existent"

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by which emptiness could be established. The case is as if a phenomenon were to be perceived by an instrument and then subsequently denied using the same instrument, which is absurd. The opponent thinks that Nāgārjuna's pronouncement that "all things are empty" is tantamount to their negation and maintains that this could only be apprehended through the opponent's very conception of the epistemic instruments. Yet, on that model, an empty instrument is incapable of acting as the foundation of any epistemic episode (see Garfield 2011: 27-8).

[64] VV 11: "Since the negation (*pratiṣedhaḥ*) "there is no pot in the house (*nāsti ghaṭaḥ gehe iti*)" is viewed as only of an existent [pot] (*sataḥ eva*), consequently, your negation of inherent existence (*svabhāvasya*) is [also] of an existent"; *sata eva pratiṣedho nāsti ghaṭo geha ityayaṃ yasmāt | dṛṣṭaḥ pratiṣedho yaṃ sataḥ svabhāvasya te tasmāt ||* (Yonezawa 2008: 240). The autocommentary continues: "Here, the negation of an existent object (*sataḥ arthasya pratiṣedhaḥ*), not of a non-existent [object] (*na asataḥ*) is performed (*kriyate*)"; *iha ca sato 'arthasya pratiṣedhaḥ kriyate nāsataḥ |* (Yonezawa 2008: 240 (see n. 10)). See Westerhoff's commentary (2010a: 109-10). The Nyāya understanding of negation requires reference to existing objects, so that negation is understood as the attribution of the local absence to some otherwise existing object. This is precisely how "there is no pot in the house" is understood. Westerhoff explains: "In the Nyāya framework, negations are only ever reports of local absences, since there must be something for the negation to work on" (2018a: 88), citing Matilal, *The Navya-Nyāya Doctrine of Negation: The Semantics and Ontology of Negative Statements in Navya-Nyāya Philosophy*, Harvard University Press, 1968: 79, 93) This adds further context to the objection at VV 5 (see above footnote) because the negation of some perceptible after the fact of perception is an example of the negation of something "real", which, to the opponent, is absurd, approaching ontological nihilism.

[65] VV 63ab: "I do not negate anything (*pratiṣedhayāmi na aham kiñcit*) [in this way] and there is not anything [as you conceive of it] to be negated (*pratiṣedhyam asti na ca kiñcit*)"; *pratiṣedhyāmi nāhaṃ kiñcit pratiṣedhyamasti na ca kiñcit |* (Yonezawa 2008: 316). These additions in square brackets are needed to make consistent sense of this passage for, when in the autocommentary Nāgārjuna discusses "all things being empty" (*śūnyāḥ sarvabhāvāḥ*) and "the negation and what is to be negated being non-existent" (*avidyamānaḥ pratiṣedhyaḥ pratiṣedhaḥ*), he is in some non-trivial sense employing negation, just not in the opponent's mode (Yonezawa 2008: 316).

too incoherent to be found anywhere in any sense (denying *their* system *in toto)*. He engages in this negational rhetoric only insofar as the refutation of an opponent's position entails the provisional acknowledgement of the terms in which their position is framed. This is essential to the *prāsaṅgi*c method forcing the opponent to abandon their position from its internal contradictions. However, a term's provisional acknowledgement does not necessarily mean it is regarded as valid by the objector. Only because the terms (as situated in the opponent's standard semantic framework) are invalid does Nāgārjuna negate them. I.e., by this act of negation, "the fabrication of what is not established (*ma grub pa'i rtog pa*) is abandoned (*spong ba yin*)".[66] This consequently means that any affirmation Nāgārjuna does make is not from within their system.

These denials' specific context, restricted to the opponent's system, is not extended to every sense and does not invalidate Nāgārjuna's own account. This is because Nāgārjuna also makes claims from within the Mādhyamikas' non-standard, conventional semantic framework; e.g., therein the interdependence of the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation is established, an example of conventional reasoning (*upapatti*).[67] In VV 30, he should not be taken as denying *tout court* that there is apprehension, objects of perception, etc. This is evident from his explicit concession elsewhere that there *are* epistemic instruments only in dependence on epistemic objects and vice versa. He accepts epistemic instruments and their objects as essential mechanical components of any valid account of conventional epistemology; however, by establishing their relation in empty interdependence (his own anti-foundationalist account's affirmation in conventional epistemology), he confirms that neither factor could be foundational in *any* sense, thus invalidating the opponents' epistemological system. Rather, the necessity of dependence relations for the valid cognition of any epistemic episode secures the *conventional* nature of Madhyamaka epistemology, meaning that this epistemology only provides knowledge at the conventional level (i.e., the conventional truth). For this reason, Candrakīrti affirms that "the knowledge of the objects of the

[66] VP 16: *ma grub pa'i rtog pa spong ba yin no* | (Tola & Dragonetti 2004: 28).
[67] See chapter 3 (§§3.4.1).

world is established (*lokasya ārtha-adhigamaḥ vyavsthāpyate*) from the fourfold epistemic instruments (*pramāṇa-catuṣṭayāt*)".[68] As seen in chapter 3 (§3.2), the specific reference to the world (*loka*) confirms this knowledge's conventional nature (*contra* ultimate).

This is the groundwork of conventional epistemology the Mādhyamikas lay. The basis of the arguments in the VV and the VP as presented is not about how we can know any specific knowledge claim is true; rather, that we can *know at all* requires first an explanation of the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation. This anti-foundationalist groundwork fixes the *mechanics* of conventional epistemology as it functions and is validly cognized in ordinary cognitive experience. Conventional epistemology so categorized is a means of explaining ordinary cognitive experience as the basic framework for conceptualizing any epistemic episode. This architecture reveals the following: ordinary cognition is framed by both a *pramāṇa* and a *prameya*, the *prameya* the object of experience and the *pramāṇa* the mode of its cognitive experience; these two elements are existentially and conceptually interdependent (i.e., mutually established, their identities mixed); and this relation is universal to every ordinary cognitive experience. For this reason, I agree with Thakchöe that "Candrakīrti [(and by extension Nāgārjuna)] is convinced that the Prāsaṅgika alone can come up with a successful epistemological account, a *śūnyavādin* version of epistemic instruments that presupposes empty metaphysics and the mutual interdependence of *pramāṇa* and *prameya*".[69] As Thakchöe indicates, there is a close connection between empty epistemology and empty metaphysics. I now turn to Madhyamaka anti-realist metaphysics and the critique of metaphysical realism, which I present as a mirror of conventional epistemology and epistemological anti-foundationalism.

§4.2 MADHYAMAKA CONVENTIONAL METAPHYSICS

Just as the Mādhyamikas' reduce epistemology to the conventional level through their non-standard

[68] PSP 75: *tadevaṃ pramāṇacatuṣṭayāllokasyārthādhigamo vyavasthāpyate* || (Vaidya 1960b: 25). MacDonald (2015b: 220 n.438) agrees this secures their merely conventional status as epistemic instruments, meaning they supply only the conventional truth.
[69] Thakchöe 2011: 55.

semantics of dependence relations, they also reduce metaphysics to the same conventional level by means of the same. In the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project, metaphysical anti-realism mirrors epistemological anti-foundationalism, such that the project could not be epistemologically anti-foundationalist without at the same time being metaphysically anti-realist. "Mirroring" is an analogy establishing a codependence or logical relation between the two insofar as the same pattern of arguments (the philosophical baseline of dependence relations and emptiness) is equally applicable in deriving both conclusions. There is no strict logical priority or precedence; epistemological anti-foundationalism was only presented first for explanatory purposes. I argue that, per the cognitive reading of the conventional truth, conventional epistemology and metaphysics are interdependent disciplines, each integral facets of ordinary experience's valid cognition. That requires validly cognizing the metaphysics supporting the *existence* of the objects of ordinary experience and the conditions under which they are *known* as such. Their link is built into *satya*'s etymology, which I establish in the strict context of the conventional truth by relying on the philosophical baseline of dependence relations. Because *satya* denotes both what is "true" and "real", it occupies both epistemological and metaphysical dimensions. For conventional *satya*, this means determining what is "truly real" *only conventionally*. Insofar as both metaphysical anti-realism and epistemological anti-foundationalism are derived from dependence relations, their conventional status is secured. This is because both share (or are derived from) the same non-standard, conventional semantic framework the Mādhyamikas espouse.

Conventional metaphysics conditions conventional epistemology in the same way conventional epistemology conditions conventional metaphysics: epistemology presupposes a metaphysical framework because epistemic objects are necessarily posited as existents in a metaphysical system; likewise, metaphysics presupposes an epistemological framework because the means of establishing those existents are equally necessary. In this tandem, the two disciplines are rather mixed. Translated in terms of cognitive experience, this relation therefore mirrors conventional epistemology's *pramāṇa–prameya* template, with any ontological object reduced to being a *prameya*. This is how Madhyamaka

metaphysical anti-realism mirrors its epistemological anti-foundationalism: the *pramāṇa–prameya* template of existential and conceptual interdependence and mutual establishment serves well the anti-realist premise insofar as the conditions establishing a *prameya* by a *pramāṇa* establish it as an object of cognitive experience. Since the existential and conceptual interdependence of *pramāṇa*s and *prameya*s reveal that the *pramāṇa*s are no epistemological foundation, it likewise follows that neither could *prameya*s be a metaphysical foundation for the same reason of a conceptual and existential interdependence with and mutual establishment by the mind (because a mind employing *pramāṇa*s identifies *prameya*s, thereby identifying any existent as an object of cognitive experience). It is thusly that the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation requires a metaphysic of interdependence; as it deduces epistemological anti-foundationalism, so it deduces a metaphysical anti-realism *equally* anti-foundationalist about the role of existents in cognitive experience. The lack of foundation in both the epistemological and metaphysical senses permits the conventional truth to simultaneously be epistemologically anti-foundationalist and metaphysically anti-realist. As the Mādhyamikas reject epistemological foundationalism, the foundationalist project required by metaphysical realism's desire to establish metaphysical bedrock is equally rejected on the same ground.

The metaphysical realist may object that the relation between the *prameya*s and metaphysics is not necessary for those who propose the foundational existence of particulars independently of the mind. This is automatically dismissed by the Madhyamaka for the cognitive reading of the conventional truth invalidates as incoherent anything posited outside the scope of cognitive experience. Therein, for any object to be posited as existent it need not necessarily be perceived (the *pramāṇa* of *pratyakṣa*) but must nonetheless exist *as a cognitive object* (and therefore as a *prameya*), even if only as an abstract object of inference (*anumāna*) or known only by analogy (*upamāna*) or authority (*āgama*). That is, for *any* object to be known, it must be conceived as an object of cognitive experience in some capacity (by one or more *pramāṇa*). The interdependence of these two constitutive elements of cognition is the Mādhyamikas' argument for the dependence relations integral to ordinary experience's valid cognition.

4.2.1 CONTEXT OF THE METAPHYSICAL DEBATE

The philosophical framework in which to situate the Mādhyamikas' metaphysic is thematically more classical (e.g., Aristotelian) than contemporary (i.e., analytic) insofar as it is a critique of any realist metaphysical system concerned with Being *as such*, the "real", the concepts of "substance", "causality", "space", and "time", and the things existing through which and within which that do not change.[70] From this, I recognize a difficulty in discussing "Madhyamaka metaphysics" in that classical sense because the realist conceptions of the above are in every way inappropriate for them.[71] However, insofar as metaphysics investigates how something exists, so long as we restrict the discussion to *conventional* existence, the label of "Madhyamaka conventional metaphysics" is appropriate in the case that its metaphysical anti-realism permits conventional existence through dependence relations.[72] The theory of how phenomena *conventionally* exist is conventional metaphysics, an anti-realist metaphysic grounded in dependence relations. This is because the Mādhyamikas posit their conventional metaphysics in the non-standard, conventional semantic framework of dependence relations, while realist metaphysics occurs from within the standard semantic framework the Mādhyamikas critique.

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[70] I differentiate ontology and metaphysics insofar as ontology investigates *what* objects exist and metaphysics *how* they exist. That is, metaphysics investigates the general nature of reality while, on that basis, ontology investigates its specific contents. In that case, ontology is a subfield of metaphysics, and an ontology presupposes an underlying metaphysic (i.e., a theory of the nature of reality). The relation is such that ontological realists are also metaphysical realists and metaphysical realists are also ontological realists. *Mutatis mutandis*, ontological anti-realists are metaphysical anti-realists and metaphysical anti-realists are also ontological anti-realists. While ontology is an inevitable consequence of doing metaphysics, the Madhyamaka critique cuts to the foundational metaphysical presuppositions of the nature of reality itself operating in metaphysical realism.

[71] This comment must be situated among the classic critique that any denial of a metaphysical position is itself a metaphysical position (so-called self-referential incoherency) insofar as the denial of a certain nature of reality presupposes an alternative account of that nature (which may be a no-nature, an inconceivable nature, etc.). I address this in PART II (chapter 5, §5.3).

[72] At MMK 13:8, Nāgārjuna says that emptiness should not be understood as a view (*dṛṣṭi*, which has the connotations of metaphysical view) and which commentators such as Siderits & Katsura (2013: 145) have interpreted as such. The Madhyamaka hold that all phenomena are dependently originated (MĀ 6:115) and empty (VV 70), and, further, that emptiness itself is empty (MĀ 6:185). This leads to the question of what metaphysical theory underpins emptiness. Some have had recourse to a "process philosophy" (see Douglass Smith, "Was the Buddha an Anti-Realist?", *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 11, 2015: 145-7) that does not subscribe to the existence of any "(substantial) things" but describes "processes" that take the appearance of things without any substantial, permanent existence. It is thus an ontology of appearances (à la Pyrrho). In either case, conventional metaphysics must be based on dependence relations and emptiness, from which phenomena are said to *conventionally* exist. How this conventional metaphysic squares with the ultimate (wherein Nāgārjuna, e.g., says that phenomena neither exist nor non-exist (e.g., MMK 15:7, 10)), is a separate issue to the claim that, *if* phenomena exist, they only exist conventionally under the conceptual framework of dependence relations and emptiness. This is then very similar to the "weak deflationism" MacKenzie discusses in relation to the conventional truth; see chapter 3 (§3.1).

Despite a preoccupation with the subjects of classical metaphysics, the Mādhyamikas' conclusions are much more contemporary (in the sense of modern metaphysics from Hume and Kant onwards) than they might initially appear. For example, the debate concludes with the *impossibility* of classical metaphysics in the mind-independent, realist conception from the complete inability to gain any conceptual access to that which exists independently of conceptual thought (a very Kantian conclusion). From this, a commonality of the Madhyamaka with modern metaphysical debates is the inclusion of the condition of mind-dependence (as in the metaphysical realism–idealism debate; see §§4.2.3). A resolution is proposed with the Madhyamaka's mind–world model of cognitive experience.

Metaphysical realists (be they orthodox Indian or contemporary Western philosophers) typically do not subscribe to the two truths, and so their realism just is *the* truth (accounting for what truly exists and how on a singular plane). If classical metaphysics were transcribed to the two truths, it would constitute the ultimate truth (as in the Abhidharmic "ultimate reality" contrasted with appearances). However, this does not hold for the Madhyamaka. The Abhidharma is usually identified as the target of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's metaphysical criticisms, though there are difficulties in establishing a precise parallel. Nonetheless, a specific metaphysical view (*dṛṣṭi*—i.e., the standard semantic framework) consistently underpins the metaphysical realism the Mādhyamikas criticize: in this context, it takes the form of the *svabhāva* doctrine. *Svabhāva* (clarified in §§4.2.2) constitutes ontological and metaphysical realism when it entails both a metaphysical theory (that there is a class of existents existing in a certain way by virtue of their *svabhāva*) and an ontological theory (a list of the specific things existing with *svabhāva*—i.e., for the Abhidharma, the *dharma*s).[73] While it is clear that the Mādhyamikas attack *svabhāvic* metaphysics and its attendant semantic framework, it is not clear that the Abhidharmic metaphysical system of the *dharma*s *specifically* is his target; nevertheless, it is equally difficult to separate it from this

[73] Despite the prevalence of the term "*dharma*" in the early strata of the canon, the *dharma*-theory itself is absent from the Mahayana *sūtra*s, belonging to the Abhidharma. If the canon lists components of sentient experience such as the five aggregates, the Ābhidharmikas systematize these into a metaphysical worldview. See Abraham Vélez de Cea ("Emptiness in the Pāli Suttas and the Question of Nāgārjuna's Orthodoxy", *Philosophy East and West* 55.4, 2005: 507-28).

critique.[74] On the other hand, Salvini paints a very respectful picture of Candrakīrti's relation to the Abhidharma, although the Abhidharma's utility for him must be restricted to the conventional truth.[75]

Scholars suggest that the Abhidharmic *dharma*-theory began as a typology of conscious experience, such that the *dharma*s constitute categories of experience.[76] As "*dharma*" (Pali: *dhamma*) may be the most etymologically and semantically ambiguous term in the Buddhist lexicon, I restrict my inquiry to its metaphysical dimension.[77] Regardless of its design, it came to be that each *dharma* possesses its own unique intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) conferring thereon a privileged existential status.[78] This system

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[74] Establishing Nāgārjuna's historical relation to the Abhidharma is difficult. Much of its literature that could be consulted would have been written after Nāgārjuna, sometimes even after Candrakīrti. Walser (2005: 224-8) concedes that Nāgārjuna's relationship therewith is tenuous, complicated by the fact he could require situation amongst the Abhidharmas of several traditions (see pp. 227-8 discussing overlaps and divergences). He says it is chiefly between the Sarvāstivāda (a Hīnayāna lineage; see Westerhoff 2018c: 60-73) and the Mahāsāṃghika (a potentially Mahāyāna-leaning lineage; see Walser 2005: 50-4) there is tension. It appears that some Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma tenets Nāgārjuna attacks, while others of the Mahāsāṃghika he accepts. Westerhoff (2018c: 47-8) and Walser (2005: 230) discuss the similarities between the Mahāsaṃghika and Madhyamaka (specifically their treatments of emptiness). In this case, the chief difference between the Sarvāstivāda and the Mahāsāṃghika Abhidharmas is the *svabhāva* doctrine (Walser 2005: 228, 230). Likewise, thematic similarity can be established for the Pāli Abhidhamma's *sabhāva* doctrine given its commentators' glosses thereof; see fn. 81 below.

[75] Salvini 2023: 408-12, 415. He presents the issue as if Candrakīrti moves from conventional falsity (ordinary experience's invalid cognition) through the conventional truth (ordinary experience's valid cognition on an Abhidharmic model) to the ultimate (thus shedding the Abhidharma but appropriately using it as a ladder). However, Salvini's account does not specifically mention the critique the Abhidharmic *dharma*-theory and what the critique of the *svabhāva* doctrine means for Madhyamaka-Abhidharma relations except for the relegation of Abhidharma to the conventional truth.

[76] Collett Cox ("From Category to Ontology: The Changing Role of "Dharma" in Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32.5/6, 2004: 549) characterizes the *dharma*-theory as "a refusal to accept the world as it presents itself to untutored, common sense and a desire to analyze experience into its salient, functional constituents. In the case of Buddhism, this analysis reveals the structure of the conditioning interconnections that underlie the gross, composite objects of ordinary experience, interconnections that are not arbitrary, but are considered to be "true" or, in Buddhist parlance, to represent the "way things are (*yathābhūta*)". Similarly, according to Noa Ronkin ("Abhidharma", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2022 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta)), "The Abhidharma analyzes in great detail each of these categories [of experience], thus creating relational schemata whereby each acknowledged experience, phenomenon, or occurrence can be determined and identified by particular definition and function. Especially important is the analysis of consciousness or *citta*, on which much of Abhidharma doctrinal thought is built". Cox (2004: 249) confirms that, whatever metaphysical developments proceeded the *dharma*-theory, "Initially, the primary concern is immediately soteriological and is directed towards supplanting defiling or ensnaring *dharma*s [as elements of experience] with those conducive to liberation".

[77] Cox (2004: 543-7) lists a variety of interpretations of "*dharma*", some detailing metaphysical connotations and some intentionally eschewing them. This term's semantics are not easily divorced from non-Buddhist usages (e.g., Vedic or Jain).

[78] Siderits rejects translating *svabhāva* as "own-being" or "self-existence", insisting that the meaning of *-bhāva* here is "nature"; with the prefix *sva-*, it yields "own-nature". Accordingly, he says (2016: 39) that "To say that something has *svabhāva* is to say that its nature is wholly its own; that is, it is not 'borrowed' from or dependent on those other things on whose existence it depends". The significance of this is that, although something *svabhāvic* may existentially depend on another, a quality of independence persists regarding its nature, which is wholly its own. This inevitably raises ontological questions; according to Cox (2004: 569), "Determining individual *dharma*s through unique intrinsic nature also entails affirming their existence, as a natural function both of the etymological sense of the term *svabhāva* and of the role of the *dharma*s as the fundamental constituents of experience. This then leads to the prominence of a new term that expressed this ontological focus: namely, *dravya*". Ronkin 2022 comments, "*Dravya* means "real existence" and, within the Sarvāstivāda framework, *dharma*s that are determined by intrinsic nature exist as real entities (*dravyatas*), as opposed both to composite objects of ordinary experience that exist provisionally and to relative concepts or contingencies of time and place that exist relatively. The presence of intrinsic nature indicates that a *dharma* is a primary existent".

acquires metaphysical realist overtones when the differentiation of the *dharma*s from their unique natures imparts a certain independent existential quality thereto, implying an eternal and static existence independent from the conceptualizing mind.[79]

There is no evidence of Nāgārjuna or Candrakīrti accepting or rejecting any Abhidharmic *dharma*-theory *per se*; it is certainly not named as such. Their criticism is of a metaphysical realism characterized by *svabhāva* (which I treat as they define it, regardless of whether this definition applies to the Abhidharma)[80] insofar as *svabhāvic* metaphysical realism holds that inherent existence, independent from dependence relations, is a necessary consequence of *svabhāva*. When the Mādhyamikas critique *svabhāva*, they critique as incoherent the metaphysical implications of the substantial existence of any irreducible element of existence as metaphysical bedrock (which may or may not be the same axiomatic role the *svabhāva* doctrine came to play in the Abhidharmic *dharma*-theory).[81]

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[79] According to Vélez de Cea (2005: 518-9), "The analytical tendency of Buddhist scholasticism to classify and define the ultimate identity and characteristics of things led to the reification of these identities and characteristics. What originally was intended to be an aid to the contemplation of nonself in all things became a set of speculations about the ultimate identity and characteristics of these very things. The scholastic term to denote these characteristics and ultimate identities was *svabhāva*, and the things that possessed them were called *dharmas*. The *svabhāva* of *dharmas* was mistakenly conceived by some schools as some kind of ultimately existing, permanent, and independent entity, something inherently possessed by each *dharma*. Buddhist scholastics imputed a *svabhāva* not only to phenomena or *dharmas* but also to concepts such as cause, effect, movement, action, and the four noble truths. Buddhist categories and philosophical concepts used to organize and describe the nature of phenomena were also reified and considered ultimate identities possessing permanent and independent characteristics".

[80] Such a treatment is found in Collobert 2022: 7-8. Though no defender of the Abhidharma, David Burton (*Emptiness Appraised: A Critical Study of Nāgārjuna's Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidass, 2001: 92-4) discusses the technical incongruities between Abhidharmic and Nāgārjunian *svabhāva*: "Whereas Nāgārjuna defines *svabhāva* as independent existence, the Ābhidharmika defines *svabhāva* as unanalyzable, more-than-conceptual existence, i.e., *dravyasat*" (2001: 92). A key element of the Abhidharmic definition is the partlessness and independence from the conceptualizing mind (2001: 93-4), thus eschewing two of the three established Madhyamaka dependence relations. Burton notes it is improbable Nāgārjuna would willfully employ an Abhidharmic technical term in an entirely innovative way without having a bone to pick. He continues, "It is arguable, however, that Nāgārjuna's general tendency to equate lack of *svabhāva* with dependence on causes and conditions, rather than specifically with dependence on parts, indicates a subtle shift or broadening in the meaning of *svabhāva*" (2001: 93). Robinson (1972: 325-331) notes this discrepancy and charges Nāgārjuna with misrepresentation, while Tillemans (*How do Mādhyamikas Think? And Other Essays on the Buddhist Philosophy of the Middle Way*, Wisdom Publications, 2016: 26-8) more favourably notes how Nāgārjuna reveals unintended philosophical consequences of the Abhidharmic position.

[81] Abhidharma defenders like to think that *svabhāva* is not a metaphysical postulate in the way the Madhyamaka critique it. However, the ultimate, realist, foundationalist pretensions are evident in the interpretations of the Sarvāstivādin Dhammajoti (*Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2009: 65): "What is real is what abides uniquely in its intrinsic nature: What is real is what has a *svabhāva*. […] What is real or what exists truly is what exists from the highest or ultimate standpoint (*paramārtha-sat*), as opposed to what exists relatively/conventionally (*saṃvṛti-sat*)". It is the same for Karunadasa and Bhikkhu Bodhi in a Pāli context: according to Karunadasa (*The Dhamma Theory: Philosophical Cornerstone of the Abhidhamma*, Buddhist Publication Society, 1996: 50), "The term *paramattha* denotes the category of real existents (*dhammas*) which have their own objective nature (*sabhāva*). […] When a particular situation is explained on the

Despite the desire to identify a singular opponent, *svabhāva* represents something much more pernicious as the philosophical expression of a general intuition of metaphysical realism ("default realism").[82] Consequently, the Madhyamaka critique need not be restricted to the Abhidharma *if* it addresses naïve, realist cognitions generally. Because the ordinary mind is prone to take appearance as reality (i.e., with the appearance of substantiality taken for its reality), Westerhoff notes that Nāgārjuna's critique is "a medicine administered to those who are suffering from the illusion of substantial existence. As the causes of illness are manifold and as a medicine has to be put together to remove the particular cause in question, the argumentative reasons why people believe that items with *svabhāva* exist vary".[83] As such, I paint a wide picture of *svabhāva* as symptomatic of default realism more generally.[84] All realist theories about fundamental elements, particles, etc., if posited to exist independently from dependence relations, the Mādhyamikas would critique in the same way.

4.2.2 THE ANTI-REALIST ARGUMENT

Metaphysical anti-realism is defined contradistinctly from metaphysical realism, which is critiqued for positing the reality of objects existing independently of any cognitive activity. The realist premise against which anti-realism is defined requires both ontological and metaphysical elements: it holds that a certain

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basis of terms indicative of the real elements of existence (the *dhammas*), that explanation is *paramattha-sacca*"; according to Bodhi (*A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Abhidhammattha Sangaha of Ācariya Anuruddha*, Charleston Buddhist Fellowship, 2007a: 21), "Ultimate realities […] are things that exist by reason of their own intrinsic nature (*sabhāva*). These are the *dhammas*: the final, irreducible components of existence, the ultimate entities that result from a correctly performed analysis of existence. Such existents admit of no further reduction but are themselves the final terms of analysis, the true constituents of the complex manifold of experience. Hence, the word *paramattha* is applied to them, which is derived from *parama* = "ultimate, highest, final" and *attha* = "reality, thing"". Though beyond the present scope to determine the similarities and differences of the Sarvāstivāda and Pāli Abhidharmas, I note that Karunadasa (1996: 29) labours to show an ontological discrepancy between the *dhammavāda* of the Pāli and Sarvāstivāda Abhidharmas insofar as the Pāli notion of *paramattha* "does not carry any substantialist implications". This is hard to square with the above.

[82] See chapter 3 (§3.3, pp. 143-4 above).

[83] Westerhoff 2017: 97. "Suffering from the illusion of substantial existence" casts a wide net encompassing a variety of possible targets. One might believe that the self is substantial, metaphysical elements are substantial, suffering is substantial, etc. There is no end to the list of reifiable phenomena; hence, Nāgārjuna's arguments are universally applicable.

[84] E.g., although the Nyāya do not propose any *svabhāvic* theory by name, they typify metaphysical realism insofar as they hold three key theses: "(1) truth is correspondence between proposition and reality; (2) reality is mind-independent; (3) there is one true theory that correctly describes reality" (Siderits 2016: 13). Nyāya foundationalist epistemology affirms direct realism when holding the *pramāṇa*s to provide direct and unconditional knowledge of objects as they are in themselves (i.e., *svabhāvically*). Cf. Matilal 1986: 5-6, 39-40; Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought*, Edinburgh University Press, 1999: 131; Westerhoff 2009a: 17, 191-2; and Dasti & Phillips 2017: 60-74.

class of objects exists objectively in a substantial, *svabhāvic* manner, independently of dependence relations, causal conditions, and the cognizing mind (its thoughts, perceptions, etc. of them).[85] The Mādhyamikas deny this realist premise: objects only meaningfully exist *for us* as objects of cognitive experience. This "existence"—the only coherent kind thereof—is *conventional* existence per the conventional truth, a merely conventional, anti-realist existence grounded in dependence relations.

In this anti-realist context, Smith distinguishes material and mental phenomena: "A realist about material things will say that material things are not constituted by, nor persistently dependent upon, mental things, although they may be causally interrelated with mental things. Material things therefore exist objectively […] and are not constructs formed out of mental things"; conversely, an anti-realist will say that "material things are constructs formed out of, or immediately dependent upon, mental things".[86] That Buddhist philosophy is staunchly critical of realism is not a novel interpretation.[87] However, should Madhyamaka anti-realism take an angle of attack concerning mind-dependence, it must be sufficiently differentiated from metaphysical idealism (see §§4.2.3), a distinction not developed by Smith. To what degree phenomena are appropriately classified as either "material" or "mental" requires clarification.

Many scholars have defended Madhyamaka anti-realism: Siderits defines it as the inability to "give content to the metaphysical realist's notion of a mind-independent reality with a nature (whether expressible or inexpressible) that can be mirrored in cognition".[88] Similarly, according to Westerhoff,

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[85] It is not clear that the Abhidharmic *svabhāva* doctrine entirely fits this mold in terms of the total mind-independent existence of the ontological object. However, there is evidence from some defenders of the Pāli Abhidhamma that it does: "It is the *dhamma*s alone that possess ultimate reality (*paramattha-dhamma*): determinate existence "from their own side" (*sarūpato*), independent of the mind's conceptual processing of the data" (Bodhi 2007a: 3).

[86] Smith 2015: 144. His treatment of Buddhist anti-realism concerns the material of the Pāli Canon and thus is not directly applicable to the Madhyamaka. Nonetheless, the philosophical content of this evidence shares a continuity with the Madhyamaka and later Buddhist philosophy.

[87] According to Alex Wynne (*Buddhism: An Introduction*, IB Tauris, 2015: 5), "the Buddha was the first person in history to reject, let alone entertain, the notion that the external world apprehended through the senses is a mind-independent reality". This is interesting because it appeals to the world as apprehended through the senses and not in itself, which is relevant to the cognitive reading of the conventional truth. Similarly, according to Noa Ronkin (*Early Buddhist Metaphysics*, Routledge, 2005: 245), "What the Buddha rejects is realism, conceptual and ontological alike: the notion that the encountered world is made up of distinguishable substances, and the linguistic theory that words refer to these substances which they represent. Cf. Smith 2015: 143-4.

[88] Siderits 2016: 23. This definition is distinctly metaphysical in flavour. However, elsewhere he says ("Replies to Garfield, Taber, and Arnold", *APA Newsletters* 6.1, Fall 2006: 18) that "It's important to point out that I use "anti-realism" in Dummett's sense, as the name of a view about meaning and truth, and not as the name of a metaphysical view. For Dummett an anti-

"[Nāgārjuna's] arguments set out to show that the idea of a theory that represents the nature of reality at the ultimate level is a chimera. Any such theory will entail the existence of some entities by *svabhāva*, and any such entities, Nāgārjuna claims, will lead to inconsistency".[89] In both cases, Madhyamaka anti-realism is defined contradistinctly from its object of critique, a metaphysical realism grasping at a reality independent of cognition. Any allusions they make to the "nature of reality" and the "ultimate" refer to the Abhidharmic ultimate truth, which assumes a direct correspondence of the realist variety of a certain class of statements (ultimate statements) with the objects of a mind-independent reality.[90] However, if instead metaphysical anti-realism is allied with the conventional truth, the above portraits indicate that i) the target, metaphysical realism, is associated with an ultimate (that is, *non*-conventional) standpoint and ii) the conventional truth is *not* metaphysically realist. Nevertheless, a point I wish to make is that negative definitions in denial of metaphysical realism and ultimacy do not sufficiently account for the means of validly cognizing both the mind and its objects in ordinary cognitive experience at the conventional level.[91] For that reason, I will situate Madhyamaka epistemology and metaphysics in the cognitive reading of the conventional truth and the mind–world model of cognitive experience (§§4.2.3).

Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti both define *svabhāva* as *akṛtrima*, "not artificially created", and *nirapekṣa*, "not dependent"; Nāgārjuna further defines it as *samavasthita*, "immutable".[92] These definitions

realist is one who denies that there are verification-transcendent truth-conditions for statements in a given class". I present Madhyamaka anti-realism as metaphysical insofar as it is an anti-realist conventional metaphysic of interdependence, thus not forcing the classical definition of metaphysics onto the Madhyamaka but adapting it thereto.

[89] Westerhoff 2017: 104.

[90] Siderits allies Abhidharmic *svabhāva* with their specific conception of the ultimate truth of the *dharma*s in a realist, correspondence fashion (i.e., "Ābhidharmikas held that only statements concerning things with intrinsic natures can be ultimately true. This is because ultimate truth is meant to conform to the rigorous standards of a realist conception of truth. On the realist conception, truth accrues to statements by virtue of correspondence to mind-independent reality, and Abhidharma takes aggregation to be a strictly mental activity" ("Is Everything Connected to Everything Else? What the Gopīs Know", *Moonshadows*, 2011: 168). However, as I address in PART II (chapter 5), this Abhidharmic model of the ultimate does not hold for the Madhyamaka because the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s on which Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti base their conception of the ultimate are irreconcilable with the Abhidharmic model.

[91] This is distinct from Smith's 2015 treatment of anti-realism in the early Buddhist Canon. I argue that metaphysical anti-realism need not be reductively called *apophatic* in differentiation from a *cataphatic* realism since the conventional truth, as the valid cognition of ordinary experience, must be cataphatic *qua* explanatory *in an anti-realist fashion*.

[92] MMK 15:2cd: *akṛtrimaḥ svabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥ paratra ca* || (Vaidya (1960b: 115); PSP 265: *tasya cedaṃ lakṣaṇaṃ akṛtrimaḥ svabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥ paratra ca* || (Vaidya 1960b: 116); MMK 24:26cd: […] *nanu kila svabhāvaḥ samavasthitaḥ* || (Vaidya 1960b: 222).

correspond to textbook substance metaphysics.[93] Insofar as dependence relations are the hallmark of ordinary experience's valid cognition, both ŚS 3 and 16 discuss the incompatibility of *svabhāva* (Tib: *rang bzhin*) with such relations, specifically with its inability to be reduced to causes, conditions, parts, etc. by reason of possessing a self-contained and complete nature.[94] ŚS 71 specifically links its incompatibility with conditionality and that which is established for the world (i.e., the worldly conventional truth).[95] Rather, anything produced by causes and conditions (*hetu-pratyaya-saṃbhūta*) is a product (*kṛtaka*).[96] From these, the incompatibility of *svabhāva* so defined with the philosophical baseline of dependence relations is evident. Since every transient and impermanent phenomenal appearance in the world is a product of various causes and conditions, a product consisting of parts, etc., no such appearance could be validly cognized by a metaphysical postulate like *svabhāva*.

I take the following cognitive approach to the Mādhyamikas' criticisms: the arguments against *svabhāva*—many having been covered in previous chapters—demonstrate its absurdity and incoherence in the valid cognition of ordinary experience (i.e., conventional falsity).[97] Taking this cognitive approach

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[93] Ronkin (2005: 58-9) defines "substance" in an Aristotelian fashion as "that which exists independently of any other thing, ontologically, epistemologically, and linguistically". She writes (2005: 55), "What is perhaps the main derivative of the concept of substance is the view that reality is such that there is something 'out there' which is abiding, enduring and unalterable, despite the diversity and change we witness. Substance is that immutable core, what underlies an object and enables it to remain the same despite the novelty of its features. The concept of substance is therefore tied in with realism, according to which we are, by and large, capable of acquiring knowledge of the world and of comprehending it, because our categories, beliefs and statements fit with the features of a mind-independent reality".

[94] ŚS 3: "Because the inherent existence of all phenomena (*dngos po thams cad kyi rang bzhin*) is not anywhere found in causes (*rgyu*), conditions (*rkyen*), composites (*tshogs pa*) or individuals (*so so rnams*), [all phenomena] are empty [of inherent existence]"; *gang phyir dngos po thams cad kyi rang bzhin rgyu rkyen tshogs pa'am | so so rnams la'am thams cad la yod min de phyir stong pa yin* || (Tola & Dragonetti 1987: 11). ŚS 16: "[If] inherent existence was established (*rang bzhin grub*), phenomena would not exist in dependence (*brten dngos mi 'gyur*). Yet, [if] independent (*ma brten par yang*), how could [phenomena] exist (*ga la yod*)? [Because] inherent existence does not itself become non-existent (*med nyid mi 'gyur*), what is inherently existent does not perish (*mi 'jig*)"; *rang bzhin grub brten dngos mi 'gyur ma brten par yang ga la yod | rang bzhin med nyid mi 'gyur zhing rang bzhin yod pa mo 'jig go* || (Tola & Dragonetti 1987: 13). *Svabhāva* in this context is therefore a specimen of metaphysical eternalism (*sāsvatavāda*).

[95] ŚS 71: ""This arises dependent on that" (*'di brten 'di 'byung*)—that which is established for the world (*'jig rten sgrub 'di*) is not refuted (*'gog mi mdzad*). That which arises in dependence (*rten 'byung gang de*) is not inherently existent (*rang bzhin med*). How could it [inherently] exist (*ji ltar de yod*)? This ascertainment is correct (*yang dag nges*)"; *'di brten 'di 'byung zhes ba ba ni 'jig rten sgrub 'di 'gog mi mdzad | rten 'byung gang de rang bzhin med ji ltar de yod yang dag nges* || (Tola & Dragonetti 1987: 23).

[96] MMK 15:1cd: *hetupratyayasaṃbhūtaḥ svabhāvaḥ kṛtako bhavet* || (Vaidya 1960b: 114).

[97] See in chapter 3 the situation of *svabhāvic* cognitions in conventional falsity (§3.3) and the disputation of *svabhāva* by means of i) the universal appeal to dependence relations by conventional reasoning (§§3.4.1) and ii) *prasaṅgic* argumentation in analysis (§§3.4.2).

injects *mind-dependence* into the metaphysical debate by reducing metaphysical postulates to objects of cognitive experience and elevating the semantic framework applied to the cognition of these postulates to the debate's forefront. To that effect, I highlight some additional arguments supporting this approach.

Alteration (that is, the appearance of impermanence from change) and its incompatibility with *svabhāva* is addressed by Nāgārjuna in MMK 13. Change belongs to cognitive experience (insofar as there is the superimposition of relations between phenomenal identities) and not to things in themselves or their essential properties. A proponent of *svabhāvic* metaphysics might insist that alteration and impermanence only apply to composite, conventional phenomena otherwise undergirded by the *svabhāvic* existence of their metaphysical parts. Siderits & Katsura explain with the example of water: as a *dharmic* element or fundamental *dhātu,* water has the intrinsic nature of wetness; this is better understood as water's essential property insofar as its possession is what makes "water" *water*, without which it loses this identity.[98] However, water is a phenomenon seen to undergo change, e.g., from being hot to cold and vice versa. Because of this changeability, water's temperature is an accidental property separate from its essential property of wetness.[99] It follows that because water now has essential *and* accidental properties it is a composite phenomenon, meaning it has parts (qualities of two distinct types, from which it is therefore not partless or indivisible); it therefore cannot be ultimately existent in the *svabhāvic* sense. From being seen to undergo change, water is no longer an immutable substance.

The point of this argument is not to debate whether wetness should be considered the intrinsic nature of water since wetness is an essential property unique and therefore indispensable to its identity; it is to disabuse the metaphysical implications of making water's intrinsic nature/essential property the reason for its *substantialization* as a metaphysical postulate. To make sense of this, I appeal to Westerhoff 's

[98] Siderits & Katsura 2013: 141-3.

[99] See chapter 2 (§2.2, pp. 88-9 above). This essential–accidental property distinction should not be confused with the primary–secondary quality distinction (as in Descartes and Locke). While both primary and secondary qualities can be subject to alteration (e.g., size, solidity, extension, etc. for the former; appearances to the senses such as taste and smell for the latter) the same as accidental properties, essential properties cannot undergo change or else the bearer of that property (an ontological identity) ceases to be what it is. Water cannot *not* be wet for when it dries there is no longer water. While essential properties do not undergo change, ontological identities (the bearers of primary and secondary qualities) do.

differentiation of *svabhāva*'s dual senses: essence-*svabhāva* and substance-*svabhāva*.[100] Collobert notes the parallels of *svabhāva* with Ancient Greek *ousia*'s having senses of both *substance* and *essence*.[101] Because essence-*svabhāva* (in that context understood as an essential property, more or less synonymous with *lakṣaṇa*, *svalakṣaṇa*, or even *svarūpa*) is necessary to any ontological identity insofar as it defines what a specific phenomenon is, substance-*svabhāva* (in the classical definition as above, in the context of independence from causal relations and immutability) must be the Mādhyamikas' object of critique.

Rather, it must be granted that only on condition of such essential properties (i.e., essence-*svabhāva*) can any meaningful distinction be made between appearances. However, the Mādhyamikas insist that such identities and their properties are a matter of cognition (of fabrication and imputation)[102] and *not* metaphysics in the substantialist sense: just because such differentiation appears to consciousness does not mean such appearances correspond to a substantial distinction of discrete entities. Because such phenomena undergo change (not the essential properties themselves), those phenomena (the bearers of such properties) are not immutable. It is coherent with the *Buddhadharma* to maintain the conventional necessity of any identity's essential properties in the conventional truth without basing them in a substantial metaphysic. Thus, it is revealed that substantial metaphysics as derived from substance-*svabhāva* cannot account for basic phenomenal change at the conventional level. By appealing to the appearance of alteration, no underlying substance in which to ground these changing appearances is identified when all valid explanations appeal to existents being subject to conditions, parts, relations, etc.

The basest layer of dependence relations most critical to Madhyamaka anti-realism concerns the dependence of cognitive experience on the conceptualizing mind. Of the three Madhyamaka dependence relations, this refers to conceptual dependence. Siderits & Katsura's argument about the essential property and metaphysical status of water confirms the same: "We have arrived at our conception of

[100] Westerhoff 2009a: 21-3.
[101] Collobert 2022: 7-8.
[102] See chapter 2 (§2.2, pp. 88-9 above).

water by bundling together two distinct properties, which shows that water is something that is conceptually constructed".[103] That is, water *as a phenomenal identity* is an *object of cognitive experience* conceptually constructed, i.e., fabricated. The same must be true of all ontological postulates from the superimposition of certain qualities (essential properties indispensable to an identity, its accidental properties inferred from alteration) to the basis of designation.[104] The argument should be universalized to show that every object of cognitive experience is likewise conceptually constructed (i.e., is a dependent designation). This anti-realism reduces every phenomenon's conceivability to the conditions of it being an object of cognitive experience by rejecting its conceivability independently of being such an object. The antidote to the realist metaphysics of substance-*svabhāva* is ordinary experience's valid cognition, which requires a conventional metaphysic of dependence relations. This requires a shift in the semantic framework by which phenomena are cognized, reducing them to objects of cognitive experience. Such dependence relations (via the Mādhyamikas' non-standard, conventional semantic framework) comprise a comprehensive cognitive template for the valid cognition of ordinary experience. This cognitive template will now be employed to differentiate Madhyamaka anti-realism from metaphysical idealism.

4.2.3 METAPHYSICAL ANTI-REALISM BETWEEN REALISM & IDEALISM

Finally, I offer a meta-level discussion of Madhyamaka metaphysical anti-realism: after its differentiation from metaphysical realism and following its appeal to mind-dependence, it must appropriately be differentiated from idealist metaphysics.[105] Differentiating metaphysical anti-realism equally from both situates it squarely as the middle way between these extremes. Metaphysical realism is essentially the

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[103] Siderits & Katsura 2013: 142.

[104] See the discussion of the basis of designation in chapter 2 (§§2.2.2).

[105] This requires differentiating epistemological and metaphysical idealism (cf. Guyer & Horstmann, *Idealism in Modern Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2023: 2-6); however, that is not to say these are always distinct. Guyer & Horstmann differentiate them based on the arguments used in support of idealism, generally either metaphysical or epistemological. Epistemological idealism holds that all *knowledge* is derived from mental structures and not reality itself, while metaphysical idealism holds that *reality* itself is only mental in character. It is not always simple to squarely differentiate specific idealists into these respective camps for epistemological idealists might remain silent on the metaphysical ramifications of their position. Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism, for example, is not really a metaphysical idealism but an epistemological one since Kant preserves the *noumenon* (in whatever unknowable and inconceivable manner), even if this does blur the distinction (cf. Guyer & Horstmann 2023: 2-3). Kant's idealism is above all phenomenal and not noumenal. To take another example, George Berkeley's immaterialist idealism is metaphysically idealist because ideas and minds are what exists.

position that reality exists independent of thoughts, perception, and its linguistic designation. Metaphysical idealism, on the other hand, is essentially the position that reality is a product of the mind, that everything that can be considered real is ultimately mental. If these are both definitions that stretch these positions to their extreme, perhaps to the point of caricature without room for nuance, then that is only to serve the purpose of pinning down the specifics of the brand of Madhyamaka metaphysical anti-realism I espouse as situated *between* these extremes. Naturally, these are categories of Western philosophy foreign to the Madhyamaka philosophical milieu. These are, nonetheless, established categories in Western Madhyamaka scholarship. What my analysis reveals is that, whatever the position is ultimately called, it requires a middle way between the complete mind-independent existence of the world and its complete mind-dependence.

Caution should abound any appeal to mind-dependence in a metaphysical context for the relation of the existence of objects to the cognizing mind in anti-realism requires clarification, lest we jump out of the pan of metaphysical realism into the fire of metaphysical idealism. If this appeal is taken too far, an extreme form of metaphysical idealism follows wherein all existents are reduced to mental phenomena (as in the *cittamātra* denial of extramental reality).[106] Navigating this hazard requires probing two inquiries: i) what reasonable anti-realist account can be given wherein the phenomenal world depends on the mind; ii) what is the existential status of that mind in relation to the world of objects depending on it? Giving anti-realist responses to these questions constitutes a significant objection to any metaphysically idealist interpretation of the *Buddhadharma* concerning the priority existential status of the mind. To that end, I highlight thematic similarities and underscore critical differences between metaphysical idealism and Madhyamaka anti-realism. Though both reject the realist premise of the mind-independent existence of the world, they do not thereafter arrive at the same conclusion. On that basis, I

[106] This should not be taken as a generalization of metaphysical idealism in all cases but perhaps as a caricature of the most extreme variant of the view the Mādhyamikas reject. This is, e.g., how Candrakīrti understands *cittamātra*; see chapter 1 (§1.1, pp. 47-9 above) and chapter 3 (§3.3, pp. 147-8 above).

argue the conventional truth is most aptly characterized as metaphysically anti-realist and *not* idealist. The unique characteristic of Madhyamaka metaphysical anti-realism and its key criterion of differentiation from metaphysical idealism is that it must be equally anti-realist and equally anti-foundationalist about the existence and nature of the mind as it is of the world. The argument invariably falls back on dependence relations, in this case the existential and conceptual interdependence afforded by the mind–world model of cognitive experience (per chapter 1, §1.1). This mirrors the mutual establishment of the anti-foundationalism of the *pramāṇa–prameya* relation above, demonstrating the same anti-foundationalist mutual establishment in the mind–world model of cognitive experience. This requires, in the end, a careful balance and an equalization of the existential statuses of both mind and world *in the context of cognitive experience*.

Consider the following contexts in which Nāgārjuna discusses the mind:

> [YṢ 34:] The primary elements and so forth (*mahābhūta-ādiḥ*) are explained (*proktam*) to be contained (*samavarudhyate*) in consciousness (*vijñāne*). When knowing this (*tat-jñāne*), one achieves [the realization of their] cessation (*vigamam yāti*), are they not false fabrications (*mithyā vikalpitam*)?[107]

> [BV 40-1:] The mind (*sems*) is a mere name (*ming tsam*). It is nothing at all (*'ga' yang med*) apart from a name. Cognition (*rnam rig*) is [also] seen as a mere name. Even the name[s themselves] are without inherent existence (*rang bzhin med pa yin*). The Conquerors (*rgyal ba rnams kyis*) do not grasp the mind (*sems ma rnyed*) as [existing] either internally (*nang*), externally (*phyi rol*), or between the two (*gnyis ka'i bar*). Consequently, the mind has the character of [being like] a magician's illusion (*sgyu ma'i rang bzhin*).[108]

Further, at RĀ 4:64ab (364ab), he establishes the merely conventional nature of the mind: "What is it that sees (*kaḥ paśyati*)? Conventionally (*vyavahāreṇa*), it is said to be the mind (*cittam*)".[109] I argue that

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[107] YṢ 34: *mahābhūtādi vijñāne² proktaṃ samavarudhyate | tajjñāne vigamaṃ yāti nanu mithyā vikalpitam* || (Li & Ye 2014: 70); *'byung ba che la sogs bshad pa | rnam par shes su yang dag 'du || de shes pas ni 'bral 'gyur na | log par rnam brtags ma yin nam* || (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 13). BV 25 makes a similar though more clarifying point insofar as it says: "To overcome the conception of self (*bdag tu 'dzin pa bzlog pa'i phyir*), the aggregates (*phung po*), elements (*khams*), etc. are taught (*bstan pa*). Having situated [such phenomenon] in the mind alone (*sems tsam*), those greatly blessed [*buddha*s and *bodhisattva*s] abandon (*spangs*) [them as truly existent]"; *bdag tu 'dzin pa bzlog pa'i phyir | phung po khams sogs bstan pa yin || sems tsam po la gnas nas ni | skal chen rnams kyis de yang spangs* || (Lindtner 2015: 16).

[108] BV 40-1: *sems ni ming tsam yin pa ste | ming las gzhan du 'ga' yang med || ming tsam du ni rnam rig blta | ming yang rang bzhin med pa yin || nang ngam de bzhin phyi rol lam | yang na gnyis ka'i bar dag tu || rgyal ba rnams kyis sems ma rnyed | de phyir sgyu ma'i rang bzhin sems* || (Lindtner 2015: 22). Other relevant passages include BV 25, 27, 32, and 55-6.

[109] RĀ 4:64ab (364): *kaḥ paśyatīti ceccittam vyavahāreṇa kathyate |* (Vaidya 1960b: 308; McClintock & Dunne 2024: 196).

the mind's conventional nature is not only consistent with metaphysical anti-realism at the conventional level but the only way it could be validly cognized. Nāgārjuna's anti-realist treatment of the mind here is reminiscent of Buddhist nominalism when it was said that "The entire world is mere name" and "Whatever exists as mere fabrication is empty of *svabhāva.*"[110] Buddhist nominalism complements metaphysical anti-realism insofar as the fabricated (conventional) nature of cognitive experience is equally incompatible with mind-independent realist and world-independent idealist metaphysics.

Candrakīrti, in reaction to the *cittamātra*/*vijñānavāda* teachings flourishing after Nāgārjuna,[111] has more to say about mind-dependence. He stresses the formative (but existentially non-privileged) status of the mind in relation to the existence of the world (*loka*) or form (*rūpa*):

> [MĀ 6:89ab-90:] The mind constructs in manifold ways (*cittam eva racayati aticitram*) the world of sentient beings (*sattvalokam*) and the world of inanimate things (*bhājanalokam*).[112]
>
> Although form indeed exists (*rūpam asti khalu yadi api*), it is not a creator (*kartṛtā tu na)* like the mind (*cittavat*). Thus, a creator other than the mind is denied (*kartuḥ itarasya hi cittāt vāraṇam*), [but] form itself is not negated (*na khalu rūpa-niṣedhaḥ*).[113]

Much weight is carried by 6:89's "construction" (*racayati*, √RAC in the causative sense, which may also mean "to produce", "to cause", or "to decorate"); in this context, it is synonymous with "fabrication" (*vikalpa*, *kalpanā*; *kalpayati*, √KḶP in the causative sense).

An established contemporary argument for metaphysical anti-realism akin to the Mādhyamikas' concern with mind-dependence in the context of cognitive experience is Putnam's conceptual relativity: "'Objects' do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description".[114] For the Madhyamaka, Siderits frames it more fully,

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[110] See chapter 2 (§§2.2.3); AS 35-6 (p. 105 above); ŚS 42cd (p. 106 above).

[111] The BV is Nāgārjuna's only work to refute *vijñānavāda*, which is a reason some allege its anachronistic misattribution to him and doubt its authenticity. On its authenticity, Lindtner (1982: 180-1; 2018: 4-5) notes that it is not mentioned by Buddhapālita or Candrakīrti but is cited by Bhāviveka, Asvabhāva, Śāntarakṣita, and others.

[112] MĀ 6:89ab: *sattvalokamatha bhājanalokaṃ cittameva racayatyaticitram* | (Li 2015: 15). MĀB 6:89 adds: "the mind itself is the primary cause of engaging in transmigration and not another" (*de'i phyir 'gro ba rab tu 'jug pa la sems nyid gtso bo'i rgyu yin gyi gzhan ni ma yin pa*) (Liland 2020: 240). He is talking about experience as a product of *karmic* conditioning.

[113] MĀ 6:90: *rūpamasti khalu yadyapi tasya kartṛtā tu na hi cittavadasti | tena karturitarasya hi cittādvāraṇaṃ na khalu rūpaniṣedhaḥ* || (Li 2015: 15). His mention here of being a "creator" (*kartṛtā*) must be juxtaposed with Nāgārjuna's remarks at MMK 8:12 about the interdependence of agent and action; see chapter 1 (§1.1, p. 46 above).

[114] Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, Cambridge University Press, 1981: 52. For the present case, "conceptual

which also demonstrates metaphysical anti-realism's mirroring of epistemological anti-foundationalism:

> We cannot give content to this notion of ideal correspondence between cognition and world unless we can be said to know the nature of the relata—cognition and world—in isolation from each other. The fact that *pramāṇa* and *prameya* are mutually dependent in the manner described above, shows that we can have no such conceptions of cognition and world".[115]
> […]
> To say that something is conceptually constructed is not to say that it is created *ex nihilo* by the mind. It is to say instead that, because the mind has played a role in its individuation, it does not possess the kind of mind-independent nature and ontological status that the metaphysical realist hankers after. The anti-realist is not a linguistic idealist. The anti-realist simply holds that the notion of how things are completely independent of all conceptualizations is incoherent.[116]

Westerhoff adds that, "There is no way of investigating the world apart from our linguistic and conceptual practices, if only because these practices generate the notion of the "world" and of the "objects" in it in the first place".[117] However, these privative accounts, which all the deny the realist opponent's standard semantic framework, face the same questions as metaphysical idealism: i) in what capacity does the mind exist to cut up the world? ii) In what capacity does the world exist if it could only be posited in relation to the mind? The answers the metaphysical anti-realist offers for both questions are interrelated.

A typical metaphysical realist objection to both idealism and anti-realism might question the world's existence prior (temporally) to any mind cognizing it in whichever way. According to Simon James, this is the "ancestrality objection".[118] However, from fully digesting the anti-realist critique and the mind–world model of cognitive experience, it is obvious that the objection is malformed (or, per Siderits, the question is based on an "incoherent" notion). It is critical to take the Madhyamaka anti-realist argument for mind-dependence as more *cognitive* (in the sense restricted to the context of cognitive experience) than strictly metaphysical (in both the classical and idealist senses): the anti-realist need not hold the

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relativity" should be distinguished from "conceptual relativism". I am less concerned with *which* nominal scheme of description is used to describe the world (i.e., whether one is more adequate than another) than I am concerned with this "world" that gets cut into "objects". This concerns the *mechanics* of schematization itself more than its *contents*.

[115] Siderits 2016: 20.

[116] Siderits 2016: 49 n.14.

[117] Westerhoff 2009a: 220.

[118] Simon P. James, "Madhyamaka, Metaphysical Realism, and the Possibility of an Ancestral World", *Philosophy East and West* 68.4, 2018: 1120-1.

world to metaphysically, existentially, and causally depend on the cognizing mind in every way such that if all minds ceased to exist the world would also necessarily cease (as might a most extreme form of metaphysical idealism). The argument revolves around the twin premises of *the mind's cognitive experience of the world* and *the world as cognitively experienced by a mind*. Insofar as the two are mutually entailing, we can therefore posit both mind and world only through this lens.

Before there were minds to cognitively experience it, there was no "world" existing *as an object of cognitive experience*; if cognitive experience were to cease from the disappearance of all cognizing minds, the "world" *as an object of cognitive experience* would also cease. The projection of a certain conceptual framework (which is, per the anti-realist argument, a product of cognitive experience) about the world *forwards* (after the death of all sentient beings cognitively experiencing the world) or *backwards* (before sentient beings were cognitively experiencing) does not alter this reliance on the same framework for discoursing about that world. The mind–world model of cognitive experience invalidates the realistic positing of how such a "world" might be in any other context since that lies entirely outside any possible frame of reference. Siderits and Westerhoff are explicit about that. James concedes that it is perfectly admissible for the Madhyamaka to account for such projection using "concepts of causation, temporal passage, part-whole relations, and indeed a range of scientific models and theories" at the level of the conventional truth.[119] This means that the objection is not unanswerable (if seriously entertained, the way such a world was/will be could be hypothesized using the same framework developed by sentient beings through cognitive experience) but misguided; it does not establish metaphysical realism as the objectors believe, and, if it is answered, they do not receive the answer they desire. One can only insist on the '*for us*' perspectivism integral to anti-realism: there is no conceivable way the world is/was/will be independently of thought and discourse that could be meaningfully understood *for us* who think,

[119] James 2018: 1122. He also concedes that Kant would permit the same thing "if we are content to seek *empirical* truths and nothing more, then we are perfectly entitled not only to help ourselves to concepts of causation. time, space, and so forth, but to contemplate the possibility of a world that exists independently of us" (2018: 1122).

discourse, and only cognitively experience the world through thought and discourse.[120]

The key to metaphysical anti-realism and its mirroring of anti-foundationalism is mind–world interdependence as a model of cognitive experience. Therethrough, the anti-realist can assign no existential, causal, or foundational priority to either mind or world. When rejecting the realist world-foundation of cognitive experience they also reject an idealist mind-foundation—thus mirroring anti-foundationalism in a metaphysical context. The critique of *svabhāva* addresses the world-foundation; the mind-foundation Candrakīrti addresses at MĀ 6:55[121] and 6:90 (above) wherein *rūpa* (form) should not in every way be denied. To make sense of both foundations' rejection, recall the arguments for the existential and conceptual interdependencies of mind and world, including the critique of one-way causality and the implementation of the two-way (interdependent) model in its place. I introduced this in chapter 1 as a conceptual model exemplary of the dependence relations integral to the conventional truth; now the argument comes full circle via the valid cognition of ordinary experience therethrough.

Thus, just as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti do not reject the basic foundationalist premise of *pramāṇa*-based epistemology because they concede *pramāṇa*s certainly do, in a restricted fashion, establish *prameya*s only if there is the amendment that *prameya*s equally establish *pramāṇa*s, neither do they reject the basic idealist premise that the experience of the world is mind-dependent only if there is the amendment that the mind itself is equally world-dependent in the following way. The valid cognition of ordinary experience requires the existential and conceptual interdependence (i.e., mutual establishment) of mind and world of the two-way causal variety in the same template as the father–son and *pramāṇa*–*prameya* relations. Just as a father does not become identified as a father until he has a son and a *pramāṇa*

[120] With this Kant would agree. While a comparison to Kantian philosophy is not my mandate, similarities and differences have been noted for explanatory purposes. In chapter 1 (§1.1), I used Kant's model of categorical predication as a *foil* for the Madhyamaka insofar as it emphasizes *one-way* causality when the mind constructs the world (essentially proposing a transcendentally idealist mind-foundation of cognitive experience). That is different from the Madhyamaka insofar as their mind–world model is a *two-way* causal relation. Kant's transcendental idealism vis-à-vis phenomenal appearances can be linked to the Madhyamaka's anti-realist conventional truth if the former is adapted to fit the fabricated nature of the language and discourse structuring cognitive experience (thus invalidating the universal or transcendental nature of the categories because fabricated). Nonetheless, as I discuss in PART II (chapter 5), as Kant's *noumenal* hypothesis is not appropriate for the Madhyamaka ultimate, his phenomenon–noumenon (or appearance–reality) dichotomy is inapt for the two truths.

[121] Discussed in chapter 3 (§3.3, p. 145 above).

does not become identified as an epistemic instrument until it has an object (and vice versa), the mind cannot be identified as a mind except by being in a world of objects. The same relation obtains in reverse: the world cannot be identified as a world except by a mind that cuts up that world into objects in cognition. The same problem of establishment found in the epistemological context creeps into the metaphysics of the mind–world model of cognitive experience; mutual establishment is the only egress, the only way to validly cognize either mind or world.

If only in that context can there be a "world" (an object of experience, appearance, *prameya*, *jñeya*, etc.) or a "mind" (a subject of experience, perceiver of appearances, host of *pramāṇa*s, cognizer, etc.), cognitive experience itself is determined by the mind–world relation of existential and conceptual interdependence and mutual establishment. This Madhyamaka metaphysical anti-realism is therefore equally anti-foundationalist about mind *and* world. Insofar as the mind–world model of cognitive experience rejects both metaphysical realism and idealism as extreme forms of metaphysical foundationalism, I situate the Madhyamaka squarely in the interstice—a middle way predicated by interdependence, mutual establishment, anti-realism, and anti-foundationalism. Invalidating the existence of either mind or world in isolation from the other, it equalizes their existential statuses in an anti-foundationalist interdependence of mutual establishment, the grasping of which is critical to the valid cognition of the ordinary experience occurring therethrough.

§4.3 CONCLUSION

In this final chapter of PART I, I demonstrated how epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism in tandem best characterize the conventional truth because of i) the mirrored critiques of epistemological foundationalism and metaphysical realism; ii) the universal appeal to dependence relations forming the backbone thereof; and iii) the mirror of epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism. It was necessary to treat these two together because of their entanglement as determinative conditions of ordinary experience's valid cognition. This was demonstrated through the problem of establishment first investigated via the foundational role of the

*pramāṇa*s (resolved by the mutual establishment of *pramāṇa* and *prameya*) rearing its head again via the establishment of either the mind or the world as a metaphysical foundation (resolved again by the mutual establishment of mind and world in the mind–world model of cognitive experience). Insofar as, due to this mutual establishment, neither *pramāṇa* nor *prameya* could function as an epistemological foundation, the same mutual establishment in the mind–world model means that neither could mind nor world function as a metaphysical foundation (the former in idealist, the latter in realist, metaphysics). This lack of foundation in both the epistemological and metaphysical senses requires the conventional truth to simultaneously be epistemologically anti-foundationalist and metaphysically anti-realist.

The defining characteristic of Madhyamaka epistemological anti-foundationalism is its being equally anti-foundationalist about the existence and nature of the *pramāṇa*s as of the *prameya*s. Likewise, the defining characteristic of Madhyamaka metaphysical anti-realism is its being equally anti-realist about the existence and nature of the mind as of the world. This balance is essential to the philosophy of the middle way. The heartwood of the conventional truth is the profound understanding that there is nothing whatsoever establishable outside these formulas of dependence relations. The philosophical baseline of dependence relations on that basis acts as the Mādhyamikas non-standard, conventional semantic framework critical to unlocking the valid cognition of ordinary experience; we are cautioned, then, to apply it judiciously to every aspect thereof.

PART II: THE ULTIMATE TRUTH & THE MADHYAMAKA PHILOSOPHICAL-SOTERIOLOGICAL PROJECT

In PART I, I elaborated the following features of the conventional truth and the form of cognition with which it correlates: in chapter 1, the convention on which it is based, an exemplary mind–world model of dependence relations, and the dependence of the ultimate on the conventional; in chapter 2; the conventional nature of language and discourse, dependent designation, which explained the dependence relations integral to every linguistic act, and the differentiation of the standard semantic framework the Mādhyamikas critique from their own non-standard, conventional framework utilized in the exposition of the conventional truth and the valid cognition of ordinary experience; in chapter 3, the cognitive reading of the conventional truth whereby its content and mission is furnishing the means of the valid cognition of ordinary experience, the differentiation of conventional truth and falsity, and the various types of arguments employed in the justification of the conventional truth; and, finally, in chapter 4, epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism at the level of the conventional truth, as required by the Mādhyamikas' specific semantic framework and as indicative of the conditions of the valid cognition of ordinary experience. These specific parameters of the conventional truth and its correlated form of cognition leave us in a strong position to investigate in PART II the conditions differentiating the ultimate from the conventional truth. From the role of language and discourse in the valid cognition of ordinary experience, including their restriction to the conventional level by means of their conventional nature (as capable of furnishing either conventional truth or falsity depending on its semantic commitments), a formal criterion of differentiation emerges for the two truths.

My model of the ultimate truth argues that, in differentiation from the conventional truth's conceptual and dualistic form, the ultimate's form corresponds to a non-conceptual and non-dual experiential truth. Following the cognitive reading of the conventional truth, the ultimate truth, on account of its formal differentiation from the conventional, becomes correlated with a radically alternative mode of cognition marked by these formal parameters. The formal criterion of differentiation of the two truths being the

presence or absence of language and conceptuality therein, the two truths distinction corresponds to two modes of cognition: the conventional truth, as correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience, comprises conceptual and dualistic cognition; the ultimate truth, as correlated with the valid cognition of *extra*-ordinary experience, comprises non-conceptual and non-dual cognition. "*Extra*-ordinary experience" in the ultimate context applies contradistinctly to the ordinary experience (defined as conceptual and dualistic cognition) of the conventional as *not*-ordinary experience (and therefore as non-conceptual and non-dual cognition) and *un*-conventional. It does not mean anything like "supernatural"; it is the cognition ("gnosis" in some lexicons) of the *ārya*s having attained the ultimate, whose cognitive experience is not restricted to the ordinary cognitive mode correlated with the conventional truth. This pertains to a distinction the Mādhyamikas frequently draw between i) the cognitive experiences of ordinary people (*pṛthagjana*, often pejoratively called *bālajana* ("childish beings"), and also sometimes what is referred to as the "world" (*loka*)) who have not yet experienced awakening to the ultimate truth and ii) those of the *extra*-ordinary *ārya*s, *yogī*s, *bodhisattva*s, and *Buddha*s, who have experienced such awakening.[1] This distinction has significant soteriological implications in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. Both truths/cognitions, serving their respective functions, are required for its completion.

This model is contrasted by, and in fact launched in opposition to, a popular contemporary interpretation called "the semantic interpretation of emptiness", as it applies the ultimate, denying there is ultimate truth. I present a model actively preserving the two truths' distinction by taking seriously the conditions of their differentiation that is also capable of, in the final analysis, collapsing the distinction into one mode of cognitive experience (as befits the endgame of the Madhyamaka philosophical-

[1] Examples of the Mādhyamikas clearly differentiating the two are found at MĀ 6:28-31, 117; YṢ 23-30; and BCA 9:3-5. Salvini explains that "Yogic perceptions […] are such [realizations of *paramārthasatya*] precisely because they do not work within the obscuration of conventions, *saṁvṛti*, which is understood etymologically as a covering to *paramārtha*. Strictly speaking, a different understanding of conventions cannot per se be the ground to distinguish common persons from *yogin*s: and accordingly, Śāntideva gives their insight into *tattva* – and not the different quality of the conventions themselves – as the reason to establish the superiority of *yogisaṁvṛti*. This gradation, and the fundamental epistemological issues that underlie the debate, are better understood from Prajñākaramati's commentary" (2009: 200-1).

soteriological project). Because of its formal differentiation from the conventional, the ultimate truth and its correlated cognition are necessarily presented *apophatically*, a strategy furnishing strictly a negative definition of what they are *not*, of what they *lack*. Apophasis does not dwell on the lack of any affirmative predication but strategically employs negation to reveal a cognitive mode that is non-conceptual and non-dual (i.e., ultimate cognition). Because of this formal distinction, a separate common denominator must unite the two truths—that is, that they are both, in their own way, valid cognitions.

The evidence for this formal criterion of differentiation is the focus of PART II. In chapter 5, I demonstrate how the ultimate must correlate with a different form of non-conceptual, non-dual cognition. However, the claim of a non-dual form of truth and cognition raises many questions: what is its benefit? What is it liberating from, and how? How is it distinguished from no cognition at all, from mindlessness? These questions I answer in chapter 6. I firmly situate ultimate cognition in a soteriological context insofar as this is the cognitive state manifesting the goal of the philosophical-soteriological project: the cessation of suffering through the cultivation of an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging (*anupādāna*). The transformation in cognitive experience emerging from acclimation to the non-dual state is exemplary of the development of a cognition in which there are neither objects of clinging, a clinger, nor clinging itself—therewithout, there can be no arising of suffering. The evidence indicates an intimate connection between the cessation of conceptualization (*prapañca-upaśama*), the attainment of bliss/welfare (*śiva*), and the cultivation of non-clinging—designations which mirror the pattern of apophasis. This sets up the soteriologization of the "truth" in its ultimate context insofar as the ultimate is not a propositional truth with conceptual content but nonetheless correlates with a valid mode of cognitive experience characteristically free from suffering.

Consequently, after having clearly differentiated the two truths both formally and cognitively, in chapter 7 I deal with the distinction's role in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. That project is a philosophical and practical guide for attaining a way of life characterized by wisdom and freedom from suffering. Relevant to this is the post-meditative re-engagement of the world, only

appropriately conducted through non-clinging. This is explained in chapter 7 (§7.2) via a dialectical model of the two truths having this as its goal.

To that end, the following inquiries correspond to the three chapters of PART II: i) what can meaningfully be said of the ultimate truth? ii) How does one realize it, and towards what end? iii) What are the hermeneutic, philosophical, cognitive, and soteriological implications of the two truths distinction, and what is its role in the Madhyamaka project?

CONTEXTUALIZING THE APPROACH TO THE ULTIMATE

I situate my model amongst contemporary scholarship, demonstrating competing approaches to the Madhyamaka ultimate truth. Mipham (via Duckworth (2010)) argues that, within the general corpus of Buddhist texts on the two truths, there are two prevalent approaches: i) an ontological model about phenomena themselves, wherein, for the conventional truth, there are appearances, and for the ultimate, there is emptiness and ii) a phenomenological model bearing on the mode of experience of these phenomena, one correlated with the inauthentic vision of appearances and the other with the authentic vision of emptiness. Insofar as I maintain that elements of both models are valid, the cognitive reading I propose accommodates both.[2] I establish this synthesis in two contexts: i) via the inseparability of the valid cognition of appearances and emptiness, such that it could only be empty phenomena that appear and that emptiness is the necessary condition of appearances, and ii) via the validity of the distinction in cognitive modes as marked by their formal characteristics and soteriological application, arranged hierarchically. However, I do not uphold any unqualified authentic/inauthentic cognitive distinction for two reasons: i) I defend the philosophical validity of the conventional truth insofar as the valid cognition of ordinary experience is a defensible account of Candrakīrti's exposition; and ii) the dialectical model I offer accounts for the necessity of re-engaging the world of appearances post-attainment, which requires the valid cognition of ordinary experience not mired in inauthenticity, delusion, and error.

[2] Douglas S. Duckworth, "Two Models of the Two Truths: Ontological and Phenomenological Approaches", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 38.5, 2010: 519-27.

Historically, Huntington identifies three phases of the ultimate's interpretation:[3] i) a nihilism wherein the ultimate truth of emptiness means the ultimate non-existence of the phenomenal world, as in Keith and Kern;[4] ii) an absolutism wherein the ultimate refers to some absolute ineffable metaphysical reality underlying appearances, as in Stcherbatsky and Murti; and iii) a linguistic interpretation (see below).[5] On the other hand, Siderits counts two trends: i) metaphysical interpretations, circumscribing the above nihilism and absolutism; and ii) the semantic interpretation (see below).[6] Although not belonging to the West, the Abhidharmic interpretation of the two truths against which the Mādhyamikas react (see chapter 5, §§5.2.1) shares features of each: while the *dharma*s to which ultimate statements refer do, for the Abhidharma, constitute the immutable structure of reality itself, their interpretation also has features of the semantic interpretation insofar as, for them, the ultimate truth consists of a set of statements corresponding to those ultimately real constituents of reality. The latter, it must be stressed, is not the Madhyamaka model, though it has had a profound influence on the semantic interpretation of the ultimate insofar as it takes this model and formulates its understanding *in the lack* from the Mādhyamikas' denial of the Abhidharmic ultimate.

Within this context, I situate my model as i) the synthesis of the two approaches outlined by Mipham and Duckworth, which ii) takes influence from what Tuck calls "post-Wittgensteinian anti-philosophy"[7] and Huntington's linguistic interpretation and iii) is opposed to the semantic interpretation's denial of the ultimate truth, especially from its overreliance on the Abhidharmic model in interpreting the Madhyamaka. Nonetheless, I make no attempt to force the Mādhyamikas into any pre-conceived Western philosophical categories.[8]

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[3] Huntington 1989: 25-32.
[4] A.B. Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy in India and Ceylon*, Oxford University Press, 1923; Hendrick Kern, *Manual of Indian Buddhism*, Verlag von Karl J. Trübner, 1896.
[5] Huntington places in this category himself, Robinson, Streng, Thurman, Gudmunsen, and Robert Gimello ("Apophatic and Kataphatic Discourse in Mahāyāna: A Chinese View", *Philosophy East and West* 26.2, 1976).
[6] Siderits 2016: 38-43. The theory is also championed by Westerhoff and Garfield.
[7] Tuck 1990: v-vi. Though not in a Wittgensteinian context, there are kindred themes discussed in chapter 5 (§5.3).
[8] According to Westerhoff (2009a: 12), "Nāgārjuna is worthy of philosophical investigation in his own right. There is no more need to legitimate a study by setting out to show him to be a proto-Kant, proto-Wittgenstein, or proto-Derrida. […] Even though we cannot interpret Nāgārjuna free of the preconceptions and concerns of our own time, we are justified in expecting

I differentiate my model from these insofar these allies offer hermeneutic approaches to the Madhyamaka in general rather than exegetical sets of arguments and conclusions regarding a formal criterion differentiating the two truths.[9] Such approaches are also distinct from the position that the two truths are the hermeneutic key unlocking the wisdom of the texts, especially considering their formal differentiation. In contrast, the semantic interpretation takes the two truths by the horns in staking a position on the form of the two truths. However, I disagree with its denial of the ultimate truth (see below). In response, I develop an exegetical set of arguments and conclusions regarding the formal distinction, taking the scholastic approach to the ultimate in a different direction.

Huntington's linguistic interpretation investigates the role of language in cognitive experience, rightly taking the Mādhyamikas to critique referential meaning and correspondence truth in a metaphysical context. Huntington says it critiques "metaphysical language", as in "any sort of linguistic behaviour that purports to derive its meaning from a source outside the sociolinguistic community in which it occurs".[10] This we saw take shape in PART I as essential to the conventional truth's philosophy of language. The ultimate is certainly devoid of this kind of language, but so must be the conventional truth; this is consistent with my discussions in chapter 2 of the conventional nature of language and discourse (as the denial of *extralinguistic* and *extracognitive* reality (§§2.2.3)) and the Mādhyamika's non-standard, conventional semantic framework (XXX) and in chapter 4 of epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism (confirming the same). In re-contextualizing the role of language in cognitive

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that the more mature study of his words will provide us with more accurate and stable knowledge of his philosophy than was previously possible". This approach greatly influences my own; see also Huntington 1989: xii.

[9] For example, Huntington (1989: 18) defines the ultimate truth (translating *paramārtha-satya* quite literally as "the truth of the highest meaning"): "As opposed to conventional truth (*vyavahārasatya*), the truth of the highest meaning (*paramārthasatya*) must be realized through a means of knowledge not grounded in the rigid dichotomy established between reified concepts of subject and object. Knower and known are experienced as interdependent events within a larger matrix of other such transitory, constantly shifting events, through a way of understanding referred to as *prajñā* (wisdom), resulting in *advayajñāna* (nondualistic knowledge). *Prajñā* and *advayajñāna* are, however, best defined with reference neither to epistemological nor to ontological categories, but rather to what can be called an alternative conceptualization of the world actualized in an attitude of nonclinging, an attitude engendered within the meditator who has completely internalized the Madhyamika critique". This does not explicitly say that the ultimate truth is formally non-conceptual but does stress its cognitive aspects.

[10] Huntington 1989: 31. Another ally in the linguistic interpretation, though they do not mention one another, is Cabezón (see 1994: 161-70).

experience, Huntington is a strong ally for the non-conceptuality and non-duality of ultimate cognition. Similarly to Huntington, although Salvini does not necessarily directly sketch a position on the non-conceptual, non-dual nature of ultimate cognition, he frequently stresses the inapplicability of language and conceptuality thereto.[11] Likewise, MacDonald is a further strong ally for understanding the cognition required to see the ultimate truth as "a completely different type of awareness" than ordinary cognition.[12]

The linguistic interpretation has in common with Tibetan Mādhyamikas (e.g., Tsong Khapa, Mabja Jangchub Tsöndrü, Kangyur Rinpoche, Jamgön Mipham, and Geshe Kelsang Gyatso) an emphasis on i) the cognitive aspects of the two truths, such that they correlate with two different modes of cognitive experience, and ii) the transformative aspects of each "truth" in association with the soteriological goal, freedom from suffering. Although I specifically focus on interpreting Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, it can be advantageous to consult these Tibetan philosophers in their commentaries and interpretations of the root texts, especially concerning aspects of the ultimate perhaps less developed or explicit therein.

While the semantic interpretation shares this same concern with language (regarding the semantic import of emptiness), it arrives at radically different conclusions about the ultimate by taking emptiness to mean a lack of ultimate truth. While I am sympathetic to its treatment of emptiness' semantic import (as covered in chapter 2 with the conventional nature of language and discourse, of which emptiness is a prime specimen; hence, the emptiness of emptiness (*śūnyatā-śūnyatā*)), in chapter 5 (§5.2) I argue against its conclusions that "the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth" and "there is only conventional truth".[13] Consequently, I derive an alternative conclusion from the same arguments: that the ultimate truth has no propositional, conceptual content. This is consistent with both the textual evidence that never denies there is ultimate truth and with a formal criterion differentiating the two truths.

As previously mentioned, Candrakīrti defines a "conventional truth" and an "ultimate truth" each in

[11] See Salvini 2014: 492; 2019: 668, 672, 678, 683.
[12] See MacDonald, "Knowing Nothing: Candrakīrti and Yogic Perception" in *Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness* (ed. Eli Franco), Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009: 162-3.
[13] Siderits 2016: 41.

terms of being an "object" (*viṣaya*; cf. MĀ 6:23). How each object is "seen" I correlate with distinct cognitions. The "object" of the ultimate truth I correlate with an alternative mode of cognition explicated via the negation of the conventional predicates of cognition. Insofar as this cognition is frequently only characterized negatively, I take that as evidence of the methodological negation of ordinary cognition,[14] thus establishing the formal differentiation of the two truths and their correlates modes of cognitive experience. Because the realization of the ultimate still occurs mentally, I use "cognition" with heavy qualification to differentiate it from its ordinary senses. The "object" of that valid cognition of *extra*-ordinary experience is variously called "emptiness", *tattva*, or "suchness", which refers to a peculiar kind of non-object through the *lack* of certain qualities in how it is cognized ultimately. No concepts apply to that "object" if cognized non-dually. Marked only by non-implicative negation, it is only directly experienced. Only in conventional terms is there an "object" posited in relation to the "subject". Unfortunately, conventional terms are all we have to discourse about the non-conceptual ultimate, and this, I argue, is the cause of much confusion. Framing the cognitive model with this formal criterion permits exploring the texts' use of negation for discoursing about the ultimate.

In an article by Satoshi Hayashima,[15] there is an analysis of Candrakīrti's breakdown of the compound (*samāsa*) *parama-artha*, which I have been translating as "ultimate"; however, it more specifically means for Candrakīrti, when interpreted as a *karmadhārya* compound,[16] either "the ultimate aim, [(i.e.,]

[14] See Salvini 2019: 683.

[15] Satoshi Hayashima, "A Study of the Concept of the Absolute Truth (*Paramārtha*) from the Perspective of the Analysis of the Compound", *Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū | The Studies in Buddhism* 73, 2017: 59-77. Satoshi's article also examines the compound as interpreted by Vasubandhu, Asaṅga, Bhāviveka, and Ratnākaraśānti.

[16] Satoshi reveals there are other ways of analyzing the compound, such as being a *tatpuruṣa* or a *bahuvrīhi* compound. He does not in this article define these types of compounds for the reader, but suffice it to say that in a *tatpuruṣa* compound the first term (X) of an XY compound modifies the second (Y) in various grammatical cases (*vibhakti*), the genitive being the most common. In a *karmadhārya* compound, on the other hand, the X and Y terms agree in case, thus offering a qualified noun. A *bahuvrihi* compound is exocentric insofar as it serves as a noun or adjective used to qualify another noun not contained in the compound itself. There are many similarities in the *tatpuruṣa* and *karmadhārya* compound interpretations. Taking "*artha*" as meaning "object" reveals, in a *tatpuruṣa* interpretation (of the genitive variety, 6th *vibhakti*), a relation of possession, yielding a translation like "the object of the ultimate". On the other hand, in a *karmadhārya* interpretation, the two terms are interpreted in the same case, yielding a translation like "the ultimate object". In English, there is not much of a distinction between these two formulations, with "the ultimate object" being effectively synonymous in meaning with "the object of the ultimate".

nirvāṇa" or "the ultimate object to be known", i.e., emptiness, *tattva*, or suchness.[17] The reason Candrakīrti is said to interpret the compound as a *karmadhārya* and not a *tatpuruṣa* is the way Candrakīrti offers a breakdown in apposition: cf. PSP 494: *paramaścāvarthaśceti paramarthaḥ*,[18] in which the grammatical case relations are vague, but which might mean something like "*paramārtha* is the ultimate (*paramaḥ*) and the object" (*arthaḥ*), or, more interpretatively, it is "[that which is the] ultimate and [its] object"; cf. MĀ 6:189ab: *paramārtho hi nirvāṇam param etat prayojanam*,[19] which means "Indeed, the ultimate (*paramārthaḥ*) is *nirvāṇa*, [and or because] this is the highest purpose/goal (*param etat prayojanam*). At MĀB 6:190, Candrakīrti also offers *don gyi sgra ni dgos pa'i tshig gam shes bya'i tshig go*,[20] which means "the word "ultimate" (*don gyi sgra*) means "the goal/purpose" (*dgos pa tshig*) or it means "the object to be known" (*shes bya tshig*)".

For these reasons, I begin PART II with the premise that there *is* ultimate truth that must correlate with a non-conceptual, non-dual, and experiential form of cognition, wherein both this cognition and its "object" are necessarily marked only apophatically. To demonstrate this, I supplement the above interpretations with an apophatic approach to the ultimate. "Apophasis" is a Western technical term projected onto a tradition to which it is foreign. Buddhist apophasis, though methodologically a *via negativa*, invokes not the Christian connotations of negative theology.[21] Rather, "apophasis" is used in the Ancient Greek etymological sense of "denial, negation" and its philosophical sense as a method of arriving at intellectual understanding only via denial and negation. Furnishing ultimate wisdom with only

[17] Satoshi 2017: 70. According to Satoshi, "It is the characteristic of Candrakīrti's analysis that he suggests the clear content of the Kdh compound *paramārtha*, that is, *nirvāṇa*. Apart from Sthiramati's texts, it is rare to find such the explicit interpretation […]. In addition, Candrakīrti shares the double meaning of *artha*, viz. the aim (*prayojana*) and object to be known (*jñeya*) like Sthiramati". On the other hand, it is my specific interpretation and not Satoshi's that links "the ultimate object to be known" with emptiness, *tattva*, and suchness, whereas his analysis links it again with *nirvāṇa* with apparent doubt (2017: 70). I think this is the case because *nirvāṇa* is not, nor can it be, such an "object" (cf. MĀB 6:190) but is rather a mental state (as distinct from the mindset of *saṃsāra*). Emptiness, *tattva*, and suchness, on the other hand, characterized as apophatic approaches to the lack of certain qualities in the objects of cognitive experience (the objects to be known), better correspond to being loosely taken as such "objects" of ultimate cognition, that which is "to be known".
[18] Vaidya 1960b: 215.
[19] Li 2015: 27.
[20] Liland 2020: 354.
[21] I differentiate the two by the Madhyamaka use being distinctly *anti*-metaphysical; see chapter 5 (§§5.3.2).

negative predicates, apophasis only demonstrates what it is not. It is viable to demonstrate what the ultimate is not when what it *is*, due to its non-conceptual nature, cannot be positively established. Working in this lacuna, the method is instead the *revealing*, *unveiling*, or *uncovering* of that which is otherwise obscured by the conceptual proclivities of the conventional truth and ordinary cognitive experience. I hold this model to be methodologically significant to the correct interpretation of not only the ultimate but also of the conventional truth from which the ultimate is presented contradistinctly. Apophasis as such is therefore significant to the two truths distinction as a hermeneutic device for interpretating the texts of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti.

The following sketches indicate the scope of apophasis' applicability to the Madhyamaka project. Firstly, Edelglass' notes of a Buddhist apophatic strategy that,

> To ask what apophatic discourse *says*, as if it were primarily in the business of making rational arguments, misses what apophasis is about. A better question is, what does apophasis *do*? [… It] is a form of Buddhist practice. The aim of Buddhist apophatic practice is to transform our relationship with language, relinquishing the congealed entanglement with words and concepts and thereby achieving freedom from conceptual proliferation".[22]

Similarly, D'Amato underscores the correlation of apophasis and the cessation of conceptualization:

> The Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev […] defines apophasis as "knowledge in the process of discarding all notions and determinations" [(*Solitude and Society* (trans. George Reavey), Centenary Press, 1938: 33)]. On this account apophasis is not understood to be a technique for indirectly approaching an ineffable absolute, but is, rather, a form of discourse which aims to "speak-away" all forms of discourse, including its own".[23]

D'Amato elaborates that apophasis "does not function as a description of the "way things really are", but rather is only an instrument or means to some further end: the end of "discarding all notions and determinations"".[24] What remains after this total abnegation is "noble silence" (*āryāṇām tūṣṇīmbhāvaḥ*;

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[22] William Edelglass, ""That Is Why the Buddha Laughs": Apophasis, Buddhist Practice, and the Paradox of Language", *Journal of Dharma Studies* 1.2, 2019: 212-3. Although not restricted to the Madhyamaka, he says (2019: 205that "A common Buddhist response to the paradox of language as both liberating and beguiling is to employ apophatic discourse, a discourse that subverts itself even as it gestures beyond its own limits".

[23] Mario D'Amato, "Buddhism, Apophasis, Truth", *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 9.2, 2008: 18.

[24] D'Amato 2008: 28. In contrast, while I commend Edelglass' cognizance of the correlation between the ultimate and a cultivation of "nonconceptual awareness that is precisely a liberation *from* language and concepts" (2019: 204), I object to his discussion of an "ultimate reality" that is "beyond the limits of language" (2019: 206); see chapter 5 (§5.3). Nonetheless, Edeglass concedes (2019: 212) that "much Buddhist apophatic discourse can be interpreted not as trying to mirror reality but as aiming to provoke a liberating transformation that is meaningful in the context of the Buddhist path". This is the point I

see chapter 5, §§5.1.5). Nonetheless, like the linguistic interpretation, these models of apophatic strategy do not take a position on the *form* of the ultimate truth but are useful in indicating how we might get there; however, it could be implied therefrom that the product of apophasis and its silence should be correlated with a distinct form of ultimate cognition. Both Edelglass and D'Amato discuss the inimicality of apophasis and truth,[25] but this is only applicable if "truth" is restrictively taken in the conceptual, propositional sense, as it is understood for the conventional truth. As I discuss in chapter 5 (§5.2), this is the same problem faced by the semantic interpretation. Standard in Western philosophy, the Mādhyamikas are not so restricted but address "truth" soteriologically (see chapters 6 (§6.1) and 7 (§7.1)). Insofar as the soteriological capacities of the conventional and ultimate truths diverge, so must the way in which we understand their respective "truths".

Westerhoff draws a line between the (intellectual) *understanding* of emptiness (i.e., the conventional truth and the arguments against *svabhāva* from dependence relations) and its *realization* (i.e., the ultimate truth), which entails a "cognitive change" requiring "specific [unnamed] practices" to bring it about.[26] I frequently appeal to this distinction to differentiate the two truths as two modes of cognition. However, this distinction also pertains to how, as conceived in the Mādhyamikas' non-standard, conventional semantic framework, both emptiness and the ultimate are *discoursed about*. As discourse is necessarily conceptual, the ultimate's apophatic presentation is also a specimen of the intellectual understanding of

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underscore in my explanation of the ultimate. For this reason, I agree with his above characterization addressing the practical and soteriological implications of the ultimate, which I discuss in chapter 6.

[25] According to Edeglass (2019: 212), "Apophatic discourse, which provides no positive content to which we can cling, is more interested in transformation than the truth of any particular claim. This is not to say that apophatic discourse has no concern for truth. Apophatic discourse, I believe, with its negation, unsaying, and critical analysis of kataphatic doctrines is committed to a better understanding. And apophatic negation, unsaying, and critical analysis can open spaces for new accounts". Similarly, D'Amato says (2008: 29) that "The impasse regarding truth may in itself serve as a clue to the nature of our entrapment with the net of views, and a hint that the ultimate goal entails moving beyond all views. In these terms, philosophy is ultimately a form of therapy, and when the therapy has done its work, it should be left behind, like a raft".

[26] Westerhoff (2009a: 49). He says, "Being convinced by some Madhyamaka argument that an object does not exist with *svabhāva* does usually not entail that the object will not still appear to us as having *svabhāva*. The elimination of this appearance is achieved only by the realization of emptiness. The ultimate aim of the Mādhyamika project is therefore not just the establishment of a particular ontological or semantic theory, but the achievement of a *cognitive change*. The elimination of *svabhāva* as a theoretical posit by means of arguments such as those presented above has to be followed by its elimination as an automatic cognitive superimposition by means of specific practices" (2009a: 49). These remarks situate *svabhāva* as a "cognitive default" (i.e., the default realism discussed in chapters 3 and 4) whose mission it is for the Mādhyamikas to override. Such an override requires a transformation of cognitive experience itself.

emptiness. Several Madhyamaka citations heavily imply that the appropriate intellectual understanding of both the conventional truth *and* the apophatic presentation of the ultimate truth constitutes at least some of the practices required to bring about the cognitive shift that is the realization of the emptiness/ultimate. Whereas the intellectual train of the conventional truth takes us as far as deconstructive analysis that finds nothing truly existent (see chapter 3, §§3.4.2) and the apophatic presentation of the ultimate (see chapter 5, §5.1), ultimate cognition is *thereafter* a product of a deeply transformative meditative practice. As such, I demonstrate how a strategy rooted in 'transforming', 'relinquishing', 'discarding', 'speaking-away', and 'achieving freedom' is significant to the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. As a meditative exercise, one meditates on this ultimate lack of conceptualization and duality to realize an alternative mode of cognition only apophatically defined as non-conceptual and non-dual, without subject and object (and, therefore, without a sufferer and reason for suffering).

It is at this point that the fruit of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project truly ripens insofar as, having achieved ultimate, non-dual cognition and, therefrom, liberation from suffering, one can now post-meditatively re-engage the world post-attainment and fulfill the soteriological mandate of liberating all sentient beings from suffering.

CHAPTER 5: THE FORM OF THE ULTIMATE TRUTH AS NON-CONCEPTUAL

In chapter 5, I establish the formal parameters of the ultimate as referring to a non-conceptual, non-dual, experiential form of truth correlated with a distinctive mode of cognition. Where the conventional truth takes a conceptual, dualistic form, a formal criterion differentiating the two truths is established. From the restriction of language and conceptualization to the conventional level (established in PART I), the ultimate can only be indirectly indicated *apophatically* by the denial of the conventional truth's formal characteristics. However, this is no good reason to deny the ultimate. With supporting evidence, I explain why Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti can only resort to apophasis in discoursing about the ultimate. Taking apophasis seriously invalidates any positive predication or reification of the ultimate, the key to which is taking apophasis as non-implicative negation. If so, no positive claims can be made for, and no reification can take place of, the ultimate; it certainly cannot be interpreted as anything like the "underlying reality" or the "subjacent ground". The only possibilities are apophatic designations like "non-conceptual", "non-dual", or "unfabricated" that refer to an alternative cognitive mode lacking such *neganda*.

I launch §5.1 with the premise that there *is* an ultimate truth that is a non-conceptual, non-dual, experiential form of truth correlated with its distinct mode of *extra*-ordinary cognition and necessarily marked only by an apophatic strategy. On this ground it is formally differentiated from the conventional truth and ordinary cognition, thus preserving their distinction. In §5.2, I explore the competing interpretation called the "semantic interpretation of emptiness" in relation to the ultimate truth and explain its shortcomings by arguing against its conclusions that there is no ultimate truth, only conventional truth. I derive an alternative conclusion from its arguments: the ultimate truth has no propositional content or conceptual form. Lastly, in §5.3, I demonstrate how the realization of the ultimate requires confronting the limits of conceptualization, suggesting that ultimate cognition cannot be found within such limits. Philosophy at its limits cannot successfully articulate the ultimate, and this is a feature, not a bug, of the two truths. Apophasis instead, as non-implicative negation, requires the exhaustion of conceptuality, such exhaustion acting as the gateway to non-dual cognition.

§5.1 THE CASE FOR THE APOPHATIC ULTIMATE

I begin by applying the model of apophasis from the "Introduction to PART II" to explain the uniquely negative rhetoric the Mādhyamikas employ for the ultimate truth. It is presented strictly apophatically, furnishing only a negative definition of what it is not (or that of which there is an absence in ultimate cognition). Apophasis, a methodological necessity, is a consequence of what is to be realized (i.e., *tattva*, the ultimate) having no conceptual content or form. As such, it strips all concepts away; it does not dwell on the lack of any positive predication but employs negation as the means to a cognitive mode that is non-conceptual and non-dual (i.e., ultimate cognition).[1] Rather than specifically defining or positively predicating the ultimate, apophasis dissolves the question because it cannot be known in that way. Nonetheless, the ultimate is cognitively accessible, just not in the conventional manner of ordinary, conceptual cognition, requiring instead a unique mode: ultimate, non-dual cognition.

5.1.1 *TATTVA* & THE INAPPLICABILITY OF CONCEPTUALIZATION

Tattva, synonymous with the ultimate,[2] is the primary 'object' of valid cognition in the ultimate truth. In practice, *tattva* acts as the non-descript conceptual placeholder signifying a non-conceptual experience, itself without conceptual content or form. In conventional terms, *tattva* is validly cognized conceptually only through apophasis, disallowing any positive predication thereto or positive interpretation thereof. In its ultimate context, it is a matter of direct experience (or ultimate cognition).[3] Because of the unique,

[1] Although there is allegedly great soteriological capacity derived from the (mental state of) pacification associated with the cessation of conceptualization, it would be wrong to assume there is something inherently *wrong* with conceptualization and fabrication and, by extension, the conventional truth that is the valid means of cognizing ordinary experience therethrough. It is, after all, only a tool that can used efficiently or deleteriously. The full discussion of the former point is reserved for chapter 6, the latter for chapter 7 when the two truths are examined synergistically. Nonetheless, it must be borne in mind that it is not the case that the call for cessation of conceptualization is the call for the total abandonment and invalidation of all conceptual activity forevermore, since this is evidently contrary to what the masters *do* post-attainment. What they do is teach, and how they teach is evidently conceptual (discoursing, speaking, writing, etc.). Instead, this call is reserved for articulating the lack thereof in the ultimate cognitive context, leaving the conventional truth unaffected in its conventional status as the means to the valid cognition of ordinary experience through a conventional, conceptual matrix.

[2] For example, MĀ 6:79 refers to the two truths as *saṃvṛti-tattva-satya*, "the truth[s] of thatness and convention". For this reason, I often translate *tattvataḥ* (an ablative sense of *tattva*, though the function of this suffix is quite plastic) as "ultimately". For a catalogue of Nāgārjunian references to *tattva* from his extant Sanskrit works, see Richard Jones ("Tattva: The Forgotten Concept in Nāgārjuna's Ontology", *Religions* 16.7, 2025: 830-42). In §5.3, I disagree with Jones' interpretation of *tattva*, especially as he takes *tattva* to be a reality independent of conceptual representation.

[3] On direct experience, see pp. 236-7 below.

non-conceptual nature of *tattva* and the conditions of the realization thereof, an apophatic approach is the only appropriate ingress. That is, the methodological reliance on apophasis is a consequence of *tattva* itself, in which case, apophasis is only a vehicle for its realization that delivers one thereto without exhausting the goal. Apophasis reveals the inapplicability of language and conceptualization to the ultimate (i.e., *tattva*), restricting such squarely to the conventional level. I argued the latter point in chapter 2 from the conventional nature of language and discourse; ultimate apophasis and the inapplicability of language and conceptuality to the ultimate is thus a consequence of this restriction. However, because for pedagogical purposes there must still be some way of *discoursing about* the ultimate, apophasis is subversive of ordinary, conventional modes of understanding it.

Literally, *tattva* means "thatness" (reflected in the Tibetan *de nyid*), though dictionaries give meanings like "true or real state, truth, reality".[4] Some scholars translate *tattva* as "reality", but for its metaphysical pretensions I do not think this accurately fits the Madhyamaka project.[5] Respecting its grammatical structure of "thatness" and the demonstrative nature of the pronoun "that" (*tat*), I interpret *tattva* as not pointing to any specific content but making an abstract noun of indeterminate meaning.[6] This function is how *tattva* acts as the non-descript conceptual placeholder signifying a non-conceptual experience, itself without conceptual content or form. I treat it as synonymous with *tathātā* (identically constructed with the demonstrative pronoun *tathā* ("such") with the abstract suffix -*TĀ*, making "suchness"; also reflected in the Tibetan *de bzhin nyid*).[7] One reference Candrakīrti makes to suchness places its realization in the

[4] Monier-Williams (1986: 432.3). This dictionary is not specifically Buddhist, and Edgerton has no entry for *tattva*. The term is common in Indian philosophy and not unique to Buddhism, but it does in the latter take on a specific meaning as a critical philosophical concept. As this is a technical term for Buddhist philosophy, I do not feel beholden to Monier-Williams' translations while still being cognizant of these connotations.

[5] See §5.3 against any metaphysical interpretation of the ultimate. For similar reasons, I reject translating *paramārtha-satya* as "ultimate reality". Similarly, I also avoid the language "the way things really are" from the latent reificationist implications of these formulas. Neither "ultimate reality" nor "the way things really are" are commensurate with the apophatic approach.

[6] *Tattva* as "thatness" differs from both *haecceity* as "thisness" meaning the essence or qualities of a *particular* thing and from *quiddity* as "whatness" meaning a thing's *universal* qualities. Each refers to specific qualitative contents of an existent thing while *tattva* does not. *Tattva* as such has no analogue in Western philosophy, for which reason I generally leave it untranslated.

[7] The translators of Candrakīrti's MĀ (2002), use "suchness" to translate *tattva* (rather, its Tibetan equivalent *de nyid*). This could be because "suchness" is more popular in Madhyamaka discussions than the more awkward "thatness". Nonetheless, there are corresponding terms in Sanskrit and Tibetan word that more literally means "suchness": *tathātā* and *de bzhin nyid*.

context of the cessation of conceptualization: "The absorption of cessation (*'gog pa la snyoms par 'jug pa*) is the absorption of the ultimate goal (*yang dag pa'i mtha' la snyoms par 'jug pa yin pas*), meaning [the realization of] cessation in suchness (*de bzhin nyid la 'gog pa zhes brjod*), since therein all conceptualization has cased (*de 'dir spros pa thams cad 'gag par 'gyur ba'i phyir*)".[8] Evidently, the cognition corresponding to the realization of *tattva*/suchness is characterized in terms of the cessation of conceptualization, indicating its lack of conceptual content.

Śāntideva offers a distinctly cognitive differentiation of the two truths further reflecting the non-conceptuality of *tattva*:

> [BCA 9:2:] The two truths are said to be conventional and ultimate. *Tattva* is not within the scope of the intellect (*buddheḥ agocaraḥ tattvam*) [because] the intellect is said to be conventional (*buddhiḥ saṃvṛtiḥ ucyate*).[9]

Where *tattva* refers to the ultimate, Śāntideva restricts the "intellect" (referring to ordinary, conventional, dualistic cognition) from accessing it in its ordinary, conventional, dualistic mode. However, with ordinary cognition barred from accessing the ultimate, how is it experienced? This implies there must be an ultimate mode of cognition distinct from the ordinary, conventional, dualistic cognition.[10] However,

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[8] MĀB 7:1: *'gog pa la snyoms par 'jug pa ni yang dag pa'i mtha' la snyoms par 'jug pa yin pas | de bzhin nyid la 'gog pa zhes brjod de 'dir spros pa thams cad 'gag par 'gyur ba'i phyir ro |* (Liland 2020: 381). On another occasion (MĀ 6:223), Candrakīrti uses the term *tathātva*, which, following the same rules of construction, would also yield "suchness". At BCAP 354.3, Prajñākaramati explicitly synonymizes "the lack of *svabhāva*" (*niḥsvabhāvatā*), "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*), "suchness" (*tathatā*), "the limit of the real" (*bhūtakotiḥ*) and "the sphere/realm of the *dharma*s" (*dharmadhātuḥ*) in the context of *all* phenomena (sarva-dharmāṇām); *sarvadharmāṇāṃ niḥsvabhāvatā, śūnyatā, tathatā, bhūtakoṭiḥ, dharmadhātur*ityādiparyāyāḥ (Vaidya 1960a: 171; cf. Oldmeadow 1994: 15, Salvini 2009: 267).

[9] BCA 9:2: *saṃvṛtiḥ paramārthaśca satyadvayamidaṃ mataṃ | buddheragocarastattvaṃ buddhiḥ saṃvṛtirucyate ||* (Vaidya 1960a: 170). In BCA 9:2d, Śāntideva's grammar is slightly ambiguous as to the specific relations that obtain between *buddhi* ("the intellect") and *saṃvṛti*, and, further, which specific sense of *saṃvṛti* is here intended, if any one in particular and not all three. Prajñākaramati's commentary favours *saṃvṛti* first etymological sense as "concealment" with respect to *saṃvṛti*'s obscuration of the ultimate (BCAP 351-3; cf. Oldmeadow 1994: 14-5, Salvini 2009: 265-6). If one is to choose a specific sense, I would translate with some relation to convention (i.e., is "conventional", since this reads most naturally in English) insofar as the caveat remains that, within that context, the conceptual nature of conventions does indeed obscure the non-conceptual ultimate, as I elaborated in chapter 1 (§1.2). This relates back (as Prajñākaramati's commentary does) to MĀ 6:28 insofar as there is a specific type of "nature" being concealed (*svabhāva-āvaraṇa*; see chapter 1, §§1.2.1). However, if we consider just the immediate context of Śāntideva's verse and those that immediately follow it, they refer to the limited knowledge of ordinary people vs. the advanced knowledge of the *yogī*s, a discussion which does not necessarily belong strictly to the "concealment" aspect of *saṃvṛti*. Regarding the published translations of this verse and how they translate the *saṃvṛti* of 9:2d, Oldmeadow (1994: 14) chooses "concealing"; Crosby & Skilton (1995: 115) choose "the conventional"; Wallace & Wallace (1997: 115) choose "conventional reality"; the Padmakara Translation Group (2017: 81) choose "the relative"; while Salvini (2009: 265) leaves it untranslated.

[10] According to Khenpo Yönten Gyamtso ("Appendix 7", *Treasury of Precious Qualities* Vol. 1 (trans. Padmakara Translation Group), Shambhala, 2010: 400), the ultimate truth "is beyond the constructions of the intellect. It does not lie within the scope

if, owing to its radical alterity, it cannot adequately be conceptualized (a fact marked by the call for the cessation of conceptualization), then a 'knowing' of the ultimate truth is not available in the sense the conventional truth is known, grasped, and disputed (this will be relevant again in §5.2).

Candrakīrti directly states the inapplicability of conceptualization to the ultimate as follows:

> [PSP 493 ad MMK 24:8:] Thus, this entire totality of conventions (*sarvah … vyavahāraḥ aśeṣaḥ*), [comprising, for example,] a name (*abhidhāna*) and what is named (*abhidheya*), cognition (*jñāna*) and what is cognized (*jneyam*), etc., is taught to be the worldly conventional truth (*lokasaṃvṛti-satyam iti ucyate*). These conventions are not possible (*na hi … sambhavanti*) ultimately (*paramārthataḥ*). […] This being so, how [could] words or cognition function with respect to the ultimate (*paramārthe vācām pravṛttiḥ kutaḥ vā jñānasya*)?[11]

Despite the inapplicability of ordinary, conventional cognition to the ultimate, it is crucial to stress that it is neither nothing nor is it mindlessness. Given how the ultimate is apophatically characterized, if the cessation of conceptualization were understood as requiring mere mindlessness, then deep, dreamless sleep, various states of unconsciousness, and even death would constitute the ultimate truth, which is absurd; liberation would have no lived, waking sense whatsoever. That it is not mindlessness but a unique mode of *extra*-ordinary cognition is what I explain throughout this chapter via the ultimate's formal and cognitive parameters. References thereto should instead, as Śāntideva makes clear, refer to a radically different form of cognition. Since it cannot be accessed by ordinary cognition, apophasis via the complete negation of conventional language is the only possible avenue to indirectly indicate it without compromising *tattva* and the ultimate's unique non-conceptuality.

Noted designations of this ultimate cognition differentiating it from ordinary cognition are *anāsrava-*

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of the referential (dualistic) mind. It can only be experienced by thought-free wisdom that sees it directly in a nonreferential (nondualistic) way. All relative phenomena appear to us conceptually because they are the object of the dualistically functioning mind". He also says that "Whatever can be the object of intellectual definition is not the [ultimate] truth. The [ultimate] truth is to be realized by thought-transcending primordial wisdom, wherein there is no duality of subject and object. The dualistic mind, which veils this state of nonduality, pertains to the [conventional] truth" (2010: 409). The translators' used different terms for the two truths ("absolute" and "relative"), which I modified according to my preferences.

[11] PSP 493: *sarva evāyamabhidhānābhidheyajñānajñeyādivyavahāro 'śeṣo lokasaṃvṛtisatyamityucyate | na hi paramārthata ete vyavahārāḥ saṃbhavanti |* […] *iti kṛtvā kutastatra paramārthe vācāṃ pravṛttiḥ kuto vā jñānasya? |* (Vaidya 1960b: 215).

jñāna ("uncontaminated cognition");[12] *tattva-jñāna* ("ultimate cognition" or "cognition of *tattva*");[13] *ārya-jñāna* ("the cognitions of the *ārya*s");[14] or *advaya-jñāna* ("non-dual cognition") and *prajñā-pāramitā* ("the perfection of wisdom").[15] These do not denote distinct aspects but different though related ways of negatively characterizing the same ultimate cognition unable to be positively predicated or have its contents positively described insofar as ordinary, conventional cognition and its medium of language and discourse do not apply. That it is "uncontaminated" (*anāsrava*) refers to the absence of the stains of conceptualization: "Through not perceiving any entities (*dngos po ma dmigs pas*), because one is not completely soiled by the stain of conceptualization (*rnam par rtog pa'i dri mas nye bar sbags pa'i phyir na*), the liberating gateway of emptiness (*rnam par thar pa'i sgo stong pa nyid*) is [indicated only by] the sign of absence (*rnam par dben pa mtshan nyid can*)".[16] The idea here, introduced as early as chapter 1 (§1.2) from the etymology of *saṃvṛti* and to be further developed below and in chapters 6 and 7, is that there is a certain tendency of the conventional, conceptual mode of cognition to obfuscate even the *possibility* of the non-conceptual cognition of the ultimate. What is concealed is *tattva*, whereas ultimate cognition is in fact "the cognition of *tattva*" (*tattva-jñāna*) uncontaminated by conceptualization. That it belongs to the *ārya*s (*ārya-jñāna*) and not ordinary beings is clear insofar as this mode of cognitive experience is not the ordinary, conventional cognition subject to the ordinary pitfalls thereof (i.e., suffering; see chapter 6 for a discussion of the soteriological implications of the non-conceptuality of the ultimate).[17] That it is non-dual (*advaya-jñāna*) insists that this cognition clings to neither pole of a duality

[12] Candrakīrti does not literally use these two terms together, but this sense is gleamed from the following passage (and MacDonald (2015b: 159) does so in translating PSP 41): "These [statements] of dependent origination stating the arising and so forth [of phenomena] are not [stated] regarding the uncontaminated nature of the object [of cognition] of the ones whose ignorant cataracts have ceased (*vigata-avidyā-timira-anāsrava-viṣaya-svabhāva-apekṣayā*). However, [they are stated] regarding the object of cognition of the ones whose minds' eyes are afflicted by the cataracts of ignorance (*avidyā-timira-upahata-mati-nayana-jñāna-viṣaya-apekṣayā*)"; *tatra ya ete pratītyasamutpādasyotpādādaya uktāḥ, na te vigatāvidyātimira-anāsravaviṣayasvabhāvāpekṣayā, kiṃ tarhi avidyātimiropahatamatinayanajñānaviṣayāpekṣayā* || (Vaidya 1960b: 13). However, Samten & Garfield's translation of Tsong Khapa's commentary (2006: 386) does discuss "uncontaminated insight".
[13] MĀ 6:91 (Li 2015: 15).
[14] PSP 10.11 (Vaidya 1960b: 4). MacDonald (2015b: 40) translates this as "the gnosis of the Nobles".
[15] PSP 3 (Vaidya 1960b: 1).
[16] MĀB 6:208: *dngos po ma dmigs pas rnam par rtog pa'i dri mas nye bar ma sbags pa'i phyir na | rnam par thar pa'i sgo stong pa nyid ni rnam par dben pa'i mtshan nyid can no* || (Liland 2020: 361).
[17] According to Mipham (2002: 199), "The nature or ultimate reality of phenomena is hidden from us because of ignorance.

(i.e., cognizing neither existence nor non-existence, entities nor non-entities, truth nor untruth, etc.).[18] As for the perfection of wisdom (*prajñā-pāramitā*), I reserve its discussion for chapter 7 (§7.2), wherein two types of wisdom, as correlated with the two forms of cognition, respectively, are differentiated. Ultimate wisdom will follow these ultimate, *extra*-ordinary cognitive characteristics.

By way of these characteristics, ultimate cognition, beyond the possibility of conceptualization, marks a cognitive state experienced only non-conceptually and non-dually, uncontaminated and unstained by conceptualization. Given this lack, it can only be *directly experienced*. From the ordinary perspective, it is expected to ask, 'what is directly experienced?'. The answer is *tattva*, but *tattva* is not a cognitive object in the expected sense. If, when phrased in conventional terms for the purpose of developing an intellectual understanding, direct experience must have an object (since, grammatically and in the cognitive scheme in which the question is asked, an experience requires an object of experience), *tattva* (or any of its synonyms like emptiness or suchness) is the only kind of 'object' that could belong to a non-dual cognition having no conceptual content. Hence, because of its indeterminate meaning and lack of content, *tattva* is not an 'object' as conventionally understood but merely occupies that role when *discoursing about* the ultimate. In that context, it is understood as a peculiar kind of *non-object* through the lack of certain qualities in how it is cognized ultimately. No concepts apply to that "object" when cognized non-dually. Marked only by non-implicative negation, it is only directly experienced.

A direct experience is, by definition, an unmediated (non-conceptual) awareness.[19] The texts speak

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This nature is misapprehended and not perceived as it really is; and this erroneous perception is called the all-concealing or relative level, because it covers or obscures the ultimate reality or status of phenomena". This ignorance concerns the distinction between conventional truth and falsity, where the latter is ignorant but the former is cognizant of dependence relations and emptiness and, hence, is the valid cognition of ordinary experience. Nonetheless, that valid ordinary cognition is not tantamount to attaining the ultimate and the peace associated with the cessations of conceptualization and suffering.

[18] MĀB 1:1: "The non-dual mind (*gnyis su med pa'i blo*; *advaya-dhīḥ*) is wisdom free from (*dang bral ba'i shes ra*b) the two extremes (*mtha' gnyis*) of things and non-things (*dngos po dan dgnos po med pa*) and so forth (*la sogs pa*) [(referring to other dualities)]"; *gnyis su med pa'i blo ni | dngos po dang dngos po med pa la sogs pa mtha' gnyis dang bral ba'i shes rab po ||* (Liland 2020: 65). PSP 495, on the other hand, stresses that, though this realization is caused by seeing the emptiness of all phenomena, one does not automatically jump to the other extreme, their complete non-existence. Rather, non-dualism eschews both extremes and therethrough finds the middle way therebetween (see §§5.1.4).

[19] This could be called "yogic perception" and is born of a meditative practice; Cf. MacDonald 2009: 133-168. I discuss this further in chapters 6 and 7.

frequently of "seeing *tattva*" (*tattva-darśana*),[20] but this "seeing" is more accurately characterized as a "way of not seeing" (*ma gzigs pa tshul*).[21] As Nāgārjuna says,

> [YṢ 10:] When seeing with valid cognition (*samyak-jñāna-avalokite*) that which [appears to] arise [only] through the condition of ignorance (*avidyā-pratyaya-utpanne*), no arising or cessation whatsoever is perceived (*utpādaḥ vā nirodhaḥ vā na kaścit upalabhyate*).[22]

This non-apprehension of anything (distinct from the apprehension of *nothing* insofar as there is the negation of anything apprehendable) is how the direct experience of *tattva* is apophatically characterized (YṢ 11 specifically calls this *nirvāṇa*; see §§5.1.3 on *nirvāṇa* and cessation). This ultimate realization is *tattvataḥ* insofar as it has the same negative characteristics as *tattva*.

Nāgārjuna lists the following five privative characteristics of *tattva*, each of which is taken as a way of *not* apprehending anything apprehendable because *tattva* lacks each *neganda*.[23] Each supports *tattva* and the ultimate as indicative of a different cognitive mode of non-conceptual, non-dual experience:

> [MMK 18:9:] [1] Not known through another (*aparapratyayam*; *gzhan las shes min*); [2] pacified (*śāntam*; *zhi ba*); [3] not proliferated by means of conceptualization (*prapañcaiḥ aprapañcitam*; *spros pa rnams kyis ma spros pa*); [4] unfabricated (*nirvikalpam*; *rnam rtog med*); and [5] not of differentiated meaning (*anānārtham*; *don tha dad min*): that is the characteristic of *tattva* (*etat tattvasya lakṣaṇam*; *de nyid mtshan nyid*).[24]

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[20] Candrakīrti appends to one reference thereto (PSP 41) the following *sūtra*: "That, oh monks, is the ultimate truth (*paramam satya*); that is to say (*yadutaḥ*), it has an undeceiving quality (*amoṣa-dharma*); it is *nirvāṇa*. All compounded phenomena (*sarva-saṃskārāḥ*) are deceptive (*mṛṣāḥ*); they have deceiving qualities (*moṣa-dharmaṇāḥ*)"; *etaddhi bhikṣavaḥ paramaṃ satyaṃ yaduta amoṣadharma nirvāṇam, sarvasaṃskārāśca mṛṣā moṣadharmāṇaḥ iti* | (Vaidya 1960b: 13). MacDonald (2015b: 160 n. 312) traces this to a parallel passage in the Pāli Canon (MN 140.26, *Dhātuvibhanga Sutta*; see Bodhi 1995a: 1093).

[21] MĀB 6:29. Candrakīrti situates this metaphor of sight amidst the cataracts analogy (see chapter 3 in the context of conventional falsity). The discussion contains some interesting points about the relative falsity, or the relative ignorance, of the convention in comparison with the ultimate. These remarks are further discussed in chapter 7 on the relation of the two truths to each other. The relevant point, made by Candrakīrti at MĀ(B) 6:29, is the distinction between "those with clear sight" (*śuddha-dṛṣṭi*) and those with defective sight, such as those affected by cataracts: "those with clear sight see through its true nature (*yena ātmanā*) that which is *tattva* (*tat tattvam iti*)". Especially by this alliance with *tattva*, those with clear sight are those who "see" the ultimate by *not seeing it conceptually*, in contradistinction with those with an obscured vision unable to see and experience *except* conceptually.

[22] YṢ 10: *avidyāpratyayotpanne samyagjñānāvalokite | utpādo vā nirodho vā na kaścid upalabhyate* || (Li & Ye 2014: 22); *ma rig rkyen gyis byung ba la | yang dag shes pas gzigs na || skye ba dang ni 'gag pa'ang rung | gang yang dmigs par mi 'gyur ro* || (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 9). Candrakīrti likens this—in the same context of the cataracts in the previous footnote—in the manner that, as someone without cataracts does not perceive the hairs, someone without ignorance (that is, free from ignorance in ultimate cognition) does not perceive anything at all (when perceiving *tattva*). Ignorance, in this case, refers to the ordinary, conventional mode of cognitive experience. Compared to the undeceiving ultimate, the conventional truth as the valid cognition of ordinary experience can also (in a limited context) be considered ignorance. This ultimate non-apprehension, this infallibility, and this unfalsifiability are precisely why the ultimate cognition is *valid*. I revisit this again in chapter 7 (§7.1).

[23] In chapter 7 (§§7.2.1), these characteristics' inversions are reverse engineered to apply to the conventional truth.

[24] MMK 18:9: *aparapratyayaṃ śāntaṃ prapacairaprapañcitam | nirvikalpamanānārthametattattvasya lakṣaṇam* || (Vaidya

(1) "Not known through another" (*aparapratyayam*; *gzhan las shes min*) refers to a personal, introspective, direct experience in the sense that *tattva* is not directly teachable, nor its experience conferrable, to another. Although direct experience was explained to refer to an unmediated (non-conceptual) awareness, this is an equally significant aspect of it insofar as, for that very reason, such a direct experience is individual and private in the sense of localized in and exclusive to valid ultimate cognition. Candrakīrti (PSP 373) says it is "unattained through the instruction of another" (*para-upadeśa-agamyam*) and "to be attained solely by oneself" (*svayam eva adhigantavyam*), both of which clarify the method of realizing *tattva*.[25] Because *tattva* has no determinate content and its realization is derived from the cessation of conceptualization, it cannot be attained through instruction. The rote recitation of some teachings accompanied by their crude intellectual understanding is not enough for the actual attainment of this experience since it is not merely reducible to and reproduceable by any conceptual formula. As such, this strongly suggests it requires a distinct (non-intellectual, non-conceptual) mode of cognition.

(2) That *tattva* is "pacified" (*śāntam*; *zhi ba*) refers to a tranquil mental state imperturbable or undisturbed (i.e., a cognition free from perturbance and disturbance).[26] Such perturbances and disturbances refer to suffering, but also to the unique role of conceptual proliferation therein that is

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1960b: 158); *gzhan las shes min zhi ba dang | spros pa rnams kyis ma spros pa | rnam rtog med don tha dad min | de ni de nyid mtshan nyid do* ||. The above translation is largely based on the Tibetan version since the Sanskrit can be a little ambiguous. I discuss these ambiguities while explaining each characteristic with reference to Candrakīrti's commentary.

[25] Cf. Salvini 2019: 681-2. The Tibetan clearly says "not known through another" (*gzhan las shes min*) while the Sanskrit's *aparapratyayam* could literally mean "not dependent on another", which, without interpretation, could contradict MMK 24:10 and VV 28's insistence on reliance on the conventional truth. Candrakīrti thus clarifies Nāgārjuna's intent. This interpretation is confirmed by Buddhapālita 2021: 245; Tsong Khapa 2006: 385-6; and Mabja Jangchub Tsöndrü 2011: 179. On the other hand, *nirvāṇa* is held in some traditions to be "unconditioned" (Pāli: *asaṇkhata*; Skt: *asamṣkṛta*), a term which must always be understood in contrast with "conditioned" phenomena (Pāli: *saṇkhata*; Skt: *saṃskṛta*). At MMK 25:13c, Nāgārjuna calls *nirvāṇa* "*asamskṛta*" in the context of neither concepts of "existence" nor "non-existence" being applicable. If it did depend on either concept (or anything else), it would be conditioned. So, that *tattva* is not dependent on X refers to, in that sense, its unconditioned nature, to differentiate it from the ordinary cognitive experience of phenomena that is dualistic and therefore depends on a conceptual framework. The ultimate is unconditioned from the lack of that conceptual dependence.

[26] Grammatically, *śānta* is a past passive participle; etymologically, it can mean "appeased, pacified, tranquil, calm, free from passions, undisturbed" (Monier-Williams 1986: 1064.2) among other senses. Candrakīrti's explanation is rather lacking; PSP 373: "The meaning (*arthaḥ*) of the nature of being pacified (*śānta-svabhāvam*) is to be free from [the misconception of] intrinsic nature (*svabhāva-virahitam*), like the sight of the one unafflicted by cataracts not seeing hairs (*ataimirika-keśā-adarśanavat*); *etacca śāntasvabhāvamataimirikakeśādarśanavat svabhāvavirahitamityarthaḥ* | (Vaidya 1960b: 159; cf. Salvini 2019: 681-2).

lacking in ultimate cognition. As such, Nāgārjuna states: "Peace (*śivaḥ*) is the cessation of conceptualization (*prapañca-upaśamaḥ*) [and] the cessation of all [conceptual] perception (*sarva-upalambha-upaśamaḥ*)".[27] This peace, indicated by the cessation of conceptualization and the cessation of all conceptual perceptions, is the product of the uncontaminated, non-dual, ultimate cognition.[28]

(3-5) The last three characteristics I treat together. "Not proliferated by means of conceptualization" (*prapañcaiḥ aprapañcitam*; *spros pa rnams kyis ma spros pa*),[29] "unfabricated" (*nirvikalpam*; *rnam rtog med*), and "not of differentiated meaning" (*anānārtham*; *don tha dad min*) each negate a specific attribute of ordinary cognition marked by conceptuality, fabrication, and the differentiation in meanings imputed therein. However, such negations indicate a different cognitive mode than the ordinary marked thereby. Ordinary, conventional cognition is proliferated by means of conceptualization, fabricated, and subject to differentiated meaning (e.g., making conventional truth or falsity per its semantic framework). Even if the conventional truth is the valid cognition of ordinary experience in contrast with conventional falsity's invalid cognition, it nonetheless has these attributes formally marking it as ordinary and conventional. That *tattva* and the ultimate are defined in the negation of these attributes indicates their formal differentiation from the conventional truth.

Candrakīrti elaborates "not proliferated by means of conceptualization" to mean "unspeakable in language" (*vāgbhiḥ avyāhṛtam*), referring to the complete inapplicability of language to characterize this ultimate experience. Hence, *tattva* itself has neither determinate content nor conceptual form but acts only as a conceptual placeholder for something non-conceptual. As for "unfabricated", he says that "fabrication (*vikalpaḥ*) is the behaviour/habit of the mind (*citta-pracāraḥ*). From the forsaking of that (*tat-rahitatvāt*), *tattva* is unfabricated (*tattvam nirvikalpam*)". *Tattva* being unfabricated confirms again

[27] MMK 25:24ab: *sarvopalambhopaśamaḥ prapañcopaśamaḥ śivaḥ* | (Vaidya 1960b: 155).
[28] The discussion of the soteriological implications of this peace (i.e., how the cessation of conceptualization is liberating and how this relates to the Madhyamaka conception of the ultimate) is reserved for chapter 6.
[29] Both Sanskrit and Tibetan texts formulate an awkward construction repeating forms of *prapañca*/*spros pa*. Since *prapañcita* is a past participle of the verbal form *PRA* + √*PAÑC* and *prapañca* is a noun, I select a different translation for the former to make better sense of this phrase (hence, "not proliferated by means of conceptualization" for *prapañcaiḥ aprapañcitam*). Salvini (2019: 682) has translated this as "not elaborated upon by elaboration".

its lack of fabricated conceptual content or form. For "not of differentiated meaning", he says its "meaning is unbroken/uninterrupted" (*abhinna-arthaḥ*), which further supports understanding *tattva's* meaning as indeterminate because it is not punctuated by any differentiations in meaning.[30] All three negations disallow that *tattva* is either 'this' or 'that' in any context whatsoever.[31]

Despite the need to discourse about *tattva* and the ultimate (to gain an intellectual understanding thereof, establish a foothold for one's ascent thereto, etc.) without being able to exhaust it, the teachings must not be confused with their actual, direct experience. According to the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*,

> Thus (*tatra*), suchness (*tathātvam*) is undifferentiated (*ananyathātvam*) and it is the ultimate (*tattvam*). Having the characteristics of neither acceptance (*anāyūha*) nor rejection (*aniryūha-lakṣaṇam*), the ultimate is said [to be] the complete cessation of conceptualization (*sarva-prapañca-upaśamam*).
>
> By that, Mahāmati, the son or daughter of a noble family (*kulaputrena vā kuladuhitrā vā*) should become skillful in not being attached to meaning in accordance with words (*na … yathā-ruta-artha-abhiniveśa-kuśalena bhavitavyam*) because the ultimate (*tattvasya*) is not [of the characteristic of] letters (*nirakṣaratvāt*). One should not be like the one looking at the finger (*aṅguli-prekṣakeṇa*): it is as if, Mahāmati, someone would point (*kiṃcit ādarśayet*) at something with their finger to someone (*aṅgulyā kaścit kasya*), and that fingertip (*saḥ ca aṅguli-agram*) is wrongly taken/seen [for the thing pointed at]. Like so, Mahāmati, the class of childish, ordinary beings (*bāla-pṛthagjana-vargāḥ*), like those belonging to the immature (*bāla-jātīyāḥ iv*a), will perpetually (*kālam kariṣyanti*) be determined to be attached to the fingertip in accordance with words (*yathā-ruta-aṅguli-agra-abhiniveśa-abhiniviṣṭāḥ*). Having abandoned (*hitvā*) the meaning of the fingertip according to words (*yathā-ruta-aṅguli-agra-artham*), they will fail to attain the ultimate (*na … paramātham āgamiṣyanti*).
> […]
> Hence, it is necessary (*avaśyam*) to be well-disciplined [in it] (abhisaṃskāreṇa bhavitavyam),

[30] This footnote applies to the contents of the entire paragraph. PSP 373: *prapañcairaprapañcitaṃ vāgbhiravyāhṛtamityarthaḥ || nirvikalpaṃ ca tat | vikalpaścittapracāraḥ | tadrahitatvāt tat tattvaṃ nirvikalpam |*. […] *nānārtho 'syeti nānārthaṃ bhinnārtham, na nānārthaḥ anānārtham, abhinnārthamityarthaḥ |* (Vaidya 1960b: 159). It is noteworthy that Buddhapālita's translator (Coghlan 2021: 243) understands *anānārtha* to mean "not a distinct object" and relates these three characteristics as follows: "[…] because conceptuality does not exist, therefore it is not fabricated by mental fabrication. Because it is not fabricated by worldly phenomena, therefore it is pacified. Because it is pacified, it is therefore not a distinct object. Therefore, the knowledge of such essential nature is self-cognition and not knowledge [acquired] from another, and these should be understood as characteristics of thatness". As Tsong Khapa (2006: 386) explains the final predicate: "Just as any one phenomenon is ultimately, so are all other phenomena. Therefore, ultimately there is no individuality". Mabja Jangchub Tsöndrü (2011: 380) comments: "The present stanza can also be read as a sequence of explanations. The ultimate cannot be known by any other means, such as language and argumentation, because it is not constructed by means of verbal or mental constructs. In other words, it is not an object of word and thought because thought cannot conceive of it by way of name or category. The reason for this is that, in essence, the ultimate has been peace from the very beginning. It is not established as anything whatsoever. There is, therefore, nothing that could present itself to the mind".

[31] See Buddhapālita's commentary ad MMK 18:9 referring to *tattva* as *nirvikalpa* and *anānārtha*: "It is "nonconceptual", for it does not impute "this" and "that". It is "not a distinct object", for it is not distinguished as "It is this" or "It is that" (Coghlan 2021: 243). Coghlan chose different translations than my own "unfabricated" and "not of differentiated meaning", though the point remains the same: there is no imputation of "this" or "that", i.e., no conceptual designation in any form.

> and not be like the one who sees meaning essentially in the grasping of the fingertip itself (*ātmānam aṅguli-agra-grahaṇa-artha-darśanavat*). Hence, for this reason, Mahāmati, a constant effort in meaning should be accomplished (*artha-abhiyogaḥ karaṇīyaḥ*).
>
> Meaning (*arthaḥ*), Mahāmati, distinguished in itself (*viviktaḥ*), is the cause of [attaining/entering] nirvāṇa (*nirvāṇa-hetuḥ*). Words (*rutam*) are bound up in fabrication (*vikalpa-saṃbaddham*) [and] are the vehicle to saṃsāra (*saṃsāra-avāhakam*).[32]

The ultimate's apophatic strategy confirms that, in a restricted manner, there must be a way of discoursing about it. Yet, per the analogy, the finger (of words, i.e., the teachings) should not be confused with the direct experience of the moon itself (i.e., *tattva*). Rather, it is by no longer looking to the finger that one actually sees the moon. Candrakīrti cites a Mahāyāna *sūtra* that I judge to be the most illustrative apophatic exposition of the ultimate in its contradistinction with the conventional truth:

> Devaputra, if ultimately the ultimate truth (*don dam pa'i bden pa*) was naturally (*rang bzhin du*) a physical, verbal, or mental object (*lus dang ngag dang yid kyi yul*), it could not be counted (*gangs su mi 'gro*) as "the ultimate truth"; it would be the conventional truth (*kun rdzob kyi bden pa nyid du 'gyur*). Ultimately, Devaputra, the ultimate truth is beyond all conventions (*tha snyad thams cad las 'das pa*), it is undifferentiated (*bye brag med pa*), unproduced (*ma skyes pa*), unceasing (*ma 'gags pa*), free from expression and expressing (*smra bar bya ba dang smra ba*), beyond cognition and cognizing (*shes par bya ba dang shes pa dang bral ba*). Devaputra, the ultimate truth is beyond being an object of the omniscient exalted wisdom (*thams cad mkhyen pa ye shes kyi yul gyi bar la 'das pa*) of those endowed with the most supreme of all aspects (*rnam pa thams cad kyi mchog dang ldan pa*). Just so, it is not encompassed by expressions like "the ultimate truth" (*don dam pa'i bden pa pa'o zhes brjod pa ltar ni ma yin*). All phenomena are deceptive (*chos thams cad ni brdzun*); phenomena deceive (*slu ba'i chos*). Devaputra, the ultimate truth is unable to be indicated (*bstan par mi nus*). How come? Whatever someone indicates (*gang gis ston pa*), whatever is indicated (*ci ston pa*), and to whomever it is indicated (*gang la ston pa'i*), phenomena are not ultimately produced (*don dam par rab tu ma skyes pa*). Ultimately, unproduced

[32] *tatra tathātvamananyathātvaṃ tattvam | anāyūhāniryūhalakṣaṇaṃ sarvaprapañcopaśamaṃ tattvamityucyate | tena na mahāmate kulaputreṇa vā kuladuhitrā vā yathārutārthābhiniveśakuśalena bhavitavyam | nirakṣaratvāttattvasya | na cāṅguliprekṣakeṇa bhavitavyam | tadyathā mahāmate aṅgulyā kaścitkasyacitkiṃcidādarśayet | sa cāṅgulyagrameva pratiseradvīkṣitum | evameva mahāmate bālajātīyā iva bālapṛthagjanavargā yathārutāṅgulyagrābhiniveśābhiniviṣṭā eva kālaṃ kariṣyanti, na yathārutāṅgulyagrārthaṃ hitvā paramārthamāgamiṣyanti |* […] *avaśyamevātrābhisaṃskāreṇa bhavitavyam, na cātmānamaṅgulyagragrahaṇārthadarśanavat | ata etena kāraṇena mahāmate arthābhiyogaḥ karaṇīyaḥ | artho mahāmate vivikto nirvāṇahetuḥ | rutaṃ vikalpasaṃbaddhaṃ saṃsārāvāhakam |* (Vaidya 1960c: 80). This imagery of the finger of words is usually said to be pointing at the moon but, when taken as the moon itself, misses the mark; the fingertip is the word, the meaning is that which it points to. In these passages, and elsewhere in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, there is a curious interplay between the notion of meaning (*artha*) and words (*ruta*) such that words, as verbal and ideational expressions, are somehow distinct from the meaning they purport to invoke. The meaning, perhaps in the way it affects cognition itself at its deepest level, is distinct from its verbal expression, which may take myriad forms (on this very topic, see Winston Barclay, "Word and Meaning: The Attitude toward Discourse in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra", *Numen* 22.1, 1975: 70-9). This links back to the discussion in chapter 2 (§§2.1.1) of semantic conditionality insofar as the same word presents different cognitive effects when situated in a different semantic framework. Taking meaning "in accordance with words" is means understand the meaning of such words in the context of the denotational and representational aspects of standard semantic frameworks.

> phenomena (*rab tu ma skyes pa'i chos rnams*) are unable to explain (*bshad par mi nus*) unproduced phenomena.[33]

Echoing ŚS 1 (see chapter 1, §1.1), in commenting on this *sūtra* Candrakīrti lists a series of dualities that are not valid distinctions in non-dual cognition.[34] This is because the ultimate, like *tattva*, is not of differentiated meaning, unfabricated, not proliferated by means of conceptualization, pacified, and not known through another. As the *sūtra* indicates, positive predication is only valid conventionally since the ultimate is, by definition, beyond all conventions. Any discourse about the ultimate (taking it as a physical, verbal, or mental object) makes it conventional.[35] Whatever apophatic indication, it is unable to be given any positive, graspable, determinate content. It follows that it cannot be said what the ultimate truth *is*, only what it *is not* via apophasis. Because it is approached in contradistinction with ordinary

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[33] Identified as the *Āryasaṃvṛtiparamārthasatyanirdeśanāmamahāyānasūtra*, "The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra Called "Teaching the Conventional and Ultimate Truths": *lha'i bu gal te don dam par na don dam pa'i bden pa lus dang ngag dang yid kyi yul gyi rang bzhin du 'gyur na ni | de don dam pa'i bden pa zhes bya ba'i grangs su mi 'gro ste kun rdzob kyi bden pa nyid du 'gyur ro | 'on kyang lha'i bu don dam par na don dam pa'i bden pa ni tha snyad thams cad las 'das pa | bye brag med pa | ma skyes pa | ma 'gags pa | smra bar bya ba dang | smra ba dang | shes par bya ba dang | shes pa dang bral ba'o | lha'i bu don dam pa'i bden pa ni rnam pa thams cad kyi mchog dang ldan pa thams cad mkhyen pa'i ye shes kyi yul gyi bar las 'das pa yin te | ji ltar don dam pa'i bden pa'o zhes brjod pa ltar ni ma yin no | chos thams cad ni brdzun te slu ba'i chos so | lha'i bu don dam pa'i bden pa ni bstan par mi nus so | de ci'i phyir zhe na | gang gis ston pa dang | ci ston pa dang | gang la ston pa'i chos de dag thams cad ni don dam par rab tu ma skyes pa'o | rab tu ma skyes pa'i chos rnams kyis ni rab tu ma skyes pa'i chos rnams bshad par mi nus so zhes rgya cher gsungs pa lta bu'o* || (Liland 2020: 167). No data about the authorship and dating of this *sūtra* is available. Though it is not Nāgārjuna's method to cite Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, one wonders if it was known to him.

[34] MĀB 6:29: "For that reason, phenomenon and non-phenomenon (*dngos po dang dngos po med pa*), own-phenomenon and other-phenomenon (*rang gi dngos po dang gzhan gyi dngos po*), truth and untruth (*bden pa dang bden pa ma yin pa*), eternity and annihilation (*rtag pa dang chad pa*), permanence and impermanence (*rtag pa dang mi rtag pa*), bliss and suffering (*bde ba dang sdug bsngal ba*), purity and impurity (*gtsang ba dang mi gtsang ba*), self and non-self (*bdag dang bdag med pa*), emptiness and non-emptiness (*stong ba dang mi stong pa*), characteristic and characterized (*msthan nyid dang mtshan gzhi*), oneness and otherness/difference (*gcig nyid dang gzhan nyid*), arising and ceasing (*skye ba dang 'gag pa*), and so forth do not exist as valid distinctions (*khyad par dag srid pa ma yin*) in the sphere of *tattva* (*de kho na nyid la de'i yul ca*n). This is so because the nature (*rang gi ngo bo*) of *tattva* is not observable (*ma dmigs pa*). For that reason, only *ārya*s ('*phags pa rnams*) validly cognize (*tshad ma*) the realization of *tattva* (*de kho na nyid bsam pa la*); those beings who are not *ārya*s [(i.e., unawakened, unrealized)] do not"; *de'i phyir de kho na nyid la de'i yul can dngos po dang dngos po med pa dang | rang gi dngos po dang gzhan gyi dngos po dang | bden pa dang bden pa ma yin pa dang | rtag pa dang chad pa dang | rtag pa dang mi rtag pa dang | bde ba dang sdug bsngal ba dang | gtsang ba dang mi gtsang ba dang | bdag dang bdag med pa dang | stong ba dang mi stong pa dang | mtshan nyid dang mtshan gzhi dang | gcig nyid dang gzhan nyid dang | skye ba dang 'gag pa la sogs pa'i khyad par dag srid pa ma yin te | de'i rang gi ngo bo ma dmigs pa'i phyir ro | de'i phyir de ltar na de kho na nyid bsam pa la 'phags pa rnams kho na tshad ma yin gyi 'phags pa ma yin pa dag ni ma yin no* || (Liland 2020: 167).

[35] See Garfield & Priest's discussion (2002: 89) of "inclosure", which paradoxically comprises "a totality, Ω, and an object, o, such that o both is and is not in Ω". In this case, the "totality Ω" is a set referring to the contents of the conceptual framework of the conventional truth and "o" to the ultimate truth, but both the *sūtra* and Candrakīrti would insist that making the ultimate or *nirvāṇa* into a physical, verbal, or mental object is to make it into an object in the set Ω. There is therefore no meaningful way to discuss "o" as an object exclusive of Ω. Ω as a set therefore represents the limits of conceptual thought (see §5.3) unable to cogently say anything exclusive of it. Grammatically, we can easily make sentences about "objects exclusive of the set Ω" and derive an apparent ontology therefrom, but there is no actual referent.

cognition characterized by conceptualization, fabrication, etc., it is demonstrated as an alternative thereto.

5.1.2 METHODOLOGICAL NEGATION RE: DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

In this section, I offer further evidence of the Mādhyamikas' strategic employment of negation, not just with reference to the ultimate but to the schemes of ordinary cognition more generally. This same kind of negation contributes to the apophatic ultimate insofar as specific characteristics structural to ordinary cognition are systematically negated to show that they have no place in ultimate cognition. This contributes to the differentiation of ultimate from conventional cognition and is indicative of the way the latter (by means of the valid cognition of dependence origination) contributes to the former. Through that lens, the MMK's dedicatory verses kickstart the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project by immediately calling for the cessation of conceptualization as a condition of the cultivation of a mental state of peace (i.e., ultimate cognition):

> I pay homage to the Fully Awakened One (*saṃbuddhaḥ*), the best of all teachers (*vadatām varam*), who taught dependent origination, which is neither ceasing nor arising (*anirodham anutpādam*), neither annihilated nor eternal (*anucchedam aśāśvatam*), neither singularity nor plurality (*anekārtham anānārtham*), neither coming nor going (*anāgamam anirgamam*), [and is] the cessation of conceptualization (*prapañca-upaśamam*) and bliss/welfare (*śivam*).[36]

Nāgārjuna serializes eight negations (four dualistic pairs) predicating dependent origination, many of which appear to do so paradoxically (referring especially to "neither ceasing nor arising").[37] That the

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[36] Dedicatory Verses: *anirodhamanutpādamanucchedamaśāśvatam | anekārthamanānārthamanāgamamanirgamam || yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaṃ prapañcopaśamaṃ śivam | deśayāmāsa saṃbuddhastaṃ vande vadatāṃ varam ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 4). It is worth comparing my translation with others. All are clear about how the eight negations should be translated, but there is a grammatical ambiguity concerning the relation of these and dependent origination to *prapañca-upaśamam* and *śivam*. For example, Siderits & Katsura (2013: 13) translate the eight negations as predicating "[any *dharma*, for the purpose of *nirvāṇa* characterized by] the auspicious cessation of hypostatization". As the square brackets are original to their translation, Siderits & Katsura insert the allusion to *nirvāṇa* that is not mistaken but not literally present in the verse. They treat *śivam* as adjectival of *prapañca-upaśamam* specifically and both of *pratītyasamutpādam* more generally. Garfield (1995: 100) likewise translates (from the Tibetan) these two as "free from conceptual construction". However, other translations treat these two (Tib: *spros pa nyer zhi zhi*) as separate but attributive nouns: e.g., in Coghlan's translation of Buddhapālita's commentary, dependent origination "is peaceful and fully pacifies all fabrication" (2021: 18); the commentary of Mabja Jangchub Tsöndrü says that the verse is dedicated "To the true teacher who reveals this peace, the complete pacification of constructs" (2011: 109); likewise, the commentary of Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso indicates that this teaching "completely dissolves all fabrications and teaches peace" (2003: 1). For what it's worth, Macdonald (2015c: 362) criticizes Siderits & Katsura's 2013 translation and proposes an interpretation of *śivam* as a noun, elsewhere translated by her as "[ultimate] welfare"—square brackets original to her translation (see MacDonald 2015c: 17).

[37] Tachikawa Musachi ("The Meaning of Dependent Origination", *Emptiness in Indian Buddhism*, Vajra Books, 2018: 38-44, originally published as "Pratītyasamutpāda in the Dedication of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā", *Brahmavidya, Dr. K. Kunjuni Raja Felicitation Volume*, The Adyar Library Bulletin 44-5, 1981: 639-53) probes the grammatical and semantic factors

dedicatory verses address dependent origination (the conventional truth's philosophical baseline) in this way is no accident. The listed characteristics are general *fabricated categories* by which phenomenal appearances are ordinarily cognized. These are not the same categories of discourse discussed in chapter 1 (§1.1) but are more like subcategorizations of the more elementary metaphysical category of "existence". For that reason, negating these predicates (taken as shorthand for the categorical conceptualization of appearances in general, but especially in a metaphysical context) is conducive to the non-apprehension of any fabricated characteristics (as in YṢ 10, p. 237 above) and, therefrom, the cessation of conceptualization in ultimate cognition.

I explain the dedicatory verses' rhetoric by recalling the previous distinction between conventional reasoning (*upapatti*) and analysis (*vicāra*).[38] This strategy is specifically a product of analysis and *not* conventional reasoning insofar as it is restricted to the standard semantic framework in which analysis' refutation operates (thus, not invalidating conventional reasoning, the Mādhyamikas' non-standard, conventional semantic framework, and the conventional truth).[39] It is important to understand these negations in that context for there is a very specific sense associated therewith, when applied to what is dependently originated, being negated. This is, rather, to counteract the misapplication of that standard semantic framework to dependent origination itself, thereby misunderstanding it and the entire teaching. This exercise denies that there are any *ultimately* arisen or ceasing phenomena (as in a metaphysical interpretation of the ultimate, thus making their arising and ceasing an ultimate truth) but does not deny

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answering the question of whether, in the dedicatory verses, Nāgārjuna specifically predicates these eight negations to dependent origination itself, as a *principle* or as a relation, or if they should rather apply to the *objects* that dependent origination characterizes. The grammar itself suggests the former, but semantically and philosophically, the latter seems more intuitive. Tachikawa demonstrates that, ultimately, both may be intended, and that this ambiguity may have been intentional, as has been borne by the various subsequent interpretations and translations of this verse across traditions. E.g., he concludes, "If *pratītyasamutpāda* can also refer to the factors of *ps* [(i.e., the factors of dependent origination, its objects)], then one may conclude that Nāgārjuna is saying that *ps* neither arises nor perishes, not that *ps* is the absence of the arising (or of the perishing) of objects. Similarly, one could take *anutpādaṃ pratītyasamutpādam* in the dedication, to mean not only (a) objects (*x*, *y*, etc.) which do not arise, but also (b) the *ps*-relation according to which objects (*x*, *y*, etc.) do not arise. The expression *an-eka-arthaṃ pratītyasamutpādam* would, then, indicate not only (a) objects (*x*, *y*, etc.,) which are found in the *ps*-relation, and which are not one and the same, but also (b) the *ps*-relation that *x* and *y* are not one and the same. In case (a), the *ps*-relation is understood as something substantial and is identified with objects (*x* and *y*)" (2018: 48).

[38] See chapter 3 (§3.4: §§3.4.1 for conventional reasoning and §§3.4.2 for analysis).

[39] For the differentiation of standard vs. non-standard semantic frameworks, see chapter 2 (§§2.2.3).

their conventional status as *appearing* to arise and cease, therefore not denying dependent origination.[40] To *not* contradict the conventional truth's philosophical baseline, dependent phenomena being unarising and unceasing can refer to nothing other than their un-*svabhāvic*-arising and un-*svabhāvic*-ceasing; i.e., phenomena neither really, inherently, or ultimately arise nor cease as *svabhāvic* entities, as in the standard semantic framework of default realism. Given that the Mādhyamikas specifically equate dependent origination and the arising of phenomena in dependence on causes and conditions with the lack of *svabhāva*,[41] it follows that for phenomena to be unarising and unceasing they must be un-*svabhāvic*-arisen and un-*svabhāvic*-ceasing. MMK 20:17-8 and 21:9 specially bar *this* kind of arising and ceasing from both empty and non-empty phenomena.[42] The parameterization of these claims to a certain semantic framework for this arising and ceasing is necessary lest dependent origination be contradicted. It is *that* sense of arising and ceasing that applies to neither empty nor non-empty phenomena.

Although it is not immediately obvious and rather counterintuitive, when given a certain contextualization the ultimate non-arising and non-ceasing of phenomena is in fact their conventional, conditional arising and ceasing. This is what the synergy of conventional reasoning and analysis revealed in ordinary experience's valid cognition.[43] This kind of negation is characteristic of the Madhyamaka (and Mahāyānist second-turning *sūtra*s, as in, e.g., the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, or

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[40] MĀ 6:114, 156-60 and 167 stress this *non-contradiction*. According to Mipham (2002: 257), "Although on the ultimate level, phenomena are primordially without origination and are unproduced, nevertheless on the conventional level of empirical experience, they are indeed produced". The same of non-contradiction is addressed in chapter XLV of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*: "What arises does not arise. When you realize that whether something exists or not is nothing but the perception of your own mind, its external existence is seen as nonexistent and non-arising. Mahamati, there is no contradiction in my earlier statements [confirming the arising and ceasing of every phenomenon, as in the teachings of dependent origination and conditionality]" (Red Pine 2012: 139).

[41] E.g., VV 22 (see chapter 3, §§3.4.3, p. 169 fn. 138 above), and PSP 368 (see chapter 3, §3.4, p. 150 above).

[42] MMK 20:17-18: "A non-empty effect (*phalam aśūnyam*) will not arise (*na utpatsyate*) [and] a non-empty [effect] will not cease (*aśūnyam na nirotsyate*). That which is non-empty will be unceasing and unarisen (*aniruddham anutpannam*). How will what is empty arise (*katham utpatsyate śūnyam*)? How will what is empty cease (*katham śūnyam nirotsyate*)? It follows (*prasajyate*) that what is empty is also unceasing and unarisen"; *phalaṃ notpatsyate'śūnyamaśūnyaṃ na nirotsyate | aniruddhamanutpannamaśūnyaṃ tadbhaviṣyati || kathamutpatsyate śūnyaṃ kathaṃ śūnyaṃ nirotsyate | śūnyamapyaniruddhaṃ tadanutpannaṃ prasajyate ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 174). MMK 21:9: "Arising (*sambhavaḥ*) and destruction (*vibhavaḥ*) do not occur for what is empty (*na śūnyasya upapadyat*e). Arising and destruction do not occur for what is non-empty (*aśūnyasya*)"; *saṃbhavo vibhavaścaiva na śūnyasyopapadyate | saṃbhavo vibhavaścaiva nāśūnyasyopapadyate ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 181).

[43] See chapter 3 (§§3.4.3) on this synergy.

Mahāmegha Sūtra).[44] I relate these negations in the context of their non-contradiction of dependent origination to MMK 18:8's "graded teaching",[45] representing the second stage after first teaching the schematics of the conditional arising and ceasing of conventional phenomena. As mentioned, the second stage teaches their "unreality" as "real" (*svabhāvic*) entities, which I will now apply to the present context of arising and ceasing. Typical of the second stage, this negation counteracts any possible misinterpretation of the teachings of the first by taking it in the wrong semantic framework. Because we have already seen how Candrakīrti uses analysis to refute *svabhāvic* production,[46] in this context I want to focus on the purpose of Nāgārjuna's negation of a certain kind of arising and ceasing for dependent origination: he is strategically employing negations like non-*svabhāvic*-arising and non-*svabhāvic*-ceasing to counteract any misattributions of *svabhāvic*-arising and *svabhāvic*-ceasing. Much methodological weight is carried by these negations insofar as it therethrough that the gravest of cognitive obscurations (i.e., the misconception of the existence of dependently originated phenomena via *svabhāva*) is dispelled, especially as misapplied to the conventional truth and conventional phenomena.

Nonetheless, such negation, as preliminary as it is, is still not the final grade of tetralemmic negation since it is not tantamount to non-dual cognition. This is evident insofar as both the tetralemma's third and fourth stages (both X and ¬X and neither X nor ¬X) are also negated: this comprehensive tetralemmic negation is more conducive to non-dual realization than just the merely negative rhetoric of the second stage. In tetralemmic negation, even the negation itself is finally negated (along with its affirmation), which is true apophasis, the method by which the non-duality is achieved. As I will demonstrate in §5.3, tetralemmic, non-affirming negation is the paragon of the apophatic ultimate. For this reason, in the dedicatory verses the eight negations are proceeded by the indications of non-dual cognition via the

[44] One such reference Candrakīrti makes to the *Mahāmegha Sūtra* at MĀB 6:182 references a passage that describes the ultimate in very similar terms to those Nāgārjuna uses in the dedicatory verse to predicate dependent origination (e.g., neither arising nor ceasing, neither coming nor going, etc., as well as specifying its non-conceptual inexpressibility, its restriction to the *āryas*, etc.); see Liland 2020: 349-50. Tsong Khapa (2006: 491) cites the same passage.
[45] As addressed in chapter 3 (§§3.4.3, pp. 170-1 above).
[46] See chapter 3 (§§3.4.2). This specifically includes the incompatibility of *svabhāva* with dependent origination.

peaceful cessation of conceptualization. More than just a stylistic coincidence, these markers of non-duality are *also* products of negative rhetoric: the negation in the cessation of conceptualization (i.e., *non*-conceptuality) is apparent, but peace is also understood as *freedom from* something (e.g., ignorance, delusion, suffering, etc. and therefore the negation thereof). A logical constraint persists that any term is either an affirmation or a denial. Both markers of non-duality conform to this mold and are to be understood as denials.[47] As gateways to non-duality, these final apophatic characteristics of dependent origination refer to the non-dual fruit proceeding the dismissal of each level of the tetralemma (specifically referring to negating both X and ¬X).

In the light of dependent origination as it services the ultimate, Nāgārjuna implies that i) these eight negations applied thereto work towards achieving the goal of peaceful mental state of non-conceptuality and ii) this multilayered teaching encapsulates the *Buddhadharma*'s true message converging on this goal. Commenting on the dedicatory verses, Candrakīrti elaborates that these eight negations are just enough to wet the tongue; in practice, the negation is more comprehensive of *every* possible predicate:

> [PSP 11:] Though there are infinite possible qualifiers for dependent origination (*ananta-viśeṣaṇa-saṃbhava api pratītyasamutpādasya*), there is the employment of these eight (*aṣṭānām eva upādānam eṣām*) summarily (*prādhānyena*) for being the limbs [(i.e., major topics)] of debate (*vivādāṅga-bhūtatvāt*). Because, when the *ārya*s see dependent origination as it is (*avasthita-pratītysamutpāda-darśane sati āryāṇām*), there is the complete cessation of conceptualization (*prapañcasya sarvathā uparamāt*), [such conceptualization] characterized as what is named and so forth (*abhidheya-ādi-lakṣaṇasya*), that dependent origination is called the cessation of conceptualization [because] there is the cessation of conceptualization in it. And because it is free from the misfortunes of birth, old age and death, and so forth (*jāti-jarāmaraṇa-ādi-niravaśeṣa-upadrava-rahitatvāt*) when there is the inactivity of the [dualistic, ordinary] mind and mental factors in it (*citta-caittānām ca tasmin aprivṛttau*) and the cessation of conventions such as cognition and what is cognized (*jñāna-jñeya-vyavahāra-nivṛttau*), it is bliss/welfare (*śivaḥ*). Because dependent origination, according to the qualifiers expressed [above] (*yathā-abhihita-viśeṣaṇasya*), is what is immediately aimed at (*īpsitatamatvāt*) by activity of teaching (*deśanā-kriyayā*), it is

[47] Cf. MacDonald 2015b: 43 n.100: "It is important to give due accord to Candrakīrti's own clarification of the word *śiva*. With his explanation that *pratītyasamutpāda* is *śiva* because it is free of the misfortunes of birth, old age, death, etc. (*jātijarāmaraṇādiniravaśeṣopadravarahita*), he stresses *śiva*'s historically prominent aspect of safety and freedom from harm". To curb the implication that "the attainment of *nirvāṇa* may be equated with or entails the experience of a positive affect", as in translations such as "bliss", "happiness" or "beatitude", her chosen translation is "[ultimate] welfare", though I'm not sure this is really all that different. I think that "peace" in English (typically meaning the *absence* of war and conflict rather than a utopian state of being) is appropriate enough so long as its privative characteristic is underscored.

expressed as the [direct] object (*karmaṇā nirdeśaḥ*) [of this teaching].[48]

Candrakīrti draws a connection between dependent origination and the cessation of conceptualization and, further therefrom, the cessation of conceptualization and peace. This is evident in the fact that dependent origination explains the conditions of both the arising *and* ceasing of every conditional, empty, non-*svabhāvic* phenomenon: the *ārya*s, knowing a certain phenomenon's conditions of arising, *also* see clearly its conditions of cessation. Thus, both halves of the formula of conditionality are satisfied. This is exactly why dependent origination, the conventional truth, and the valid cognition of ordinary experience therethrough are given such a prominent, instrumental role in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. This requires conditionality's application to conceptualization itself, whose conditions of arising I addressed in chapters 1 and 2 in the context of fabrication. The focus is now, in an ultimate context, on the conditions of conceptuality's cessation. However, there is still Candrakīrti's further indication of the connection between the cessation of conceptualization and peace deserving further exploration, a connection drawn through characterizing *nirvāṇa* as follows.

5.1.3 *NIRVĀṆA* & THE CESSATION OF CONCEPTUALIZATION

Nirvāṇa refers to the mental state in which the cessation of suffering is realized; it is thus the soteriological goal. The following evidence links *nirvāṇa* and the ultimate truth through the cessation of conceptualization (because both the ultimate and *nirvāṇa* are explained as non-conceptual).[49] Paralleling the arguments from the above *sūtra* and the *Laṅkāvatāra*'s "finger of words", *nirvāṇa* itself, like the ultimate, is just a *concept* (i.e., a dependent designation, like emptiness: the emptiness of emptiness, the emptiness of the ultimate, and the emptiness of *nirvāṇa* consequently follow).[50] As such, one must look

[48] PSP 11: *anantaviśeṣaṇasaṃbhave 'pi pratītyasamutpādasya aṣṭānāmevopādānameṣāṃ prādhānyena vivādāṅgabhūtatvāt | yathāvasthitapratītyasamutpādadarśane sati āryāṇāmabhidheyādilakṣaṇasya prapañcasya sarvathoparamāt, prapañcānām-upaśamo 'sminniti sa eva pratītyasamutpādaḥ prapañcopaśama ityucyate | cittacaittānāṃ ca tasminnapravṛttau jñānajñeyavyavahāranivṛttau jātijarāmaraṇādiniravaśeṣopadravarahitatvāt śivaḥ | yathābhihitaviśeṣaṇasya pratītya-samutpādasya deśanākriyayā īpsitatamatvāt karmaṇā nirdeśaḥ* || (Vaidya 1960b: 4; cf. MacDonald 2015b: 41-3).

[49] I reserve the extended discussion of the Madhyamaka-specific conception of *nirvāṇa* in its soteriological context for chapter 6. In this chapter, I simply discuss it as the goal in the context of the method of the Mādhyamikas' presentation thereof, wherein, just like the ultimate, it is characterized by the cessation of conceptualization. In that context, the two are treated synonymously. To have attained the ultimate is to have attained *nirvāṇa* and vice versa.

[50] Cf. MĀ 6:186, 189, 192.

beyond the concept itself to the *experience* to which its finger points, which, by all accounts, is a non-conceptual experience. According to Candrakīrti,

> [YṢV 6:] Because it has the nature of the complete pacification of all signs (*mtshan ma thams cad rab tu zhi ba'i ngo bo yin pas*), [only] in accordance with the conventional truth (*tha snyad ky bden pa dang sbyar nas*) is it called "*nirvāṇa*" (*mya ngan las 'das zhes bya ba*) and must be understood as lacking any established own nature (*rang gi ngo bo grub pa ni gang yang med par shes par bya*).[51]

"The complete pacification of all signs" correlates well with what Candrakīrti calls "the serenity of signlessness" (*śāntatā animittasya*), just like the pacification and bliss/welfare of *tattva*/the ultimate.[52] If *nirvāṇa* had any established own nature, as in an essential property, then that essential property would belong to it, by which it would be apprehendable as such. But such a cataphatic approach to *nirvāṇa* is not possible due to its strict apophatic derivation, as in the lack of conceptualization. Attempting to cataphatically cognize it by means of such an essential property (an artifact of ordinary cognition) is incompatible with *nirvāṇa* being apophatically characterized as the complete pacification of all signs. The same must apply to the concepts of "emptiness" and the "ultimate".[53]

Siderits & Katsura insert in their translation of the dedicatory verses the connection between the teaching contained within it (and more specifically the cessation of conceptualization) and *nirvāṇa* for good reason,[54] since both Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti indicate that *nirvāṇa* is the link between the

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[51] YṢV 6cd: […] *mtshan ma thams cad rab tu zhi ba'i ngo bo yin pas tha snyad kyi bden pa dang sbyar nas mya ngan las 'das pa zhes bya ba rang gi ngo bor grub pa ni gang yang med par shes par bya'o* || (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 8). Thakchöe (2012: 441) discusses the non-privileged, empty status of the concept of *nirvāṇa* that when analyzed in its linguistic, conceptual form is reducible to a "linguistic utterance based on linguistic convention, understood, and made sense, only within the bound of linguistic convention".

[52] MĀ 6:209. This serenity that is signless shares an etymological root with the peace (*śiva*) derived from the cessation of conceptualization and which Candrakīrti associates with *nirvāṇa*, the teaching of which is Nāgārjuna's purpose (see PSP 4 below). I discuss the Madhyamaka's conception of *nirvāṇa*, its association with the cessation of conceptualization and signlessness, the alleged peace and serenity derived therefrom, and its correlation with liberation from suffering in chapter 6 when I explore further the cognitive reading of the ultimate truth and its soteriological implications wherein ultimate cognition is just that, a *nirvāṇic* mental state, peaceful and serene, devoid of conceptual activity, and therefrom free from suffering.

[53] Buddhapālita's commentary ad MMK 18:8 (Coghlan 2021: 243) states, "those who desires to see thatness [(=*tattva*)] should not cling to such statements made due to the influence of worldly conventions but apprehend what is thatness in itself". *Mutatis mutandis*, the same must apply to *nirvāṇa* and *emptiness*.

[54] Siderits & Katsura 2013: 13; see fn. 36 above. However, MacDonald has criticized this addition with respect to her criticism of their understanding of *śivam* adjectivally. She writes (2015c: 362) "Awareness of this sense of *śiva* would have spared S&K having to add a reference to *nirvāṇa* in square brackets […]. Even so, the point is not that dependent-arising was taught for the *purpose* of *nirvāṇa*. Rather, dependent-arising in its ultimate sense, which is characterized as the calming of *prapañca* (*prapañcopaśama*), is equated with *śiva*, ultimate security; in other words, the true nature of dependent-arising is *nirvāṇa*".

cessation of conceptualization and the attainment of peace. The following evidence establishes the link between dependent origination and *nirvāṇa* as mediated by the cessation of conceptualization:

> [MMK 18:7:] When the domain of the [dualistic, ordinary] mind ceases (*nivṛttaḥ citta-gocare*), what is to be named [also] ceases (*nivṛttam abhidhātavyam*). The nature [of phenomena] (*dharmatā*) is, like *nirvāṇa*, unarisen and unceasing.[55]
>
> [PSP 4:] Dependent origination as characterized by [these] eight qualifiers such as unceasing and so forth (*anirodha-ādi-aṣṭa-viśeṣaṇa-viśiṣṭaḥ*) is the primary meaning of [Nāgārjuna's] text (*śāstra-abhidheyārthaḥ*). *Nirvāṇa*, characterized as bliss/welfare and the cessation of all conceptualization (*sarva-prapañca-upaśama-śiva-lakṣaṇam*), is indicated as the ultimate purpose (*prayojanam*) of the text.[56]

Echoing the dedicatory verses' negations, Nāgārjuna predicates again the first two to *nirvāṇa* when linked by the cessation of conceptualization. It is inferable that the others also apply. Candrakīrti adds that, although the valid cognition of dependent origination is the MMK's primary meaning, the attainment of *nirvāṇa* remains its ultimate purpose, the former serving the latter. He also takes the dedicatory verses' final characteristic of dependent origination, the peaceful cessation of conceptualization, as also being characteristic of *nirvāṇa*.

I therefore draw the following line from the eight negations through the cessation of conceptualization and peace to *nirvāṇa*. Though in the dedicatory verses there is the predication of these negations to what is dependently originated, their purpose is indicated as the attainment of the peaceful cessation of conceptualization, which is how *nirvāṇa* is here characterized. Though I previously argued that the ultimate non-arising and non-ceasing of phenomena meant their conventional dependent arising and ceasing, the fact that such phenomena are ultimately unarisen and unceasing should be seen as conducive, as in YṢ 10, to the non-apprehension in ultimate cognition of *any* phenomena *appearing* to arise and

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[55] MMK 18:7: *nivṛttamabhidhātavyaṃ nivṛttaścittagocare | anutpannāniruddhā hi nirvāṇamiva dharmatā ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 154). I have made some modifications to this translation in the interest of clarity. E.g., I have indicated that it is the *ordinary* mind that ceases and not necessarily mental activity *in toto* to indicate that there remains an ultimate mode of cognitive experience without conceptualization (without the "to be named"). Regarding *dharmatā*, *dharma* has a range of meanings beyond nature and phenomena but the *-TĀ* suffix makes it an abstract noun difficult to succinctly render in English. Siderits & Katsura (2013: 200) have translated it as "the nature of things" and Anne MacDonald in several places in her PSP translation uses "the real nature", though in those cases *dharmatā* usually has a qualifying noun and there is none in MMK 18:7.

[56] PSP 4: *tadatrānirodhādyaṣṭaviśeṣaṇaviśiṣṭaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śāstrābhidheyārthaḥ | sarvaprapañcopaśamaśiva-lakṣaṇaṃ nirvāṇaṃ śāstrasya prayojanaṃ nirdiṣṭam |* (Vaidya 1960b: 2).

cease (or the non-apprehension of anything apprehendable, of which arising and cessation are shorthand for apprehendable characteristics). If these apprehendable characteristics are fabricated imputations in ordinary cognition, then, *tattva* (and the ultimate) being *un*fabricated, there cannot be the apprehension of any such fabrications therein. The non-apprehension of anything fabricated is what is meant by the cessation of conceptualization in the context of ultimate, since *nirvāṇic* cognition is *unfabricated*.

On two occasions (MĀB 5:1 and YṢV 12), Candrakīrti reorganizes the four noble truths by the metric the two truths, assigning noble truths one, two, and four (respectively, i) that there is suffering (*duḥkha*), ii) that it has a cause (*samudaya*), and iv) the path (*mārga*) to its cessation) to the conventional truth and reserving the third (the truth of the cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering) for the ultimate. That reservation concerns the *attainment* of such cessation, not its teaching (which is subsumed under the path). As cessation (of suffering, of conceptualization, etc., the connection of which I establish in chapter 6) is how *nirvāṇa* is characterized, Candrakīrti links the attainment of *nirvāṇa* and the ultimate truth by means of having accomplished such cessation: such attainment is a matter of cessation, not accretion. However, because the truth of cessation nevertheless belongs to dependent origination and conditionality, the conventional truth outlines the path thereto. If the conventional truth is grounded in the philosophical baseline of dependence relations, the connections the Mādhyamikas establish between dependent origination, the cessation of conceptualization, the ultimate truth, *nirvāṇa*, and peace require the mastery of such dependence relations concerning the conditioned arising and ceasing of every aspect of ordinary cognition towards the total cessation of conceptualization therein and, only therefrom, the attainment of ultimate cognition, *nirvāṇa*, and peace. This is evident in *nirvāṇa*'s strict apophatic characterization, such apophasis demonstrating that it is only attainable by realizing the peaceful cessation of conceptualization.

5.1.4 APOPHASIS LEADING TO THE NON-DUAL MIDDLE WAY

The Madhyamaka ultimate is paradigmatically associated with the "middle way", as that is indeed its fruit. The middle way in its ultimate context, once attained, is characterized as a specific kind of mental state (cognitive mode) that is *positionless*, with such positionlessness being another apophatic epithet of

non-duality. This positionless need not be established with reference to VV 29 and Nāgārjuna's differentiation of standard vs. non-standard semantic frameworks *at the conventional* level,[57] since this positionless is restricted to the ultimate. The negation of both extremes of a duality is a common strategy for realizing non-dual wisdom. As it addresses both extremes, such negation is exhaustive and non-implicative.[58] In fact, the indication is of the unstated positionless middle way between any such extremes, neither one nor the other, and hence the rejection of that dichotomy. The notion of the "middle way" might suggest a position locatable between a duality's poles; yet, given a duality's logical characteristics (referring to the law of excluded middle), it has no corresponding *third value*. From the lack thereof, the middle way for the Mādhyamikas is positionless. As such, the middle way between extremes, especially as it designates ultimate, non-dual cognition, is not itself a position or a view like the extremes it negates. At PSP 358, Candrakīrti cites the *Āryaratnakūṭa Sūtra* to establish this point:

> Kāśyapa, "self": this is one extreme (*ātma iti kāśyapa ayam ekaḥ antaḥ*); "non-self": this is a second extreme (*nairātmyam iti ayam dvitīyaḥ antaḥ*). That which is the middle between these two extremes (*anayoḥ antayoḥ madhyam*) is without form (*arūpyam*), invisible (*anidarśanam*), has no solid ground (*apratiṣṭham*), is non-appearing (*anābhāsam*), unknowable (*avijñaptikam*), and without abode (*aniketa*); this is taught. Kāśyapa, the middle way (*madhyamā pratipadaḥ*) reflects the true/real (*bhūta-pratyavekṣā*) [nature] of phenomena (*dharmāṇām*).[59]

Given that in apophasis an entire dichotomy is negated and no alternative offered, the further indication is that the exhaustive negation thereof is conducive to the cessation of conceptualization and thereby the attainment of positionless peace from the inability to grasp any position at all. This is contextualized by the fact that the impetus behind this spiritual exercise is not the accumulation of further views (cf. MMK 27:30). For this reason, Stepien argues,

> Nāgārjuna's insistence on the abandonment of *all* views—including ultimately his own—constitutes his distinctive means to the thoroughgoing exhaustion (metaphysical, epistemic,

[57] See chapter 2 (§§2.2.3, pp. 107-9 above) on VV 29 and the parameterization of Nāgārjuna's claim to not have any *pratijñā*.
[58] See chapter 3 (§§3.4.2) on non-implicative negation in the context of analysis (*vicāra*); see §5.3 for the application of non-implicative negation to the ultimate.
[59] PSP 358: *yathoktamāryaratnakūṭe- ātmeti kāśyapa ayameko 'ntaḥ | nairātmyamityayaṃ dvitīyo 'ntaḥ | yadetadanayorantayormadhyaṃ tadarūpyamanidarśanamapratiṣṭhamanābhāsamavijñaptikamaniketam | iyamucyate | kāśyapa madhyamā pratipada dharmāṇāṃ bhūtapratyavekṣā iti* || (Vaidya 1960b: 152-3). There is a Pāli parallel at SN 12.15 (*Kaccānagotta Sutta*; see Bodhi 2000: 545).

> and doxastic) characteristic of *nirvāṇa*, wherein all views, propositions, theses (*dṛṣṭi*, *pakṣa*, *pratijñā*)—all beliefs—are abandoned as so many subtle affirmations of an only ever empty self.[60]

As such, the task is to clear all obscurations, chiefly all conceptual, dualistic obstacles to non-conceptual, non-dual wisdom (as in overcoming *saṃvṛti* in the first sense of its concealment of the ultimate).

According to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti,

> [YṢ 1:] The mind/intellect (*buddhiḥ*) that passes over [the concepts of both] existence and non-existence (*asti-nāsti-vyatikrāntā*) is without abode [in] them (*yeṣām nirāśrayā*). Therethrough, the [ultimate] meaning of condition[ality] (pratyaya-arthaḥ) is comprehended as profound and supportless (*gambhiraḥ … nirālambaḥ ... vibhāvyate*).[61]

> [YṢV 1:] The mind, by the power of its previous practice (*de sngon goms pa'i mthu nyid kyis*), perceives beyond (*mthong ba las 'das*) [the concepts of] existence and non-existence (*yod pa dang med pa*). Because there is no centre exceeding (*lhag pa'i dbus med pa'i phyir*) those two extremes (*mtha' gnyis de*), and because there can be no abiding in that (*de la yang gnas pa med pas*) [centre], [such a mind] does not abide [anywhere].[62]

Since both Mādhyamikas refer to the mind (*buddhi*, *blo*), both indicate the middle way as a mental state quite distinct from ordinary cognition; since both eschew the extremes of existence and non-existence, this mental state is non-dualistic because not located anywhere on that spectrum. That it has no corresponding conceptual content is precisely the serenity of signlessness Candrakīrti predicates to the ultimate, eschewing the dualities inherent to conceptual cognition, beyond which there is no abode, exactly as Kāśyapa is told and Candrakīrti tells us. Without dualistic abode, the ultimate is profound and unobservable to the intellectual eye of ordinary cognition. From that non-implicative negation of both extremes is the middle way ultimately positionless insofar as there is no position corresponding thereto.

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[60] Stepien 2019: 530. I take up this prospect further in chapter 6, especially as the positionless of the ultimate relates to the soteriological goal of the dissolution of all traces of selfhood.

[61] YṢ 1: *astināstivyatikrāntā buddhir yeṣāṃ nirāśrayā | gambhīras tair nirālambaḥ pratyayārtho vibhāvyate* || (Li & Ye 2014: 4); *gang blo yod dang med pa las | rnam par 'das shing mi gnas pa | de dag zab mo dmigs med pa yi | rkyen gyi don la rnam par bsgom* || (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 24). Cf. also MMK 5:8 wherein, from the jettisoning of both extremes of existence and non-existence, one sees "the bliss/welfare that is the cessation of what is to be perceived" (*draṣṭavya-upaśamam śivam*). Candrakīrti's commentary (PSP 135) says this is "free from the net of all fabrications" (*sarva-kalpanā-jāla-rahitam*), a pacification that is "the nature of the cessation of [the distinction] between cognition and what is cognized" (*jñāna-jñeya-nivṛtti-svabhāvam*) and the same nature as the ultimate (*paramārtha-svabhāvam*) (Vaidya 1960: 54).

[62] YṢV 1: […] *de bas na de ltar de sngon goms pa'i mthu nyid kyis de dag gi blo yod pa dang med par mthong ba las 'das so | mtha' gnyis de las lhag pa'i dbus med pa'i phyir de la yang gnas pa med pas mi gnas so |* (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 25).

5.1.5 NOBLE SILENCE

The apophatic capstone Candrakīrti places on this ultimate, non-dual cognition, the positionless middle way between dualistic extremes, is *noble silence*: "The ultimate is noble silence (*āryāṇām tūṣṇīmbhāvaḥ*). Consequently, how could there be the possibility of any conceptualization therein (*kutaḥ tatra prapañca-saṃbhavaḥ*), wherein there could be reasoning or unreasoning (*yat-upapattiḥ anupapattiḥ vā syāt*)?".[63] Candrakīrti's final point is significant insofar as the reasoning–unreasoning distinction does not apply to the noble silence of the ultimate: it is in the end neither a product of reasoning nor unreasoning but a transcendence of this and all other distinctions. Elsewhere, he adds that "the *ārya*s for whom the goal is attained (*āryāḥ kṛtakāryāḥ*) would not realize anything that is either false or not false (*yat mṛṣā amṛṣā vā*)".[64] In the same vein, Nāgārjuna says,

> [RĀ 2:5:] Ultimately (*paramārthataḥ*), this world is beyond truth and falsity (*satya-anṛta-atītaḥ*). Consequently, ultimately neither "it is" (*asti*) nor "it is not" (*nāsti*) obtain.[65]

Barring conceptualization also bars both reasoning and unreasoning and falsity or non-falsity from the ultimate, indicating the non-duality typical of this noble silence finding no abode in any extreme. To that effect, a common refrain from the Pāli *sutta*s says, "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being".[66] Demonstrating this noble silence as only hinted at apophatically, Nāgārjuna says that "No *Dharma* whatsoever was taught by the Buddha to anyone at any time".[67] To neither contradict the fact that the *Buddhadharma* has obviously been taught nor to invalidate what has been taught (by formally restricting it to the conventional level), this must refer to the inability of the ultimate, *tattva*, and *nirvāṇa* to be indicated except apophatically:

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[63] PSP 57: *paramārtho hyāryāṇāṃ tūṣṇīṃbhāvaḥ | tataḥ kutastatra prapañcasaṃbhavo yadupapattiranupapattirvā syāt?* (Vaidya 1960b: 19).
[64] PSP 45: *naiva tvāryāḥ kṛtakāryāḥ kiṃcidupalabhante yanmṛṣā amṛṣā vā syāditi |* (Vaidya 1960b: 14). It is curious that Candrakīrti has not used the terms *satya*/*asatya* but a term like falsity (*mṛṣā*) and its negation (*amṛṣā*), a double negative.
[65] RĀ 2:5 (105): *iti satyānṛtātīto loko 'yaṃ paramārthataḥ | asmādeva ca tattvena nopaityasti ca nāsti ca ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 301; McClintock & Dunne 2024: 185)).
[66] As in, e.g., MN 105: '*khīṇā jāti, vusitaṁ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṁ, nāparaṁ itthattāyāti |* (trans. Bodhi 1995a: 861; Treckner & Chalmers (vol. 2) 1898: 252).
[67] MMK 25:24cd: *na kvacitkasyacitkaściddharmo buddhena deśitaḥ ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 155). See also ŚS 70.

just like the finger–moon analogy, no *Dharma* teaches them cataphatically; no teaching amounts to the ultimate truth; and no conceptualization is equal to a graspable fact concerning its experience.

According to Ruegg, "While no doubt related to apophaticism, this [silent] approach goes beyond a negative as well as a positive theory".[68] This is true insofar as that silence is the intentional refusal to ultimately take either a positive or negative position, eschewing all dualistic schemes and conceptualization. That is why silence is the last word and final testament of realization evidenced by the actions (i.e., the lack of speech) of Vimalakīrti in demonstrating his realization of the *dharma*.[69] Nonetheless, as also evident in this exchange, should one try to comment on this silence or have to say anything at all, apophasis again prevails: as Mañjuśrī comments on Vimalakīrti's (lack of) explanation, "Not a word, not a syllable—this truly is to enter the gate of nondualism!".[70]

In that vein, this noble silence has been interpreted as "philosophical quietism" and, in the context of the peace associated with *tattva* and the ultimate, "irenic philosophy".[71] So long as this quietism is understood as an abstention from assertion regarding the ultimate (i.e., positionlessness, noble silence) *without* connotations of cowardice, complacency, laziness, or skepticism, quietism can be an appropriate explication of this positionlessness and noble silence. Insofar as skepticism implies a skepticism *about* something, the Mādhyamikas are not skeptical about the ultimate; rather, if it could have no conceptual content or form, there is not-anything they could say about it. This is the occasion for their silence.

It would exhaust the reader to list every textual support of this interpretation, but this should be a

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[68] Ruegg 1981: 34.

[69] In the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, several *bodhisattva*s offer an apophatic explanation of how to enter the gate of nondualism, each saying that it is not this or not that. When it is Vimalakīrti's turn he "remained silent and did not speak a word" (*The Vimalakirti Sutra* (trans. Burton Watson), Columbia University Press, 1997: 110).

[70] Watson 1997: 111.

[71] According to Tillemans (2017: 111), "The *Verses on the Middle* [(MMK)], the *Dismissal of Disputes* [(VV)], and the *Sixty Verses* [(YṢ)], as well as the writings of Āryadeva and the Nāgārjunian commentators, promote a certain type of irenic philosophy or quietism. An irenic approach is, of course, a basic theme in much of Buddhism—Buddhists advocate pacifying thought as a method to reach enlightenment and they describe the goal, *nirvāṇa*, as itself a "state of peace." Indeed, quietistic methods and goals were not confined to Nāgārjuna and his school, but figure in most Mahāyāna schools in one way or another, whether in India, Tibet, or China. Mādhyamikas typically use the term the "silence of the noble ones" (*āryatūṣṇīṃbhāva*) or the "absence of conceptual proliferations" (*niṣprapañca*); another prevalent early formulation is that "there is nothing fixed," "nothing that is grounded" (*apratiṣṭhita*; *apratiṣṭhāna*)".

sufficient indication of the method behind the ultimate's presentation and its formal parameters. As will be addressed in the juxtaposition of this interpretation with the prevailing view, there is by no means in any of this any denial of the ultimate; while there is the express denial of any conceptual foothold, content, or form, there has occurred no specific denial of the ultimate as the Mādhyamikas understand it.

§5.2 THE SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION OF EMPTINESS RE: THE ULTIMATE TRUTH

The apophatic interpretation of the ultimate truth must be squared with the prevailing contemporary interpretation, what some Madhyamaka scholars, such as Siderits, Garfield, and Westerhoff, call "the semantic interpretation of emptiness" as it pertains to the ultimate. It is not the only interpretation of the Madhyamaka ultimate advanced, but it is the most recent, widespread, and relevant to my work. Although its proponents take emptiness seriously and deduce important philosophical and soteriological consequences therefrom, they do not treat much of the above evidence concerning the cognitive or formal parameters of the ultimate, with a result rather dismissive of this half of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. According to Siderits, the semantic interpretation "takes the claim that all things are empty to mean that the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth—there is only conventional truth"; the result is that "the very notion of ultimate truth is incoherent".[72] For Garfield & Priest, "Ultimate truths are those about ultimate reality. But since everything is empty, there is no ultimate reality. There are, therefore, no ultimate truths. […] To express anything in language is to express truth that depends on language, and so this cannot be an expression of the way things are ultimately. All truths, then, are merely conventional".[73] Similarly, Westerhoff says,

> According to the Madhyamaka view of truth, there can be no such thing as ultimate truth, a theory describing how things really are, independent of our interests and conceptual resources employed in describing it. All one is left with is conventional truth, truth that consists in agreement with commonly accepted practices and conventions. These are the truths that are arrived at when we view the world through our linguistically formed conceptual framework.[74]

[72] Siderits 2016: 41-2.
[73] Garfield & Priest 2002: 96.
[74] Westerhoff 2009a: 220.

Siderits and Westerhoff call the denial of the ultimate and the elevation of the conventional truth "semantic non-dualism" [75] insofar as, in the final analysis, they reject the two-tier semantics of the Abhidharma and only the semantic level of the conventional truth remains. *This* non-dualism is not the same rejection of duality in the rejection of any pair of conceptual extremes or the Madhyamaka non-dual ultimate without any dualistic abode; semantic non-dualism is specifically the rejection of two forms of truth for the two truths and is thus incompatible with my model.

While Siderits and Westerhoff's interpretations are similar, Garfield's (with Graham Priest) sometimes takes a turn into contradiction, paradox, and dialetheism.[76] For this reason, these interpretations should not be unnecessarily conflated, though all have in common the dictum "the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth", which is my concern. Garfield is nonetheless inclined to sometimes take emptiness as indicative of the ultimate, which is more in line with the Madhyamaka and Tibetan interpretation thereof (so long as it is only understood privatively); he says that emptiness "is an ultimate truth, even if not an ultimate existent. But for it to be nondeceptive in its appearance is for it to appear as a mere negation, and not as a positive object or an entity, and hence not as something that can serve as the subject of characterization—as the subject of proposition—or as the object of a view".[77]

Although accepting most of the semantic interpretation's premises, I cannot accept its conclusion to deny the ultimate truth. Where the ultimate has no propositional content, its denial only follows in the narrow conception of truth formally restricted to propositions, but I argue that this is not the Mādhyamikas' form of the ultimate. As such, the semantic interpretation subscribes to a propositional form of truth too restrictive to accommodate the nuances of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project vis-à-vis the non-conceptual ultimate.[78] I wish to amend it according to the above

[75] See Siderits 2007: 182; 2016: 43-5 and Westerhoff 2016: 373.
[76] See Garfield & Priest 2002: 96-7, 99; see the dissolution of some paradoxes in §5.3.
[77] Garfield 2002: 65.
[78] A propositional form of truth, to which the semantic interpretation subscribes, holds truth to be a property of propositions, wherein it is propositions that are truth-bearers. It is the entire idea a sentence conveys that is true or false; see Siderits 2007: 182; 2016: 41. Consequently, Siderits' definition of the ultimate truth (which he maintains is impossible for the Madhyamaka) mirrors the Abhidharmic propositional definition thereof: "A statement is said to be ultimately true if and only if it corresponds

evidence by i) not denying the ultimate truth; ii) on that basis, not holding that it is incoherent; and iii) severing attachment to the claim that the only form of truth for the Madhyamaka is propositional (i.e., the propositional conventional truth). This is to be accomplished by not using the Abhidharmic model of the ultimate truth (in the lack) but by taking what the Mādhyamikas say about the ultimate seriously. The same arguments employed by the semantic interpretation establish not that there is no ultimate truth but that it has no propositional content, therefore confirming its non-conceptual, positionless nature.

The semantic interpretation takes the two truths distinction to differentiate truth-statements into conventional and ultimate kinds. This perpetuates the Abhidharmic model of a propositional form of truth with conventionally valid statements concerning the phenomenal world and ultimately valid statements concerning what really exists (the *dharma*s). This requires both a two-tier semantics and a two-tier ontology insofar as there is a twofold differentiation of both truth and existence (ultimate vs. conventional). The semantic interpretation takes the *satya* of the two truths in the Abhidharmic model to refer to a semantic property (i.e., the truth of its two classes of statements in relation to how they match or not with the way things really are).[79] However, the *satya* of the ultimate in the Abhidharmic model has a distinctly metaphysical foundationalist tint vis-à-vis the reference of its statements to the *dharma*s, the foundational metaphysical bedrock on which the existence of the referents of merely conventionally true statements depend, the knowledge of which making conventionally true statements merely conventional. Insofar as the Mādhyamikas reject the second, ultimate semantic tier from the conventional

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with reality, and neither asserts nor presupposes the existence of any conceptual fictions [(as in the conventional truth being comprised of such conceptual fictions, i.e., fabrications, dependent designations (*prajñaptir upādāya*)]" (2016: 41). For Siderits, the lack of this kind of ultimate statement and that to which it refers is the lack of the Madhyamaka ultimate.

[79] This Siderits & Garfield ("Defending the Semantic Interpretation: A Reply to Ferraro", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 41.6, 2013: 656) confirm: "In English the word 'true' is used principally to characterize statements and beliefs; it is the content of statements and beliefs that may be said to be true or false. […] Truth, so understood, is a semantic property. To say of a statement that it is true is to say something about its relation to how things are in the world, and that relation is usually understood to be semantic in nature". While this is true of the concept "truth" in English (the chosen translation of *satya*) and might be the (formal) case for the Abhidharmic model, it does not necessarily hold for all senses of the original Sanskrit term. Siderits ("The Prapañca Paradox", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47.4, 2019: 646) further says that "a truth necessarily involves concepts—it conveys information, minimally at least by ruling out certain states of affairs. And states of affairs can only be specified through concepts". While this can be true of the conventional truth, this narrow conception obstructs the Madhyamaka approach to the non-conceptual ultimate truth.

nature of language and discourse, the validity of this Abhidharmic model is jeopardized.

The semantic interpretation is concerned with the role of emptiness in the Mādhyamikas' invalidation of the Abhidharmic ultimate, but a corollary concern is how the first semantic tier of the conventional truth is preserved. Insofar as the semantic interpretation denies the ultimate, it has been accused of succumbing to metaphysical nihilism.[80] Ferraro's criticism posits similarities between the semantic interpretation of emptiness denying the ultimate truth and a metaphysical nihilist interpretation of the ultimate.[81] Ferraro's model is not an appropriate alternative to the semantic interpretation but a rehashing of the attempt to sneak foundationalist metaphysics in through the backdoor.[82] While I agree with Siderits & Garfield's refutation of Ferraro, that their interpretation runs nihilistic is not my criticism thereof.[83]

I differentiate my interpretation from the semantic insofar as the latter defers to the Abhidharmic model of the ultimate truth as consisting of ultimate statements in epistemological (as the means of

[80] Siderits & Garfield (2013: 661) disagree: "the metaphysical nihilist holds it to be ultimately true that nothing exists, whereas on the semantic interpretation Madhyamaka denies that there is such a thing as ultimate truth, and so denies that this or any other statement is ultimately true. The metaphysical nihilist is doing metaphysics, whereas the anti-realist Mādhyamika wants us to stop trying to do metaphysics". Siderits further says that metaphysical nihilism presupposes metaphysical realism insofar as "there is a fixed number of objects with natures that are independent of our conceptual resources: there are exactly zero such objects; and their nature (to be non-existent) clearly cannot depend on facts about our minds, given that our minds are likewise held not to exist" (2016: 42).

[81] Giuseppe Ferraro ("A Criticism of M. Siderits and J.L. Garfield's 'Semantic Interpretation' of Nāgārjuna's Theory of Two Truths", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 41.2, 2013: 213-5). Accordingly, he says (2013: 214) that "Garfield and Siderits, just as the nihilist interpreters, claim that things exist only conventionally or conceptually; they affirm, just as the nihilist interpreters, that from the ultimate point of view, *dharmas* do not exist; and, just as they, Garfield and Siderits declare that there is no other reality that transcends the *dharmas*". I object to Ferraro's conclusion that, if the only kind of existence is conventional, this results in metaphysical nihilism. As a dependent designation, the predicate "existence" is a conceptual artifact inconceivable and inapplicable outside the ordinary mode of conceptual cognitive experience. As Nāgārjuna says at ŚS 1, it is not a predicate applicable to the ultimate. I have covered arguments against any nihilistic interpretation of the Madhyamaka in chapters 2 (§§2.2.2, 2.2.4) and 4 (§4.2) arguing for the valid cognition of *conventional existence*. If there is conventional existence (irrespective of any ultimate existence), the Madhyamaka cannot be metaphysical nihilists.

[82] Ferraro (2013: 214) objects to any claim that "it is possible to conceive of a conventional/conceptual/illusory existence without recognizing any reality upon which convention might be built. The world would thus be a hallucination that arises from nothing, that is, from the absence of any objective or subjective foundation from which (or in which) this hallucination might be produced. […] Without a *noumenon*, the phenomenon becomes *reality*".

[83] Siderits (2007: 203) has responded to an objection like Ferraro's via the instrumental value of paper money without the backing of the gold standard. He says "The value of the currency derives from the convention of treating it as a medium of exchange. It derives from its role in a set of human practices". I would say the same for the old style of currency: gold (and other precious metals) derives its instrumental value by either being a medium of exchange or a symbol of social status, neither of which suggest an inherent value. As such, the conceptual frameworks used in the articulation of cognitive experience likewise derive their instrumental value in the same way as constituting the medium of discourse, none of which requires that these concepts reflect, represent, or correspond to "real" entities with inherent existence. All that is required for commerce or discourse to function is the shared belief in the validity of the medium and, therefrom, a mutual understanding. This is rather like another avenue of addressing the objection to groundlessness I discussed in chapter 2 (§§2.2.4).

knowledge validating such statements) and metaphysical (as the referential content of such statements) contexts *in the lack*, from which they deny the ultimate truth. This is not an appropriate model for the Madhyamaka except as an object of criticism. I recognize the difficulty in that, although "*satya*" appears in *paramārtha-satya* ("the ultimate *truth*") and, although *satya* has both epistemological and metaphysical connotations as the "true/real" specifically lacking in its ultimate context, the specific kind of "truth" required by an apophatic ultimate can hold neither epistemological nor metaphysical commitments. It was specifically explained above to be positionless (§§5.1.4-5) in that respect but also demonstrated to require a specific cognitive reading (§5.1) thereof. Consequently, a different conception of "truth" is required as a radically different mode of cognitive experience; the ultimate's apophatic presentation offers the path of least resistance thereto.[84] Insofar as their dictum actually claims that "the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth", the ultimate truth for them would consist strictly in the intellectual understanding of this lack; this claim only pays lip service to the Madhyamaka ultimate yet is nonetheless tantamount to its denial.[85] This is an insufficient account of Madhyamaka ultimate cognition; while its presentation might insist on such a lack, its realization must go beyond the negation in effectuating a profound cognitive shift by means of the call for the cessation of conceptualization.

The semantic interpretation's greatest shortcoming is its inability to recognize this feature of the Madhyamaka. Its over-reliance on the Abhidharmic model is evident in how its proponents discuss the ultimate truth: "A statement is said to be ultimately true if and only if it corresponds with reality, and neither asserts nor presupposes the existence of any conceptual fictions [(as in the conventional truth being comprised of such conceptual fictions, i.e., fabrications, dependent designations)]".[86] Westerhoff

[84] As D'Amato (2008: 29) concludes his investigation, apophasis "implies a conception of philosophy as *praxis* more than *theory*, as more concerned with the cultivation of spiritual realization rather than the statement of theoretical truths". Where this leads to an impasse regarding "truth", this impasse "may in itself serve as a clue to the nature of our entrapment with the net of views, and a hint that the ultimate goal entails moving beyond all views. In these terms, philosophy is ultimately a form of therapy, and when the therapy has done its work, it should be left behind, like a raft" (2008: 29). This cuts to the heart of the two truths distinction itself. This relation (and the raft metaphor) is explored in chapter 7.
[85] I revisit this idea in chapter 6 (§§6.2.2).
[86] Siderits 2016: 41.

clarifies such a statement as referring to "how things really are, independent of our interests and conceptual resources employed in describing it".[87] This is the Ābhidharmikas' ultimate reality, the object of their ultimate truth. When following this model, because the Mādhyamikas reject this ultimate reality requiring *svabhāvic* existence, any ultimate semantic property referring thereto is equally invalidated: in denying the ultimate existence to which ultimately true statements refer, there equally follows a denial of the ultimate truth so conceived. There can be thus no ultimate statements as in the Abhidharmic model. Must this conclude with the denial of the ultimate truth? To avoid this pitfall and better accord the apophatic ultimate, I do not differentiate the *satya*s of the two truths semantically (as in two-tier semantics) but formally and cognitively via a conceptual–non-conceptual cognitive distinction.

The semantic interpretation employs two argumentative branches towards its denial of the ultimate, one metaphysical and the other epistemological. While it, rightly so, finds both lacking in the ultimate, I still do not agree we must conclude therefrom that there is no ultimate truth. Their argument boils down to twin premises: i) if there are no ultimately existent objects to which ultimately true statements refer, and ii) if there are no ultimately valid epistemic instruments through which ultimately true statements are validated, then the possibility of ultimately true statements is null. If we can't do ultimate metaphysics, we also can't do ultimate epistemology; without either, there can be no ultimate truth *in that context*. This argument is solid. Their arguments look strikingly similar to those I employ in chapter 4 in demonstrating the *conventional* nature of the Madhyamaka critiques leading to epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism. Proponents of the semantic interpretation are usually also proponents of epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism at the level of the conventional truth, for which reason I cited the likes of Siderits, Garfield, and Westerhoff in defence thereof. Because of this similarity, I revisit the arguments only briefly, focusing on how they move therefrom to the denial of the ultimate. While I accept the soundness of their arguments' premises, I

[87] Westerhoff 2009a: 220.

object that they do not support that specific conclusion but another, that the ultimate truth has no propositional or conceptual content (and hence takes no propositional or conceptual form). Per the apophatic strategy, the ultimate itself need not be denied. That is only the case in the Abhidharmic model.

Firstly, the metaphysical branch: although the semantic interpretation lives in the shadow of Abhidharmic two-tier semantics, on the basis of the Mādhyamikas' denial of Abhidharmic ultimate metaphysics it rejects the possibility of ultimate semantics. Against any metaphysical reading of emptiness and the ultimate truth,[88] its interpretation hinges on emptiness' metaphysically anti-realist consequences, holding that "the point of emptiness is to undermine the very idea of an ultimate reality with its ultimate nature, and along with this idea the notion that there might be statements that correspond to such an ultimate nature".[89] The denial of the semantic property of the ultimate truth is a consequence derived from universal emptiness: "to say that all things are empty is, on the semantic interpretation, to say that no statement can be ultimately true. Given that *dharma*s must be things with intrinsic natures, if nothing can bear an intrinsic nature, then there is nothing for ultimately true statements to be about; hence the notion of the ultimate truth is incoherent".[90] In other words, because emptiness denies that there are mind- and convention-independent substances to which an ultimately true statement (on the Abhidharmic model) could refer, the ultimate truth conceived on that same model therefore has no metaphysical content whatsoever. Because there is nothing to which such ultimate statements could refer, there are no such ultimate statements. From this lack of propositional content, the ultimate truth is denied.[91]

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[88] Siderits (2016: 40) defines as metaphysical "any interpretation that takes the doctrine to be intended to characterize the nature of reality". This comprises both the Abhidharmic ultimate from the *svabhāva* doctrine (see chapter 4, §4.2) but also a metaphysical interpretation of emptiness in a Madhyamaka context. The latter maintains that, insofar as emptiness expresses the ultimate truth, emptiness is the true nature of reality: phenomena are empty because emptiness characterizes or instantiates their true, essential nature. Emptiness is thus a predicate of phenomena indicating their true and final mode of reality in itself. This yields two incommensurable approaches: the nihilistic interpretation wherein all is lost to some nebulous form of empty non-existence, and the ineffable, mystical, absolutist interpretation in which emptiness becomes reified noumenally. These approaches are both metaphysical insofar as, by making metaphysical presuppositions, they propound an interpretation in which the ultimate comprises a theory of the way things really exist independently of cognition and perception.

[89] Siderits & Garfield 2013: 657.

[90] Siderits 2016: 42.

[91] Siderits (2011: 171) argues as follows: "Absent things with intrinsic natures, there can be nothing that is ultimately real, and the ultimate truth is supposed to state the nature of mind-independent reality. There being nothing that is ultimately real, the ultimate truth is without a subject matter. So the notion is incoherent. The teaching of emptiness gets called "ultimate

Because any semantic interpretation also concerns the relation of truth and language, to say that all phenomena are empty is to say that no statement can be ultimately true because all statements themselves are empty; they are products of dependence relations (in particular, dependent designation).[92] Anything subject to dependence relations is precluded from reaching the status of the Abhidharmic ultimate. I have not seen the proponents of the semantic interpretation make that specific argument but there is no reason for them to disagree with it.[93] As I have argued in chapters 1 and 2, the conventional nature of language and discourse, which includes all propositions and their contents, therefore secures the non-ultimate, conventional status of all linguistic and discursive products, barring them from the ultimate. Crucially, this means that the rejection of the Abhidharmic ultimate is a dialectical matter reserved for the Mādhyamikas' conventional truth (especially because any refutation is a product of language, discourse, and rigorous argumentation and therefore subject to and generated by dependence relations).

Secondly, the semantic interpretation's epistemic argument follows the metaphysical insofar as there cannot be any ultimate metaphysical objects as ultimate epistemic objects, thus conveying the non-ultimate (i.e., conventional) nature of epistemology. As seen in chapter 4 (§4.1), this requires emptiness' application to both the epistemic instruments (*pramāṇa*) and objects (*prameya*) as the mechanical components of epistemology. Because there are no non-empty epistemic instruments or objects (as seen, because of their existential and conceptual interdependence and mutual establishment, i.e., their emptiness), there can be no ultimate (non-conventional, non-empty) forms of knowledge. This means that the epistemic instruments and their objects are only ever capable of constituting the conventional truth; thus, there can be no ultimately true statements from a lack of ultimate validation.[94]

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truth" only because, according to Madhyamaka, it represents the final realization on the path to the cessation of suffering". While the argument is sound, the conclusion "the notion is incoherent" does not obtain since, as I have argued, a propositional form of the ultimate truth is not the Madhyamaka design.

[92] See the discussion in chapter 2 (§§2.2) of the conventional nature of language and discourse via dependent designation.

[93] Considering dependent designation indirectly by way of the emptiness of emptiness, Siderits (2016: 42) considers this only in the context of denying the ultimate truth: "If there is no ultimate truth, then apparently the claim that all things are empty can only be conventionally true. Indeed, the Madhyamaka doctrine that emptiness is itself empty is actually equivalent to the claim that the only sort of truth there can be is conventional truth. (If emptiness is itself a mere conceptual fiction, then the statement that something is empty can at best be conventionally true.)".

[94] Siderits (*Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*, Ashgate, 2003: 139-40) provides the following argument: "If all things

As the semantic interpretation argues, it follows from denying any conceptual, propositional content to the ultimate that the conventional truth as propositional is the only form of truth of *that* kind, the only kind of truth conceptually and intellectually knowable. This is commensurate with restricting any linguistic and conceptual form of truth to the conventional truth, whose form is then contrasted with the ultimate. However, must it follow that there is only conventional truth and no ultimate truth? This is the case only insofar as we strictly hold to a propositional form of truth (appropriate for the conventional truth but not the ultimate). The propositional form of truth is admissible when "truth" is *only* considered the fruit of the marriage of epistemic instrument and object producing a statement reflecting such a state of affairs (per Siderits & Garfield's definition of the predicate "true" in fn. 79 above). Yet it is not obvious that this reflects well *satya*'s appearance on *both* sides of the two truths or how the Madhyamaka apophatically characterize ultimate cognition. Instead, understanding *satya* as propositionally knowable only captures what is the conventional understanding of truth. If this were the only viable conception thereof, what need would there be for *two* truths?[95]

In consequence of these arguments, the semantic interpretation holds that, because there is no ready-to-hand formula deriving the ultimate truth, it simply is not. I object that this is a much narrower conception of "truth" than the Mādhyamikas afford to their ultimate. While Siderits' conditional "if nothing can bear an intrinsic nature, then there is nothing for ultimately true statements to be about" obtains since there are neither epistemological nor metaphysical objects to which ultimately true statements could refer, the conclusion "there is no ultimate truth" does not follow because the Madhyamaka do not subscribe to the Abhidharmic model of the two truths (the ultimate in particular). This rejection does not directly concern the Madhyamaka's own apophatic conception of the ultimate. It

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are indeed empty, then anything that might be considered a means of knowledge must be empty, that is, lacking in intrinsic nature. Hence anything that might be considered a means of knowledge must lack whatever intrinsic nature is distinctive of a means of knowledge. Hence ultimately there are no means of knowledge. By the same token, anything that might be considered the proper object of a means of knowledge must likewise lack the intrinsic nature distinctive of the object of a means of knowledge, so that ultimately there can be no objects of knowledge".

[95] Siderits has an answer to this question (i.e., the soteriological efficacy of emptiness) that I take up in chapter 6 (§§6.2.2).

instead follows that there is *no propositional form of ultimate truth*, no dualistic, conceptual content therein, which is not the same as there being no ultimate truth. The ultimate's non-propositional form follows from the conventional nature of language and discourse (i.e., the *inapplicability* of the propositional form of the conventional truth to the ultimate, with conceptuality, language, and discourse restricted to the conventional level), and it follows from defining the ultimate apophatically in contradistinction with the conventional as conceptual, linguistic, fabricated, ordinary cognitive experience phrased propositionally. Hence, if approached via these formal and cognitive distinctions, the ultimate truth must instead correlate with non-conceptual, non-linguistic, unfabricated, non-conventional, non-propositional form of *extra*-ordinary cognition.

The most glaring problem is that there being only conventional truth and not ultimate contradicts the Mādhyamikas' unanimous assertion of *two truths*. Nonetheless concluding, despite these claims, that there is no ultimate truth fails to grasp the entire picture. As seen, the Mādhyamikas do not define their ultimate with reference to the lack of the Abhidharmic definition thereof such that, the latter not obtaining, the former is denied; rather, they frame their ultimate apophatically as a distinct form of cognitive experience marked by the cessation of conceptualization and bliss/welfare. In that case, the unpalatability of the Mādhyamikas' apophatic approach to the non-conceptual, non-dual ultimate is not grounds for its rejection as "incoherent". I can only speculate the reasons for this dismissal. For instance, underlying its rejection as incoherent could, firstly, be a bias for an analytic rationalism not necessarily shared by Indian philosophy; however, that is not to promote interpreting the ultimate truth as strictly-speaking "irrational".[96] Secondly, the rejection of the non-conceptual ultimate betrays an attachment to

[96] This depends on how "rationalism" is defined and what kind of connotations are associated with a rationalism–irrationalism dichotomy. If rationality is restricted to cogent, conceptual argumentation, then surely the Madhyamaka ultimate has none of that. Does it follow then that the ultimate truth is "irrational"? Non-duality requires eschewing entirely the rational–irrational dichotomy, exactly as Candrakīrti said of noble silence (§§5.1.5): "How could there be the possibility of any conceptualization therein, wherein there could be reasoning or unreasoning?"; see PSP 57, p. 254 above. According to Huntington (1989: 35), "[Logic] is in itself quite incapable of resolving the confusion which is generated by the attempt to apply conventional, dichotomized thinking to a task for which it is totally unsuited. As the crystallized essence of conceptualization, logic tends by its nature to engender the clinging and antipathy associated with reified thought. The Mādhyamika philosopher must not get caught up in and obsessed with the effort to manipulate syllogistic reasoning or any other conventional device. […] Conventional truth is not to be reconciled with the soteriological truth of the highest meaning [(= the ultimate truth)] by

words and concepts and the "truth" as strictly consisting thereof insofar as, when none can be found, it retreats and clings to the security of the knowable, graspable nature of the conventional truth and the familiar type of cognitive experience it affords, blindly elevating it as the only kind of truth.

The evidence indicates neither the ultimate's denial nor its incoherence, only the constraints of its articulation and the difficulty of its attainment, for which reasons a strict apophatic regimen is implemented: there is no access to ultimate cognition by conventional means because there is intended the overcoming of that ordinary mode of conventional, conceptual cognition dualistically carving the world into fabricated conceptual identities of this and that. Seeing *tattva* (by "*not* seeing" it) is liberation from this cognitive default; for that reason, the ultimate requires cognition free from conceptualization.

§5.3 PHILOSOPHY AT THE LIMITS: NON-IMPLICATIVE NEGATION

In this final section, I present the Madhyamaka ultimate as necessarily requiring the confrontation of the limits of conceptualization insofar as the non-conceptual, non-dual form of ultimate cognition cannot be found within such limits. This follows the restriction of conceptualization to the conventional level and its ultimate inapplicability. In the present context, this specifically requires invalidating the reification of the ultimate as something noumenal existing beyond this limit. Taking a cognitive approach to the ultimate (i.e., that the ultimate truth correlates with a cognitive mode distinct from ordinary cognition) accomplishes this well. My argument is that philosophy at its limits cannot *successfully articulate* the ultimate, and this is a feature, not a bug, of the two truths. That the ultimate is never successfully articulated means that the wisdom of its realization lies not in apophasis itself but in its wake. Apophasis, functioning as a non-implicative negation, exhausts conceptuality, with such exhaustion acting as the gateway to non-dual cognition.[97] The apophatic strategy says more about the limitations of conceptual

grounding bits of language (*prajñāpti*s) in an objective rationalist methodology". Further, "An alternative form of life is not necessarily a function of believing or expecting different things about the world in which we live. Liberation from old and deeply engrained patterns of thinking and perceiving need be neither a supernatural nor a miraculous phenomenon, but rather a very mundane affair. Dreams of magic and talk of mystical intuition are all too often merely alternative, slightly more pleasant ways of masking the old destructive patterns of clinging and manipulation" (1989: 116-7).

[97] A non-implicative negation (*prasajya-pratiṣedha*) is a negation that automatically discounts the affirmation of the other extreme on a dualistic spectrum (i.e., if X is negated, ¬X is not therefore affirmed; insofar as ¬X is negated, X is not therefore

cognition (in reference to its conventional, *non*-ultimate nature) than anything about the ultimate *per se*. This suits the Mādhyamikas' purpose perfectly regarding the cessation of conceptualization.

There is good reason to take the unbridged formal chasm between the two truths for "philosophy at the limits" insofar as the ultimate, as a distinct mode of cognition from ordinary, conceptual cognition, confronts conceptualization's limits at the precipice of the conventional truth.[98] However, unlike Garfield & Priest's foray into dialetheism, I do not hold that philosophy at the limits devolves into paradox;[99] we are not forced to accept contradictory statements and somehow think we have arrived at the truth therethrough. While *apparent* contradictions litter Madhyamaka texts (such as phenomena being both arisen and unarisen or the call for the cessation of conceptualization through the very medium thereof), these can be explained away with appropriate contextualization.

Garfield & Priest name two paradoxes: i) the "paradox of expressibility" and ii) the "paradox of ontology". For i), "linguistic expression and conceptualization can express only conventional truths; the ultimate truth is that which is inexpressible and that which transcends these limits. So it cannot be expressed or characterized. But we have just done so".[100] For ii) "all phenomena, Nāgārjuna argues, are empty and so ultimately have no nature. But emptiness is, therefore, the ultimate nature of things. So they both have and lack an ultimate nature".[101] Such paradoxes are related when together suggesting that

affirmed. It consists entirely of this denial). See chapter 3 (§§3.4.2) and the shopkeeper example in fn. 114 below.

[98] It is necessary to address the limits of conceptualization now to take up a distinct, non-conceptual mode of cognition in chapter 6. I take up this formal chasm of the two truths in chapter 7 regarding the relation of the two truths to each other.

[99] Garfield & Priest 2002: 88-9; see also "dialetheism" in Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, Cambridge University Press, 1995: 4-6. While Siderits is not a dialetheist, he discusses what he calls "the *prapañca* paradox" "from the claim that the cessation of suffering is attained through stopping all *prapañca*. Suppose we take *prapañca* to mean conceptualisation, and we take the attainment of nirvāṇa to invoke coming to see the truth about the world and ourselves. In that case it would have to be true that all conceptualisation falsifies. What, then, of the statement, "All conceptualisation falsifies" (or *P* for short)? Since P, like any other statement, employs concepts, if it is true then it must be false" (2019: 645-6). I take up the soteriological efficacy of the call for the cessation of conceptualization in chapter 6.

[100] Garfield & Priest 2002: 103.

[101] Garfield & Priest 2002: 103. Garfield & Priest, taking a dialetheist position, do not want to dissolve the paradoxes but affirm them in the context of the denial of the ultimate truth (as in the semantic interpretation). I.e., in the first sense, "There is […] no escape. Nagarjuna's view is contradictory, clearly a paradox of expressibility. Nagarjuna succeeds in saying the unsayable, just as much as the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*. We can think (and characterize) reality only subject to language, which is conventional" (2002: 99; emphasis added); in the second sense, "Nagarjuna's enterprise is one of fundamental ontology, and his conclusion is that fundamental ontology is impossible. But that is a fundamentally ontological conclusion—and that is the paradox. There is no way that things are ultimately" (2002: 101).

the ultimate truth *has* a 'nature' both inexpressible and empty. Regardless of whether it is Garfield & Priest's intention, this framing implies a reification of *something* lying paradoxically and ineffably between contradictory statements. Taken to its extreme, it culminates in a noumenal, non-linguistic reality accessible only to ultimate cognition. This is problematic if the apophatic strategy of the ultimate non-affirmingly presents only a lack, especially a lack of any such 'nature' affirmatively belonging to it.

These apparent contradictions can be dissolved.[102] The solution is the fact that in apophasis the ultimate is never *successfully articulated*. On this point, there is agreement with Stepien's criticism of the semantic interpretation of emptiness. According to Stepien,

> I do not consider the conceptual difficulty (even impossibility) of conceiving what such wholescale abandonment of views would consist of to constitute an argument against my reading Nāgārjuna as espousing it. On the contrary, our very inability to conceive this I see as yet further evidence in favor of my interpretation, for were we able to conceptualize *nirvāṇa* (taken here precisely as the nonconceptualizable), it would no longer lie beyond the very mental bonds its attainment is explicitly meant to sever".[103]

This failure of articulation, which is a consequence of restricting conceptuality to the conventional level, is critical to the realization of the ultimate via the exhaustion of conceptuality. "Exhaustion" is used in the senses of "depletion" and "extinguishment" without remainder. Conceptuality is exhausted in non-affirming, tetralemmic negation when even the negation itself is necessarily negated. Consequently, no conceptual foothold whatsoever is left, and this acts as the gateway to non-dual cognition.

Both paradoxes dissolve in the same way by taking non-implicative negation seriously.[104] The rejection of the ultimate's expressibility should not force the reification of anything that *is* characteristically inexpressible, especially in the sense of a reified underlying noumenal reality or a

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[102] Tillemans (2013: 417) takes a similar position regarding the dissolution of paradox that he calls a "weak dialethism" of "a non-adjunctive variety", wherein "p is asserted somewhere for one set of reasons (call them "convention"), and $\neg p$ is asserted somewhere else for another set (call them "ultimate")". Insofar as the adjunction of p & $\neg p$ is blocked, this *parameterization* of seemingly contradictory claims is necessary given the two truths distinction. In chapter 2 (§§2.2.3), I argued for such a parameterization in the context of VV 29, but this parameterization concerned not a conventional vs. ultimate parameterization but of the opponents' standard vs. the Mādhyamikas' non-standard semantics (strictly at the conventional level).

[103] Stepien 2019: 558.

[104] Following fn. 102 above, non-adjunctive dialetheism could better "preserve the irenic positionless Nāgārjunian standpoint. […] Because one negates (for various reasons) precisely what one has asserted (for other reasons), each statement undermines the other—one will not fully believe either, or, better, one will not believe either to capture how things really are" (Tillemans 2013: 421). Non-implicative negation, as mentioned above, is critical to the positionless middle way.

subjacent ground, implying the success of the predication.[105] Rather, there is strictly a denial, without further claim, of expressibility. Likewise, the 'claim' to emptiness is the very same non-implicative negation: emptiness must deny any ultimate nature (or ultimate existence in the Abhidharmic sense) without itself becoming an alternative ultimate nature.[106] This is the warning voiced at MMK 13:8 about turning emptiness into any kind of view (especially ultimate, metaphysical) and is the reason for the emptiness of emptiness.[107] Candrakīrti's commentary invokes a poignant analogy of emptiness (and, more broadly, negation) as a *purgative* or *emetic* that, having purged the stomach, must itself also be expelled.[108] This is non-implicative negation. The mechanics of this purge are explained by addressing the above two paradoxes, the "paradox of expressibility" in the context of exhausting conceptuality (§§5.3.1) and the "paradox of ontology" in the reification of emptiness and the ultimate (§§5.3.2).

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[105] Ruegg (1977: 19) comments that it is "necessary not to confound ultimate reality (*paramārtha*), which may be described as both inexpressible (*anabhilāpya*), and even as undeterminable (cf. Tib. *ma nges pa*), with an entity conceived of and defined as indescribable, undecidable or indeterminate which, instead of being free of all four positions of the *catuṣkoṭi* [(tetralemma)], would simply correspond to the (unnegated) fourth *koṭi* [of being neither X nor non-X]". That is, *tattva* is only realizable from the total negation of all four lemmas (e.g., the tetralemma of emptiness at MMK 22:11; see below).

[106] Though Garfield & Priest frame emptiness as the ultimate nature (as in paradox ii) and the following: "To be *is* to be empty. That is what it is to be. It is no accidental property; it is something's nature—though, being empty, it has no nature" (2002: 102)), they are also aware of this fact, as in: "Central to Nāgārjuna's understanding of emptiness as immanent in the conventional world is his doctrine of the emptiness of emptiness. That, we have seen, is what prevents the two truths from collapsing into an appearance/reality or phenomenon/noumenon distinction. But it is also what generates the contradictions characteristic of philosophy at the limits" (2002: 102). This problem arises from trying to discuss a "nature" of the ultimate truth in any way other than apophatically.

[107] MMK 13:8: "Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is taught by the conquerors as the antidote to all views (*sarva-dṛṣṭīnām ... niḥsaraṇam*). But those who take emptiness to be a view (*dṛṣṭiḥ*) have been called incurable (*asādhyān*)"; *śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭīnāṃ proktā niḥsaraṇaṃ jinaiḥ | yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatā dṛṣṭistānasādhyān babhāṣire ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 108). This is confirmed in Buddhapālita's commentary to MMK 13:8 (2021: 179): "Since they [(= the *jina*s, the "victors")] proclaim that every sea-monster of false views should be removed, it is untenable that [emptiness] which removes these sea-monsters of false views is itself a thing". Similarly, Candrakīrti comments on the same: "[PSP 247:] The remedy (*niḥsaraṇam*) [bringing] the cessation (*apravṛttiḥ*) of the strong attachment to all grasping (*sarva-graha-abhiniveśānām*) to the fabrication of heresies [(i.e., wrong views)] in every way (*sarveṣām eva dṛṣṭikṛtānām*) is emptiness (*śūnyatā*). However, the mere cessation (*nivṛttimātram*) of the fabrication of views is not [itself] existent (*na … bhāvaḥ*). With those with strong attachment to "existence" (*ye … bhāva-abhiniveśinaḥ*), even in the case of emptiness, we can have no dialogue (*avācakāḥ vayam*). How could there be, on account of our teaching (*upadeśāt*) that liberation will arise (*mokṣaḥ bhaviṣyati*) through the complete exhaustion of fabrication (*sakala-kalpanā-vyāvṛttyā*)?"; *iha sarveṣāmeva dṛṣṭikṛtānāṃ sarvagrahābhiniveśānāṃ yaniḥsaraṇam-apravṛttiḥ sā śūnyatā | na ca dṛṣṭikṛtānāṃ nivṛttimātraṃ bhāvaḥ | ye tu tasyāmapi śūnyatāyāṃ bhāvābhiniveśinaḥ, tān prati avācakā vayamiti kuto 'smadupadeśāt sakalakalpanāvyāvṛttyā mokṣo bhaviṣyati? |* (Vaidya 1960b: 108). On the emptiness of emptiness, see chapter 2 (§§2.2.2, pp. 102-4 above).

[108] Candrakīrti (PSP 247-9) cites an unnamed *sūtra* telling this parable. Sprung (1979: 150) notes that it is from the *Ratnakūta Sūtra* but Siderits & Katsura (2013: 145-6) note it is from §65 of the *Kāśyapaparivarta Sūtra*. They also note that the same metaphor was used by the Pyrrhonian skeptics. This metaphor will bear fruit in chapter 7 (§§7.2.2)'s discussion of the raft.

5.3.1 THE EXHAUSTION OF CONCEPTUALITY

I take emptiness as exemplary of a concept that must be exhausted. As mentioned, emptiness, as a core Madhyamaka concept, has both conventional and ultimate implications. When it synonymizes dependent origination (since phenomena are empty because they are dependently originated and vice versa), phenomenal emptiness is determined at the conventional level. Emptiness in that conventional context (by way of dependence relations) is the means to the valid cognition of the objects of ordinary experience *as empty*. There is an argument that, from the conventional nature of the *concept* of "emptiness" (as a dependent designation implying its own emptiness), emptiness is not itself the ultimate but rather, as a conventional concept, functions as the "gateway to liberation". It is, according to MĀB 6:208, one of three such gateways (*rnam par thar pa'i sgo gsum*, the other two being "signlessness" (*animitta*; *mtsham ma med pa*) and "aimlessness" (*apraṇihita*; *smon pa med pa*)).[109] The conventional status of "emptiness" weaves the same thread as the Mahāyāna *sūtra* on the two truths (whereby, if the ultimate were to become a verbal, physical, or mental object, it would be the conventional truth (pp. 241-2 above)) and Candrakīrti's discussion of the *concept* of "*nirvāṇa*" (YṢV 6, p. 249 above). This "gateway" is functionally analogous to the *Laṅkāvatāra*'s "finger of words" that points at the moon/liberation but is not it (pp. 240-1 above).

Emptiness being a "gateway" reveals its function in the realization of the ultimate. As in analysis finding nothing, coming up *empty*, to that which emptiness denies on the ultimate level (as in the rejection of the Abhidharmic conception of ultimate reality) no counterpoint is advanced. It indicates there only a lack of ultimate, *svabhāvic* existence and replaces it with not-anything-else in the same semantic framework. Hence, emptiness in its ultimate context functions as a non-implicative negation from which

[109] See a partial translation of MĀB 6:208 above (p. 235, fn. 16 above). According to Khenpo Yönten Gyamtso, of the three gateways of liberation, emptiness is called the ground, signlessness the path, and aimlessness the fruit, thus suggesting the relation between the three ("Appendix 10", *Treasury of Precious Qualities*, 2010: 437-8). I discuss this relation further in chapter 6. Though Candrakīrti does not cite a *sūtra*, the teaching of the three doors to liberation is present in many Mahāyāna *sūtra*s such as *The Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-Five Thousand Lines* and *Sutra of the Questions of Brahma* (*brahmā-paripṛcchā-sūtra*). That is not to say that this is specifically a Mahāyāna teaching, and there may be reason to investigate its origins in the Pāli Canon. That is, however, outside the present scope.

no ultimate claim is made.[110] Not only is emptiness in this context a non-implicative negation, but it features in an exhaustive tetralemmic negation, the most profound type of non-implicative negation:

> [MMK 22:11:] "Empty" (*śūnyam iti*) is not to be said, nor should "non-empty" (*aśūnyam*), "both [empty and non-empty]" (*ubhayam*), and "neither [empty nor non-empty)" (*na ubhayam*). However, [emptiness] is explained only for the sake of instruction (*prajñapti-artham*).[111]

This tetralemma, when applied to the ultimate (not the conventional, since conventionally phenomena *are* empty), is not paradoxical insofar as it 'paradoxically' expresses what cannot be expressed, for it does not in any way *successfully* express anything. None of the negated limbs and not even the totality of negations ever successfully articulate the ultimate. Rather than successfully expressing what cannot be expressed, there is the insistence on the failure thereof. Consequently, conceptuality concerning emptiness is exhausted. The wisdom of realization lies not in the negation itself but in its wake. It is a pedagogic necessity that the only foothold to this ultimate cognition comes from the non-implicative negation of *all* possible modes of its characterization. Conceptuality is therethrough exhausted and the ultimate never successfully articulated; this is not paradoxical but intentional to exhaust any attempt to conceptualize it. In its ultimate, tetralemmic context, emptiness is thus conducive to the cessation of conceptualization via its *own* exhaustive non-implicative negation. The very concept of "emptiness" is left by the conventional wayside in the wake of its own non-affirming negation of itself, meaning that,

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[110] This is the position of Mipham. It is a subtle distinction, but he contends that "The existence of inherent nature [(*svabhāva*)] is *negated*, a mere absence of inherent nature is not being *established*" (Karma Phuntsho, *Mipham's Dialectics and the Debates on Emptiness*, Routledge Curzon, 2005: 125—*emphasis added*). Accordingly, according to Phuntsho, Mipham differentiates his position from *Geluk pa*s like Tsong Khapa who affirm "the absence of hypostatic existence as the final ultimate" (2005: 124). Rather, Mipham holds that "ultimate Emptiness cannot be affirmed, delineated or discerned in the normal sense of the word. Words such as establish, affirm, discern are used only for the sake of convenience. […] Although the terms such as prove, establish or delineated are used, there is nothing that can be proved, affirmed or delineated to be the ultimate Emptiness" (2005: 125).

[111] MMK 22:11: *śūnyamiti na vaktavyamaśūnyamiti vā bhavet | ubhayaṃ nobhayaṃ ceti prajñaptyarthaṃ tu kathyate ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 116). Candrakīrti comments (PSP 444): "Without words (*anukte*) it is not possible (*na samarthaḥ*) to acquire an understanding (*pratipattā pratipattum*) of the nature [of phenomena] as they stand (*yathāvat avasthitam svabhāvam*). Having relied on the conventional truth (*vyavahārasatye eva sthitvā*) as a matter of [pedagogical] imputation (*āropataḥ*) for the sake of convention (*vyavahāra-artham*), in consideration of the trainees (*vineyajana-anurodhena*) we [variously] say "empty" (*śūnyam*), "non-empty" (*aśūnyam*), "both empty-and-non-empty" (*śūnya-aśūnyam*), and "neither empty nor non-empty" (*na eva śūnyam na aśūnyam*)"; […] *anukte yathāvadavasthitaṃ svabhāvaṃ pratipattā pratipattuṃ na samartha ityato vayamapi āropato vyavahārasatye eva sthitvā vyavahārārthaṃ vineyajanānurodhena śūnyamityapi brūmaḥ, aśūnyamityapi, śūnyāśūnyam-ityapi, naiva śūnyaṃ nāśūnyamityapi brūmaḥ |* (Vaidya 1960b: 192-3).

in the attainment of non-dual ultimate cognition, it no longer applies.

5.3.2 THE REIFICATION OF EMPTINESS & THE ULTIMATE

In the context of reification, some interpretations of the ultimate have a distinctly noumenal quality that both the linguistic and semantic interpretations rightly reject.[112] This reading fails for the same reasons when taking seriously non-implicative negation, wherein no positive claims can be made about anything ultimate. In that vein, Murti makes a similar foundationalist objection as Ferraro concerning the negation of anything ultimate towards groundlessness.[113] Contra Garfield & Priest's second paradox regarding emptiness as the nature of reality and any absolutist reading of the ultimate (without conflating these two positions, because Garfield is a proponent of the semantic interpretation of emptiness denying the ultimate truth, incompatible with the latter) emptiness cannot *be* any underlying nature or existence if it only indicates the lack of such an underlying nature or existence. On the basis of its anti-metaphysical tendencies (in metaphysics' classical sense), the semantic interpretation of emptiness also rightly rejects any metaphysical reading of the ultimate implying the reification of *something* "ineffable" "absolutist",

[112] See "General Introduction" (pp. 5-6 above). Historically, this refers to the transcendental idealist phase of Madhyamaka interpretation, most clearly identified in Murti (1955: 244): "Paramārtha Satya or Absolute Truth is the knowledge of the real without any distortion (akṛtimam vastu-rūpam)".

[113] I.e., According to Murti (1955: 234-5), "Negation itself is significant because there is an underlying reality—the subjacent ground. If there were no transcendent ground, how could any view be condemned as false. A view is false, because it *falsifies the real*, makes the things appear other than what it is in itself. Falsity implies the real *that* is falsified"; see a similar argument on p. 140: "The awareness of the transcendental illusion is possible because of an ideal or norm to which thought tries, fruitlessly, to conform. Thought is subjective, false, in relation to the objectively real". This interpretation is problematic for several reasons insofar as this is not how the Mādhyamikas employ negation, never implying there is an "underlying reality" or a "subjacent ground". Huntington (1989: 27) disagrees with Murti, rejecting that negation implies this subjacent ground by referring to the tetralemma of MMK 18:8 (addressed in chapter 3, §§3.4.3, pp. 170-1 above) rejecting all logical permutations of the "real" (*tathya*; i.e., that all is real, unreal, both real and unreal, and neither real nor unreal). Huntington (1989: 204 n. 11) also notes that Murti is often inconsistent in his discussion of this "real", some examples of which include: "Śūnyatā (the dialectic) does not add anything to that which it applies nor is it a different thing" (1955: 162); "The Absolute is not one reality set against another, the empirical. The Absolute looked at through thought-forms (vikalpa) is phenomenon (saṁsṛāra or sāṁvṛta, literally covered). The latter, freed of the superimposed thought-forms (nirvikalpa, niṣprapañca), is the Absolute. The difference is epistemic (subjective), and not ontological" (1955: 141); "Nirvāṇa is not an ens (bhāva) or abhāva (non-ens), etc.; it is the *abandonment of such considerations of the real* (bhāvābhavaparāmarśakṣayo" (1955: 274). The glaring problem is that, notwithstanding these secondary points, Murti sometimes lapses into positive discussion of the ultimate as "the real" instead of taking apophasis seriously. My central argument in this section is that *taking apophasis seriously* precludes any reification of the ultimate, the key to which is the central role of non-implicative negation in apophasis. If that is the case, no positive claims can be made, and no reification can take place of the ultimate; it certainly cannot be called "underlying reality" or "the subjacent ground". Westerhoff (2009a: 9-10) also criticizes Murti's reification of the "Absolute": "To conceive of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka as a theory whereby an indescribable Absolute grounds the world of appearances means reading assumptions into it that Nāgārjuna does not share, thereby resulting in an unsatisfactory theory" (2009a: 10).

or "mystical" transcending the capacities of ordinary conceptual thought. This I agree is neither the Madhyamaka position nor the intention of apophatic, non-implicative negation.

Because existence and truth are necessarily inseparable inquiries, the ultimate would be susceptible to reification in the case where, if there were a propositional form of ultimate truth, then its content would have to refer to an ultimate existence in some sense, as in the Abhidharmic ultimate. The difference is, in the absolutist reading, we are explicitly told that, although it exists, we cannot know it. A similar position the semantic interpretation takes in the negative (hence, for them, there is no ultimate truth). While denying the ultimate truth *in toto* is one way to nullify this reifying tendency, I must clarify why the apophatic, cognitive reading of a non-dual, experiential ultimate truth does not imply any noumenal reality (as the 'object' of experience) *transcending* the limits of conceptuality by insisting on the anti-metaphysical, anti-reificationism required by taking apophasis and non-implicative negation seriously.[114]

Siderits rightly criticizes as incoherent a claim like "reality transcends the capacity of discursive thought" insofar as "this requires that there be such a thing as how the world is, independently of the concepts we use; what it claims is that the world is of such a nature as to always elude our concepts".[115] That is the position that Jones has recently taken with respect to *tattva*: "Despite what these commentators state, *tattva* is Nāgārjuna's designation of phenomenal reality as it truly is once we remove our projection of conceptualized entities onto it—it is what is experienced once the perception of *svabhāva*-based self-contained entities is ended. In short, there is something *real* there".[116] However, the Mādhyamikas do

[114] Candrakīrti (PSP 248) elaborates a remark in Buddhapālita's commentary ad MMK 13:8 (2021: 179) discussing the reification of what is a mere lack: he discusses the example of the shopkeeper who says to a patron that he has no wares to sell, while that patron then demands to be sold what the shopkeeper calls "no wares". Candrakīrti adds, "by what means is there any capacity to grasp any non-existent wares?" (*sa kena upāyena śakyaḥ paṇyābhāvaṃ grāhayitum*; Vaidya 1960b: 108). In the context of MMK 13:8 where Nāgārjuna deems incurable an opponent who reifies emptiness, Westerhoff (2016: 365) comments: "Similarly, when faced with a theory that says that there are no *x*s, [the opponent] will consider this as making a positive (an ultimately true) pronouncement of the real non-existence of *x*s. As such a substantialist reading can be given for any claim (as a request for a purchase can be based on whatever a shopkeeper says) there is literally nothing the Madhyamaka can say in order to convey his position to this opponent in a correct manner". This example demonstrates the difficulty encountered in the use of non-implicative negation in metaphysical anti-realism because the shopkeeper's denial of having any wares to sell does not imply that there is anything else for sale, including something called "no wares".

[115] Siderits 2016: 42. Avoiding such complications is one reason I reject translating *tattva* as "reality".

[116] Jones 2025: 839. Jones launches this interpretation in the face of critiquing any nihilistic interpretation of Nāgārjuna as denying "reality" (his preferred translation of *tattva* when "that-ness" is not used): "This gives Nāgārjuna a positive

not claim that "reality" transcends the capacity of discursive thought as a noumenal posit when it is said *tattva* is "unfabricated" (*nirvikalpa*) and so forth.[117] A crucial distinction separates Madhyamaka apophasis from the Christian sense of negative theology affirming indirectly some unknowable, unutterable, transcendental nature of God, the divine, reality, etc.[118] In the former, there is no such transcendent nature, only a lack and a negation; i.e., as a non-affirming negation, there is no affirmation of *something beyond* language that it fails to grasp. The appearance otherwise results from the difficulty in grasping the subtlety of non-affirming negation. This is precisely why the move from neither existence nor non-existence (or neither empty nor non-empty, or any other duality-candidate of the fourth lemma of a Nāgārjunian tetralemma) to positing any sort of "reality" is baldly incoherent, for both the letter and the spirit of non-duality have been violated.[119]

The purpose of Madhyamaka apophasis is not for the ultimate to refer to *something* that transcends any given concept (in the sense that it is greater than X, unmeasured by X, etc.); it is, instead, to dissolve completely any application of concepts *without remainder* in its mode of cognition. In apophasis, there is only the negative claim of the total inapplicability of language and conceptual thought to ultimate cognition. Its "object" is likewise only negatively indicated, staving off its reification. This method, intentionally, says more about concepts themselves, for the purpose of restricting their reach, than it does

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ontological foundation and thus eliminates any ultimate nihilism: there is reality, and the that-ness of things is that there are no self-existent things" (2025: 839). Jones' account, while discussing MMK 18:9, fails to derive any kind of apophatic methodology from the verse that would preclude any interpretation of *tattva* as offering a "positive ontological foundation".

[117] According to Westerhoff (2011: 203), the metaphysical realist assumption that "there is something 'which is there anyway', something that exists independent of human interests and concerns" is "incompatible with Candrakīrti's claim that it is utterly incoherent to envisage the existence of something beyond our conceptual abilities, whether this is an inexpressible noumenon or a mysterious something that makes sure some of our interactions are successful or not". Garfield (2002: 92) agrees the ultimate is not "a *Kantian* noumenal realm" if "ultimate reality is just as empty as conventional reality".

[118] On the etymology and Christian threads of apophatic discourse, see Edelglass 2019: 205-6.

[119] As Jones (2025: 839) concludes, wrongly, in my opinion: "When Nāgārjuna speaks of that-ness, he means phenomenal reality as it truly is independent of our ideas. He is not subverting all notions of reality but only the independent existence of entitles (*bhāvas* and *dharmas*). Thus, translation "*tattva*" as "reality" is appropriate. Entities may only be conventionally real or "illusory," since they are not "real" in the *svabhāva* sense, and thus he is not a realist who thinks our conceptions reflect real objects, but he is a realist in the broader sense of affirming that there is a reality independent of our conceptions of entities". I argued in chapter 4 for the Madhyamaka position of metaphysical anti-realism strictly at the conventional level, but I also argue in this chapter, alongside the semantic interpretation of emptiness in this specific context, against any metaphysical interpretation of the ultimate, the category to which Jones' must surely belong. While he rightfully wants *tattva*'s role given more prominence in Nāgārjunian scholarship, the fact that he does not discuss its apophatic mode of presentation or the links thereof to non-duality and its mode of cognition means that his analysis remains incomplete.

about the ultimate and its experiential realization of non-dual cognition.

Consider some of Garfield & Priest's examples of paradox outside the Madhyamaka tradition. E.g., insofar as Sextus Empiricus is said to claim that "it is impossible to assert anything about things beyond appearances, he would seem to be asserting just such a thing; and when he argues that no assertion is justified, this must apply to his own assertion as well", or as when Kant is said to claim that "it is impossible to know anything about, or apply any categories to, the noumenal realm, he would seem to be doing just what cannot be done".[120] Sextus & Kant do not appear to be trying to say anything beyond what they actually say (that is, these can be read as non-affirming negatives): Sextus is not suggesting there is anything beyond appearances and Kant is not (successfully) describing the noumenon. Both are indicating the inability to do just what Garfield & Priest suggest they are doing. How else could they do this but through negation? This in fact points to a limitation of conceptualization itself rather than to that which is 'beyond'. Garfield holds that Kant's own account is unclear and confused insofar as, despite his proscription, he still has much to say about noumena.[121] While I reserve judgment on this, that is the difficulty in trying to use language for a task it is not suited. Apophasis, while specifically designed to fail in its articulation of the ultimate, is the conscious effort to avoid this blunder as much as possible.

If conceptual application to the ultimate dissolves because of its conventional (non-ultimate) nature, there is not anything to transcend and nothing that transcends. All that talk is merely conventional. This distinction matters because it underscores that not even the negation accurately captures the issue (in opposition to negative theology). Recalling the Buddha's graded teaching (MMK 18:8),[122] apophatic negation of the ultimate is shorthand for the more comprehensive tetralemmic negation functioning as the gateway to non-duality and the complete exhaustion of fabrication (*sakala-kalpanā-vyāvṛtti*). In tetralemmic negation (as in, e.g., MMK 22:11 above), even the negation (i.e., emptiness) is negated, as

[120] Garfield & Priest 2002: 88.
[121] Garfield 2002: 164-5.
[122] Addressed in chapter 3 (§§3.4.3, pp. 170-1 above).

well as both the affirmation and negation (neither X nor ¬X). If no predication in *any* mode ultimately applies, the ultimate is not successfully expressed. Non-duality specifically requires this failure of predication. This is the only way to let go of the habit of conceptualization.

The Mādhyamikas would agree with the semantic interpretation that reality "independently of the concepts we use" is incoherent because they make no attempt to answer the question of what "reality" underlies and transcends appearances (as the Abhidharma would); they would rather jettison the question itself as incoherent towards the exhaustion of conceptuality with respect to the ultimate. That is how apophasis dissolves the question entirely.[123] According to the evidence seen (e.g., MMK 18:9, PSP 493, and the Mahāyāna *sūtra* on the two truths), there is no (positive) claim made at all for the ultimate: not metaphysical, semantic, epistemological, and not evaluative. While the ultimate is in its own way nominally posited (for the sake of instruction and liberation) "independently of the concepts we use" insofar as it could never be an object of conceptual thought, it is not posited independently of being an 'object' of cognitive experience; that is, it is not posited independently of a cognizing mind, though one that does not cognitively experience it in the ordinary, conceptual manner but ultimately, non-dually.[124] Applying a cognitive reading to the ultimate truth, as was parallelly done with the conventional, the former's strategy of presentation indirectly indicates correlation with a radically alternative form of cognitive experience (the form of which follows the total inapplicability of predication in *any* mode at the heart of Madhyamaka apophasis) from which no positive claims about anything.

This is advanced contra Siderits' conflation of the ineffable metaphysical reading of the ultimate with "some sort of non-discursive mystical intuition", of which he is dismissive.[125] In his case, if there were

[123] As in the response to Vacchagotta (MN 72; see Bodhi 1995a: 593) about where the extinguished fire has gone, any predicate "does not apply", no predicate applies to *tattva* or the ultimate. Apophasis dissolving that question acts as the gateway to this realization.
[124] This is in direct contrast with a noumenal posit that is, by definition, not an object of cognitive experience but a necessary metaphysical posit. Considering the various phases of interpretation of the Madhyamaka ultimate as *phases* and not necessarily irreversible progressions ever moving towards the truth, it is not as if the transcendentalist idealist interpretation of Murti's "absolute" ultimate is unaware of the ultimate as a cognitive experience (see Murti 1955: 218-20). I take up the specifics of this cognitive experience in chapter 6.
[125] Siderits 2016: 22.

such a non-discursive intuition, it must have an object, and that object would be the absolute. However, I have demonstrated how *tattva* can provisionally (in conventional language) be called such an 'object' (see §§5.1.1) without itself becoming any such metaphysical referent. Nonetheless, without vindicating the former element, "some sort of non-discursive mystical intuition" might be just what is needed for the *direct experience* of *tattva*, despite the difficulty arising from only being able to indirectly characterize this experience. That this experience must be non-discursive is evident enough, but whether it is mystical (especially if "mystical" requires being "irrational") depends on one's taste.[126] Certainly, it is non-dual, which is a significant obstacle to attaining any intellectual (i.e., conceptual, dualistic) grasp of it. For this reason, the ultimate cannot be known as can the conventional truth, thus confronting the limits of conceptualization. It is nonetheless, as the evidence indicates, correlated with a distinct mode of cognitive experience. This is only indicated apophatically through the non-implicative negation of all conventional predicates of cognition, exhausting all conceptual avenues without any successful predication.

Regardless of its clarity, straightforwardness, or lack thereof, a path is lain, the conventional truth its start, the ultimate's apophasis its midpoint, and the ultimate's full realization its terminus. At every step, the concepts on the path are merely the fingers pointing the way, not be confused with the goal itself.

§5.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I demonstrated an alternative model to the semantic interpretation of emptiness regarding the ultimate, a model respecting the conditions differentiating the two truths without denying the ultimate. I instead applied a cognitive reading thereto, taking the ultimate truth as referring to non-dual cognition. In §5.1, I explained the formal criterion differentiating the ultimate from the conventional truth through the presence or absence of concepts and language, a distinction the Mādhyamikas present apophatically by explicitly barring language and conceptualization from the ultimate. This follows the established restriction of language, conceptualization, and ordinary cognition to the conventional truth

[126] See fn. 96 above; see also chapter 6 (§6.3).

(chapters 1 and 2). According to the evidence that insists on the ultimate's non-conventional/*extra*-ordinary cognitive characteristics, a radically different mode of cognition is indicated than the ordinary, conceptual mode. Consequently, the ultimate, in contradistinction with the formal elements of the conventional truth, constitutes a non-conceptual, unfabricated, non-dualistic form of experiential truth as differentiated from the conventional truth's conceptual, fabricated, dualistic form of theoretical truth.

Based on this formal criterion, I argued in §5.2 against the fundamental conclusions of the semantic interpretation that "the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth" and "there is only conventional truth". Such is the case only insofar as we strictly hold a propositional form of truth for *satya* (as in the Abhidharmic model scaffolding the semantic interpretation), but the Mādhyamikas evidently maintain otherwise. While respecting the arguments employed in this interpretation, I argued against its specific conclusion concerning the denial of the ultimate truth insofar as the arguments do not lead thereto but rather to the conclusion that the ultimate truth has no propositional, linguistic, or conceptual content. This confirms its non-conceptual form. Per the evidence from §5.1, this does not mean denying the ultimate. To deny the ultimate and glorify the conventional truth does a disservice to the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project and contradicts the evidence. For this reason, an alternative model is required to make sense of the two truths in that project. A cognitive reading of the ultimate indicated strictly through apophatsis affords the path of least resistance to opening its non-dual gates.

For this reason, in §5.3 I discussed the ultimate as requiring the confrontation of the limits of conceptualization. I argued that apophasis, by design of non-implicative negation, cannot *successfully articulate* it, where the failure of this articulation is critical to the ultimate's realization. No claim whatsoever is ultimately made since tetralemmic negation exhausts conceptuality by exhausting all logical dualistic possibilities (surpassing even the negation of neither X nor ¬X). I discussed the fact that, while the ultimate refers to a distinct mode of cognition, the 'object' of that cognitive experience (i.e., *tattva*) cannot be noumenal. It is the reaction to apophasis of the reifying tendencies of conceptualization to suggest that there *is* something beyond language to which language would fail to adequately refer, but

instead I argued that the apophatic strategy (in contrast with the negative theology from which the term is borrowed) really says more about the limitations of conceptual cognition (in reference to its conventional, non-ultimate nature) than anything about the ultimate *per se*. The exhaustion of conceptuality is instead the gateway to non-dual cognition.

Since I was concerned only with establishing the formal parameters of the ultimate truth in this chapter, this model is incomplete without a serious investigation of its practical and soteriological implications (where the soteriological goal is the ultimate purpose of the two truths in the first place). What is the ultimate benefit of a non-conceptual, non-dual form of truth? What exactly is it liberating from, and how? Why should it be sought? Questions such as these I address in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: THE SOTERIOLOGY OF THE ULTIMATE

It cannot be overstated that the soteriological application of the non-dual cognition correlated with 'seeing' the ultimate truth requires neither stupefaction in mindlessness nor eschewing language and conceptualization as the means of transactional and pedagogical communication and introspective investigation. Ultimate cognition is instead applied towards cultivating an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging (*anupādāna*). The term "attitude/behaviour" demarcates both a transformation in cognition and mental states ("attitude") *and* comportment in the world ("behaviour"). This is the soteriological goal, and the cultivation of a specific type of non-dual cognition is the means thereto. This is because in non-dual cognition there is the cognitive experience of neither a clinger (*upādātṛ*, i.e., the self that clings) nor its objects of clinging. Typically, the actionable element of Buddhist soteriology is the dissolution of the illusion of selfhood at the heart of suffering.[1] From this dissolution emerges an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging rooted in the non-duality of self and other. Accordingly, this is an *extra*-ordinary (ultimate) cognition insofar as it differs from ordinary (conventional) cognition requiring such a cognitive distinction. It is not enough to, intellectually, negate (as in the apophasis of the ultimate and the teachings of non-self (*anātman*), emptiness, and non-clinging) but to realize the dissolution of the subject–object and self–other dichotomies endemic to ordinary cognition that structure clinging relations and perpetuate the experiential baseline of selfhood.

In §6.1, I discuss the essential components of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project: the teachings of the cessation of conceptualization (*prapañca-upaśama*), bliss/welfare (*śiva*), dependent origination (*pratītysamutpāda*, including clinging (*upādāna*)),[2] the four noble truths (*catvāryārya-satyāni*), non-self, and emptiness, each of which I contextualize with the problem of suffering (*duḥkha*)

[1] It is typical insofar as the Mādhyamikas do not break this mould but echo Buddhism's original message. Despite differences amongst its traditions, the teaching of non-self (*anātman*) is the consistent core of Buddhist philosophical soteriology. In that vein, the practical emphasis on cultivating non-clinging and its association with liberation and freedom from suffering is present from the earliest stratum of Buddhist literature (e.g., SN 12.16 (*Dhammakathiko Sutta*; see Bodhi 2000: 545).
[2] Cf. SN 12.52 (*Upādāna Sutta*; see Bodhi 2000: 589-90). According to the doctrine of dependent origination, *upādāna* is the ninth link in the chain.

and the Madhyamaka ultimate truth. From their application towards cultivating an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging, an actionable soteriological program is revealed. In §6.2, I investigate the experience of selfhood as problematized by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. This concerns a differentiation of a *concept* of self (*ātman*, *ātmavāda*, *ātmadṛṣṭi*; a view of the self) from an innate *sense* of self (*ahaṃkāra*) that requires neither the exposure to nor the adoption of specific philosophical tenets (as in the former). This innate sense of self is identified as the *root* of the problem of suffering (and, by extension, clinging), such that an analytical meditation dissolving this specific disposition is liberating therefrom. Consequently, the liberating method is not, as in the conventional truth, a mere correction of conventional falsity in ordinary experience's valid cognition but requires a transformative experience in the attainment of ultimate cognition devoid of all traces of selfhood and clinging. Lastly, in §6.3, I reconcile non-clinging and the non-dual ultimate through the dissolution of the subject–object and self–other dichotomies that perpetuate the notion of the clinger (the subject, the self, the "I") and its objects of clinging (what is "mine", or what is other, "not-I", and "not-mine"). That is, non-dual ultimate cognition is the means to the complete dissolution of the sense of self and its attendant tendencies, manifesting in an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging, the soteriological goal.

§6.1 MADHYAMAKA SOTERIOLOGY

The focus of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project is the cultivation of an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging (that is, referring to the *practical* results of the realization of a non-conceptual, non-dual, experiential form of truth in *extra*-ordinary cognition). In keeping with the ultimate's apophatic presentation, this transformation in attitude and behaviour should also be apophatically approached as the uprooting of the tendencies (*vāsana*s) and dispositions (*saṃskāra*s)[3] accompanying ordinary cognitive experience that are *a*soteriological (i.e., conducive to suffering). The

[3] *Saṃskāra*s are one of the five aggregates (usually translated as "karmic volitions/mental formations"; see fn. 11 below) and one of the 12 links of dependent origination. Many authors note the term's polysemy and its difficulty of succinct translation; see an overview of such treatments in Boisvert 1995: 91-3. I take it in the above senses as referring to mental activities (patters, habits, tendencies) that shape thought and action, and so translate it in this context as "disposition".

tendencies and dispositions receiving the primary focus in this soteriological context are clinging and, relatedly, the self (the clinger).

6.1.1 CLINGING, FABRICATION, & SUFFERING

In this section, I address clinging and the soteriological context in which Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti discuss its cessation. As the chief condition of the arising of suffering (though nonetheless inseparable from and impacted by the other links of dependent origination), it is identified as the primary mental process to be uprooted for the attainment of liberation from suffering. From the cessation of clinging, the remaining links in the chain fall like dominos. It is identified as the primary mental process in the generation of suffering because it generates the identity of the sufferer (the self, clinging to its suffering by its appropriation). Clinging fixes the self's relation to its objects of experience as one of appropriation. However, more than from a mere intellectual understanding, liberation from clinging is achieved by a transformative insight via the realization of the emptiness of the clinger (the self) and its objects of clinging, referring to their existential and conceptual interdependence, their mutual establishment: this is by now a familiar conceptual model. The realization of this emptiness dissolves clinging to the identity of the clinger and its objects of clinging at the *experiential level*, manifesting a transformation in both attitude and behaviour. Thus, clinging is uprooted only through the realization of a wisdom of emptiness that dissolves clinging to the illusion of selfhood and all it entails.

As discussed in chapter 5, the Mādhyamikas link the cessation of conceptualization and the attainment of pacification and bliss/welfare as the means and the goal, respectively, of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. However, the immediate soteriological applicability of Buddhist philosophy is found in the actionable teachings of dependent origination and the four noble truths since they directly explain suffering and the conditions of its arising and cessation. As such, a further connection should be established between the cessation of conceptualization and the attainment of pacification and bliss/welfare as explained through the psychological schemes of dependent origination and the four noble truths. Because clinging is specifically listed as one of the 12 links of dependent

origination culminating in suffering, an investigation of its role in both the perpetuation and cessation of suffering is warranted. To that end, the Mādhyamikas derive the link between the cessations of conceptualization (non-dual cognition) and of suffering as the cultivation of an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging. Insofar as it is devoid of subject and object, non-dual cognition cannot be subject to clinging and neither, therefore, is it subject to suffering.

Upādāna ("clinging") is defined as "the act of taking for one's self, appropriation to one's self"; in a specifically Buddhist context it means "grasping at or clinging to existence".[4] It is also translated as "appropriation" and "grasping", suggesting the mental activities of the identification with and appropriation of something essential to personal identity. It is a complex process subsuming fabrication (see chapters 1 and 2) insofar it conditions the *construction* of the identities of the clinger and the objects it clings to, including the differentiation of self from other. Insofar as the ultimate is *un*fabricated (*nirvikalpa*, as in MMK 18:9; see chapter 5, §5.1), when validly cognized it cannot be conditioned by attitudes of clinging. Just as it is apophatically characterized as unfabricated in contrast with fabricated convention, the ultimate is likewise apophatically characterized as validly cognized in the contexts of non-clinging, non-dual, and non-suffering in contrast with the default, ordinary attitudes of clinging, duality, and suffering associated with ordinary cognitive experience.

According to Collobert, *upādāna* is a mental process (of ordinary cognitive experience, though not its

[4] Monier-Williams 1986: 213.2. Edgerton (1970: 144) includes the etymology of *upādāna* as originally meaning "fuel (app. as the *substratum* or *material cause*) of fire". This explains metaphorically that *upādāna* is the fuel of the fire of suffering. The same meaning is preserved in the Pāli (also *upādāna*); the *Pali-English Dictionary* lists the meaning of "(lit. that (material) substratum by means of which an active process is kept alive or going), fuel, supply, provision" (T.W. Rhys Davids & William Stede, Motilal Banarsidass, 1993: 149). SN 12.52 (*Upādāna Sutta*) focuses on this meaning of fuel (as in, fueling the fires of craving (*tṛṣṇā*/*taṇhā*, the preceding link in the chain of dependent origination): "Suppose, bhikkhus, a great bonfire was burning, consuming ten, twenty, thirty, or forty loads of wood, and a man would cast dry grass, dry cowdung, and dry wood into it from time to time. Thus, sustained by that material, fuelled by it, that great bonfire would burn for a very long time. So too, when one lives contemplating gratification in things that can be clung to, craving increases.... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering"; *seyyathāpi bhikkhave, dasannaṃ vā kaṭṭhavāhānaṃ vīsāya vā kaṭṭhavāhānaṃ tiṃsāya vā kaṭṭhavāhānaṃ cattārīsāya vā kaṭṭhavāhānaṃ mahāaggikkhandho jaleyya | tatra puriso kālena kālaṃ sukkhāni ceva tiṇāni pakkhipeyya, sukkhāni ca gomayāni pakkhipeyya, sukkhāni ca kaṭṭhāni pakkhipeyya | evaṃ hi so bhikkhave mahā aggikkhandho tadāhāro tadupādāno ciraṃ dīghamaddhānaṃ jaleyya | evameva kho bhikkhave, upādānīyesu dhammesu assādānupassino viharato taṇhā pavaḍḍhati* | […] *evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti* | (trans. Bodhi 2000: 589; Feer (vol. 2) 1888: 84-5).

valid cognition) belonging to the domain of psychology:

> Any phenomenon, be it inner or outer, that arises in the field of consciousness is a potential object for *upādāna*. It is the moment when the mind, having got into contact (*sparśa*, 6th link [of dependent origination]) with a phenomenon, leans towards it, dwells on it and appropriates it. The phenomenon is appropriated, first, because it has produced a feeling (pleasure, pain or neutral, *vedanā*, 7th link), and, second, because the feeling has produced a craving or desire (*tṛṣṇā*, 8th link identified as the origin of suffering S 5.421).[5]

In that vein, Candrakīrti identifies four categories of objects of clinging, all of which relate to the experiential baseline of selfhood: i) the doctrine of the self (*ātmavāda*, the view of the self's substantial reality and permanence); ii) morality and rules (*śīla-vrata*, the monastic or moral codes that guide the self and solidify its identity as, e.g., moral), iii) views (*dṛṣṭi*, especially those concerning the mode of existence of the self and the objects it appropriates), and iv) sensual pleasures (*kāma*, the pleasure and pain experienced and appropriated by that self).[6] Evidently, these need not be tangible objects but could also be abstractions nonetheless essential to the fabrication of any self's identity.

The first and third categories are most relevant to Madhyamaka soteriology, and, as indicated by their definitions, are intimately related. Much ink has already been spilled discussing views; as always, the most dangerous wrong view acting as the greatest obstacle to wisdom is *svabhāvic* existence, which concerns the proliferation and appropriation of views about what does and does not exist and how it does or does not exist in a very specific mode (in this case, as applied to the existence of the self and its objects, including its existential relation to everything other than it). These views emerge from the substantialized foundational wrong view of the self as inherently existent; that is, belief in real existence stems from the view of the existence of the self that is extended to the objects with which it interacts.[7]

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[5] Collobert 2022: 3-4)

[6] PSP 555: "The one who adheres to and focuses on feeling (*vedanāsu abhiniviṣṭaḥ saktaḥ*) on condition of craving (*tṛṣṇā-pratyayam*) seizes (*parigṛhṇāti*) the fourfold appropriations, namely [i)] the doctrine of the self (*ātmavāda*), [ii)] morality and rules (*śīla-vrata*), [iii)] views (*dṛṣṭi*)], and [iv)] pleasure (*kāma*) (*kāma-dṛṣṭi-śīla-vrata-ātmavāda-upādāna-ākyam caturvidham*), [the seizing of which is] the cause of actions (*karma-ākṣepa-kāraṇam*). Thus, there is clinging on condition of the craving of these"; *sa evaṃ vedanāsvabhiniviṣṭaḥ saktaḥ tṛṣṇāpratyayaṃ kāmadṛṣṭi-śīlavratātmavādopādānākhyaṃ caturvidhaṃ karmākṣepakāraṇaṃ parigṛhṇāti | tadevamasya tṛṣṇāpratyayamupādānaṃ bhavati* || (Vaidya 1960b: 243). The same four are listed in the Pāli Canon (cf. MN 11, *Cūḷasīhanāda Sutta*; see Bodhi 1995a: 159-63).

[7] The 62 wrong views listed in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1; see Bodhi 2007b) each concern the relation of the self to the cosmos/the world. All permutations of wrong views are based on the existence of the self (i.e., the personality view).

Relatedly, *upādāna* being the ninth link in the chain of dependent origination culminating in suffering, its immediately preceding link is *tṛṣṇā* ("craving, thirst"; Pāli: *taṇhā*). Craving is identified as the cause of suffering in the second noble truth.[8] However, there need not be understood a substantial difference between *tṛṣṇā* and *upādāna*.[9] While *upādāna* has four subdivisions, *tṛṣṇā* has three: craving for i) sensual desires/pleasures (*kāma-taṇhā*); ii) existence (*bhava-taṇhā*); and iii) non-existence (*vibhava-taṇhā*).[10] Craving's first type is identical to clinging's fourth category, and its second and third types are subsumable under clinging's third category as its two wings.

In the Buddhist system, the five aggregates (*pañca-skandha*) psychophysically account for the *appearance* of the self.[11] According to Huntington, the "conventionally valid" relationship of the aggregates to the appearance of the self is explained as one of cause and effect insofar as the aggregates are the cause of the self (the effect).[12] Nonetheless, per the Madhyamaka conceptual template of

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[8] As in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (SN 56.11; see Bodhi 2000: 1843-7).

[9] That is, according to Boisvert (1995: 134), "Clinging is usually defined as an intensified form of craving. *Taṇhā* and *upādāna* can be dealt with together since both represent craving at different levels of intensity". For the same reason, Candrakīrti says that the objects of clinging arise from the craving of them (see PSP 555, fn. 6 above).

[10] As in SN 56.11: "Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination"; *idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave dukkham ariyasaccam | jāti pi dukkhā jarā pi dukkhā vyādhi pi dukkhā maraṇam pi dukkkhaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā pi dukkhā | appiyehi sampayogo dukkho piyehi vippayogo dukkho | yam picchaṃ na labhati tam pi dukkhaṃ | saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā pi dukkhā |* (trans. Bodhi 2000: 1844; Feer (vol. 5) 1898: 421). In that context, Boisvert (1995: 134) specifies that "*taṇhā* refers to both craving and aversion. According to Buddhism, craving reflects our discontentment with the present moment, with reality as it is. We desire or crave something because of a deep inner dissatisfaction and because of our inability to accept reality as it presents itself. Craving is nothing but aversion towards our immediate situation. Similarly, aversion manifests itself as the craving for a better condition. The word *taṇhā* refers to both craving and aversion and henceforth, whenever the word craving is employed, aversion is also intended since both are the two faces of the same coin".

[11] The five aggregates are "form" (*rūpa*), "feeling" (*vedanā*), "perception/recognition" (*saṃjñā*; Pāli: *saññā*); "karmic volitions/mental formations" or "dispositions" (*saṃskāra*; Pāli: *saṅkhāra*), and "consciousness" (*vijñāna*, Pāli: *viññāṇa*). For a detailed treatment of the five aggregates, see Boisvert 1995. Given that the first aggregate appears to refer to material form and the remaining four to mental processes, the five aggregates list the psychophysical elements that account for the material and mental processes constituting the experience of sentience (being a sentient being). See Collobert 2022: 17-8 for a discussion of the aggregates as objects of clinging. As I discuss below, these need not necessarily be restricted to personhood and may, in their own manner, qualify animal existence as well (see fn. 66 below). Nonetheless, the Buddha refused to take a stance on either the identity or difference of the body and the mind (cf. SN 44.8), seeing as the former leads to a materialist reduction of the mind to material form and the latter to mind–body substance dualism. As such, the teaching of the five aggregates covers both facets in one scheme without making either such a distinction or identification.

[12] According to Huntington ("The System of the Two Truths in the *Prasannapadā* and the *Madhyamakāvatāra*: A Study in Mādhyamika Soteriology", *Journal of Indian philosophy* 11.1, 1983: 87), "The self is recognized as an effect because it is produced from the psycho-physical constituents as cause [(i.e., "an effect produced from the particular collocation of causes and conditions represented in the Buddhist analysis [of] the body, consciousness, feeling, apperception, and the predispositions"—the five aggregates)]: and the psycho-physical constituents are a cause, in this context, to the extent that they are responsible for production of the concept of "self" as their effect".

dependence relations, cause and effect share both an causal/existential and conceptual interdependence.[13] However, insofar as the aggregates schematize a neutral, factual breakdown of sentience's components, there is something more pernicious at play in the diagnosis of suffering. These are the *clinging aggregates* (*upādāna-skandha*), wherein the aggregates and the psychophysical processes they enumerate are clung to by the self and experienced appropriatively as "mine", essentializing *me* and belonging to *me*. On one hand, the five aggregates neutrally schematize the conventional self (the conventionally existent person) as the means to their valid cognition, and there is no problem with saying that self depends on the aggregates; on the other, the five clinging aggregates specifically schematize suffering through relating the self to its appropriation of those aggregates.

The relation of the self to its clinging aggregates is well-attested in Madhyamaka scholarship. According to Salvini, "Clinging to the aggregates is the basis for the occurrence of *saṁsāra*; from a cognitive perspective, the aggregates are the basis that is taken up (*upādāna*) for the conceptual designation of a "self"".[14] Candrakīrti defines clinging in relation to the aggregates as follows: "Clinging means that the five clinging aggregates (*pañca-upādāna-skandhāḥ*) are clung to (*upādīyate*). That which is designated in dependence on them (*yaḥ tān upādāya prajñapyate*) is said to be clinger (*upādātā*), the grasper (*grahītā*), the performing self (*niṣpādakaḥ ātmā*)".[15] According to Siderits, "Clinging results in suffering, on the Buddhist analysis, just because it reinforces the false belief in 'I' and 'mine'".[16] Evidently, the clinging that results in suffering from reinforcing the senses of "I" and "mine" occurs due to clinging to the aggregates as if they truly constituted "I" and "mine"—*my* mind, *my* body, *my* pleasure, *my* suffering, none of which is possible without the aggregates. In that vein, Collobert regards

> *upādāna* as encompassing two mental processes: first, seizing and second identifying. Once pleasure has arisen, there is first the seizing of the desire for pleasure, then the identification

[13] See chapter 1 (§§1.1.2).
[14] Salvini 2015: 48.
[15] PSP 212: *tatra upādīyate ityupādānaṃ pañcopādānaskandhāḥ | yastānupādāya prajñapyate, sa upādātā grahītā niṣpādaka ātmetyucyate |* (Vaidya 1960b: 91). It is not clear what Candrakīrti might mean by "the performing self" (*niṣpādakaḥ ātmā*), but this is how Jonardon Ganeri (*The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology*, Oxford University Press, 2007: 201) has translated it.
[16] Siderits 2016: 51.

> with it. The latter causes the judgment: [e.g.,] "I'm a person who likes chocolate". The moment that immediately follows appropriation is ownership, which is, as it were, the solidification of a self or personality view. […] There is a move from a descriptive judgment [(i.e., eating chocolate is pleasant)] to a subjective judgment [(the above identification)] that is caused by appropriation. In fact, *upādāna* implies the production of the "I", which is the appropriator (*upādātṛ*).[17]

Likewise, Fink identifies two related aspects of clinging, phenomenological and metaphysical: "Phenomenologically, it is clinging that gives birth to the illusion of self"; "metaphysically, it is clinging that binds consciousness to a worldly being as a basis of support".[18] Both are significant because the first accounts for the *experience* of selfhood and the second the metaphysics of that self that is experienced (i.e., the semantic framework (referring to right or wrong view) determining how it and the world with which it interacts and in which it inhabits exists). This concerns the perceived reality of what is clung to, specifically including the self, its possessions, and the relations therebetween. However, this aspect is in the final analysis subordinate to the phenomenological (or cognitive) experience of selfhood (as the differentiation of the *concept* from a *sense* of self makes clear; see §§6.2.1).

Etymologically, the same root of "clinging" (the prefix *UPA* + √*ĀDA*) is present in what I translated in chapter 2 (§§2.2.2) as "dependent designation" (*prajñaptir upādāya*) via Candrakīrti's chariot analogy, which, as designated in dependence on its parts, is analogized to the self designated in dependence on its parts (the aggregates). Insofar as "dependence" is a core implication of *upādāna*, especially as it relates the self and its aggregates, there is, in consequence of the whole's causal dependence on its parts, the reification of that mereological whole over and above its parts. Insofar as there is such reification, we repeat the third instance of clinging (to views), specifically to the view of the existence of what is reified, (e.g., the existence of either the self or the chariot as independent entities from their parts).

I clarify the connection between clinging and suffering, such that with the cessation of clinging the

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[17] Collobert 2022: 4.

[18] Charles K. Fink, "Clinging to Nothing: The Phenomenology and Metaphysics of *Upādāna* in Early Buddhism", *Asian Philosophy* 25.1, 2015: 16. This "binding" of consciousness "to a worldly being as a basis of support" is what Salvini means by clinging being "the basis for the occurrence of *saṃsāra*" (see p. 286 above) in the case where, in the cycles of dependent origination, clinging engenders birth (rebirth), perpetuating *saṃsāric* existence from moment to moment.

cessation of suffering follows. *Duḥkha* is a psychophysical phenomenon rooted in the habituations and dispositions of the mind.[19] While it may have physical stimuli (as in physical pain), it is a condition more correctly derived from the attitude/behaviours associated with those stimuli in relation to the experience of the self that suffers (when those stimuli are appropriated as "*my* suffering"). Likewise, suffering may be entirely mental (i.e., emotional, without physical stimulus) and the same relations apply. The mechanics are mirrored for pleasure (*sukha*) insofar as both pleasure and suffering are cognitive experiences requiring mediation through a sense of self that experiences and appropriates pleasure and suffering as such. Clinging and the experiential baseline of selfhood derived from appropriating the self's experiences of suffering and pleasure have correspondingly positive and negative poles, both of which serve to reinforce the experience of selfhood.

Suffering being primarily an attitude/behaviour, its cessation requires a transformation in one's attitude/behaviours concerning how those stimuli are cognized and contextualized by the self (and not necessarily their non-experience). Here enters the clinging–non-clinging distinction as cognitive, since through the former such stimuli are experienced and appropriated as belonging to the experiencer but not in the latter. Given that clinging fixes a certain relation of the self to its objects of experience, without

[19] There are three categories of suffering, each supporting taking suffering as primarily a mental state. According to SN 38.14 (*Dukkha Sutta*; see Bodhi 2000: 1299) & SN 45.165 (*Dukkhatā* Sutta; see Bodhi 2000: 1561), the three types are i) the suffering of conditioning (*saṃskāra duḥkhatā*), suffering due to general causal/conditional nature of phenomena, in particular the fear of certain phenomena arising and certain others ceasing; ii) the suffering of suffering (*duḥkha duḥkhatā*), referring to the general unpleasantness of life, such as pain, sickness, death, etc.; iii) the suffering of change (*vipariṇāma duḥkhatā*), referring to the fear of impermanence and inevitable decay. According to Peter Harvey ("Dukkha, Non-Self, and the Teaching of the Four "Noble Truths"", *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy* (ed. Steven Emmanuel), Wiley-Blackwell, 2013: 26), "The Pāli word *dukkha* (Skt *duḥkha*) encapsulates many subtleties of meaning, but its application spans pain, suffering, disappointment, frustration, things going badly, hassle, unease, anxiety, stress, dis-ease, unsatisfactoriness, non-reliability of people and things, limitation, imperfection. It sums up the problematic aspects of life: its mental and physical pains, obvious or subtle, and also the painful, stressful, unsatisfactory aspects of life that engender these". The Buddha's first sermon (first teaching post-awakening), the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (SN 56.11), lists the following examples: "Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering"; *idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave dukkham ariyasaccam | jāti pi dukkhā jarā pi dukkhā vyādhi pi dukkhā maraṇam pi dukkkhaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā pi dukkhā | appiyehi sampayogo dukkho piyehi vippayogo dukkho | yam piccham na labhati tam pi dukkhaṃ | saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā pi dukkhā |* (trans. Bodhi 2000: 1844; Feer (vol. 5) 1898: 421). Harvey (2013: 30) clarifies that it makes better sense to translate the above passage (and similar repetitions in the Pāli Canon) as "birth (etc.) is painful" and wants each of these occurrences to be understood as "occasions for the arising of the experience of sufferings, things which often entail it" in the contexts of both physical and mental pain, all of which can be succinctly summed up as occasions "which we would like to be otherwise".

clinging the relations and contexts of those experiences are completely transformed; that transformation corresponds to a transformation in cognition itself.

Traditionally, suffering is typified in three mental states: desire/greed (*rāga*), aversion/hatred (*dosa*; Skt: *doṣa*, *dveṣa*), and delusion/confusion (*moha*).[20] Insofar as we are desirous of what we designate as "good" *for us* and averse to what we designate as "bad", Nāgārjuna says that,

> [MMK 23:1-2abc:] Desire (*rāgaḥ*), aversion (*dveṣaḥ*), and delusion (*mohaḥ*) are said to be produced from false conceptions (*saṃkalpa-prabhavaḥ*). These arise in dependence (*pratītya*) on errors/distortions [such as] the "good" and the "bad" (*śubha-aśubha-viparyāsān*).
>
> That which arises in dependence on errors/distortions [such as] the "good" and the "bad", that does not exist intrinsically (*svabhāvān na vidyante*)".[21]

It is significant that Nāgārjuna specifies that whatever persists through this relationship of dependence cannot persist intrinsically since it means that, from being only subject to dependence relations, no singular aspect of this relation (e.g., desire itself, the desirer, or the object of desire) stands independently of this process. That process is explained to consist of fabrication (*vikalpa*),[22] which, etymologically, shares the same root (√KḶP) with the above false conception (*samkalpa*):

> [ŚS 59-60:] Desire, aversion, and delusion (*chags sdang gti mug rnams*) are produced [by] the condition (*rkyen skyes*) [of] the errors/distortions [of] the desirable and undesirable (*sdug dang mi sdug phyin ci log*). Because they arise [in this way], desire, aversion, and delusion do not inherently exist (*rang bzhin gyis 'dod chags zhe sdang gti mud med*).
>
> Since desire, aversion, and delusion [may all arise] for the same object, these are produced by fabrication (*rnam rtog gis bskyed*), and that [which is] fabricated is not ultimately existent (*yang dag nyid du yod ma yin*).[23]

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[20] As in the Buddha's third sermon, the *Ādittapariyāya Sutta* (SN 35.28; see Bodhi 2000: 1143). In the Mahāyāna tradition, these are called the "three poisons" (*triviṣa*); in the Theravāda tradition, the "three unwholesome roots" (*akusala-mūla*).

[21] MMK 23:1-2abc: *saṃkalpaprabhavo rāgo dveṣo mohaś ca kathyate | śubhāśubhabiparyāsān saṃbhavanti pratītya hi || śubhāśubhaviparyāsān saṃbhavanti pratītya ye | te svabhāvānna vidyante* […] || (Vaidya 1960b: 197). Contextually, Nāgārjuna concludes from this argument in the d *pāda* that the defilements (*kleśa*), because of being dependent in this way, are not ultimately (*na tattvataḥ*) true/real. This is important for the prospect of their cessation, because if they were ultimately real (as in *svabhāvic*, inherently existent), they would not be capable of cessation.

[22] See the extended discussion of fabrication in chapter 1 (§§1.2.1 in the context of *saṃvṛti*) and chapter 2 (§§2.2-2.2.1 in the context of the fabrication of phenomenal identities and dependent designation (*prajñaptir upādāya*)).

[23] ŚS 59-60: *sdug dang mi sdug phyin ci log rkyen skyes chags sdang gti mug rnams | 'byung ste de phyir rang bzhin gyis 'dod chags zhe sdang gti mug med || gang phyir der chags der sdang der rmongs pa de phyir de dag ni | rnam rtog gis bskyed rnam rtog kyang yang dag nyid du yod ma yin ||* (Tola & Dragonetti 1987: 21). In ŚS 60, the Tibetan is a little vague in marking to what specifically desire, aversion, and delusion refer, but Tola & Dragonetti 1987: 35, Lindtner 1990: 61 and Ross 1987: 93 all agree that the verse discusses desire, aversion, and delusion all possibly arising for the same object as a reason

For this reason, Candrakīrti explains that "through the superimposition of the aspect of the "good" (*śubha-ākāra-adhyāropeṇa*) onto forms and so forth (*rūpādibhyaḥ*), desire [for those forms] arises, [and, likewise,] aversion through the superimposition of the aspect of the "bad". Delusion arises through [distortions like] the superimposition of permanence, the self, and so forth (*nitya-ātma-ādi-adhyāropeṇa*)".[24] Such mental states as desire, aversion, and delusion are conditionally born of fabrication, dependent on two interdependent conditions: i) an object for which one experiences desire, aversion, or delusion, onto which there is the superimposition of the respective aspects of "good" or "bad" or, e.g., "permanence" fuelling desire, aversion, or delusion; and ii) the designating mind that does the superimposing. Given that the designation of such aspects and their attendant mental states are intimately related with the problem of suffering (insofar as, through this predication to the objects of experience, such mental states arise and their dissatisfaction causes suffering), an analysis of the conditions under which such predications stoking the fires of desire, aversion, and delusion cease is needed. This is explained by the fact that all the above are conditioned fabrications, dependent designations, subject to dependence relations and therefore capable of cessation. The ultimate (i.e., *tattva*, that of which there is realization in ultimate cognition) being *un*fabricated specifically means there is therein no fabrication of (i.e., identification of) of objects of desire, aversion etc., without which there can be neither an object of clinging nor a clinger (i.e., a self that clings). How is this achievable?

6.1.2 THE SOTERIOLOGICAL PROGRAM: REVERSING THE CAUSAL CHAIN

Faithful to the Buddha's original soteriological program, the Madhyamaka also schematize their program through dependent origination. Canonically, its first link is ignorance (*avidyā*). In chapter 3, ignorance was associated with conventional falsity (as ignorance of the universality of dependence relations), the remedy to which was the conventional truth's valid cognition of ordinary experience through dependence

for their being subject to fabrication.

[24] PSP 457: […] *śubhākārādhyāropeṇa yathā rūpādibhyo rāga upajāyate, aśubhākārādhyāropeṇa dveṣaḥ, nityātmādyadhyāropeṇa mohaḥ saṃbhavatīti* || (Vaidya 1960b: 199).

relations. However, the scope of ignorance in a soteriological context expands to include more than wrong views (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*) in the philosophical sense. Considered alongside its sister term delusion (*moha*, which was, in chapter 1 (§§1.2.1 via MĀ 6:28), associated with fabrication insofar as delusion conceals the ultimate from concealing its own nature of fabrication and the unfabricated ultimate), ignorance taken more broadly has stronger ordinary connotations than a narrow restriction to philosophical views. While the former sense is in one way ignorance's primary meaning, it also refers to a general ignorance in ordinary cognition that is the default realism cognizing phenomena as if they existed substantially, each experienced as independently existent.[25] In the soteriological context, it is significantly in the *behaviouralist* context of cognition that the belief in the inherent desirability of so-called desirable objects, the enmity of so-called aversive objects, and the sway these processes have in our lives that are considered "ignorance" and consequently attacked. This behaviour regarding (e.g.,) the desirability of objects stems from the ignorant belief in their reality and in the reality of desirability in relation to the illusion of the self that desires. On Fink's analysis,

> To cling to something is simultaneously to regard it as a substantial, enduring being. Otherwise, what is there to grasp and hold on to? I do not consciously cling to ephemeral or insubstantial phenomena, to water bubbles or shimmering mirages. But I do cling to the name-and-form (*nāma-rūpa*, a sentient body) that I take myself to be, and in so doing I regard this being as irreducibly real.[26]

While this is the case for the self generally automatically taken "as irreducibly real", this same default ignorance is extended to the self's possessions, also taken "as irreducibly real".

Continuing the discussion of false conceptions arising through the distorted superimpositions of the "good", "bad", and so forth conditioning the arising of desire, aversion and delusion, Nāgārjuna says,

> [MMK 23:23:] Thus, ignorance is ceased (*nirudhyate avidyā*) from the cessation of errors/distortions (*viparyaya-nirodhanāt*). When there is the cessation of ignorance, the dispositions and so forth are also ceased (*saṃskāra-ādhyam nirudhyate*).[27]

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[25] On "default realism", see chapter 3 (§3.3, pp. 143-4 above).
[26] Fink 2015: 18.
[27] MMK 23:23: *evaṃ nirudhyate 'vidyā viparyayanirodhanāt | avidyāyāṃ niruddhāyāṃ saṃskārādhyaṃ nirudhyate ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 206). Siderits & Katsura (2013: 265) comment: "This is the standard Buddhist account of the cessation of suffering. The twelvefold chain of dependent origination begins with ignorance. For it is out of ignorance that the defilements are said to spring. Once we have dispelled false discrimination concerning the good and the bad and false conceptions, the series of

"The dispositions and so forth" refers to both the 12 links of dependent origination (wherein ignorance is first and dispositions (*saṃskāra*s) second) and the five aggregates (where the latter is the fourth). For the former, the cessation of ignorance is a domino effect bringing the cessation of the remaining links, beginning with ignorance, dispositions, and continuing with the rest. For the latter, such dispositions are a constituent element of the psychophysical makeup of the appearance of the self insofar as this element encompasses the self's patterns of attitude/behaviours, its general comportment (hence, *saṃskāra* may be translated as "disposition"). That is, the plagues of desire, aversion, and delusion are symptoms of ignorant dispositions and are therefore *a*soteriological, unhealthy, and unwholesome. Non-clinging is a symptom of a healthy disposition. Buddhist soteriology requires systematically examining ignorant dispositions through the conditions of their arising and cessation and, thereafter, cultivating healthy ones.

Insofar as the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project begins and ends with the eradication of ignorance, MMK 26:1-9 demonstrate the causal connection between the 12 links beginning with ignorance and culminating with the claim that "there is thus the arising of this entire mass of suffering" (*kevalasya evam etasya duḥkha-skandhasya saṃbhavaḥ*). Verses 11-2, though brief, mention the reversal of these processes (as with MMK 23:23 above) culminating with the cessation of ignorance:

> [MMK 26:11-2:] When there is the cessation of ignorance, there is the non-arising (*asaṃbhavaḥ*) of the dispositions, but there is the cessation of ignorance from the meditation (*bhāvanāt*) on just the cognition of this (*jñānasya asya eva*) [(that is, the 12 links, especially taken in the reverse sense of cessation)].
>
> Through the cessation of one, another [factor] does not arise (*na abhipravartate*). Thus, this entire mass of suffering is completely ceased (*samyak nirudhyate*).[28]

According to this model, what must be cultivated to attain the cessation of suffering (i.e., liberation therefrom) is the valid cognition of both the conditions of the arising of suffering (i.e., the 12 links of dependent origination) and of its cessation (i.e., the 12 links in reverse) when rooted in ignorance (as

causes leading to old age, death, rebirth, and suffering will be stopped".

[28] MMK 26:11-2: *avidyāyāṃ niruddhāyāṃ saṃskārāṇāmasaṃbhavaḥ | avidyāyā nirodhastu jñānasyāsyaiva bhāvanāt || tasya tasya nirodhena tattannābhipravartate | duḥkhaskandhaḥ kevalo 'yamevaṃ samyaṅ nirudhyate ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 244).

dependent origination's first link). Taking the 12 links in reverse is a frequent feature of various Pāli *sutta*s (as in Ud 1.3 and SN 12.52).[29] Candrakīrti's commentary specifically allies the meditation on dependent origination with the meditation on emptiness. The Mādhyamikas' project requires insight into the twofold selflessness (or emptiness) of *both* persons and phenomena (*dharmanairātmya*), which are the same constituent elements of the subject–object and self–other dichotomies (see §6.3). He says,

> [PSP 559 ad MMK 26:11:] Ignorance is destroyed (*avidyā prahīyate*) from the proper and non-erroneous [(i.e., correct)] meditation (*yathāvat-aviparīta-bhāvanātaḥ*) on dependent origination. The one who correctly sees dependent origination perceives no essence (*na svarūpam upalabhate*) in even the subtlest of entities (*sūkṣmasya api bhāvasya*), but they enter (*avatarati*) into a meditation on the emptiness of *svabhāva* of all [phenomena] (*svabhāva-śūnyatām sarveṣām*) [as if they were] like a reflection (*pratibimba*), a dream (*svapna*), a firebrand's wheel (*alāta-cakra*), a covering (*mudga*), and so forth. The one who has entered into a meditation on the emptiness of *svabhāva* of all [phenomena] does not perceive anything real (*na kiṃcit vastu upalabhate*) or [any] self that is external or internal (*bāhyam ādhyātmikam*). The one who is not perceiving (*saḥ anupalabhamāṇaḥ*) is not confused regarding any *dharma* (*na kvacit dharma muhyati*); not confused (*amūḍhaḥ*), they perform no action[s] (*karma na karoti*). Thus, through meditation on dependent origination, one enters into [the realization of] *tattva* [(i.e., the ultimate)]. The *yogin*s who *see tattva* (*tattva-darśinaḥ yoginaḥ*) completely destroy ignorance. [Consequently,] from ignorance's destruction, the dispositions cease (*saṃskārāḥ nuridhyante*) [and so on for the remaining links].[30]

Candrakīrti's elaboration of meditation (*bhāvanā*)—specifically meditation on dependent origination *and* emptiness—coupled with his references to *seeing* (√*PAŚ*, *-darśin*) are topical.[31] By highlighting that,

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[29] Ud 1.3 (see Masefield 1997: 3) presents the 12 links in both orders (forwards leading to the arising of suffering and backwards leading to its cessation). SN 12.52 (*Upādāna Sutta*; see Bodhi 2000: 589-90), on the other hand, focuses on the link of *upādāna* and traces the cessation of suffering therefrom through the remaining links. There is, additionally, a further stress on the processes of dependent origination known as "transcendental dependent arising". Cf. *Upanisa Sutta* (SN 12.23; Bodhi 2000: 553-6); see also Bhikkhu Bodhi's "Transcendental Dependent Arising", The Buddhist Publication Society, 1995b). However, this teaching is about more than just the same 12 links taken in reverse but draws 12 additional links that trend towards liberation, wherein one moves from suffering (and the knowledge thereof through the four noble truths) through "faith" (*saddha*), "gladness" (*pamojja*), "rapture" (*piti*), "tranquility" (*passaddhi*), "happiness" (*sukha*), "concentration" (*samadhi*), "knowledge and vision of things as they really are" (*yathabhutañanadassana*), "revulsion" (*nibbida*), "dispassion" (*viraga*), "liberation" (*vimutti*), to "knowledge of destruction" (*asavakkhaye ñana*); see Bodhi 2000: 554-6.

[30] PSP 559: *asyaiva pratītyasamutpādasya yathāvadaviparītabhāvanātaḥ avidyā prahīyate | yo hi pratītyasamutpādaṃ samyak paśyati, sa sūkṣmasyāpi bhāvasya na svarūpamupalabhate | pratibimbasvapnālātacakramudgādivattu svabhāva-śūnyatāṃ sarveṣāṃ bhāvānāmavatarati | sa eva svabhāvaśūnyatāṃ sarveṣāṃ bhāvānāmavatīrṇo na kiṃcidvastu upalabhate bāhyamādhyātmikaṃ vā | so 'nupalabhamāno na kvaciddharme muhyati, amūḍhaśca karma na karotīti | evaṃ pratītyasamutpādabhāvanayā tattvamavatarati | tattvadarśino yogino niyatameva avidyā prahīyate | prahīṇāvidyasya saṃskārā nirudhyante |* (Vaidya 1960b: 244).

[31] As noted by Siderits & Katsura (2013: 116): "The mention of meditation, in the verse and in Candrakīrti's comments, is also significant. It is widely accepted that the path to the cessation of suffering discussed in the fourth of the noble truths involves not only the understanding or insight developed through philosophical practice (such as that of Mādhyamika philosophers like Nāgārjuna) but also the practice of meditation. Candrakīrti here hints at why that might be important: The

in meditating on emptiness, the meditator who "correctly sees dependent origination" "does not perceive anything real" is also "the one who is not perceiving" and "is not confused", he echoes Nāgārjuna's apophatic invocation (cf. YṢ 10) of a total non-(conceptual)apprehension in ultimate cognition.[32] This is specifically said to result from meditating on dependent origination and emptiness, referring to the dissolving insights (i.e., wisdom) gleaned therefrom. This non-(conceptual)apprehension in ultimate cognition refers to non-conceptual, non-dual ultimate cognition. In that context, Candrakīrti's exegesis draws the philosophical and practical implications of the necessity of the cessation of conceptualization in ultimate cognition. Emphasizing meditation's role theretoward is critical because meditation is the gateway to non-conceptuality (or non-conceptuality is the fruit of meditation). Here, he has specifically identified meditation as *meditation on dependent origination and emptiness*, which must be associated with the cessation of conceptualization through non-(conceptual)apprehension.

According to Nāgārjuna:

> [MMK 18:5:] Liberation (*mokṣaḥ*) [is attained] from the destruction of actions and defilements (*karma-kleśa-kṣayāt*) [and] actions and defilements [arise] from fabrication (*vikalpataḥ*). Those [arise] from conceptualization (*prapañcāt*), but conceptualization is ceased in emptiness.[33]

Candrakīrti comments, "Emptiness is taught for the sake of the complete cessation of conceptualization (*niravaśeṣa-prapañca-upaśama-arthaṃ*). Consequently, the total cessation of conceptualization is the ultimate purpose (*prayojanam*) of emptiness".[34] According to Stepien, with this verse "Nāgārjuna brings out the necessity of abandoning conceptual-linguistic elaboration in order to liberate oneself from karma-creating action and defilement".[35] Contextualize this with MMK 25:24ab: "Bliss/welfare (*śivaḥ*) is the

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yogin or meditator comes to directly see the emptiness of each thing presented in experience. This might be different from the sort of theoretical knowledge acquired through philosophical activity. If so, then this would explain why the karma-generating volitions of the yogin are all suppressed".

[32] See YṢ 10 in chapter 5 (§§5.1.1, p. 237 above).

[33] MMK 18:5: *karmakleśakṣayānmokṣaḥ karmakleśā vikalpataḥ | te prapañcātprapañcastu śūnyatāyāṃ nirudhyate ||* (Vaidya (1960b: 149).

[34] PSP 491: *niravaśeṣaprapañcopaśamārthaṃ śūnyatopadiśyate*, *tasmātsarvaprapañcopaśamaḥ śūnyatāyāṃ prayojanam |* (Vaidya 1960b: 214).

[35] Stepien 2019: 538.

cessation of conceptualization (*prapañca-upaśamaḥ*) [and] the cessation of all [conceptual] perception (*sarva-upalambha-upaśamaḥ*)".[36] Insofar as i) emptiness is taught for the sake of the complete cessation of conceptualization (its ultimate purpose), and ii) the cessation of conceptualization brings bliss/welfare, then the realization of emptiness, which Candrakīrti indicates is attained by meditation on dependent origination (in this context the conditions of the arising of conceptualization unto suffering and of its cessation unto suffering's cessation), is pacifying, blissful, and liberating. This is because liberation does not merely consist of the valid cognition of ordinary experience, the conventional truth, or the intellectual understanding of dependent origination and emptiness. Apophatically defined (as is standard for the ultimate), liberation occurs only from the cessation of all mental factors generating suffering.

In that context, there is a further element of the meditation on dependent origination contributing to the conditions of both the arising and cessation of conceptualization: the existential/causal and conceptual interdependence of the clinger and the clung to (i.e., the grasper and the grasped, the appropriator and the appropriated, the cognizer and the cognized, the designator and the designated, the conceptualizer and the conceptualized, etc.). Dependent origination, conditionality, emptiness, and mutual establishment, as always, condition the valid cognition of their relation. On this, the Mādhyamikas suggest we meditate. As Nāgārjuna says,

> [MMK 26:7-9:] When there is the existence of clinging (*upādāne sati*), the existence of the clinger arises (*bhavaḥ upādātuḥ pravarate*). If, without clinging (*yadi anupādānaḥ*), one would be freed (*syāt … mucyeta*), there would be no [further] existence (*na bhavet bhavaḥ*).[37]
>
> [In the context of the 12 links of dependent origination,] this existence is the five aggregates

[36] MMK 25:24ab: *sarvopalambhopaśamaḥ prapañcopaśamaḥ śivaḥ* | (Vaidya 1960b: 155). See chapter 5 (§§5.1.1 p. 239 above).

[37] As Candrakīrti comments (PSP 556): "The clinger (*upādātā*) of the fourfold aforementioned objects of clinging (*caturvividham yathā-uktasya upādānasya*) is the grasper (*grahītā*) and the producer (*utpādayitā*). On condition of the clinging of the clinger (*upādātuḥ upādāna-pratyayaḥ*) [as an existential, substantial identity], existence is produced (*bhavaḥ upajāyate*). What is the cause? Just as the one whose craving for feeling is unproduced (*yaḥ hi anutpādita-vedanā-tṛṣṇaḥ*), through the power of careful consideration (*pratisaṃkhyāna-balena*), rejects craving (*tṛṣṇām asvīkurvan*), the clinger should abandon the four objects of clinging (*caturvidham upādānaṃ pravihāya*) on account of standing face to face with unstained and non-dual cognition (*amala-advaya-jñāna-saṃmukhībhāvāt*). If, without clinging, one would be liberated (*mucyeta*), then, for them, there would be no [further] existence (*na bhavet bhavaḥ*)"; *caturvidhasya yathoktasya upādānasya upādātā grahītā utpādayitā | tasya upādātuḥ upādānapratyayo bhavaḥ upajāyate | kiṃ kāraṇam? yasmāt, yo hi anutpāditavedanātṛṣṇaḥ pratisaṃkhyānabalena tṛṣṇāmasvīkurvan, caturvidhamupādānaṃ pravihāya upādātā amalādvayajñānasaṃmukhībhāvāt syāddhi yadyanupādāno mucyeta saḥ | tadānīṃ tasya na bhavedbhavaḥ* || (Vaidya 1960b: 243).

> (*pañca skandhāḥ saḥ*), [and] from this existence birth (*jātiḥ*) arises. The suffering of old age, death, and so forth (*jarā-maraṇa-duḥkha-ādi*), sorrow (*śokaḥ*) accompanied by lamentations (*saparidevanāḥ*), melancholy/despair (*daurmanasyam*), and mental disturbances (*upāyāsāḥ*)—these arise from birth (*jāteḥ etat pravartate*). There is thus the arising of this entire mass of suffering.[38]

Making sense of this verse requires application of the Mādhyamikas' conceptual template of interdependence to derive the existential/causal *and* conceptual interdependent identities of clinging and the clinger, such that neither exists nor is designated without the other. Nāgārjuna here notes the connection between non-clinging (i.e., dissolving the identity of the clinger) and liberation, from which conjunction the remaining links culminating in suffering have no further catalyst (i.e., no further existence). This suggests, in a practical context, that the uprooting of clinging (and its existential/causal and conceptual interdependence with the identity of the clinger, the self, itself related in the same way to its objects of clinging) is necessary to reverse the causal chain beginning with ignorance and culminating in suffering. To that end, I now undertake an investigation of the identity of the clinger (the self).

§6.2 THE SELF RE: CLINGING, NON-CLINGING, & LIBERATION

The primary object of clinging addressed in Buddhist soteriology is the self (*ātman*). In MMK 18, Nāgārjuna relates clinging and selfhood as the agglomeration of the behaviours of "I" (i.e., the clinger, the self) and "mine" (i.e., the objects of clinging, the self's appropriations):

> [MMK 18:2-4:] When the self does not exist (*ātmani asati*), how will there be what is mine (*ātmīyam … bhaviṣyati*)? There is no "sense of self" (*nirahaṃkāraḥ*)[39] [and] no "mine" (*nirmamaḥ*) from the pacification of self and what is mine (*śamāt ātmā-ātmīyayoḥ*).
>
> The one who is without a "sense of self" and "mine" does not [really] exist (*na vidyate*). The one who sees without a "sense of self" and without "mine" does not see (*na paśyati*) [any self who *is* without a "sense of self" and "mine"].[40]

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[38] MMK 26:7-9: *upādāne sati bhava upādātuḥ pravartate | syāddhi yadyanupādāno mucyeta na bhavedbhavaḥ || pañca skandhāḥ sa ca bhavo bhavājjātiḥ pravartate | jarāmaraṇaduḥkhādi śokāḥ saparidevanāḥ || daurmanasyamupāyāsā jāteretat pravartate | kevalasyaivametasya duḥkhaskandhasya saṃbhavaḥ ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 243-4).

[39] "*Ahaṃkāra*" translated literally is "I-making". I treat it as a "*sense* of self" distinct from the "*concept* of self", as in *ātman*, *ātmavāda* or *ātmadṛṣṭi*—the doctrine or view of the self as substantially, independently existent; see §§6.2.1.

[40] Candrakīrti's commentary (PSP 348) makes clear that what is *not seen* is any entity/being distinct from "I-making" and "mine", that is, one who is truly existent as an entity/being without "I" and "mine". That would be, in a sense, a *substitute self* that, instead of characteristically consisting of "I-making" and "mine", characteristically consists of the *lack* of "I-making" and "mine". Though not commenting on this specific passage, according to Westerhoff (2009a: 163), "For the Mādhyamika not only is there no substantial self, there is also no substantial basis on which a nonsubstantial self could be built". Such a nonsubstantial self is here being refuted. Similarly, Collobert (2022: 31) comments, "An appropriator free of appropriation is

> In the exhaustion of "I" and "mine" (*mama iti aham iti kṣīṇe*) [with respect to that which is] external and internal (*bahiḥ ca adhyātmam*), clinging is ceased. From the destruction of that (*tat-kṣayāt*), there is the destruction of birth (*janmanaḥ kṣayaḥ*) [and so on for the remaining links of dependent origination].[41]

Several critical concepts in the debate on selfhood and selflessness punctuate these verses. All Buddhist schools agree that selfhood, as consisting of the *behaviours* of "I" (*aham*) and "mine" (*mama*, *ātmīya*), is the root of suffering.[42] Beginning at MĀ 6:120, Candrakīrti situates his refutation of selfhood in the broader context of criticism of *satkāyadṛṣṭi* (Pāli: *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*; Tib: *'jigs tshogs la lta ba*), which is usually translated as "the view of the transitory collection"; it is, in other words, a personality view or an identity view about the existence of the self.[43] In Buddhist literature, *satkāyadṛṣṭi* is unanimously categorized as a "wrong view" (as in, e.g., MN 109, the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, or the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* (ch. XIII)). This refers to the reification of the self on the basis of its aggregates in either of the following relations. The teaching of the aggregates coupled with non-self refutes the wrong views of i) a self *distinct* from the aggregates (as non-Buddhists such as the Sāṃkhya or the Vaiśeṣika hold in various doctrines of the *ātman*; cf. MĀB 6:121), and ii) a self *identical* to the aggregates. Various arguments are supplied to this effect, such as, in the case of distinctness, the aggregates being multiple the self would also be a multiplicity (cf. MĀ 6:127), which is contrary to the

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an oxymoron, as is an appropriator with nothing to appropriate. The appropriator vanishes along with appropriation and the appropriated: this is freedom".

[41] MMK 18:2-4: *ātmanyasati cātmīyaṃ kuta eva bhaviṣyati | nirmamo nirahaṃkāraḥ śamādātmātmanīyayoḥ || nirmamo nirahaṃkāro yaśca so 'pi na vidyate | nirmamaṃ nirahaṃkāraṃ yaḥ paśyati na paśyati || mameti ahamiti kṣīṇe bahiścādhyātmameva ca | nirudhyata upādānaṃ tatkṣayājjanmanaḥ kṣayaḥ ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 147-8). Consider also MMK 27:7: "The self (*ātmā*) that is other (*anyaḥ*) than clinging (*upādānāt*) is not possible (*na eva upapadyate*). If it were other, [the self] would be obtained (*gṛhyeta*) without clinging, but it is not obtained [as such]"; *anyaḥ punarupādānādātmā naivopapadyate | gṛhyeta hyanupādāno yadyanyo na ca gṛhyate ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 251).

[42] From this, another important factor of "I" and "mine" is the distinction of them from "not-I" and "not-mine", for which a further set of desires and aversions arise. The result is generally an antagonism between what is "I" and "not-I" and between what is "mine" and "not-mine", or between self and what is other, an antagonism conducive to suffering.

[43] It is sometimes translated more literally as the "view of the transitory collection" from the Tibetan. There are two possible etymological roots identified in the original Sanskrit term. *Dṛṣṭi* unequivocally means "view" and suggests a philosophical view; *kāya* refers to "the body" but can also refer to "a collection", in which case it unambiguously refers to the five aggregates; however, *sat* could either refer to √SAT as in "existing" (i.e., "the existing body") insofar as it claims that the five aggregates together exist to compose the self (Liland 2020: 280 n.248), or, due to *saṃdhi* rules, it could also refer to √SAD as in "sinking/perishing", as a reference to the impermanence of the aggregates nonetheless constituting the self (Liland 2020: 290 n.264). In either case, the view concerns the relation of the self to the aggregates.

conventional notion of the self as unitary.[44] On the other hand, the problem with the *identification* of the self and the aggregates, a position taken by some Buddhist schools (e.g., the Saṃmitīya;[45] cf. MĀ 6:126), is that the identity of the self and aggregates would mean there is a sense of self only so long as the aggregates persist. Given that the aggregates persist only as long as one's mind–body continuum, there is no reprieve from selfhood until the death and dissolution thereof, and so there is also no possibility of reprieve from suffering until the death and dissolution of the same. Therefore, a lived liberation from suffering is not possible on this model.

Against these views of the relationship of the self and the aggregates Candrakīrti launches his chariot analogy (cf. MĀ 6:134-9, 150-65), rejecting seven relations deriving the real existence of the chariot/self from its parts.[46] Nāgārjuna likens the relation of the self and the aggregates to which it clings (or from which it is derived) to the relation of fire and fuel:

> [MMK 10:15:] The explanation of [the interdependence of] fire and fuel (*agni-indhanābhyām vyākhyāta*) is the way [to understand] (*kramaḥ*) everything, without remainder (*sarvaḥ niravaśeṣeṇa*), [such as] clinging and the self [that clings], (*ātma-upādānayoḥ*) [up to] including pots, cloths, and so forth (*sārdham ghaṭa-paṭa-ādhibhiḥ*).[47]

This is fitting insofar as there is a semantic connection between clinging and fuel.[48] Per the analogy, fire depends on fuel in the same way fuel depends on fire, just like clinging depends on the self that clings in the same way the self that clings depends on clinging, depends on objects of clinging. Neither unilaterally

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[44] According to Collobert (2022: 19), "The idea of a continuity is based upon an idea of unity that is supposed to be constitutive of the self. As Candrakīrti states in his commentary on Āryadeva's *Catuḥśataka*, "People […] attribute a unity to a continuum of constructed things, a continuum that is not something different from the individual things that constitute it. For this reason, they act without understanding that it is momentary" (*Bodhisattvayogācāracatuḥśatakaṭīkā* 6.41, trans. Lang 2003: 122). The continuum of mental fabrications is misleadingly taken as a unity. […] As a bearer [of fabrications], the self is different from the fabrications and owns them. The misleading sense of unity, i.e., of a bearer, along with the continuous arising and ceasing, causes the illusion of permanence. In fact, as a bearer of constant changing fabrications, the self is experienced as unchanging and a sort of immutable entity".

[45] According to Liland (2020: 268 n.261), the *Saṃmitīya* view can be classified as *pudgalavāda* insofar as they believe the person (*pudgala*) or the self (*ātman*) is really existent as identical with the collection of the aggregates. The Chinese traveler Xuanzang wrote of encountering such believers in considerable numbers, though little of their writings survive today.

[46] See chapter 3 (3.4, pp. 165-6 above).

[47] MMK 10:15: *agnīndhanābhyāṃ vyākhyāta ātmopādānayoḥ kramaḥ | sarvo niravaśeṣeṇa sārdhaṃ ghaṭapaṭādibhiḥ ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 91-2). Candrakīrti (PSP 212) supplies the verses' missing verb: "Those established arguments established concerning clinging (*upādānasya*), the self (*ātmanaḥ*), and that which belongs to it (*tat-asya*) are all without remainder to be known (*avagantavyaḥ*) according to the explanation of fire and fuel"; *tadasyātmana upādānasya ca yaḥ kramaḥ siddhiḥ, sa sarvo 'gnīndhanābhyāṃ vyākhyāto 'vagantavyo niravaśeṣeṇa ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 91).

[48] See fn. 4 above.

establishes the other because they are mutually established.[49] In the verses following MĀ 6:120 attacking the identity and difference of the self and aggregates, Candrakīrti concludes that the self's "establishment arises in dependence on the aggregates".[50] This dependent establishment must be understood in the above context of mutual establishment insofar as the self is established in dependence on the aggregates and the aggregates established *as* aggregates in dependence on their constituting a self (whether clinging or validly cognized, the same relation obtains).[51] Nāgārjuna confirms:

> [RĀ 1:31-2:] Just as, by means of a mirror (*ādarśam upāya*), the reflection of one's own face is seen (*svamukha-pratibimbakam dṛśyate*), nevertheless it does not ultimately [exist] (*na … tattvataḥ*), in the same way, the sense of self (*ahaṃkāraḥ*) is perceived to be dependent on the aggregates (*skandhān upādāya upalabhyate*). Whatever is like the reflection of one's own face does not at all ultimately [exist].[52]

This analogy holds that, much like a reflection depends on a mirror, the sense of self (*ahaṃkāra*; see §§6.2.1) depends on the aggregates, it being the case that neither appears without this condition; because of this conditionality, this mutual establishment, neither is granted an independent existence apart therefrom. Consequently, the respective identities and differences of both are mere appearances. This is significant insofar as neither the appearance of the reflection nor of selfhood belong to the mirror or the aggregates intrinsically but nonetheless depend on them, respectively: such appearances are rather conditional and perspectival.[53] This is a critical realization in the consideration of selfhood, selflessness, and the respective relations thereof to suffering and liberation therefrom.

6.2.1 THE INNATE SENSE OF SELF

No Buddhist philosopher admits in consequence of non-self the self's complete non-existence (cf. MMK 18:6; 23:3). This is where distinguishing an *inherently existent self* from both i) a *conventionally existent*

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[49] See chapter 4 (§§4.1.2) on mutual establishment.
[50] MĀ 6:150d: *skandhāṃstūpādāya yātyeṣa siddhim* || (Li 2015: 22).
[51] See Westerhoff 2009a: 163 for corroboration.
[52] RĀ 1:31-2 (31-2): *yathādarśamupādāya svamukhapratibimbakam | dṛśyate nāma taccaivaṃ na kiṃcidapi tattvataḥ || ahaṃkārastathā skandhānupādāyopalabhyate | na ca kaścitsa tattvena svamukhapratibimbavat* || (Vaidya 1960b: 298; McClintock & Dunne 2024: 180).
[53] Cf. Ganeri (2007: 201-2): "A reflection depends for its existence on the mirror, but the relation of ontological dependence between the two is not like that between an object and its material. It seems to be *in* the mirror but not made *of* the mirror; just as fire seems to be in the fuel but not made of the fuel. Not a merely subjective illusion, it is nevertheless observer-dependent".

self and ii) a *mere experience of subjectivity*[54] is warranted, for the former is denied but never the latter two. There are two reasons for admitting the latter: i) avoiding nihilism in both metaphysical and ethical contexts with respect to persons and ii) from that avoidance, the valid cognition of ordinary experience wherein there is a conventionally existent experiencer, a host of the *pramāṇa*s, and a karmic vessel, whose impermanent, conditional existence depends on the aggregates.[55] In this respect, the distinction should be further extended to distinguish i) the *concept* of the self, which may take either the form of a) the inherently existent self (as in *ātman*, *ātmavāda*, *ātmadṛṣṭi*; a view of the self as situated in the standard semantic framework as an independently existent, perduring entity) or b) the conventionally existent self admitted in Buddhist philosophy, and ii) the *sense* of self (*ahaṃkāra*, the mere experience of subjectivity without requiring such a deliberate reification or conceptual identification).[56] In the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project, the focus is rightly on selfhood and selflessness in their experiential, behaviouralist contexts. To that effect, there is reason to posit this sense of self as being *innate*; however,

[54] A common objection rejects *anātman* on the grounds that, if subjectivity requires a subject and non-self denies the self as that subject, it therefore denies subjectivity. Dreyfus (2011b: 140 ("Self and Subjectivity: A Middle Way Approach", *Self, No Self? Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, Oxford University Press, 2011: 114-56)) agrees that "from a Buddhist perspective, the deconstruction of the self does not affect the person as subjectively consciousness. […] Stressing such a difference [as between conscious subjectivity and selfhood] seems to be one of the contributions that Buddhist philosophy can make to the contemporary discussion about the self".

[55] See Matthew MacKenzie, "Enacting the Self: Buddhist and Enactivist Approaches to the Emergence of the Self", *Self, No Self?*, 2011: 257 and Siderits 2016: 79 for conflicting accounts of this conventional self. Both allow conventional discourse involving persons/selves in ontological and ethical contexts without presupposing any ultimate, inherent existence thereof.

[56] Though it exceeds the scope of the soteriological inquiry of this chapter, there is a further distinction sometimes drawn between the *ahaṃkāra*'s sense of self and what is called *svasaṃvedanā*, often translated as "reflexive self-awareness". It is "a narrower form of self-awareness. It refers to the immediate acquaintance we have with both the *content* of our conscious states (i.e. the intentional object that an experience is an experience of, such as a perception of a tree, a memory of a childhood experience, or the image of a unicorn), as well as the *character* of our conscious states (i.e. the first-person phenomenal mode of access to the intentional content, such as the act of perceiving a tree, remembering a childhood experience, or imagining a unicorn). Put differently, *svasaṃvedanā* refers to the 'self-illuminating' (*svaprakāśa*) character of conscious states" (Joel Krueger, "The Who and How of Experience", *Self, No Self?*, 2011: 30); see his discussion of its distinction from *ahaṃkāra* on p. 39). This holds that for there to be any cognition of, e.g., blue, there must also be the *awareness* of that cognition of blueness. Candrakīrti (cf. MĀ 6:73-6) and Śāntideva (cf. BCA 9:21-25) criticize *svasaṃvedanā* in the context of its usage by Cittamātrins, though there is disagreement over whether this refutation concerns its conventional or ultimate status. E.g., Tsong Khapa holds the refutation at both levels (see his "Eight Difficult Points") while Mipham (2005: 123-5) argues for the ultimate refutation but conventional acceptance of consciousness' reflexive nature. See Paul Williams, *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defence*, Curzon, 1998b: 17 for a defence of Mipham; see Garfield, "The Conventional Status of Reflexive Awareness: What's at Stake in a Tibetan Debate", *Philosophy East and West* 56.2, 2006b: 202, 223 for a defence of Tsong Khapa. Williams narrows Candrakīrti, Śāntideva, and Tsong Khapa's arguments to a specific metaphysical context. On the other hand, Garfield's argument is significant because, while acknowledging that reflexivity is a possibility for consciousness, it rejects it as an essential, intrinsic, non-deceptive feature thereof.

that it is innate does not mean it is not caused and conditioned and is therefore incapable of cessation. As is clear in dependent origination, the five aggregates, non-self, etc., the permanent, inherently existent self, an artifact of conventional falsity equivalent to the son of a barren woman, is denied as an impossible entity without conventional referent (MĀ 6:122d: "even its conventional existence is not accepted" (*no saṃvṛtyā api iṣyate sattvam asya*)). However, the refutation of *that* self as an invalid cognition and its supplantation with the valid cognition of the conventionally existent self of dependence relations belongs to a sterile philosophical debate without any immediate or lasting behavioural or soteriological impact. There is a more pernicious tendency requiring uprooting. That abstract conception of the self is said by Candrakīrti to be "not suitable as the basis of the sense of self (*na ahaṃkārasya āśrayaḥ … yuktaḥ*)".[57] According to Candrakīrti,

> [MĀ 6:124cd-5abc:] [On account of those who are] ignorant of a view of the self (*atadvidām ātma-dṛṣṭeḥ*), [this philosophical concept of the self] is not even accepted as the basis (*api iṣṭaḥ na eva ādhāraḥ*) of the worldly [(ordinary, unphilosophical)] mind[s afflicted by] a sense of self (*lokasya ahaṃkāra-buddheḥ*).
>
> Nonetheless having seen their disposition of a sense of self (*ahaṃkāra-vṛttim*), even those [worldly beings who are] continuously reborn (*kalpaśaḥ saṃpravṛddhā*) [as, for instance,] animals (*tiryaktaḥ ye*) do not see this (*paśyanti na enam*) [(their self)] as unborn and permanent (*nityā-ajātam*).[58]

These verses distinguish i) the philosophical "concept of the self" (generally, the *ātman* of the non-Buddhists (cf. MĀ 6:121a), but also including the invalid cognition or reification of the conventionally existent person admitted by Buddhist philosophy) from ii) the ordinary experience of a sense of self that even animals, as sentient beings nonetheless endowed with a mind, experience.[59] The former Kelsang

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[57] MĀ 6:122b: *nāhaṃkārasyāśrayaścaiṣa yuktaḥ* | (Li 2015: 19). According to Ganeri (2007: 198), "Candrakīrti regards the idea that selves are souls as a sort of metaphysical straw man. Rejecting it doesn't really touch the main issue at all, which is to get at a proper explanation of our sense of ownership of our experiences, emotions and bodies. […] The errors we make in our thought about self go much deeper than that. Indeed, the idea that 'I' refers to a soul is not even part of our folk concept. It is just a piece of false theory". I revisit this "metaphysical straw man" and the root of the problem in §§6.2.2 (pp. 308-9 below).

[58] MĀ 6:124cd-5abc: *lokasyāhaṃkārabuddherapīṣṭo naivādhāro 'tadvidām ātmadṛṣṭeḥ || tiryakto ye kalpaśaḥ saṃpravṛddhā nityājātaṃ te 'pi paśyanti nainam | dṛṣṭvā teṣāmapyahaṃkāravṛttiṃ* […] (Li 2015: 19).

[59] Westerhoff (*Candrakīrti's Introduction to the Middle Way,* Oxford University Press, 2024: 135-6) supports this reading of the verses, extending the sense of self to "animals and pre-linguistic children, as well as beings born in the other realms included in Buddhist cosmology".

Gyatso calls "the peak" and the latter "the root" of *saṃsāra*.[60] The difference Candrakīrti here underscores is that the former, though it may take diverse forms, is the conceptualization and reification of the latter, the more basic affliction identified as the root of the problem of suffering. With similar terminology, Nāgārjuna posits that sense of self's universality as affecting *all* sentient beings and links them with the aggregates (as in the clinging aggregates):

> [RĀ 1:27-30:] By the one who speaks for the benefit of *all* beings (*prajāhita-ekānta-vādinā*), it is said that [*all*] beings (*prajā*) are produced by the sense of self (*ahaṃkāra-prasūtā*) and attached to the sense of mine (*mamakāra-upasaṃhitā*).
>
> "I exist" and "mine exists" (*asti aham mama ca asti iti*)—this is ultimately false (*mithyā etat paramārthataḥ*) since, for those who have a thorough knowledge [of phenomena] as they are (*yathābhūta-parijñānām*), both do not exist (*na bhavati ubhayam*).
>
> The aggregates arise from the sense of self, [but] that sense of self is actually false (*anṛtaḥ arthataḥ*). When its seed is false (*bījam yasya anṛtam*), how can its sprout be true (*tasya prarohaḥ satyataḥ kutaḥ*)?
>
> Having seen the aggregates as [ultimately] unreal (*skandhān asatyān dṛṣṭvā*), the sense of self is destroyed (*prahīyate*); from destroying the sense of self (*ahaṃkāra-prahāṇāt*), there is no further arising of the aggregates (*skandha-saṃbhavaḥ*).[61]

The essential points are that i) the senses of "I" and "mine" affect *all* beings; ii) these do not ultimately exist but could conventionally in the sense that they are conditional, dependently originated phenomenon (i.e., the sense of self and the sense of mine are genuinely experienced phenomena, though they have no independent, inherent, or necessary existence); iii) due to the interdependence of the aggregates (meaning, in this case, the clinging aggregates) and the sense of self, abandoning the invalid cognition and behaviour of the true existence of one should lead to the destruction of the same invalid cognition and behaviour of the other; lastly, iv) from uprooting the sense of self, there is no further arising of the

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[60] Of the former, Kelsang Gyatso (2017: 396) says that "The peak views of the transitory collection are intellectually-formed views. Unlike the innate view, the intellectually-formed views of the transitory collection do not arise naturally from imprints in the mental continuums but develop as a result of misguided reasoning. For example, if we investigate the nature of our I and erroneously conclude that it must be inherently existent, we will have generated an intellectually-formed view of the transitory collection". For the latter, see Gyatso's discussion of the innate view of the transitory collection (2017: 50) in fn. 64 below.

[61] RĀ 1:27-30 (27-30): *ahaṃkāraprasūteyaṃ mamakāropasaṃhitā | prajā prajāhitaikāntavādinābhihitākhilā || astyahaṃ mama cāstīti mithyaitatparamārthataḥ | yathābhūtaparijñānānna bhavatyubhayaṃ yataḥ || ahaṃkārodbhavāḥ skandhāḥ so 'haṃkāro 'nṛto 'rthataḥ | bījaṃ yasyānṛtaṃ tasya prarohaḥ satyataḥ kutaḥ || skandhānasatyān dṛṣṭvaivamahaṃkāraḥ prahīyate | ahaṃkāraprahāṇācca na punaḥ skandhasaṃbhavaḥ ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 298; McClintock & Dunne 2024: 179-80).

clinging aggregates, i.e., no further instances of behaviours reinforcing "I" and "mine" based thereon.

Given that both Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti discuss a sense of self affecting *all* sentient beings and not merely a deliberately adopted concept of the self afflicting only humans, there is something biopsychologically innate about the experience of selfhood. The experiential baseline of ordinary cognition is that same sense of selfhood (often confused for the concept of self). However, the question of the "innateness" of the sense of self (and of the ignorance with which it is correlated) in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist contexts is complex. Although commentators such as Jamgön Mipham, Kangyur Rinpoche, and Kelsang Gyatso respectively discuss an "innate self-clinging"[62], i.e., the manner in which "the mind is already "configured" in a self-oriented way" and "has been oriented in this way from beginningless time",[63] or the "innate view of the transitory collection",[64] the philosophical and soteriological implications of this point deserve further development.[65] These suggest a universal underlying affliction a more pernicious culprit than an "inferior philosophical tenet" such as the concept of the self since it persists without exposure to or acquisition thereof (and could, more likely, generate the latter). These commentators focus on the fact, as Candrakīrti says at MĀ 6:124ab, that there is no self distinct from the aggregates. It is implied that, even for beings of lower realms (presumably constituted by the same or a similar list of aggregate components), there is the same or similar experiential baseline

[62] Mipham 2002: 209.
[63] Kangyur Rinpoche 2010: 222. This is a consequence of Buddhist cosmology in which the wheels of *saṃsāra* have spun since beginningless time.
[64] According to Kelsang Gyatso (2017: 50), "The innate view of the transitory collection is a mind conceiving of one's own identity to be inherently existent that arises naturally without any intellectual investigation from imprints accumulated in the mind over countless lives. Unlike the intellectually-formed view, it functions continuously in the minds of all ordinary beings including animals and insects. The innate view of the transitory collection is the root of samsara".
[65] Tsong Khapa (2021: 427-8), though I would have liked for him to develop the point, comments that, "even in those sentient beings unaware of such a self as conceived by the non-Buddhist schools—that is to say, without grasping at self in such terms—the identity view is present. Through their tendencies towards clinging, they do experience [the world] in terms of 'I" and "mine". […] We can observe the presence of 'I"-grasping even in sentient beings with no habituation to inferior philosophical tenets". Mipham's comments are even more terse. However, Thupten Jinpa (*Self, Reality and Reason in Tibetan Philosophy: Tsongkhapa's Quest for the Middle Way,* Routledge Curzon, 2002*:* 123), in the context of Tsong Khapa's other works (such as his commentary on Nāgārjuna's MMK), says that "One of the fundamental premises of Tsongkhapa's thought, and in fact, of Buddhist philosophy as a whole, is that an individual's sense of self, or I-consciousness, is innate. It is instinctual and natural. It is neither linguistic nor even conceptual, if by conceptual one presupposes self-awareness. It is a natural, reflexive consciousness, almost like an underlying sense of one's own existence. […] Tsongkhapa calls this the 'mere I' (*nga tsam*) to indicate that it is not confined to any specific space and time".

of selfhood even if there is, for them, no knowing it as such.[66] Kelsang Gyatso emphasizes that that experience of selfhood, rooted in its appearance as such, appears to such beings as if it were inherently existent, at which point one should also differentiate the *concept* of inherent existence from the *experience of being* so.[67]

The point remains, as I think Candrakīrti argues, that if the aggregates were the constituent categorical processes of animal experience (see fn. 66), then they would not experience any self distinct therefrom. That sense of self is therefore dependent on the aggregates for all sentient beings. This Candrakīrti's commentators rightly emphasize to the detriment of the fact that Candrakīrti also says that there is nonetheless a non-intellectual, non-conceptual experience of selfhood responsible for all beings' *saṃsāric* existence. On Candrakīrti's instruction, I think this is the more significant problem.

We can corroborate this innate sense of self (as correlated with and dependent upon the aggregates)

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[66] In that sense, it doesn't appear difficult to attribute the five aggregates as the constituent categorical processes of animal sentience. There is perhaps a difficulty with the fourth aggregate, "perception/recognition" (*saṃjñā*; Pāli: *saññā*) if understood as conceptual, though that does not necessarily appear to be the case. Animals are quite adept at *identifying* food, water, friends, predators, and shelter without any conceptual label designating them as such. On that basis, I see no reason why the five aggregates should not also schematize animal experience. In that way, this is the difference in prognosis between the senses of self of persons and animals: no formal distinction is drawn if both are pre-linguistic and non-conceptual behaviours of clinging to their aggregates as "I" and "mine" that divide these from the remainder of phenomena as "not-I" and "not-mine", a division the impetus of the defiled attitudes of desire and aversion (from which animals also surely suffer). The practical difference is that animals lack the abstract conceptual capacity for analysis (a condition by which they also lack the concept of self), especially in the context of analytical meditation. Consequently, they do not wield the requisite analytical tools to uproot the sense of self through analytical meditation. Two conclusions are reached from this: i) in Buddhist cosmology and soteriology, a human existence is a favourable birth insofar as it is a favourable condition in which to learn the *Buddhadharma* and acquire the requisite tools to accomplish freedom from suffering; and ii) the goal of the attainment of the non-conceptual ultimate cognition is not a *regression* to an animalistic pre-linguistic, pre-conceptual cognition wherein the sense of self remains but to disrupt, uproot, dissolve, and overcome that sense of self—including its associated behaviours/attitudes and the suffering that accompanies them—entirely. For this reason, an investigation of the role that non-conceptuality (non-duality more specifically) plays in the dissolution of clinging is needed (see §6.3).

[67] Kelsang Gyatso (2017: 367) comments, "A self that is a different entity from the aggregates is not the observed object of worldly people's I-grasping minds because even though they have no concept of such a self and therefore do not cognize it they nevertheless do have the view of the transitory collection grasping at an inherently existent I". However, given his description of the inherently existent "I" as a conceptual imputation (2017: 360), how this "inherently existent I" looks to a non-linguistic animal is not clear. The appearance of *permanence* seems unlikely because impermanence and mortality are precisely what the instinct of self-preservation preserves against, suggesting the possibility of an unspoken intuition thereof. Conditionality also seems apparent enough (and Candrakīrti argues that even uneducated, worldly people know about cause and effect (cf. MĀ 6:32, 99)) for animals to intuitively grasp in a practical manner insofar as, for example, the experience of hunger leads to the eating of food, inclement weather leads to seeking shelter, etc. Similarly, Hopkins (1996: 44) explains that "This innate mind does not analyze whether the I is the same as or different from mind and body. Without any reasoning and through the force of habituation, it conceives of an I that is as if self-sufficient, able to establish itself, naturally or inherently existent from the very start and fused with the appearance of mind and body". It is difficult to attribute such a cognitive and anthropocentric definition to non-linguistic animal consciousness. There remains an intentionally vague yet opaque intuition of selfhood nonetheless dependent on the aggregates.

with contemporary accounts in the intersecting fields of neuroscience and philosophy of mind. However, unsurprisingly, both these generally take anthropocentric approaches that perhaps unnecessarily narrow the issue, belying a more universal underlying affliction in sentience in general. Firstly, one non-Buddhist example is a discussion by Metzinger: the rubber hand experiment demonstrates that there is the phenomenological, subjective experience of a non-conceptual self-awareness (which I interpret as the sense of self).[68] No concept of self is necessary to fall for this trick if it preys on unconscious habituations.

Secondly, a Buddhist example is found in Āryadeva, who argues that this innate sense of self must be idiosyncratic and unique to a specific collection of the aggregates:

> [CŚ 10:3:] [Since] that which is *your* self (*tava ātmā*) is not *my* self (*mama anātmā*), from that restriction (*niyamāt*) the self [(as the opponent understands it)] is not that (*na saḥ*) [(i.e., the basis of either conception)]. Is it not the case that the fabrication (*kalpanā*) [of the self] indeed is arisen with respect to impermanent phenomena (*anityeṣu bhāveṣu*) [(i.e., the aggregates)]?".[69]

This raises a significant point insofar as the "object" (*viṣaya*)[70] of this sense of self is not fixed across subjects or else they would share the same self and basis of designation, which is evidently false.[71] Because the self (both the conventional self the Buddhists admit and the sense of self, the general

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[68] Thomas Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel,* Basic Books, 2009: 3-4. Metzinger references the 1998 experiment conducted by University of Pittsburgh psychiatrists Matthew Botvinick and Jonathan Cohen ("Rubber Hand 'Feels' Touch that Eyes See", *Nature* 391, 1998: 756). The experiment induces a healthy individual to experience an "artificial hand" as part of their own body. Their own hand is concealed from sight, and the artificial hand is placed before the subject in such a way that appears connected to their arm. At first, for a time both the artificial hand and the actual hand are stimulated in the same way. After stimulation of the actual hand ceases, the subject's vision of the stimulation of the artificial hand can still invoke sensations in that subject. In this way has the "artificial hand" becomes absorbed into the subject's "sense of self". It appears that no "concept of self" is necessary at all to fall for this trick.

[69] CŚ 10:3 (228): *yastavātmā mamānātmā tenātmāniyamānna saḥ | nanvanityeṣu bhāveṣu kalpanā nāma jāyate ||* (Lang 1986: 94). Gyel-tsap's commentary clarifies that the "impermanent phenomena" to which Āryadeva refers are the aggregates (i.e., "form and so forth" (*Āryadeva's Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way* (trans. Ruth Sonam), Snow Lion, 2008: 216). See Ganeri's discussion of this passage and Candrakīrti's commentary (2007: 191-2); see also Matthew MacKenzie 2011: 261.

[70] This is terminology from Candrakīrti's commentary: "That which is *your* self, for you the object of [*your*] sense of self (*tvat ahaṃkāra-viṣaya*) and the object of *your* self-attachment (*ātmasneha-viṣayaḥ*) is indeed not *my* self because it is not the object of *my* sense of self (*asmat ahaṃkāra-aviṣayatvāt*) and not the object of *my* self-attachment (*ātmasneha-aviṣayatvāt*). Since from that restriction, it ([the self)] is not that [(i.e., the basis of either conception)], the self according to that restriction does not exist (*na bhavati*) [and] is not inherently existent (*svabhāvataḥ nāsti*). [Consequently], one must abandon (*tyajyatām*) the superimposition of [that] self (*ātmā-adhyāropaḥ*) [because it is] something unreal (*asadarthaḥ*)"; *yo hi tavātmā tvadahaṅkāraviṣaya ātmasnehaviṣayaśca sa eva mamānātmā bhavatyasmadahaṅkārāviṣayatvādātmasnehāviṣayatvācca | yata etadevaṃ tena niyamānna saḥ | yaśca niyamādātmā na bhavati sa svabhāvato nāstīti tyajyatāmasadartha ātmādhyāropaḥ |* (Bhattacharya 1931: 71; see also Ganeri 2007: 192).

[71] Gyel-tsap (2008: 216) comments: "It follows that the personal self is not established by way of its own entity. If it were, just as the thought "blue" arises universally in relation to blue, the thought "I" should arise in Yajñā when he observes Devadatta's self, but it does not".

experience of selfhood) is dependent on (but neither identical to nor distinct from) the aggregates, a specific sense of self arises from a unique collection of aggregates that are not interchangeable.[72] This is commensurate with the results of the rubber hand experiment insofar as, while I could be tricked into believing another hand is my own, it seems doubtful (though not necessarily impossible) that an otherwise healthy individual could be so easily tricked into thinking their *own* hand belonged to another.

Thirdly, at the intersection of Buddhist philosophy, philosophy of mind, and cognitive science, this locus of interiority and subjective experience is variously known as a "core sense of self" (Dreyfus)[73] or "the minimal self" (Krueger, MacKenzie).[74] However, unlike some of these, I would sooner insist on focusing on the basic *behaviouralist* aspects of sentience in general (including animals) than take an anthropocentric approach where the sense of self and the "I" are reduced to mere concepts (since the latter is a species of *ātmavāda*).[75] It is not the case that uprooting this sense of self is simply a matter of *un*learning what has been learned; instead, a more profound and impactful investigation is required.

6.2.2 UPROOTING THE INNATE SENSE OF SELF: AN ANALYTICAL MEDITATION

The question remains of how to address the affliction arising from clinging to this sense of self. At MĀ 6:141, Candrakīrti colourfully illustrates the issue: if someone found a snake hiding in their wall, they

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[72] Though it does not harm his argument (with the conclusion there is no inherently existent entity called the self that exists independently of the aggregates), this presents a potentially significant departure from Candrakīrti's chariot analogy insofar as this is an important way in which selves are *not like* chariots. The parts of a chariot are interchangeable (with, for examples, axles or wheels being swappable among chariots) but the parts of a self (the aggregates) are not. This makes the identity of a self more unique than the identity of a chariot. None of this has any bearing on the ontology of selves vs. inanimate objects but it could colour the experience of selfhood a different shade than its experience of inanimate objects.

[73] According to Dreyfus (2011b: 139), focusing on its pre-linguistic emergence, "the existence of this [temporally] extended sense of self should not obscure the fact that, although our core sense of self is greatly extended by our acquisition of language, it is not created by language, for it exists prior to the development of symbolic capacities. Hence, contrary to the extended self, it exists in any animals that can act in a coordinated fashion, even in the absence of any symbolic capacity". In that respect, he draws on a Tibetan distinction between an "innate apprehension of the self (*bdag 'dzin lhan skyes*)" and the "acquired apprehension of the self (*bdag 'dzin kun gtags*)" (2011b: 139).

[74] According to Krueger (2011: 28-9), the minimal self "captures the feeling of phenomenal interiority that is perhaps the central aspect of selfhood—the feeling that I, and only I, have this particular first-hand mode of access to the goings-on in my head at this very moment" and is "an invariant structural feature of consciousness, meaning that every conscious entity is, or has, a minimal self". According to MacKenzie, "Our most basic sense of self is pre-conceptual, pre-linguistic, and natural" and, he says that, according to Tsong Khapa, it is "experientially prior to linguistic construction" (2011: 262-3).

[75] For this reason, accounts like a "narrative self" discussing the diachronic qualities of the experience of selfhood belonging solely to a conceptualized reification of the self are out of the question for explaining the basic experiential quality of selfhood that characterizes sentience more generally. The former acts much more like a "substitute self" insofar as there is the imputation of a transcendent identity across experiences (i.e., the diachronic identity of the experiencer).

could not overcome their fear of snakes by proclaiming "this is not an elephant!". Deducing that "this is not an elephant!" and thinking that thereby the house would be rid of the snake or oneself the fear of snakes is analogous to falsely claiming that the sense of self is really equivalent to the *ātman*, so that with *anātman* understood, that sense of self would be entirely uprooted (where "this is not an elephant!" = "this is *an-ātman*").[76] According to Candrakīrti, this does not solve the initial problem of the snake (analogous to the *ahaṃkāra* hiding in the recesses of the mind). This means that the acquired concept of the *ātman* (if acquired at all) is not the root of the problem; it is rather the disposition towards *ahaṃkāra*, the deeper-rooted sense of self. This is the root cause of adopting the concept of self but not the reverse, meaning that *ahaṃkāra* is the pre-condition of the grasping at the *ātman*, prefiguring it in every way. For this reason, I stated that the concept of self, though appearing diversely, is in all cases one form or another of the mere conceptualization of this deeper-rooted sense of self afflicting all sentient beings.

The non-conceptual sense of the subjective experience of selfhood (i.e., the sense of self that experiences the world on the basis of the behavioural equivalents of the concepts of "I" and "mine" vs. "not-I" and "not mine") is not necessarily the immediate concern of the conceptualized conventional truth addressing the incoherence of the concept of an acausal, permanent, independent, substantial self (as in *anātman* vs. *ātmavāda*). The conventional truth in *that* sense teaches the dependence of the person on the aggregates, culminating in its impermanence and merely conventional existence. This relation is why the impermanence and conditionality of the aggregates is so strongly emphasized. However, for the aforementioned reasons, this does not uproot the real problem and may nonetheless perpetuate it by providing a substitute self (in a behavioural context) for that experience of subjectivity to

[76] Similarly, MĀ 6:140 reads: "[Some say that] the permanent self (*nityā-ātmā*) is refuted (*kṣipyate*) with respect to the understanding of non-self (*anātma-bodhe*), but this (*ayam*) [concept of the permanent self] is not acceptable (*na … iṣṭaḥ*) as the basis of "I-making" (*ahaṃkārasya āśrayan*). Why (*kim*) [would there be] the eradication (*utkhātaḥ*) of that self-view (*tat sva-dṛṣṭeḥ*) by the knowing of the non-existence of the self (*ātmā-abhāva-jñena*)? That would be marvelous indeed! (*ucyate atīva citram*); *nityātmā ca kṣipyate 'nātmabodhe nāhaṃkārasyāśrayaś cāyam iṣṭaḥ | ātmābhāvajñena kiṃ tat svadṛṣṭer utkhātaś cety ucyate 'tīva citram* || (Li 2015: 21). In this way, *anātman* (and *śūnyatā*) are the entrance to the process of undoing the tendencies of *ahaṃkāra,* but the intellectual understanding thereof in itself is not the total eradication of the totality of the sense of self. It is not as simple as using a conceptual function (i.e., the negation of *ātman*) to dismantle an old one (i.e., *ātman*). If it were that simple, "that would be marvelous indeed!"; one could realize non-self in an afternoon!

appropriate/cling to, vindicating that sense of self with some other form of validity.

The teaching of the five aggregates serves a twofold analytical purpose: it, firstly, undermines this concept of a permanent, independent, real self, but, secondly, should also be applied towards cultivating an insight dissolving the more pernicious sense of self.[77] For the purposes of this argument, I make the following methodological distinction: a conceptualist, philosophical investigation of the experience of selfhood (a third-person perspective of the concept of self) should be sufficiently differentiated from a behaviouralist, meditative investigation (a first-person introspection of its experience).[78] The valid cognition of ordinary experience correlated with the conventional truth dissolves the concept of the permanent, real self by insisting on its impermanent, conventional, empty, dependent, and conditional existence, whereas it is the purview of ultimate cognition to dissolve the sense of self as a deeper rooted problem requiring extensive introspective, meditative investigation of one's experiences, feelings, behaviours, and dispositions reflective thereof. To unmask the "metaphysical straw man" (see fn. 57 above), Candrakīrti demonstrates (such as at MĀ 6:122, 6:125, and 6:139-141) that undoing the illusion of selfhood is not strictly an intellectual matter; it requires a secondary approach consisting not of a mere knowing but of a *realization*, of a transformative insight. Because this exceeds the conventional truth's theoretical capacity, *there is necessarily recourse to the experiential ultimate truth* (see §6.3). Much like meditation on dependent origination, this requires a meditation on the five aggregates and, therethrough,

[77] There is a parallel insofar as many Buddhist authors across traditions discuss "two obscurations" (*āvaraṇa-dvaya*; Tib: *sgrib pa gnyis*) in a variety of contexts: there are "afflictive obscurations" (*kleśa-āvaraṇa*; Tib: *nyon sgrib*) and "cognitive obscurations" (*jñeya-āvaraṇa*; Tib: *shes sgrib*), the former "subtle" and the latter "gross". In this context, these roughly correspond to the "sense of self" and the "concept of self", respectively, the former more "emotional" and "subtle" and the latter rather "conceptual" and "gross". Generally, a path of learning and philosophy is prescribed for alleviating the latter, but one of meditation for the former.

[78] This distinction is in keeping with an interpretation of the two truths wherein there is a domain of theory and a domain of practice/experience, each neither identical nor distinct. When discussing Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and Āryadeva on the *ahaṃkāra*, this is a distinction MacKenzie (2011: 262) upholds in criticism of a reductionist view (reducing the self to the impersonal aggregates): "The project of Buddhist reductionism is to account for persons in impersonal terms, that is, in terms of causal connections between fleeting mental and physical events. In shifting to an impersonal and non-perspectival standpoint, the reductionist loses sight of the first-person perspective, and it is unclear in this case how to derive the perspectival from the non-perspectival. There appears to be an explanatory gap between the first- and third-person standpoints. Of course, for the reductionist, the fact that the minimal self is not found when one shifts to a non-perspectival, third-person discourse is grounds to deny its real existence. However, the Mādhyamikas deny that this discourse has any absolute metaphysical or explanatory priority. The problem with reductionist accounts of personal identity, then, is that they deny the importance of the first-person perspective".

a meditation on the self and how it is affected by dependent origination understood in both directions, forwards towards its generation and backwards towards its cessation.

This is contrary to the soteriological program understood by the semantic interpretation of emptiness (which, as discussed in chapter 5 (§5.2), denies the ultimate truth). For example, Siderits & Garfield say that "What one needs to know in order to attain liberation is that the very idea of how things ultimately are is incoherent".[79] In another formulation, Siderits says that "The ultimate truth$_1$ is that there is no ultimate truth$_2$" (where ultimate truth$_1$ is "a fact that must be grasped in order to attain full enlightenment" and ultimate truth$_2$ "a statement that corresponds to the ultimate nature of mind-independent reality").[80] These formulations unfairly privilege liberation's intellectual component insofar it results from "what one needs to know", "a fact that must be grasped". This aspect of Siderits' account has been criticized by Brunning.[81] Following the denial of the ultimate truth, these formulas appear to reduce soteriology to a state of merely cognizing the conventional truth when it is suggested that liberation consists merely of understanding this fact. Additionally, "what one needs to know in order to attain liberation" makes no attempt to ask 'what activities are done to attain liberation?' because it is only concerned with an intellectual understanding. The desire for such an intellectual understanding of the conditions and path to liberation is precisely what the ultimate's apophatic strategy is designed to undo. Insofar as dissolving the sense of self is the purview of the ultimate, it too is the fruit of apophasis.

I discussed how "there is no ultimate truth" should mean that it has no propositional content.[82] I agree it is important to understand how, therein, there are no privileged concepts and means of knowledge presenting a knowable, propositional truth greater than the conventional truth.[83] However, in

[79] Siderits & Garfield 2013: 659.
[80] Siderits 2007: 202.
[81] According to Luke Brunning ("Reconsidering the Soteriological Significance of *Śūnyavāda*", *Contemporary Buddhism* 15.2, 2014: 255), "Correct forms of thought comprise only one aspect of the Eightfold Path and this needs to be more centrally acknowledged by Siderits. His views retain a vestigial element of rationalism in holding that one certain truth will be enough to guard against other forms of clinging without generating its own temptations and troubles".
[82] See chapter 5 (§5.2) in critique of the semantic interpretation of emptiness in relation to the ultimate truth.
[83] Siderits (2016: 36) further says that "In the context of Madhyamaka, [metaphysical] anti-realism has the soteriological function of deflating the pretensions of philosophical rationality. It was Nāgārjuna's insight that in order to become truly selfless one must become profoundly sceptical about our ability to arrive at the ultimate truth about reality". Additionally, he

consequence of the correlation of the ultimate and *tattva* with non-conceptual, non-dual, and unfabricated cognition, no fact can bring about liberation when apophatically correlated with non-conceptual, non-dual, unfabricated cognition. Apophasis and non-affirming negation are the gateway to non-dual cognition without exhausting its attainment, from which it follows that the mere intellectual understanding of negation and the *neganda* are necessary but insufficient conditions for liberation. The transformation in cognition requires more.

Rightfully so, the proponents of the semantic interpretation do tie the lack of ultimate truth back to the self: according to Siderits, "The notions of ultimate truth and ideal rationality breed clinging and attachment, and thereby a sense of self. Scepticism about these notions undermines these last refuges of the self".[84] Similarly, Westerhoff says that "the conception of truth supported by the way things really are presents a subtle object of clinging and thereby ultimately a source of suffering. Such clinging is not as coarse as clinging to possessions, to one's body, or to one's self, but it still generates a kind of attachment which in turn supports a sense of selfhood as a subject who has realized the way things really are".[85] Siderits neatly summarizes the problem with this relation of the self to the ultimate truth: "What is at stake is the thought that there is the right way for a life to go, and that my life might go that way. For this depends on the notion of a truth that is somehow 'bigger than all of us', that reveals the larger scheme wherein our lives must fit if they are to have value and purpose".[86] This begins to scratch the surface of the deeper-rooted issue of the sense of self for it concerns how the experience of selfhood fits into a grander narrative of the functioning of the world that self inhabits. Rightly, the belief that there is such an ultimate truth reinforces the belief in the self that participates in that world. It is problematized like so: even if it were the case that it was known (taking, e.g., the Abhidharmic model on which Siderits'

says that "On the semantic interpretation of emptiness, the truth that liberates is the insight that there can be no truth apart from the contingent institutions and practices of social existence. It liberates because it undermines the last vestige of clinging, the belief that there is a mind-independent ultimate truth" (2016: 48).

[84] Siderits 2016: 36.

[85] Westerhoff 2009a: 224.

[86] Siderits 2016: 48.

account is based) that the person (as conventionally existent) is reducible to the existence of the impersonal *dharma*s and that such *dharma*s (ultimately existent) are the world's fundamental building blocks, this is insufficient to uproot that sense of self, that experience of selfhood. Although the self may be known as a "fiction" (along with the objects of desire and aversion, the desire and aversion for which cause suffering), they are nonetheless made up of real parts and, in whatever way it is imagined that it does, the self participates in this reality.[87]

Siderits' solution leans on emptiness' soteriological capacity to erode the philosophical foundation of this Abhidharmic ultimate truth, after which he returns to a standard formulation of non-self requiring "a variety of practical techniques": "The practice of such techniques in combination with the cultivation of philosophical rationality is said to eventually culminate in enlightenment. This is the thorough internalization of the truth of non-self".[88] That "internalization" takes place in meditation,[89] for which intellectual understanding is necessary but nonetheless insufficient. Despite Siderits' explicit reliance on intellect and rationality (i.e., "what one needs to know in order to attain liberation"), there is nonetheless a concession to practical techniques (i.e., meditation) for the erosion of the pernicious sense of self at the experiential level. The advantage of pivoting the soteriological initiative to the experiential realization of

[87] See Siderits 2016: 46-8 for a discussion of this possibility. He says (2016: 46) that "Philosophical rationality is used to construct and defend the theoretical framework that shows how a thoroughly impersonal description of persons and their states is possible. But since our lives are organized around the practice of seeing ourselves and others as persons, mastery of this theoretical framework does not by itself suffice to undermine the tendency to think of oneself as the author of one's life narrative". He also says (2016: 51) that "The Buddhist Reductionist programme of early Buddhism and Abhidharma is meant to reveal the falsity of this belief [in the "I"]. But to the extent that that programme relies on the view that there is such a thing as the ultimate nature of reality, it still leaves room for a covert and thus insidious form of self-assertion".

[88] Siderits 2016: 46. This is the case for him insofar as "the role emptiness plays in liberation from suffering is ancillary in nature; it is the doctrine of non-self that continues to play the chief role in that project, while emptiness serves just to correct for certain common errors in the application of non-self" (2016: 45).

[89] See Siderits 2007: 25; though not in a strict Madhyamaka context, he says that "To learn to meditate is to learn to control the mind. That control is then used to examine various mental processes, and to counteract those processes that perpetuate ignorance and suffering. So through meditation one can supposedly confirm that there is no self, by observing how impermanent mental states actually do all the work that we imagine could only be done by an enduring self. We can also see how certain mental states, such as anger and hatred, can reinforce belief in a self and thus perpetuate ignorance. And through meditation we can then learn to counteract such states. In the case of anger and hatred, for instance, the adept is taught to cultivate feelings of kindness and sympathetic joy toward ever larger circles of beings, starting with friends and loved ones and eventually extending to those toward whom they feel anger and enmity. So meditation serves as a necessary supplement to philosophy in Buddhist practice. (This is why, even if the Buddhist philosophers are right about things, studying Buddhist philosophy wouldn't bring about liberation by itself)".

emptiness and non-self is that it does not require the ultimate truth on the Abhidharmic model. We in fact benefit from its lack because such ultimate existence is grounds for clinging, while the realization of the lack thereof is conducive to non-clinging.[90] Still, we require meditation to realize non-dual cognition as the manifestation of that non-clinging, which is the cognitive model of the ultimate for which I argue.

I think the Mādhyamikas would vehemently deny that liberation arises from merely knowing a fact (*any* fact, but especially that there is no ultimate truth as the possibility of knowing the way things really are)[91] for, otherwise, every Buddhist philosopher could swiftly attain liberation (see Siderits concede the latter point in fn. 89). Nonetheless, it would be careless to say that intellectual investigation plays no part, lest the conventional truth be invalidated. Instead, Candrakīrti institutes the following program:

> [MĀB 6:120:] Analysis of the self (*bdag rnam par dpyad pa*) is the means to achieving (*sgrub pa'i thabs yin*) liberation (*thar pa*). For that reason, the yogin (*rnal 'byor pa*) initially analyzes (*rnam par dpyod par byed*) [as follows, asking:] "what is the object of the view of the transitory collection (*'jig tshogs la lta pa'i dmigs pa*), this so-called "I" (*bdag ces bya ba di*)?[92]

The above analysis revealed that the object of the personality view ("the view of the transitory collection"), or the object of the sense of self, is neither identical to nor distinct from the aggregates, though it is dependent on them and does not appear without them. For that reason, Candrakīrti says that,

> [MĀB 6:139:] When, in that way, the aggregates (*phung po rnams*) are not [identified as] the object of sense of self (*ngar 'dzin pa yul*) but also when it does not exist [as something] other than the aggregates (*tha dad pa yang yod pa ma yin pa*), [it is realized that] the object of the sense of self does not [really] exist.[93]

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[90] In Fink's account, non-self is a meditative practice that must be applied towards the realization of non-clinging: "What matters is what one *does* with the teaching, Liberation from cyclical existence is won not by understanding the teaching on *anattā*, but by putting it into practice (2015: 15).

[91] This is essentially Stepien's position, who adamantly insists that (I would specifically restrict to the ultimate context but agree in that ultimate's formal and soteriological contexts) we are truly required to abandon *all* views: "The holding of a view is never innocent, is always a commitment, and therefore necessarily involves one in attachment (*upādāna*) thereby reinforcing one's enmeshedness in the wheel of *saṃsāric* rebirth. Holding is always also clinging. There is no such thing as a completely objective position; one that would entail no subjective affirmation but would be affirmed, rather, with utterly detached neutrality. As such, the holding of a view is inextricably entwined in the holding *onto* views" (2019: 552).

[92] MĀB 6:120: […] *bdag rnam par dpyad pa na thar pa sgrub pa'i thabs yin te | de'i phyir gang zhig 'jig tshogs la lta pa'i dmigs par gyur pa bdag ces bya ba 'di ci zhig ces rnal 'byor pa je thog mar bdag kho na rnam par dpyod par byed do* || (Liland 2020: 280).

[93] MĀB 6:139: *gang gi tshe de ltar phung po rnams ngar 'dzin pa'i yul yang ma yin la | phung po las tha dad pa yang yod pa ma yin pa de'i phyir | ngar 'dzin pa'i yul nyid yod pa ma yin pas |* (Liland 2020: 308).

That is, it is realized that the sense of self has no real basis, no real existence apart from its conditional appearance as dependent on the aggregates. It is, therefore, a mere appearance, empty. Given a conditional appearance, a conditional cessation is also thus possible.

It follows from *seeing* (not merely knowing) the conditional appearance of the sense of self, from its analytical reduction to the five clinging aggregates and the conscious effort to uproot the tendencies that appropriate such aggregates in this way in the experience of subjectivity, that it is possible to dissolve the mindset perpetuating the sense of self. Candrakīrti continues:

> [MĀB 6:139:] From the [complete] non-observation of the self (*bdag ma dmigs pa las*) [in any context whatsoever] by the yogin, there is the realization (*yongs su shes*) that neither does "mine" (*bdag gi ba*) have any essence (*yang snying po dang ldan pa ma yin pa*) and, having cleared away all [habituations to treat] compounded phenomena (*'dus byas mtha 'dag bsal nas*) [as objects of clinging], a *nirvāṇa* without clinging (*nye bar len pa med par mya ngan las 'da' bar 'gyur*) [to either "I" or "mine"] is attained. For this reason, this analysis (*rnam par dpyod pa 'di*) is very powerful (*ches mdzes*)![94]

The analysis Candrakīrti prescribes is the same as in chapters 3 and 5 (i.e., *vicāra*), analysis finding nothing, coming up empty, and dissolving its object without remainder in a non-implicative negation. To *see* its results, the method is partly philosophical and partly meditative. It is, as chapter 5 described the ultimate, a seeing "by way of not seeing", a non-apprehension of neither that self's existence nor non-existence in any capacity. Not seen in any context whatsoever is any reality of the self beyond its being a mere appearance, a mere fabrication afforded a merely conventional existence the middle way between its inherent existence and complete non-existence. The palpability of the sense of self and the experience of subjectivity is not denied but its behaviours dissolved, its source of fuel (the appropriation of the aggregates) starved. Specifically dissolved is i) taking the aggregates as either identical to or distinct from that self, from which dissolves ii) the misconception that either of these inherently exist; iii) the senses of "I" and "mine" derived from the appropriation of the aggregates, unto iv) the sense of self as

[94] MĀB 6:139: *rnal 'byor pas bdag ma dmigs pa las bdag gi ba yang snying po dang ldan pa ma yin pa nyid du yongs su shes shing | 'dus byas mtha' dag bsal nas nye bar len pa med par mya ngan las 'da' bar 'gyur te | de'i phyir rnam par dpyod pa 'di ches mdzes so ||* (Liland 2020: 308).

distinct from its objects and other selves. This dissolution cannot be accomplished by the self's mere intellectual reduction to the aggregates insofar as it requires a meditative insight that *sees through* the conditions of its appearance.

§6.3 NON-DUALITY, NON-CLINGING, & THE SUBJECT–OBJECT DICHOTOMY

In this final section, I reconcile non-clinging with the non-dual cognition I correlate with the ultimate truth. Non-clinging in its ultimate, cognitive context is apophatically marked by the dissolution of the subject–object and self–other dichotomies perpetuating the notion of the clinger (the subject, the self, the "I") and its objects of clinging (what is "mine" or what is other, "not-I", and "not-mine") in ordinary cognition. That is, non-dual cognition, acting as the means to the complete dissolution of the sense of self and its attendant dispositions, manifests in an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging marked by the absence of these dualities. Sketching this mode of cognitive experience is the purpose of this section.

I argue that only and specifically non-dual cognition (which, from rejecting both extremes of a duality, is non-conceptual) dissolves the sense of self and its behaviouralist differentiation of itself from the other. Non-dual cognition formally manifests as non-conceptuality, but not all non-conceptuality (i.e., animalistic non-conceptuality) manifests as non-duality because non-duality specifically refers to the apophatic product of the dissolution of the mindset/behaviours of cognitively experiencing through the subject–object and self–other dualities. As the previous discussion of the sense of self indicates, this default cognition need not be conscious; e.g., animals can be non-conceptual yet not non-dual because of the presence of the sense of self orienting their attitudes and behaviours in a self–other antagonism (through behaviours indicative of "I", "mine", "not-I", and "not-mine"). Rather, only non-dual cognition, as a specific result of an intense analytical and meditative practice, breaks the hold of the sense of self by dissolving such attitudes and behaviours that mar ordinary cognitive experience. This is why there must be recourse to the experiential ultimate truth as an alternative mode of cognition.

As scholarship at the intersection of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra demonstrate,[95] non-duality and the dissolution of the subject–object dichotomy are topics more frequently associated with Vasubandhu and the Yogācāra than Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka. Consequently, Madhyamaka non-duality (especially the role of non-dual cognition therein) is underexplored. While the Yogācāra make it explicit (in the context of *cittamātra* and *vijñāptimātra*), that is not to say it does not feature for the Madhyamaka. The Mādhyamikas' brand of non-dual cognition is a direct consequence of the non-conceptual, non-dual, experiential form of the ultimate truth applied to the dissolution of the subject–object and self–other dualities structuring ordinary cognitive experience.

Shulman argues that while, for Vasubandhu, the denial of objectivity is accomplished "due to *Vijñaptimātratā* and nonduality of grasper and graspe[d]", for Nāgārjuna it is "because there is no *svabhāva*".[96] Yet, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti also subscribe to the non-duality of grasper (clinger, the subject) and grasped (the clung to, the object) when such non-duality refers to their interdependence, meaning that (as *advaya* literally means "not two") the two cannot exist independently (i.e., *svabhāvically*). In this familiar model, subject and object (like mind and world, cause and effect, fire and fuel) are both existentially/causally and conceptually interdependent (i.e., mutually established) and are therefore "not two". This is therefore a direct corollary of the Mādhyamikas' anti-foundationalist anti-realism insofar as there is the rejection of both a mind- and world-foundation in cognitive experience.[97] This valid cognition is the strongest weapon against any false conception of the independent self disregarding this interdependence. However, this interdependence should also apply to the sense of self since what is clung to (the clinging aggregates) is only clung to in dependence on that sense of self; without one neither does the other exist (cf. MMK 18:2-4, pp. 296-7 above). Where it concerns the self, the experience of selfhood, and its objects of experience, therein lies the soteriological value of the

[95] See the various essays collected in *Madhyamaka and Yogācāra* (2015).
[96] Eviatar Shulman, "Nāgārjuna the Yogācārin? Vasubandhu the Mādhyamika? On the Middle-way between Realism and Antirealism", *Madhyamaka and Yogācāra*, 2015: 206.
[97] See chapter 4 (§§4.2.3).

argument: the non-dual argument is most effective when two-pronged, attacking both the sense of self (subject) and what it appropriates (object). This is the same as the twofold selflessness (or emptiness) of persons and phenomena, which, again, can be corroborated by anti-foundationalist mutual establishment.

As seen, the interdependence of the clinger and its objects in the context of selfhood refers to clinging to the aggregates as constituting the sense of self, such that diagnosing the self as a product of such clinging in an appropriative relationship to the aggregates is the first step towards its cessation. In terms of methodological progression, we seem to be required to work backwards, beginning with the impossibility of the concept of the independent self (related to how subjectivity is experienced as independent though not necessarily reducible to this concept), working through subjectivity's dependence on the aggregates, before moving on to the equal dependence of the aggregates on the sense of self (i.e., their mutual establishment). As such, the independence of all these elements is refuted and their interdependence secured. That interdependence, a non-distinction in terms of identity or difference, is the gateway to their non-dual dissolution. Hopkins provides the following account of the self's dissolution via analytical meditation:

> The self is realized as an imputation dependent on the mental and physical aggregates. The meditator is told again and again that when he realizes the unfindability of the self, what appears is an utter vacuity which is the mere absence of an inherently existent self. He is told again and again that at the time of direct cognition subject and object become like fresh water poured into fresh water and that the emptinesses of all phenomena are directly cognized without the slightest appearance of those phenomena themselves.[98]

All this depends on disrupting clinging to the sense of self, which is realized to be a mere appearance dependent on the clinging aggregates. In this, there is the typical vagueness I attribute to the inability to successfully articulate the non-conceptual, non-dual, experiential ultimate.[99] If that is the case, then only apophasis approximating a lack is suitable; e.g., "what appears is an utter vacuity" (i.e., non-conceptual and non-dual cognition), a "direct cognition" wherein "subject and object become like fresh water poured

[98] Hopkins 1996: 189.
[99] See chapter 5 (§5.3).

intro fresh water", completely indifferentiable (i.e., non-dual) "without the slightest appearance" of any discreteness. The "unfindability of the self" refers to the analytical meditation finding nothing in the context of both the concept of the self and the unconscious sense thereof, the experience of selfhood and subjectivity without any real basis. There can be the appearance of neither in non-dual cognition.

Contrasting the semantic interpretation's approach to the ultimate truth and its soteriological efficacy (§§6.2.2), Huntington's account does not suffer from the defect of privileging the conventional truth and the intellect at the expense of the ultimate. It is instead concerned with developing a new "form of life",[100] balancing a non-conceptual meditative experience with non-dual cognition framed as a *bodhisattvic* attitude of universal compassion (where non-duality means non-discrimination between self and other).[101] He characterizes the fruit of the analytical meditation dissolving the sense of self as follows:

> Eventually the meditator establishes himself in a great inner peace characterized in the texts as the actualization of emptiness, devoid of reified thought and therefore free from the distortions of an emotionally unbalanced, egocentric mind. This tremendous inner peace is described as the power embodied in realization of the "suchness" of everyday experience, the ability to see oneself and all the other things of the world with "perfect clarity," just as they are in the context of their relations with each other. The highest experience of perfect, balanced concentration (*samyaksamādhi*) involves the transformation and harmonization of the entire personality so that one's attitude and form of life are in complete accord with the understanding gained through study and critical reflection.[102]

However, what matters for the two truths distinction and the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project is not merely a definition of non-clinging in terms of compassionate engagement with the world

[100] A new form of life can mean nothing other than a total change in mental operations at the deepest level: a new mode of cognitive experience and a new way of living therethrough. According to Huntington (1989: 59), ""Emptiness," the central concept of Madhyamika philosophy, is amenable to interpretation only as the expression of an entire form of life. The task is, then, to interpret it in this manner. To accomplish this we must begin by listening carefully to what the Madhyamaka authors have to say in the total context of their writings. Nothing of significance will come from attempts to understand the texts by basing our analysis on predetermined categories of philosophy, religion, sociology, psychology, and so forth. This could have the effect only of more firmly entrenching us in a preexisting network of unexamined presuppositions about what can legitimately be considered a problem".

[101] Such non-discrimination is characteristic of the ethical dimension of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project, more important than the personal mission of the attainment of the wisdom of liberation for oneself. It could also be that the very attainment of this wisdom of liberation is instrumental in sharing such attainment with other sentient beings for the sake of their own liberation. What matters more is the outpouring of compassion in the form of non-discrimination as a manifestation of non-dual cognition recognizing no substantial distinction between self and other or subject and object.

[102] Huntington 1989: 82.

post-attainment (the importance of which is not denied)[103] but to paint as vivid a picture as can be apophatically painted of non-dual, ultimate cognition itself. What persists for Huntington, in terms of a waking experience of engagement with the world, is the valid cognition of the thorough interdependence of all phenomenal appearances with no substantial differentiations thereof: "to assume full responsibility for all sentient beings is to realize the highest truth and the deepest meaning of the self. No longer dominated by reified concepts of "I" and "mine," the bodhisattva is directly, noninferentially aware of the world as nothing more than a constantly changing pattern of relationships".[104] However, so long as there remains conceptual discrimination (even if only nominally) of different phenomena nevertheless interweaved in a pattern of interdependence, one is not truly experiencing the non-dual, non-conceptual, unfabricated ultimate cognition of *tattva*.[105] In that vein, required for any lucid account of non-clinging and non-dual cognition is for the non-conceptual ultimate to be given its due place vis-à-vis the experience of the cessation of suffering manifest therethrough.

Huntington paints a picture of non-dual cognition that subtracts from it the subject–object dichotomy:

> As opposed to conventional truth (*vyavahārasatya*), the truth of the highest meaning (*paramārthasatya*) must be realized through a means of knowledge not grounded in the rigid dichotomy established between reified concepts of subject and object. Knower and known are experienced as interdependent events within a larger matrix of other such transitory, constantly shifting events, through a way of understanding referred to as *prajñā* (wisdom), resulting in *advayajñāna* (nondualistic knowledge). *Prajñā* and *advayajñana* are, however, best defined with reference neither to epistemological nor to ontological categories, but rather to what can be called an alternative conceptualization of the world actualized in an attitude of nonclinging, an attitude engendered within the meditator who has completely internalized the Mādhyamika critique. This is the central theme of Candrakīrti's philosophy.[106]

It is commendable that non-dual cognition is "defined with reference to neither epistemological nor to

[103] For example, Huntington (1989: 84) defines non-clinging in passing as a "wholesome state of mind" "founded on calmness and insight" and "an emotional and intellectual involvement with the world marked by the selfless concern needed to actualize the concept of emptiness", wherein "Actualization of emptiness dissolves the afflictions of delusion, clinging, and antipathy into insight, nonclinging, and compassion" (1989: 91).
[104] Huntington 1989: 125.
[105] MacDonald (2009: 161) criticizes this aspect of Huntington's account insofar as it boils down to "a rational insight into a profound interconnectedness inherent in the truly existing world, and thus merely a worldly, lived awareness of a state of affairs, and one that is involved not only with perception but with conceptual thought". As MacDonald goes on to explain (see below), ultimate, non-dual cognition is so much more than this.
[106] Huntington 1989: 18.

ontological categories".[107] Nonetheless, there are obvious difficulties with calling it an "alternative conceptualization of the world" *if* non-duality is to have its unmistakable flavour of non-conceptuality. However, elsewhere Huntington refers to it as "the noninferential actualization of what has been conceptually grasped", "associated not so much with a way of *knowing* as with a way of *being*", and, hence, a new form of life.[108] Thus, this account should be supplemented with further emphasis on the non-clinging *to conceptuality in toto* necessary to and characteristic of non-dual cognition.[109]

A *sūtra* Candrakīrti cites (PSP 516) presents such a lucid account of the interrelation of non-clinging, non-conceptuality, and non-dual cognition vis-à-vis the experience of the cessation of suffering. A concise summary is available in Collobert (2022: 31-2), though I present my own highlights. According to the *Āryadhyāyitamuṣṭisūtra* ("The Noble *Sūtra* on Grasping the Object of Meditation"),

> Mañjuśri, it is due to the perception of the self and its possessions (*ātma-ātmīya-upalambhataḥ*) that all beings fail to escape *saṃsāra* (*sattvāḥ saṃsāram na atikrāmanti*). […] Through imputation on what is unreal (*asat-samāropeṇa*), one fabricates (*vikalpayati*) [as follows]: "I am desirous (*aham raktaḥ*), I am averse (*aham duṣṭaḥ*), I am confused (*aham mūḍhaḥ*)". [… In the context of studying the *Buddhadharma*, one also thinks:] I am moral (*aham śīlavān*), I am celibate (*aham brahmacārī*), I will escape *samṣāra* (*saṃsāraṃ samatikrāmiṣyāmi*), I will attain *nirvāṇa* (*aham nirvāṇam anuprāpsyāmi*), I will be liberated from suffering (*aham duḥkhebhyaḥ mokṣyāmi*).[110]

Thoughts such as these betray the sense of self, the identity of the one who suffers and who will consequently be liberated from suffering. The *sūtra* continues:

> Mañjuśri, by seeing all phenomena as unarisen (*yena … anutpannāḥ sarvadharmāḥ dṛṣṭāḥ*), there is the thorough knowledge of suffering (*duḥkhaṃ parijñātam*). […] By seeing all phenomena as completely empty (*atyanta-śūnyāḥ*), Mañjuśri, the path is cultivated (*mārgaḥ bhāvitaḥ*). By seeing thusly the four noble truths, one does not fabricate [distinctions like] "these phenomena wholesome (*ime dharmāḥ kuśalāḥ*), these phenomena are unwholesome (*ime dharmāḥ akuśalāḥ*), these phenomena are to be abandoned (*ime dharmāḥ prahātavyāḥ*),

[107] Though MacDonald does not discuss this specific passage, she cites another of Huntington's that says, "The Mādhyamika does not advocate any radically unconventional category of epistemic act, but rather a radically unconventional form of life, in which one is constantly and profoundly in touch with the holistic, contextual nature of *all* experience—with the "suchness of dependent origination"" (Huntington 1989: 119-20, cited in MacDonald 2009: 160). Evidently, there is tension between these statements, and, although Huntington's emphasis is on a "new form of life", his account could be clearer concerning the unique conditions of differentiation of conventional and ultimate forms of cognition.

[108] Huntington 1989: 90, 119.

[109] I address this in the following chapter.

[110] *ātmātmīyopalambhato mañjuśrīḥ sattvāḥ saṃsāraṃ nātikrāmanti* | […] *saḥ asatsamāropeṇa vikalpayati- ahaṃ raktaḥ, ahaṃ duṣṭaḥ, ahaṃ mūḍhaḥ iti* | […] *ahaṃ śīlavān, ahaṃ brahmacārī, saṃsāraṃ samatikrāmiṣyāmi, ahaṃ nirvāṇamanuprāpsyāmi, ahaṃ duḥkhebhyo mokṣyāmi* || (Vaidya 1960b: 225).

> these phenomena are to be realized (*ime dharmāḥ sākṣātkartavyāḥ*), [any] suffering that is to be thoroughly known, [any] production to be abandoned, [any] cessation to be realized, [or any] path to be cultivated". What is the cause of that? One does not fix their gaze on (*na samanupaśyati*) or perceive (*na upalabhate*) any phenomenon that could be fabricated [as above. …] One does not accept (*āvyūhati*) or reject (*nirvyūhati*) any phenomena.[111]

The lack of acceptance or rejection of any phenomena is characteristic of a non-dual cognition:

> Seeing thus the [empty] nature of all phenomena, one becomes free from [both] attraction and repulsion (*anunaya-pratidhā-apagataḥ*) regarding all beings. What is the cause of that? One does not seize any phenomena that could attract or repulse. Through [the cultivation of] a space-like mind (*ākāśamena cittena*), one does not fix their gaze on the Buddha, the *Dharma*, or the community [(i.e., the three jewels)]. Fixing [instead] their gaze on the emptiness of all phenomena, doubt concerning any phenomenon does not arise (*na kvacit dharme vicikitsām utpādayati*). Without [any] doubt (*avicikitsan*), there is no clinging. Without clinging [to non-clinging, even] non-clinging [itself] is completely extinguished (*nirupādānaḥ anupādāya parinirvāti*).[112]

In Collobert's reading, non-clinging is fully realized through the annulation of *svabhāvic* cognition (seeing no longer the self or its possessions, including all phenomena more generally such as that which is "not-I" and "not-mine", as intrinsically real; that is, seeing them as truly empty): "The cancellation amounts to an equalization of all phenomena, the perception of which cannot induce any leaning towards them. The lack of inducement makes it impossible for *upādāna* to arise".[113] This is what the *sūtra* means by the non-fabrication of any wholesome or unwholesome phenomena to be abandoned, realized, etc. since, through the non-fabrication of any phenomenon (especially with desirous or aversive qualities, but

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[111] *yena mañjuśrīranutpannāḥ sarvadharmā dṛṣṭāḥ, tena duḥkhaṃ parijñātam* | […] *yena atyantaśūnyāḥ sarvadharmā dṛṣṭāḥ, tena mārgo bhāvitaḥ* | *yena mañjuśrīrevaṃ catvāri āryasatyāni dṛṣṭāni, sa na kalpayati- ime dharmāḥ kuśalāḥ, ime dharmā akuśalāḥ, ime dharmāḥ prahātavyāḥ, ime dharmāḥ sākṣātkartavyāḥ, duḥkhaṃ parijñātavyam, samudayaḥ prahātavyaḥ, nirodhaḥ sākṣātkartavyaḥ, mārgo bhāvayitavyaḥ iti* | *tat kasya hetoḥ? tathāhi sa taṃ dharmaṃ na samanupaśyati nopalabhate yaṃ parikalpayet* | […] *sa na kaṃciddharmamāvyūhati nirvyūhati* | (Vaidya 1960b: 226).

[112] *evaṃsvabhāvān sarvadharmān paśyan anunayapratidhāpagato bhavati sarvasattveṣu* | *tat kasya hetoḥ? tathāhi sa tān dharmān nopalabhate yatrānunīyeta vā pratihanyeta vā* | *sa ākāśasamena cittena buddhamapi na samanupaśyati, dharmamapi na samanupaśyati, saṃghamapi na samanupaśyati* | *sarvadharmān śūnyāniti samanupaśyan na kvaciddharme vicikitsāmutpādayati* | *avicikitsan nirupādāno bhavati* | *nirupādāno 'nupādāya parinirvātīti vistaraḥ* || (Vaidya 1960b: 226). This last sentence is tricky since there is a repetition of non-clinging, with the first (*nirupādānaḥ*) being in the nominative case, presumably the subject of the verb (*parinirvāti*)—i.e., non-clinging is completely extinguished—, and the second (*anupādāya*) being an indeclinable gerund (i.e., without clinging, …). These grammatical considerations, plus the above content about non-fabrication here applied to non-clinging itself, disabusing the notion that non-clinging is a goal to be clung to and that there *is* someone who does not cling (i.e., MMK 18:2-4), are why I translated this line as I have.

[113] Collobert 2022: 32. Further, "Having lost its graspability, reality is known as it is: ungraspable. The entrapment of the mind thus consists of perceiving phenomena as graspable, which is to say as substantial. The graspable is indeed that which appears as existing inherently. The mind believes that it grasps and therefore owns. However, it cannot grasp anything because of the ungraspability of all phenomena" (2022: 32).

also more generally), there is no locus of clinging and there is no identity of the clinger. As fabrication leads to clinging by reifying the objects of clinging, the identity of the clinger, etc., non-fabrication leads to its dissolution through dissolving the objects of clinging and the identity of the clinger.

Most significantly, as the *sūtra* makes clear, in non-clinging there is neither the identity of the one who suffers nor who is liberated, as an agent to whom actions belong and who is actively or passively affected. At MMK 18:2cd-3 and RĀ 1:28 (28), Nāgārjuna confirms this: it is necessary in the quest for liberation and awakening that, in uprooting the sense of self, also uprooted is the sense that there is someone liberated and awakened.[114] This initially appears contrary to the task, as if severing the very motivation for seeking liberation and awakening in the first place, but this is not the case for two reasons: i) conventionally speaking, there is the conventionally existent person, still afflicted by a sense of self, making their way through the stages and practices leading to liberation and awakening and experiencing a gradual transformation in their sense thereof; however, ii) the subsequent non-identification of the one who suffers, who is liberated from suffering, or is awakened (and therefore, crucially, the non-appropriation of suffering, liberation, or awakening) naturally follows the dissolution of the sense of self required by that liberation and awakening. As such, from the attainment of liberation and awakening achieved only by uprooting the sense of self, where there was once an identity of a suffer, an attainer, a sense of self, there remains now only non-dual cognition characterized by non-clinging to any distinction in the identities of a sufferer or non-sufferer, attainer or non-attainer, self or non-self, etc.

Similarly, a corollary of the equalization of all phenomena and the abnegation of any self-identity (and its possessions) is the abnegation of any other-identity: in a metaphysical context there is no longer any substantial distinction between self and other (since both are dependently originated phenomena, mere fabrications that form a conceptually interdependent pair: without self, there is no other, and vice versa). More significantly, in an axiological (ethical) context, the distinction dissolves, from which the

[114] See pp. 296-7 and 302 above, respectively.

bodhisattva's attitude of universal compassion without discrimination emerges.[115]

The *sūtra* discusses "seeing" in the context of a negation such as unarising or emptiness and as the non-fabrication of various desirous or aversive qualities in the same kind of "seeing by way of non-seeing" reserved for ultimate cognition. The result of its cultivation is not simply a not-seeing of anything (i.e., pure non-conceptuality, pure mindlessness, pure nothingness), but a seeing—by way of not seeing anything else—of *tattva* and emptiness (i.e., unfabricated cognitive experience); this is that non-dual cognition again characterized apophatically. MacDonald explains that this ultimate cognition (what she calls "gnosis" (*jñāna*)) is "a completely different type of awareness" than ordinary cognition:

> The ceasing of all conceptual and perceptual activity in the Madhyamaka *yogin* would thus act as a catalyst for experience of the concept-, designation- and perception-transcending ultimate that is neither an existent entity nor pure nothingness. Consciousness' coming to rest would create, so to speak, a vacuum in which emptiness as thusness (*tattva*), the true nature of the world free of any appearances or conceptual content, could reveal itself.[116]

Despite the inevitable structure of conceptual exposition in which it must be specified that *tattva* (or emptiness) is the 'object' of this awareness and that it is *tattva* (or emptiness) revealed to it, for the above reasons it cannot be the case that a subject–object scheme determines this experience.[117] However, unlike Siderits, MacDonald sees no problem in calling this a "radical mystical experience" so long as this mysticism is not of a reified absolute: that mystical experience is rather apophatically defined by MacDonald as "that there is no experience of reality, or that its non-experience is the experience of it"; it is an "objectless gnosis, far beyond the spiritually immature".[118] Such a skillful use of negation underscores the uniquely unfabricated nature of *tattva*'s cognition.

Whether non-dual cognition and the realization of the ultimate truth should appropriately be labeled

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[115] According to Huntington (1989: 136), in this state "There is then no grasping and pushing away, no personal stake in the dividing, categorizing, and criticizing activity of intellectual processes that are normally steeped in a manipulative, self-centered energy". In such a context are placed the legendary feats of self-abnegation in the legends of the *bodhisattva*s.
[116] MacDonald 2009: 162-3.
[117] According to MacDonald (2009: 164), "Of course as an awareness that is diametrically opposed to ordinary consciousness, it will not be configured in a subject-object relationship with emptiness, expressed as its focus for conventional convenience; its functioning would rather be non-dual".
[118] MacDonald 2009: 164; see my discussion of Siderits in chapter 5 (§5.3, pp. 276-7 above).

"mystical experience" depends on the precise meaning of "mysticism". Not many works directly address the intersecting (or non-) lines of Madhyamaka and mysticism in sufficient detail, though there are frequent passing remarks without elaboration.[119] While certain scholars like Garfield reject the strict application of the schismatic framework of philosophy vs. religion to the study and practice of Buddhism but do insist on its soteriological contexts,[120] others like Streng do not shy away from the latter label only in the case it is appropriately differentiated from the historically Western definitions and practices of religion and properly situated in its own soteriological context.[121] If any of these labels should apply, it certainly cannot bet in the typical Western sense of the "religious experience" of theism and absolute

[119] E.g., Siderits (2016: 22) is *contra* mysticism; MacDonald (2009: 164; see above) is *pro* mysticism in a not-overly qualified way; J. W. de Jong ("The Problem of the Absolute in the Madhyamaka School", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 2.1, 1972: 6; *Cinq chapitres de la Prasannapadā*, E.J. Brill, 1949: XIV) is similarly *pro* mysticism but in a not-overly qualified way; Jacques May (1959: 20-1) is *pro* mysticism (à la "directe experience") but in a way that does not support a rupture from intellectualism; Ruegg (1981: 2) mentions that this is one interpretation of the Madhyamaka, discussed "in connexion with the exposition of the purification of the spirit and contemplation" in the context of Śāntideva (*Ibid*., 82-3); Richard P. Hayes ("Nāgārjuna: Master of Paradox, Mystic or Perpetrator of Fallacies?", Presentation for the Philosophy Department at Smith College, 2003: 6-7) is *contra* mysticism but holds that Taber's interpretation (see below) advocates a form of Nāgārjunian mysticism ; John A. Taber ("On Nāgārjuna's So-Called Fallacies: A Comparative Approach", *Indo-Iranian Journal* 41.3, 1998: 236-7) does not directly call Nāgārjuna a mystic but compares him to other mystical traditions; Garfield (2002: 87) denies mysticism for Nāgārjuna if it means "irrationality" or a lack of philosophical rigour; and Streng (1967: 97-8, 159-60) does not directly call Nāgārjuna mystical but does discuss his religious soteriology (see fns. 121-2), the necessity of a "mystical intuition" for apprehending the ultimate (Streng (1967: 97), and how the wisdom (*prajñā*) that totally transforms the practitioner's way of life "transcends both logic and mysticism (1967: 159). An exchange between L. Stafford Betty and David Loy touches on this, with Betty decisively declaring that Nāgārjuna "was a mystic disguised as a philosopher" ("Is Nāgārjuna a Philosopher? Response to Professor Loy", *Philosophy East and West* 34.3, 1984: 449), taking a rather dim view of Nāgārjuna's philosophical contributions. Loy, on the other hand, is unwilling to parse Nāgārjuna's philosophy from his soteriology: "it makes no sense to say that the *Kārikās* are *both* philosophical *and* a mystical tract, since, as these alternatives have developed in the West, they are indeed incompatible. […] Perhaps the best description of the *Kārikās* is that they fall into neither category as we have come to understand them in the West but are, rather, sui generis, requiring a new (to us!) view of how the philosophical enterprise relates to the path of liberation—as neither identical with it, nor divorced from it: a conclusion I suspect Nāgārjuna would be pleased to agree with" ("How Not to Criticize Nāgārjuna: A Response to L. Stafford Betty", *Philosophy East and West* 34.3, 1984: 444).

[120] Garfield (2002: 254-60) lists some Judeo-Christian sympathies and residues in Western philosophy absent in Buddhism. He also notes a shared *soteriological* characteristic wherein "philosophy always begins in *aporia*, always aims at *noûs*, and always for the sake of *eudaimonia*. Or to put it another way, philosophy always begins in *avidya* and *saṃsāra*, always aims at *prajñā*, and always for the sake of *nirvāṇa*. This quest turns out to be built into *Dasein* itself" (2002: 260).

[121] Streng 1967 is the most extensive work on the Madhyamaka's religious/spiritual/mystical aspects. His treatment of *śūnyatā* likewise situates it at the intersection of philosophy and religion: "If the assertion of an absolute (divine) Being is a requisite for "religious" thinking, then Nāgārjuna's affirmation of "emptiness" can be regarded merely as an interesting philosophical position of extreme skepticism. We, however, have interpreted this expression as religious on the ground that *it has a soteriological intention*. Here we are using the term "soteriological" in a broad sense to mean "ultimately transforming"; and it is this transformation which is seen in terms of "purifying", "becoming real", "being free", and "knowing the truth" in various religious traditions around the world. The *intention* of religious life is to provide a *means* to correct an experienced deficiency in human existence, a radically salutary power by which man is saved from himself. Insofar as a soteriological intention is an essential factor of religious life, Nāgārjuna's use of "emptiness" can be understood as religious" (1967: 171).

divinity, nor could it be only ecstatic, transient, or episodic (as restricted to the meditative cushion).[122] It certainly can be neither a communion with anything nor an awareness of some presence because of the apophatic, unfabricated nature of *tattva* and because of non-duality's rejection of the subject–object dichotomy. It must constitute a lasting transformation in cognition, a total paradigm shift towards a completely unfabricated cognitive mode culminating in non-clinging. However, should mysticism only be broadly defined as *extra*-ordinary cognitive experience (extraneous and radically alternative to ordinary, conceptual cognition; i.e., *un*conventional), without necessarily specifying the content of that experience (since *tattva* has no conceptual content and therefore cannot therethrough be conceptually identified nor its experience successfully articulated), then one could call it "mystical" without adopting the connotations of other traditions. Mystical, religious, or neither, the kind of cognitive experience sought is *extra*-ordinary *qua un*conventional, yet foremostly soteriological insofar as it constitutes the cessation of suffering, liberation therefrom, and awakening to the ultimate truth.

The most apt apophatic characterization of non-dual cognition in the above *sūtra* refers to the cultivation of a *space-like mind*. The specific ignorance to which non-dual cognition is the antidote is ignorance of the functioning of the mind, its mental operations.[123] Space (*ākāśa*) is (negatively) defined as "non-obstruction" (as in an open space for presence and movement free from impediment). A space-like mind, variously understood as sky-like "awareness"[124] or "luminosity",[125] is an *empty space*, an *empty mind*, referring to a lack of obstruction therein insofar as there is a lack of content (in the sense of

[122] According to Streng (1967: 160), "Wisdom [(*prajñā*)] is not to be equated with mystical ecstasy; it is, rather, the joy of freedom in everyday existence"; this freedom "applies to every moment of existence, not to special moments of mystical escape to another level of being, nor to the freedom attained by priestly activity at a sacred time and place" (1967: 164).
[123] See Collobert 2022: 32.
[124] As by Padmasambhava: "This nature of mind, which is all-knowing, aware of everything, empty and radiant, is established to be the manifestly radiant and self-originating pristine cognition, [present] from the beginning, just like the sky, as an indivisible [union] of emptiness and radiance. This itself is actual reality. The indication that this is [the actual reality] is that all phenomenal existence is perceived in [the single nature of] one's own mind; and this nature of mind is aware and radiant. Therefore, recognise [this nature] to be like the sky!" (*The Tibetan Book of the Dead: First Complete Translation* trans. Gyurme Dorje), Penguin, 2006: 52-3). However, though there may be seeds in Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti (e.g., MĀ 11:56), this emphasis on "the nature of mind", "radiance" or "luminosity", and its sky- or space-like qualities are special interest of the Tibetan tradition and its interpretation of the Madhyamaka.
[125] Cf. AN 1.6.1-2 (see Bodhi 2012: 97). This is also known "consciousness without surface" (*viññaṇam anidassanam*; MN 49, DN 11).

ordinary consciousness' intentionality) functioning to obstruct that mind's pure awareness. In the Tibetan Dzogchen tradition, it is a common meditative practice to take the mind as the space in which phenomena appear (in the sense that phenomena appear before the mind), rather than itself being another phenomenon.[126] In that respect, cultivating a space-like mind involves cultivating the mind's awareness of the space itself (i.e., the mind itself) rather than the objects that occupy its space (its thoughts, discriminations, feelings, etc.). Ultimate cognition, then, in differentiation from ordinary cognition, focuses on the awareness of the non-object that is the space of awareness itself, while ordinary cognition is mired in the objects obstructing that space of awareness and the awareness of that space. In that complete non-obstruction is the pacified, blissful equanimity of non-dual cognition directly experienced.

It exceeds the scope of the present inquiry to venture further down this path, but, in the context of the ultimate truth, it needs to be said that, while the ultimate truth correlates with a purely experiential mode of cognition explainable by appeal to this type of mind, its temporary attainment restricted to a narrow meditative context is not necessarily tantamount to the lasting and waking attainment of the cessation of suffering, which remains, above all, the soteriological goal of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project as encompassed by the two truths distinction.[127] In that context, this exercise serves

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[126] See, for example, B. Alan Wallace, *Stilling the Mind: Shamatha Teachings from Düdjom Lingpa's Vajra Essence*, Wisdom Publications, 2011. Wallace translates: "Once limpid, clear consciousness has withdrawn into the central domain of pervasive, empty space, it has been directed inward. At that time, the mind and all appearances disappear as they completely dissolve into an ethically neutral, pervasive void. Through the power of self-grasping, the essential nature of this great, pervasive vacuity—the basis of phenomena—arises in the mind and its thoughts. This is certain. Since space and luminosity are nothing other than the mind, the mind itself becomes self and others by the power of the contributing circumstance of its radiant clarity" (2011: 96). Commenting elsewhere, Wallace notes that this "essential nature" refers to the *conventional* nature (in the context of the Yogācāra influence on Dzogchen, this is the *ālayavijñāna*, the "substrate consciousness") but not its *ultimate* nature (2011: 117-8). It is conventional insofar as dualistic dichotomies persist in it (e.g., inner–outer, phenomena–mind, mind–thoughts, etc.). In its ultimate context, the tradition refers to *rigpa*, "primordial consciousness" or "primordial awareness", which is "that out of which all relative states of consciousness emerge and is non-dual from the absolute space of phenomena" (2011: 2). That it is non-dual means it is non-conceptual, non-discriminative, and unfabricated in any conceptual manner. This work's purpose is instruction in the practice of *śamatha* ("calm abiding") meditation towards penetrating the functioning of the ordinary mind as the ground of all appearances: "Here is consciousness stripped bare, down to its essential nature of luminosity and cognizance. […]. It is the ground from which your psyche emerges" (2011: 177). When applying this in a Madhyamaka context (which is not its original context, though Madhyamaka Buddhism has considerably influenced Dzogchen), one should be wary of the possibility of reifying this mind (as the Mādhyamikas critique any metaphysical idealism attending the *ālayavijñāna* doctrine). Nonetheless, such instructions are useful meditative techniques to gain a better understanding of the functioning of the ordinary mind as the arena of fabrication.

[127] Pāli commentators such as Bhikkhu Bodhi and Thanissaro Bhikkhu associate this attainment of the mind's luminosity with the fourth *jhāna* (the highest, most profound form of meditative stabilization; see MN 24, MĀB 6:209). This is a non-conceptual state within which suffering could not arise, but, as strictly a meditative state, is not tantamount to attaining the

merely to sketch non-dual cognition and a narrow application of non-clinging. Nevertheless, the truest test of non-clinging in the context of the cessation of suffering and the greatest application of the wisdom required for its realization necessitates returning to the conventional world of language and concept with a new form of life and a new ethical-soteriological mandate. This is the subject of chapter 7.

§6.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I offered an account of the Madhyamaka soteriology focusing on the attainment of an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging. This is the soteriological goal, and the cultivation of a specific non-dual cognition (i.e., the ultimate truth) is the means thereto insofar as in this state there can be the cognitive experience of neither a clinger (i.e., the self that clings) nor its objects of clinging. In characteristic Buddhist fashion, this requires dissolving all remnants of the sense of self.

In §6.1, I sketched Madhyamaka soteriology as it concerns the conditions of the arising of clinging unto suffering and of the cessation of clinging unto the cessation of suffering. The Mādhyamikas schematize clinging through dependent origination, the four noble truths, and the five aggregates, wherein the chief object of clinging is clinging to the aggregates (making the clinging aggregates) in the experience of selfhood. According to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, meditation on dependent origination (that is, the conditions of the arising and cessation of clinging) leads to its dissolution.

In §6.2, I addressed the experience of selfhood (as comprising the behaviours of "I" and "mine") in its soteriological context. Non-self teaches the self as a conceptual imputation on its basis of designation, the five aggregates. In the case that the self is neither identical to nor distinct from the aggregates, it is instead a mere appearance in dependence thereon arising from the clinging thereto. The Mādhyamikas focus on an innate sense of self distinct from the acquired philosophical concept of the inherently existent self (as held by orthodox non-Buddhists), which affects all sentient beings, even animals. The perniciousness of this underlying sense of self means that the mere refutation of the inherently existent

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wisdom the Mādhyamikas associate with the complete cessation of suffering *while being in the world*, which is the truest test. This is a very complicated doctrinal question with minute intricacies I cannot hope to here resolve.

self (as accomplished by the valid cognition of the conventional truth) is insufficient to adequately dissolve the root of the problem of suffering. This requires an analytical meditation (a first-person behaviouralist introspection) on the experience of selfhood and how this sense of self shapes and warps ordinary cognitive experience. Accordingly, it is not merely the intellectual understanding afforded by the conventional truth that uproots this sense of self but the realization of non-conceptual, non-dual ultimate cognition wherein there persists no appearance whatsoever of the self, its objects of clinging, nor its differentiation from all that is other than it.

In §6.3, I reconciled the soteriological efficacy of non-clinging with non-dual ultimate cognition. This was explained apophatically through what is chiefly lacking from it: the subject–object and self–other dualities. This is because, with the dissolution of subject–object duality, there is necessarily the dissolution of clinger–clung duality. This means that non-dual ultimate cognition is the means to the complete dissolution of the sense of self and its attendant tendencies to carve the experience of the phenomenal world into 'this' or 'that category based on the subject–object and self–other dichotomies. In the way that *tattva* (the 'object' of ultimate cognition that is ultimately a non-object) is *un*fabricated, the following was established: as fabrication leads to clinging through the reification of the objects of clinging, the identity of the clinger, etc., *non*-fabrication leads to the dissolution of clinging through the non-appearance of the objects of clinging and the identity of the clinger. Thus, the cultivation of non-duality is the cultivation of non-clinging, and non-clinging is the fruit of non-duality. At this intersection of non-clinging, non-fabrication, and non-duality, suffering cannot arise for there is neither catalyst thereof nor trace of a sufferer suffering from X. I then explained the radically different nature of this type of cognitive experience as compared to ordinary, conceptual cognitive experience.

In chapter 7, I will address the relations of the two truths to one another, in particular the perspective taken on the conventional truth from the attainment of the ultimate. I address the conditions under which there is the post-attainment return to language and conceptualization by means of a transformed cognition and usage thereof.

CHAPTER 7: THE SOTERIOLOGICAL PROGRAM OF THE TWO TRUTHS

The Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project requires a soteriologization of the concept(s) of "truth" (*satya*), which means that truth in this project cannot be divorced from its soteriological context. Rather, the formal differentiation of the two truths corresponds to a twofold soteriologization. There is an interdependence between the cognitive reading of the two truths and their respective soteriological functions insofar as the cognitive distinction should be predicated by a twofold soteriologization. That is, beyond their formal differences, a difference in soteriological application distinguishes two modes of cognition. Each "truth" or form of cognition functions in its respective way as a soteriological device for attaining liberation (*mokṣa*) and awakening (*bodhi*). This cognitive-*qua*-soteriological distinction is significant for only through the realization of the ultimate is liberation attained. The conventional truth is insufficient to attain the soteriological goal; nonetheless, it is the means to achieving the ultimate and, therefore, that goal. This instantiates a specific relation between the two truths as one of means and goal. Any comprehensive model of the two truths must explain this progression in not only philosophical but soteriological terms. Awakening to the *full* truth (that is, the two truths) and applying that wisdom (*prajñā*) to every facet of cognitive experience liberates from ignorance and suffering.

In this chapter, I examine how that formal differentiation corresponds to a soteriological differentiation: insofar as these formal characteristics comprise cognitive differences, they constitute different soteriological capacities, each truth filling its own soteriological niche. That is, I investigate the two truths' soteriological applications, both respectively and concomitantly, as they configure in the greater Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. I first consider the concept of "truth" in its pragmatic-soteriological utility (§7.1). This demonstrates the value of the conventional truth in relation to the ultimate. Central to their distinction, this very relation circumscribes the Madhyamaka project. I then schematize that project with a dialectical model of the two truths juxtaposing their apparent incompatibility from the antithetic characterization of the ultimate with the compatibility the project nonetheless requires (§7.2). I demonstrate three stages of progression through the conventional and

ultimate truths, culminating in the world's post-attainment re-engagement by means of the wisdom attained by both truths' mastery. At this point, the distinction collapses into one mode of cognitive experience. A sketch of this collapse investigates why the Mādhyamikas discuss the illusion-like nature of cognitive experience and why Candrakīrti reduces the conventional truth to "mere convention". These indicate at last the synergy defining the two truths insofar as the *ārya*s' cognitive experience is suffused with the wisdom derived from each of the two truths.

§7.1 THE PRAGMATIC-SOTERIOLOGICAL UTILITY OF THE TWO TRUTHS

The interdependence between the cognitive reading of the two truths and the soteriologization of the truth the Madhyamaka project requires means that the twofold cognitive differentiation corresponds to a twofold soteriological differentiation as the very reason for the distinction. While each truth and its correlated cognition configure in their own way, according to their formal parameters and capacity, in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project, the Mādhyamikas are unequivocal that it is only through the ultimate truth/cognition is liberation from suffering truly attained. This instantiates a specific relation between the two truths as one of means (conventional truth) and goal (ultimate truth). This raises a number of methodological questions and practical considerations to be explored. Insofar as they are schematized in terms of the relation of means and soteriological goal, the primary question is of the two truths' pragmatic-soteriological utility, respectively and concomitantly.

I first introduce the function of the truth's soteriologization. I identify the conventional truth's pragmatic-soteriological utility as foremostly *pedagogical* as it teaches the conditions of the valid cognition of ordinary experience. In the light of the two truths distinction and the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project, it is best explained in terms of pragmatic-soteriological utility insofar as this subsumes its epistemological status (i.e., the way it is true)[1] under its soteriological import (its purpose, design) insofar as the valid cognition of ordinary experience it affords is both anticipatory

[1] See chapter 3 (§3.1) on situating the conventional truth between pragmatic and deflationary accounts of truth, with special attention paid to the weakened correspondence principle that determines what makes a sentence/proposition true.

of and instrumental to the attainment of liberation from suffering in the ultimate. Conversely, the ultimate's soteriological value is *purely experiential* as it manifests an alternative cognitive mode devoid of the possibility of the cognitive experience of a sufferer (a clinger, a self) and objects of suffering (objects of clinging). This differentiation in soteriological utility is a consequence of the two truths' formal differentiation. Whereas the conventional truth's soteriologization is preparatory, anticipating the ultimate in acting as the means thereto, the ultimate's soteriologization refers to the completion of the soteriological goal, the cessation of suffering. Insofar as its realization is the experience of liberation from suffering, the attainment of the ultimate truth is the attainment of awakening and liberation.

Soteriology, as the "study" of liberation, is a common theme in Indian philosophy differentiating it from Western philosophy.[2] With its emphases on epistemology and metaphysics, Indian philosophy derives soteriological import from epistemological and metaphysical inquiries—i.e., from knowing the truth, to what it refers, and how it is liberating from suffering and the ignorance at its cause. Buddhism follows this trend but departs from its colleagues with *anātman* (non-self, selflessness) and *śūnyatā* (emptiness), both of which are decidedly anti-foundationalist but not skeptical. As seen in chapter 4, the Mādhyamikas develop this through epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism at the conventional level.

The difference between what has been called "Reason-Driven Philosophy" and "Soteriologically-Animated Rhetoric" even plays out in the way Western scholars treat Madhyamaka philosophy.[3] Without

[2] See William Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Philosophical Understanding,* Motilal Banarsidass, 1990: 263-286. He contrasts the philosophical approaches of "pure theory" and "soteriological orientation" (1990: 269). This refers to at least to post-Aristotelian Western philosophy, exempting some schools like the Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics, Platonists, and Neoplatonists.

[3] See Alexandra Ilieva, "Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka Reconsidered: Neopragmatist Reflections on Language", *Philosophy East and West* (article in press, to appear in) 76.1, 2024: 2-4. She places scholars like Siderits, Garfield, Westerhoff, and Arnold in the former camp, and scholars like Huntington and Stepien in the latter. Ilieva's concern is as follows: "This debate over the role of rationality and philosophy in understanding Nāgārjuna's middle way is crystallized in a dispute over the metalinguistic status of Nāgārjuna's statements. At the heart of this disagreement is the question: are the statements in the MMK exemplars of philosophical inquiry, written in the language of reason, and expressing logically systematized beliefs whose semantic content is truth-evaluable; or, should Nāgārjuna's statements be read as primarily religiously motivated protreptic instructions whose semantic content is secondary to the intended investigation of a spiritual transformation in the reader? In other words, did Nāgārjuna take his statements to be *merely* useful to follow for the goal of liberation or to be *true* as well, that is, to accurately capture a fact about reality" (2024: 4).

discounting the prevalence of this divide in approaches for Western Madhyamaka scholarship, the two do not need to be seen as incommensurate; in fact, the development of a hermeneutic approach to the Madhyamaka that accommodates both concerns, i.e., i) the Madhyamaka's rational coherence and philosophical validity and ii) the soteriological efficacy of their project, would benefit Madhyamaka scholarship immensely. Such an approach is found at the intersection of Madhyamaka philosophy and Madhyamaka soteriology, thus requiring the soteriologization of the truth.

The reason the Mādhyamikas adopt their philosophical positions as "true", such as their epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism at the conventional level, is i) decidedly philosophical because these positions accurately reflect the structure and dependent nature of cognitive experience for its valid cognition and ii) foremostly soteriological because they address the ignorance at the heart of suffering, diagnosed as the persistence of the sense of self in its relations to its objects of experience. That ignorance is, firstly, addressed philosophically by establishing their necessary interdependence (and, therefore, their emptiness) in the conditions of their generation. Notwithstanding their philosophical validity, the more significant role these truths play is soteriological. With respect to their practical application, these teachings serve to curb clinging to both the self and its objects, the cessation of which, occurring through the cessation of the fabrication of these objects of clinging, is liberating. In that respect, Madhyamaka philosophy—even if restricted to the conventional level due to the formal parameters of both the conventional truth and philosophy itself as generally understood—serves a specifically soteriological purpose, from which follows two conclusions: i) for the Madhyamaka, truth cannot be divorced from its soteriological content; and ii) truth claims without soteriological import are largely irrelevant to its mandate.[4]

[4] This does not mean that they do not fit some narrower definition of truth. Such claims could be considered the conventional truth in a limited form insofar as they are truths in the ordinary world, though relegated to mundane and worldly concerns without soteriological application. Nonetheless, though seemingly unrelated to cognitive experience and the conditions of suffering and/or liberation/awakening therein, such truths can still be cognizant and demonstrative of dependence relations and causal relations (e.g., physical sciences like astrophysics and earth sciences like meteorology). These are usually of neither concern nor impact to a philosophical-soteriological project except for when they pertain to objects of cognitive experience.

On the other hand, given the restriction of philosophy proper to the conventional truth, a different approach must be taken towards assessing the ultimate. The formal parameters of the ultimate truth and the *extra*-ordinary cognition with which it correlates require that philosophy and intellectual understanding are not the terminus but serve as the vehicle to that end. More specifically, the methodology the Mādhyamikas prescribe through their call for the cessation of conceptualization assigns to the ultimate a soteriological capacity *more than* philosophical because it does not solely rely on concepts, argumentation, and intellection to achieve the soteriological goal—without discounting the role that philosophy plays therein.

It follows that any accurate portrayal of the Madhyamaka project requires the soteriologization of the truth in the context of *both* truths. The truth as it operates in any philosophical-soteriological project is soteriological *by definition*, since it is truth that delivers from suffering by overcoming the ignorance at its cause. That it overcomes ignorance covers its philosophical value, but that the overcoming of ignorance is itself inherently soteriological carves for the truth a uniquely soteriological role. For this reason, the question of the nature of "truth" for the Madhyamaka is more complicated than could be summarily resolved by its equation with one or another theory from Western philosophy *if* the truth's soteriologization is generally a feature lacking therein.

To show that truth is necessarily and in all ways soteriological in Buddhism, I first appeal to its function in the material of the early Canon. Although no straightforward definition of "truth" *in the abstract* is found in the Pāli Canon, there are various instances invoking it (e.g., the *sacca* of the four noble truths or *bhūta* meaning "fact, i.e., what has become, taken place or happened").[5] While this factuality might demonstrate how truth is arrived at and circumscribe the conditions that make a statement true, it neither defines its role in a philosophical-soteriological project nor indicates what makes its possession desirable or the reliance thereon efficacious.

[5] K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1963: 352; cf. Siderits 2016: 54.

Because these are my concerns, I investigate one invocation of truth stressing not for truth-for-the-sake-of-truth but its soteriological implications. In the *Abhayarājakumāra Sutta* (MN 58), the Buddha is said to only utter speech that is true (*bhūtam*), correct (*taccham*), and beneficial (*atthasaṃhitam*), regardless of whether it is liked or disliked by others (*paresam piyā manāpā* or *paresam appiyā amanāpā*).[6] The classic Mahāyāna example of the last criterion (whether a truth is liked or disliked) is emptiness, a 'dangerous' teaching inducing disquiet in those who misunderstand it; this also goes for the related rhetoric declaring all phenomena as ultimately unarisen, unceasing, etc. The Buddha himself, upon awakening, is said to have had to vanquish a certain despair from the inability of most ordinary beings to understand his teachings (cf. MMK 24:12). Both examples suggest that the truth to be taught could initially be disquieting (especially as it works to uproot the sense of self). Nonetheless, both the Buddha and Nāgārjuna proceed with the belief that such teachings, ultimately, will be beneficial in awakening others and successful in delivering them from suffering.

This shows that, while factuality is significant, the criterion of admission to the Buddha's curriculum is soteriological value.[7] This is a clear instance of pragmatic-soteriology utility *qua* soteriological consequentialism. The Buddha's concluding remarks at MN 22 make this clear: "Bhikkhus, both formerly and now what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering".[8] All teachings should be so

[6] See Trenckner & Chalmers (vol. 1) 1888: 393-4; Bodhi 1995: 498-501. This specifically means that the Buddha refused to utter speech that is untrue, false, and useless, regardless of whether it is like or disliked by others. See the commentaries of Jayatilleke 1963: 351 and Siderits 2016: 54.

[7] A parable from the Pāli Canon (*Simpasa Sutta*, SN 56.31) illustrates this: the Buddha asks, which is more numerous, the leaves in his hand or the leaves in the forest? Given the obvious reply that there are more leaves in the forest, the Buddha says, "So too, bhikkhus, the things I have directly known but have not taught you are numerous, while the things I have taught you are few. And why, bhikkhus, have I not taught those many things? Because they are unbeneficial, irrelevant to the fundamentals of the holy life, and do not lead to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. Therefore I have not taught them"; *evam eva kho bhikkhave eta eva bahutaraṃ yaṃ vo mayā abhiññāya anakkhātam | kasmā cetam bhikkhave mayā anakkhātaṃ | na hetam bhikkhave atthasaṃhitam nādibrahmacaryakaṃ na nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya saṃvattati | tasmā tam mayā anakkhātam* | (trans. Bodhi 2000: 1857-8; Feer (vol. 5) 1898: 438).

[8] MN 22: *pubbe cāhaṃ bhikkhave etarahi ca dukkhañceva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ* | (trans. Bodhi 1995a: 234; Trenckner & Chalmers 1888: 140). This is a familiar refrain in the Pāli Canon, also appearing in, e.g., SN 22.86 (Bodhi 2000: 938). Translators of the Pāli Canon have debated the translation of this passage, with some interpreting *ca eva* (*ceva*) as an exclusive sense of *only* teaching suffering and the cessation of suffering. In a statistical study investigating *sutta*s addressed to the laity, John Kelly categorizes their subjects (and notes their occurrence across the *suttanta piṭaka*) as "Happiness in This Life", "Good Rebirth", "Stream-entry", "Nibbāna", and "Unspecified", each of which, I think, can be broadly construed under the general heading of teaching "suffering and the cessation of suffering", all being generally soteriological in nature. See

contextualized, regardless of what other features they may possess. This introduces a criterion of pragmatic utility in a specifically soteriological function operating irrespective of, though concomitant with, any criteria of factuality or coherence. The connection between Buddhism and pragmatism is not new,[9] but this pragmatism's uniquely soteriological function is underexplored in Madhyamaka scholarship. Buddhist philosophy's pragmatic utility is expressly soteriological, [10] for which reason I refer to "pragmatic-soteriological utility" in a philosophical-soteriological project. This is the defining characteristic of "truth" on which hinges the two truths distinction and the entire Madhyamaka project.

For this reason, any consequentialist pragmatism in the conventional truth must be more soteriological than practical insofar as it is not true simply in virtue of it 'working' but it is true *and* it 'works' in both mundane and soteriological contexts. The conventional truth "works" in a pragmatic-soteriological fashion in two contexts: it functions by i) affording the valid cognition of ordinary experience and ii) acting as the means to the ultimate truth. That it 'works' is a byproduct of its established reliance on convention (*saṃvṛti*, *vyavahāra*) but, in mundane contexts, is not its primary purpose.[11] Since there is no "quarrelling with the world",[12] in mundane contexts, it is as practically efficacious as conventional knowledge already is. This point can be extrapolated from MĀ 6:99: ordinary beings are already vaguely enough aware of dependence relations in a local, limited fashion to succeed in agriculture. This stands for a variety of mundane concerns; as with the cases of fire and fuel (MMK 10:12), seed and sprout (MMK 17:7), and father and son (VV 49-50), appeals to such commonsense examples are frequent to universalize dependence relations by extracting the core supposition of their necessity therein and applying it globally to more abstract cases, as in the case of the dependencies necessary to the relation of

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Kelly ("The Buddha's Teaching to Lay People", *Buddhist Studies Review* 28.1, 2011: 18).

[9] See chapter 3 (§3.1).

[10] This has been argued by Ziporyn 2013: 344 and Huntington 2007: 112-3. Nonetheless, the account I propose leaves a little more room for philosophy and ordinary valid cognition at the conventional level, even if this is always and only in a sense *on the way to* awakening.

[11] One could object that, by design, the conventional truth has no practical purpose whatsoever, serving only as the means to the ultimate in a philosophical-soteriological project. While consistent with the broad strokes of the Madhyamaka presentation of the two truths, it is not as if it could be claimed that the conventional truth would *never* have overlapping concerns with entirely practical contexts (cf. fn. 4 above). Nonetheless, it is not the main concern, which is, above all, soteriological.

[12] See chapter 1 (§1.2,.1 p. 56 above); cf. MĀ 6:83, 158-60, 166-7.

the self to its objects.

If conventional falsity and ignorance dominate the cognitive sphere of ordinary beings, it is in spiritual matters that their effects are felt, not practical. The conventional truth is the antidote to the former and not the latter, presenting a globalized perspective of a conceptual framework for the valid cognition of the contents and structure of ordinary experience. Rather than strictly being concerned with practical consequences in mundane contexts, its concern is foremostly soteriological regarding the soteriological benefits conferred by that valid cognition. That is, beyond philosophical validity, soteriology is the primary overriding context in which the conventional truth and the valid cognition of ordinary experience are differentiated from its invalid cognition and conventional falsity. Nominally constituted by the same contents as conventional falsity (i.e., the same names and the same conventions, thus capable of replicating any practical success), the conventional truth's globalized approach is corrective of the underlying semantic commitments of cognitive experience in metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology to be consistent with the universality of dependence relations and emptiness in a way overcoming of the ignorance and suffering associated with their invalid cognitions.

Acting as its philosophical baseline, dependent origination is the perfect case study in the conventional truth's pragmatic-soteriological utility. Dependent origination is not true *because of* soteriologically consequentialist reasons; it is demonstrably true through logical and coherent argumentation.[13] It is the nature of phenomena, restricted to objects of cognitive experience, to be subject to such dependence relations—this is the truth of their appearances. This accounts for the conventional truth's epistemological status (not "objectively" true in a mind-independent manner insofar as it is a product of cognitive experience's valid cognition). However, given the truth's soteriologization, this must be contextualized by its soteriological import. It is more important to understand that dependent origination

[13] As I argued in chapter 3 (§3.4) via its two styles of argumentation, analysis (a *reductio ad absurdum* style of argumentation attacking dependent origination's alternative, *svabhāva*) and conventional reasoning (the positive establishment of the necessity of dependence relations to make sense of cognitive experience).

features in the curriculum not simply because it is true but *specifically because of* its soteriological application. This I demonstrated insofar as dependent origination teaches the conditions of both the arising and cessation of suffering, with particular respect to the self and its relations to its objects of cognitive experience.[14] The dependence relations endemic to dependent origination (via conditionality, emptiness) establish them both as dependently originated phenomena, the relation therebetween that of interdependence and emptiness (i.e., the twofold selflessness of persons and phenomena).[15] As ignorance thereof leads to suffering by perpetuating the sense of self who appropriates their suffering, the knowledge thereof (as only the conventional truth could afford) is instrumental towards liberation from ignorance and suffering. The application of dependent origination in the Madhyamaka project is, hence, both philosophical and soteriological, with a greater methodological significance afforded to the latter.

The case of dependent origination establishes that the conventional truth's value in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project is foremostly pedagogic insofar as it teaches right view to combat wrong view. Its pedagogic value is demonstrated by its inclusion in the curriculum. Its limited pragmatic utility is to be as efficacious as conventional knowledge generally is but to supply a more appropriate and coherent semantic framework for the ordinary cognition occurring therethrough.[16] While the conventional truth is restricted to the intellectual level, it, additionally, has hints of experiential value insofar as, because it accounts for the conditions of the valid cognition of ordinary experience, it inaugurates the transformation from ignorance, invalid cognition, wrong view, and conventional falsity to knowledge, valid cognition, right view, and the conventional truth. These first few steps have doubtless soteriological value in transforming ordinary cognitive experience itself from wrong view to right view. Because the conventional truth is nonetheless insufficient to complete the soteriological goal (for which reason there is necessary recourse to the ultimate), its pragmatic-soteriological utility is therefore

[14] See chapter 6 (6.1.2).
[15] In chapter 4, this was explained via epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism as the architecture of the valid cognition of ordinary experience.
[16] See chapter 2 (§§2.2.3) on the Mādhyamikas' semantic framework.

ultimately derived from its acting as the means to the ultimate, teaching the truth of the cessation of dependently originated, conditional, and empty phenomena (specifically including suffering) that can only be realized in the ultimate. It is thus a necessary condition of the ultimate and liberation.

Insofar as it is the means to the ultimate, the conventional truth, after vanquishing conventional falsity and presenting the means of the valid cognition of ordinary experience, goes only so far as offering the apophatic presentation of the ultimate truth. At this point, we must change gears to an entirely different conception of "truth" to account for the ultimate's soteriological application because its non-conceptual, non-dual form precludes its direct association with any specific teaching, any truth associated with language. In the case that the ultimate cannot be taught, the second stage of the soteriologization of the truth is no longer pedagogical and does not concern pragmatic utility in that context but is purely experiential. Due to its formal differentiation from the conventional truth, the ultimate is not a truth of teaching or philosophizing but a truth characterized by cessation, attainment, and realization. This is also, in its own way, soteriologically pragmatic *qua* consequentialist insofar as a causal chain is traced through the truth of cessation (i.e., of the possibility of the cessation of suffering, of conceptualization—the tail end of the conventional truth), non-duality, and non-clinging, to, finally, liberation—the ultimate truth. Soteriologically, the ultimate truth finds its value in the case it is the only cognitive condition in which the cessation of suffering without remainder is accomplished insofar as it is the only cognitive mode in which the sense of self, in both cognitive and behavioural contexts, is entirely dissolved.

If only the ultimate realizes the soteriological goal, there is established a soteriological hierarchy in the two truths. In terms of their formal differentiation, the hierarchy requires that the non-conceptual ultimate soteriologically supersedes the conceptuality of the conventional. The hierarchy cannot be simply epistemological because *both* truths are considered true (i.e., valid cognitions) but in different ways insofar as they correlate to different (formally distinct) modes of cognition. The hierarchy is therefore foremostly soteriological: the conventional truth is soteriologically inferior to the ultimate, though no less instrumental to the philosophical-soteriological project. This hierarchy is evident in the

dialectical model of the two truths I offer in the following section, which demonstrates its stages of progression and the function of each of the two truths.

§7.2 THE DIALECTIC OF THE TWO TRUTHS

A dialectical model of the two truths addresses the relations that obtain or not between them. It tackles the two truths together in their role in the Madhyamaka project and the distinction's very purpose. Taking an approach via thesis and antithesis as two otherwise incompatible perspectives, the contrasted perspectives/cognitions address how we cognize and experience through either side of the cognitive antagonism (or, in the case of the antithesis, the inability to do so in the same way as the thesis).[17] Per the two truths distinction, it treats two forms of truth characterized as distinct modes of cognition contrarily defined as so dimorphic to appear utterly incompatible, unable to obtain simultaneously. I explore this incompatibility inherent to the model and uncover any latent compatibility. As such, the dialectic itself is epistemological but more specifically cognitive. The two types of cognition, although formally differentiated, do not address distinct objects but the *same* object through different cognitive modes, conventional (ordinary, dualistic) and ultimate (*extra*-ordinary, non-dual).[18] Both address the

[17] This dialectic is inspired by Kantian antinomies (see, e.g., *Critique of Pure Reason* B421, B434, B451; see also Jonathan Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic*, Cambridge University Press, 2016: 115-118) but intends no likening thereto nor calls the Madhyamaka Kantian in any meaningful way. The difference is that, despite superficial structural commonalities, the Kantian and Madhyamaka projects have different concerns and applications, the comparison of which is not my concern. I am not concerned with Kant's specific applications, only noting they are metaphysical in nature (for the phenomena–noumena thesis–antithesis, more cosmological for the four listed antinomies, towards the goal of his transcendental idealism). Scholars have tried applying a Kantian metaphysical interpretation to the Madhyamaka the two truths before; this has resulted in a two-tier metaphysics (phenomenon and noumenon) that looks strikingly similar to the Abhidharmic model the Mādhyamikas critique. I mention this phase of interpretation in the "General Introduction" (pp. 5-6 above). I argued against interpretating the Madhyamaka's metaphysical anti-realism as metaphysical idealism in chapter 4 (§§4.2.3) and against any noumenal reading of the ultimate in chapter 5 (§5.3).

[18] Cf. MĀ 6:23 on p. 365 above. See Thakchöe 2007b: 7-12, 17-21 for an explanation of Tsong Khapa's support of this point (contrasted, in the same chapter, with that of Gorampa; see p. 106 for an overview of the disjunction). Despite previous criticism of Jones (see chapter 5 (§5.1, pp. 273-4 above)), he also, perhaps contradictorily (in my interpretation), says (2025: 834) that "*Tattva* is not a hidden reality or reality transcending the phenomenal world that is the source of the world but is simply the way the phenomenal world actually is once we cease our conceptual projections—free of the illusion of entities existing by *svabhāva*. That is, *tattva* is not another level of reality but the phenomenal world seen from the highest point of view. The that-ness of reality is directly experienceable. It can be said to be "behind" conceptualized perceptions, but it is not an unexperienceable noumenon behind phenomena. Rather, it is simply the way the phenomenal world is without our conceptual overlay. Thus, it can be experienced directly and without meditation". This is good in that it demonstrates a non-difference in the objects of cognitive experience but a difference in the cognition itself, but taking non-duality and apophasis seriously precludes calling it "the way the phenomenal world actually is once we cease our conceptual projections" precisely because it is no longer the "phenomenal world", no contrast drawn between "appearances" and "reality" or any other such distinctions. It is also, for this same reason, more than just freedom from the illusion of *svabhāva* but freedom from

objects of cognitive experience at differentiable levels of wisdom (*prajñā*), each correlated with formally distinct modes of cognition. That is to say, in the cognitive reading I offer, the chief difference the two truths distinction draws is not, strictly speaking, between the objects of cognitive experience but between their correlated cognitions. Their compatibility is the ultimate inseparability of appearance (i.e., the objects of ordinary cognition) and emptiness (or *tattva*, suchness, etc., the objects of *extra*-ordinary cognition), which means at all times cognizing the emptiness of appearances that makes them possible.[19]

The purpose of the dialectic and of the resolution of its antinomy is that the completion of the philosophical-soteriological project (i.e., the realization of both truths) requires the re-engagement of the world and thereby, ultimately, the collapse of this formal cognitive distinction. This requires a return to the conceptuality of convention, now imbued with the wisdom of the ultimate. This re-engagement is only possible through an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging,[20] specifically referring to non-clinging to conventions. This would not be possible on the basis of a strict relation of antinomy, in which case the formal antagonism of the two truths therefore belies an inherent compatibility evidenced by the re-engagement of the world post-attainment. The project is designed for the awakened mind to synergistically integrate the wisdom of each truth. Rather than bifurcating it into distinct faculties or domains, it is the mind's fullest capacity to cognitively experience through an awareness of both modes simultaneously, thus ultimately collapsing the cognitive distinction of the two truths: the space-like

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conceptualization *in toto* in any form.

[19] As Mipham (2002: 192) explains, "The two truths are two distinct isolates of a single reality. Their one shared nature resides in the inseparability of appearance and emptiness. This is validly ascertained by the analysis of the two truths. What appears is empty. If emptiness were different from appearance, phenomena would not be empty. Consequently the two are not separate". According to the Dalai Lama (*Practicing Wisdom: The Perfection of Shantideva's Bodhisattva Way* (trans. Thupten Jinpa), Wisdom Publications, 2005: 19), "when we examine the nature of the reality of things and events—everyday objects such as tables, chairs, vases, and flowers—the degree of reality that we perceive at the level of our phenomenal experience relates to their relative truth. And so long as we remain content within this framework, we remain at the level of phenomenal experience and conventional validity. The moment that we are not content with the validity of the conventional framework and seek to go beyond its confines, we are then searching for a deeper or truer essence or core identity. Yet what we find through the ensuing analysis is that things and events are actually unfindable. When engaged in this way, we are relating to the world, to things and events, at their ultimate level, their total emptiness. This is their emptiness of intrinsic existence, the absence of any identity and existence of things and events in their own right. At this point we find that the two truths are most clearly understood as two different perspectives on the things and events that make up the world". I appeal to this same formulation to close out the chapter in demonstration of the two truths' compatibility.

[20] As specified in chapter 6, the term "attitude/behaviour" demarcates both a transformation in cognition and mental states ("attitude") and comportment in the world ("behaviour").

awareness of ultimate cognition, as the mind's true nature, is the space in which the conventions of the world may circumstantially, though lucidly, appear in a manner of non-clinging,[21] thus making possible the world's re-engagement from the vantage of liberation. In what follows, I sketch the stages leading to this point and, thereat, the features of the cognitive experience underlying this re-engagement.

7.2.1 INCOMPATIBILITY: A FORMAL ANTAGONISM

I address the two truths' *prima facie* incompatibility by expressly juxtaposing the thetic definition of the conventional truth and antithetic definition of the ultimate. I contrast these in the most obvious fashion to restrict the antinomy to a formal antagonism. The conventional truth's thetic nature was explained in the chapters of PART I in its demonstration as being the truth of dependence relations, as correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience, and the philosophical counter to conventional falsity, intellectual ignorance, and the invalid cognition of ordinary experience. The ultimate's antithetic nature was explained in chapter 5 through apophasis via the negation of all conventional attributes and predicates and the appeal therethrough to an alternative form of *extra*-ordinary cognition. Apophasis that only negatively (i.e., antithetically) predicates the ultimate is necessary from its form and nature that are radically alternative to all aspects of the conventional truth and its correlated form of cognitive experience positively (i.e., thetically) predicated. As such, this antinomy is a consequence of the formal criterion differentiating the two truths and their correlates forms of cognition. This formal differentiation (related, as above, to a differentiation in soteriological capacity) is the reason for the two truths' distinction.

I serialize in parallel the following antinomies: i) The conventional truth is conceptual and dualistic in form (chapter 2); the ultimate truth is non-conceptual and non-dualistic in form (chapter 5). ii) The conventional truth is intellectual in form (chapter 3); the ultimate truth is non-intellectual, i.e., purely experiential, in form (chapter 5). iii) The conventional truth is referential and propositional in form (chapter 2); the ultimate truth is non-referential and non-propositional in form, i.e., it is without

[21] See chapter 6 (§6.3, pp. 324-6 above).

referential and propositional content (chapter 5). iv) The conventional truth correlates with the valid cognition of ordinary, dualistic, conceptual experience (chapter 3); the ultimate truth correlates with the valid cognition of *extra*-ordinary, non-dualistic, non-conceptual experience (chapter 6). v) The conventional truth serves merely pedagogic, instrumental purposes; the ultimate truth is purely experiential (as above). vi) The conventional truth, without the application of non-clinging thereto (see the limitations discussed above, see also further below) has reificationist liabilities; the ultimate truth is immune to reification for there is not-anything to be reified and no one to reify (chapters 5 and 6). vii) MMK 18:9 lists five apophatic characterizations of *tattva* (the 'object' of ultimate cognition; see §§5.1.1) indicating an alternative mode of cognitive experience to the default, ordinary cognition: it is [1] not known through another; [2] pacified; [3] not proliferated by means of conceptualization; [4] unfabricated; and [5] not of differentiated meaning.[22] By reason of apophasis, the conventional truth has the contrarian forms of the above: it is [1] known through another insofar as it is a transmissible teaching (i.e., the contents of the *Buddhadharma*); [2] not pacified, i.e., not serene insofar as liberation is not accomplished without the ultimate; as in chapter 5, [3-5] are taken together: it is [3] proliferated by means of conceptualization since its form is conceptual and dualistic; [4] fabricated because, following [3], conditioned by dependent designation (*prajñaptir upādāya*); and [5] of differentiated meaning because the specific meanings attributed to its concepts depend on the semantic commitments supporting them (i.e., the same conventions referring either to conventional truth or falsity, thus furnishing either ordinary experience's valid or invalid cognition).

Given these antinomies, the ultimate truth consistently defined antithetically to the conventional, the two truths share no overlapping formal characteristics. This juxtaposition suggests a hard disjunction: *either* one cognitively experiences conceptually in the conventional truth *or*, in meditative equipoise, one cognitively experiences non-dually in the noble silence of the ultimate.[23] Given that ultimate cognition

[22] See my translation and comments on this passage in chapter 5 (§§5.1.1, pp. 237-40 above).
[23] *Contra* Tsong Khapa, this is Gorampa's position vis-à-vis the relation of the two truths. From the unfavourable way

is the product of the cessation of conceptualization, there appears no obvious bridge between the two truths. Nonetheless, the common subject of "truth" bifurcated in its respective correlations with two modes of cognitive experience reveals the distinction as *insubstantial*, notwithstanding its formality.[24] On that basis, the Madhyamaka project necessitates the distinction's collapse into one synergistic mode of cognition in the case such a collapse is the only way to re-engage the world post-attainment.

7.2.2 COMPATIBILITY: TOWARDS RE-ENGAGING THE WORLD POST-ATTAINMENT

The resolution of this antinomy, the bridging of thesis and antithesis, is the cultivation of the attitude/behaviour of non-clinging towards conventions themselves. The two truths' program is a methodological progression leading to the collapse of its very distinction into one synergistic mode of awakened cognition. If the very distinction of the two truths themselves is just a pedagogic-*qua*-soteriological device, this demonstrates the two truths' ultimate compatibility in the cognitive mode of the *ārya*s who re-engage the world post-attainment. Despite their formal antagonism suggesting incompatibility, the ultimate truth is not a true antithesis to the conventional (i.e., the contradiction that nullifies the thesis) but correlates with an *alternative* mode of cognition that, without conceptual content, is thesisless—its antinomian, apophatic presentation is just the conceptual placeholder indicating this lack as the condition of its differentiation. While the ultimate's attainment requires abandoning the conventions of the default, ordinary, conceptual cognition for another shore, it requires neither the conventional truth's falsification nor the complete loss of conceptuality. Rather, both truths are necessary to account for the cognitive mode that re-engages the world post-attainment. A three-stage model establishes this synergy: i) identifying the conventional truth's practical and soteriological role *en route*

Gorampa understands the conventional truth (emphasizing its equation with ignorance), Thakchöe (2007b: 21) explains Gorampa as finding the compatibility of the two truths revolting insofar as it equalizes such ignorance and wisdom. I prefer Tsong Khapa's approach to the conventional truth over Gorampa's insofar as it is more methodologically consistent with how Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti present the two truths, especially their reliance on the conventional truth, the falsification of which would be a categorical mistake (see chapter 1 (§1.2), chapter 3 (§3.4) and below).

[24] This is the most important differentiation from the Kantian dialectic. Whereas phenomena and noumena are substantially differentiated, the noumenon forever segregated from the faculty of the understanding, that the Madhyamaka dialectic has a common subject (truth, cognitive experience) means that the distinction is not substantial (i.e., not ultimately metaphysical).

to the ultimate; ii) realizing the ultimate as correlated with a distinct mode of cognition from the conceptual, dualistic cognitive experience correlated with conventional truth; and iii) post-attainment, re-engaging the world conceptually through manifesting non-clinging to those conventions. This final stage requires the collapse of the two truths distinction *for the ārya*s insofar as the cognitive experience of those who re-engage the world post-attainment is appropriately suffused with the wisdom of each.

Before addressing the evidence for this progression, I offer an abstract, conceptual argument in favour of the distinction's eventual collapse. The dependence relations inherent to the two truths as a conceptual model (with their interdependence in a pedagogical and conceptual sense) precludes a strict thesis–antithesis model of contradiction and incompatibility. Instead, this interdependence invokes a relation of complementarity. There is, firstly, a conceptual interdependence of the two truths themselves insofar as the very concepts of "conventional" and "ultimate" "truth" are *contradefined* and therefore conceptually interdependent (in the same model as the subject–object, fire–fuel, and mind–world relations are mutually established). There is, secondly, a relation of causal dependence insofar as the conventional truth is the means, the cause, of the ultimate truth (where the cause–effect relation is again understood as a relation of conceptual interdependence, interdependently defined and therefore mutually established). Nonetheless, the latter having been attained, the attainer still has use for the former in executing the mandate of the philosophical-soteriological project of delivering all sentient beings from suffering.

STAGE ONE: THE CONVENTIONAL TRUTH AS THE RAFT

The dialectic's first stage addresses the requirements of the transition from conventional to ultimate truth. Recall that the conventional truth entails the valid intellectual understanding of the phenomenal world as an object of ordinary cognitive experience. Such ordinary cognitive experience, by definition conceptual in form, cannot experience the world otherwise. This is the mind–world model of cognitive experience introduced in chapter 1 (§1.1). Through the conventional truth, the valid cognition of ordinary experience understands all phenomena (including the conceptualizing mind itself) as dependently originated (subject to the three dependence relations: causal/existential, mereological, and conceptual). At the same time, as

discussed, the conventional truth's limited soteriological value is evident in the soteriological hierarchy of the two truths, for which reason there is necessary recourse to the ultimate. In its juxtaposition therewith, the strongest limitation of the conventional truth is that it affords only an intellectual model. Demonstrating its truth in concepts and logic, it has little (if any) transformative effect on behaviours. Both phenomena and the self could be known in a disinterested, intellectual manner to be dependently originated and therefore not inherently existent; yet, viscerally, we might still behave as if we and the phenomena with which we interact are inherently existent. Accordingly, we can still suffer with the conventional truth. Nevertheless, its soteriological value derives from its capacity to end intellectual ignorance (overcoming conventional falsity, invalid cognition); however, this is not the end of behavioural ignorance insofar as the sense of self persists without its dissolution in the ultimate.

As the dialectic of the two truths is firstly concerned with the conditions of the move from conventional to ultimate truth, this requires explaining how the former serves as the means to the latter. The discussion of these conditions is analogical because it is limited by the lack of conceptuality in the ultimate. Reflecting this, the analogy has a distinctly restrictive tone concerned with a cessation explained as the abandonment of default, ordinary cognitive experience on the way to a radically alternative mode of awareness, a direct (unmediated) experience. Cultivating the capacity for this abandonment indicates non-clinging to the conventional truth and default, ordinary, conceptual, dualistic cognition.

A clear analogical exposition is found in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (MN 22) preaching understanding the teachings "similar to a raft" (*kullūpamam*).[25] The raft serves a specific purpose as a means of transportation across water, in this case from the analogical shore of *saṃsāra* to the other shore of *nirvāṇa*. However, the raft is strictly said to not be for holding onto (*nittharaṇatthāya*, *no gahaṇatthaya*), meaning it must be disembarked when the time is right—*it must not be clung to*. The analogy illustrates what one should do with the raft (the teachings) upon completing the journey (reaching the soteriological

[25] See Bodhi 1995a: 224-36.

goal). Its import is that the raft is simply a tool without further use once its job is completed. This relates to another analogy in the same *sutta* concerning the misinterpretation of the teachings and the *a*soteriological consequences thereof.[26] The teachings are analogized to a snake either (rightly) grasped by the head or (wrongly) by the tail. Their misinterpretation is analogous to grasping the snake by the tail, allowing it still the freedom to strike, with its correct interpretation grasping it by the head, immobilizing it and the danger. Apply this to the raft: correctly grasping the teachings means their proper contextualization as a vehicle but not clinging to the raft and therefore being capable of its appropriate abandonment; wrongly grasping them means clinging to the raft and therefore being incapable of its abandonment. In the latter case, one is again bitten by the snake of clinging.

At MMK 24:11, Nāgārjuna invokes the same snake analogy vis-à-vis the correct/incorrect interpretation of emptiness.[27] Its location is noteworthy since it follows the MMK's three primary verses on the two truths. Candrakīrti's commentary (which also cites RĀ 2:19-20 (119-20)) discusses the duality of emptiness' misinterpretation, wrongly taken as either the non-existence of all phenomena or as their underlying nature, as in emptiness' reification into a metaphysical absolute.[28] A similar warning against emptiness' reification is found at MMK 13:8: Nāgārjuna calls emptiness a "remedy to get rid of *all* views" (*sarvadṛṣṭīnām … niḥsaraṇam*), meaning that emptiness is not itself another view.[29] In his commentary, Candrakīrti invokes the metaphor of a purgative expelling contaminants from the stomach: those contaminants purged, the purgative itself must also be expelled. This conjures the same image as the abandonment of the raft insofar as two tools are no longer needed once their task is accomplished.

This exercise, in addition to establishing important context about the pragmatic and soteriological role of the conventional truth, serves as a lesson in the virtues of non-fabrication and non-clinging. Across

[26] See Huntington 2007: 112-3 for a variety of examples of metaphors for pragmatic-soteriological utility from the Pāli Canon.
[27] MMK 24:11: "Emptiness wrongly seen (*durdṛṣṭā śūnyatā*) destroys (*vināśayati*) the weak-minded (*manda-medhasam*), like a snake wrongly grasped (*sarpaḥ yathā durgṛhītaḥ*) or a spell wrongly applied (*vidyā vā duṣprasādhitā*)"; *vināśayati durdṛṣṭā śūnyatā mandamedhasam | sarpo yathā durgṛhīto vidyā vā duṣprasādhitā ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 216). See also PSP 495.
[28] See chapter 5 (§5.3).
[29] Garfield 1995: 212-5 is a clear formulation of the latter idea. See MMK 13:8 discussed in chapter 5 (§5.3, p. 269 above).

the ocean of *saṃsāra,* the other shore is characterized by the unfabricated ultimate (in which convention cannot participate). The non-fabrication of the identity of both the clinger (the student) and the objects of clinging (the teachings) is necessary for cultivating non-clinging. This exercise in non-clinging is about not clinging to the teachings themselves (especially once they have accomplished their goal). This is a warning against taking views—even right views—as objects of clinging, especially as they perpetuate the sense of self.[30] The exercise therefore demonstrates the limitations of the conventional truth (i.e., the teachings), especially when clinging to it conceals the possibility of the ultimate.[31]

Landing on the other shore is accomplished only by the complete digestion (and expulsion) of the core teachings of dependent origination and emptiness, which not only teaches the conditions of the *arising* of every phenomenon but, more importantly, their conditions of *cessation*. This is, as discussed, taking the 12 links in reverse, culminating in their cessation.[32] Applying this to the conventional truth, this cessation requires the *deconditioning* of the mental habituation towards the default cognition of the fabrication and superimposition of dualistic phenomenal identities onto every aspect of cognitive experience. The exhortation towards shedding that habituation indicates, as in the unadulterated, direct experience of *tattva*, a mode of cognitive experience only apophatically characterized as *un*fabricated.

STAGE TWO: PHILOSOPHY VS. WISDOM IN COGNITIVE EXPERIENCE

The dialectic's second stage bridges the gap. The move from the conventional to the ultimate truth requires some commonality that makes possible the transition. The commonality is that both truths indicate modes of cognitive experience. Intersecting the two truths is *prajñā* (often translated as "wisdom", though "insight" and "knowledge" are also possibilities. The term has clear epistemological connotations from its root √JÑĀ).[33] Common in Indian philosophy, this term takes on new life in its

[30] See in chapter 6 (§§6.1.1, p. 184 above) the fourfold objects of clinging, especially in their relation to the self.
[31] See in chapter 1 (§1.2.1) the primary etymological element of *saṃvṛti*, "concealment".
[32] See chapter 6 (§§6.1.2).
[33] According to Monier-Williams (1986: 659.2), *prajñā* encompasses such meanings as "wisdom, intelligence, knowledge, discrimination, judgment". According to Buswell & Lopez (2014: 655), *prajñā* is "typically translated "wisdom," but [has] connotations perhaps closer to "gnosis," "awareness," and in some contexts "cognition"; the term has the general sense of accurate and precise understanding, but is used most often to refer to an understanding of reality that transcends ordinary

ultimate extension under the influence of the Prajñāpāramitā ("Perfection of Wisdom") literature[34] and the Madhyamaka insistence on the total mind-dependence of cognitive experience.[35] Williams rightly emphasizes *prajñā*'s cognitive aspects,[36] an emphasis meaning it cannot directly equate with the discovery of any mind-independent truth but applies to a sagacious and truthful mode of cognitive experience. In that way, wisdom is a determinative quality of the validity of cognitive experience: it is a property of certain modes of cognition (in contradistinction with conventional falsity lacking it).

According to scholars both historical and modern, due to its polysemy and plasticity, *prajñā* has two identifiable forms, a distinction paralleling the differentiation of the two truths. Each of the two truths is in its own way a form of *prajñā*. Even if the same terminology is sometimes used for both, with context the only clue to their differentiation,[37] I distinguish the two *prajñā*s via the dialectic (thetic and antithetic forms) of the two truths. That they are each in their own way *prajñā* is critical to the transition from one to the other. Insofar as the two *prajñā*s correlate to two modes of cognition, *prajñā* operates in the conventional truth as the valid cognition of ordinary experience as intellectual, philosophical

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comprehension". Given a relevant sister term, *jñāna* (in Tibetan, there are correspondingly two distinct but related terms: *shes rab* and *ye shes*; see their discussion on p. 349 below), there is reason to wonder about the differences between the two, especially since both share the same etymological root (√JÑĀ). However, I do not think that the authors are consistent enough in their terminological choices to draw a substantial distinction (see, e.g., Huntington 1989: 103-4). For example, both are frequently discussed as the goal (in an ultimate context) and associated with non-dual cognition (often called *advaya-jñāna*, though *prajñā* is also invoked in the context of non-duality). Additionally, both can be invoked in rather mundane contexts of referring to "knowledge" more generally. However, the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) is the sixth stage of the 10 *bhūmi*s of the *bodhisattva*, and the 10th stage is *jñānapāramitā* (which, for the sake of differentiation, could be called "the perfection of cognition" or perhaps of "gnosis").

[34] See Westerhoff 2018c: 93. Nāgārjuna expands the philosophical content of the Prajñāpāramitā as he sets it out in a clear argumentative form.

[35] As in the mind–world relation of chapter 1 (§1.1) and conceptual dependence in chapter 2 (§§2.2.1), which culminates in the metaphysical anti-realism and epistemological anti-foundationalism of chapter 4.

[36] According to Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (2nd ed.), Routledge, 2009: 49-50), "*Prajñā* is a mental event, a state of consciousness. […] Since the principal concern of Buddhist writing is with the correct understanding of the way things really are, however, by an understandable process of thought '*prajñā*' comes to be used [by the Abhidharma in the sense of metaphysical analysis] for the correct discernment of the true situation, the ultimate way of things. [… For the Mahāyāna,] *prajñā* is said to be a state of consciousness which understands emptiness (*śūnyatā*), the absence of intrinsic nature even in *dharmas*. […] In speaking of wisdom as understanding the way things really are there is correspondingly a distinction between knowing intellectually, through deep, even meditative analysis, the way things really must be (knowing that 'Aha – this is the way things really are!') and the 'paranormal' experience of a meditative absorption directed towards the results of such analysis –or emptiness as the case may be".

[37] Although I do not elaborate it, *prajñā* is one of (if not the most important) perfections (*pāramitā*) of a *bodhisattva*. Candrakīrti and others differentiate mundane ('*jig rten pa yi pha rol phyin*) from supramundane perfections ('*jig rten 'das pa'i pha rol phyin*), the former of which are dualistic and the latter non-dualistic (cf. MĀ 1:16).

understanding; in the ultimate, it is the non-conceptual, non-dual cognition of experiential wisdom.

A more palpable distinction would, paralleling the formal antagonism of the two truths, distinguish the two *prajñā*s as *philosophy* and *wisdom*, respectively. That is, philosophy *proper*, a specific activity of intellectualized investigation requiring a set of arguments (sound premises and logical conclusions) towards the systematic exposition and defence of a coherent theoretical framework in, e.g., metaphysics, epistemology, or axiology, belongs strictly to the conventional truth. A natural consequence of the formal requirements of the respective truths, it is not an insult to philosophy making it any less 'true' or 'effective' but aligns its formal characteristics and requisite conception of truth to the established parameters of the conventional truth. This equally means that wisdom *proper* (i.e., the wisdom of the ultimate) belongs not to convention (or any conventional, intellectual medium) and, conversely, that philosophy *proper* belongs not to the ultimate. This restriction follows from i) the conventional nature of language and discourse (philosophy's traditional medium) and ii) the ultimate's non-conceptual, non-dual form (i.e., the formal criterion differentiating the two truths). This requires that ultimate wisdom, like the ultimate truth with which it corresponds, has no conceptual content.[38]

According to Huntington,

> Prajñā is a matter of both intellectual understanding and action. With it the bodhisattva not only slashes away at the thick undergrowth of reified concepts [through deconstructive analyses like the tetralemma and the apophatic characterization of the ultimate] but is also conducted along the path to a point where the concept of emptiness is actualized through his attitude and behavior in the world.[39]

He notes that Prajñākaramati divides *prajñā* into two categories:

> (1) intellectual discernment, or what might be called "dualistic wisdom," employed by the bodhisattva in traveling along the path as a cause for actualizing emptiness—hence its name,

[38] This is in reaction to the Abhidharmic 'metaphysical' notion of *prajñā* as "the understanding which results from an investigation into the way things really are, what we might call 'metaphysical' understanding, the result of deep and sharp rigorous thought" (Williams 2009: 49). On account of emptiness, this is "a defective *prajñā*, not the perfection of *prajñā*, or no real *prajñā* at all" (2009: 50). It is curious that Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics*, presents a similar metaphysical understanding of wisdom (*sophia*), underpinning his search for first causes and principles with the divine. Nonetheless, the Abhidharma conducts not disengaged metaphysical analysis but alleges itself to bear soteriological import in the reduction of the self to these impartite particles (see, e.g., Huntington 1989: 84). The deficiency in this approach, and the subtle latency for clinging that persists, have already been discussed in chapter 5 (§5.2-3). The Mādhyamikas disagree not with this reductionism but do relegate it to the level of the conventional truth, leaving something much more propound for the ultimate.

[39] Huntington 1989: 90.

> "wisdom as a cause" (*hetubhūta-prajñā*); and (2) "wisdom as an effect" (*phalabhūta-prajñā*), the noninferential actualization of what has been conceptually grasped, which is devoid of intrinsic being, empty, subsuming all forms, and yet unrelated to any particular thing or idea, no matter how philosophical or refined it may be.[40]

Similarly, Westerhoff recognizes a differentiation in *prajñā* along the same lines, as in "wisdom gained from meditation (*bhāvanāmayā paññā*)" and "wisdom gained from reflection (*cintāmayā paññā*)": "In the case of analytical meditation and the wisdom gained from meditation, we are talking about the shift from a *mere intellectual understanding* of a philosophical position to its *experiential realization*".[41] The latter is specifically associated with meditation, as in the fruit thereof.[42] In the Tibetan tradition, Mipham likewise discusses these two types: one, like Prajñākaramati's first, is intellectual and dualistic, a wisdom (*shes rab*) that validly discerns objects; the second is actualized as "primordial wisdom (*ye shes*) where subject and object are of one taste", the non-dual wisdom of the *buddha*s.[43] Differentiating "wisdom as a cause" from "wisdom as an effect" is a potent illustration of the necessary relations between the two truths as means (cause) and goal (effect). Although in Tibetan these may correspond to two different terms (*shes rab* vs. *ye shes*), both of which can be understood as "wisdom" in their respective ways, they are still formally differentiated via the same schema of intellectual versus non-dual cognition, one anticipatory of the other. This subdivision is an effective schematization of the two truths as distinct cognitive modes nonetheless demonstrating their commonality as modes of cognition not substantially different but concerning the mental operations of the same cognizer. This demonstrates an inherent complementarity insofar as a transition from one (the cause) to the other (the effect) is possible.

However, how does the conventional truth, a dualistic intellectual form of wisdom, function as the cause of non-dual experiential wisdom, a wisdom of an *extra*-ordinary form? The conventional truth

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[40] Huntington 1989: 90; BCAP 349.9. See Oldmeadow 1994: 10-1 and Salvini 2009: 263-4.

[41] Westerhoff 2015: 181. Here, Westerhoff argues that, although the Ābhidharmikas, Yogācārins, and Mādhyamikas all have a different vision of what this wisdom gained from meditation entails (i.e., differently described goals "associated with the experiential realization of the associated philosophical position"), they invariably fall back on "the same technique of analytical meditation".

[42] See chapter 6 (§§6.1.2, pp. 292-4 above) on meditation on dependent origination and emptiness.

[43] Mipham 2002: 336. According to Hopkins, *shes rab* corresponds to the Sanskrit *prajñā* (1989: 542), and *ye shes* to the Sanskrit *jñāna* (1989: 477). See fn. 33 above.

functions as the groundwork of the philosophical-soteriological project in the cultivation of the valid cognition of ordinary experience: schematizing the mental operations of ordinary cognitive experience, it consists of intellectual insight into the nature of cognitive experience itself. This insight circumscribes the mind–world model of cognitive experience such that mind, world, and everything entailed by this relation is reducible to a product of ordinary cognitive experience. From understanding the conditions generating ordinary cognitive experience it also traces those steps backwards towards the cessation thereof, towards the deconditioning of the ordinary, dualistic mind. This understanding of dependent origination prefigures the deeper realization of the emptiness of cognitive experience, a realization (not a mere intellection) corresponding with attaining freedom from clinging to the conventions and ordinary cognitions that generate that phenomenal cognitive experience. At that point of realization, wisdom is transformed from dualistic cause to non-dual effect.

In this vein, Williams underscores the *extra*-ordinary (i.e., *un*-conventional) cognitive dimension of ultimate *prajñā* insofar as it is "a state of consciousness that results from analysis, it has transcended itself, and the mind is left in one-pointed absorption on the results of analysis"; it is "a meditative absorption the content of which is the ultimate truth", coming "through nonconceptual and therefore nondual awareness to equal the content or object of such ultimate awareness, i.e., here emptiness itself [(or *tattva*)]".[44] Similarly, Streng says that "Wisdom is, in part, a concentrative exercise which dissolves the mental and emotional attachment of the apparent mind to "things" (including ideas or assertions), for it is the awareness that all "things" are empty".[45] Huntington frequently calls this ultimate cognition "the noninferential actualization of philosophical understanding" or "the implementation of understanding toward actualization of a new form of life".[46] Each reference to a "state of consciousness", a "meditative absorption", "non-dual awareness", and a "concentrative exercise" that is a "noninferential actualization"

[44] Williams 2009: 50-1.
[45] Streng 1967: 91; elsewhere: "The aim of wisdom is to melt the chains of greed and thirst for possession of "things". Or to state the same thing from the viewpoint of a religious goal, its aim is to relate oneself to all "things" in an *empty* relationship, i.e., in total freedom" (1967: 82).
[46] Huntington 1989: 90.

refers to the non-dual experiential wisdom of the ultimate *not* arrived at with pure mindlessness but the awareness left in the wake of the analytical deconstruction of all dualistic possibilities (as in non-implicative tetralemmic negation and the ultimate's apophatic characterization). In this case, it is the fruit of analysis' ultimate aspect.[47] In the wake of this analysis there emerges a transformative cognitive experience dissolving both the clinger (the subject) and its objects of clinging.

It follows that, in the transition from conventional to ultimate truth, there is a jump from philosophical forms of thought (conceptual cognitive experience) to an alternative cognition rooted in non-conceptual, non-dual experiential wisdom. Towards the latter the instrumental role of philosophy, analysis, and analytical meditation is not denied but emphasized; it is, however, therethrough relegated to a means: the raft. This is evident in MĀ 6:118ab: "Analysis is not performed (*na … vihitaḥ vicāraḥ*) out of a love for disputation (*vādalobhāt*), but, in the *śāstra* [(i.e., the MMK)], the ultimate (*tattvam*) is explained for [the sake of] liberation (*kathitam vimuktyai*)".[48] *For the sake of liberation* is the key unlocking philosophy's greater goal than mere disputation and truth for its own sake, from which emerges a soteriological program necessarily beginning with (rooted in) such philosophy, analysis, and disputation, yet culminating in liberation from the snares thereof (such as doubt, vexation, consternation, clinging to views, etc.). Analysis, as it is a feature of the conventional truth pointing beyond it (through exhaustive non-implicative negation) to the ultimate truth, is conducted for this purpose; for this reason, analysis leads to the appropriate abandonment of the raft. Here, the contrast is evident between the cognitive modes of *philosophy* (the conventional truth as intellectual understanding) and *wisdom* (the ultimate as experiential realization): the latter constitutes the achievement of a transformative experience, a paradigm shift opening new cognitive horizons. Because of their formal chasm, there is a corresponding rupture

[47] In chapter 3 (§§3.4.2), "analysis" (*vicāra*) was introduced as having both conventional and ultimate aspects. Its conventional aspect consisted of the refutation of conventional falsity (i.e., wrong view) at the level of the conventional truth, in which case it works synergistically with the conventional reasoning (*upapatti*) that establishes dependence relations. Conversely, in chapter 5 (§§5.1.2-5), analysis' ultimate aspect was revealed as a tool for cultivating the positionless middle way and its attendant noble silence insofar as, beyond the refutations it affords, there is nothing left in its wake.

[48] MĀ 6:118ab: *na vādalobhādvihito vicārastattvaṃ tu śāstre kathitaṃ vimuktyai* | (Li 2015: 18). See an earlier discussion of this passage in the context of "analysis" (*vicāra*) in chapter 3 (§§3.4.3, pp. 172-3 above).

when leaving the familiarity of ordinary, conceptual cognition for the 'unknown' of non-conceptual, non-dual, awakened cognition.

Paralleling the two *prajñā*s with the two truths as two forms of cognitive experience is a useful metric for contextualizing the two truths distinction in a philosophical-soteriological program. The difference between, and yet the possibility of the transition from, wisdom as cause (conventional truth, philosophical understanding) to wisdom as effect (ultimate truth, experiential application) embodies the dialectic complementarity of the two truths explained as the abandonment of the raft of the conventional truth and the subsequent disembarkation on the other shore of the non-dual experiential wisdom of the ultimate.

STAGE THREE: POST-MEDITATIVE RE-ENGAGEMENT

The third stage asks: having attained ultimate *prajñā* as non-dual cognition and having experienced the unburdening of its liberating insights, what happens next? What does this mean for the two truths that were formally differentiated? Are conceptuality and convention forever abandoned, with only noble silence remaining? Neither Nāgārjuna nor Candrakīrti say much about this apart from the successive stages of the *bodhisattva* path culminating in Buddhahood.[49] However, the Mahāyāna is not just concerned with personal attainment (as in its criticism of the Hīnayāna *arhat*)[50] but delivering *all* sentient beings from suffering. As such, whether for compassionate soteriological or ordinary purposes (such as

[49] Cf. MĀB 11:41. I do not attempt to explain Buddhahood since the texts are unanimous that this mental state is inconceivable to ordinary beings (see MMK 22:15; RĀ 5:61 (461); MĀB 6:28; PSP 371, 448). E.g., Candrakīrti says at MĀB 6:28 that "The Buddhas (*sangs rgyas rnams*), because they are completely perfectly awakened (*mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa'i phyir*) in every aspect of all phenomena (*chos thams cad rnam pa thams cad du*), are considered (*'dod pa yin*) to have utterly reversed (*gtan log par*) the movement of the mind and mental factors (*sems dang sems las byung ba'i rgyu ba*)"; *sangs rgyas rnams la ni chos thams cad rnam pa thams cad du mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa'i phyir | sems dang sems las byung ba'i rgyu ba gtan log par 'dod pa yin no |* (Liland 2020: 165). The omniscience and supramundane powers of a Buddha, the more esoteric parts of the Mahāyāna tradition, are not here pertinent, for which reason my explanation does not include them.

[50] Cf. MĀB 1:8. Sustained *samādhi* and an isolated asceticism are not the true goal or application of the Mahāyāna-specific philosophical-soteriological project or of the mandates of *bodhisattva*s and *Buddha*s as expounded in that tradition. Nāgārjuna notes in the RĀ that the *bodhisattva* ideal is specifically lacking from the earliest canonical material, not necessarily as a criticism of that material and the traditions sprung therefrom but as a means of legitimating the Mahāyāna (cf. (RĀ 4:66-7 (366-7), 4:90 (390), 4:94 (393), 5:40 (440)). Some *sutta*s appear to glorify the isolated, secluded life of the wandering ascetic (not practicing extreme asceticism like bodily mortification but nonetheless practicing judicious austerity; e.g., Sn 1.3), though still not without emphasizing compassion and morality. Conversely, Nāgārjuna points out that the emphasis on the *bodhisattva*'s vow to bring liberation to all sentient beings is a Mahāyāna-specific focus. Given that the Mādhyamika belongs to the Mahāyāna, I situate my account of the practical and soteriological capacities of the two truths in that overall context.

being a member of a community), the world's re-engagement post-attainment is necessary.[51] This requires the simultaneous application of both ultimate cognition's liberating insights *and* conceptuality. For this reason, it is necessary to investigate how the *ārya*s perceive the world post-attainment. This perception and this re-engagement constitute the truest fruit of the wisdom of the two truths, the evidence of both the collapse of the distinction and the soteriological mission's efficacy.

To that effect, I differentiate ultimate cognition in meditative equipoise (as in chapter 6) from its post-meditative manifestation. The specific content of this re-engagement is the purview of Buddhist ethics at the confluence of wisdom and universal compassion (*mahākāruṇa*), but this exceeds my mandate.[52] Instead, I sketch the groundwork of the cognitive experience underlying this re-engagement, with the caveat that this is only speculative because i) Candrakīrti, on whom I largely rely, admits to not be that high of an attainer, instead basing his account on Nāgārjuna and various Mahāyāna *sūtra*s (cf. MĀB 11:41-2); and ii) it is said to be impossible to fathom the mind of a Buddha (see fn. 49 above). As such, I do not offer an account of a Buddha's cognitions but of some unspecified, high degree of realization associated with the wisdom of the ultimate as it re-engages the world post-meditation. Such re-engagement bears practical considerations germane to the two truths insofar as, even if rooted in the non-dual ultimate, it requires the conceptuality, language, and discourse (the medium of engaging ordinary beings in transactional, pedagogical, and soteriological contexts) that ultimate cognition sheds. As such, at the point of re-engagement, it is necessary to explain that the *ārya*s cognitively experience the world

[51] Ignoring the metaphysical undertones of the appearance–reality distinction, this is not unlike the Platonic philosopher returning to the cave (*Republic* 514-20, Book VII). An allegory for education and the pedagogical duty of philosophers, Plato encourages their return to the cave to liberate the trapped prisoners (519d). In a parallel theme, the *bodhisattva* completes the same return to *saṃsāra* in executing the *bodhisattvic* mandate. The main difference is that they do so not out of any compulsion or gratitude for the city but out of a universal compassion unquestionably extended to all sentient beings and not only those who are to be educated to become philosophers or rulers of the city.

[52] It is easy to pay lip service to altruism, compassion, and ethical comportment, but the nuances of the practices of which this engagement should consist are more difficult to address. In his article "Disengaged Buddhism" (*Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 26, 2019: 258-61), Amod Lele attacks with textual evidence some of the fundamental presuppositions of "Engaged Buddhism" that laud performing social and political activism to enact widespread changes in the sociopolitical landscape in the name of Buddhism. He cites, among older texts, Candrakīrti and Śāntideva to the effect that the spiritual physician takes a more local approach dealing with cognitive and spiritual obscurations than global enacting sociopolitical change. This is, likely, because the source of suffering is more cognitive than material (without discounting any material conditions that exacerbate suffering, the problem remains one of cognition and relation thereof to the sense of self that suffers).

through the lens of non-clinging, the hallmark of attaining ultimate wisdom.

In support of this interpretation, Candrakīrti presents two features to consider: i) cognitively experiencing phenomena as "like illusions" and, therefrom, ii) reducing such phenomena to "mere conventions". These could be interpreted to function as *either* pedagogical devices serving as preparatory, ground-clearing meditations (i.e., meditating on phenomena as if they were so, serving to curb attachment to them) *or* a retrospective of the cognition of the *ārya*s who have realized the underlying truth of these meditative exercises, thus evincing their lack of attachment to such phenomena and therefore a re-engagement of the world demonstrating non-clinging. The context of these teachings being addressed to ordinary beings supports the former, though further context also suggests them as features of awakened cognition (e.g., YṢ 25 or MĀ 11:24). I discuss them as if they constitute the latter, but the former possibility always bears consideration. In either case, these cognitive features are the result of correctly understanding the conventional truth in its relation to the ultimate (and vice versa) with a consequence of cultivating non-clinging towards convention itself. According to Candrakīrti,

> [MĀB 6:28:] The hearers (=*śrāvaka*s), solitary realisers (=*pratyekabuddha*s), and *bodhisattva*s (*nyan thos dang rang sangs rgyas dang byag chub sems dpa'*) have abandoned (*spangs pa*) [all] afflicted vision (*nyon mongs ba can gyis gzigs pa*). Seeing (*gzigs pa*) conditioned phenomena (*'du byed*) existing as similar to reflections and so forth (*gzugs brnyan la sogs pa'i yod pa nyid dang 'dra bar*), [they realize] they are not true from their artificial nature (*bcos ma'i rang bzhin gyi bden pa ma yin*) because [such phenomena] are not presumed (*rlom pa med pa'i phyir*) to actually [exist] in truth (*bden par mngon par*).[53]
>
> To childish beings (*byis pa rnams la*), they are deceptive (*slu bar byed pa yin*), but to others (*de la gzhan pa rnams la*) [(i.e., awakened beings, the *ārya*s)] they become mere convention (*kun rdzob tsam du 'gyur*), dependently originated [phenomena] (*rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba*) [appearing only] like illusions and so forth (*sgyu ma la sogs pa ltar*).[54]

I first treat the illusion-like nature of cognitive experience (i.e., seeing phenomena "as similar to reflections", "like illusions and so forth") before treating their reduction to "mere convention".

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[53] MĀB 6:28: *de la nyan thos dang rang sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' nyon mongs ba can gyis gzigs pa spangs pa | 'du byed gzugs brnyan la sogs pa'i yod pa nyid dang 'dra bar gzigs pa rnams la ni bcos ma'i rang bzhin gyi bden pa ma yin te | bden par mngon par rlom pa med pa'i phyir ro |* (Liland 2020: 165).

[54] MĀB 6:28: *byis pa rnams la ni slu bar byed pa yin la | de las gzhan pa rnams la ni sgyu ma la sogs pa ltar rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba nyid kyis kun rdzob tsam du 'gyur ro |* (Liland 2020: 165).

THE ILLUSION-LIKE NATURE OF COGNITIVE EXPERIENCE

It is said that "an illusion is not something that does not exist, but something that is not what it seems".[55] Illusions are fundamentally a matter of perspective and cognition because they concern appearances before consciousness. In that way, the Mādhyamikas relate the experiencer (cognizer) and the experienced (cognized) by analogies of illusion to show both are not what they seem. This is a recurrent motif in Buddhist literature; in the *Pheṇapiṇḍūpama Sutta* (SN 22.95), the exercise is applied to the five aggregates:

> Form [(*rūpa*)] is like a lump of foam, feeling [(*vedanā*)] like a water bubble; perception [(*saññā*; Skt: *saṃjñā*)] is like a mirage, volitions [(*saṅkhāra*; Skt: *saṃskāra*)] like a plantain trunk, and consciousness [(*viññāna*; Skt: *vijñāna*)] like an illusion: so explained the Kinsman of the Sun. However one may ponder it and carefully investigate it, it appears but hollow [(*rittaka*)] and void [(*tucchaka*)] when one views it carefully.[56]

Candrakīrti (cf. MĀB 1:8) understands this exercise to concern the emptiness of the aggregates in contrast with their manner of appearance. Even if the term "emptiness" is a more Mahāyāna-specific focus, Salvini argues that for Candrakīrti it is the same point being made.[57] The same emptiness should apply to all phenomena; these are only singled out here for teaching non-self, a specific application of emptiness. This is evident in each comparison to some other phenomenon more typically exemplifying emptiness in contrast with an appearance otherwise. Initially, each appears real, full, and substantial, but, upon careful examination with clear cognition, each is known instead as vacuous, hollow, and insubstantial. The analogies have in common that they initially appear otherwise than they exist (appearing as full), such that discernment is required to see them as they are (as empty). Candrakīrti says, "Because their nature is deceptive (*bslu ba'i bdag nyid pas*), they are illusions (*sgyu ma*): they are deceptive because they appear mistakenly (*log par snang bas*) for those ignorant of their nature (*de'i ngo*

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[55] Westerhoff, *Twelve Examples of Illusion*, Oxford University Press, 2010b: 7.

[56] SN 22.95 (*Pheṇa Sutta*); *pheṇapiṇḍūpamaṃ rūpaṃ | vedanā bubbuḷūpamā | marīcikūpamā saññā | saṃkhārā kadalūpamā | māyūpamañca viññāṇaṃ | dīpitā diccabandhunā | yathā yathā nijjhāyati yoniso upaparikkhati | rittakaṃ tucchakaṃ hoti yo naṃ passati yoniso |* (trans. Bodhi 2000: 953-3; Feer (vol. 3) 1890: 142). Additional references to some of these comparisons of phenomena to illusions occur in the *Dhammapada* (Dhp 46, 170). Lending authenticity to its inclusion in the argument, Candrakīrti cites its Sanskrit equivalent at PSP 41 and MĀB 1:8; cf. MacDonald 2015b: 162-3 n.317.

[57] Salvini 2023: 412.

bo nyid la rmongs pa rnams la)".[58] This is clearest in the examples of the mirage and magic trick for these are initially the most deceiving in their mode of appearance and the most causing of desire for what is delusively perceived. This exercise specifically attacks such deception and desire.

In the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* of the Prajñāpāramitā, there are 10 such comparisons: "These bodhisattvas accept that dharmas are like 1) a magic show [(*māyā*)], 2) a mirage [(*marīci*)], 3) the moon reflected in water [(*daka-candra*)], 4) space [(*akāśa*]), 5) an echo [(*pratiśrutkā*)], 6) a city of the *gandharva*s [(*gandharva*)],[59] 7) a dream [(*svapna*)], 8) a shadow [(*chāya*)], 9) a reflection in a mirror [(*pratibimba*)], 10) a creation [(*nirmāṇa*)]".[60] Unlike the Pāli *sutta*, this one is direct in its association of the 10 comparisons with the realization of the emptiness of all *dharma*s.[61]

Because the Mādhyamikas' references to illusionism are too numerous to exhaust, I note only the clearest examples.[62] Nāgārjuna clarifies the exercise's intent in the following way:

> [YṢ 16:] When an illusion is said to arise or when it is thought to have vanished (*gang tshe sgyu ma 'byung zhe 'am gang tshe 'jig par 'gyur*), the one who knows the illusion (*sgyu ma shes pa*) [as illusion] is not confused (*mi rmongs*); the one who does not know the illusion [as illusion] is completely [consumed by] attachment (*yongs su sred*) [for it].[63]

Problematizing *attachment* to phenomena held to be like illusions, by seeing through the illusion one

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[58] YṢV 15: *bslu ba'i bdag nyid pas sgyu ma ste | de'i ngo bo nyid la rmongs pa rnams la log par snang bas bslu ba yin no |* (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 24). Candrakīrti (YṢV 25) also says, "And although the totality of phenomena (*bhāvajātam*) is without intrinsic nature/existence (*niḥsvabhāvam*), it appears (*khyāti*) to ignorant beings (*bālānām*) to have intrinsic nature/existence (*sasvabhāvatvena*). Consequently, because deceptive (*visamvādakatvāt*), like an illusion and so forth (*māyā-ādi-vat*), phenomena have the nature of deception (*bhāvaḥ moṣadharmāḥ*)"; *niḥsvabhāvam eva ca bhāvajātaṃ yasmāt sasvabhāvatvena khyāti bālānāṃ tasmān māyādivad visaṃvādakatvāt sa eva bhāvo moṣadharmā |* (Li & Ye 2014: 128); *dngos po'i rang bzhin ni ngo bo nyid med pa yin na gang gi phyir byis pa rnams la ngo bo nyid yod par snang ba de'i phyir sgyu ma la sogs pa bzhin du bslu bas na dngos po de nyid bslu ba'i chos so ||* (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 64).

[59] Regarding Candrakīrti's references to a "city of *gandharva*s" (see MĀ 6:109 below), Liland (2020: 267 n.227) notes that "Jayānanda (229a) explains that the *city of gandharvas* is a certain bad omen resembling a city that can be seen in the sky at times". Siderits & Katsura (2013: 88) comment on MMK 7:34 (mentioning the same) that "The gandharvas are a class of mythical beings that supposedly live in the sky. "The city of the gandharvas" is a stock example of a mirage or illusion". In that case, it is reasonable to speculate that the city of gandharvas may be a kind of mirage like a fata morgana.

[60] Chodron 2001: 293. Lamotte compiles canonical lists of comparisons that occasionally differ in number and content though thematically remain the same. Additionally, with specific reference to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Westerhoff (2010b) discusses 12 examples of illusions: magical illusions, the moon in water, visual distortions, mirages, dreams, echoes, the city of gandharvas, optical illusions, rainbows, lightning, water bubbles, and reflections in a mirror.

[61] Chodron 2001: 295.

[62] References are found in five of the six texts of Nāgārjuna's *yukti* corpus: MMK 7:34, 17:33, 23:8-9; ŚS 36, 56, 66; YṢ 15-7, 25, 27, 45, 54-6; VV 23, 27, and RĀ 1:52-6 (52-6), 2:9-13 (109-13). Candrakīrti's references in his commentaries will match the root text but the MĀ(B) also features a discussion at, for example, 6:52, 105, 109-10, 170, and 11:24.

[63] YṢ 16: *gang tshe sgyu ma 'byung zhe 'am | gang tshe 'jig par 'gyur snyam du | sgyu ma shes pa der mi rmongs | sgyu ma mi shes yongs su sred ||* (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 10).

suffers no affliction (e.g., desires not the apparent water in the mirage). Candrakīrti (YṢV 16) contextualizes the magician conjuring the illusion as the one who knows it as such, while the spectator is the one duped. Focusing on the valid cognition of phenomena's illusory nature, Nāgārjuna further says,

> [YṢ 25:] Those wise with respect to phenomena (*bhāva-vicakṣaṇāḥ*) see [such] phenomena as impermanent (*anityam*), [their] nature deceptive (*moṣa-dharmāṇam*), liberated (*muktam*), empty (*śūnyam*), selfless (*anātmakam*), and pure (*viviktam*).[64]

Though appearing otherwise from a limited perspective, their impermanence is key to cultivating non-attachment for illusory phenomena. As at YṢ 16, the one ignorant of illusory appearances, not understanding why the desired object has vanished (as in the end of the magic show or the discovery of the absence of water in the mirage), suffers dissatisfaction thereupon; the one expecting impermanence, knowing the illusion for what it is, does not.

Other references tread familiar ground. Candrakīrti entertains the following objection:

> [MĀ 6:109:] If (*gal te*) a dream (*rmi lam*), a city of *gandharva*s (*dri za'i grong kyer*), the water of a mirage (*smig rgyu'i chu*), illusions (*mig 'phrul*), and reflections and so forth (*gzugs brnyan sogs*) are experienced as unproduced (*skye med mthong*), even as similar to non-existence (*yod nyid min mtshungs kyan*g), then how for you (*khyod la ji ltar*) [are they experienced at all]? It is unreasonable (*de mi rigs*).[65]

Significant here is the three-way comparison between illusions, non-production, and non-existence. According to context, the *opponent* thinks the comparison of phenomena to illusions is equivalent to their

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[64] YṢ 25: *anityaṃ moṣadharmāṇaṃ muktaṃ śūnyam anātmakam |viviktam iti paśyanti bhāvaṃ bhāvavicakṣaṇāḥ* || (Li & Ye 2014: 54); *dngos la mkhas pa rnams kyis ni | dngos po mi rtag bslu ba'i chos | gsog dang stong pa bdag med pa | rnam par dben par rab tu mthong* || (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 12). Candrakīrti explains that the phenomena in question are dependently arisen, conventional phenomena: "[YṢV 25:] Because arisen (*byung bas*), they are called "phenomena"" (*dngos po zhes bya*): the word "phenomena" means "compounded phenomena" ('*dus byas*)"; *byung bas dngos po zhes bya ste | dngos po zhes bya ba'i sgra ni 'dus byas la bya'o* || (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 63). Though my translation repeats the term "phenomena", *dngos po* and *'dus byas* should be appropriately differentiated. Often, the former is translated as "thing", but I dislike this for its reificationist tendencies. *'Dus byas*, on the other hand, is the Tibetan equivalent of *saṃskṛta*, often translated as "compounded phenomenon" or "conditioned phenomenon".

[65] MĀ 6:109: *gal te rmi lam dri za'i grong khyer bcas | smig rgyu'i chu dang mig 'phrul gzugs brnyan sogs | skye med mthong na yod nyid min mtshungs kyang | khyod la ji ltar der 'gyur de mi rigs* || (Liland 2020: 267). Though the Sanskrit is extant, the Tibetan was used because the verse's loose syntax, permissible and frequent in Sanskrit, is unclear. The Tibetan syntax is more straightforward but produces a slightly different reading. In contrast therewith, the Sanskrit appears to read, "If you see (*paśyasi ... yadi*) a dream (*svapnam*), a city of *gandharva*s (*sagandharva-puram*), the water in a mirage (*marīcyām kam*), illusions (*indrajālam*), reflections and so forth (*pratibimbaka-ādi*) as unborn/unproduced (*ajātān*), how for you (*katham ye*) are they equivalent to non-existence (*tulye api asattvena*)? It is not possible (*tat na yuktam*)"; *svapnaṃ sagandharvapuraṃ marīcyāṃ kam indrajālaṃ pratibimbakādi | paśyasy ajātān yadi tat kathaṃ te tulye 'py asattvena tu tan na yuktam* || (Li 2015: 17). The Tibetan is clearer when taken to wonder how such illusory phenomena, considered non-existent, could be perceived at all.

non-existence (cf. MĀ 6:107).[66] Candrakīrti clarifies that, although there are significant ways illusory phenomena are like the son of a barren woman (a stock phrase for a non-existent phenomenon), the difference is that, unlike the latter, illusory phenomena can actually be experienced: "For example, perceptions in dreams (*rmi lam du dmigs pa*) and the son of a barren woman (*mo gsham gyi bu*) are alike in not [really] existing (*yod pa ma yin pa nyid du 'dra*). Nonetheless, the dream is experienced (*mthong*) while the son of a barren woman is not".[67] Candrakīrti clarifies the distinction as follows:

> [MĀ 6:113:] Just as pots and so forth (*ghaṭa-ādayaḥ*) do not exist ultimately (*santi na tattvataḥ*) but do exist through worldly-establishment (*loka-prasiddhyā ... bhavanti*), that all phenomena (*bhāvāḥ … sarve*) are like the son of a barren woman would not be the consequence (*syāt na eva vandhyāsutavat prasaṅgaḥ*).[68]

The contents of dreams, pots, etc. are conventionally accepted objects of experience while the son of a barren woman is not. For this reason, he stresses in the latter case the non-similarity of phenomena, though illusion-like, and non-existent entities like the sons of barren women. The difference is an experienceable referent in cognitive experience, which the latter lacks.

The exercise addresses how the phenomena the Mādhyamikas call un(inherently) arisen,

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[66] MĀ 6:107: "If, ultimately (*tattvataḥ*), phenomena (*bhāvāḥ*) do not truly exist (*na … khalu santi*), they would (*syāt*) not exist even conventionally (*asattvam vyavahārataḥ api*), just like the son of a barren woman (*vandhyātanayasya yadvat*). Hence, there [must] be the inherent existence of them (*svabhātaḥ sattvam ataḥ asti teṣām*)"; *na tattvataścet khalu santi bhāvāsteṣām asattvaṃ vyavahārato 'pi | syādeva vandhyātanayasya yadvat svabhāvataḥ sattvam ato 'sti teṣām ||* (Li 2015: 17). The opponent thinks that, since the Mādhyamika *do* grant conventional existence, they must be granting an inherent/ultimate existence. If so, they misunderstand the two truths. Immediately before, Candrakīrti summarizes their argument, though it is still not that clear: "[MĀB 6:106:] If form and so forth (*gzugs la sogs pa rnams*) have no ultimate nature whatsoever (*don dam par rang bzhin 'ga' yang med na*), then, because they are not ultimately existent (*don dam par yod pa ma yin pa'i phyir*), they are just like the son of a barren woman (*mo gsham gyi bu bzhin du*). Even their conventional nature (*de dag gi rang bzhin kun rdzob tu yang*) would not exist (*yod par mi 'gyur ba*). However, [you grant that] the nature of forms and so forth (*gzugs la sogs pa rnams kyi rang bzhin*) does exist conventionally (*kun rdzob tu yod pa*). Therefore, their existence (*de dag gi yod pa nyid*) exists only ultimately (*don dam par yang yod pa kho na*)"; *gal te de ltar gzugs la sogs pa rnams la don dam par rang bzhin 'ga' yang med na | 'o na mo gsham gyi bu bzhin du don dam par yod pa ma yin pa'i phyir | de dag gi rang bzhin kun rdzob tu yang yod par mi 'gyur ba zhig na | gzugs la sogs pa rnams kyi rang bzhin ni kun rdzob tu yod pa yang yin no | de'i phyir de dag gi yod pa nyid ni don dam par yang yod pa kho na'o zhes smras pa ||* (Liland 2020: 265). Again, the opponents' argument makes sense in the case they have misunderstood the two truths by conflating "existence" in *any* form with "ultimate existence".

[67] MĀB 109: *dper na rmi lam du dmigs pa dang | mo gsham gyi bu yod pa ma yin pa nyid du 'dra yang rmi lam mthong la mo gsham gyi bu ma yin par 'gyur |*. He makes the same point concerning emptiness: "while [everything in] these examples is empty of inherent existent (*rang bzhin gyis stong pa*), they are [nonetheless] experienced (*de dag mthong*); the son of a barren woman is not"; *dper na rang bzhin gyis stong pa yin du zin kyang | de dag mthong gi mo gsham gyi bu ni ma yin no |* (Liland 2020: 267).

[68] MĀ 6:113: *ghaṭādayaḥ santi na tattvato 'mī lokaprasiddhyā tu yathā bhavanti | bhāvā bhaviṣyanti tathaiva sarve syānnaiva vandhyāsutavatprasaṅgaḥ ||* (Li 2015: 18). See also MĀ 6:110-2 for additional context.

un(inherently) ceasing, non-(inherently)existent, etc. and, as such, illusory are experienced at all: "they are seen in the way that one sees a magical object, they are heard in the way that one hears an echo, they are experienced in the way that one experiences things in a dream, etc.".[69] This reveals an insurmountable way that phenomena do not exist as they initially appear, the realization of which is the point of the exercise. Nāgārjuna addresses this in the following verses:

> [RĀ 2:10-12 (110-2):] Just as one might see the production and destruction (*janma-antaḥ*) of an illusory elephant (*māyā-gajasya*),[70] but, ultimately (*tattvena*), no production and destruction exist anywhere, so the production and destruction of the illusion-like world (*māyā-upamasya lokasya*) are seen, although, ultimately (*paramāthena*), there is no production or destruction.
>
> Just as the illusory elephant, from existing only as a trick of the mind (*citta-mohana-mātratvāt bhāvatvena)*, does not come from anywhere (*na eti kutaścit*), does not go anywhere (*yāti na kvacit*), nor remain (*na tiṣṭhati*), so the illusion-like world, because existing only as a trick of the mind, does not come or go anywhere and nor does it remain.[71]

How the illusory elephant differs from the mirage is significant. The mirage is an 'external' deception arising from material properties coinciding under specific conditions to appear like water. The observer is passenger to the illusion, duped by a desire for what is only the shimmering of light in the desert. There is a cognitive element insofar as there is the conceptual perception of water, its projection onto a trick of light, since it does indeed appear like water. A magic illusion, on the other hand, has clearer active and

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[69] Chodron (2001: 293 n.580).

[70] References to an "illusory elephant" are common in many treatises of Buddhist philosophy, but the nuances of the magic trick are lost. It appears to somehow be a false image conjured by a magician through means unknown. There are a couple of scholarly discussions of Vasubandhu's usage thereof in the *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* (TSN, verses 27-30), the primary work on the Yogācāra theory of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*); see Gold, "No Outside, No Inside: Duality, Reality, and Vasubandhu's Illusory Elephant", *Asian Philosophy* 16.1, 2006; *Paving the Great Way: Vasubandhu's Unifying Buddhist Philosophy*, Columbia University Press, 2015a: 157-8 and Garfield, "I Am a Brain in a Vat", *Madhyamaka and Yogācāra*, 2015b: 252-73. Naturally, there are differences between Vasubandhu and Nāgārjuna's respective employments of the analogy insofar as Nāgārjuna does not employ the Yogācāra device of the three natures, but there remains a common core to the analogy that discusses the confusion of mere appearances for reality. Nāgārjuna is not usually accused of denying the external world in the way that proponents of the Cittamātra have been (leaving aside the validity or lack thereof of this accusation, it is held (by, e.g., Candrakīrti) that the Cittamātrins deny the external world at the expense of prioritizing the existence of the mind. This was discussed in chapters 1 (§§1.1.1), 3 (§§3.4), and 4 (§§4.2.3 in the context of metaphysical idealism); nor is this the purpose of his invocation of the analogy here. On pp. 360-2 below, I discuss what fails to exist as it appears (the *percept*) in the context of cognition.

[71] RĀ 2:10-3 (110-13): *māyāgajasya dṛśyeta yathā janmānta eva ca | na ca kaścitsa tattvena janmāntaścaiva vidyate || māyopamasya lokasya tathā janmānta eva ca | dṛśyate paramārthena na ca janmānta eva ca || yathā māyāgajo naiti kutaścidyāti na kvacit | cittamohanamātratvādbhāvatvena na tiṣṭhati || tathā māyopamo loko naiti yāti na kutracit | cittamohanamātratvādbhāvatvena na tiṣṭhati ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 302; McClintock & Dunne 2024: 185-6).

passive elements insofar as there is one *passively* deceived by the magician's show (the spectator) and, equally, the *active* conjurer.[72] While the magic illusion is in every respect mind–dependent (as a trick of the mind), the analogy reveals that in cognitive experience we act analogously to the conjurer and not that we are deceived by something external (either another conjurer or the sticks themselves over which the spell is cast).[73] Extrapolating, it is reasonable that the exercise demonstrates that Nāgārjuna (or any equal or greater *bodhisattva*/Buddha) knows himself in his own cognitive experience to be such a conjurer for this conjuring is the nature of cognitive experience itself, fabricated by the mind by imputing the categories of cognitive experience onto phenomenal appearances (see chapter 1, §1.1). He knows the world an awakened mind conjures (i.e., fabricates) is necessarily cognized per the conventional truth as schematized in perfect accord with dependence relations and emptiness. The various comparisons to illusions convey this image (alongside disillusionment, non-attachment, etc.) insofar as they are primary examples of dependence relations (as the misperceptions are causally conditioned) and of the mind-dependent nature of cognitive experience (as they initially appear to a mind otherwise than they exist but can be validly cognized despite that initial appearance).

There is an object of perception (a percept) appearing to a mind, in this example either a pile of sticks or an illusory elephant, dependent on the cognition of the observer.[74] This refers to the basis of

[72] An important difference, though not one on which I will focus, is that the mirage, to the benefit of its analogy, invokes an element of desire insofar as the perceiver of the mirage is likely parched in the desert and so fervently desires for there to be water. The illusory elephant does not invoke an element of desire to the same degree since the desire (more concretely, the biological *need*) for water is far more powerful than the desire for mere entertainment. However, there are instances where Candrakīrti discusses (e.g., PSP 46, YṢV 16) the magical creation of a woman that acts as an object of desire. The same goes for BCA 9:30-1, where Śāntideva says that that desire persists because the knowledge of emptiness is too weak.

[73] It can be argued that Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu are working towards a similar conclusion of non-duality through the dissolution of the subject–object dichotomy as a scheme of cognitive experience (as I argue for Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti in chapter 6 (§6.3) and Garfield argues for Vasubandhu (2015b: 259-60, 268, 271). Gold (2006: 9) argues that the analogy is not invoked to deny the reality of external objects but the reality of the self (in relation to its objects). He argues that Vasubandhu's Yogācāra implements a two-step program: first is the realization of *cittamātra* insofar as there is the reduction of all (external) objects to objects of cognitive experience (in which case cognitive experience is strictly mind-dependent); second is the move, within the confines of this *citamātra* mind-dependence, to a non-dual realization reducing the mind itself to a duality of grasper and grasped (*grāhya* and *grāhaka*), such that the mind itself does not and cannot exist independently of the objects it grasps. This move prevents the prioritization and reification of the mind for which Cittamātrins are frequently criticized. Nāgārjuna's argument here is not so much about accomplishing such a dissolution but gaining awareness of the illusion itself and the illusory qualities of cognitive experience, in particular the illusion of birth and destruction (or arising and ceasing); hence, verses 110-111 of the RĀ discuss the lack of ultimate (i.e., inherent, *svabhāvic*) birth and destruction.

[74] Noteworthy, though irrelevant to Nāgārjuna, is that Garfield (2015b: 259) reads Vasubandhu's elephant analogy as similarly

designation, the objective support (*ārambaṇa*/*ālambana*) that, due to the fabricated nature of cognitive experience, cannot be posited outside of the mind–world model.[75] For this reason, more important than any appearances to the senses is the cognition of the percept. The passive audience cognizes these appearances uncritically as they immediately appear: under conditions of ignorance there appears to be an elephant existing mind-independently, a distinct subject experiencing that elephant, etc.[76] However, the active conjurer does not cognize the same uncritically: they know the elephant as a false appearance made to appear only under certain causal conditions and that there is just the pile of sticks.

Crucial to the conjuring analogy is that the appearance of the elephant is not really the *distortion* of a truly existent phenomenon (i.e., the pile of sticks as it exists in itself, *extra*-mentally).[77] Nonetheless, it is still correct to say that one perception/cognition is *more true* than the other. This distinction between the perception of an elephant or of a pile of sticks is only valid at the conventional level, corresponding to the distinction between conventional falsity and truth, respectively, in the following ways.

Those under the spell (equivalent in Candrakīrti's analogy of conventional falsity to those afflicted by cataracts, both literally and figuratively (i.e., cognitively; see chapter 3, §3.3)) see the illusory elephant because they have been so conditioned. Of what that conditioning consists is a complex and multilayered

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phenomenological and not metaphysically idealist. According to him, "Perception has as its material condition, or *de re* object (*ālambanā/dmigs rkyen*), *reality* or a pile of sticks, but delivers as its intentional *object (artha/don)* a subject-object duality *absent from reality itself*, or a hallucinated elephant. While the *intentional object* of perception is denied existence independent of the mind, neither perception nor the external world that occasions it is even *interrogated* ontologically".

[75] See chapter 2 (§§2.2.2) on the basis of designation; see chapter 3 (§3.1) on the weakened form of correspondence operative in the conventional truth and §3.3 (pp. 144-8 above) on the causal condition of perception.

[76] Though discussing Vasubandhu, Garfield (2015b: 259), a proponent of the similarities between the Yogācāra and Mādhyamika on this front, says that "On [a] purely phenomenological reading, Vasubandhu argues that our ordinary experience involves a confusion of the nature of that experience with the fundamental nature of reality, caused by instinctive cognitive habits of which we are unaware, and leading us to ascribe the subject-object duality we superimpose in consciousness to reality itself as it is independent of that superimposition, thus confusing construction with discovery".

[77] According to Westerhoff (2009a: 220), this lack of "distortion" is a consequence of the denial of the ultimate: "The very notion of "distortion" presupposes that there is a world untainted by conceptuality out there (even if our minds can never reach it) which is crooked and bent to fit our cognitive grasp. But precisely this notion of a "way things really are" is argued by the Mādhyamika to be incoherent. There is no way of investigating the world apart from our linguistic and conceptual practices, if only because these practices generate the notion of the "world" and of the "objects" in it in the first place. To speak of conventional reality as distorted is therefore highly misleading, unless all we want to say is that our way of investigating the world is inextricably bound up with the linguistic and conceptual framework we happen to employ". This argument holds true even if, as I argued in chapter 5 (§5.2), the ultimate truth is not *denied* but it is granted to require a mode of non-conceptual, non-dual cognition.

question ultimately boiling down to ignorance taking a given appearance as reality, i.e., as intrinsically existent.[78] However, those *not* under the spell (i.e., those *un*afflicted by cataracts, those with correct vision) see only a pile of sticks. This is a cognitive distinction with empirical undertones, derived from the correct functioning of the senses (especially the sixth, mental sense, i.e., valid cognition) operating at the level of convention (accordingly, making the distinction between conventional truth and falsity).[79]

The cognition of the elephant is in all cases false since, according to the conventional truth's *valid* cognition, there is no elephant, only the sticks. The elephant's *appearance* under certain specific conditions is not denied, only the validity of the cognition of that appearance as truly an elephant. On the other hand, in the Madhyamaka system the naked cognition of the sticks can itself still be either conventional truth or falsity depending on its semantic commitments (the Mādhyamikas' metaphysical anti-realism requires the sticks only conventionally exist as subject to dependence relations).[80] When validly cognized in the conventional truth, even the pile of sticks is not anything more than a percept—no matter how lucidly seen, "a pile of sticks" is a dependent designation imputed by the conceptualizing mind on the basis of designation that is otherwise inconceivable (i.e., unable to be posited, grasped, or predicated) any other way.[81] Disillusionment requires 'seeing through' the independent appearance of the elephant, the sticks, and the cognizing mind by realizing their interdependence through the mind-dependency of cognitive experience itself (i.e., the mind–world model of cognitive experience).

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[78] See the discussion of "default realism" in chapter 3 (§§3.3, pp. 143-4 above).

[79] MĀ 6:24bcd-5: "With reference to the knowledge derived from the correct senses (*sadindriya-jñānam apekṣya*), it is understood (*matam*) [that there is] the false knowledge (*mithyā jñānam*) of the faulty senses (*doṣavat-indriyāṇām*). That which the world grasps (*grāhyam avaiti lokaḥ*) by the six senses without defect (*vinā upaghātena yat indriyāṇām ṣaṇṇām*), that is true for the world (*satyam hi tat lokataḥ*). The remaining fabrication[s] (*śeṣam vikalpitam*) for the world are consequently false (*eva mithyā*)"; *sadindriyajñānamapekṣya mithyā jñānaṃ mataṃ doṣavadindriyāṇām || vinopaghātena yadindriyāṇāṃ ṣaṇṇāmapi grāhyamavaiti lokaḥ | satyaṃ hi tallokata eva śeṣaṃ vikalpitaṃ lokata eva mithyā ||* (Li 2015: 7).

[80] See chapter 3 (§§3.4.1) for the criteria of this differentiation; see chapter 4 (§4.2) on metaphysical anti-realism.

[81] Here, Garfield (2015b: 255) would say that the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra converge (at least the Yogācāra doctrine presented in Vasubandhu's TSN, which could differ in philosophical temperament from his other works like *Vimśatikā* or the *Triṃsikākārikā* for unstated reasons. This is because of each being "aimed at establishing selflessness and nonduality" (2015b: 268). He concludes with the remark that "We, the elephant, and the moment of experience are all sticks in a pile by the side of the road. This is a conclusion in which Mādhyamikas and Yogācārins could happily concur, and on which their analyses nicely converge" (2015b: 271). Through his explanation of Vasubandhu's employment of the metaphor, the pile of sticks comes to stand for something "never encountered directly" (2015b: 260) and without "*unmediated* access" or "*unmediated* knowledge of any reality independent of these sensory inputs" (2015b: 256) in cognitive experience.

This plays out in a discussion of the *Tathāgata* in the act of conjuring (i.e., fabrication).[82] This is not likely meant to literally discuss the *Tathāgata* as fabricating their own cognitive experience (given that a Buddha's cognitions are inconceivable) since it presumes his powers to make phenomena appear to ordinary beings. Nonetheless, the lessons are i) the emptiness of what is conjured and ii) the discussion of an apparition created by an apparition, together which make the same point drawn from the conjuring of the illusory elephant insofar as both the elephant and the sticks and the conjurer and the experiencer are empty. Nāgārjuna's argument compares the agent (the conjurer) to the first apparition and that agent's actions to the second-order apparition (i.e., a second apparition conjured through the first):

> [ŚS 42:] Whatever exists (*yod pa yin*) is mere fabrication (*rtog pa tsam gang ci yang rung*)—that is both (*de dag gnyi ga*) [the apparition and the second-order apparition]. Like that (*de bzhin*), the agent (*byed po*) is like the apparition (*sprul par mtshungs*) and action like the second-order apparition (*las ni sprul pas sprul dang mtshungs*). They are [both] empty of *svabhāva* (*rang bzhin gyis ni stong pa yin*). Whatever exists as mere fabrication (*rtog tsam gang ci'ang rung bar yod*) is empty of *svabhāva* (*rang bzhin gyis ni stong pa yin*).[83]

The *ārya*s understand the illusory nature of ordinary, conceptual cognition as a product of conjuring, in every way only a trick of the mind undeserving of attachment/clinging. That illusory nature is, in turn, how they express the nature of cognitive experience itself as both a pedagogical tool for those yet to have attained it and as an apt characterization of their own cognitive experience.

MERE CONVENTION & ULTIMATE COGNITION

From the illusion-like nature of cognitive experience, Candrakīrti says that the *ārya*s determine the world

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[82] What is being conjured is not explicitly stated. Tola & Dragonetti interpret that the *Tathāgata* is magically conjuring the image of his body (presumably, the *nirmāṇakāya*, the "emanation body" of the Buddha) that appears to the minds of ordinary beings (1987: 31 n.155).

[83] The full sequence (ŚS 40-2) reads, "Just as (*ji ltar*) the *Bhagavān Tathāgata* (*bcom ldan de bzhin gshegs*), through his powers (*rdzu 'phrul gyis*), conjures an apparition (*sprul pa sprul pa mdzad*) and, through that apparition (*sprul des*), conjures another apparition (*sprul pa gzhan zhig sprul par byed*) [(i.e., a second-order apparition)], in that way (*de las*), the apparitions of the Tathāgata are empty (*de bzhin gshegs sprul stong*); how much more the apparitions from an apparition (*sprul pas sprul pa smos ci dgos*)? Whatever exists (*yod pa yin*) is mere fabrication (*rtog pa tsam gang ci yang rung*)—that is both (*de dag gnyi ga*) [the apparition and the second-order apparition]. Like that (*de bzhin*), the agent (*byed p*o) is like the apparition (*sprul par mtshungs*) and action like the second-order apparition (*las ni sprul pas sprul dang mtshungs*). They are [both] empty of svabhāva (ra*ng bzhin gyis ni stong pa yin*). Whatever exists as mere fabrication (*rtog tsam gang ci'ang rung bar yod*) is empty of *svabhāva* (*rang bzhin gyis ni stong pa yin*)"; *ji ltar bcom ldan de bzhin gshegs de ni rdzu 'phrul gyis sprul pa | sprul pa mdzad la sprul des kyang sprul pa gzhan zhig sprul par byed || de las de bzhin gshegs sprul stong sprul pas sprul pa smos ci dgos | rtog pa tsam gang ci yang rung de dag gnyi ga yod pa yin || de bzhin byed po sprul par mtshungs las ni sprul pas sprul dang mtshungs | rang bzhin gyis ni stong pa yin rtog tsam gang ci'ang rung bar yod ||* (Tola & Dragonetti 1987: 18).

to be "mere convention" (*saṃvṛtimātra*; Tib: *kun rdzob tsam*). This specifically means seeing conventions *as conventions*, unlike ordinary minds who take them as something more. Although this designation appears unique to his exposition, Candrakīrti's discussion is terse, appearing only once in the PSP[84] and at MĀB 6:28 (p. 354 above). Nonetheless, this could be problematic if interpreted to invalidate the conventional truth for the *ārya*s, raising two questions: i) what kind of characterization of the *ārya*s' cognitive experience does this require? ii) What does it mean for the two truths distinction?

My position on the *ārya*s' perspective on the conventional truth appears inconsistent with some of what Candrakīrti says but which I feel is, ultimately, more compatible with some other things he says vis-à-vis both the methodology of the two truths and the non-duality of the ultimate.[85] It is not the case that the conventional truth must be considered false from the ultimate perspective: it is, from the non-duality of the ultimate, necessarily neither true *nor* false—it is *mere convention*. That ultimate perspective does not address (and does not tarnish) the internal validity of the conventional truth *per se* and especially not its distinction from conventional falsity (a distinction which, although only valid at the conventional level, is necessary to the two truths). It is necessary to the world's re-engagement post-attainment that the *ārya*s nevertheless validly conceptualize ordinary experience. It also follows that, if the ultimate is the most valid form of cognition, the conventional truth and the kind of cognition correlated with that conventional truth must in some way be deficient compared thereto. The hierarchy of the two truths is not disputed. However, the merit and validity (for both the methodology and

[84] The only PSP reference to *saṃvṛtimātra* is in a citation of the *Āryahastikakṣa Sūtra* at the end of the 19th chapter. It states, "These five (*prañca-imāni*), monks, are said to be mere perceptions (*saṃjñāmātram*), mere assertions (*pratijñāmātram*), mere customs (*vyavahāramātram*), mere conventions (*saṃvṛtimātran*): the past time (*atītaḥ adhvā*), the future time (*anāgataḥ adhvā*), space (*ākāśam*), *nirvāṇa* (*nirvāṇam*), and the person (*pudgalaḥ*)"; *pañcemāni bhikṣavaḥ saṃjñāmātraṃ pratijñāmātraṃ vyavahāramātraṃ saṃvṛtimātraṃ yaduta atīto 'dhvā anāgato 'dhvā ākāśaṃ nirvāṇaṃ pudgalaśceti ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 167). I have previously translated both *vyavahāra* and *saṃvṛti* as "convention", but their juxtaposition here requires distinct translations to differentiate their respective invocations; hence, "mere customs" for *vyavahāramātra* and "mere conventions" for *saṃvṛtimātra*. I speculate these five are listed because they are critical elements of cognitive experience itself (including *nirvāṇa* in the case it is the perfection of that cognitive experience, but also itself only a mere designation (see chapter 5, §§5.1.3). Though it isn't specifically invoked, these are analogues of the *nāmamātra* discussed in chapter 2 (§§2.2.3)].

[85] Typical in my interpretation of Candrakīrti, I note that certain passages appear to denigrate the conventional truth, others discuss its methodological, pedagogical, and soteriological importance, and others still address it from the ultimate non-dual perspective precluding its definitive predication as false. I rank these in terms of importance in the order I presented them.

coherence of the distinction) of calling the conventional truth itself 'false' I dispute as a categorical mistake. I do not want to give the impression that there is no conventional truth and therefore no valid (i.e., true) conceptual cognition for *ārya*s having attained ultimate cognition because this is vital for explaining their re-engagement of the world occurring conceptually. Because I argue that valid conceptual cognition post-attainment (insofar as one engages the world) is the endgame of the two truths' dialectic, I need to present an account of how such *ārya*s cognitively experience conventions. I think this is precisely what Candrakīrti must mean by the *ārya*s' reduction of the world to "mere convention".

I appeal to Tsong Khapa (and his modern interpreters) to make sense of this.[86] On multiple occasions, Candrakīrti appears to use disparaging language for the conventional truth. E.g.:

> [MĀ 6:23:] All phenomena (*sarva-bhāvāḥ*) bear two aspects (*rūpadvayam bibhrati*): the phenomenon grasped through correct or incorrect cognition (*samyak-mṛṣā-darśana-labdha-bhāvam*). The object correctly seen (*samyak-dṛśām yaḥ viṣayaḥ*) is *tattva*; the conventional truth is said (*saṃvṛtisatyam uktam*) to be the wrongly seen (*mṛṣā-dṛśām*).[87]

This is the least clear feature of his exposition, contributing to the various fictionalist interpretations of the Madhyamaka or ones that seek Candrakīrti's falsification of the conventional truth.[88] This is perhaps the most glaring instance of Candrakīrti predicating falsity to the conventional truth (i.e., it is the "wrongly seen"), but this is evidently also in comparison with the ultimate (the "correctly seen"). This demonstrates a clear hierarchy of the two truths. However, the explanation given for the conventional truth in that verse's autocommentary is i) constrained to the cognitions of ordinary beings in contrast with the ultimate cognition of the *ārya*s and ii) more consistent with conventional falsity than the conventional truth. In the autocommentary, Candrakīrti says it

> finds its existence (*bdag gi yod*) through the power of the false perception (*mthong ba brdzun*

[86] Such as Williams, "Tsong-kha-pa on *kun-rdzob bden-pa*", *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson: Proceedings of the International Seminar on Tibetan Studies, Oxford 1979* (eds. Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi), Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1980: 325-334 and Thakchöe, "Status of Conventional Truth in Tsong Khapa's Mādhyamika Philosophy", *Contemporary Buddhism* 8.1, 2007a: 31-47).

[87] MĀ 6:23: *samyagmṛṣādarśanalabdhabhāvaṃ rūpadvayaṃ bibhrati sarvabhāvāḥ | samyagdṛśāṃ yo viṣayaḥ sa tattvaṃ mṛṣādṛśāṃ saṃvṛtisatyamuktam* || (Li 2015: 7).

[88] As I explain in chapter 3 (§3.1) in advancing the cognitive reading of the conventional truth, while fictionalist accounts thereof circumscribe its fabricated nature, fiction generally lacks the normativity necessary to the conventional truth's differentiation from conventional falsity. If anything goes in fiction, this is not the case in the conventional truth.

> *pa'i stobs las*) of the complete obscurations *(ma lus par khebs pa rnams kyi*) of the mind's eye (*blo'i mig*) of the ordinary person (*so so'i skye bo'i*) by the clouded vision of cataracts (*ma rig pa'i rab rib kyi ling thog gis*). The objects perceived by childish beings (*byis pa rnams kyi mthong ba'i yul du*) in this way are not self-established (*rang gi ngo bos grub pa ni ma yin*).[89]

This description seems more applicable to conventional falsity than the conventional truth or, perhaps, the conventional truth as presented by the *ārya*s that is *invalidly* cognized by ordinary beings.[90] On the other hand, Candrakīrti also provides evidence like the following:

> [PSP 44:] By depending on the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya-vypakṣayā*), the falseness of phenomena (*mṛṣārthatā bhāvānām*) is explained by us as the *antidote* to the world's attachment to the truth/reality of this [(i.e., anything *real*)]" (*lokasya idaṃsatyābhiniveśasya*). The *ārya*s for whom the goal is attained (*āryāḥ kṛtakāryāḥ*) would not realize anything that is either false or not false (*yat mṛṣā amṛṣā vā*).[91]

The falseness of ordinary cognitive experience, *when taken as more than mere convention*, is explained "by depending on the conventional truth"; it is not the falseness of ordinary cognitive experience *in toto*. This means that it necessarily occurs through the conventional truth, i.e., the valid cognition of ordinary experience. That ultimate falseness is taught for the sake of cultivating non-clinging, but that ordinary cognitive experience is validly cognized in that same conventional truth.

The controversy of "mere conventions" stems from the following: "[For the three classes, such

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[89] MĀB 6:23: *gzhan ni so so'i skye bo'i ma rig pa'i rab rib kyi ling thog gis blo'i mig ma lus par khebs pa rnams kyi mthong ba brdzun pa'i stobs las bdag gi yod pa rnyed pa yin te | byis pa rnams kyi mthong ba'i yul du 'gyur pa ji lta ba de lta bu'i rang bzhin du rang gi ngo bos grub pa ni ma yin no |* (Liland 2020: 160).

[90] Preceding the illusion-like nature of phenomena and their reduction to mere convention, Candrakīrti also says at MĀB 6:28 that "The conventional truth is established (*kun rdzob kyi bden pa rnam par gzhag*) by the power of ignorance afflicted by [its] involvement in the [12] factors/links of [*saṃsāric*, mundane] existence (*srid pa'i yan lag gis yongs su bsdus pa nyon mongs pa can gyi ma rig pa'i dbang gis*)"; *de ltar na re zhig srid pa'i yan lag gis yongs su bsdus pa nyon mongs pa can gyi ma rig pa'i dbang gis kun rdzob kyi bden pa rnam par gzhag go ||* (Liland 2020: 164).This seems like a condemnation of the conventional truth from its incontrovertible association with ignorance. However, the equalizer is the further association of a certain involvement with the factors of *saṃsāric* existence from which, naturally, the *ārya* is free—ignoring the fact that *bodhisattva*s, by mandate foregoing the final *nirvāṇa* (*parinirvāṇa*), choose to be continuously reborn in *saṃsāra* to aid sentient beings. They are not, thereby, *afflicted* by either *saṃsāra* or ignorance. In the program of the *bhūmi*s, some form of ignorance remains until one fully attains Buddhahood (a Buddha being the only one to completely eradicate ignorance and thereby attain omniscience). This is what distinguishes *ārya*s from *Buddha*s, affecting the way they conceptually cognize. Tsong Khapa's translator, Thupten Jinpa, says (2021: 622 n.449) that these *ārya*s, because they have not yet reached Buddhahood, "still have residues of ignorance and its propensities, and so dualistic appearances still persist for them during those [post-meditative] states". In relation to Buddhahood, so long as dualistic appearances persist, some form of cognitive ignorance remains. In that respect, if the cognitions of *ārya*s are tainted by some latent ignorance, they are not necessarily *afflicted* by this.

[91] PSP 44: *saṃvṛtisatyavyapekṣayā lokasya idaṃsatyābhiniveśasya pratipakṣabhāvena mṛṣārthatā bhāvānāṃ pratipādyate 'smābhiḥ | naiva tvāryāḥ kṛtakāryāḥ kiṃcidupalabhante yanmṛṣā amṛṣā vā syāditi |* (Vaidya 1960b: 14).

compounded phenomena realized to be like illusions] are not true from their artificial nature (*bcos ma'i rang bzhin gyi bden pa ma yin*) because [they are] not presumed (*rlom pa med pa'i phyir*) to actually [exist] in truth (*bden par mngon par*)".[92] Tsong Khapa is clear it is only certain beings for whom this applies, those at or above the seventh stage (*bhūmi*).[93] This is said to have two conditions: i) the realization of the illusion-like nature of phenomena and ii) the elimination of afflictive ignorance.[94] Both Tsong Khapa and Williams note this should not discount the conventional truth as it is to be understood by ordinary beings. Because of the restriction of its application, it is instead a *retrospective* on the cognitive experience of the *ārya*s.[95] In all cases, the conventional truth must not be invalidated to preserve both its distinction from conventional falsity and its instrumental role in the dialectic of the two truths.

The controversy orbits Candrakīrti's use of "not true" (*bden pa ma yin*, a copular negation of "true"). It would be inadvisable to take this negation in the strictest sense as implying the conventional truth's *inherent falsity* (a categorical mistake), as the falsification of the possibility of the valid cognition of ordinary experience for ordinary beings or *ārya*s.[96] To that end, I consider his more definitive statements

[92] MĀB 6:28; see p. 354 above. This translation is amended here to better fit the context, but the content remains the same.

[93] Although traditionally important, this is not a feature of the texts on which I focus because it is not germane. In the same vein, the distinctions between the stages are not always clear. At the sixth stage the initial realization of the ultimate (i.e., emptiness) occurs, so these beings have indeed realized it in some capacity. Nonetheless, I do not consider these stages relevant to an exegesis of the two truths (the ultimate in particular). It is not necessarily a difference in philosophical understanding (notwithstanding the alleged omniscience of a Buddha) but a matter of praxis, application of the teaching, ethical development, and meditation that differentiates the later stages. The philosophical content of the teachings brings us to the point of the apophasis of the ultimate truth (indicated in MĀ 6). As such, that is generally where my analysis stops.

[94] Tsong Khapa (2021: 238) notes that "it is not just any śrāvaka or any pratyekabuddha or bodhisattva; it is those with specific characteristics. One such feature is the direct realization that all conditioned things are just like reflections in that although devoid of intrinsic existence, they appear as such. To exclude bodhisattvas below the seventh ground and śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas on the learner's stage, who also have this realization, the three individuals are also described [in the *Commentary*] as having "eliminated the affliction of ignorance." Thus we must understand these persons to include bodhisattvas on the purified grounds and śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha arhats. It is from the perspectives of these three that phenomena remain untrue".

[95] Tsong Khapa (2021: 239) specifies that the above declaration of MĀB 6:28 is a pedagogical device for ordinary beings as a characterization of the awakened cognition of the *ārya*s: "It is not that these phenomena are being demonstrated as untrue to the three kinds of persons for their benefit; it is for people like ourselves that these phenomena are demonstrated to be untrue from the perspectives of those three kinds of person.". He says elsewhere in the commentary that "It is not the case that Candrakīrti says these phenomena cannot be obtained by the valid conventional cognitions of the āryas" (2021: 224).

[96] Tsong Khapa (2021: 238) comments, "Since the *Commentary* in no way establishes these phenomena to be not conventional truths [for these beings] other than demonstrating them to be untrue [for them], those who read these passages as demonstrating these phenomena are not conventional truths [for the three persons] expose a great crudeness in their intellectual engagement. This is therefore an inferior standpoint whereby the intention of the master Candrakīrti is soiled by the stains of their own [feeble] intellect" (all square brackets original to the translation). In that respect, I argue that we must understand the negation of *bden pa* as a non-implicative negation (see chapter 5, §5.3).

regarding a non-dual retrospective on convention (as neither true nor false) philosophically stronger. In that regard, I interpret his negation as a shorthand of such non-duality, and I explain this as the reason for the reduction of phenomena to "mere convention".

To account for this, I appeal to Tsong Khapa's differentiation of two senses of "truth" for Candrakīrti's claim that such illusion-like phenomena "are not presumed to actually [exist] in truth". It is evident that Candrakīrti plays with an ambiguity like this from his repeated reliance on the conventional truth. For this reason, we must take care how we parse these senses because this denial must be reconcilable and remain consistent with the conditions establishing the conventional truth. This claim must be because such phenomena (even the conventional truth) are not *ultimately* true in any which way it is construed, Abhidharmic, Madhyamaka, or otherwise. Tsong Khapa differentiates truth "from the perspective of the subject (for the cognition)" from truth "in the objective sense".[97] In the first sense, the cognition of ordinary objects of experience, whether by ordinary beings or *ārya*s post-meditation, structurally consists of an object appearing before a subject. This kind of cognition can be consistently conventionally true (i.e., in the conventional truth) while nonetheless remaining untrue in the second sense.

My explanation of the second sense, especially in that it does not obtain (i.e., "not true") proceeds in a way wherein "not true" does not imply its opposite extreme ("false") and thereby does not falsify the conventional truth. "True in the objective sense" should be contrasted with the first cognitive sense to mean 'true in an entirely cognition-independent way'.[98] This is not the Mādhyamikas' sense of "ultimate truth", but understanding how it does *not* obtain anyway is significant to that project. I liken it to the Abhidharmic ultimate the Mādhyamikas critique via *svabhāva* through dependence relations; it is the

[97] Tsong Khapa 2021: 239.

[98] In the editor's glossary to Tsong Khapa's commentary on the MĀ (2021: 659), the entry for "nominal existence (*btags yod, prajñaptisat*) defines it as "The existence of things on the level of a truth defined not in an objective sense, as independent facts, but from the perspective and shared norms of thought, language, and everyday experience and conventions" (emphasis added). This seems like the former kind of truth Tsong Khapa is discussing via truth "from the perspective of the subject (for the cognition)" insofar as the kind of existence conferrable therethrough would be a mere "nominal existence". See the discussion in chapter 2 of *nāmamātra* (§§2.2.3) and mere conventional existence in chapter 4 (§4.2.2).

kind of 'true existence' that analysis searches for and never finds.[99] It never obtains simply because it contradicts the truth of emptiness. Ordinary beings may understand truth in that deluded way (even, erroneously, the conventional truth), and, for them, phenomena are explained as not true in *that* way. Candrakīrti explains that "That which is the ultimate for ordinary beings (*so so'i skye bo rnams kyi don dam pa gang yin pa de nyid*) is merely conventional (*kun rdzob tsam yin*) for those *ārya*s who possess the [cognitive] sphere associated with appearances (*'phags pa snang ba dang bcas pa'i spyod yul can rnams kyi*)".[100] In other words, insofar as ordinary beings take appearances as their ultimate, they are guilty of disregarding the two truths distinction by not acknowledging distinct conventional and ultimate cognitions, of solely relying on a crude notion akin to truth's old metaphysical model as "the way things really are" (objectively), and thus of uncritically taking appearances as reality.[101] According to Candrakīrti, appearances only deceive the ignorant who do not understand their emptiness but not those who do.[102] Therefore, there is no deception in the valid cognition of those appearances (i.e., as illusion-like). Meanwhile, for the *ārya*s (who have taken hold of the wisdom of the conventional truth, i.e., dependent origination and emptiness), the conventional truth and all the objects and experiences it

[99] On the critique of the Abhidharmic ultimate, see chapter 5 (§5.2); on analysis searching for a similar true existence, see chapter 3 (§§3.4.2).

[100] MĀB 6:28: *de la so so'i skye bo rnams kyi don dam pa gang yin pa de nyid 'phags pa snang ba dang bcas pa'i spyod yul can rnams kyi kun rdzob tsam yin la* | (Liland 2020: 165). Williams (1980: 329) comments: "*Don-dam bden-pa* [(ultimate truth)] for the *pṛthagjana* [(ordinary being)] is the world of his everyday experience; for the *Ārya* it is the unutterable ultimate truth. The *pṛthagjana*'s *don-dam bden-pa* is *kun-rdzob-tsam* [(mere convention)] for the *Āryas*, but the world of everyday experience seen as illusory, not-Self, unsatisfactoriness and so on is just *kun-rdzob bden-pa*. It is the world not of the *pṛthagjana*, not of the *pṛthagjana* as seen by the *Ārya*, but of the *Ārya* inasmuch as he himself perceives the everyday world. For having eliminated defiled nescience he no longer sees the self-essence, but he sees only illusion. And it is at this level, the level where the *Ārya* sees the everyday world, that the analyses of the Madhyamaka as articulated occur and have meaning".

[101] As Williams (1980: 329) explains, "The pot, says Tsong-kha-pa, is truly established for them [(i.e., ordinary beings)], it is not a conventional object. But the pot which is ultimately established for them appears to the *Āryas* as like an illusion and is thus not ultimate but conventional. Dependent upon this sort of cognition since it is not truly maintained, it is simply conventional. The pot can certainly not be ultimate for the *Āryas*, since it is not found when searched for in the light of critical analytic cognition. It is clear that the claim here is not that conventional truth is the world as perceived by everyday cognition, but rather it is the sensory world as understood correctly by the *Āryas* inasmuch as it is a means to liberation".

[102] PSP 237: "Without inherent existence (*niḥsvabhāvāḥ*), phenomena are untrustworthy [(i.e., deceive)] (*santaḥ … visaṃvādakāḥ*), like illusory elephants, horses, and so forth (*māyā-kari-turaga-ādivat*), those childish beings who do not know (*bālānām … tat-anabhijñānām*) [this emptiness] but not those who do (*vijñānām*)"; *tasmānniḥsvabhāvā eva santo bālānāṃ visaṃvādakā māyākarituragādivat tadanabhijñānāṃ na tu vijñānām* | (Vaidya 1960b: 104). The valid cognition of appearances is explained concerning the *ārya*s' cognition (i.e., those who know, who are not deceived) of appearances as illusion-like mere convention.

contains are certainly not true in that objective (cognition-independent) sense.

That something is *not ultimately true* does not mean it is *conventionally false*.[103] If that were so, two unfortunate consequences would follow: i) the division of the two truths would not be respected insofar as there are different kinds of truth pertaining to different modes of cognition now conflated; and ii) since not anything is ultimately true because all is empty (which is, crucially, different from there is being no ultimate truth *if*, rather, the ultimate truth is non-propositional and non-dual direct experience) and only conventional, the complete falsity of everything would follow, as would epistemological skepticism and nihilism. The conventions of the world would be destroyed, ordinary cognitive experience invalidated, and the conventional truth would be unable to act as the means to the ultimate that relies on it. That ruination is neither the intention of ultimate cognition nor of the two truths distinction.

That convention is not true "in the objective sense" is the most obvious way "mere convention" could be predicated "not true"; the *ārya*s know that the denial of this kind of truth is exactly what makes the conventional truth *conventional* (i.e., the first sense). However, it is not the only way to understand a lack of being "ultimately true" and therethrough the reduction of phenomena to "mere convention". For this reason, the apparent discount of convention's truth-status must be related in the context of the non-duality of the ultimate, which *is* the Mādhyamikas' sense of ultimacy (not the objective, cognition-independent one). Convention can also be predicated "not [ultimately] true" in that sense as follows: if the negation were understood as non-implicative, and, more than that, a shortform for an exhaustive non-implicative tetralemmic negation, then we do not arrive at the conclusion that, for *āryan* cognition, "mere

[103] Although I disagree with the fictionalist context in which he posits it (see chapter 3 (§3.1)), Garfield astutely notes (2006a: 1) that "Madhyamaka Buddhist theory is committed to a doctrine of two *truths*, not to a doctrine of one truth and one falsehood". He explains elsewhere (1995: 208) that "Conventional phenomena are sometimes referred to as empirically real and not imaginary and sometimes as wholly imaginary. So it is important to see that the sense of "falsehood" in play when the conventional is characterized as false is "deceptive." That is, insofar as conventional phenomena present themselves as more than conventional—as inherently existent—they deceive us. We take them to be what they are not—to be intrinsically identified, inherently existent entities. In that sense, they are false. But to the extent that we understand them as dependently arisen, empty, interdependent phenomena, they constitute a conventional truth. Yet one must bear in mind that, according to Nāgārjuna, perception untutored by Mādhyamika philosophy and rigorous practice delivers objects to consciousness as inherently existent. In *this* sense, the things that we see are wholly false". Garfield is here referring to default realism discussed in the context of *svabhāva* (see chapter 3, §3.3).

convention" is the falsification of the conventional truth. Instead, we arrive at the non-duality of ultimate cognition: from the ultimate retrospective, wherein all conceptual categories and dichotomies disappear, the conventional truth is *neither true nor untrue*. In that case, this retrospective, indicated conceptually through exhaustive non-implicative negation, contextualizes "convention" via its juxtaposition with the non-dual ultimate. The result is transformative of both cognition and convention: from an ultimate retrospective, the conventional truth is reduced to "mere convention" and appearances cognized as mere illusory appearance: neither inherently true nor false, existent nor non-existent, good nor bad, etc.[104]

Strictly speaking, no conventions would appear at all in the meditative equipoise of ultimate cognition, but I am concerned with the specific circumstance of the *ārya*s' post-meditative re-engagement of the world, which requires not only conceptuality and conventions but the valid cognition thereof. Candrakīrti says that "mere conventions" only "appear (*snang*) for the *ārya*s possessing the [cognitive] sphere associated with appearances (*snang ba dang bcas pa'i spyod yul can gyi 'phags pa rnams la*) but, for those who possess the [cognitive] sphere of non-appearance (*snang ba med pa'i spyod yul mnga' ba rnams la)*, they do not".[105] The latter is a meditative absorption without conceptual appearances and therefore no conventions; the former is a post-meditative state wherein there are conceptual appearances and therefore conventions.[106] The non-appearance of conceptual cognition and conventions intra-

[104] According to Garfield (2002: 39-40), "We typically perceive and conceive of external phenomena, ourselves, causal powers, moral truths, and so on as independently existing, intrinsically identifiable, and substantial. But though this is, in one sense, the conventional character of conventional phenomena—the manner in which they are ordinarily experienced—to see them this way is precisely not to see them as conventional. To see that they are merely conventional, in the sense […] defended by Nāgārjuna and his followers, is thereby to see them as empty, and this is their ultimate mode of existence".

[105] MĀB 6:28: *snang ba dang bcas pa'i spyod yul can gyi 'phags pa rnams la snang gi | snang ba med pa'i spyod yul mnga' ba rnams la ni ma yin no* | (Liland 2020: 165). According to Constance Kassor ("The Context(s) of "Correct Seeing": Truth and Fiction in Tibetan Madhyamaka", *Philosophy East and West* 68.4, 2018: 1181), "Gorampa identifies three different types of minds: the minds of ordinary persons (*so so skye bo*), the minds of *ārya*s in meditative equipoise (*'phags pa'i mnyam gzhag*), and the minds of *ārya*s in the post-meditative state (*rjes thob*). Briefly, ordinary persons have normally functioning sense faculties that apprehend conventional objects in a dualistic way. *Ārya*s alternate between meditative equipoise and the post-meditative state. Meditative equipoise involves a direct, nondual apprehension of the ultimate truth, which is free from conceptual proliferations. The post-meditative state involves a temporary return to dualistic engagement with the conventional, but because it follows from a direct realization of the ultimate, *ārya*s in this state understand that their dualistic engagement with the conventional is not actually true. Eventually, as an *ārya* repeatedly practices meditative equipoise and approaches fully awakened buddhahood, she can effortlessly remain in the nondual state of freedom from conceptual proliferations".

[106] Tsong Khapa (2021: 244) says that for the three classes, "things remain contrived entities that are dependently originated; for them they exist as *mere conventionalities*, not truly existent. And these [merely conventional] entities appear to the āryas

meditation (indicating ultimate cognition apophatically) explains the non-appearance of the conventional truth therein, but the re-appearance of conceptual cognition and conventions post-meditation requires the re-appearance of the conventional truth therein for that cognition to be validly cognized.

There are two contexts where the valid cognition of conventions post-attainment occurs. Firstly, I emphasize the re-engagement of convention as "not actually true" as indicative of a cognitive transformation via the mastery of the conventional truth through penetrating its lack of ultimacy in every sense. Convention and the conventional truth are thusly relegated to their rightful place in the dialectic, consistent with this hierarchy. Because the conventional truth never attains any ultimate status, it is never anything more than mere convention validly cognized vis-à-vis its invalid cognition in conventional falsity; this distinction is in no way diminished. Secondly, given that, post-meditation (post-attainment of the non-dual ultimate), the world is re-engaged, its cognition should be manifestly transformed by that attainment. For this reason, I secondly emphasize the re-engagement of convention as "not actually true" as indicative of a cognitive transformation via non-duality. Having tasted non-duality, ultimate cognition is not interested in judging phenomena that are "mere convention" by their truth–falsity or existence–non-existence (in either of Tsong Khapa's senses) for, from the ultimate perspective no such categories apply. This is the consequence of the noble silence that follows from carrying analysis to its completion. All such categories are reduced to mere fabrications belonging to convention; all such fabrications refer to mere appearances appearing before the mind as objects like illusions from the cognitive perspective of a subject (something that, structurally, the re-engagement of the world requires). The *ārya*s realize this, and so cognize such appearances as fabrications, as illusion-like mere conventions.

For these reasons, conventions are let stand *as mere conventions* and analysis beyond their conventional acceptance (i.e., appearances accepted in the conventional truth as established through

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abiding in the stages subsequent to meditative equipoise—stages where one remains within the sphere of perceptual experience tainted by ignorance [towards the full realization of Buddhahood] and its habitual propensities. This is because they possess a form of ignorance that is not afflicted but is characterized as an obscuration to knowledge. In contrast, the entities do not appear at all to āryas who are abiding in meditative equipoise, for they are devoid of [dualistic] perceptions".

dependence relations *as conventionally existent*, exempting falsities like the son of a barren woman) is proscribed. This reveals two critical points: i) that such conventions are let stand *as they are* (as mere conventions) is necessary to any post-attainment re-engagement, and ii) that, although phenomena are conventionally 'true' and 'existent' only from the perspective of the conventional truth, no such categories apply in ultimate cognition. In that case, only the conventional truth, through its juxtaposition via the ultimate, transforms into "mere convention"; conventional falsity remains false and excluded in every way. This leaves such conventions, when validly cognized, as tools of transactions, pedagogy, and soteriology. Addressing the world in its own language without succumbing to its reificatory traps, "mere conventions" are frequently used by the *ārya*s in a way demonstrative of their non-clinging thereto.[107]

THE *ĀRYA*S' COGNITIVE SPHERE

This retrospective of the *ārya*s discounts neither the conventional truth's pedagogical validity nor its soteriological efficacy but is a consequence of the full realization of *both* truths. The retrospective is formalized by the attainment of non-clinging to the conventional truth.[108] The label "mere convention" is symptomatic of clinging to neither the conventional truth as the sole type or metric of truth nor to any dichotomies like truth–falsity or appearance–reality as being anything more than mere conventions. It is

[107] This is evident in passages like MĀ 6:44: "Just as, with respect to the vanquishing of the view of the transitory collection (*satkāyadṛṣṭeḥ vigame*), the Buddha nonetheless taught using "I and mine" (*aham mama iti*), so, although all phenomena lack inherent existence (*asvabhāvān api sarva-bhāvān*), he [nonetheless] provisionally taught "existence" (*asti iti neyārthatayā*)"; *ahaṃ mametyeva yathā dideśa satkāyadṛṣṭer vigame 'pi buddhaḥ | tathā 'svabhāvān api sarvabhāvān astīti neyārthatayā dideśa* || (Li 2015: 9). The autocommentary clarifies: "Although having abandoned the "I" and "mine" (*ngar 'dzin pa dang nga yir 'dzin pa spangs su zin*) through abandoning (*spangs pas*) the entirety of the view of the transitory collection (*'jig tshogs la lta ba mtha 'dag*), "I' and "mine" are expressed (*nga dang nga'i zhes bsnyad pa*) because they are a method of [causing] understanding for worldly beings (*'jig rten gyis khong du chud par bya ba'i thabs yin pa'i phyir*). [For this reason,] the Buddha taught using "I" and "mine" (*bcom ldan 'das kyis nga dang nga'i zhes bya ba de lta bu ji skad bstan pa*). Likewise, although all phenomena (*dngos po rnams*) lack inherent existence (*rang bzhin yod pa ma yin yang*), because it is a method of [causing] understanding for worldly beings, "existence" (*yod pa nyid du*) is taught (*nye bar bstan pa*). Thus, he taught their [conventional] existence (*yod pa nyid du bstan pa mdzad*)"; *'jig tshogs la lta ba mtha' dag spangs pas ngar 'dzin pa dang nga yir 'dzin pa spangs su zin kyang | nga dang nga'i zhes bsnyad pa'i 'jig rten gyis khong du chud par bya ba'i thabs yin pa'i phyir | bcom ldan 'das kyis nga dang nga'i zhes bya ba de lta bu ji skad bstan pa de bzhin du | dngos po rnams rang bzhin yod pa ma yin yang de yod pa nyid du nye bar bstan pa 'jig rten gyis khong du chud pa'i thabs yin pa'i phyir | yod pa nyid du bstan pa mdzad do* || (Liland 2020: 187).

[108] While Streng (1967: 96) does not use this terminology, he argues a similar point: "According to Nāgārjuna, the Ultimate Truth both negates and brings to fruition the mundane [(=conventional)] truth at the same time. Mundane truth is not rejected in the sense that it is replaced by another "truth", but it is rejected in the sense that it is transformed into "no self-existent truth". The things of the apparent world are not destroyed, but they are re-evaluated in such a way that they no longer have the power emotionally and intellectually to control human life". This re-revaluation and the transformed relation of those objects to the cognizer is precisely the cultivation of non-clinging.

equally symptomatic of non-clinging to the duality of the two truths itself, from which the conventional truth, the ultimate truth, and the distinction therebetween each becomes another "mere convention", with non-dual ultimate cognition the underlying mode through which it is cognitively experienced.

I propose two points to summarize the retrospective on convention and the conventional truth as "mere convention" in the context of the non-dual ultimate: i) that the gamut of ordinary phenomena (e.g., cups, chariots, persons, etc.) conventionally exists as "mere conventions" is the conventional truth for the *ārya*s because the conventional truth is mere convention in the face of the non-dual ultimate. This means that no distinction is drawn between the conventional truth (as the *ārya*s cognize it) and mere convention. None of this requires the falsification of the conventional truth in itself but relies on its dialectical juxtaposition with the non-duality of the ultimate. Mere convention and the conventional truth are henceforth understood as "not [ultimately] true" *because* conventional. This relation is the reason why Nāgārjuna says that

> [YṢ 35:] *Nirvāṇa* (*mya ngan 'das pas*) is the sole truth (*bden gcig pu*). When this is said by the Buddhas, what wise person (*mkhas pa su zhig*) would not understand (*rtogs mi byed*) that the remainder (*lhag ma*) is mistaken (*log pa*)?[109]

From such a position, non-clinging towards the conventional truth and ordinary, conventional cognition is the only possible orientation; hence, "mere convention" is a designation symptomatic of that.

ii) In awakened cognition, the conventional truth understood as "mere convention" is no longer *conventional truth as distinct from ultimate truth* insofar as that distinction collapses into one mode of cognitive experience lucidly cognizing the objects of ordinary experience as merely empty appearances, mere illusion-like conventions appearing when re-engaging the world. This is marked by an acute and pervasive awareness of the non-dual and empty space-like nature of awakened cognition in which dualistic conventions only circumstantially, superficially appear. Mere conventions appear in the space of post-meditative cognition, lucidly known as such. There is neither affliction nor ignorance in this; it

[109] YṢ 35: *mya ngan 'das pa bden gcig pu || rgyal ba rnams kyis nam gsungs pa || de'i tshe lhag ma log pa zhes || mkhas pa su zhig rtogs mi byed ||* (Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 13).

is an expedience, nonetheless based in valid cognition, for engaging ordinary beings in the world.

As such, when engaging ordinary beings yet to culminate their intellectual and spiritual journey, it remains appropriate to refer to "the conventional truth" to stress its distinction from conventional falsity (a distinction that must stand at the conventional level); it is also appropriate to refer to "the conventional truth" to differentiate it from the non-dual ultimate, indicating its pedagogical and soteriological role as the means to the latter. At the same time, there is no contradiction in "the conventional truth" being "mere convention" in the context of *āryan* cognition insofar as the conventional truth, operating under the sense of truth as "from the perspective of the subject (for the cognition)", is a truth in *mere name* (i.e., strictly by conventional standards) in comparison to the non-dual ultimate.[110] In line with underscoring the conventional truth's pragmatic element, it is only instrumentally and circumstantially true with the caveat that, contextualized by ultimate non-duality, it is ultimately neither true nor false—it is "mere convention". Given the latter's non-conceptual, non-dual form, therefrom and through non-clinging to the conventional truth it becomes difficult to see ordinary, conceptual, dualistic cognition as comprised of anything other than illusion-like mere conventions. There is no loss in this but there is lucidity.

This is symptomatic of the complete transformation of "truth" according to the hierarchy of the two truths. That transformation follows the truth's soteriologization insofar as the conventional truth is, firstly, relegated to the means to the ultimate truth, and the ultimate, with its concomitant attitude/behaviour of non-clinging, is experienced as the cessation of suffering in the completely *un*conventional cognitive dissolution of the identity of the sufferer and its cause of suffering. Secondly, re-engagement at this point is only possible through non-clinging to the same convention as a tool restricted to the conditions of that re-engagement. Consequently, non-clinging regards the conceptuality of ordinary cognitive experience as illusion-like mere convention. This is why Nāgārjuna says at MMK

[110] According to Williams (1980: 330), "Even the conventional realm when properly understood is not really conventional truth, since it is not really true. Truth is simply superimposed". "Not *really* true" is the key, and it depends on the kind of "truth" to which "really" could be pointing. By "superimposed" he refers to the fabricated, dependently designated conceptualization of ordinary cognitive experience in the conventional realm, carving it into this or that entity with this or that characteristic.

26:7c that, "without clinging (*anupādānaḥ*), one would be freed (*mucyeta*)".[111] *Non-clinging is the solution to the problem of suffering and the entire Mādhyamika philosophical-soteriological project*: it is taught via the conventional truth of dependence relations; it realizes the cessation of suffering through the dissolution of the sense of self (the clinger) and its objects (the clung to); and it determines the relation to convention post-attainment. These are the same three stages of the dialectic of the two truths.

At this point, the distinction of the two truths collapses.[112] Or, it might be better said that any substantial difference in the distinction collapses. Ultimately, the distinction is only pedagogical. Once formally distinct, the result of this collapse is one cognitive mode blending the advantages of each, characterized by the post-meditative instrumental use of conventions through non-clinging. This is the cognitive framework necessary for re-engaging the world post-attainment, the context in which I assess the purport of the two truths' dialectic. This preserves the two truths *for others* (in a pedagogical context, as in the current explanatory one) insofar as an acute awareness of the formal distinction remains between cognitively experiencing the world conceptually and an underlying non-dual cognition (a distinction also preserved in the meditative vs. post-meditative equipoise of the *ārya*s). However, the distinction collapses insofar as it is no longer problematic (i.e., *a*soteriological) to circumstantially conceptualize the world by means of mere conventions when all traces of philosophical *and* spiritual ignorance arising therethrough (i.e., habits towards clinging, the perpetuation of the sense of self, etc.) have dissolved.

I see this as one topical application of Nāgārjuna's claim of no substantial difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.[113] This is because they refer not to metaphysical planes but mental states. If *saṃsāra* is the

[111] See the discussion of this passage in chapter 6 (§§6.1.2, pp. 295-6 above).
[112] Whether this "collapse" could also be a "unity" is, in my opinion, a matter of taste. Each has its own connotations that may be taken positively or negatively. I prefer the negative "collapse" *of the distinction* over the "unity" *of the two truths* for the latter may have reificationist implications of oneness, a whole greater than the sum of its parts, while the former only takes away any conceptual obscurations, keeping with the apophasis of the ultimate. Ultimately, the distinction is only pedagogical.
[113] MMK 25:19-20: "There is no distinction whatsoever (*na ... kimcit … asti viśeṣaṇam*) between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* (*saṃsārasya nirvāṇāt*). There is no distinction whatsoever between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*. Whatever is the limit of *nirvāṇa* (*nirvāṇasya ca yā koṭiḥ*) is the limit of *saṃsāra*. Not even the slightest difference whatsoever (*na ... antaram kiṃcit susūkṣmam*) exists between them (*tayoḥ ... vidyate*)"; *na saṃsārasya nirvāṇātkiṃcidasti viśeṣaṇam | na nirvāṇasya saṃsārātkiṃcidasti viśeṣaṇam || nirvāṇasya ca yā koṭiḥ koṭiḥ saṃsaraṇasya ca | na tayorantaraṃ kiṃcitsusūkṣmamapi vidyate ||* (Vaidya 1960b: 234-5).

world of sentient beings as experienced in ordinary cognition (largely invalidly and *a*soteriologically, hence, the connection between *saṃsāra* and suffering), it is nonetheless engaged with (by the valid cognition thereof) by the *ārya*s from their awakened perspective. This could only be the result of a dialectic of the two truths realizing the distinction's collapse, thus making possible this re-engagement of convention/*saṃsāra* through the wisdom of the ultimate/*nirvāṇa*. Kangyur Rinpoche summarizes this project as follows:

> If in meditation one settles in the spacious state of wisdom free from thoughts, and if in the post-meditation period one unremittingly accumulates merit on the understanding that all is like an illusion, one will avoid falling one-sidedly into one or other of the two truths. Even in post-meditation, when appearances arise, it will be impossible to stir from the fundamental mode of phenomena, and, conversely, even when one rests in meditation in a state free from conceptual constructs, such an emptiness will not be a state of mere nothingness. At all times, the two truths are united and inseparable.[114]

This requires realizing the inseparability (i.e., the collapse of the distinction between) appearances and emptiness. This is, as far as I know, not terminology used by Nāgārjuna or Candrakīrti, but it is common in Tibetan Madhyamaka, as also used by Mipham (see fn. 19 above). Where appearance and emptiness respectively correspond to the conventional and ultimate truths, their inseparability corresponds to the same inseparability of the two truths. Having mastered both, the combined applied wisdom of both cognitions realizes well that all appearances only appear as empty and can only appear because they are empty. The combined wisdom is schematized like so: ultimate cognition is the necessary condition of realizing the conventional truth *as conventional* because it is not ultimate; conventional cognition is the necessary condition of realizing the ultimate truth *as ultimate* because it is not conventional (i.e., *un*conventional cognition). While the formal and conceptual differentiation may remain (in pedagogical contexts), in this dialectic the wisdoms of each of the two truths coincide and are indeed inseparable.

§7.4 CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I presented an overview of the two truths distinction as it operates in the

[114] Kangyur Rinpoche, "The Quintessence of the Three Paths", *Treasury of Precious Qualities*, 2010: 350.

Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. That began in §7.1 with the soteriologization of the concept(s) of "truth" required by this project. The truth, as it functions in that project, is a soteriological device, making soteriology its overriding priority over philosophical validity; it nonetheless undoubtedly requires validity (i.e., to be "true") to carry out its soteriological mandate. Assessing each truth's role in that project revealed that the conventional truth's soteriological value is pedagogical from teaching the conditions of the valid cognition of ordinary experience. Conversely, the ultimate's soteriological value is purely experiential insofar as it manifests an alternative cognitive mode removed from the possibility of the cognitive experience of a sufferer (a clinger, a self) and an object of suffering (an object of clinging). This established a soteriological hierarchy insofar as i) the conventional truth is relegated to the means to the ultimate and ii) the conventional truth alone is insufficient to realize the soteriological goal, for which reason there is recourse to the ultimate truth.

In §7.2 I offered a dialectical model of the two truths addressing the incompatibility implied by their antinomian definitions. I argued that their formal antagonism belies an inherent compatibility insofar as both are correlated with modes of cognitive experience that ultimately prove compatible. I developed a three-stage dialectic of progression highlighting this compatibility, culminating in the collapse of the distinction into one mode of awakened cognitive experience. The first stage, identifying the conventional truth's practical and soteriological role *en route* to the ultimate, addressed the conditions of the transition from conventional to ultimate truth/cognition. This was explained with the analogy of the raft that is to be appropriately abandoned (not clung to) upon completion of its task. The second stage, wherein the ultimate truth is realized as a distinct mode of non-dual cognition, required the differentiation of two kinds of wisdom (*prajñā*) paralleling each of the two truths and their correlated cognitions, one a wisdom as cause (i.e., the conventional truth, the valid conceptual cognition of ordinary experience) and the other a wisdom as effect (i.e., the ultimate truth, the valid non-dual cognition of *extra*-ordinary experience). While this highlighted the formal differences between the two truths, critical to both their distinction and the philosophical-soteriological project, it also bridged their gap insofar as each refers to a mode of

cognitive experience (their commonality). The third stage concerns the re-engagement of the world post-attainment. I sketched the groundwork of the cognitive experience behind this re-engagement. Candrakīrti offers a twofold retrospective on convention post-attainment of ultimate cognition: the illusion-like nature of cognitive experience and, therethrough, the reduction of phenomena to mere convention. These do not in any way invalidate the conventional truth but are a necessary cognitive consequence of the full realization of *both* truths, especially from the contextualization of the conventional truth vis-à-vis the ultimate. They are symptomatic of having cultivated non-clinging towards the conventional truth, characterizing the perspective the *ārya*s adopt when guiding ordinary beings in their intellectual and spiritual journeys.

As my final argument, I sketched this retrospective as indicating the collapse of the two truths' distinction (also explained as their inseparability). This is the same inseparability of appearance and emptiness, such that all appearances (all phenomena, appearing like illusions) are empty and emptiness is itself mere appearance. Schematized via the two truths, the argument was that ultimate cognition is the necessary condition of realizing the conventional truth *as conventional* because it is not the ultimate truth; conventional cognition is the necessary condition of realizing the ultimate truth *as ultimate* because it is not conventional (i.e., *un*conventional cognition). While the formal and conceptual differentiation may remain in a pedagogical context, in this dialectic the wisdoms of each of the two truths coincide. This is the fruit of the two truths distinction and Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I treated the two truths distinction of the Madhyamaka school of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism as a hermeneutic device for interpreting the philosophy of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. I used this hermeneutic device to devise a cognitive reading of the two truths, wherein each truth correlates to a different mode of cognitive experience. Using the features of each cognitive mode as characterized by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, I derived a formal criterion of distinction for each of the two truths, with that formal criterion determining the formal parameters of the specific mode of cognitive experience correlated therewith. Accordingly, I have established that the conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*, defined as comprising the objects of the valid cognition of ordinary experience, therefore correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience) refers to a conceptual, dualistic form of truth, and that the ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*, defined as comprising the "object(s)" of the valid cognition of *extra*-ordinary experience, therefore correlated with the valid cognition of *extra*-ordinary experience) refers to a non-conceptual, non-dualistic form of experiential truth. This formal criterion was hermeneutically significant for interpreting the Madhyamaka texts because any truth contained therein (as referring to its written, linguistic form) is thereafter only the conventional truth; consequently, the ultimate truth cannot be directly indicted in language and concept. Hermeneutically, this presented a significant challenge to elucidating the ultimate truth.

I contextualized the formal parameters of each of the two truths within the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project by deriving a twofold soteriological function for the twofold "truth": in the two truths distinction, "truth" (*satya*) in both its forms functions as a soteriological device appealed to for attaining liberation (*mokṣa*) and awakening (*bodhi*). Accordingly, I argued that there is an interdependence between the cognitive reading of the two truths and their respective soteriological functions insofar as the cognitive distinction should be predicated by a twofold soteriologization. That is, beyond their formal differences, a difference in soteriological application distinguishes two modes of cognition. Each "truth" or form of cognition functions in its respective way as a soteriological device for

attaining liberation and awakening. This cognitive-*qua*-soteriological distinction is significant for only through the realization of the ultimate is liberation attained. This instantiates a specific relation between the two truths as one of means and goal. Any comprehensive model of the two truths must explain this progression in not only philosophical but soteriological terms.

The conventional truth was revealed to act as the means to the ultimate by providing the philosophical groundwork of the intellectual understanding of that Madhyamaka project, its intellectual content by means of the valid, conceptual cognition of ordinary cognitive experience. This was specifically characterized in chapter 7 as a raft to be appropriately abandoned upon making landfall on the other shore (analogous to *nirvāṇa* and ultimate cognition). The ultimate truth, on the other hand, was characterized as the cognitive mode tantamount to the attainment of the soteriological goal insofar as, due to its non-conceptual, non-dual, experiential nature, it is no longer subject to the conditions responsible for the generation of suffering (*duḥkha*). This is accomplished by the complete dissolution, without any cognitive trace, of either subject or object (i.e., in reference to the identity of the suffer (the subject) and the identification of the cause of suffering (its object)) in non-dual, ultimate cognition.

In the introduction, I identified three objectives to be accomplished in this dissertation. These were i) demonstrating the necessity of taking the two truths as a hermeneutic device for interpreting the contents of the Madhyamaka texts of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti; ii) demonstrating the conditions of the formal differentiation of the two truths on the criterion of the presence or absence of language and conceptuality in their correlated cognitive modes; and iii) elucidating the conditions of the specific characterization of the Madhyamaka project as a philosophical-soteriological project, which means characterizing the Madhyamaka vision of the role its philosophy plays towards its soteriological goal. Naturally, the conditions of the attainment of each objective are entangled with the others, which means i) that there is not necessarily a clear methodological, sequential progression from achieving one objective to the other and ii) that any one objective could not be achieved without achieving the others. For this reason, the means of accomplishing each objective were mixed; nonetheless, the argument itself unfolds in a

systematic way by beginning with the conventional truth, its formal parameters, its philosophical validity, and its philosophical application (PART I, chapters 1-4); then, for the ultimate truth, establishing its formal parameters and its soteriological application (PART II, chapters 5-6), finally, an assessment of the two truths distinction taken as a whole, with special concern for the relations that obtain between the two truths distinction as it befits the centrepiece of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project.

I began accomplishing the first objective in chapter 1 by immediately establishing (per Nāgārjuna's ŚS 1) the restriction of language and conceptuality to the conventional level by means of Nāgārjuna explicitly barring it from the ultimate. I then, throughout the remainder of that chapter, began developing the philosophical ramifications of this formal restriction. I demonstrated, using the specific categories of discourse Nāgārjuna lists as inapplicable to the ultimate, the Madhyamaka mind–world model of cognitive experience as circumscribing the conditions of the valid cognition of ordinary experience, which necessarily occurs through the medium of language and discourse by means of these categories and their attendant semantic framework. This model also contributed to the second objective. Further contributing to the appropriate hermeneutic of the two truths distinction, the remainder of the chapter focused on the Mādhyamikas' treatment of the "convention" on which the philosophical-soteriological project relies. This also set the stage for the third objective, indicating further why it was necessary to stake these important points at the outset of the dissertation. The explanation of this hermeneutic continued in chapter 2 insofar I was concerned with the justification of *why* language and concept are restricted to the conventional level and barred from the ultimate. This I explained as due to the conventional nature of language and discourse, the way it is subject to and generated by dependence relations (such dependence relations, when validly cognized, being the hallmark of the conventional truth). In that chapter, I also indicated the conditions differentiating the Mādhyamikas' conventional, non-standard semantic framework in contrast with the standard framework of their opponents (the distinction of which is fully fleshed out in chapter 3 via the differentiation of conventional truth from falsity). That Madhyamaka semantic framework, a non-standard semantic framework baked in

dependence relations positing no independence therefrom in any context, is indicative of how the Mādhyamikas employ language and discourse, which is necessary to any hermeneutic of the two truths. As a dependent designation (*prajñaptir upādāya*), this subsumed the very concept of "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) under the fold of the conventional truth; hence, Candrakīrti argues for the "emptiness of emptiness" (*śūnyatā-śūnyatā*). The conventional nature of emptiness was further confirmed with Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's frequent synonymization of emptiness and dependence relations insofar as emptiness (defined as the lack of *svabhāva* in all phenomena) is tantamount to phenomena being subject to and generated by dependence relations, to being dependently originated. This is significant for determining how the Mādhyamikas *discourse about emptiness* (i.e., the semantic and philosophical framework in which emptiness is best understood), which functions as the key to their entire philosophical-soteriological project when applied to the two truths, both respectively and concomitantly.

Naturally, the ultimate ramifications of this hermeneutic came to fruition in the chapters dealing with the ultimate truth (chapter 5 in particular), wherein I argued how and why language and conceptuality are barred from the ultimate (in consequence of which the ultimate truth must correlate with a non-conceptual and non-dual form of cognition). Given these parameters, the hermeneutic of sorting the two truths by means of their formal differentiation is accomplished, in which case it was revealed that only the conventional truth (due to its formal parameters) is directly found in the Madhyamaka texts. This left only indirect indication for the ultimate, which was explained through a model of apophatic non-implicative negation indicating only what the ultimate is not: indicating the formal parameters it lacks, the ultimate is defined contradistinctly from the conventional truth. This is a methodological necessity of the ultimate truth's formal characteristics.

Regarding the second objective of justifying a cognitive model for the interpretation of the two truths distinction and the differentiation of the two truths, I indicated that it began with the Madhyamaka mind–world model of cognitive experience in chapter 1, which was subsequently appealed to throughout this dissertation. That model, by means of establishing both causal/existential and conceptual

interdependencies of mind and world (or subject and object) *in the context of cognitive experience*, therefore circumscribes the conditions of the valid cognition of that ordinary experience in the conventional truth. The explanation of that valid cognition continued in chapter 2 regarding the conditions of the Mādhyamikas' non-standard semantic framework insofar as that semantic framework (in contrast with the standard semantic framework from which, by means of critique, it differentiates itself) is a necessary condition thereof. I specifically argued for the cognitive reading of the conventional truth as correlated with the valid cognition of ordinary experience in chapter 3 in the context of its differentiation from conventional falsity (contradistinctly defined as correlated with the invalid cognition of ordinary experience). I both distinguished and allied the cognitive reading of the conventional truth with features thereof that have already been argued by Madhyamaka scholars. In the final section of that chapter, the specific forms of argumentation the Mādhyamikas employ in the refutation of conventional falsity, the conventional reasoning (*upapatti*) of dependence relations furnishing the positive account of the valid cognition of ordinary experience and the analysis (*vicāra*) refuting *svabhāvic* cognitions (i.e., invalid cognitions and invalid semantic frameworks), were elaborated. This argumentation formally demonstrated the conventional truth's philosophical value insofar as such argumentation normatively differentiates invalid from valid cognitions on both perceptual and philosophical grounds (both together making a cognitive distinction). I elaborated that positive account in chapter 4 vis-à-vis the exposition of Madhyamaka epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism as the necessary conditions of that valid cognition; despite the negative nomenclature (insofar as they are defined in contradistinction with their objects of critique, epistemological foundationalism and metaphysical realism), such philosophies indicate the positive account of the valid cognition of ordinary experience precisely because they are baked in dependence relations (i.e., the Mādhyamikas' conventional, non-standard semantic framework, equally defined in contradistinction from its object of critique, the standard semantic framework). The arguments the Mādhyamikas offer towards epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism invariably rely on the mind–world model of cognitive

experience insofar as there can be no epistemological foundation in epistemic objects (*prameya*s) without the cognizing mind (by means of the epistemic instruments, the *pramāṇa*s); the same argument applies in reverse to a lack of metaphysical foundation in metaphysical realism. As integral to the mind–world model of cognitive experience, the dependencies go both ways, such that the cognizing mind likewise cannot be established without a corresponding cognitive object; hence, mutual establishment (*qua* interdependence) is the only coherent account of either the mind or the world *in the context of cognitive experience*. Such mutual establishment was explained to constitute the cognitive template by which ordinary experience is validly cognized in the conventional truth.

Naturally, the cognitive reading of the ultimate truth was elaborated in the chapters on the ultimate, beginning in chapter 5 with the elaboration of the apophatic model demonstrative of the formal characteristics of its correlated cognitive mode. I specifically situated this model in contrast with the popular contemporary interpretation called "the semantic interpretation of emptiness" in the context of its treatment of the Madhyamaka ultimate truth, which it denies. I supplant that model with the cognitive reading of the ultimate truth. Chapter 6 then sketched this ultimate cognition in its soteriological dimension insofar as it consists of having cultivated an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging (*anupādāna*). Such non-clinging applies to conventions and the formal parameters of ordinary (conceptual) cognition generally, but more specifically to the jettisoning of the subject–object and self–other dichotomies endemic to that ordinary cognitive experience. Insofar as the absence thereof is transformative of both one's attitude *and* behaviour, this absence is the hallmark of non-dual cognition, which, in that way, was differentiated from pure non-conceptual mindless (as in, for example, pre-conceptual animal cognition). A contrast was developed such that, despite lacking the conceptual imputation of the subject–object and self–other dichotomies to cognitive experience, the behaviours thereof nevertheless remain therein. There can be no trace of either, in both cognitive and behavioural contexts, in the non-dual cognition of the ultimate. The complete deconditioning of clinging in the context of that ordinary cognitive mode is how the Mādhyamikas characterize the cessation of suffering (i.e., liberation, the soteriological goal) insofar

as therewithout there is no possible catalyst of suffering's generation; without clinging, one would consequently be freed (MMK 26:7). This further relates to the third objective of the dissertation.

Regarding that third objective, because I characterized the Mādhyamikas as specifically engaging in a philosophical-soteriological project, an equal emphasis was placed on both philosophy and soteriology; this required demonstrating the instrumental role that philosophy plays in this soteriological mission. Per the cognitive reading of the two truths for which I have argued, this required demonstrating the way the valid cognition of ordinary experience (i.e., the conventional truth with specific philosophical overtones) is instrumental towards the realization of *extra*-ordinary ultimate cognition's validity as an alternative mode of cognitive experience (with specifically soteriological overtones). I began to stake this position in chapter 1 with the demonstration of the Mādhyamikas' incontrovertible attestations of their methodological vision of the two truths distinction: the ultimate truth cannot be taught without assenting to the conventional truth (MMK 24:10, VV28), and the conventional truth acts as the means to the goal, the ultimate (MĀ 6:80). Because I established in chapter 2 the restriction of language and discourse to the conventional level, insofar as language and discourse are the medium of philosophy, philosophy itself as conventionally understood is therefore restricted to the conventional level. Due to the non-conceptual, non-dual nature of the ultimate, it is natural for philosophy so characterized to be inapplicable thereto; this seeming downgrade is therefore by no means a criticism of philosophy but a natural consequence of the formal differentiation of the two truths. Nonetheless, in chapter 3 I specifically sought to demonstrate the philosophical value of the conventional truth via its argumentative prowess and the conditions establishing its cognition of ordinary experience as *valid* by means of the mind–world model. In chapter 4, I then applied this valid cognition in the fields of epistemology and metaphysics to demonstrate what is known, what exists, how it is known, and how it exists in the conventional truth. The arguments directed against epistemological foundationalism and metaphysical realism, which culminate in the Madhyamaka's epistemological anti-foundationalism and metaphysical anti-realism, are chiefly demonstrative of the conventional truth's philosophical prowess. I contextualized this philosophical

prowess by demonstrating its soteriological application vis-à-vis the soteriological benefits of the valid cognition of ordinary experience.

The question of soteriology was most fully addressed in chapter 6 vis-à-vis the soteriological capacity of the ultimate truth to deliver from suffering. However, it was further necessary to any valid characterization of the Mādhyamikas as engaging in a philosophical-soteriological project to demonstrate how it is that philosophy specifically serves this soteriological goal. In chapter 6, this was demonstrated by means of the philosophical baseline of dependence relations, the valid cognition of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) specifically. Insofar as dependent origination teaches the conditions of both the *arising and cessation* of any given phenomenon, cultivating the conditions of cessation of certain specific *a*soteriological cognitions is conducive to the soteriological goal. Vis-à-vis the cultivation of the ultimate, per its formal characteristics, cultivating the cessation of conceptualization is obviously a necessary condition thereto. However, for cultivating the cessation of suffering, more is required: the cessation of clinging (*upādāna*), which, as the 9th link in the chain of dependent origination, begins with ignorance (*avidyā*). In the context of soteriology, clinging to the subject–object and self–other dichotomies, but more specifically their reality, as the architecture of ordinary cognitive experience itself, especially on condition of ignorance of their merely fabricated nature, was marked as the specific cause of suffering insofar as it is through these schemes that there is identified the identity of the suffer and the cause of their suffering (which is, due to the process of clinging, appropriated as *their* suffering, *their* sense of self that suffers).

In chapter 7, this dissertation's final chapter, the two truths distinction itself and the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project were put to the soteriological test. The importance of this chapter for tying together all three objectives and for acting as a capstone on this entire project warrants giving it an extended review. Firstly, the necessarily soteriological slant of that project was explained in the context of pragmatic-soteriological utility as it applies to both truths, individually and concomitantly. That pragmatic-soteriological utility applies to each of the two truths in distinct ways: for the conventional

truth, it is pedagogical insofar as it teaches the conditions of the valid cognition of ordinary experience, which overcomes the intellectual ignorance at the heart of suffering; for the ultimate truth, it is purely experiential insofar as it manifests ultimate cognition, which overcomes the spiritual/behavioural ignorance at the root of suffering. Evidently, both play their respective roles in the two truths; their pragmatic-soteriological utility is consequentially evident in the transformations in cognitive experience that the attainment of each truth entails, which suggest a gradual progression of attainment.

Secondly, a dialectical model of the two truths demonstrated their inherent compatibility insofar as both are defined as correlated with two modes of cognitive experience (though formally distinct). Within that compatibility, I identified three stages of progression that culminated in an extended discussion of the *ārya*s' post-attainment retrospective on convention. That third stage concerns the re-engagement of the world post-attainment of ultimate, non-dual cognition, which I identified as the truest test of one's attainment indicating finally what one is supposed to *do* with the two truths. My analysis focused on sketching the groundwork of the cognitive experience behind this re-engagement. Candrakīrti offers a twofold retrospective on convention post-attainment: the illusion-like nature of cognitive experience and, therethrough, the reduction of phenomena to mere convention. I laboured to demonstrate how these do not invalidate the conventional truth but are a necessary cognitive consequence of the full realization of *both* truths, especially from the contextualization of the conventional truth vis-à-vis the ultimate. Rather symptomatic of having cultivated non-clinging towards the conventional truth, these mark the perspective the *ārya*s adopt when guiding ordinary beings in their intellectual and spiritual journeys.

As my final argument, I sketched Candrakīrti's retrospective characterization of conventions from the ultimate perspective as indicating the collapse of the two truths' distinction (also explained as the two truths' inseparability). This is the same inseparability of appearance and emptiness, such that all appearances (all phenomena, appearing as illusion-like mere conventions) are empty, and emptiness is itself mere appearance. Schematized via the two truths, the argument was that ultimate cognition is the necessary condition of realizing the conventional truth *as conventional* because it is not the ultimate

truth; on the other hand, conventional cognition is the necessary condition of realizing the ultimate truth *as ultimate* because it is not conventional (i.e., *un*conventional cognition). While the formal and conceptual differentiation may remain in pedagogical context, in this dialectic the wisdoms of each of the two truths coincide. This is the fruit of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project.

Since my methodology sought to address the practical implications of my thesis of the cognitive reading of the two truths distinction and its attendant twofold soteriologization insofar as it specifically inquired, 'what are we supposed to do with the two truths?', my objectives likewise overall aligned with a more practical orientation, though in a way deliberately demonstrative of the philosophical value of the two truths distinction (and of Madhyamaka philosophy more generally) towards the realization of this goal. In pursuit of my objectives, I encountered two great difficulties, each of which corresponds to one of the two truths but which both, ultimately, concern their interrelation. The first concerned the approach to the Madhyamaka itself and the two truths distinction but focused on the role of the conventional truth therein. Interpretations of the distinction itself have generally fallen into either of two extremes, invariably privileging one truth or the other: either i) the conventional truth is privileged and the ultimate consequently denied/undervalued, or ii) the ultimate is privileged and the validity of the conventional consequently denied/undervalued. As we have seen, neither is coherent with any middle way approach, what the Mādhyamikas truly desire. Some Madhyamaka scholars have found themselves at the precipice of this divide, privileging the conventional truth at the expense of the ultimate (in fact, outright denying the latter) while nonetheless simultaneously undervaluing the profundity, richness, and originality of the Mādhyamikas' philosophical investigations in the conventional truth, in particular its capacity to furnish a positive account of the conditions circumscribing the valid cognition of ordinary experience. In that respect, the interpretation of the two truths distinction I have offered has had to walk this hermeneutic tightrope without falling to either extreme. In my interpretation, each truth, though strictly formally differentiated without any overlap in that regard, has been given its due in the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project in a way demonstrative of a methodological progression from our

original (ordinary) state of ignorance, through the conventional truth (the arena of Madhyamaka philosophy) as correlated with the valid cognition of our ordinary experience, culminating in the ultimate truth (the soteriological arena): this is, as I have shown the texts to describe it, to constitute a profoundly transformative and life-altering cognitive shift, transformative of the nature of cognitive experience itself.

The former tendency, the championing of the conventional truth in Madhyamaka philosophy at the expense of the ultimate, I have argued is a consequence of not being open to the many appreciable differences between the Western and Indian/Buddhist philosophical temperaments. This is especially the case regarding the latter's soteriological concerns and the non-analytical (perhaps even taken to an extreme of being anti-philosophical, if the reader is of a certain temperament) nature of the ultimate truth, which is where the soteriological goal of the Madhyamaka bears its greatest fruit.

In the case of the latter tendency, whose defining characteristic is the undervaluing of the conventional truth, it is not difficult to see how Candrakīrti specifically is responsible for this interpretation given his frequent denigrations thereof. Nāgārjuna himself has not been immune from these accusations, particularly in the historical context of him being frequently misunderstood as a nihilist or a skeptic, especially with reference to the intervening centuries separating Candrakīrti from Nāgārjuna. However, among some modern Madhyamaka scholars Candrakīrti has taken the brunt of this criticism. Although Candrakīrti's unique vision of the conventional truth is arguably the least clear feature of his exposition, I still do not think this is the best possible interpretation of his mission. His frequent associations of the convention on which the Mādhyamikas' project relies, and even of the conventional truth itself, with falsity, ignorance, concealment, error, etc. can easily lead one to the conclusion that these and all they comprise are in some way invalid, defective, undesirable, unwarranted, a burden to be shed. There is indeed an appreciable way this is correct (in the hierarchical relation of the conventional truth to the ultimate), but context suggests this is a fundamentally shortsighted interpretation of his grander vision of the conventional truth and its philosophical power. It has been my hope to disabuse this notion by demonstrating other passages of his—often buried deep in his commentarial works—that overriding

paint a different portrait, that contextualize these remarks in demonstrating that there is a specific design in these apparent denigrations. While this has, at times, required adding certain qualifications demonstrating that it is only in a certain context that Candrakīrti only apparently denigrates the conventional truth, digging deeper into his works has revealed plentiful evidence of both important clues that would show both the necessary implication of these qualifications and instances of Candrakīrti himself making those same qualifications. Chapters 3 and 7 contained the bulk of this contextualizing evidence and its discussion: chapter 3 demonstrated the philosophical value of the conventional truth by means of its argumentative prowess in refuting conventional falsity, and chapter 7 contextualized such remarks in the distinction between ordinary and *āryan* cognition, suggesting that many such denigrations appear from the perspective of the post-attainment cognitions of the *ārya*s as demonstrative of their non-clinging to conventions. In that context, such rhetoric is both conducive to attaining and exemplary of having attained the soteriological goal.

In light of the philosophical-soteriological project, there is certainly warranted criticism of convention and its role in ordinary cognitive experience as integral thereto, a criticism Candrakīrti is not too shy to make explicit (referring more specifically to ordinary cognition and its pitfalls vis-à-vis the ultimate). This criticism, which is ultimately a re-contextualization by means of a shift in the semantic framework applied in ordinary cognitive experience, is both consequential and necessary to the two truths distinction. Such pitfalls are, ultimately, only overcome through recourse to the ultimate truth insofar as it correlates with a radically alternative form of cognition in which nothing conventional can participate. Without criticism of the conventional truth, a criticism which amounts to its appropriate contextualization vis-à-vis the ultimate, there would be no recourse to the ultimate, and their distinction would not only be futile but meaningless. This is the point on which I must insist: without the conventional truth, the Madhyamaka project itself would be futile and meaningless for there would be nothing to learn, nothing to teach, and nothing to cognize when the conventional truth itself (when appropriately differentiated from conventional falsity) is the very medium of learning, teaching, and ordinary cognition on which

Madhyamaka pedagogy and the entire philosophical-soteriological project rely. For this reason, the invalidation of the conventional truth (and, by extension, the invalidity of conceptual cognition post-attainment of non-dual ultimate cognition) would be a categorical mistake violating the two truths distinction. I therefore have had recourse, with support from both Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, to insist on the manifold ways the philosophical value of the conventional truth and its necessary role in both the two truths distinction and the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project is demonstrated therein. This is precisely how the Mādhyamikas affirms the role and value of philosophy itself in their project.

On the other hand, the second difficulty concerns the ultimate truth. Where the philosophical-soteriological project concerns liberating insight in its ultimate context, if that ultimate truth is non-conceptual and non-dual in form, it requires a tactful yet nonetheless meaningful way to speak about what cannot be spoken about, to use propositions and language regarding a subject without propositional or linguistic content. It is even more difficult to discuss the merits of this non-conceptual and non-dual cognition in a philosophical context because it is utterly devoid of philosophy. For this task, I developed in chapter 5 a model of apophasis exposing the indirect indication, by means of a strict regimen of non-implicative negation, of the characteristics lacking from the ultimate truth/cognition that differentiate it from the conventional truth and ordinary cognitive experience. I then developed in chapter 6 an application of this apophatic approach to the ultimate as indicating a method of cessation culminating in the cultivation of an attitude/behaviour of non-clinging (*anupādāna*)—naturally, defined apophatically. The term "attitude/behaviour" was used to demarcate both a transformation in cognition and mental states ("attitude") *and* comportment in the world ("behaviour")—as the attainment of the ultimate truth intends. I consequently argued that this, in turn, is the manifestation of having realized the ultimate truth, having attained ultimate cognition, and having achieved liberation from suffering.

These have indeed been great difficulties, and yet the second (although I believe I have demonstrated how I am justified in my interpretation by the abundance of textual evidence indicating the non-conceptual, non-dual form of the ultimate truth) is self-imposed because consequential to the formal

parameters under which I define the two truths (respectively), the distinction itself, and its design and purpose. Nonetheless, that is the direction in which the textual evidence has led me in this investigation. Interpretations that do not understand the two truths in this way have not faced the same difficulty; being dismissive of either the Madhyamaka's philosophical value, the philosophical games they play with standard vs. non-standard semantics, the nuances of their presentation of the ultimate, or the role of the above in the soteriological mission in which they engage provides a less bumpy road. However, that constituted no reason for me not to proceed, and I believe I have found an appropriate solution, a cognitive model respecting the formal conditions of the two truths' differentiation nonetheless accommodative of their respective philosophical and soteriological capacities—a philosophical-soteriological project requiring both. The project, despite any appearance otherwise, is not *anti-* but *meta-*philosophical, the highest affirmation of philosophy as the Mādhyamikas afford it an unprecedented methodological significance in their soteriological project as the only appropriate vehicle to that soteriological end. The difficulty, from the philosopher's perspective, is that philosophy is not itself the terminus but only the vehicle thereto.

As for my final remarks, I would like to identify two future considerations that could arise from the groundwork my dissertation has lain. Firstly, I mentioned in the introduction while providing historical context that there are other Mādhyamikas besides Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, specifically referring to Āryadeva, Buddhapālita, and Bhāviveka pre-Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva (and his commentator Prajñākaramati) post-Candrakīrti. There is, of course, in addition to this the entire Tibetan Madhyamaka tradition spawned by the importation and translation of the treatises of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti (among others). Evidently, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti themselves are only two drops in the greater Madhyamaka bucket, yet they are the drops having made the biggest splash. Nonetheless, my project was necessarily restricted to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti in the main for numerous reasons stated in the introduction. However, I did have occasion to cite some of these other Mādhyamikas in support of my interpretation of them. Concerning other Mādhyamikas and their relation to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, further

investigation could be had in two contexts: i) by further integrating Āryadeva and Buddhapālita specifically into the fold regarding their interpretation of the two truths and commentaries on Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's comments on them, thus more concretely solidifying the Madhyamaka lineage from Nāgārjuna to Candrakīrti and tracing its development. On the other hand, the scholar I cited most often to support my interpretation of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti was the Tibetan Madhyamaka Tsong Khapa. This is in itself not novel but a rather common strategy for deciphering Candrakīrti that many scholars have adopted; however, further integration of the philosophical interpretations of Jamgön Mipham or other more obscure Tibetan Madhyamakas, specifically as they relate to the philosophies of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, could be another avenue of investigation. This was only briefly indicated by me with references to Mipham or Gorampa (the latter interpretation I employed, as it contrasts with Tsong Khapa, as a foil to the latter). There is, of course, no shortage of scholarship on Tibetan Madhyamaka, but it would be interesting to see further investigation into i) how these Tibetan Mādhyamikas have interpreted Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti in ways both congruent and incongruent with the interpretation I have offered; and ii) how the interpretation I have offered is both congruent and incongruent with the respective projects of those Tibetan Mādhyamikas.

ii) In a second context, the groundwork my project has laid in deciphering the philosophy of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti could consequently be applied to intra-Madhyamaka schisms, such as between the *Prāsaṅgika* and *Svātantrika* branches of Madhyamaka philosophy. I only briefly touched upon this distinction in establishing context for Candrakīrti. Nonetheless, having this picture of the design and function of the two truths distinction from Candrakīrti's perspective will prove fruitful in future investigations into his criticisms of Bhāviveka, the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka tradition he inspired, its fundamental tenets, and its differences from the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka's picture of the two truths distinction and the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project. Naturally, as above, the Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas also had influence in the Tibetan interpretation of the Madhyamaka, in which case this investigation could also bear fruit with regard thereto.

As for the second future consideration, in its final context, the scope of the investigation of the Madhyamaka philosophical-soteriological project was only briefly expanded beyond the prospect of personal accomplishment regarding the post-attainment re-engagement of the world. In that context, it could easily be argued that soteriological *qua* ethical, more than practical, reasons should condition that re-engagement. That initiative paints the clearest picture of what one is to *do* with the two truths distinction beyond the prospect of personal attainment because the two truths can and should be taught to others as an edifying, pedagogical program to consequently lead all sentient beings out of *saṃsāra* and into *nirvāṇa* (as befits the Mahāyāna mandate of the *bodhisattva* ideal). This is, evidently, what Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti do in their works. In that respect, the ethical implications borne by this project, although deliberately neglected by me because falling outside of my scope (nor is it a major concern of Nāgārjuna or Candrakīrti yet not entirely absent therefrom either; rather, Śāntideva is the go-to Mādhyamika for Madhyamaka ethics), are a potential further area of investigation for Madhyamaka scholars. By this, I do not mean to imply that Madhyamaka scholars do not study Madhyamaka ethics or that such investigations have ignored the two truths distinction. Rather, I would suggest further investigation into the ethical implications of non-clinging in the context of an ethics without either cognitive schemes of the subject–object or self–other dichotomies. Per the established contexts of the two truths and their formal parameters, in ultimate cognition there are no traces whatsoever of these schemes; yet, in the context of the conventional truth, the cognitive experience Candrakīrti describes for the *ārya*s post-attainment of illusion-like mere conventions could be a useful launchpoint for investigating the cognitive experience of accomplished *bodhisattva*s in their ethical outreach programs. The point is that ethical concerns cannot be entirely divorced from the Mādhyamikas' more analytical concerns in epistemology and metaphysics, such that the Madhyamaka epistemology and metaphysics I have sketched could be cause for further investigation into Madhyamaka ethics.

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