

SOME (CRITICAL) REMARKS ON PRIEST'S DIALETHEIST READING OF NĀGĀRJUNA

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ABSTRACT

Graham Priest in collaboration with J. Garfield and Y. Deguchi (henceforth: DGP) wrote several articles and responses arguing that the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna was a dialetheist thinker, i.e. that he not just identified and exposed certain contradictions but that he embraced it. These contradictions, according to DGP, always occur “at the limits of thought” i.e. when a certain view at the same time transcends the limit (“transcendence”) and is within that limit (“closure”). In Nāgārjuna’s case, these limital contradictions arise at the boundary between “conventional reality/truth” (*saṃvṛti-sat/satya*) and “ultimate reality/truth” (*paramārtha-sat/satya*). Ultimate truth is that things lack intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), i.e. that they are empty (*śūnya*) of intrinsic nature. This emptiness is universal and it includes emptiness itself (emptiness of emptiness). But that means that being empty is intrinsic property of all things so it comes out that things both have (conventional truth) and lack (ultimate truth) intrinsic nature. This is ontological paradox. DGP identify also semantic and expressibility paradoxes in Nāgārjuna. Although logically coherent and philosophically intriguing, I think that DGP’s interpretation nevertheless overlooks a special kind of semantics that, presumably, works behind Nāgārjuna’s reasoning and that would be best described in terms of difference between first and second order statements, i.e. between terms referring to the world (primary system) and terms referring to the primary system (meta-system, comprising the “meta” concept of emptiness). Working in these two semantic levels Nāgārjuna, I believe, escapes contradictions — and Nāgārjuna is aware of them — that arise “at the limits of thought”.

Keywords: Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, emptiness, semantics, contradiction, paradox

Graham Priest in collaboration with J. Garfield (henceforth : GP) and recently also with Y. Deguchi (henceforth: DGP) wrote several articles and responses¹ arguing that the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna, founder of the Madhyamaka (“Middle Way”) school (probably 2nd C.E.) was a dialetheist thinker, i.e. that he not just identified and exposed certain contradictions but that he (somehow) embraced it as an inevitable outcome of his understanding and analysis of reality . These contradictions, according to DG, always occur “at the limits of thought” i.e. when a certain view at the same time transcends the limit (“transcendence”) and is within that limit (“closure”). (Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2003: p. 4) In Nāgārjuna’s case, these limital contradictions arise at the boundary between “conventional reality/truth” (*saṃvṛti-sat/satya*) and “ultimate reality/truth” (*paramārtha-sat/satya*).

¹Cf. “Philosophy East and West”, vol. 63. no. 3 (2013) that is entirely dedicated to the present issue.

1. Nāgārjuna's basic "position" and philosophical strategy (attack on essentialism of any kind):

Before we proceed to investigate more closely DGP's reading of Nāgārjuna it would not be out of place here to picture at least some basics of Nāgārjuna's philosophical endeavour.

1. We cannot establish or explain any (obvious) relation existing between entities if we assume that they exist inherently (by themselves, *svabhāva*, "inherent nature"). E.g. a seed and a sprout are in obvious relation (of "cause" and "effect"). We can assume that they are identical or different. But if identical, there is no relation and hence no base for distinction between them, and if different, again no relation because of complete "otherness" existing between them.² "Inherent nature" of something, "existing by itself", etc. (and a world-view based on it), are completely fictitious concepts/terms that are not just misguided but also block any coherent and contradictions-free understanding of reality.
2. Hence, Nāgārjuna claims, all entities whatsoever are "devoid of inherent nature" (*niḥsvabhāva*) and that is to say that they are empty (*śūnya*). And only if empty (or because of being empty), we can make sense of obvious interrelatedness we encounter in our experience of the reality. Can we find anything in the world that could satisfy requirements for being self-established, i.e. not created by/dependent on something other?³
3. What Nāgārjuna in most cases philosophically does (convincingly or not) then is reducing to absurd (*prasaṅga*) absolutistic (*svabhāva* - based) standpoints/propositions drawing many unacceptable consequences (or contradictions) issuing from them. In doing so, it is now generally agreed upon, he does not violate any fundamental law of reasoning (or classical logic), e.g. Law of the Excluding Middle (cf. MMK 2.8.: "A goer does not go, and a non-goer does not go; what third one other than goer and non-goer goes?"), and Law

²If A possesses inherent nature i.e. exists by itself (*svabhāva*) it means, among other things, that there cannot be anything from "outside" that could constitute its fundamental (numerical) identity. Otherwise at least some of its nature or identity would be "borrowed", i.e. shared with something else. Hence the only relation that could obtain between self-existing entities is the relation of (complete) otherness.

³Candrakīrti (7th C.E.), a celebrated commentator of Nāgārjuna's MMK, states that if someone holds the view that things possess inherent nature (*svabhāva*) he would consequently be forced to accept following characterizations: a) things are not artificial (*akṛtrima*), i.e. not depending on other, b) things do not occur after having previously been non-existent, c) things are not dependent on causes and conditions (for their existence) (comm. to MMK 15. 2.). But such a thing obviously cannot be found anywhere.

of Contradiction (cf. MMK 8.7.: “An agent who is both existent and non-existent does not perform an action that is both existent and non-existent, for they are mutually contradictory, *paraspara-viruddha*. Where can existent and non-existent co-exist?”)

4. Now in two places in all of his known writings he introduces the idea of “two truths” (*dve satye*):

“The teaching of the Law of the Buddhas is relied on two truths: the Truth of Mundane-Transactional-Expressional (*lokasaṃvṛtisatya*) and the Truth of the Highest Meaning (Ultimate Truth, *paramārthasatya*). Without relying on the Conventional (*vyavahāra*) the Highest Meaning (*paramārtha*) is not instructed; without entering the Highest Meaning, *Nirvāṇa* is not attained.” (MMK 24. 8, 10)

He does not, however, explain anywhere what is the “content” of both truths, especially the “content” of the *paramārthasatya*.⁴

5. As for the Truth of Mundane-Transactional-Expressional (*lokasaṃvṛtisatya*) it is more or less obvious that it comprises generally accepted mental (reasoning procedures included) and linguistic “patterns” through which we make sense of the world. Candrakīrti (comm. to MMK 24. 8.): “All these practical orders: denomination, the object of denomination, knowledge, the object of knowledge, etc., [we may add: truth and falsity, good and bad, one and many, parts and the whole...] are without exception called truth of mundane-conventional-expressional.” It is not admissible nor even possible to transgress these patterns or “practical orders”.
6. But what is possible and in fact what is constantly occurring especially in philosophy, religion, etc., is that these “practical orders” become “reified” or “proliferated” (*prapañca*) through the concept (and mental behaviour) of “inherent nature/existence” (*svabhāva*). Thus e.g. when it is stated that a sprout arises from a seed there is nothing wrong with that statement. It is based on the conventional pattern called causation that is verified by experience – hence generally accepted. But as soon as one is engaged in investigation of this occurrence (“theories” of causation) he almost unconsciously starts to impute or “superimpose” (*samāropa*) certain features (concepts, ideas etc. thought to be real) upon it that are not just, according to Madhyamaka, non-referential (i.e. fictional) but, probably because of that, also burdened with

⁴Note that *satya* does not mean “reality” (*sat*) but “truth”. In some other Buddhist schools, e.g. Sarvāstivāda, we find the idea of two realities – *paramārtha-sat*, absolute/ultimate existence and *saṃvṛti-sat*, conventional/relative existence, but not in Nāgārjuna. It seems, however, that GDP understand *satya* here both in a sense of existence/reality and truth almost interchangeable paving the way thus for ontological reading of Nāgārjuna’s theses.

contradictions (cause is identical with effect, is different from it, etc). Thus, according to Madhyamaka, all we do in our attempt to understand reality and in searching for its ultimate foundation is reification of fictional and non-referential concepts, ideas, beliefs, etc. constantly imposed upon reality. The concept of “svabhāva” (inherent nature) symbolizes, so to speak, this mental behaviour and is at the same time self-imposed cause of our fundamental ignorance about the reality and everything regarding the reality.

Now, it seems that the main Nāgārjuna’s philosophical concern is to expose the absurdity of the concept of “inherent nature” or more generally to show that any attempt to find any absolut (metaphysical) foundation of things is doomed to failure. And that is because there is no such thing as “inherent nature”. So far so good. It could seem a reasonable (whether convincing or not) philosophical position regarding things.

But what about emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of things? Is it a foundational property (“being empty”) of things just as for a (at least Indian) realist “inherently existing” is a foundational property of things? And is this property related to the Truth of the Highest Meaning (“Ultimate Truth”)? If so, then this concept does not operate within conventional-expressional domain (*saṃvṛti*). But that cannot be since, according to Madhyamaka, everything that is (meaningfully) expressible is within the domain of conventional.

2. GP and DGP theses

Now it’s a time to briefly introduce GP and DGP’s discover of “limit contradictions” in Nāgārjuna’s analysis of reality that he himself is aware of and accepts which makes him, according to DGP, a dialetheist thinker. They identify three fundamental contradictions and paradoxes “at the limits of thought” discovered by Nāgārjuna and all of them concerns concepts of emptiness and the Truth of the Highest Meaning (Ultimate Truth, *paramārthasatya*):

- *Ontological contradiction*: “Things have no nature, and that is their nature. To be empty is to be empty of intrinsic properties. Everything is empty, and so has no intrinsic properties. But: something is an intrinsic property of x if it would have it even if x were the only thing in existence. Therefore being empty is an intrinsic property. For being empty is part of something’s nature (essence), and so it would have it whenever it existed.” (Deguchi, Y., Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2013a, p. 426).⁵

⁵The same ontological paradox is stated also elsewhere with a bit different wordings: “First, it is central to Madhyamaka that emptiness is the emptiness of intrinsic nature. That things are ultimately

- *Semantic paradox*: “There are no ultimate truths (‘Ultimate truths are those about ultimate reality. But since everything is empty, there is no ultimate reality. There are, therefore, no ultimate truths. All truths, then, are merely conventional’, Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2003, p. 10) and it is ultimately true that everything is empty. There is no ultimate reality (distinct from conventional reality). Ultimate truth is the truth about such a reality. Ultimate reality provides the truthmakers of such claims. Therefore, there is no ultimate truth. But there is at least one ultimate truth, namely that everything is empty. (Deguchi, Y., Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2013a, *ibid.*; cf. also Deguchi, Y., Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2013b, *ibid.*)
- *Expressibility paradox*: “there are no ultimate truths; but there are, for example, that is one. Ultimate reality is nondual. One cannot, therefore, apply concepts to it. So it is ineffable. But one can say things about it (e.g., in explaining why it is ineffable), so there are ultimate truths.” (Deguchi, Y., Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2013b, *ibid.*)⁶

3. Critical remarks

DGP think that for Nāgārjuna the content of the ultimate truth is the fact that things are empty (that is universal claim and includes the emptiness itself along with the statement that things are empty). But then since everything is empty, there is no ultimate truth/reality. But again, according to DGP, there are ultimate truths and MMK is “full of them” (Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2003, p. 11). Now I proceed to analyze briefly some of Nāgārjuna’s stanzas that according to DGP speak about ultimate truth (ultimate state of affairs) generating at the same time contradictions “at the limits”.

MMK 24.19: “Something that is not dependently arisen, such a thing does not exist. Therefore a nonempty thing does not exist.”

According to DGP this is a statement about the nature of ultimate reality. But I think it is not. All Nāgārjuna is doing here is providing (convincingly or not) an argument against the possibility of a self-established thing. This is purely conducted within the “pattern” of conventional, just as when someone says “I receive money

empty is affirmed, and, hence, it is affirmed that things have no intrinsic nature. But an intrinsic nature is a property that a thing has on its own, independently of all else, essentially “from its own side.” Emptiness is such a property. Hence, things, by virtue of being essentially empty, have an intrinsic nature, that is, emptiness, which is the absence of any intrinsic nature.” (Deguchi, Y., Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2013b, p. 395)

⁶Cf. also: “Since all words and concepts fabricate and falsify, and ultimate truth characterizes reality free from fabrication, just as it is, ultimate truth is inexpressible. But we have just expressed something true about it.” (Deguchi, Y., Garfield, J.L. and Priest, G. 2013b, *ibid.*)

from my parents and so I am not financially independent”. Candrakīrti is very specific about Madhyamaka’s philosophical arumentation. They do not frame any reasoning procedure that could be (formally) unacceptable for their opponents. They just follow accepted reasoning standards (hence convention) but use them against their opponents’ theses drawing unacceptable consequences issuing from them.

MMK 18.8.: “Everything is real and is not real, both real and not real, neither real nor not real. This is Lord Buddha’s teaching.” (GP’s translation; Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2003, p. 16)

At the first glance this statement is obviously riddled with contradictions, but not if the sanskrit word *anuśāsana* (“teaching”) is translated with more precision as “graded” or “progressive” teaching.⁷ Normal sanskrit word for teaching is *śāsana* (e.g. in MMK 18.11). Here it is introduced the concept of different Buddha’s teachings according to the “state of mind” (advanced or not so advanced) of his listeners.⁸ Such a method of teaching (according to the situation) is accomodated to conventional ways of speaking and obviously does not represent an attempt to define ultimate and ineffable reality.⁹

MMK 22.11: “‘Empty’ should not be asserted, ‘nonempty’ should not be asserted. Neither both nor neither should be asserted. These are used only nominally.” (GP’s translation, Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2003, p. 14)

Again, seemingly contradictory statement because of the wrong translation of the

⁷“When prefixed to nouns *anu-* means progressive, each by each, orderly, one after another.” (Ruegg D. S., 2010, p. 44)

⁸The idea of “graded teaching” can be found also in other Nāgārjuna’s works; cf. YŚ 30: “To seekers of reality at first you should declare ‘everything exists’! Once they understand things and grow detached, then (you may teach) them freedom”. Candrakīrti (comm.): “Those who are seeking truth motivated by their habitual self-preoccupation tend to be attached to things, so first you must teach them that “everything exists” and then correctly describe (for them) the objects of their desire, since they delight in analyzing the natures of those things.” (Loizzo, J. 2007, p. 180-181): Cf. also Nāgārjuna’s ŚS (verse 44): “There exists the statement of existence and also the statement of non-existence and again the statement of both existence and non-existence. The intentional proclamations of the Buddhas are not easily penetrated.” The (auto)commentary explains that all of these statements exists (only) through superimposition or imputation and so cannot be taken literally (cf. Santina, P. D., p. 148)

⁹DGP’s understanding of *anuśāsana* merely as a (fixed) “teaching” led them to view this stanza as a purely theoretical statement about (ultimate) reality that generates contradictions: “Many contradictions do not occur in an immediately soteriological context; they occur in theoretical discourse about Buddhism, such as Nāgārjuna’s MMK (above stanza, 18.8). Contradictions in this context are not uttered simply for the psychological effect that they have on the listeners; in general, they are not intended to trigger fundamental psychological transformation.” (Deguchi, Y., Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2008, p. 397).

first and the crucial part of the stanza: It should be read: “Empty’ should not be asserted or else there would be ‘non empty’ ...” (śūnyamiti na vaktavyamaśūnyamiti vā bhavet)

Candrakīrti (comm): “So, relying on conventional truth (*vyavahārasatya*), by imputation (*āropatah*) we say “empty” with a view to conventional usage by accommodation to people who are to be trained. And we also say ‘non-empty’, ‘empty and non-empty’, and ‘neither empty nor non-empty’.” (Ruegg, D. S. 2010, p. 56) So, the term “empty” by itself cannot have any special status among other terms within the frame of dichotomizing conceptualization which involves the logically complementary and opposite concepts (long-short, truth-falsity, conventional-ultimate, empty-nonempty etc.)

Finally, MMK 13.7. clearly states that “emptiness” should not be understood as an description of the Ultimate Reality (emptiness is not the ultimate “nature” of anything instead of some other ultimate property, e.g. “inherent nature”):

“If something not empty existed, something called ‘empty’ would exist; something not empty does not exist, and how will there [then] exist something empty?”

Buddhapālita (5. C.E.) comm.: “Those who view emptiness as a thing because it exists separately from the mere expression ‘emptiness’ have their mental eyes obscured by the great darkness of ignorance.” (Saito, 1984, p. 186)

Obviously, Buddhapālita criticizes those who hold that word’s referents necessarily exist as things, that the word “emptiness” has its real referent somewhere “out there”.

Let us also check the most celebrated stanza of MMK (18.24):

“Whatever is dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*), we call that ‘emptiness’ (*śūnyatā*), the latter (‘emptiness’) is the act of designating after relying (upon something, *prajñaptir upādāya*), and is itself the middle path.” (Salvini, M. 2011, p. 242)

There are numerous different analyses of this stanza, but I think that the message is again very clear: emptiness has not some special status by itself among other terms, nor does it refer to some special and “objective” state of affairs (that would make Nāgārjuna a realist which he obviously is not); within the frame of dichotomizing conceptualization it links itself (‘relying upon’) to the opposite concept of “inherent nature” (*svabhāva*). The idea that “emptiness” is the “concept based on” (notional dependence) is paralleled with the idea that whatever can be said to exist, it exists “in dependence upon” something (*pratītyasamutpāda*, “existential” dependence). Hence, since there are no “isolated” things by themselves, there cannot be terms (concepts) that could refer to these isolated “things”, emptiness included. We cannot postulate (or even think of) “short” without the idea of “long”, truth without the idea of falsity, emptiness without the idea of inherent nature, etc.

Cf. also Candrakīrti (comm. on YŚ 11b): “For if one imagines (*parikalpa*) that things as perceived have some sort of intrinsically identifiable objectivity, since these things would be mutually distinct entities, being ascertained as such, they would necessarily be determinable (only) as individual particulars (*viśeṣa*). For (in such a view) one cannot determine the actuality of a thing through knowing some other actuality, just as one cannot determine (the color) yellow by knowing something blue.” (Loizzo, J. 2007, p. 158)

Since a word in Madhyamaka’s view inherently does not signify anything “real” and isolated or inherently existing (as semantic realism assumes) it can only have a function of positing its counter-part in the total web of designation within the framework of conceptualization. According to Indian Grammarians, “meanings” of words are either conventionally agreed upon through the generations of speakers (in the case of everyday words) or individually intended (in the case of “technical” terms, such as “emptiness”); cf. Candrakīrti: “But words are not like policemen. They cannot subject a speaker to their own will. Although they possess the power [to express], they are [actually] governed by the speaker’s intention.” (PP, 24. 1-2)

So Nāgārjuna in one place declares what is the “intended meaning” of “emptiness”:

MMK 13.8: “Emptiness has been declared by the Victors to be the cancellation of all (on inherent nature based) views (*dṛṣṭi*). But those who have a view of Emptiness they have said to be untreatable.”

Candrakīrti in his comment again warns us that emptiness does not refer to some ultimate entity or property of any kind: “But simple cancellation of what are (speculative) views is no substantial entity. Yet against those who are conceptually attached to Emptiness as to a substantial entity (*bhāvābhiniveśin*) we propound nothing.”

So we learn that teaching of emptiness is not the teaching about ultimate nature of things but a specially designed teaching (otherwise completely non-referential) aiming at “purging” all views based on reified (*svabhāva*) conceptualization. But in that process it should also purge itself (Emptiness should not be understood as another “view” hence “emptiness of emptiness”). That is intended meaning of “emptiness”.

4. Making sense of Emptiness, Ultimate Reality and DGP thesis

I think that it is quite clear that:

1. “emptiness” does not refer to any kind of ultimate entity or ultimate property, it is more like a metalinguistic term that guides Madhyamaka’s analysis of their

opponent' theses. In fact, "emptiness" could be understood as a third order term within a following scheme:

- First order, non-analytical statement about the world that Madhyamaka never argue against but quite contrary, e.g. purely conventional statement: "the sprout arises from the seed"; cf. Candrakīrti, comm. on YŚ 20: "For the things of the world cannot be accepted as (critically) examined, but just (as presented) according to convention. ... Since all mundane conventions (*laukika-vyavahāra*) are without (logical) justification (*upapatti*) even the commonsense things in the world must be established by worldly convention (*loka-prasiddhārtha*), not by (analytic) validation." (Loizzo, J. 2007, p. 170)
- Second order, analytical or "philosophical" statement about the world, thought to establishes some ultimate state of affairs, e.g. "the sprout pre-exists in the seed/has a different nature from the seed", things exist by their own nature, etc. Second order statements or propositions are full of conceptually constructed terms and notions armed by which a philosopher is in search for the ultimate foundation of things or ultimate explanation of events not being satisfied (for some reasons) by the conventional or non-analytical (first order) description of the world. According to Madhyamaka, these second order statements and propositions are roots of all delusions and distortions regarding the world. And the root of all these roots is the false projection of the "inherent nature" (*svabhāva*) "upon otherwise innocuous objects of our customary world that do not have such *svabhāva*" as Tillemans pointed out. (Tillemans, T. 2001. p. 15).¹⁰
- Third order or "emptiness" statement, canceling the second order statement, but not the first, e.g. "the seed and the sprout are empty of inherent nature". It is crucial to note here, as was suggested by Robinson (Robinson, R. H. 1978, p. 43 and 49) that "emptiness" is not another or independent factor in philosophical analysis, but is, so to speak of "parasitic" nature, i.e. without positing (by someone) second order statement it cannot perform any meaningful function. To be more precise, "emptiness" is a term in the descriptive or meta-system referring (by way

¹⁰GP also effectively phrased the same idea behind the Madhyamaka's "deconstructivist" philosophical project: "Penetrating to the depths of being, we find ourselves back on the surface of things, and so discover that there is nothing, after all, beneath these deceptive surfaces. Moreover, what is deceptive about them is simply the fact that we take there to be ontological depths lurking just beneath." (Garfield, J. L. and Priest, G. 2003, p. 15); cf. also Candrakīrti's commentary to YŚ 20 above.

of cancellation) to the primary (i.e. second order, *svabhāva*-based statements) system supposedly referring to the ultimate or objective state of affairs.¹¹

This idea is reflected in Candrakīrti's observation that if human (philosophical) minds were not inclined to reify or hypostatize concepts (e.g. *svabhāva*), nobody would ever teach emptiness.¹² In a word, the notion (and argument) of the emptiness of things can arise only in relation to the illusion that inherent nature exists. But then it means that emptiness is illusion too! And Nāgārjuna is quite clear about that: In VV discussing the nature of his "thesis" namely that all things are empty of intrinsic nature he compares it with the illusion that stops or prevents another illusion (namely that of intrinsic nature) to arise.¹³

Hence, what is problematic with DGP theses is their analysis of Nāgārjuna's statements through the lens of semantic realism that Nāgārjuna most certainly rejects as is evident especially in his VV. The whole misunderstanding between Nāgārjuna and his opponent in this work is based exactly on the assumption of the later that Nāgārjuna advances semantic realism regarding his thesis about universal emptiness of all things. On the realistic assumption, the problem with this central Nāgārjuna's thesis is quite clear: If "all things are empty" is a universally valid claim, then it means that this claim itself is empty too, and so it cannot be in position to negate (e.g. inherent nature in things) or prevent anything. But this is exactly the point Nāgārjuna has in mind. He does not negate (nor affirm) anything because there is nothing graspable "out there" (in terms of inherent nature or "numerical" identity) to be negated or affirmed (cf. VV 30 and 63). His thesis is as "empty" as any other, it does not have any privileged semantic or ontological status by its own because it is expressed in notional "dependence on" (*prajñaptir upādāya*, MMK 18. 24, see above), in our case in dependence on the second order statement, just as any other statement or proposition.

¹¹I would say metaphorically that "emptiness" is a black hole within the system of constructs that constantly spreads out.

¹²Cf. also Ames (1982, p. 172): "The notion of the non-existence of *svabhāva* can arise only in relation to the illusion that *svabhāva* exists."

¹³"It would be as if an artificial man hindered another artificial man engaged in some action or as if an illusory man brought forth by an illusionist would hinder another illusory man engaged in some action who was brought forth by the illusory man's own illusory power. In this case the artificial man who is hindered is empty, as is the one who hinders him. The illusory man who is hindered is empty, as is the one who hinders him. Therefore in just the same way the negation of the substance [*svabhāvapratiṣedha*] of all things is established by my empty speech [*madvacanenā śūnyenā*]; autocommentary to VV 23 (trans. Westerhoff, J. 2010, p. 49-50).

We can approach Nāgārjuna's semantic anti-realism also from the conceptual framework of classical Indian grammarians' analysis of language-meaning.¹⁴ According to the later, three notions are crucial here: basic linguistic element (*śabda*) that is the bearer of meaning, meaning itself (*artha*) and the expressional power (*śakti*) of a linguistic element. It is generally accepted and recognized that articulated (grammatically well formed) words and sentences generate some kind of understanding, i.e. that they are "meaningful", but the question is what is the nature of this understanding and especially its relation to things "out there". This depends on how we understand expressional power of linguistic items (*śakti*). According to realists this expressional power must be inborn or inherent or fixed in linguistic items because it has to be assumed that language is intimately connected with the world "out there" in undistorted way. If there is a word "apple" it exists because there exists a corresponding thing that generates "apple-meaning" and that is because a word "apple" itself has the inborn power to express this precise thing.

There is the fourth element in this analysis, namely "speaker's intention" (*tātparya* or *vivakṣa*). In India it is early recognized as a factor that is significant to the problem of meaning. The question is: What is relation between *śakti* and *tātparya* or *vivakṣa*? If the expressional power of linguistic items is inborn, i.e. objective, then "speaker's intention" is of very limited impact on how meaning is generated. But if opposite, then the later factor (speaker's intention) is the one that actually generates meaning. But if so, then there is a serious discordance between language and reality. That does not, however, mean that facts of language become a nonsense, but only that they do not (at least not directly) reflect "objective" reality (as a realist assumes), but only "inner state of mind". So, grammarians conclude (or at least Bhartṛhari), what language expresses is not "primary being" (*mukhyasattā*) or external and objective order of things (whose existence however they do not deny), but rather "metaphorical" or "superimposed" reality (*upacāra sattā*) that exists only in mind (cf. *Vākyapadīya*, III, 3 and comm.).

Nāgārjuna, I think, made a step further in these considerations: Not only that concepts and language do not and cannot touch upon reality in a way realist thinks they do, but this reality itself is not "out there" as a realist thinks in a sense of numerically identifiable "things", objective processes and so on. Madhyamakas have only one albeit fundamental definition or description of things and that is the fact of mere condition-hood (*idampratrayatāmātra*). But even this definition or description of reality is hardly understood by Madhyamakas as being objectively "out there". This description is just convenient framework within which the teaching of emptiness could be rationally grounded and thus presented to others (if A depends

¹⁴That Nāgārjuna was significantly influenced by Indian grammarians is now well recognized, cf. Bhattacharya 1980

on B for its existence then A is empty of intrinsic nature, etc.).

Armed with above considerations let us check now more closely DGP's contradictions and paradoxes they have identified in Nāgārjuna's philosophy. All of them are based on semantic realism that Nāgārjuna do not adhere to and on realist metaphysics that Nāgārjuna also do not adhere to. "Ontological contradiction" develops from the premise "things have no nature, and that is their nature". This premise probably stems from one passage of Candrakīrti's commentary to MMK 15.2.: "And that inherent nature (*svabhāva*) of things is . . . , because of being non-being (*abhāva*), . . . a mere non-inherent nature (*asvabhāva*). In this context it should be known that there is no inherent nature of things." DGP somehow from here conclude that for Nāgārjuna or Madhyamaka absence of inherent nature or "no nature" is the real nature of things and from here that "being empty" (of inherent nature) is the universal property of things, "for being empty is part of something's nature (essence)".¹⁵ (see above) This line (and the spirit) of (realistic) reasoning is exactly the same as advanced by an opponent in VV against which Nāgārjuna employs his, I believe, radical anti-realist semantics. What is "realistic" about DGP's reasoning is the concept of negation they employ which is the same as advanced by Nyāya school (the main Indian representative of ontological and epistemological realism). For Nyāya, negation is always implicative, i.e. the function of negation is operative only in connection with some existing thing (subject of proposition) and refers to its disconnection with certain time, place, property, etc., affirming or implying at the same time its connection with some other time, place, property, etc.¹⁶ Hence for Nyāya "things have no (inherent) nature" is meaningful statement only if it implies that instead of property "inherent nature" we affirm some other property, in our case, being empty (of inherent nature) in otherwise existing "thing". But this is exactly one of the major point of dispute between Nāgārjuna and Nyāya. For the former there are no things and no properties (and hence no "referential" propositions), "being empty" included, to which the negation (or affirmation) could be attached to.¹⁷

To conclude: emptiness or "being empty" is not an intrinsic property of anything nor is it description of things ultimately (Nāgārjuna nowhere in his writings links emptiness with ultimate truth, much less with ultimate reality); it is just "context-bound" (cf. Ruegg, D. S. 2000. p. 207-208) cancellation of the conceptual fiction

¹⁵Cf. Ames' semantic interpretation of this seemingly paradoxical statement, namely that "intrinsic nature of things is non-intrinsic nature" (Ames, 1982, p. 174).

¹⁶Cf. Nyāyavārttika on Nyāyasūtra 2. 1. 12.: "Because when the word 'pot' etc. is coordinated (*samānādhikaraṇa*) with (predicate) 'does not exist', it does not signify mere (absolute) non-existence of the pot but rather (that predicate) negates connection of (that) pot with (certain) place ('house'), certain time or (negates certain causal) efficiency (*sāmarthyā*) of the pot."

¹⁷I think that Nāgārjuna shares certain similarities with the so called Deflationary and Pragmatist theories of truth.

“inherent nature” (*svabhāva*) held to be by his opponents ultimate truth regarding things. This cancellation is “non-implicative” (*prasajya*), it does not affirm anything instead, it cancels itself after canceling this fiction. Because it is also conceptual fiction! Hence, no ontological contradiction.

But then also there is no semantic paradox to be found in Nāgārjuna part of which is DGP's statement “it is ultimately true that everything is empty”, nor expressibility paradox part of which is the statement that the statement “everything is empty” cannot be a conventional truth. The question is of course why Nāgārjuna introduces the distinction between conventional and ultimate truth? The natural answer would be – because there are two kinds of reality, conventional and ultimate. But I think it is not at stake here because, as is, I hope, revealing here, Nāgārjuna is not interested in relation between language and “reality” but rather between language and (mental) behaviour. In that sense I have tried to show elsewhere¹⁸ that the distinction between these two truths (as well as the argument for emptiness of things based on the universal conditionality of things, *pratītyasamutpāda*) is introduced by Nāgārjuna in order to prevent the fear in those (to be instructed) who could understand the teaching of emptiness as entailing nihilism in a sense that things do not exist at all, not even conventionally!

As for the purpose of the teaching of emptiness, it is well elaborated in Madhyamaka's writings and there is no need to discuss it here. It should suffice to say (cf. also “GP and DGP theses”, point 6, above) that for these philosophers the main problem with (doxic) philosophical theses, views, standpoints, etc. is not their problematic truth value but rather their negative impact on human mind. They generate mental „proliferations“ (*prapañca*) that disturb mind preventing it to see and experience clearly and unbiasedly things “as they are” (*yathābhūtam*).

In this process of cleansing the mind the task of philosophy could be only one: “to destroy adherence to language [or: verbal expressions] and secondly to the referents of language” as was pointed out by Devaśarman in his (survived only in a few quotations) commentary to MMK. (cf. Williams, P. M. 1980. p. 1)

¹⁸Kardaš, G. “Madhyamaka in Abhidharma Śāstras: The Case of Harivarman's Tattvasiddhi” (forthcoming), in: Dessein, B. and Teng, W. (eds.), *Text, History, and Philosophy: Abhidharma across Buddhist scholastic Traditions*, Leiden: Brill.

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