

## II. Materials for the Study of the Reason Sixty and its Commentary

### 1. Nāgārjuna's Reason Sixty (*Yuktiṣaṣṭikākārikā*)

Modern scholars are in unanimous agreement with the traditional attribution of the *Reason Sixty* (*Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*) to Nāgārjuna,<sup>1</sup> known as the founder of the Central Way or Centrist school of Buddhist philosophy. The original Sanskrit is lost, although twelve verses preserved through citation in other works have been identified,<sup>2</sup> and an additional twenty-five reconstructed from the Tibetan.<sup>3</sup> With sixty-one verses including the opening stanza of dedication, the *Reason* is the briefest of Nāgārjuna's philosophical works, numbered by traditional and modern scholars at six to eight.<sup>4</sup> The preservation of some portion of its Sanskrit verses reflects the fact that it is among the works of Nāgārjuna most often cited by Centrist commentators. Chandrakīrti measures its importance in Nāgārjuna's eyes by the fact that "the Master" composed an opening dedication for the *Reason*, unlike such

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Schaeffer, *Yukti-ṣaṣṭikā: Die 60*, 2–3; Murti, *Central Philosophy*, 88–89; Ruegg, *Literature*, 19–20; Lindtner, *Nāgārjuniana*, 10–11; Tola and Dragonetti, "Yuktiṣaṣṭikā," 94–95; Scherrer-Schaub, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, xxiii. Traditional attributions to Nāgārjuna include those by Chandrakīrti, *Madhyamakaśāstrastuti* (cf. de Jong, "Madhyamakaśāstrastuti," 47–56); Bu-ston, *History of Buddhism I*, 50–51; and the colophons of the Tibetan translations in the *sDe-dGe* and Peking editions of the *bs Tan-'gyur*.

<sup>2</sup> Lindtner has collected the twelve Sanskrit verses of the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* preserved through citation in other works, and presents them in critically edited versions in *Nāgārjuniana*, 102–119. Cf. Yamaguchi, *Chūgan Bukkyō Ronkō*, 29–110; Ruegg, *Literature*, 19 n. 43; Tola and Dragonetti, "Yuktiṣaṣṭikā," 96–97; and Scherrer-Schaub, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, 101–114. These verses are cited in the notes to the translations, below.

<sup>3</sup> Twelve of those reconstructed by Uryūzu Ryūshin, "Nāgārjuna Kenkyū" 1–2 (1973–74), have been collected by Tola and Dragonetti, "Yuktiṣaṣṭikā," 97–98, and the ten which do not duplicate preserved verses are cited in the notes to the translations, below.

<sup>4</sup> Chandrakīrti, in his *Madhyamakaśāstrastuti* (cf. de Jong, "Madhyamakaśāstrastuti"), and at the end of the Tibetan translation of his *Prasannapadā*, includes YṢ among his list of eight works attributed to Nāgārjuna. Bu-ston, *History of Buddhism I*, 50–51, lists five in addition to MMK: *Śūnyatāsaptati*, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*, and *Ratnāvalī*. Lindtner, *Nāgārjuniana*, 11, lists six philosophical works in addition to the MMK as "genuine": *Śūnyatāsaptati*, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*, *Vyavahārasiddhi*, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*, and *Pratītyasamutpādahṛdayakārikā*.

works as the *Rebuttal of Objections* (VV) and *Voidness Seventy* (ŚS). Chandra-kīrti's own assessment of the *Reason*'s importance is reflected in his decision to single it out as the only text of Nāgārjuna's beside the *Wisdom* (MMK) and its companion texts to receive direct commentary. The text's place in the Tibetan tradition is also clear from its inclusion in the Sixfold Canon of Reason (*Rigs tshogs drug*), recognized by historian-scholar Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub (1290–1364) as the textual basis for the Centrist studies (*dBu-ma*) portion of the monastic philosophy curriculum.<sup>5</sup> This may explain why there are two Tibetan commentaries on the *Reason*, both written after the time of Bu-ston.

The *Reason* appears to have been among the first Centrist works translated into Tibetan during the early dissemination (*snga dar*) of Buddhism under Srong-btsan sGam-po (r. 627–651) and Khri-srong lDe-btsan (754–797). With no Sanskrit title or mention of any member of its translation team, this early version dates to no later than the start of the ninth century, when it was included in the lDan-dkar Catalogue (824) of works translated into Tibetan.<sup>6</sup> This version comes to us preserved in two of the Dunhuang manuscripts, and is thought to have influenced the version of the root text embedded in Ye-she-sDe's eventual translation of the *Commentary*.<sup>7</sup> The canonical version of the text was translated approximately three centuries later by a team including the Indian Abbot Muditāśrī and the Tibetan Translator (*Lo-tsa-ba*) Pa-tshab Nyi-ma Grags (1055–1145). While this text differs markedly from the earlier version in its syntax and translation of technical terms, the differences are mostly simple inversions and substitutions that do little to alter the sense of the translation. Additionally, an extra-canonical version attributed to Pa-tshab and edited at Zhol Par-khang has also been preserved, although this version is essentially identical to the canonical one. The only other translation is the Chinese version attributed to Dānapāla (Ch. Shīhu'), an Indian master who reportedly emigrated to Kaifeng, China, from his native Uḍḍiyāna in 982.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> On Bu-ston, see Ruegg, *The Life of Bu ston Rin po che* (1966).

<sup>6</sup> Lalou, "Les Textes Bouddhiques au Temps de Khri-sron-lde-bcan" (1953), 333 n. 591. Cf. Scherrer-Schaub, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, xxiii n. 5.

<sup>7</sup> P nos. 795–796. Cf. Scherrer-Schaub, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, xxiii.

<sup>8</sup> *Lieou che song jou li louen*, Taisho, XXX, no. 1575, 254b–265a. Cf. Ruegg, "Le Dharmadhātustava," 463 n. 67; Scherrer-Schaub, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, xxvi and n. 8.

The first modern translation of the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*, Philipp Schaeffer's 1923 German version, *Yukti-ṣaṣṭikā: Die 60 Sätze des Negativismus*, was based primarily on the Chinese.<sup>9</sup> Subject to the limitations of that translation, Schaeffer's early effort is acknowledged as marred by philological inaccuracy.<sup>10</sup> Equally flawed is its hermeneutical strategy of reading Nāgārjuna's nondualism as a critique of reason essentially equivalent to the standard Kantian critique of reason.<sup>11</sup> As already elaborated above, this problem is only beginning to come to the attention of modern Buddhologists and Indologists, with the consequence that hermeneutical inaccuracies have not been eliminated from subsequent translations as easily and completely as have philological ones.

Early philological inaccuracies were effectively corrected by translations relying on critical editions of the characteristically systematic canonical Tibetan versions of Pa-tshab and Ye-shes sDe. Yamaguchi's 1944 critical edition of the Tibetan with Chinese was the basis of his 1965 Japanese version,<sup>12</sup> the first of six philologically critical modern language translations. Lindtner's 1980 Danish and 1982 English translations<sup>13</sup> benefit from the critical edition offered with the latter, enhanced by twelve recovered Sanskrit verses as compared with the one and one-half available to Yamaguchi. Tola and Dragonetti's 1983 English version<sup>14</sup> has the added benefit of ten reconstructed Sanskrit verses from the first two of Uryūzu Ryūshin's four studies on the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*.<sup>15</sup> And finally, there is the invaluable 1991 French version embedded in Scherrer-Schaub's French translation of the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, solidly informed by a critical edition of the Tibetan translation of the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* that compares four canonical versions with the extra-canonical version of Pa-tshab's translation and with the anonymous

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<sup>9</sup> *Yukti-ṣaṣṭikā: Die 60 Sätze des Negativismus nach der Chinesischen Version Übersetzt*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Lindtner, *Nāgārjuniana*, 100, n. 138.

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion of hermeneutics in the sections, above, and in the following text.

<sup>12</sup> Yamaguchi, *Chūgan Bukkyō Ronkō*, 29–110, offers the critically edited text with Japanese translation.

<sup>13</sup> Lindtner, “Den rette laeres tres vers” (1980), 85–92; and *Nāgārjuniana* (1982), 100–199.

<sup>14</sup> Tola and C. Dragonetti, “Yuktiṣaṣṭikā” (1983).

<sup>15</sup> Uryūzu Ryūshin, “Nāgārjuna kenkyū” 1–3 (1973, 1974, 1981), and “Rokujūju Nyoriron ni okeru Nāgārjuna no shiso” (1981).

translation of the Dunhuang manuscripts. Drawing on the recent studies of Ruegg,<sup>16</sup> Scherrer-Schaub is also the first translator to deploy a post-Kantian hermeneutic, and hence the first to clearly translate the critical thrust of Nāgārjuna's relativism.<sup>17</sup>

As for the traditional commentarial literature, some scholars assume the existence of an autocommentary by Nāgārjuna, listed in Catalogues of the Tibetan Canon as *Rigs pa drug cu pa'i rang 'grel*.<sup>18</sup> Although this reference appears to be spurious, it suggests the possibility that such a commentary was written and even translated, but that both the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions were lost. That Nāgārjuna would have written such a commentary is plausible in itself, given the existence of autocommentaries on works such as the *Rebuttal of Objections* and *Voidness Seventy*, which Chandrakīrti tells us he considered less important. Yet the fact that we find no reference to an autocommentary in Chandrakīrti's *Commentary* makes this unlikely and suggests that the *Reason Sixty Commentary* of Chandrakīrti translated here is the only Indian commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Reason*.<sup>19</sup> The fact that the two known Tibetan commentaries both post-date Bu-ston suggests the continued importance of this text in the Indo-Tibetan teaching and practice lineage of the Central Philosophy, especially in the tradition of the Gelukpa founder Tsong Khapa (1357–1419). They are the *Zin Bris*, comprising Gyal-tsap's (1364–1432) notes of Tsong Khapa's oral teachings on the text; and the recent *mChan 'Grel* of gZhan-phan Chos-kyi sNang-ba (1871–1926).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ruegg, "The Uses of the Four Positions" (1977); "Mathematical and Linguistic Models" (1978); and *Literature* (1981).

<sup>17</sup> Even if not, in my opinion, quite capturing the full thrust of its evolutionary view of causality or its subtle conventionalism.

A more recent English translation of the *Reason Sixty* verses by Dr. Peter Della Santina was discovered too late to consider herein. This philologically solid and hermeneutically neutral translation was published on the web in 2002. See above, p. 11 n. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Vaidya, *Études sur Āryadeva*, 49, presumes the existence of such a commentary and its preservation in Tibetan, giving as reference *Tibetan Canon*, *mDo* XXVII, 7, *Cordier* III, 292. Cf. Lalou, *Répertoire du Tanjur*, 3:122, who lists the title as *Rigs pa drug cu pa'i (rang 'grel)*; Tola and Dragonetti, "Yuktiṣaṣṭikā," 95, 117 n. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Scherrer-Schaub, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, xxvii.

<sup>20</sup> *Rigs pa drug cu pa'i zin bris rJe'i gsung bzhin rGyal tshab chos rjes bkod pa*, TKSB, v. 15 (ba) (New Delhi, 1979), 595–617; and *Rigs pa drug cu pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa zhes bya ba'i mchan* (cont'd)

## 2. Chandrakīrti's Reason Sixty Commentary (*Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*)

The attribution of the *Commentary* to Chandrakīrti is uncontested.<sup>21</sup> The original Sanskrit of the text has been lost, except for the opening dedication and a few following lines identified by V.V. Gokhale on the back of the manuscript of Bhāvaviveka's *Heart of the Central Way* (*MH*) found at Zha-lu Monastery in 1936.<sup>22</sup> Chandrakīrti's *Reason Sixty Commentary* was preserved only in the Tibetan translation found in various versions in editions of the *Tengyur*. According to its colophon, this was the work of a ninth century team including the Indian scholars Jinamitra, Dānaśīla and Śīlendrabodhi,<sup>23</sup> and the Tibetan translator Ye-shes sDe.<sup>24</sup>

The *Commentary* has been translated from the Tibetan in two recent modern language versions. The first is an annotated translation into Japanese by Uryūzu, which appeared in 1974.<sup>25</sup> The second is Scherrer-Schaub's 1991 French translation, accompanied by a critical edition of the Tibetan text.<sup>26</sup> Other studies include a brief analysis of Chandrakīrti's comments on

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'grel, *The Collected Works of gZhan-phan* (New Delhi: Jayyed Press, 1978), 459–495. The topic outline inserted in the translation and edition below was taken from the former text.

<sup>21</sup> There is general agreement that Chandrakīrti lived in the latter half of the seventh century. Cf. Ruegg, *Literature*, 71 n. 288; and "Towards a Chronology of the Madhyamaka School," 513–514. See also appendix, below.

<sup>22</sup> The manuscript was discovered by Rāhula Sāmkṛtyāyana, and its YṢV fragment presented in Gokhale, "The Vedānta-Philosophy described by Bhavya" (1958), 165 n. 1. Cf. Scherrer-Schaub, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, xxix.

<sup>23</sup> On this Indian team, see Simonsson, *Indo-Tibetische Studien*, 228–229, 241–242; Naudou, *Les Bouddhistes*, 86–87; de Jong, "Notes à propos des colophons," 507; Hoffmann, *Tibet*, 132–133.

<sup>24</sup> See the critical editions below. On Ye-shes sDe, see Roerich, BA, I, 345; Simonsson, *Indo-Tibetische Studien*, 242; Ruegg, *Literature*, 210–211, and 211 n. 16; and Ruegg, "Autour du lTa ba'i khyad par de Ye shes sde," 207–229.

<sup>25</sup> Uryūzu Ryūshin, *Rokujuju Nyoriron* (1974), 5–88, nn. 364–372.

<sup>26</sup> Scherrer-Schaub, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti* (1991).

verse thirty by Lindtner,<sup>27</sup> and a résumé of the *Commentary*'s contents by Scherrer-Schaub.<sup>28</sup>

### 3. Central Philosophy as a Method of Self-Correction

I understand Nāgārjuna's Central Philosophy as an application of the Indian linguistic-mathematical placeholder zero (*śūnya*) to critically redefine the formula of relativistic origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), traditionally known as the epitome of Buddhist teaching.<sup>29</sup> Thus, before presenting the concept of voidness (*śūnyatā*) and its therapeutic use, Nāgārjuna begins both his *Wisdom* and his *Reason* by praising the Buddha for his insight and teaching of relativity. Likewise, having introduced Nāgārjuna's celebrated formula equating the relativity of things with their voidness with respect to intrinsic reality (*svabhāvasūnyatā*), Chandrakīrti opens his *Commentary* by describing the *Reason* as "a primary study of the principle of relativity, like the *Wisdom*" (YṢV, ad k. 0).

Considering the fact that Nāgārjuna uses the term "relativity" variously in various contexts, with senses ranging from philosophical contingency and psychobiological causality to the ethical sense of a natural law of psychosociocultural development, his formula that relativity equals intrinsic realitylessness (*niḥsvabhāvatā*) supports various senses for the term voidness, as well. Thus, he speaks of voidness as "the cure for worldviews" (MMK, 8.8); as the vessel in which we "cross the ocean of intolerable existence" (YṢ, 59); and as "essentially compassion" (RA, 4.96). So, to resolve the various senses of this equation, we need a parallel equation of the voidness-relativity

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<sup>27</sup> YṢV, P23a2–23b1; in Lindtner, "Atīśa's Introduction" (1981), 167–168. The root verse is among those for which the Sanskrit is preserved.

<sup>28</sup> Scherrer-Schaub, "Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti of Candrakīrti" (1995), in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, ed. by K. Potter.

<sup>29</sup> Ruegg, "Mathematical and Linguistic Models in Indian Thought: The Case of Zero and Śūnyatā." The formula which scholars call "the Buddhist creed," traditionally known as the heart of relativity (*pratītyasamutapādahṛdayā*), presents the basic four truths' framework as a system of rational self-knowledge and liberative practice that was considered general enough to have been applied to Indian medicine. *! om ye dharma hetū prabhava, hetun teṣām tathāgata hy 'vādat | teṣām cayo' nirodha evam vādi mahāśramaniya svāhā !*. Thurman's translation of the term in the Centrist context with "relativity" presupposes the traditional glosses, *pratītyasamutpāda = idampratīyāmatra*, and *parasparāpekṣa*.

nonduality with the Central Way, which Nāgārjuna links to his primary formula in the final dedicatory verse of the *Rebuttal of Objections*: “I salute that incomparable Buddha who taught the equivalence in meaning of voidness, relativity, and the Central Way.”<sup>30</sup>

This second equation links Nāgārjuna’s critical use of voidness as a nondualistic alternative to binary (positive or negative) symbolic constructs with his practical use of relativity as a Centrist alternative to the dualistic extremes of thought and action which result when such binary constructions are reified in self-deceptive projection or denial. Since this reifying habit is the cognitive root of dualistic extremisms, known philosophically as absolutism and nihilism (*asti-nāsti-vāda*), psychologically as projection and denial (*samāropa-apavāda*), and ethically as eternalism and nihilism (*śāśvata-ucchedavāda*), the therapeutic rationale for Nāgārjuna’s Central Philosophy is to apply voidness as an allopathic remedy to that self-limiting mental habit, much as zero is used to overcome the limits of mechanical counting systems.

To do its work, Nāgārjuna’s voidness must keep the mind open despite its habit of closing prematurely or rigidly on its own binary constructs; it must free the symbolic mind from its own demon (*māra*), the instinctive misknowledge that takes the medium of signs for the message of reality, placing self-imposed limits on the development of cognitive objectivity and universal altruism. This interpretation of Nāgārjuna’s system explains why, of all conceivable views, the only view said to block the Centrist philosophy’s therapeutic effect is one which reifies voidness as a presence or absence independent of the constructs it critiques. “Since the Victors teach voidness as the cure for all worldviews, whomsoever takes voidness as a worldview they pronounce incurable” (MMK, 8.8).<sup>31</sup> Whether such a worldview reifies voidness as an ineffable something or an absolute nothing, it is called “the view of voidness” because it conceives its ultimate reality

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<sup>30</sup> *yaḥ śūnyatām pratītyasamutpādaṃ madhyamām pratipadaṃ ca | ekārthān nijaḡāda pra-  
ṇamāmi tam apratīmasambuddham ||*. This equation is implicit in the famous affirmative  
consequence in MMK 24.10 sq., which, Tsong Khapa commented in his *Rigs-pa’i rgya-  
mtsho*, should be appended to every critique in MMK as a safeguard against a skeptical  
misunderstanding of voidness. Cf. Thurman, *Essence*, Introduction.

<sup>31</sup> *śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭīnaṃ proktā niḥsaraṇaṃ jinaiḥ || yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatāḍṛṣṭānasādhyān babbhāṣire  
||*. Compare YṢ, 31, and YṢV, below.

dualistically, as somehow distinct from the fabric of causal relations and symbolic conventions Nāgārjuna calls “superficial reality.” When misused in this way, the potent medicine of voidness can be toxic, confirming either the mystic illusion of an ultimate somewhere beyond the relative, or the pragmatic illusion that there is no ultimate truth, no cure for the ills of human self-deception. Thus, Nāgārjuna issues his famous warning, “Voidness wrongly viewed may bring the slow-witted to ruin, like a poorly caught snake or a misapplied formula” (MMK, 24.11).<sup>32</sup> And, elsewhere he directly critiques the binary alternatives of mystic projection and pragmatic denial that result from reifying voidness, reminding the mystic that “voidness...is defined in a conventional sense” (MMK, 22.11), and the pragmatist that “without relying on convention, the ultimate cannot be taught” (MMK, 24.10).<sup>33</sup>

Thus, from its inception, the Central Philosophy confronted dualistic misreadings of Buddha’s teaching of voidness clearly analogous to the neo-Kantian views that obscure modern translations of Nāgārjuna. In fact, Nāgārjuna considered such views the most serious obstacles to the understanding and use of Centrist philosophy, anticipating the hermeneutical problems that modern scholars and translators have had with his works. This significant cross-cultural finding supports Nāgārjuna’s premise that such dualistic distortions are universal symptoms of the symbolic mind’s self-limiting illness of reifying its own fabrications (*prapañca*). Thus, modern studies and translations of Nāgārjuna suffer from the same critical weaknesses that Centrist philosophy was designed to treat among Indian Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholar-practitioners.

The dualistic views of voidness Nāgārjuna addressed continued to be of critical concern to masters of the Indo-Tibetan Centrist tradition down to the modern era, as evidenced by the Dialecticist systems of Chandrakīrti and Tsong Khapa. The misunderstandings Chandrakīrti takes most pains to critique in his *Lucid Exposition* and *Introduction* fall into the two same classes Nāgārjuna addressed. His critique of Bhāvaviveka’s Dogmaticist for-

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<sup>32</sup> MMK, 24.11: *vināśayati durdr̥ṣṭā śūnyatā maṇḍamedhasam || sarpo yathā durgrhīto vidyā vā duṣprasādhitā ||*.

<sup>33</sup> MMK, 22.11: *śūnyam iti na vaktavyam aśūnyam iti vā bhavet | ubhayaṁ nobhayaṁ ceti prajñāpty artham tu kathyate ||*. MMK, 24.10: *vyavahāram anāśritya paramārtho na deśyate | paramārtham anāgamya nirvāṇam nābhigamyate ||*.



malism in *Lucid Exposition* 1 takes Bhāvaviveka to task for reifying the dichotomy between conventional and ultimate by insisting that mundane perception and language must work by conventionally identifying objects or referents via some kind of self-evident given that is not, however, ultimately identifiable by philosophical analysis. Chandrakīrti argues that this requirement is excessive, violating the superficial reality of unexamined social consensus and constraining the profound therapeutic insight of voidness that overrides the reifying habit limiting human knowledge and communication: “Otherwise, the superficial would not be the superficial, and would either lack validity entirely or become [ultimate] reality.”<sup>34</sup> Chandrakīrti returns to this point in discussing the view of voidness explicitly in *Lucid Exposition* 13: “How can those who insist upon [intrinsic] being even in voidness ever cease such insistence on being? Since they do not recognize even such a universal medicine [as voidness], the supreme doctors, the transcendent buddhas, must turn away from such individuals.”<sup>35</sup> Finally, in his discussion of the sixteen voidnesses in *Introduction* 6.179–223, he addresses the problem of understanding voidness as an entity (*bhāva*) in his definitions of the voidness of voidness (k. 186), voidness of the ultimate (ks. 189–190), voidness of absence (k. 217), and voidness of nothingness (k. 220).

As for the view which reifies voidness as an absolute nothing, a tautology devoid of sense or reference, Chandrakīrti takes great pains to critique it in the *locus classicus* of his defense of the Dialecticist stance of positionlessness in *Introduction* 6.171–178, as we see from *Introduction Commentary* (ad k. 172): “Although negation and negated do not exist [analytically]... one should know that negation negates the negated conventionally. Negation devoid of intrinsic reality negates the negated, and a reason, even without [analytic] validation... proves what is to be proven.”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Chandrakīrti makes it clear in the *Reason Commentary* that this negation is not empty abstraction, but has a sense and reference like any other conventional cognition:

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<sup>34</sup> PPMV 1, ed. Vaidya, 23: *anyathā hi samvṛttir upapattya na viyujyate tad eva tattvam eva syāt na samvṛttiḥ* /.

<sup>35</sup> PPMV 13, ed. Vaidya, 108: *evam yeṣāṃ sūnyatāyām api bhāvābhiniveśaḥ kenedānīm sa teṣāṃ tasyām bhāvābhiniveśo niśidhyatāmiti / ato mahābhāṣaiḥ pi doṣasamjñitvāt parama-cikitsakairmahāvaidyaistathāgataih pratyākhyātā eva te* /.

<sup>36</sup> MABh, ad k. 173.

Even in mundane [parlance], one calls such types [of cognition], “direct experience.” For instance, when surveying from a great distance the country in the region before him, a traveler sees something as if filled with abundant, pure [water], and wants to cross it. Yet from his experience, [thinking] he will not be able to, and being afraid, he asks a farmer who comes from the region, “Just how [expansive] is this water?” That [farmer] may say to him, “Where is this water? This resembles water but it is a mirage. If you don’t believe my words about it, go there and look—*you will directly experience [the truth of] my words.*” Just as, by indicating the absence of water, one says “directly experience” to the traveler, likewise the world also conventionally designates absences and non-perceptions as “directly experienced.” Because of this, there is no contradiction with the truth of worldly conventions in calling the cognition of non-perceptions [such as cessations] a “direct experience.” (YŚV, ad k. 8)<sup>37</sup>

This negative perception is in fact the realistic intuition (*samyag-jñāna*) Chandrakīrti aligns with ultimate truth, because of its ultimate therapeutic import and effect: “Reality is the domain of those with realistic intuition; what is falsely perceived is declared superficial reality.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, Chandrakīrti’s understanding of the proper use of the therapeutic convention and transcendent insight of voidness is consistent with Nāgārjuna’s definition of voidness as a treatment for the reifying mental habit, the root of misknowledge:

Misknowledge, whose nature is the obscuration of the understanding of the real nature (of things) through reification (of

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<sup>37</sup> Chandrakīrti borrows the same simile Nāgārjuna used in *Jewel Rosary* (RA, 1.55–57) to clarify the scope of the pure negation involved in self-analysis, but with a slightly different emphasis: stressing the truth value of the negative finding it yields, rather than reminding us not to reify that nominal finding into a substantial nothingness. See Tsong Khapa’s *Legs-bshad snying-po* (LSNP), VII, 3 (Thurman, *Essence*, 376ff.).

<sup>38</sup> MA 6.23: *dngos kun yang dag rdzun pa mthong pa yis l dngos rnyed ngo po gnyis ni 'dzin par 'gyur l yang dag mthong yul gang de de nyid de l mthong ba brdzun pa kun rdzob bden par gsungs ll.*

[intrinsic] reality) in things without intrinsic reality, is utterly false.... Thus, the superficial truth is established under the influence of the addictive misknowledge included among the (twelve) factors of existence.<sup>39</sup>

In the modern era, dualistic misreadings of voidness as an ineffable something or an absolute nothing are clear targets in Tsong Khapa's hermeneutical treatment of Centrist philosophy in the *Essence*. Thurman, in introducing his translation of the *Essence*, identifies the advocates of these misreadings in Tsong Khapa's era.<sup>40</sup> The great Tibetan was concerned to critique the overly mystic readings advocated by Chinese Ch'an master, Hoshang Mahāyāna (8th CE)<sup>41</sup> and Dol-bu-pa Shes-rab rGyal-mthsan of the Jonangpa school (1292–1361). And he was equally concerned to critique the overly skeptical reading represented by the legacy of Jayānanda (11th–12th CE) and rNgog Lo-tsva-ba bLo-ldan Shes-rab of the Kadampa school (1059–1109), translator of the *Lucid Exposition* and *Introduction*. That Tsong Khapa's concern to critique these overly mystical and skeptical misreadings of voidness is consistent with Nāgārjuna's and Chandrakīrti's is evident from the "false views" he addresses in this formulation of the therapeutic effect of Central Philosophy, from the *Essence*:

In regard to (phenomena) such as a sprout, there are three perceptual habits: one holding it to be objectively existent; one holding it to be objectively inexistent; and one holding it without qualifying it in either way. If the distinction is clearly understood that all three of these habit-patterns exist in the mental process of one in whom the realistic view is generated, but that only the first and last are present in the mental process of one in whom no realistic view has been generated, then one will put a stop to the following false views: (the view) that rationality does not put a stop to all

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<sup>39</sup> This passage from MABh 6, ad k. 28, is cited in Tsong Khapa's LSNP and quoted as translated in Thurman, *Essence*, 309 (parentheses in original).

<sup>40</sup> Thurman, *Essence*, 49ff.

<sup>41</sup> For an account of the debate between Hoshang Mahāyāna and Kamalaśīla, organized by King Khri-srong lDe-btsan (r. 754–797), see Tucci, *Minor Buddhist Texts* (1958); and Demiéville, *Le Concile de Lhasa* (1963).

perception (controlled) by mental constructions (such as “this is it”; (the view) that all practices before the generation of the realistic view, such as cultivation of the will to enlightenment, are but truth-habits, or sign-habits; and (the view) that after one lays claim to having generated in mind the realistic view, there will be no intentionality in all one’s acts.<sup>42</sup>

In the first two false views we recognize the idealistic and mystical misunderstandings which reify voidness as an ineffable something that can only be known approximately, by constructions of reason, or intuitively, by leaping beyond reason; while in the third false view we recognize the materialist or pragmatic misunderstandings which reify voidness as an absolute nothingness, whose knowledge is supposed to dispel the “illusion” that there is any ultimate truth or aim to strive for. In place of these views, Tsong Khapa defines the realistic view in terms of the cultivation of a habit of deobjectifying, dereifying insight that adds a new degree of freedom from the learned conditioning of perception and the instinctive cognitive bias of reification. This liberative, dereifying habit builds a negative faculty of transcendent insight that counteracts what Tsong Khapa calls the objectifying mental habit (*yul gyi ’dzin stangs*), freeing the mind from the self-deceptive grip of reified constructs and self-deceptive instincts.<sup>43</sup> Because the therapeutic convention and insight of voidness works to counteract the reifying habit at the root of misknowledge, views which reify voidness block the therapeutic effect of Centrist philosophy. As Tsong Khapa sees it:

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<sup>42</sup> Tsong Khapa, LSNP, trans. in Thurman, *Essence*, 342–343 (parentheses in original).

<sup>43</sup> *Lam gso rnam gsum: snang ba rten ’brel bslu ba med pa dang || stong pa khas len bral ba’i go ba gnyis || ji srid so sor snang ba de srid du || da dung thub pa’i dgongs pa rtogs pa med || nam zbig res ’jog med par cig car du || rten ’brel mi bslur mthong ba tsam nyid nas || nges shes yul gyi ’dzin stangs kun ’jig na || de tshe lta ba’i dpyad pa rdzogs pa lags ||*. The psychological formulation follows a discussion in the *lhag mthong* section of Tsong Khapa’s *Lam rim chung ngu*, where he cites the *Elucidation of the Intention* quote: “He who practices quiescence and transcendent insight will be freed from the bondages of negative conditionings and of signs,” then comments: “‘Negative conditionings’ here refers to instincts underlying mental processes, which instincts increasingly generate a distorted subjectivity. ‘Signs’ refers to the continuous habitual adherence to mistaken objects which reinforce those instincts. The former are abandoned by transcendent insight, and the latter by peaceful quiescence.” Tsong Khapa’s *Collected Works* (TKSB), pha, f. 132a–b, as quoted in Thurman, *Essence*, 131–132. A full translation of the section is available in Thurman, *Life and Teachings of Tsong Khapa*, 108–185.

All the reasonings of the central way are factors of the eradication of the habit-pattern of misknowledge, the root of the life-cycle. Hence, having identified how our own unconscious misknowledge maintains its hold, we should strive to terminate it, and should not amuse ourselves with expertise in mere hair-splitting with other philosophers!<sup>44</sup>

Thus, those who assume the objectivist framework of modern critical scholarship are ill-equipped to interpret and translate Centrist works, since the dualistic reference frame they assume contains a hermeneutical bias toward mystical and skeptical misreadings, malignant views known to traditional scholars as the prime intellectual obstacles to a clear view of the Central Philosophy's intent and use.

#### 4. A Nondualistic Hermeneutic for the *Reason Sixty Commentary*

Given the general need for a nondualistic comparative framework for interpreting Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti's texts, we turn now to consider the particular importance of such a framework for translating the *Reason* and its *Commentary*. The special importance of a nondual reference frame for these texts follows from the key role they play in their authors' systems: formulating the Central Philosophy's critical nondualism as a self-corrective therapy for the reifying mental habit. Chandrakīrti's *Commentary* explains that this briefest of Nāgārjuna's works was of special interest to its author and tradition because of its technical focus on the "Centrist way" that "clears away dualistic extremes" that block the insight of relativity. Chandrakīrti starts his work by citing the liberative primacy of that insight to explain why the *Reason* is among the few works beside the *Wisdom* and *Jewel Rosary* for which Nāgārjuna wrote a dedication. Presumably, that technical primacy also explains why the *Reason* is the only text beside the *Wisdom* and its companions to receive Chandrakīrti's direct commentary, and why it is among the works of Nāgārjuna most often cited by other Centrist commentators. Given the tradition that Chandrakīrti's own *Introduction* is an indirect commentary on the *Jewel Rosary*,<sup>45</sup> Chandrakīrti's decision to

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<sup>44</sup> Thurman, *Essence*, 310.

<sup>45</sup> As elaborated in Gyatso, *Ocean of Nectar*.

comment on the *Reason* suggests he viewed it as occupying a key role alongside the masterpieces of wisdom and compassion, *Wisdom* and *Jewel Rosary*, as one of Nāgārjuna's three main works. But what precisely is the *Reason's* role, and how does it relate to those of the *Wisdom* and *Jewel Rosary*? The *Reason's* dedication suggests that its intent is methodological:

I bow to the Lord of Sages,  
Who proclaimed relativity,  
The way by which he abandoned  
[Real] creation and destruction! (YŚ, 0)

Given this image of Shākyamuni Buddha as a master sage and the traditional praise of his message of relativity (*rten 'brel*), Nāgārjuna's precise focus on liberative method might be anything from philosophical or psychological to anthropological. Comparing this with the dedicatory verses of the *Wisdom* and *Jewel Rosary* helps pinpoint Nāgārjuna's intent here, by defining the *Reason's* precise technical focus. First, consider this abridged version of the first two *Wisdom* verses:

I salute the Completely Enlightened One,  
That supreme philosopher,  
Who taught relativity,  
The quieting of fabrications that is peace!<sup>46</sup>

Here, in line with an image of Buddha as Completely Enlightened (*sambuddha*) and the epithet "supreme philosopher" (*vadatām varam*), relativity figures as the royal reason (*yukti-rājā\**) proving voidness, the critical means to that perfect clarity of mind that can only come from transcending the fabrications arising from reifying one's own binary mental constructs into intrinsic realities. In this light, the *Reason's* "Lord of Sages" is a relatively contemplative image, and the sense of relativity it embodies is that of a system of insight which frees one from the double-edged alienation

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<sup>46</sup> I omit the four line list of dualistic extremes whose exclusion defines the ultimate nature of relativity, "Free of extinction and creation; without annihilation and permanence; with no coming and no going; not a unity, nor a plurality" (MMK, 1.1–2), representing the main philosophical alternatives which will be targets of Nāgārjuna's critique in the *Wisdom*: *anīrodhamanutpādam-anuchedam-aśāsvatām anekārtham anānārtham-anāgamamanirgamam | yah pratītyasamutpādam prapañcopaśamam śivam | deśayāmāsa sambuddhastam vande vadatām varam ||*.

of reifying one's self and world as either a divine creation or a material accident. In this sense, the division of labor between the two texts may be viewed as one of theory versus practice, with the *Wisdom* covering the phase of cognitive enlightenment with its analytic therapy for worldviews (MMK, 8.8), and the *Reason* covering the second phase, the practical application of that analytic method to the contemplative task of developing enlightened self-knowledge. Thus, the *Reason's* aim is to apply Nāgārjuna's critical method as a cure for the misknowing human condition; its means is to use the nondual equation of relativity and voidness to revise the dualistic epistemologies of theism and materialism, as well as any subtly dualistic reification of the disease-cure dichotomy between the self-enclosed life-cycle (*samsāra*) and its extinction (*nirvāṇa*).

So, the role of the *Reason* among Nāgārjuna's major works can be understood as one of practical versus critical method. Its dedication is appropriate to this role. Another parameter of the *Reason's* focus on Centrist method emerges when we look further on the praxis side and compare its dedication with the opening dedication of Nāgārjuna's masterpiece on bodhisattva practice, the *Jewel Rosary*:

I bow to the Omniscient One,  
Who is free from all faults,  
And adorned with all qualities,  
The sole friend of all living beings!<sup>47</sup>

While this verse seems more soteriological than methodological, a closer look reveals the anthropology behind Nāgārjuna's buddhology. The traditional image of Buddha as omniscient, or perfectly objective (*sarvajñā*), condenses the praise due his person and his teaching, celebrating him for embodying the ideal of simultaneous realization of both the cognitive ideal of objectivity and the practical ideal of altruism. With it, Nāgārjuna introduces the *Jewel Rosary* as his treatment of that nondual practice of combined transcendence and ascendance (*niḥśreyasa-abhyudaya*) whose fruit is integration of a mind "faultless" in ultimate wisdom of voidness with a body fully "adorned" with conventional mastery of communicative art. This buddhological image of human evolutionary perfection is well suited to the third and last phase in the nondual methodology of Nāgārjuna's system, the

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<sup>47</sup> RA, 1.1.

enlightened performance (*bodhisādhana*) of voidness and compassion (*śūnyatā-karuṇā-garbha*), based on the therapeutic anthropology of internalizing an ideal model of enlightened agency via the art of relying on a healing guide (RA, 5.92). So, the *Jewel Rosary*'s role is to formulate the nondual performance that reproduces the agency of enlightened altruism, based on the nondual capacity to transcend the egocentric life-cycle while rising to divine heights as a God Beyond Gods (*Devātideva*), Sole Friend and Healer to all living beings (RA, 5.97).

Thus, a reading of the *Reason*'s dedication in the context of those of two of Nāgārjuna's other major works suggests that our text is located between his masterpieces on critical philosophy and practical methodology. The *Reason*'s place in his *oeuvre* is central since it puts the critique of the *Wisdom* into practice, reframing it as a self-analytic or self-corrective practice that clears the way for the nondual performance of objectivity and altruism formulated in the *Jewel Rosary*. In terms of the traditional threefold cultivation of wisdom—through learning, critical reflection, and meditation (*śruta-cintā-bhāvanā-mayī-prajñā*)—the practice of transcendent insight outlined in the *Reason* describes the reflective link between the *Wisdom*'s cognitive “solution” and the *Jewel Rosary*'s practical “performance” of wisdom and compassion.

Just as the *Reason* holds a pivotal place among Nāgārjuna's major texts, the *Commentary* is pivotal in relation to Chandrakīrti's theoretical and practical masterpieces, the *Lucid Exposition* and the *Introduction*. We can see this from the introductory verse to the *Commentary*:

Bowling to the author of the *Reason Sixty*  
Which dispels the two extremes,  
Following the Victor's path of reasoning,  
I will elucidate it with the Central Way. (YṢ, ad k. 0)

Chandrakīrti's dedication demonstrates his view of the *Reason*'s intent in four respects. First, it salutes Nāgārjuna for his liberative use of language, traditionally viewed as the ultimate tool for cultivating and communicating transcendent insight. Second, its substitution of “Victor” (*jina*) for Nāgārjuna's “Lord of Sages,” highlights the text's tone of confidence in the perfectibility of reason (*yukti*) in nondual objectivity, the mind's ultimate victory over cognitive bias and affective resistance. Third, the dedication places the *Reason* and its author as “following the Victor's path of reasoning,” defining the thrust of Nāgārjuna's text as a demonstration of



the Centrist method “which dispels the two extremes” by treating the reifying habit underlying them. Finally, its structure models the production of altruistic agency from the insight of nondual, immediate nirvāṇa, the aim of the contemplative path mapped in the text. Thus, Chandrakīrti’s verse presents the *Reason*’s author as embodying “the Victor’s path of reasoning,” just as Nāgārjuna’s verse praises “that Lord of Sages,” who for him personifies “the method that frees.” In fact, Chandrakīrti not only mirrors but extends the reproductive structure of the path to the objective knowledge of buddhahood, by offering himself to the reader as a product of the living tradition of Centrist philosophy, “I will elucidate it with the Central Way.”

By contrast, Chandrakīrti’s dedication to the *Lucid Exposition* depicts Nāgārjuna not as a model for those who seek to emulate the Victor’s path of selflessness (*anātmavāda*), but as a warrior champion (*mahāratha*) who clears the way by vanquishing the self-reifying views (*satkāyadṛṣṭi*) that block the path to self-transcendent wisdom:<sup>48</sup>

I bow to that Nāgārjuna,  
 Who took birth in the ocean of the genius of buddhas,  
 And lived to extinguish dualistic extremes,  
 Empathically sharing his own realization  
 From the depths of the treasury of Excellent Teaching;  
 Whose blaze of vision consumes others’ views  
 Burning away the gloom from their minds.  
 Matchless in wisdom, the showering arrows of his words  
 Vanquish the whole hostile army of [egocentric] existence,

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<sup>48</sup> Chandrakīrti’s *Commentary* identifies the six main schools of Indian thought whose dualistic extremes Nāgārjuna critiqued, suggesting that a critical familiarity with these is part of the intellectual culture assumed by the author of the *Reason*. “Those who wish to travel to the city of nirvāṇa by abandoning all the claims of realists, theists and others as to the creation and destruction of life through intrinsic reality, a Creator, nature, spirit, time, God, and so on, yet are handicapped by error through misperceiving the two realities [ultimate and superficial], will not be able for a very long time to reach that city of nirvāṇa whose nature is the termination of cyclic life” (YŚV, ad k. 0). For a treatment of India’s orthodox six perspectives (*ṣaḍdarśana*), see Raju’s *Philosophical Traditions of India* (1971); for the perspective of Tibetan traditions on these views, see Thurman, *Essence*, 13–17.

And win him glorious dominion over all three realms  
Of this world to be civilized, along with its gods.<sup>49</sup>

There is no mistaking this brilliant icon of the triumph of complete philosophical clarity. Chandrakīrti depicts his master's insight into relativity as the sun rising from the ocean of Buddha's genius, burning the self-drawn veils from the minds of those who take their own objectivist or subjectivist constructs for reality itself, "civilizing" with his words the self-limiting narcissism both of humans and their gods, as the sun's rays dispel all shadows from the face of the planet. By comparison, the *Reason Sixty Commentary's* dedication portrays Nāgārjuna not as Champion in the war with the gods of egocentric resistance, "the hostile army of existence," but as the paragon of Centrist method, a model for the sustenance and guidance of all those who would follow in the footsteps of the Victor's self-analysis. In this, it is consistent with Nāgārjuna's dedication to the *Reason*, which gives us Buddha not as Supreme Philosopher, but as that Lord of Sages who personifies the relativity insight.

Thus, as the *Reason* clears the contemplative way to the final nondual practice of the *Jewel Rosary*, Chandrakīrti's *Commentary* offers a transition from the critical hermeneutics of the *Lucid Exposition* to the altruistic anthropology celebrated in the dedication to his *Introduction*:

I salute those who develop compassion for beings  
Who revolve helpless as buckets in a water-wheel,  
Coming to insist on a self, once they say "I,"  
Growing addicted to things, saying "This is mine."<sup>50</sup>

Once the *Reason* and its *Commentary* are placed in the context of their authors' main works, their focus can be suggestively defined as follows:

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<sup>49</sup> PPMMV, ed. Vaidya, 1: *yo antadvayāvāsavidhūtavāsah sambuddhadhbīsāgaralabhdajanma / saddharmatoyasya gambhīrabhāvaṃ yathānubuddhaṃ kṛpāyā jagāda / yasya darśanatejāmsi paravādimatendhāngam / dabantyaḍhyāpi lokasya manasāni tamāmsi ca // yasya asamajñāvacah-śaraughā nighnanti niḥśeṣabhāvārisenam / tridhāturājyaśriyam adadhāna vineyalokasya sadevakasya // Nāgārjunāya praṇipatyā tasmai //*

<sup>50</sup> MA, 1.3: *dang por nga zhes bdag la zhen gyur zhing // bdag gi 'di zhes dngos la chags bskeyed pa // zo chun 'phyan tar rang dbang med pa yi // 'gro la snying rjer gyur gang de la 'dud //*

<b>Discipline</b>	Philosophy	Contemplation	Ethics
<b>Canon</b>	Abhidharma	Sūtra	Vinaya
<b>Root Text</b>	MMK	YṢ	RA
<b>Comments</b>	PPMMV	YṢV	MA

Table 1: Nāgārjuna’s and Chandrakīrti’s Works in Context

Since the *Reason*’s focus is on the self-corrective “path of reason” that leads from the intellectual analysis of worldview to the nondual performance of enlightened altruism, its internal structure can be mapped into three steps, corresponding to the three developmental stages of cognitive-affective-behavioral self-transcendence. The three steps on this core path of relativistic self-correction are intellectual, reflective, and meditative. First, relativistic reason is linked with cognitive self-correction, aligned with the purely negative, dereifying insight of voidness that overcomes cognitive biases that block objectivity or omniscience. Next, relativistic reason is linked with affective self-correction, aligned with the deobjectifying insight that overcomes emotional resistances to objective self-knowledge. Third, relativistic reason is linked with behavioral self-correction, emerging from meditative integration of the nondual, dereifying insight that culminates in unbiased objectivity and unconditional altruism, the cognitive-practical ideal of enlightened altruistic agency. In what follows, I will briefly survey the argument of the *Reason* and its *Commentary* in light of these three self-corrective steps toward an enlightened social epistemological agency.

1) The *Reason* begins by introducing relativity, the epitome of Buddhist teaching, as transcending the grasp of dualistic constructs (*astināstivyatikrānta*) (YṢ, 1). With its subject clear, it defines as its audience the overly-realistic adherents of the Buddhist Analyst and Traditionist (*Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika*) schools, who reject nihilism but are still prone to absolutism (*astitā*) (YṢ, 2). In the following verses, Nāgārjuna defines the thrust of his *Reason* (*yukti*) in terms of a rational insight (*darśana*) which penetrates reified views of creation or destruction, *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa*, as absolute “being or nothingness” (YṢ, 3–9). Such realistic insight or precise intuition (*samyagjñāna*), the cure for misknowledge (*avidyā*) (YṢ, 10) and [extremist] worldviews (*dr̥ṣṭi*) (YṢ, 17), is then defined as the immediate nirvāṇa state (*dr̥ṣṭadharmanirvāṇa*), that purely negative finding (YṢ, 11–12; 25–27) which frees the noble (*ārya*) and the skilled (*paṇḍita*) (YṢ, 28–29).

2) Having defined the ultimate, dereifying mode of transcendent insight, Nāgārjuna turns to define its relative, virtual mode as the source of emotional self-mastery (YṢ, 29); of the empathic use of conventional constructs (*vyāvahārikavikalpa*) to communicate insight (YṢ, 30–38); and of freedom from self-deceptive views (*dyṣṭi*) and biases (*doṣa*) that come of reifying illusory social constructs (YṢ, 40–45).

3) Finally, the author goes on to define these nondual insight modes as the cure for the process of obsession and conflict (*parigrahavivādādikrama*) (YṢ, 49), the door to the impartial, great soul (*apakṣika-mahātma*\*) (YṢ, 50), and the wisdom-insight eye (*jñāna-cakṣuḥ*) (YṢ, 54) which frees individuals from the trap of [false] objects (*viśaya-pañjara*) (YṢ, 53–56), allowing them to transcend dualistic constructs (YṢ, 57–58) and so cross the ocean of intolerable existence (*tīvrabhāvārṇava*) (YṢ, 59).

As for Chandrakīrti's *Commentary*, its argument faithfully follows the threefold structure of the *Reason*, critiquing the subtle epistemological rationalizations of the reifying habit current among his contemporaries. It elucidates the intermediate steps in Nāgārjuna's argument and refines his conventionalist methodology, appealing to everyday language to arrive at distinctive Dialecticist formulations of the key points. The following celebrated passages formulate each of the three steps.

First, Chandrakīrti describes the pure non-finding of ultimate dereifying insight as an intuitive non-perception, as already mentioned above.<sup>51</sup>

Second, Chandrakīrti describes transcendent insight by expanding on Nāgārjuna's simile of the virtual person (*māyā-puruṣa*\*) in YṢ, 16:

Conditioned by a magician's spell, young women appear as well trained performers, exquisite in form and movement, with an elegant manner. Captivating with their consummate skill in seduction, they will be a source of intense pleasure like a real mate for those who are addicted to desire and ignorant of their nature. But the magician, who knows that their nature lacks any intrinsic reality that corresponds to the fantasies of the ignorant, will recognize their appearance as

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<sup>51</sup> See p. 34 n. 37 above, and YṢV, ad k. 8.

an unreal illusion and hence have no such confused conception of it.<sup>52</sup>

Third, Chandrakīrti describes how the nondual practice of transcendent insight empowers the liberated self to develop the unbiased agency of an enlightened altruist:

A child, not understanding mundane activities, his awareness stupefied with intrinsic realities, sees a mirror image, holds it to be a real thing, and can fall in love with it and play with it however he can. In just that way, naïve persons, endowed with misknowledge created by the force of their delusions, are mentally, verbally, and physically obsessed with arguing about [intrinsically] real things, insisting on “this” or “that.” They are helplessly seduced by desire, anger, pride, and the other [addictions]. And, not knowing the nature of cyclic life, they are completely trapped in its thicket, whatever they try to do. Such people are objects of loving concern for the noble ones. For they, having opened their wisdom eyes, can see reality as it truly is. (YŚV, ad k. 53)

An intriguing parallel to this threefold argument of the *Reason* and its *Commentary* can be found in the opposites of the three false views about transcendent insight addressed by Tsong Khapa: 1) rational insight does put a stop to perceptions controlled by reified verbal constructs in forms like “this is it”; 2) before one perfects actual insight one may use simulated negative and illusion-like insights to break egocentric mental habits and cultivate altruistic ones;<sup>53</sup> 3) the realization of genuine insight frees one to develop genuine empathy and maintain an altruistic intentionality through all one’s acts.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See YŚV, ad k. 16.

<sup>53</sup> This distinction between simulated (*rjes su mthun pa*) and actual (*dnegos*) forms of transcendent insight (*lhag mthong*) may be traced to Prajñākaramati’s distinction between causal wisdom (*hetubhūtaprajñā*) and fruitional wisdom (*phalabhūtaprajñā*). See Vaidya, ed., *Bodhicaryāvatāra[pañjikā]*, 349.

<sup>54</sup> See Thurman, *Essence*, 168–172, 342–43.

### III. Self-Correction in the Reason Sixty Commentary

#### 1. A Comparative Philosophical Framework for Therapeutic Self-Correction

A therapeutic philosophy is a philosophy meant to define and treat ignorance as an illness, rather than to advance one worldview against opposing views. From the Buddha's first teaching of four noble truths, the basic framework of Buddhist thought and practice was to expose and end the misknowledge that conditions human suffering, by diagnosing the delusional self-habit (*ātmagraha*) it supports, and extinguishing it with the philosophy of selflessness (*anātmavāda*). The Central Philosophy of Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti is no exception to the Buddha's therapeutic teaching; its basic framework of two realities, resolved in the equation of relativity (*pratītyasamutpāda*) with voidness (*śūnyatā*), must be understood not as a formula of causality or deconstruction, but as further clarifying the symptoms, origin, treatment and cure of the self-habit. The essence of its clarification is the Dialecticist definition of delusions of "self" as any concepts or percepts of intrinsic reality (*svabhāva*), intrinsic identity (*svalakṣaṇa*) or intrinsic objectivity (*svarūpa*). For Nāgārjuna, according to Chandrakīrti, it is the instinctive reification (*adhyāropa*) of such delusive "selfhood" in persons or things which is the root of misknowledge; and it is this addictive, compulsive self-habit that must gradually be exposed and corrected by the self-analytic wisdom of voidness. Thus, Nāgārjuna's *Reason* says:

Those who insist on a non-relative  
"Self" or "world"—Alas!  
They are deprived by addictive views  
Such as absolutism and nihilism. (YṢ, 43)

And his "Analysis of Self" in the *Wisdom* concludes: "Since what exists in relation to anything can in no way be identical to that thing nor distinct from it, any such [self which relates to mind-body aggregates] is neither eternal nor annihilated" (MMK, 18.10).<sup>1</sup> Chandrakīrti refines the equation in a famous formulation of the voidness of self in persons and things:

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<sup>1</sup> MMK, 18.10: *pratītya yad yadbhavati na hi tāvattadeva tat || na cānyadapi tasmānnocchin-  
nam nāpi śāsvatam ||*.

As for “self,” it is a reality or substance of things that does not relate to anything else. As it does not exist, there is selflessness. That again is understood as twofold because of the distinction between persons and things; namely personal selflessness and objective selflessness.<sup>2</sup>

Although modern Western philosophy after Descartes became increasingly critical of the permanent, substantial matter and soul (*anima*) of scholastic thought, from the Centrist perspective it remained uncritically tied to egocentrist notions of non-relational subjects and objects. Thus, Kant’s residual reification of a transcendent ego and things in themselves was replaced only by Nietzsche with a critical relativism comparable to Nāgārjuna’s: “That the world is a unity neither as spirit nor as sensorium, that alone is the great liberation!”<sup>3</sup> Given Nietzsche’s philological methods and insights, Kant’s egocentrist categories of experience could finally be exposed and treated as delusions of ego-substance (*ich-substanz* = *svabhāva*) traced to reified linguistic constructions:

We are constantly led astray by words and concepts, and are induced to think of things as other than they are: as autonomous, indivisible, existing in the absolute. A philosophical mythology lies hidden in language.... It is language which sees everywhere deed and doer; this which believes in the “ego” as being, in the “ego” as substance, and which projects its belief in ego substance on to all things—only thus does it create the concept “thing.” Being is everywhere foisted on us as cause; it is only from the conception “ego” that there follows derivatively the concept “being.”... Today we know it is merely a word.<sup>4</sup>

Although Nietzsche’s philosophy is generally associated with his ideas of transcendence (*ubergangung*) and cultivation (*erzeugung*), its therapeutic thrust is clear in his prophecy that psychology will displace metaphysics as “Queen of the Sciences,” a prophecy partly fulfilled in the “talking therapy”

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<sup>2</sup> CŚT, 12, ad k.13; C, ya, 29a6ff. Translation from Thurman, *Essence*, 298.

<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 37–38.

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 38, elisions mine.

which his and Goethe's philosophies inspired in Freud. A philosophically educated neurobiologist who sought "a middle way between philosophy and medicine," Freud saw his prime contribution as the analytic insight that stopped egocentric delusions of a fixed, independent self:

Normally there is nothing we are more certain of than the feeling of our self, our own ego. It seems to us an independent and unitary thing, clearly distinguished from everything else. That this is a deceptive appearance, that on the contrary the ego...serves as a kind of facade...was first discovered by psychoanalysis. The universal narcissism of men...has suffered three blows from...science; and this [after Copernicus and Darwin's]...was probably the most wounding.<sup>5</sup>

Yet despite this basic non-egocentrist thrust, Freud's reliance on a neo-Kantian philosophical method left the "metapsychological" framework of his insight therapy burdened with reifications, especially of the key concept of an unconscious mind, later identified with the structural agency he fashioned after Nietzsche's "It."<sup>6</sup> While subsequent schools have done much to dereify and critically revise Freud's framework, much as the later therapeutic philosophies of Buddhism, the Traditionist, Idealist, and Centrist schools, dereified and revised the scientific teaching of the classical Analysts, psychoanalytic thought has not yet reached the level of critical refinement of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein.<sup>7</sup> Thus, while the non-egocentrist philoso-

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<sup>5</sup> Freud, *Standard Edition*, 21: 74; *Standard Edition*, 17: 137, brackets added.

<sup>6</sup> The *loci classici* for Freud's development of these concepts, drawn from the philosophies of German Idealism, are his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900, *Standard Edition*, V), his paper on "The Unconscious" (1915), and *The Ego and the Id* (1923). For a review of their origins and development from a contemporary hermeneutical-phenomenological perspective, see Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (1970).

<sup>7</sup> Considering the cultural-historical distance involved, the parallels are remarkable in a comparison of the false "self-object constructs" analyzed by various schools of psychoanalytic and Buddhist insight. Although the Analysts (*Vaibhāṣika*) assert no "subconscious mind" (*ālaya-vijñāna*), they use their "table of elements" (*dharmasamāketa*) as a grid for self-analytic insight much as classical Freudian analysts use the structural model; Traditionists (*Sautrāntika*) use the same grid, but dereify the elements and stress their relationality, much as object-relations theorists do with the metapsychology; the Idealists (*Cittamātra*), or Experientialists (*Yogācāra*) accept a subconscious mind, and focus on its "transformation" (*parāvṛtti*) by analyzing the reified dichotomy of inner self and outer object, much as do the Jungian, gestalt and humanis-

(cont'd)



phies of Nietzsche and Freud provide a matching context for cross-cultural comparison with the therapeutic philosophy of Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti, they do not provide a complete comparative framework. What Nietzsche lacks in therapeutic methodology, Freud and his heirs lack in philosophical methodology. Since Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language refines both Nietzsche's language-based philosophical method and Freud's language-based therapeutic method, the non-egocentrist ideas and techniques presented in his later works are well suited to a comparative framework for Dialecticist Centrism. Before outlining such a framework, however, it is important to realize that it does not stop with comparing the language-therapies of Chandrakīrti and Wittgenstein, but rather uses that comparison as a frame of cross-cultural reference from which the full range of applications of Dialecticist thought can be compared with the analogous applications of ordinary language philosophy in the West. We have already alluded to some of these by implicitly comparing the application of Centrist methods in Buddhist anthropology and scientific method with Thomas Nagel's general theory of objective self-knowledge. It is also possible to extend the analogy to compare the role Centrist self-corrective methods played in the Buddhist traditions of human science of mind (*adhyātma-vidyā*) with the role language philosophy has played in the cognitive therapies and cognitive sciences.

I will here present the basic comparative framework. That presentation must be threefold, since in order to effectively translate the *Reason* and

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tic schools; the Dogmaticist Centrists (*Svātantrika-Mādhyamika*) are divided in their stance on the subconscious mind but all the more critical of the reification of self-object constructs as having any non-relational, non-socially-constructed status, much as the most recent Kohutian hermeneutical and intersubjective schools; the Dialecticist Centrists (*Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika*), including Nāgārjuna as understood by Chandrakīrti, reject the subconscious as equivalent to a reified soul or God that evolves, and reject any construct of an intrinsically real or identifiable self or element, accepting persons and things only as "mere linguistic usages" (*upādāya-prajñāptimātra*) "based only on unexamined assent" (*avicāryamānasiddha*) to linguistic "conventions" (*vyavahāra*). Since no modern Western philosophical psychology but Wittgenstein's defines the false and true self in a comparable way, our comparative framework must center on Wittgenstein.

For critical views of the schools of psychoanalysis, see Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (1983); Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology* (1977); Stolorow and Atwood, *Contexts of Being: The Intersubjective Foundations of Psychological Life* (1992); and Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth* (1982).

its *Commentary*, our comparative framework will need to relate the concepts and terminology of Nāgārjuna, Chandrakīrti, and Wittgenstein in three key areas, corresponding to the three main aspects of Dialecticist contemplative method and the three perceptual habits defined by Tsong Khapa. The three aspects are: 1) defining relativity as the reason for negating intrinsically real, identifiable, or objective subjects and objects, and hence, as the conventional ground for a form of self-corrective analysis, the ultimate logical conclusion of which is the dereifying voidness insight; 2) defining relativity as the psycholinguistic process sustaining human subjects and objects as working consensual fictions, and hence, as the conventional ground for a form of self-corrective thinking and acting whose unexamined premise is the voidness-relativity insight; and 3) defining these nondual modes of self-transcendent insight as the critical and practical conditions for responsible social knowledge and communication, and hence, as the conventional ground for a self-corrective anthropology aimed at reproducing free and responsible social agents.

## 2. Dereification and Self-Correction in Chandrakīrti and Wittgenstein

Although the self-habit in its natural (*sahaja*), instinctive form is the root of misknowledge and all its ills, the first step in its treatment in most human beings must be the analysis of the self-reifying views (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*) that are its highest level of defense, and the worldview-habit (*dr̥ṣṭigrāha*) or reality-habit (*satyagrāha*) of objectification (*ālambanagrāha*) or reification (*adhyāropa*) underlying them. Since the crux of these views and the resistance to objective truth they maintain consists in reified subjective constructs of identity and reality, non-egocentrist philosophers are especially concerned with treating the reification of such constructs. Thus, the *Reason* is concerned with egocentrist views that stem from the habit of absolutism (*astivāda*) (YŚ, 2–3, 40), which Nāgārjuna defines as the presumptive commitment to intrinsic things (*bhāvābhyupagama*) (YŚ, 46–47) that reifies the forms of language into substances:

When “this” or “that” [appears a fact],  
 Yet when analyzed is not perceived,  
 What wise person would advocate with arguments  
 That “this” or “that” is [really] true? (YŚ, 42)

Once they commit to [intrinsic] things,  
 They are trapped in painful malignant views  
 Which produce attachment and aversion,  
 And the disputes that spring from them. (YṢ, 46)

Chandrakīrti's *Commentary* elsewhere underscores the point:

Thus, alienated beings are deceived by their own minds from their insistence upon [a being in] things. Since this insistence on [a being in] things is constructed by their own minds, even though such things are not established with intrinsic objectivity, their insight into the suchness of things is obstructed, and through mistaken reification [of intrinsic realities in things], their own minds deceive them, that is to say, [they become] deluded. (YṢV, ad k. 24)<sup>8</sup>

And Wittgenstein: “We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it.” (BBB, 1)

These philosophers' critique of the habit of reifying language has led some to compare them with contemporary deconstructionists.<sup>9</sup> But unlike some deconstructionists, they prove themselves to be non-subjectivist, or rather non-egocentrist, by their therapeutic focus on the reification of the language of personal identity and reality, centered on the substantive pronouns “I” and “mine.” Thus, the *Reason* narrows its focus on reification to highlight self-centered views that come from reifying constructs of “myself” and “my world”:

Those who insist on a non-relative  
 “Self” or “world”—Alas!  
 They are deprived by views  
 Such as absolutism and nihilism. (YṢ, 43)

Chandrakīrti's *Commentary* explains:

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<sup>8</sup> Cp. MA, 6.117: *so so'i skye bo rnam ni rtog pas bcing ll mi rtog rnal 'byor pa ni grol 'gyur bas ll* “Egocentric individuals are bound by their own constructions; non-conceptual practitioners are freed.”

<sup>9</sup> See Fenner, *Ontology*; and especially Huntington, *Emptiness*.

Those who do not designate “the self” in dependence on the five aggregates—which are devoid of intrinsic reality just like mirror reflections—but rather, locate “the self” in an intrinsically identifiable mind, will no doubt be swept far from the road to nirvāṇa and carried away by the stream of world-views.

Why is that? Now, if one asserts the objectively real status of mind, it must be either permanent or impermanent. If it is permanent, then one is an eternalist. Alternatively, if [one asserts] its impermanence, then one is a nihilist, since the nihilistic view is that something [once] emerged can [then] become a nothing. Thus, “Alas! They are deprived by views.” The word “alas” should be known as an exclamation of either regret or certainty. Likewise, if [instead of an intrinsically identifiable mind] one claims the five aggregates—known as “the world”—to be intrinsically identifiably established, similar problems apply. (YṢV, ad k. 43)<sup>10</sup>

In the modern West, most Wittgenstein scholars agree that the prime focus and contribution of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is the treatment of solipsism offered in his critique of the language of private experience, especially in his *Investigations*:<sup>11</sup>

The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language...are deep disquietudes.... (PI, §111)

The philosopher’s treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness.... (PI, §255)

You have a new conception and interpreted it as seeing a new object. You interpret a grammatical movement made by

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<sup>10</sup> Cp. MA, 6.120: *nyon mongs skyon rnams ma lus ’jig tshogs la || lta bas byung bar blo yis mthong gyur zhing || bdag ni ’di yi yul du rtogs byas nas || rnal ’byor pa yis bdag ni ’gog par byed ||*. “Having come to the intellectual insight that the illnesses of addictions develop from egocentric views, and since the self is constructed as the object of these [views], practitioners [of insight] work to negate [reified constructs of] the self.”

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Morick, *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds* (1967); Kenny, *Wittgenstein and his Times* (1982); Hacker, “The Refutation of Solipsism” (1986).

yourself as a quasi-physical object which you are observing.... (PI, §401)

“I” is not the name of a person, nor “here” the name of a place, and “this” is not a name.... (PI, §410)

[A] whole cloud of philosophy condensed into a drop of grammar. (PI, II, 222)

Given the clear cross-cultural parallel in our non-egocentrists’ diagnoses of the linguistic self-habit and its underlying structure of reification, we turn to examine whether that parallel extends to the aims and methods of their therapeutic analysis. First, one finds a clear parallel between the general statements of aim and method in the *Reason* and *Commentary* and those in Wittgenstein’s later work. The essence of non-egocentrist therapeutic strategy is to communicate a rational insight that remedies the habit of reifying the language of experience, by exposing the relativity of words and their referents, especially of “I” and “mine,” and the persons and things they designate. The *Reason* uses the metaphor of visual perception to define the aim of realistic insight (*samyagjñāna*) (YŚ, 10), and the method of seeing relativity (*pratītyasamutpāda-darśana*\*) (YŚ, 48), or of simply seeing (*darśana*) (YŚ, 5, 11, 25, 54). It develops the metaphor by defining intelligence or mind (*buddhi*, Tib. *blo gros*) as the organ of insight, speaking of seeing with the intellect (*blo yis mthong ba*) (YŚ, 17) and seeing with the eye of intuitive wisdom (*ye shes kyi mig gis mthong*) (YŚ, 54). Chandrakīrti’s *Commentary* defines genuine insight as the remedy for “whose intellectual eye is blinded having been covered by the cataract of misknowledge” (ad k. 29), and, as often in his *Lucid Exposition* and *Introduction*, also speaks of the intellectual eye as diseased by egocentric views, and healed only by the salve of the voidness insight applied with the method of the reason of relativity.<sup>12</sup> By showing the pervasive relatedness of things, this method trains realistic insight to see through things’ deceptive superficial reality (*mṛśasamvṛtisatya*)

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<sup>12</sup> MA, 6.115: *gang phyir dngos po rten nas rab ’byung nas ll rtog pa ’di dag rtag par mi nus pa ll de’i phyir rten ’byung rigs pa ’di yis ni ll la ngan dra ba mtha’ dag gcod par byed ll.*

to their profound ultimate reality (*tattva*).<sup>13</sup> In the West, Wittgenstein defines his therapeutic aim and method in similar terms:

A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words.... A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connexions’.... It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things. (PI, §122)

The aspects of things which are most important for us are hidden.... (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one’s eyes.)... [W]e fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful. (PI, §129)

For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear. The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question.—Instead, we now demonstrate a method, by examples.... There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies. (PI, §133)

The cross-cultural parallel in diagnoses we saw in comparing these three non-egocentrist philosophers extends to their general aims and methods, as well. Remarkably enough, the parallel remains consistent with more detailed comparison of the means and ultimate end of their respective de-reifying insights. When we compare the style of these philosophers’ critical analyses of the reified “I” and “mine,” we find a striking similarity in the line of reasoning they prescribe, as well as in the negative insight that is their logical conclusion. One way to further the comparison is to follow the concise fourfold logical structure in which the contemplative practice of ultimacy-analysis (*paramāṛthavicāra*\*) is framed to this day in the Tibetan

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. MA, 6.23: *dn̄gos kun yang dag rdzun pa mthong pa yis ll dn̄gos rnyed ngo bo gnyis ni ’dzin par ’gyur ll yang dag mthong yul gang la de nyid du ll mthong ba brdzun pa kun rdzob bden par gsungs ll.*

tradition. This structure is that of a pure or exclusion negation (*prasajya-pratiṣedha*) proving things' voidness of intrinsically identifiable reality without implying anything else. In contrast to an implicative negation (*paryudāsa-pratiṣedha*), such an exclusion negation implies no other thesis, but simply rules out the logical possibility that things are intrinsically identifiable or intrinsically real, as they appear to the reifying and objectifying mental habits.<sup>14</sup> In the Gelukpa tradition, this concise mode of analysis is taught in four steps or “keys” (*gnad bzhi*), although it may be abbreviated further to three, as we shall see below. Since the expanded modes—from the six-key tetralemma of Nāgārjuna's *Wisdom* 1, to the nine-key chariot-like analysis in Chandrakīrti's *Introduction* 6—assume the same basic logical form, we refer the reader to more extensive treatments elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> For the purposes of this comparison, the four keys may be defined as follows: 1) identifying the false self-habit to be analyzed; 2) committing oneself to the binary linguistic conventions of rational analysis; 3) seeing the absurdity of absolute unity; 4) seeing the absurdity of absolute diversity.

### 3. The Language of Objective Self-Correction: Mapping the Four Keys onto the *Reason Sixty*

#### 3a. Targeting the False Self

The first step in the investigations of non-egocentrist philosophers is the clear identification of what is to be analyzed, comparable to the precise diagnosis of the illness to be treated. Thus, the analyses themselves begin by simply focusing on objectified constructs of subject or object as self-sufficient or self-evident, with the aim of exposing these as forms of self-deception, the result of reification of linguistic constructs of “I” and “mine.” After defining the *Reason*'s larger focus on absolutistic views of the self-enclosed life-cycle (*saṃsāra*) and its extinction (*nirvāṇa*), Nāgārjuna

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<sup>14</sup> Traditional examples of the implicative and exclusion negation, respectively, are “This man is not a Brahmin,” which implies that he belongs to another caste, and “Brahmins should not drink beer,” which indicates what they should not drink (thereby “excluding” beer) but does not imply what they should drink.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed discussion of these and other reasoning patterns, see Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, and Thurman, *Essence*.

highlights the target of his analysis, the way such views subtly obstruct the contemplative insight of relativity:

If, after that insight into the truth,  
 One discovers any particular here,  
 Imagining any sort of creation,  
 In anything, however subtle,  
 Such an unwise individual  
 Does not see the meaning of “conditioned arisal.” (YṢ, 11cd–12)

Later, he identifies the objectified constructs he is targeting as reifications of the technical terms that frame the Buddhist analysis of selflessness, comparing the psychophysical aggregates (*skandha*), experiential media (*āyātana*) and elements (*dhātu*) to the mundane conventional expressions “I” and “mine”:

Just as the Victors say “I”  
 And “mine” for a useful purpose,  
 So they speak of “aggregates,” “media,”  
 And “elements” for a useful purpose. (YṢ, 33).

Finally, Nāgārjuna pinpoints the egocentrist habit of reifying “I” and “mine,” “self” and “world,” highlighting such linguistic truth-habits as the target for non-egocentrist analysis, the cognitive crux of maladaptive views, and hence all the addictions and conflicts they foster. To quote again:

Those who insist on a non-relative  
 “Self” or “world”—Alas!  
 They are deprived by views  
 Such as absolutism and nihilism. (YṢ, 43).

Chandrakīrti’s elucidation of this verse in the *Commentary* defines the subject to be analyzed in terms quite consistent with Nāgārjuna’s. Chandrakīrti’s comment on another verse (YṢ, 24) is also relevant in this context:

Those who insist upon an enduring self in things, whether they maintain a real [personal] self or a self in things, are those “who hold self [as] real,” since, by maintaining a self, they perceive it. Alternatively, by being conceptually attached to things, they hold things as selves; and since they conceptually develop the failing of being mistaken with regard to



being and nothingness, they fall under the influence of addictions. (YṢV, ad k. 24)

Later, Chandrakīrti will return to describe the illness of reification to be treated again, making more explicit the fact that the target of contemplative analysis is in fact reified linguistic convention: “A child, not understanding mundane conventions, his awareness stupefied with intrinsic realities, sees a mirror image, holds it to be a real thing, and can fall in love with it and play with it however he can” (YṢV, ad k. 53). The linguistic nature of the reified conventional constructs he targets is underlined by the following key verse from his *Introduction*: “The referent of beings’ constantly arising mental habit of ‘I,’ in relation to which they develop the mental habit of ‘mine,’ is the ‘self’; it comes from delusion, which designates it without examination.”<sup>16</sup>

As for Wittgenstein, the analysis of language-independent facts or “simple objects” (PI, §46) in the opening of the *Investigations* only serves to introduce the subject that is the main target of the analysis of his later work: the egocentrist conception of logically “private” subjects and objects, the supposedly self-sufficient and self-evident “givens” of personal experience, of which the identity and reality are assumed prior to the mundane conventions of language. Wittgenstein gradually sharpens the focus of his *Investigations* to highlight the mental habit which insists on reifying such egocentrist constructions, expressed by the anonymous opponent many consider the ghost of his own early philosophy:

A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably. (PI, §115)

When philosophers use a word—“knowledge”, “being”, “object”, “I”, “proposition”, “name”—and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? (PI, §116)

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<sup>16</sup> MA, 6.164: *gang la rtag tu 'gro rnams ngar 'dzin blo || rab tu 'byung zhing de yi gang yin der || nga yir 'dzin blo 'byung ba'i bdag de ni || ma brtags brtags par gi mug las yin no ||*.

“But when I imagine something, or even actually *see* objects, I have *got* something which my neighbour has not.”—I understand you. You want to look about you and say: “At any rate only I have got THIS.”—What are these words for? They serve no purpose. (PI, §398)

You interpret a grammatical movement made by yourself as a quasi-physical phenomenon you are perceiving. (PI, §401)

You think that after all you must be weaving a piece of cloth: because you are sitting at a loom—even if it is empty—and going through the motions of weaving. (PI, §414)

The similarity in critical texture and intent here is all the more remarkable given our preconception that vast cultural and historical gulfs separate Nāgārjuna, Chandrakīrti, and Wittgenstein. In this sense, the inevitable differences that earmark their writings as belonging to distinct intellectual historical milieus serve only to emphasize a resemblance that marks the universality of their therapeutic purpose. As therapeutic non-egocentrists, these three philosophers concern themselves less with the differentia of cultural conventions than with the generic variety of self-deception that makes any convention limiting to individuals in any world: the reification of linguistic constructs that lets the naïve (*bāla*) rationalize the innate habit of egocentrism. Thus, for the non-egocentrist, philosophy begins with the recognition of a problem that is endemic to the life-cycle (*samsāra*), in any form of life (PI, §241); and its precise recognition is as crucial to the outcome of analysis as a proper diagnosis is to medical treatment. For if the kind or degree of reality falsely attributed to “the self” is either understated or overstated, the result of the analysis will be to leave unanalyzed a residual resistance to treatment, an absolutistic or nihilistic obstruction to the insight of relativity, to “seeing connexions.”

As for the precise measure of their subject, the fact that these three philosophers agree in recognizing all habits of mind and action consistent with concepts of unrelated being or essence as forms of the solipsistic or subjectivist habit makes it clear that their prime target is nothing less than the illness of self-deception at the core of all egocentric life. The fact that they agree in targeting their analyses at the use of pronouns like “I” and “mine” makes it clear that the subject they examine is nothing more mysterious than the misuse of the everyday language of personal experience.

### 3b. Committing to Commonsense

The second key aspect of the language of self-correction in Nāgārjuna, Chandrakīrti, and Wittgenstein raises the complex issue of the place of discursive reason in their philosophies. Despite the persistence and refinement of the skeptical and mystical readings of these philosophers, their mature work is characterized by the clear conviction that the rational conventions of everyday language are the gold standard by which all knowledge and communication, mundane and transcendent, must be judged. Thus, these philosophers unequivocally state that the linguistic conventions of reason (*yukti*) are a perfectly adequate means to realize and convey relative and ultimate truths; and they also can be articulated as the formal validating cognitions (*pramāṇa*) that include perception, tradition, and inference.

In the *Reason*, Nāgārjuna's therapeutic alignment of insight with voidness, and self-deception with reified constructs, is supported by a methodological alignment of insight with critical intellect, and method with all other sources of knowledge:

One whose intellect sees existence  
As similar to an illusion or mirage,  
Is not deceived by [extremist] views  
Of an ultimate beginning or end. (YŚ, 17)

Critical intellect sees through the authority of tradition and consensus:

What is proclaimed as the truth in this world  
By Brahmā [the Creator] and the others,  
Was declared “false” for the noble ones.  
What else remains that is otherwise? (YŚ, 28)

And critical intellect is also definitive in interpreting received tradition:

[The Victors] speak of “aggregates,” “media,”  
And “elements” for a useful purpose.  
  
[Things first] proclaimed, such as primary elements,  
Then are incorporated into consciousness.  
Since knowing that, you break free [of them],  
Are they not unreal constructions? (YŚ, 33cd–34)

What is it about intellectual insight that makes it definitive and unequivocal in Nāgārjuna’s eyes? Nāgārjuna makes his views on this complex issue clear in three of the key methodological pronouncements of the *Wisdom*. The first of these is the often misunderstood statement that the ultimate scope of mind is determined by the medium of language: “The range of mind ends where the verbalizable (*abhidhātavya*) ends.” (MMK, 18.7)<sup>17</sup> That Nāgārjuna defines the scope of the mental faculty in terms of language shows the traditional Centrist stance, contra that of Buddhist logicians, that nondiscursive perception (*pratyakṣa*) and discursive inference (*anumāna*) may share the same object, and is consistent with Chandrakīrti’s claim that they may be conflated (*samplava*). This is especially clear in modes of mental perception (*mānasapratyakṣa*) like realistic insight (*samyagjñāna*), in which reason breaks free of “unreal constructions” (*mithyāvikalpa*) and corrects falsely objectified, dualistic intuitions of the senses. In this sense, the intellectual eye (*buddhicaṅsu*) or faculty of thought is not intrinsically inferior to the faculties of sense, insofar as it relies on the objective medium (*viśayāyatana*) of language.

This brings us to a second point: the kind of language Nāgārjuna means when he speaks of “the verbalizable” is not some special language of pure logic or mystic paradox, but the common language of everyday linguistic convention (*vyavahāra*). Thus, the celebrated methodological statement: “Without relying on convention, the ultimate import cannot be taught.” (MMK, 24.10)<sup>18</sup> While this reliance on mere convention would seem to be a disadvantage, the great strength of everyday language is that it is a common possession, a medium of exchange shared by all trained speakers, and that the conventional signs (*nimitta*) and usages (*upādaya*) of language are not founded (*anāsrīta*) in any being, essence, or objectivity intrinsic to persons or things. That they are mere fabrications (*prapañca*), based on a recursive logic of mutually defining binary constructs (*vikalpa*), is precisely what makes them viable, in Nāgārjuna’s view. What constricts

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<sup>17</sup> MMK, 18.7: *nivṛttamabhidhātavyam nivṛtte cittagocare* |. I say “medium” here since the word translated as “range” or “scope” (*gocara*) is the familiar technical term distinguishing the objective fields or “media” (*āyatana*) of the “faculties” (*indriya*), in this case the “ideational objects” (*manoviśaya*) of the sixth or “mental faculty” (*mānendriya*), from their subjective field, the medium of consciousness.

<sup>18</sup> MMK, 24.10: *vyavahāramanāsrītya paramārtho na deśyate* ||.

their use is the reifying habit that would bind the selfless and empty reference frame of language to an egocentrically fixed perspective (*dr̥ṣṭi*) or position (*pakṣa*). Voidness is the ultimate therapeutic convention because it counteracts the habit that perverts all linguistic conventions into forms of self-deception: “Everything is coherent which coheres with voidness; nothing is coherent which does not cohere with voidness” (MMK, 24.14).<sup>19</sup>

Nāgārjuna’s third point is that voidness must be understood as a critical linguistic convention before it can serve as a signpost or placeholder for transcendent insight: “Here, let us explain. You do not know either the sense, usage, or referent of ‘voidness’ and so do yourself such injury” (MMK, 24.7).<sup>20</sup>

Given these three intervening steps, we can pick up the *Reason*’s methodological argument and follow it to conclusion. Critical intellect is not to be freed *from* conventions of language but *with* those conventions; hence, the only means by which it can treat its self-limiting “demon” of reification is to commit itself without vacillation to the relative, binary constructs of language: “As long as the mind vacillates, it remains under the dominion of Māra” (YṢ, 36ab). The only alternative to the ambivalence of the mystic or skeptic is to accept as practically binding the binary structure which frames Centrist analysis: 1) if this self truly exists as objectively as it appears, 2) *then it must ultimately be found to exist in logical conformity with one or another alternative in an exhaustive dichotomy*; for instance, it must ultimately be found to exist *either* 3) as an absolute unity identical with its parts, causes, aspects, or designation, *or* 4) as an absolute plurality unrelated to its parts, causes, aspects, or designation. Only given the crucial second key, does the finding that absurd consequences follow from examining both alternatives serve as a reason for negating the reality of the unrelated self identified as assumed in key one, just as only committing to an exhaustive search of the house makes the non-finding of the spider I thought I saw a decisive way of ruling out its presence. This binary analysis, which exclusively negates the false self of persons or things by exposing its logical

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<sup>19</sup> MMK, 24.14: *sarvaṃ ca yujyate tasya śūnyatā yasya yujyate || sarvaṃ na yujyate tasya śūnyam na yujyate ||*.

<sup>20</sup> MMK, 24.7: *atra brūmah śūnyatāyām na tvaṃ vetsi prayojanam || śūnyatām śūnyatārtham ca tata evaṃ vihanyase ||*.

absurdity, is what Nāgārjuna reminds his readers of in the much quoted statement:

When “this” or “that” [appears a fact],  
 Yet when analyzed is not perceived,  
 What wise person would advocate with arguments  
 That “this” or “that” is [really] true? (YŚ, 42).

Only after this pivotal key of commitment to a binding language of analysis does Nāgārjuna bring his argument home to target the objectified constructs of self and world that hinge on the habit of reifying expressions like “I” and “mine”: “Those who insist on a non-relative ‘self’ or ‘world’—Alas! They are deprived by views” (YŚ, 43a–c), and “Once they commit to [intrinsic] things, they are trapped in painful malignant views” (YŚ, 46ab).

Of course, when binary analysis of the referents of pronouns like “I” and “mine” finds neither being nor essence, persons nor things, it does not thereby “demonstrate” something “beyond language,” or confirm that there is nothing to know beyond egocentrist conventions.<sup>21</sup> Instead, it tells us

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<sup>21</sup> Fenner, *Ontology*, 166ff., following Gangadean, “Formal Ontology,” points out that Nāgārjuna’s system is designed to train its user to conform his critical intellect *more* exclusively to the conventions assumed as canons of realistic logic: the laws of contradiction, identity, and excluded middle. The added “insight” Fenner calls “the principle of definition through logical opposites,” if not classically recognized as a convention, has certainly been recognized by most modern linguists as fundamental to “natural language.” Puzzling is why Fenner views Nāgārjuna’s system as “reasoning into reality” by moving outside of language, rather than by moving more radically *into language*. Despite the sophistication of their readings, which we cannot do justice to here, Fenner and Huntington exemplify the persistence of the tendency to over-dichotomize language and reality. While Huntington’s pragmatic skepticism and Fenner’s dialectical mysticism both abandon the naïve realistic correspondence theory that words mirror reality, they also both maintain the residual theory that language is substantially or clearly distinct from the ultimate reality of things. The skeptical view holds that that reality is in principle unknowable by language and hence by the human mind; the mystical view holds that that reality is unknowable by language but can be known by a mind that goes beyond language. Both views continue a legacy of critical thought that dates to the neo-Platonic *via negativa* and continues through Kant to contemporary deconstructionist and inductivist views. The essence of this ancient tradition is the Dionysian dictum that the best name for reality is no name; its obviously problematic implications are that reality is either nothing at all or a unity beyond linguistic differentiation. In contrast to this tradition, Nāgārjuna’s voidness theory has an advantage like that enjoyed by the Indian (“Arabic”) numerical system over the Roman numerical system. By defining the critical linguistic convention of voidness in binary opposition to all the binary oppositions of ordinary linguistic convention, Nāgārjuna can represent within language the relativity of signifier and

*(cont’d)*

something ultimately freeing about the pronouns “I” and “mine,” namely, that their relative use lies in their absolute voidness, as part of a family of words modern linguists call “indexicals” or “shifters,” including “this” and “that,” “here” and “now.” This family of words, typically seized on by realistic epistemologists as the ostensive pointers that “hook” language onto a public or private world of self-evident referents, in fact shows that language works only because empty referents are uncritically designated by the empty conventions governing the usage of such verbal tools. Like the zero of a measure, these mere designations (*prajñaptimātra*) allow language to be universal and flexible, by relativistically centering its anonymous, contentless reference frame on particular persons and things, or particular aspects of persons and things, while conventionally defining the particularity of those very designative bases in the process.<sup>22</sup> By incorporating zero

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signified which is the “groundless ground” for the workings of language. This step frees the user of language to represent in language the subject and object of its use without any further binary determination that would unnecessarily limit their range of action, including such determinations as identical/diverse, unitary/multiple, absolute/relative, self/other. Cf. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964); Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (1987).

<sup>22</sup> It is important here to distinguish the subtlety of this Dialecticist reading of Nāgārjuna’s stance on the conventional reality of linguistic usage from what has been called the “linguistic interpretation” of Centrist thought (cf. Huntington, *Emptiness*). In the eyes of Dialecticists from Chandrakīrti to Tsong Khapa, the voidness of linguistic and conceptual signs is not opposed to any sort of self-evidence or identity intrinsic to their referents, whether conceived as the unconsciously constructed impressions of preverbal intuition or the pragmatically functional particulars of perception. While only the latter particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*)—held as distinctly characterized and efficient things-in-themselves by Traditionist thinkers—were explicitly critiqued by Nāgārjuna as empty, the former psychosocially constructed impressions—the “differential bases” (*āśrayavyāvṛtti*), “conceptual bases” (*abhiniveśyādihāra*), and conventional “intrinsically identifiable perceptual bases” (*svalakṣanasiddhāmbanaviśaya*) of conceptuality held in the successively subtler systems of Buddhist Logicians, Idealists, and Dogmaticists—would have been equally critiqued by Nāgārjuna, according to Chandrakīrti and his Dialecticist descendants. The thrust of the Dialecticist reading here is that, for Nāgārjuna, the apparent self-evidence of particular perceptual objects is no less empty than that of the abstract concepts that refer to them; for not only must the ultimate validity of such objects be determined by means of critical reason, in dependence on linguistic conventions, but also their actuality is part of the constructive, evolutionary process of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), the factors of which include “name-and-form” (*nama-rūpa*), the words and referents of language. For an in depth treatment of the Dialecticist critique of the realistic epistemology of other schools, see Thurman, *Essence*, 231ff. and 238ff., especially 232 n. 68; 234 n. 72; 304 n. 51.

(*śūnya*) as a special, dereifying convention of language, Nāgārjuna has given the ordinary language user a new degree of freedom, a constant reminder of the relativity and conventionality on which the usefulness of words depends, and a new unrestricted (*apraṭiṣṭhita*) space for keeping the mind open to master its most universal medium for knowledge and communication. While most modern readings present Nāgārjuna as a critic of discursive reason, forced to rely on it as a means to an end, in this reading he is a critical therapist of reason, who views language as both the means and the end; the space in which the mind is ultimately free from self-habits, and the method of clearing that space of the self-imposed limits of reified language. By reducing “constructions,” “fabrications,” “consciousness,” “insight,” and “intellect” to the public conventions of speech that define them, Nāgārjuna frees the self-critical mind to unravel misuses of language constricting its space of intersubjective exchange.<sup>23</sup> For him, what dereifying insight achieves is a decentering of the thought process from any delusion of non-relative “I” and “mine.” This closely relates to the famous Dialecticist stance known as “positionlessness” (*nirapakṣatva*), which doesn’t mean the Dialecticist is not there to argue with his opponent, but means that his vantage point is purely relational, standing in a free space of equal communication with the opponent:

[Those] overwhelmed by mistaken knowledge,  
Are trapped by attachment in a process  
Of obsession and conflict,  
Clutching to truth in the [intrinsically] untrue.

Great souls are beyond disputes,  
[For,] they assume no [fixated] position.  
For those who have no position,  
How can there be opposition? (YṢ, 49–50)

Here, Nāgārjuna finally refers to the Centrist methodological stance of being positionless (*apakṣa*) or without thesis (*apratijñā*), a stance that historically has been misread as a skeptical or mystical rejection of the place

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<sup>23</sup> Compare Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*: “everything happens as if, in order to enter the symbolic universe, the speaking subject must have at his disposal an ‘empty space’ from which the use of signs can begin...[a space which] could also be expressed as a distantiation of self from itself...the ruin of the ego’s pretension to constitute itself as ultimate origin” (116, 113).



of linguistic reason and logic in developing and communicating insight. His preceding reference to the reality-habit (*satyagraha*), however, makes clear what Chandrakīrti would further elucidate: that the position or thesis he means to reject is one which presumes that logic has some intrinsically real foundation or identifiable essence. As Nāgārjuna would state in other works,<sup>24</sup> one who reasons with voidness makes no such presumption, but advocates the logical stance that logic has and needs no ground other than ungrounded convention and its metaphysically unexamined use. In its structural commitment to convention as method, Nāgārjuna's grammatically based philosophy advocates a specifically human ontology, epistemology, hermeneutic, and therapeutics, based on the position that human forms of life revolve around the empty conventionality of language. Thus, his analytic method is meant to turn the ordinary human condition of self-reification toward the performance of enlightened altruists, whose liberative speech is the conventional expression of their self-transcendence.

Chandrakīrti is acknowledged by traditional and modern scholars alike for his key role in clarifying the Dialecticist view of Nāgārjuna's conventionalist methodology presented above. Chandrakīrti's extensive treatment of the use of linguistic conventions of analysis in *Lucid Exposition 1* and *Introduction 6* are applied in the *Commentary* to the contemplative practice of deobjectifying insight. Here, we need only touch on its three main points as condensed in the *Commentary*.

First, Chandrakīrti follows Nāgārjuna by arguing that all determinate sense perception and intellectual formulas depend on mental constructs, and that these in turn depend on the conventional signs of everyday language:

[T]he primary elements and what arises from the primary elements, the mind and mental factors, as well as things not associated [with the mind]—because of being causal components of consciousness—all of these things howsoever

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. MMK, 4.8: "When one argues by means of voidness and an opponent tries to answer, none of his statements serve as answers, since his proofs always remain to be proven"; VV, 29: "If I were to have any thesis whatsoever, I would be liable to that fault; but I am completely faultless, because I have no thesis"; CŚ, 16.25: "Whoever takes no position at all, either 'existence,' 'non-existence,' or 'both existence and non-existence,' cannot be refuted even if [one tries] for a long, long time."

feasibly explained as this and that primary element, and so forth, are subsumed and understood within consciousness.

Now, a yogin/ī sees that pure consciousness, which superimposes [on things] the meanings of being existent and being non-existent, as the possessor of an object that is false and deceptive and, at the time of seeing it as lacking intrinsic production, knows that [insight] to be definitive. (YṢV, ad k. 34)

The dereifying insight Chandrakīrti prescribes here to free the intellect from uncritical adherence to constructs is predicated on its ability to use the fictive conventions of reason to prove the voidness of all conventional signs and referents with respect to intrinsic identity:

Such full understanding does not perceive any [real] absence of the intrinsically objective creation of existence, as the reality of existence; it just has the nature of the complete eradication of all signs. It is called “nirvāṇa” in accordance with conventional truth, and must be understood as lacking any intrinsically objective status whatsoever. (YṢV, ad k. 6cd)<sup>25</sup>

The second main point in Chandrakīrti’s argument is to apply his distinctive Dialecticist view—that language works *only* in the absence of intrinsic identity or self-evidence—to explain how ultimacy-analytic reason (*don dam pa’i dpyod pa’i rigs pa, paramārtha-vicārayukti\**) draws the logical conclusion that is the ultimate therapeutic insight of voidness. Essential to Chandrakīrti’s refinement of Centrist conventionalism, this pivotal point is one traditional scholars consider the subtlest in his Dialecticist system.<sup>26</sup> Where Nāgārjuna urged the naïve reifying minds of his day to embrace the voidness of linguistic conventions in terms of their lack of any ground in

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<sup>25</sup> Thurman notes how Tsong Khapa clarifies the sense in which Chandrakīrti here and later in the *Commentary* speaks of nirvāṇa as ultimate *by convention*. According to Tsong Khapa, Chandrakīrti means that its ultimacy is established by its therapeutic non-deceptiveness in relation to superficial cognition, not that it is a conventional reality. Cf. Thurman, *Essence*, 368 n. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Tsong Khapa states this in Thurman, *Essence*, 288ff.

intrinsic reality, Chandrakīrti urged the subtle reifying minds of his day to embrace the voidness of linguistic conventions in terms of their lack of any essential ground in intrinsic identity, referentiality, or self-evidence. Thus, where the *Reason* critiques the self-habit displaced by Analysts and Traditionalists from naïve egocentrism into reifying the life-cycle and its extinction as realities outside mere conventions of language, the *Commentary* critiques the subtler self-habit displaced by Idealists and Dogmaticists into reifying the relative and its voidness into intrinsic identities outside empty conventions of language. According to Tsong Khapa, Chandrakīrti supports his critique with four imperative, absurd consequences that follow from the assumption of intrinsic identity or self-evidence, no matter how “relative” or “conventional.” The order of consequences in Chandrakīrti’s classic statement in *Introduction* 6.34–36 and its *Commentary* (ad k. 34) differs in his *Reason Commentary*.<sup>27</sup> Chandrakīrti’s use of these consequences here is less explicit than in the MABh. They may be paraphrased as follows:

If relative or conventional things depended on any kind of intrinsic identity or self-evidence:

- 1) it would contradict the scriptural statements that all things are devoid of intrinsic reality;<sup>28</sup>
- 2) it would mean that they would have to withstand analysis, since what is intrinsically identifiable or self-evident by definition has its identity ultimately, unrelated to anything else;<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> What I order as 1, 2, 3, 4, corresponds to Chandrakīrti’s 2, 3, 1, 4 in the MA and MABh, and to Tsong Khapa’s 4, 2, 1, 3 in the *Essence*.

<sup>28</sup> YŚV, ad k. 3; see trans. below, where the consequence parallels the argument that if saṃsāra was a “real” something and nirvāṇa a real “nothing,” that would contradict the statement of the natural voidness of things made in the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, 13.19c, ed. Wogihara-Tsuchida, 239: *śūnya nirīhā sthita nityakālam*||. Cp. MABh, 6, ad k. 34, where the reference is to the famous statement in the *Kāśyapa Chapter* of the *Jewel-Heap Scripture*: “Kāśyapa, furthermore, the central way is the genuine insight into things; it does not make things empty by means of emptiness, but [realizes that] the very things themselves are emptiness,” quoted as translated in Thurman, *Essence*, 165.

<sup>29</sup> YŚV, ad k. 10. Cp. MA, 6.35: *gang phyir dngos po 'di dag rnam dpyad na || de nyid bdag can dngos las thsu rol tu || gnas rnyed ma yin de phyir 'jig rten gyi || tha snyad bden la rnam bar dpyad mi bya ||*.

- 3) it would mean that they would be destroyed when their intrinsic identity or self-evidence was repudiated by the rational insight of voidness, and voidness would be the destructive cause;<sup>30</sup>
- 4) it would mean that the reasons negating the objective reality of cause and effect would not accomplish that negation, since these reasons apply equally to the intrinsic identifiability of cause and effect, even when these are qualified as “relative” or “conventional.”<sup>31</sup>

The aim of Chandrakīrti’s argument is to expose and critique the subtle realistic premise that the apparent self-evidence of the referents of everyday language is not a form of self-deception, but is quasi-logically or pragmatically necessary as a relative anchor for conventions of communication. His argument makes it logically imperative to accept the conventions of language as mere linguistic usages (*prajñaptimātra*), because it negates the premise of self-evidence even conventionally, when he shows that self-evidence does not underlie the mundane conventions of language or even the critical convention of voidness. For example, as follows:

[T]he noble ones—those who are distinguished by realizing things without perceiving an intrinsic reality—neither construct nor perceive that dichotomy [of the life-cycle and nirvāṇa].... Since “cyclic life” is a construction, “nirvāṇa” is also a construction, because they both exist as mundane expressions. (YṢV, ad k. 5)

And this pivotal point brings us to Chandrakīrti’s third main point: the distinctive Dialecticist stance that conventional reality, including the logical means of establishing the ultimate therapeutic reality of voidness, has only non-analytic or critically unexamined status (*avicāryamānasiddha*); it exists only insofar as we use it without grounding it in any ultimacy-seeking analysis. Thus, conventional constructions of language, when reified, falsely

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<sup>30</sup> YṢV, ad k. 13. Cp. MA, 6.34: *gal te rang gi mshan nyid rten ’gyur na || de la skur bas dngos po ’jig pa’i phyir || stong nyid dngos po ’jig pa’i rgyur ’gyur na || de ni rigs min de phyir dngos yod min ||*.

<sup>31</sup> YṢV, ad k. 18–19 (P16b8–17b3). Cp. MA, 6.36: *de nyid skabs su rigs pa gang zhig gis || bdag dang gzhan las skye ba rigs min pa’i || rigs des tha nyad du yang rigs min pas || khyod kyī skye ba gang gis yin par ’gyur ||*.

appear as intrinsically identifiable subjects and objects, but once their referents are subjected to binary analysis which seeks their identity as identical with or distinct from their parts, and so on, no such subjects or objects are rationally found to correspond to that appearance. In this way, “self” and “world,” “I” and “mine,” are shown to be empty fictions, “un-created” with respect to any intrinsic identity or self-evidence; their reification is thus conclusively logically negated, to be thereafter seen through and treated as a form of self-deception. Although the means and end of that analysis—the conventions of negation and the insight of voidness—are in turn unable to withstand analysis seeking intrinsic identity, this in no way impairs but rather confirms the validity of the analysis. For when simply assumed as unexamined, those conventions do conclusively dispel the illusion of self-evidence, without implying the existence of any intrinsically objective lack of self-evidence.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, the two realities are two perspectives on the uses and referents of language: the superficial, in which their deceptive self-evidence remains unexamined; and the ultimate, in which analysis dispels the illusory self-evidence, and rational insight confronts the voidness of conventions and the voidness of voidness. Thus, the means and end of Centrist analysis are to free the language user to master language’s anonymous, groundless frame of reference, without the lingering egocentrist bias that blocks critical intellect from fully inhabiting its fictive medium. The self-critical “I,” freed by a new dereifying habit, is the “positionless” subject of Chandrakīrti’s Dialecticist methodology. This enlightened “self” is a fictive linguistic agent<sup>33</sup> in full mastery of its communicative medium and object,<sup>34</sup> not trapped in any reified transcendence, but

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. MA, 6.175: *mi bden bzhin du'ang rnag gi byad bzhin mdzes par bsgrub bya'i phyir l de ni yod pa ji ltar de bzhin 'dir yang shes rab gdong l sbyang bar bya la nus pa mthong bar gyur pa'i gtan tshigs ni l 'thad pa dang bral las kyang bsgrub bya rtogs shes shes par bya ll.*

<sup>33</sup> Cf. MA, 6.158: *de ni de nyid du'am 'jig rten du l rnam pa bdun gyis 'grub 'gyur min mod kyil rnam pyad med par 'jig rten nyid las 'dir l rang gi yan lag brten nas 'dogs pa yin ll.*

<sup>34</sup> Cf. MA, 6.177: *dngos rnam mtha' dag dngos po med par rtogs su gzbugs par ni l nus pa ches sla ji lta de ltar rang bzhin gzhan dag la l khong du chud par bde blag tu ni nus pa ma yin no l rtog ge ngan pa'i dra bas 'jig rten ci ste 'dir bcol byed ll.*

omniscient in its access to all viewpoints on the culture-medium of verbal convention.<sup>35</sup> As Chandrakīrti's *Commentary* states:

Such beings who develop such a view by turning their backs on cyclic life, and who generate an aspiration to overcome it, are able to easily realize—*via* the teaching of relativity—the uncreatedness of what is to be abandoned. (YṢV, ad k. 5ab)

Furthermore, since nirvāṇa is established in dependence on that [life-cycle] which is glossed as “like a magician's illusion,” it is established, as is impermanence, by worldly convention. (YṢV, ad k. 7)<sup>36</sup>

Just as, by indicating the absence of water, one says “[you will] directly experience” to the traveler, likewise the world also conventionally designates absences and non-perceptions as “directly experienced.” (YṢV, ad k. 8)

[I]t is irrational to say that the absence [of action and addiction] is unable to cause [termination]. If [someone] further objects, “[Such] a cause is impossible [because it is not found] under rational investigation,” [we reply that] it is not so, for the things of the world cannot be accepted as [critically] examined, but just [presented] according to social convention.... As the absence of such things as water is [conventionally] known as a cause of losses, consequently, it is established that one may speak of “peace through exhausting the cause [of suffering].” (YṢV, ad k. 20)<sup>37</sup>

Since there is no perceivable sign for what is objectively uncreated, none of these aspects—“that form is this,” “that sensation is this,” “that consciousness is this,” or “those other

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. MA, 6.119: *rang gi lta ba chags dang de bzhin du l gzhan gi lta la 'khug gang rtog pa nyid l de'i phyir 'dod chags khong khro rnam bsal te l rnam dpyod pa na myur du grol bar 'gyur ll.*

<sup>36</sup> Cp. MA, 6.23: *dngos kun yang dag rdzun pa mthong pa yis l dngos rnyed ngo bo gnyis ni 'dzin par 'gyur l yang dag mthong yul gang de de nyid de l mthong ba brdzun pa kun rdzob bden par gsungs ll.*

<sup>37</sup> Cp. MA, 6.35; cited above, p. 67 n. 29.

created things are this”—appear in the mind. Hence, those who do not have anything that appears as a concrete particular cannot prove to others, “that’ or ‘this.’” It is irrational for the wise to argue about that which is undemonstrable. (YSV, ad k. 42)

As for Wittgenstein, even a cursory review of the divergent readings that dominate the debate over his mature therapeutic method would require a volume. Among the moderating voices, the two centrist readings of Rorty and Cavell are of interest for their complementary efforts to grapple with what Wittgenstein presented as the “bedrock” of his later philosophy, the conventionalism obvious in statements like: “When we reach conventions, we reach rock bottom,” (BBB, 26) and, “this language, like any other, is founded on convention” (PI, §335). A comparison of the Wittgensteinian and Centrist literature on this topic suggests a parallel between the subtly dualistic views on convention expressed by Rorty and Cavell and those expressed by various Dogmaticists. Thus, pragmatist Rorty<sup>38</sup> reads conventions as linked to contextual “criteria” or cues anchoring language use, much as Bhāvaviveka assumed that some relative “intrinsic identity” in things was needed to make conventions of perception and language consensually valid. Alternatively, existentialist Cavell<sup>39</sup> reads conventions as superimposed on the natural self-evidence of personal experience, much as Śāntarakṣita saw them as social constructions veiling the evolving relative, intersubjective nature of the subconscious mind. Our reading of Wittgenstein’s conventionalism is that its method and aim are to critique the premise of self-evidence shared by such subtle reifying views, much as Chandrakīrti’s Dialecticist system critiqued the Dogmaticist premise of relative or conventional referents that are intrinsically identifiable (*svalakṣaṇasiddha*).<sup>40</sup>

The first point in our reading of Wittgenstein’s conventionalist method is that it is meant to analyze the subtle reification of the subjects

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<sup>38</sup> See Rorty, “Wittgenstein, Privileged Access, and Incommunicability” (1970); “Criteria and Necessity” (1973); and *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979).

<sup>39</sup> See Cavell, “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy” (1962); and “Criteria and Judgement” (1979).

<sup>40</sup> For Tsong Khapa’s detailed account of the Dialecticist critique of the Dogmaticist thought of Bhāvaviveka, Śāntarakṣita, and Kamalaśīla, see Thurman, *Essence*, 265–344.

and objects of language which are symptomatic of the residual realism of his own early philosophy. His early reifications of the “metaphysical subject” and “simple objects” may be viewed as versions of Kant’s transcendent ego and things-in-themselves, redefined in terms of their limiting role in the “grammatical framework” of language, as opposed to Kant’s “categorical framework” of knowledge. From this vantage, Wittgenstein’s later philosophical method appears as an attempt to complete a partial reframing of Kant’s objectivist critique of knowledge, as a *critique of language*. And in this light, conventionalism of language figures as the key advance that allows Wittgenstein to eliminate the last vestige of naïve realism in Kant.

Like Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti, Wittgenstein seeks to free the critical intellect from its self-deceptive habit of reification. Thus, following Kant, he argues that logic reveals the mental constructs on which perceptual and conceptual knowledge depend; then, like his Centrist counterparts, he argues that the essence of logic lies in the conventions of language-use he calls “grammar,” following Nietzsche. The aim of Wittgenstein’s mature *Philosophical Investigations*, then, is to expose the supposedly self-evident objects and subjects of his earlier views as reified forms of the empty conventions of grammar:

What looks as if it *had* to exist is part of the language. (PI, §50)

We predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it. (PI, §104)

*Essence* is expressed by grammar. (PI, §371)

The only correlate in language to an intrinsic necessity is an arbitrary rule. (PI, §372)

Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar). (PI, §373)

The thrust of Wittgenstein’s linguistic conventionalism, like Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti’s, is to free critical intellect from its own self-limiting “demon”—the projection of any “mind” or “world” outside language:

Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language. (PI, §109)



Thinking is essentially the activity of operating with signs.  
(BBB, 6)<sup>41</sup>

No sign leads us beyond itself, and no argument either.  
(1975, 71)

The second point in our reading of Wittgenstein's method is that this linguistic conventionalism is basic to his critique of the false premise of reified intrinsic identity in persons or things. The structure of his arguments, like the consequential "bi-negations" of his Centrist counterparts, is that of an exclusive negation supported by *reductio ad absurdum* type reasonings against the alternative ways a binary conventional construct can be reified as self-evident. The method he employs to show the absurdity of these alternative philosophical usages is a conventionalist "method by examples" (PI, §133) meant to "bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (PI, §116) by comparing them with scenarios of conventional usage called "language-games." Like conventional "measuring-rods" (PI, §131), these language-games expose the origin of metaphysical views in reifying one side of binary conventional constructs. Like his Buddhist counterparts, Wittgenstein methodically exposes and negates the premise of self-evidence, by serial analyses of the exhaustive alternatives that follow from reifying any binary construct of an essential subject or object:

Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important?... What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand. (PI, §118)

The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if...there really were an object, from which I derive its description, but I were unable to shew it to anyone. And the best that I can propose is that we yield to the temptation to use this picture, but then investigate how the *application* of the picture goes. (PI, §374)

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<sup>41</sup> Cp. PI, §327.

It is not a *something* but not a *nothing* either!... We have only rejected the grammar which forces itself on us here. (PI, §304)

The law of the excluded middle says here: It must either look like this, or like that. So it really...gives us a picture. And the problem ought now to be: does reality accord with the picture or not? (PI, §352)

There is here no question of a “seeing”—and therefore none of a “having”—nor of a subject, nor therefore of “I”....[For] if as a matter of logic you exclude other people’s having something, it loses its sense to say that you have it.... (PI, §398)

[Despite]...feeling...as if the negation of a proposition had to make it true in a certain sense, in order to negate it,... (PI, §447)

...[n]egation, one might say, is a gesture of exclusion.... (PI, §550)

These comments outline the means and end of Wittgenstein’s conventionalist logic in terms clearly parallel to our authors’. His innovative negation of self-evident (“logically private”) subjects and objects has as its logical conclusion the purely critical intellectual insight that “shews the fly the way out of the fly-bottle,” as he put it. This critical insight frees the nominal subject from any “bewitchment” of its medium of language, by training the user of language to have “complete clarity” about the empty conventional uses of “I” and “mine,” whose reification is the prime egocentric block to “a clear view of our use of language.”

The final point in our reading of Wittgenstein’s method is that the conventional “ground of language” on which all his arguments stand is not itself grounded in any self-evident reality or identity, but is perfectly valid as long as it is used without ultimacy-seeking analysis. This stance leads Wittgenstein to a series of formulations parallel to the distinctive Dialecticist positions of Chandrakīrti’s Centrism. These include formulations of: everyday language as perfectly adequate to philosophical analysis; the experiencing subject as a working “fiction” of conventional language use; a binary opposition between the ultimate voidness of conventions and their

relative, unanalyzed use; and the “positionless” stance of therapeutic philosophy. So Wittgenstein states:

When I talk about language...I must speak the language of every day. Is this language somehow too coarse and material for what we want to say? Then how is another one to be constructed?—And how strange that we should be able to do anything at all with the one we have! (PI, §120)

The meaning of a word is its use in the language. (PI, §43)

“Aren’t you at bottom really saying that everything except human behavior is a fiction?”—If I do speak of a fiction, then it is of a *grammatical* fiction. (PI, §307)

At the foundation of well founded belief lies belief that is not founded. (OC, 253)

Even a proposition like this one, that I am now living in England, has these two sides: it is not a *mistake*—but on the other hand, what do I know of England? (OC, 420)

The fact that I use the word “hand” and all the other words in my sentence without a second thought, indeed that I would stand before the void if I so much as try doubting their meanings—shows that absence of doubt belongs to the essence of the language-game, that the question “How do I know...” either prolongs the language-game [i.e., is part of it], or else dispels it. (OC, 370)<sup>42</sup>

Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language;...it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is. (PI, §124)

If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would be impossible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them. (PI, §128)

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<sup>42</sup> Retranslated from facing German for terminological consistency.

Despite any historicist sense of the vast distance between Wittgenstein, Nāgārjuna, and Chandrakīrti, these comments define in detail a distinctive non-egocentrist method of therapeutic philosophy, of which the clear resemblance to the Dialecticist method speaks to the universality of human language, and the special problems and competence it entails.

### 3c. *Dereifying Reductive Usage*

Given the methodological foundation of the first two keys, which explicitly or implicitly define the logical premise, structure, and conclusion of all Centrist analysis, the supporting arguments exemplified in what follows by the third and fourth keys are relatively straightforward. I say “exemplified” because the binary alternatives “identity or diversity” are often expanded by second-order alternatives like “identity-and-diversity or neither-identity-nor-diversity,” as in the six-key tetralemma (*catuskoti*) of Nāgārjuna’s *Wisdom* 1; or further by third-order alternatives like “possessor,” “container or contained,” “conglomerate,” or “configuration,” as in the nine-key sevenfold chariot (*saptāṅgaratha*) analysis of Chandrakīrti’s *Introduction* 6.151–167. On the other hand, there is the condensed three-key analysis said to be especially useful for advanced practitioners, in which the royal reason of relativity (*pratīyasamutpādayuktirāja*) alone serves to conclusively negate the premise of any intrinsically real, identifiable, or objective self or object.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, while the *Reason* and its *Commentary*

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<sup>43</sup> Implicitly presupposing the first two keys, Nāgārjuna’s classic tetralemma or “diamond smithereens” argument in MMK, 1.1, is formulated as a negation of production of an effect from a cause which is identical, other, both, or neither. His reasons are that identical reproduction would be senseless and endless; other-production would be unpredictable and uncontrollable; combined production would have combined flaws; production from neither would be uncaused, hence non-production. Chandrakīrti’s sevenfold chariot-like argument also presupposes the first two keys, and is formulated as a negation of the possibility of an intrinsically identifiable self which is identical or different from its parts, contained in them, their container, their possessor, their conglomerate, or their configuration. His reasons are that intrinsic identity would obviate the need for the separate designation “self”; difference would preclude the self’s having the character of its parts; either form of containment would make agent and act identical; possession entails the faults of difference; conglomeration would entail the faults of identity; and configuration would exclude any immaterial parts. For the royal reason, see MA, 6.115: *gang phyir dngos po rten nas rab ’byung bas | rtog pa ’di dag brtag par mi nus pa | de phyir rten ’byung rigs pa ’di yis ni | lta ngan dra ba mtha’ dag gcod par byed ||*; Thurman, *Essence*, translation, chs. III, VII. See Hopkins, *Meditation on*

(cont’d)

present this most powerful and elegant form of reasoning as their prime subject, they exemplify the traditional Centrist reliance on the serial negation of binary alternatives like “creation and destruction,” the basic training required for proper use of the “relativity...way” (YŚ, 0).

The Centrist procedure advocated in Buddha’s philosophy of non-egocentrism is traditionally defined as the remedy for that self-deceptive condition whose symptoms are self-enclosing extremes like ontological absolutism and nihilism, epistemological mysticism and skepticism, metaphysical idealism and materialism, and psychological projection and denial. Of these, the third key’s negation of the identity of the self with its constituents is essential to the treatment of nihilism, skepticism, materialism, and denial. Self-enclosing views which reify a construct of self as intrinsically identical with one or more of its constituents imply nihilism since those constituents decay; skepticism, since knowledge is limited to what is sensible to those constituents; materialism, since the effects of actions are limited to pleasure and pain in those constituents; and denial, since any reality beside those constituents is repudiated.

While the *Reason* addresses its audience of Buddhist Analysts and Traditionists as those “who have eliminated nihilism” and so “should attend to the reasons why absolutism must be rejected as well” (YŚ, 2), the *Commentary* clarifies that Nāgārjuna’s concern is with the absolutistic habit that reifies dualistic concepts of Buddha’s teaching of relativity, yielding subtle forms of absolutism *and* nihilism *about relativity* (YŚV, ad k. 0). In the *Reason*, he also critiques subtle nihilistic views of nirvāṇa and voidness that derive from paralleling the subtle absolutistic reification of the saṃsāric life-cycle by reducing it to the self’s supposedly intrinsically real and identifiable constituents. Nāgārjuna’s prime argument negating such views exposes the absurdity that reducing the subject to its constituents—here defined in the classical terms of five psychophysical aggregates (*skandha*)—reduces the range of the subject’s experience to a point that precludes transcendent insight:

If cessation happens through annihilation [of the aggregates],  
Not by fully understanding creations,

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*Emptiness*, Ch. 5, 7, and 8, for a detailed treatment of the six, three, and nine key analyses following their presentation in ’Jam-dbyangs bZhad-pa’s *Grub mtha’ chen mo*.

Who would be there to experience it?  
How could there be such a destroyed [subject]? (YṢ, 8)<sup>44</sup>

The *Reason*'s intended audience would likely have recognized in this argument the two main absurdities Nāgārjuna cites in the *Wisdom* against the identification of self with its constituent aggregates of matter (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), conception (*saṃjñā*), emotion (*saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*vijñāna*). The first, the famous opening consequence of the “Analysis of Self Chapter,” hinges on the grammar of “self” as a performative designation of continuity through change: “If the self were the aggregates, then it would have [their properties of] creation and destruction” (MMK 18.1).<sup>45</sup> He gives a further elaboration of this consequence in the “Analysis of Worldviews Chapter,” where reducing the “self” to its present aggregates is shown to preclude the use of “self” to designate the continuity of subjective experience through evolutionary transformations: “If human and divine [embodiments] were [intrinsically] other, they could not properly constitute [successive forms of] a continuous process” (MMK 27.16).<sup>46</sup> Nāgārjuna's second main consequence, also from the “Worldview Chapter,” hinges on the grammar of “self” as a performative designation of agency, as distinct from activity: “When you assert that there is no self except for the appropriation [of aggregates], then, as [the act of] appropriation itself is the self, your self does not exist [as agent]” (MMK 27.5).<sup>47</sup> The thrust of these consequences is to expose any move to identify the “self” with the aggregates as contradicting the conventional use of “self” to distinguish the nominal continuity and agency of evolving beings from the transformations of their constituents.

In the *Reason*, Nāgārjuna is especially concerned with the implications for the process of transcendent insight of the Analysts' and Traditionists' reductive definition of self. By reifying the constituents of the self, these

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<sup>44</sup> Chandrakīrti repeats the consequence in MA, 6.128: *mya ngan 'das tshes nges par bdag chad 'gyur / mya ngan 'das ngon skad cig dag la ni / skye 'jig byed po med pas de 'bras med / gzhan gyis bsags la gzhan gyis za bar 'gyur //*.

<sup>45</sup> MMK, 18.1: *ātmā skandhā yadi bhavedudayavyaya-bhāgbhavet /*.

<sup>46</sup> MMK, 27.16: *devādanyo manuṣyashcetasāntatir nopadyate //*.

<sup>47</sup> MMK, 27.5: *upādānavinirmukto nāstyātmeti kṛte sati / syādupādānamevātmā nāsti cātmeti vaḥ punaḥ //*.

realists tended to displace their self-habit onto those constituents, with the consequence that they also reified the process and goal of transcendent insight as a substantial annihilation (*uccheda*) rather than an altruistic participation in the evolutionary process. This tendency expressed itself in reified views of the life-cycle as an intrinsically real or identifiable being (*bhāva*), and in complementary reifications of nirvāṇa or voidness as an intrinsic nothingness (*abhāva*). To counter this tendency, the *Reason* forces the premise of true identity to logical absurdities in metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, and psychology, and exposes its contradiction of the Buddha's authoritative statements in these domains. Thus, Nāgārjuna targets the materialist view that the subject's evolutionary agency and continuity are not conserved (YŚ, 7, 9); the skeptical view that the evidence of the senses is not deceptive (YŚ, 28); the psychological denial that genuine insight can guide self-transcendence and altruistic open-mindedness (47, 55); and the contradiction of Buddha's injunctions to avoid idle metaphysical speculation (YŚ, 13),<sup>48</sup> to cultivate virtue (YŚ, 31), and to view one's mundane life and world as illusory, constructed processes to be transcended (YŚ, 34, 35, 37).

Chandrakīrti's critique of the premise of identity in the *Commentary* refines and extends Nāgārjuna's two main consequences, including arguments familiar from the extensive analysis of self in *Introduction* 6. While the *Commentary* targets subtler empiricist views of the constituents as self-evident processes, the basic logic of its argument parallels the *Reason*'s, as we see from Chandrakīrti's comment on verse eight:

[I]f those who see reality necessarily directly experience  
cessation, when the aggregates have not ceased, [from your

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<sup>48</sup> YŚ, 13, referring to the Buddha's refusal to speculate about a beginning of the universe, touches on the fourteen areas of non-speculation (*avyākṛtavastunī*) which the Buddha declined to comment on, not out of any conviction that the truth lies beyond reason, but out of the therapeutic insight that the perplexities are symptoms of the self-deceptive reification of language that would be exacerbated by any positive response. The fourteen are that: 1) a Buddha survives death, 2) does not, 3) both, 4) neither; 5) the world is finite, 6) infinite, 7) both, 8) neither; 9) the world has a beginning, 10) does not, 11) both, 12) neither; and 13) the self and the body are the same, and 14) are different. Cf. RA, 1.72: "Ultimately, the world cannot disappear through *nirvāṇa*; asked whether it had an end, the Victor remained silent"; MMK, 25.9: "The fact of life and future, however driven and dependent, is seen to be *nirvāṇa*, without addiction or dependence."

perspective] just such a cessation could not exist. [Alternatively,] when [the aggregates] have ceased, since there would be no one there at all, who would directly experience that cessation? (YṢV, ad k. 8)

Thus, Chandrakīrti proceeds to show the absurdity of any reductive identification of “self” with its constituents by exposing its contradiction of the conventions of “transcendent insight,” as Nāgārjuna did. As for the first consequence, that an identical “self” would be subject to the creation and destruction of its constituents, Chandrakīrti restates Nāgārjuna’s argument that this premise contradicts the grammar of insight because it entails the absurdity that negating such a self would annihilate the empirical subject.<sup>49</sup> Extending the argument to its contrapositive, Chandrakīrti shows that if critical insight verified the identity of the constituents it would contradict their deceptiveness,<sup>50</sup> as well as the scriptural reports that such insight is a non-finding.<sup>51</sup> He then proceeds to refine Nāgārjuna’s original consequence further by critiquing the common non-Dialecticist view that the constituents themselves form a continuum of intrinsically identifiable causes and effects.

The premise of self-evident constituents not only contradicts reports of their non-findability through objective self-analysis, but also renders incoherent any account of how that non-findability has causes and effects within a continuum of self-evident psychobiological processes. Here Chandrakīrti brings to bear arguments familiar from *Introduction 6*,<sup>52</sup> countering

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. MA, 6.34; PPMMV, ed. La Vallée Poussin, 342: *ātmacchedo nirvṛtau syād avāśyaṃ / nāśotpādaṃ nirvṛteḥ prakṣaṇeṣu / kartur nāśāt tatphalābhāva eva bhūñjītānyenārjitam karma cānyah||*.

<sup>50</sup> YṢV, ad k. 8, 10. Cf. MA, 6.127cd: *bdag ni rdzas su 'gyur zhing der lta ba / rdzas la 'jug pas phyin ci log mi 'gyur ||*; PPMMV, ed. La Vallée Poussin, 342: *skandhā ātmā ced atas tad bahutvād ātmānaḥ syus te 'pi bhūyām sa eva / dravyam cātmā prāpnuyāt tādrśaś ca dravye vṛttau vaiparitātyam ca na syāt ||*.

<sup>51</sup> YṢV, ad k. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. MA, 6.17: *myu gu sa bon dang ni dus mnyam yod pa ma yin te / gzhan nyid med par sa bon gzhan pa nyid du ga la 'gyur / des na myu gu sa bon las skye 'grub par 'gyur min las / gzhan las skyes ba yin zhes bya ba'i phyogs 'di btang bar bya ||*; and MA. 6.61: *byams pa nyer sbas la rten chos rnams ni / gzhan nyid phyir na rgyud gcig gtogs min te / gang dag rang mtshan nyid kyis so so ba / da dag rgyud gcig gtogs par rigs ma yin ||*.



the non-Dialecticist opponent's objection to accepting such non-discovery as a cause, by showing the absurdity of any continuity between supposedly intrinsically identifiable cause and effect:

[The Traditionist] objects: "How can you apply the term 'cause' to an absence?"

[Let me reply.] How can you apply the term "cause," even to something [intrinsically] present? At such time as when the seed is present, it cannot be recognized as the material cause of the sprout; it has served as a cause when it has become absent. For instance, compare [your] assumption that the very [moment of] consciousness which has come to pass is the antecedent condition of another [moment of] consciousness. As long as the consciousness persists, it cannot be defined as being the cause of another consciousness, since two [moments of] consciousness cannot occur simultaneously; another consciousness conceived as other than either existing or not existing is [logically] impossible. (YṢV, ad k. 20)

Chandrakīrti's other line of argument against the premise of identity follows Nāgārjuna's second consequence that a self identical with the appropriation of constituents would contradict conventions of agency. Thus, Chandrakīrti reasons that a self identified with intrinsically real constituents could not serve as an agent of transcendent insight in this life, extending the argument also to a self reduced to intrinsically identifiable constituents. In a final parallel to Nāgārjuna's critiques of skepticism and denial, Chandrakīrti goes on to argue that unless the constituents are as much "uncreated" fictions as the self, it would be impossible for the subject's analytic insight to cause delusion to end or to effect self-transcendence and objective self-knowledge in this life (YṢV, ad k. 19); and, as long as the constituents are imagined to be intrinsically existent, their absence in an overconcretized nirvāṇa ("expressed as termination") will be imagined to be intrinsically existent (YṢV, ad k. 20). This distinctive Dialecticist line of argument is more extensively developed in *Introduction* 6, where Chandrakīrti exposes the absurdity of moves to logically ground the linguistic convention of the subject in any supposedly self-evident referential base, however qualified as "relative" or "conventional." There, he cites as consequences of reducing the self to its constituents, their conglomerate or their configuration, namely

the respective absurdities that there would be multiple selves (MA, 6.127);<sup>53</sup> that the self would not be a master, controller or agent (MA, 6.134, 137);<sup>54</sup> and that only the gross material constituents would be the self (MA, 6.136).<sup>55</sup> These consequences expose the contradiction between any reductionist view of the subject and the conventional use of “self” to distinguish the nominally unifying subject of linguistic agency in human beings from their psychobiological constituents. Thus, they support the line of argument that concludes in Chandrakīrti’s distinctive formulation of “self” as “designated in dependence on its constituents, according to mere unexamined social consensus” (MA, 6.158). And it is this formulation that supports the *Commentary*’s account of the subject, its constituents, and their transformation through insight, as so many “uncreated” fictions of linguistic convention.

Although Wittgenstein has been read by some as a behaviorist<sup>56</sup> and by others as a phenomenologist,<sup>57</sup> his critique of egocentrist views in the *Investigations* in fact proceeds by reducing both the empiricist and transcendentalist modern accounts of the self to absurdity. Thus, while he openly adopts the empiricist and transcendentalist lines of argument used by behaviorists and phenomenologists against each other’s positions, he just as openly rejects the binary egocentrist alternatives they advance as formulations of the self. The continued debate over Wittgenstein’s psychology reflects the fact that he advanced a non-egocentrist view by negating modern dualistic reifications of the linguistic subject and its referents, and

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<sup>53</sup> MA, 6.127ab: *gal te phung po bdag na de phyir de l mang bas bdag de dag kyang mang por ’gyur ll*; PPMV, ed. La Vallée Poussin, 342: *skandhā ātmā ced atas tad bahutvād ātmānaḥ syus te ’pi bhūyān sa eva l dravyaṁ cātmā prāpnuyāt tādṛśas ca dravye vrttau vaiparitāyān ca na syāt ll*.

<sup>54</sup> MA, 6.134: *mgon min ’dul ba’am dbang po kyang min l de med phyir de tshogs pa ma yin no ll*; MA, 6.137: *len po rang nyer len gcig rigs ngos min l de lta na las byed pa gcig nyid ’gyur l byed po med las yod snyam blo yin na l ma yin gang phyir byed po med las med ll*.

<sup>55</sup> MA, 6.136: *dbyibs she na de gzugs can la yod phyir l khyod la de dag nyid bdag ces ’gyur gyi l sems sogs tshogs ni bdag nyid ’gyur min te l gang phyir de dag la dbyibs yod ma yin ll*.

<sup>56</sup> See Chihara and Fodor, “Operationalism and Ordinary Language” (1965).

<sup>57</sup> See Gier, *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology* (1981); Dweyer, *Sense and Subjectivity: A Study of Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty* (1990).

did so by a conventionalist method typically mistaken for either a brand of behaviorist “verificationism” or of phenomenological “transcendentalism.”

Wittgenstein’s critique of an empiricist or behaviorist reduction of the linguistic subject to its psychophysical constituents proceeds by exposing any such reduction’s absurd contradiction of the linguistic conventions of self. He is especially concerned with showing how these modern forms of the identity-premise contradict the usage of “self” to designate the human speaker’s subjective continuity and intentional agency. He begins by examining the behaviorist reduction of subjective experience to psychophysical states:

But isn’t it absurd to say of a *body* that it has pain?—And why does one feel an absurdity in that? In what sense is it true that my hand does not feel pain, but I in my hand?... Well, something like this: if someone has pain in his hand, then the hand does not say so (unless it writes it) and one does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: one looks into his face. (PI, §286)

Having outlined the contradiction, Wittgenstein, like Chandrakīrti, traces the identity premise to a reified construct of supposedly self-evident psychophysical processes and states, showing that these lead to an eventual denial of the subject’s conventional reality:

How does the philosophical problem...about behaviourism arise?... We talk of processes and states.... Sometime perhaps we shall know more about them—we think. But that is just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter. For we have a definite conception of what it means to know a process better. (The decisive move in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that we thought quite innocent.)—And now the analogy which was to make us comprehend our thoughts falls to pieces. So we have to deny the yet uncomprehended process in the yet unexplored medium. And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don’t want to deny them. (PI, §308)

Wittgenstein proceeds to expose the self-deceptive habit underlying the identity-premise, by showing the absurdity of supposing that the conventional “self” must be logically grounded in some self-evident referent:

“The chair is thinking to itself...WHERE? In one of its parts?... But then how is it with man: where does *he* say things to himself?” (PI, §361) The argument given here in elliptical form recalls those used against the common target of his analyses of metaphysical language in the phenomenal and personal realm—the intrinsically identifiable “simple” or “private” object which the epistemological realist assumes must underlie all valid knowledge and language:

But what are the simple constituent parts of which reality is composed?—What are the simple constituent parts of a chair?—The bits of wood of which it is made? Or the molecules, or the atoms?—“Simple” means: not composite. And here the point is: in what sense “composite?” It makes no sense to speak absolutely of the “simple parts of a chair.” (PI, §47)

The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there were something one couldn’t do. As if there really were a [simple] object, from which I derive its description, but I were unable to shew it to anyone. (PI, §374)

Thus, the identity-premise contradicts the language of the subject, by reifying the relative conventions of language whose unexamined use is the only ground for the “grammatical fiction” of self (PI, §413). Like Chandrakīrti, Wittgenstein forced reductive empiricism to the point where its premise contradicts the use of “self” to distinguish the nominal continuity and agency of the human speaker; and, like Chandrakīrti, he did so as a way to clear up the “groundless ground” of unexamined usage on which all human language, knowledge, and insight stands:

A misleading analogy lies at the root of this idea; the causal nexus seems to be established by a mechanism connecting two parts of a machine. (PI, §613)

When I raise my arm “voluntarily” I do not use any instrument to bring the movement about. My wish is not such an instrument either. (PI, §614)

Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a “proto-phenomenon”. That is, where we ought to have said: *this language-game is played*. (PI, §654)

### 3d. Dereifying Abstractive Usage

The final step in the four key framework—the critique of the diversity-premise that the self is intrinsically different from its constituents—concludes the bi-negation that clears the Central Way by dereifying both dualistic extremes of conventional usage. Since it views the true “self” as an independent spirit or soul, substantially and/or essentially different from its empirical constituents, the diversity-premise entails some degree of ontological absolutism, metaphysical idealism, epistemological mysticism, and psychological projection. Although such views, unlike their reductive opposites, give rise to the individual and social evolutionary benefits of “ascendance” (*abhyudaya*) in evolutionary state, they are rigorously critiqued by Centrists as obstacles to “transcendence” (*niḥśreyasa*).<sup>58</sup>

When, at the outset of the *Reason*, Nāgārjuna expresses his intention to critique absolutism (YṢ, 2), one of his main concerns is the tendency of realistic Analysts and Traditionists to project their subtle self-habit onto nirvāṇa, reified as a static “extinction” or anesthetic “nothingness” (*abhāva*) (YṢ, 3–4) absolutely divorced from the constituents of the life-cycle (*samsāra*). In the verses immediately following, he clearly targets this form of the diversity-premise as incompatible with “seeing reality” (*tattvadarśana*) (YṢ, 5), instead equating nirvāṇa with the “full understanding of existence” (YṢ, 6) which makes possible the achievement of “immediate nirvāṇa” (*drṣṭa-dharmanirvāṇa*) (YṢ, 11) in this life. Nāgārjuna supports his argument with the same consequence he employed against the identity-premise, compelling in this context because it exposes the absurdity of a subject intrinsically divorced from its empirical constituents:

If cessation happens through annihilation,  
Not by fully understanding creations,  
Who would be there to experience it?  
How could there be such a destroyed [subject]? (YṢ, 8)

Here again, the *Reason*’s intended audience may well have recognized as implicit in this argument the two main consequences against the diversity-premise from Nāgārjuna’s *Wisdom*. The first of these is the second hemistich of the opening verse from the “Analysis of Self Chapter”: “If the self

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. RA, 1.3–4, 57.

were [intrinsically] other than the aggregates, then it could not have the character of the aggregates” (MMK, 18.1).<sup>59</sup> The second is from the “Analysis of Worldviews Chapter”: “Nor can the self possibly be other than the appropriation [of aggregates]; for something other without appropriation would be perceived, but nothing is perceived” (MMK, 27.7).<sup>60</sup> Thus, Nāgārjuna’s argument against the diversity-premise hinges on exposing its contradiction of the conventional usage of “self” to locate the nominal subject of thought and speech in relation to one set of constituents as opposed to another.

The rational analysis of the diversity-premise completes a bi-negation that conclusively rules out the major premise to be negated by transcendent analysis: the false presumption of an intrinsically real or identifiable “subject” or “object” underlying conventional uses like “I” and “mine,” “this” and “that.” Thus, Nāgārjuna’s *Reason* defines the binary analysis of the referents of such expressions as the conclusive means of dispelling the reification of binary constructs on which self-deception depends:

When “this” or “that” [appears a fact],  
 Yet when analyzed is not perceived,  
 What wise person would advocate with arguments  
 That “this” or “that” is [really] true? (YŚ, 42)

This new habit of analysis is what frees the linguistic intellect from its own “demon,” the reifying habit that gives addictive self-deception a home:

If any sort of hold is found,  
 The cunning poisonous snake of addiction  
 Will seize it; but those whose minds  
 Have no [such] hold, will not be seized. (YŚ, 51)

Thus, the psychological correlate of the exclusive negation of transcendent analysis is the dereifying insight that frees the intellect to master its definitive communicative medium, the empty and selfless conventions of speech. The purely negative insight of voidness conclusively stops self-deceptive reifications, reminding the symbolic intellect that it cannot find itself

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<sup>59</sup> MMK, 18.1: *skandhebbhyo ’anyo yadi bhavedbhaved-askandhalakṣaṇaḥ* ||.

<sup>60</sup> MMK, 27.7: *anyaḥ punarūpādānād ātmā naivopapadyate | grhyeta hyanupādāno yadyanyo na ca grhyate* ||.

among its signs or outside them, any more than the eye can see itself among or apart from its objects. Hence these verses from *Jewel Rosary*:

As no reflection appears independent of a mirror, so there is no perception of any “I,” independent of the aggregates. (RA, 33)

All these beings and things are seen to be fuel for the fire of consciousness; they are consumed in the brilliance of genuine discernment. (RA, 97)

Chandrakīrti’s argument against the diversity-premise closely parallels Nāgārjuna’s. In the *Commentary*, Chandrakīrti also first targets any projection of the self-habit onto a transcendent subjectivity intrinsically other than the empirical constituents of the life-cycle, citing the two familiar consequences that an absolutely different self would be distinctly perceptible apart from those constituents and would be absolutely incompatible with their empirical character:

[In the Centrist view] it is taught that “the wise also cannot conceive of anything whatsoever called ‘nirvāṇa,’ that has an intrinsically real status, without referring to [conventional] things—which are like a magician’s illusion.” (YṢV, ad k. 6cd)

If [a created thing]...were to have such [intrinsically objective status], it would be seen as an intrinsic reality independent of [any created] thing. (YṢV, ad k. 7)

Readers of the *Commentary* may well have been familiar with Chandrakīrti’s more extensive exposition of these consequences in *Introduction* 6.123–124.<sup>61</sup> They may also have recognized other *Introduction* consequences in Chandrakīrti’s comments on Nāgārjuna’s verse 43:

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Chandrakīrti’s consequence against the diversity-premise in MA, 6.123–124: *gang phyir bstan bcos las de’i khyad l mu stegs rnam kyis gang bstan de kun la l rang grags ma skyes gtan tshigs kyis gnod pa l de phyir de khyad kun kyang yod ma yin ll de’i phyir phung po las gzhan dbag med de l phung po ma gtogs de ’dzin ma grub phyir l jig rten ngar ’dzin blo yi rten de yang l mi ’dod de rig min pa ’ang bdag lta’i phyir ll.*

Those who do not designate “the self” in dependence on the five aggregates—which are devoid of intrinsic reality just like mirror reflections—but rather, locate “the self” in an intrinsically identifiable mind, will no doubt be swept far from the road to nirvāṇa and carried away by the stream of addictive views.

Why is that? Now, if one asserts the intrinsically real status of mind, it must be either permanent or impermanent. If it is permanent, then one is an eternalist. Alternatively, if it is impermanent, then one is a nihilist, since [the view that mind] having emerged becomes nothing is the nihilist view. Thus, “Indeed! They are deprived by views.” The word “indeed” should be known as an exclamation of either regret or certainty. Likewise, if [instead of an intrinsically identifiable mind] one claims the five aggregates—known as “the world”—to be intrinsically identifiably established, similar problems apply. (YṢV, ad k. 43)

The gist of Chandrakīrti’s argument against the diversity-premise in the *Commentary* and elsewhere parallels Nāgārjuna’s: to show its contradiction of the conventional use of “self” to zero the grammatical subject on a particular speaking subject, designated in relation to a particular set of psychophysical constituents. Thus, Chandrakīrti argues in the *Introduction* that the “self” cannot possess its constituents, since “self” is neither the name of a person nor something other than a person, as the grammar of possession requires (MA, 6.143); that the “self” cannot relate to its constituents as container or contained, since by convention these must be two different things (MA, 6.165); and that the “self” is not an ineffable private object beyond identity and difference, since it must be as expressible as “mind” in order to be anything at all (MA, 6.147).

With the bi-negation complete, Chandrakīrti has conclusively negated the major premise of any intrinsically real or identifiable self, thus clearing the way for the *Introduction*’s distinctive conventionalist formulation of “self”:

As the referents of [conventional expressions] like these cannot be found in [any of] seven [logical] modes when chariot-like analysis is performed, yet otherwise are [when



unexamined], they must exist by way of [mere] mundane consensus. (MA, 6.167)<sup>62</sup>

So it is that, simply by freeing the mind from the monopoly of the reifying habit, transcendent analysis and the new habit of rational intuition (*yuktijñāna\**) it develops completely frees its practitioner from the ills of self-deceptive activity: “Therefore, by viewing ‘myself’ and ‘my property’ as void, the practitioner is completely free of that” (MA, 6.165).<sup>63</sup> And, with Nāgārjuna, he concludes in the *Commentary*:

Since those who burn all the nesting grounds of the snakes of addictions by not perceiving [an intrinsic reality] in anything, and block the caves of the senses with mindfulness and awareness, thus leave no hold for the snake of the addictions to seize. “Those whose minds have no hold are not seized,” because once the mind does not perceive [an intrinsic reality] in things, there is no place in it to hold onto. (YṢV, ad k. 51)

Wittgenstein targets the diversity-premise in his critique of any phenomenological reduction of the self to a subjectivity that transcends all empirical constituents. His analysis of the premise proceeds by exposing its absurd contradiction of the linguistic conventions of self. He is especially concerned with showing how modern forms of the diversity-premise contradict the usage of “self” to zero the grammatical subject onto a particular empirical speaker within a community of similar speakers. To begin, he shows the absurdity of the phenomenologist’s location of the subject in a transcendent realm of immediate self-evidence divorced from the “mechanism” of everyday speech, citing the consequence that such diversity contradicts the subject’s conventional relation to a set of empirical constituents:

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<sup>62</sup> MA, 6.167: *yon tan yan lag 'dod chags mtshan nyid dang ni bud shing la sogs dang / yon tan can yan lag can dang mtshan gzhi me la sogs dag / de rnams shing rta'i rnam dpyad byas pas rnam bdun yod pa ma yin zhing / de las gzhan du gyur par 'jig rten grags pa'i sgo nas yod pa yin ll.*

<sup>63</sup> MA, 6.165: *gang phyir byed po med can las med can / de phyir bdag gi bdag med par yod min / de phyir bdag dang bdag gi stong lia zhing / rnal 'byor pa de rnam par grol bar 'gyur ll.*

A wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it, is not part of the mechanism. (PI, §271)

“But doesn’t what you say come down to this: that there is no pain, for example, without *pain-behavior*?”—It comes to this: only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious. (PI, §281)

“But in the fairy tale the pot too can see and hear!”  
Certainly; but it *can* also talk. (PI, §282)

Thinking is not an incorporeal process which lends life and sense to speaking, and which it would be possible to detach from speaking, rather as the Devil took the shadow of Schlemiehl from the ground. (PI, §339)

An inner process stands in need of outward criteria. (PI, §580)

Forget this transcendent certainty which is connected with your concept of spirit. (OC, 47)

If this first aspect of Wittgenstein’s critique parallels the first consequence of his Buddhist counterparts, that the diversity-premise precludes the self’s having the empirical character of its constituents, the second aspect parallels the second consequence that the self would have to be discoverable apart from its constituents. The gist of his argument is to show that the phenomenologist’s location of the subject in an intrinsically private realm of incommunicable self-evidence contradicts the conventional use of “self” or “I” to distinguish the “inner experience” of one empirical speaker from the comparable experience of others:

Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a ‘beetle’. No one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle.... The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty. (PI, §293)

The sensation...is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either!  
The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as

well as a something about which nothing could be said. (PI, §304)

There is here no question of a 'seeing'—and therefore none of a 'having'—nor of a subject, nor therefore of 'I' either... [For] if as a matter of logic you exclude other people's having something, it loses its sense to say that you have it. (PI, §398)

Thus, by rejecting both dualistic alternatives of self-evident identity and diversity, Wittgenstein exclusively negates the major premise that conventional expressions like "self," "this," "I," and "mine" must refer to some intrinsically grounded or essential referent. Although he has "only rejected the grammar which tries to force itself on us here"—the reifying habit he calls "a main source of our philosophical bewilderment" (BBB, 52)—Wittgenstein nonetheless has made "the real discovery...the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace..." (PI, §133). For his non-egocentrist method of examples retrains the language user to stop the self-deceptive habit of egocentrist reifications of grammar, especially by exposing the "I" and "mine" as "grammatical fictions," conventions of which the life lies in their unexamined use. Thus, the therapeutic effect of his method is to free the speaker to selflessly master the empty conventions of language:

Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of the intelligence by means of language. (PI, §109)

The problems arising through the misinterpretation of our forms of language...are deep disquietudes; their roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language. (PI, §111)

What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand. (PI, §118)

"What is your aim in philosophy?" To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle. (PI, §309)

...to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense. (PI, §464)

For the clarity we are aiming at is indeed *complete clarity*. But that simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear.... Problems are solved (obstructions cleared), not a *single* problem. (PI, §133)

#### 4. The Social Epistemology of Self-Correction: Virtual Insight and Agency

Now that the first part of our comparative overview of the *Reason* and its *Commentary* has defined a parallel structure linking their dereifying analysis with the language therapy of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, the remaining two parts of our comparative framework will be relatively simple. In the three part overview of the critical-contemplative practice of non-egocentrist philosophy, we took the second task to be: defining relativity as the psycholinguistic process sustaining human subjects and objects as working consensual fictions, and hence, as the conventional ground for a form of self-corrective thinking and acting whose unexamined premise is the virtual insight of voidness. The key point to be considered here is how the purely negative or "critical" dereifying insight of voidness translates into the "practical," illusion-like, or virtual, relational insight, sustaining the enlightened cultivation of living individuals and their social consensus. We turn now to compare the treatment of this practical aspect of non-egocentrist contemplation in Nāgārjuna, Chandrakīrti, and Wittgenstein.

Since Nāgārjuna's focus in the *Reason* is to present the voidness insight as the door to nondual transcendence in and through relativity, it is only reasonable that his text highlights the illusion-like virtual insight, the relative reflex of dereifying analysis. Thus, the *Reason's* initial critique of dualistic constructs of transcendence clears the way for its core practical thrust: presenting a nondual formula of "immediately experienced transcendence" (*dr̥ṣṭadharmānirvāṇa*), including a contemplative framework in which dereifying (critical) and deobjectifying (virtual) insights are equated as complementary aspects of one nondual practice of corrective self-transcendence. So, the *Reason's* practical task requires a nondualistic reframing of the Buddha's therapeutic insight of selflessness, and hence of the classical paradigm of human science structured around the easily reified disease/cure dichotomy of cyclic life versus extinction. The crux of this reframing is

Nāgārjuna’s evolutionary epistemology of psychosocial construction (*laukika-vikalpanā*),<sup>64</sup> which defines the intersubjective experience of life by a nondual formula whose critical constant is the voidness of all signs, and whose practical constant is that all constructed knowledge, conceptual and perceptual, is relative to its matrix of evolutionary development (*karmavipāka*):

Those who are expert in things  
See them as impermanent,  
Deceptive in nature, hollow,  
Empty, selfless, and vacant.

With no basis and no perceptual object,  
With no root and no foundation,  
Totally arisen from the cause—misknowledge—  
Bereft of beginning, middle, and end,

Essenceless—like a plantain [tree]—  
Resembling a fairy city,  
And an unbearable city of confusion,  
Life appears like an illusion. (YŚ, 25–27)

The intended audience of the *Reason* would likely have recognized in these verses key statements from the *Wisdom*, including the famous formula from the “Analysis of Evolutionary Causality Chapter”: “The Buddha proclaimed the truth of the conservation of evolutionary actions: as voidness, they are not annihilated; as cyclic life, they are not permanent” (MMK, 17.20).<sup>65</sup> This formula’s reframing of classical Buddhist psychobiology is nondualistic in that it allows Nāgārjuna to include the subjects and objects

<sup>64</sup> I borrow the terms “evolutionary epistemology” and “psychosocial construction” from current exploration—in the fields of neurobiology, sociology, linguistics, and the philosophy of science—of the fact that human knowledge and perception is shaped by the constructive activity of the subject, in dependence on a psychosociobiological matrix of conditions. In this, I am extending Stcherbatsky’s comparison between Buddhist and Kantian epistemology to the present day, while recognizing that the comparison between Centrist and contemporary Western constructivism is limited by the residual epistemological dualism of constructivists in the West. Cf. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1965); Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967); Pribram, *Languages of the Brain* (1971); Piaget, *Genetic Epistemology* (1970).

<sup>65</sup> MMK, 17.20: *śūnyatā ca na cocchedaḥ saṃsāraśca na śāśvatam | karmaṇo ’vipraṇāśaśca dharmo buddhena deśitaḥ ||*.

of perception and language within an evolutionary epistemology, as functions of evolution's illusion-like conservative and transformative laws. Since, for Nāgārjuna, all knowledge and truth are relative to life's evolutionary-developmental process, the unaided sense faculties yield deceptive knowledge at best, and must be corrected with the less self-enclosed mental faculties trained in conventional social symbols and signs; while the truth of social consensus is also relative and deceptive, and must in turn be corrected by the intellect that critically appropriates and renews the definitive culture-medium of linguistic convention. Thus, the ultimate truth is the truth that frees the mind from the self-limiting habit of reifying its constructions, while relative truth is what frees the mind to override the innate egocentric bias of sensation and instinct, as one overrides the deceptive evidence of an illusion. These practical themes from the *Reason* also echo formulations from the "Evolutionary Causality Chapter" and the "Misperception Chapter" of the *Wisdom*:

Freedom comes from ending compulsive activity;  
 Compulsive activity comes from constructions,  
 Which come from fabrications;  
 And fabrications terminate in voidness. (MMK, 17.5)

The forms, sounds, tastes, textures,  
 Scents, and [mental] phenomena  
 Constructed as the six kinds of objects  
 Of desire, anger, and delusion

...Resemble a fairy city,  
 A dream, or a mirage. (MMK, 23.7–8)<sup>66</sup>

This critical nondual anthropology provides the context within which Nāgārjuna's formula of nondual self-corrective insights must be understood. Evolution is not a mechanism to be escaped or a disease to be terminated, but the open matrix within which all illusion-like causes and effects, diseases and cures, must take place. To be truly transcendent, life must be "fully

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<sup>66</sup> MMK, 17.5: *karmakleśakṣayānmokṣa karmakleśā vikalpataḥ | te prapañcātprapañcastu śūnyatāyān nirudhyate ||*; MMK, 23.7–8: *rūpaśabdarasasparśā gandhā dharmāśca śaḍvidham | vastu rāgasya dveṣasya mohasya ca vikalpyate || rūpaśabdarasasparśā gandhā dharmāśca kevalāḥ | gandharva nagarākārā maricisvapnasamñibhāḥ ||*

understood” (YS, 6); and the self-corrective insight of voidness is the door to its understanding (YS, 54).<sup>67</sup> This is not because the voidness insight leads one “beyond” conceptuality or language into “reality,” “nature,” or “consciousness,” but because it frees the mind to fully inhabit the evolutionary reality of linguistic convention, the definitive culture-medium of enlightened selflessness. If the dereifying insight is corrective because it frees the language user *from* the delusion of an intrinsically real “I” or “mine,” the illusion-like insight is corrective because it frees the language user *to* selflessly employ conventional fictions like “I” and “mine.” While the insight that “I” is an empty convention displaces the speaker from habitual self-enclosed reference frames, the insight that “I” is a communicative fiction re-centers the speaker within the relatively omniscient intersubjective reference frame of conventions of speech.

In Nāgārjuna’s self-corrective practice, then, these two insights are equated, as are ultimate and superficial in the two-reality theory, and as the voidness of signs and the deception of senses in his nondual anthropology. Specifically, the critical dereifying insight is aligned with the ultimate reality of the voidness of linguistic signs, while the practical, virtual insight is aligned with the superficial reality of perceptual relativity and unexamined convention. The discovery defined by their nondualistic equation is the rational insight of relativity, confirmed by complementary findings under two distinct experiential conditions. When persons, things, or signs are subjected to ultimacy analysis, no shred of logical or perceptual evidence is found to confirm that they have the non-relative reality, identity, or objectivity they appear to have; when persons, things, or signs are *not* subjected to ultimacy analysis, they live and work perfectly well as sheer relativities while still appearing to have non-relative reality, identity, and objectivity, confirming that their non-relative appearance is a psychosocial construction which neither underpins nor undermines their viability.

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<sup>67</sup> Nāgārjuna’s concern with defining the process of “relativity” or “conditioned development” (*pratītyasamutpāda*), like the Buddha’s, is not a scientific concern with defining “causality” objectified as an “empirical” or “inductive law,” as some have suggested (Cf. Kalupahana, *Nāgārjuna*, 29ff.; Scherrer-Schaub, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, xxxix ff.). Rather, it is a therapeutic concern with defining a conventional model of evolution that helps humans cultivate self-transcendent insight, and hence its liberative and transformative influence on psychosocial development.

The critical linkage and practical complementarity joining these conditions and insights are clear. Without the dereification of habitual self-centered constructs, critical intellect could not be free to override their illusory self-evidence or see and use alternate constructions, such as those others prefer. Without the virtual insight that practically applies dereifying insight to everyday interactions, critical intellect would be limited in its ability to transcend the inertia of biosociocultural patterns and guide the formation of more enlightened ones. In this light, the virtual insight shows the practical intent and use of the convention of voidness: to define a social epistemology and self-corrective anthropology appropriate to humans as cultural agents who speak. And it also shows the intent and use of the *Reason's* nondual framework of self-corrective insight modes: to advance the *Wisdom's* analysis of worldviews one step nearer its final application to the *Jewel Rosary's* enlightened altruism, by training the thinking and speaking agent to dereify and reconstruct itself as a freer, more objective fiction of language:

One whose intellect sees existence  
As similar to an illusion or mirage,  
Is not deceived by [extremist] views  
Of an ultimate beginning or end. (YŞ, 17)

Seeing things to be like mirror images  
With their eye of intuitive wisdom,  
Great souls do not get stuck  
In the quicksand of "objects." (YŞ, 54)

Those who cherish beauty become attached;  
Those who turn away from it become detached.  
But those who see it as empty,  
Like an illusory person, reach nirvāṇa. (YŞ, 56)

Thus, the self-corrective social epistemology of Nāgārjuna's nondual insight modes is meant to empower its user to override and reform the archaic misknowledge of egocentrist worldviews and perceptions, and so to ascend to inhabit the open and selfless evolutionary stage of objective linguistic intelligence and agency. It is with the anonymous "eye" of speech that living beings are most free to release the reified self-enclosed views that make the life-cycle an "unbearable city of confusion." The complementary voidness insights are two sides of the door leading the verbal subject out of



the trap of self-deceit: one cutting through the reification of “I” and “mine” that locks the mind in self-centered constructs; the other cultivating the free and equal exchange of “I”s and “mine”s that turns the illusory fictions of everyday life into increasingly objective selves and worlds. Nāgārjuna describes this virtual process of evolving fictions in the “Evolutionary Causality Chapter” of the *Wisdom*: “As a master may artfully fashion a fiction, which fiction in turn fashions another fiction, so likewise, the agent is a fiction who fashions another fiction, and his action is the fiction he fashions” (MMK, 17.31–32).<sup>68</sup>

Chandrakīrti’s anthropological framework for the nondual practice of self-corrective insight closely parallels Nāgārjuna’s. Drawing on more extensive treatments in the *Lucid Exposition* and *Introduction*, Chandrakīrti in the *Commentary* clearly describes the illusion-like nature of evolution and its transcendence:

Regarding the nature of such things, since they lack reality, like illusions, they deceive the naïve by appearing to have reality; such things in fact are “deceptive in nature.” In lacking the strength to endure, they are naturally feeble, hence “hollow.” Because they lack intrinsic substantiality, they are “empty.” Because they are empty of a self, they are “selfless.” (YṢV, ad k. 25)

The noble do not perceive the variety of forms of the world, since for them, the world has the singular taste of voidness, and there is no variety of forms in voidness....

Thus, to indicate how it lacks intrinsically objective status, [Nāgārjuna] taught, “bereft of beginning, middle, and end,” meaning that [the world] is free from creation, duration, and destruction. Furthermore, that [the world] originates from the seed of misknowledge [is reflected in] this [statement], “Essenceless—like a plantain [tree].” If [the world] did not originate from the seed of misknowledge, then when analyzed, it is reasonable to expect that one would perceive

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<sup>68</sup> MMK, 17.31–32: *yathā nirmītakam śāstā nirmīmīta ṛddhisam padā | nirmīto nirmīmītānyam sa ca nirmītakam punaḥ || tathā nirmītakākāraḥ kartā yat karma tat kṛtam | tadyathā nirmītenānyo nirmīto nirmītaḥ ||*

its core essence. However, when examined, created things have no core essence, like the trunk of a plantain [tree]. Anything that lacks any essence yet appears to have an essence, must arise through the force of delusion; such being the case, the world originates from the seed of misknowledge....

Therefore, the unmistaken see this [world] as like an illusion. What is a city of confusion for the naïve is seen by the noble as like an illusion, because they are free from the darkness of misknowledge. (YṢV, ad k. 26–27)

As with Nāgārjuna, with Chandrakīrti the pure negations of dereifying analysis translate into the illusion-like transformational laws of the relativity insight:

Thus, abandoning permanence and annihilation, a dependently arisen form, like a reflection, is not incompatible with the sphere of activity of a mistaken awareness, so the various migrant beings that were spoken of are not impossible.

The noble, as well, abandon such errors and do not reify false [things]; thus, their liberation is not impossible. Since relativity is not objectively created, those who, through this reasoning,<sup>69</sup> accept dependent things as resembling the moon in water and reflections in a mirror, [understand them as] neither intrinsically objectively true nor false. (YṢV, ad k. 45)<sup>70</sup>

Chandrakīrti highlights the linkage between the dereifying mode of transcendent insight and its virtual or conventional mode, as well as defining them in terms of different perspectives on the linguistic usages of mundane convention. As for their linkage, the two insight-modes are mutually indispensable to liberative development, the critical and practical aspects of a single process. Without the freedom from reified constructs of “I” and

<sup>69</sup> The “royal reasoning of relativity” (*pratītyasamutpāda-yukti-rāja*).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. MA, 6.37–38: *dnegos po stong pa gzugs brnyan la sogs pa | tshogs la ltos rnams ma grags pa yang min | ji ltar der ni gzugs brnyan sogs stong las | shes pa de yi rnam par skye 'gyur ltar || de bzhin dnegos po thams cad stong na yang | stong nyid dag las rab tu skye bar 'gyur | bden pa gnyid su 'ang rang bzhin med pa'i phyir | de dag rtag pa ma yin chad pa 'ang min ||.*

“mine,” the virtual transformation from self-enclosed life-cycle to liberated life-cycle is logically inconceivable; without artful mastery of the intersubjective use of “I” and “mine” in the illusion-like world, their dereification is therapeutically ineffective, if not ruinous:

For if one does not accept the reality of the non-creation of suffering at that moment as *nirvāṇa*, then, even though one may be free from addictions—since bonds of desire, and so forth, have been interrupted—still, one would see that the cause of the futile view of the impermanent aggregates [as “I” and “mine”] exists. Because seeing that gives rise to [the addictions] of desire, and so forth, therefore there would be no attainment of any such liberation at all. (YŚV, ad k. 9ab)

When not taught in this manner, students may succumb to error through the teaching of voidness, since they may come to confound the principle of the two realities, superficial and ultimate. In such cases, they would be unable to avoid non-virtue, since the intellectually inept might cling to the idea, “this world is void.” Hence, [thinking,] “If this is voidness, what use is it all,” they may not be inspired [to cultivate] the virtuous actions that will make success certain. Consequently, they may be destroyed, like a bird with undeveloped wing feathers thrown from its nest. (YŚV, ad k. 30)<sup>71</sup>

Chandrakīrti also distinguishes the nondual insight modes in social, epistemological terms. While equally therapeutic and mutually indispensable, the dereifying and illusion-like insights are respectively aligned with the ultimate and superficial truths by the fact that the former applies ultimacy-analysis to the referents of linguistic conventions, while the latter simply accepts and employs conventions without such analysis, as unexamined usages:

Similarly, the noble, as well, do not perceive anything whatsoever established in an intrinsically real way that can be called “cessation,” for when analyzed with wisdom, that which is unproduced in any intrinsically real way and lacking

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. MA, 6.80; Tib. cited below, p. 101 n. 74.

in objectivity—like a magically fabricated elephant—is [called] “nirvāṇa.” Furthermore, since nirvāṇa is established in dependence on that [life-cycle] which is glossed as “like a magician’s illusion,” it is established, as is impermanence, by worldly convention. Thereby, so-called “cyclic life” and “transcendent nirvāṇa” both lack intrinsically objective status. Therefore, the thorough knowledge of the reality of things, by just that lack of objective perception, should be recognized, without a doubt, as “nirvāṇa.” (YṢV, ad k. 7)

[E]ven the commonsense things in the world must be established by social convention, not by [analytic] validation. (YṢV, ad k. 20)<sup>72</sup>

Yet the logical and epistemological distinction between these two modes does not imply a therapeutic inequality. The illusion-like virtual insight is no more deceived by the apparent self-evidence of perception than the insight in which such false evidence is simply not found. In fact, the virtual insight enjoys a technical primacy in Chandrakīrti’s self-corrective framework, as in Nāgārjuna’s, by virtue of its practical application to the virtual self and world. This is only reasonable given Chandrakīrti’s formulation of that self and world as mere linguistic usages whose reality depends on unexamined assent to conventions, like working fictions. The technical primacy of the virtual insight lies in its role in the art of transforming a deceptively factual, self-enclosed life, into a non-deceptive life of omniscient objectivity and altruism, as one might revise an artless fiction into an artful one:

Those who see the world as like an illusion completely understand being and nothingness by not perceiving an intrinsically identifiable being or nothingness. Since they do not imagine [an intrinsic identity] in these two, they are not constructed. For those who know the [true] meaning [of reality], having dissolved being and nothingness, desire and the other addictions undoubtedly will no longer function as causes of cyclic life. (YṢV, ad k. 57)

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<sup>72</sup> Cp. MA, 6.35; Tib. cited above, p. 67 n. 29.

Thus, while illusion-like insight presupposes a suspension of ultimacy-analysis, it does not thereby entail a suspension of conventions of reason, conceptuality, or language. It is not some merely aesthetic “negative capability” or “unknowing.” For the premise of virtual insight is the ultimately rational pure negation of dereifying analysis; and it is no less rational for its unanalyzed affirmation that the negative findings of such ultimacy-analysis are indeed decisive grounds for thinking and acting in disregard of the illusion that things have intrinsically real, identifiable, or objective status. Chandrakīrti elaborates on virtual insight’s decisive role as the conventional rationale guiding the therapeutic art of self-transcendence, in *Introduction* 6.41 and 80:

As the type of hair-like [floater] seen by one with eye disease does not assume the form of some other visual object, however equal in lacking objective existence, so one must recognize that the developmental effect of actions is not a gratuitous effect.<sup>73</sup>

Conventional truth constitutes the art, while ultimate truth is what evolves from the art; those who are ignorant of the distinction between the two, enter through false constructs the path of misfortune.<sup>74</sup>

As for Wittgenstein, Part II of the *Investigations* defines the practical aspect of his method for gaining “a clear view of the use of our words” in terms of the optical-illusion metaphor of gestalt-shifts in perception. This modern account of gestalt-insight, like the ancient Centrist account of illusion-like insight, is set within a language-centered picture of the evolution of human knowledge and forms of life drawn in terms of relativistic “language-games” founded only on “unfounded” convention:

What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings. (PI, §415)

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<sup>73</sup> MA, 6.41: *ji ltar yul ni yod nyid min mtshungs kyang l rab rib can gyis skra shad rnam par ni l mthong gi dngos gzhan rnam par ma yin ltar l de bzbin smin las slar smin min shes kyis ll.*

<sup>74</sup> MA, 6.80: *tha snyad bden pa thabs su gyur pa dang l don dam bden pa thabs byung gyur pa te l de nyis rnam dbye gang gis mi shes pa l de ni rnam rtog log pas lam ngan zhugs ll.*

I shall call the whole consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven the “language-game”... (PI, §7)

...and to imagine a language means to imagine a *form of life*.... (PI, §19)

The evolution of the higher mammals and of man.... The picture...must be explored if we want to understand the sense of what we are saying.... (PI, II, 184)

[W]hat has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life*.... (PI, II, 226)

[W]hat looks as if it *had* to exist is part of the language.... (PI, §50)

The only correlate in language to an intrinsic necessity is an arbitrary rule.... (PI, §372)

The truth of certain empirical propositions belongs to our frame of reference.... (OC, 83)

If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false.... (OC, 206)

Here *once again* there is needed a step like the one taken in relativity theory. (OC, 305)

Wittgenstein’s method for exploring and correcting egocentric distortions of consensual reality presumes his analogy between the interpretation of unfounded language-games and the deceptive optics of perceptual *gestalts*, which he refers to as “aspect vision” or “seeing as”:

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden...because [they are] always before one’s eyes.... (PI, §129)

Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to...have said: *this language-game is played*.... (PI, §654)

Look on the language-game as the *primary* thing. And on the feelings, etc.,...as interpretation. (PI, §656)

Do I really see something different each time, or do I only interpret what I see in a different way?... “I am seeing this figure as a...” can be as little verified as...“I am seeing bright red.”... We find certain things about seeing puzzling, because we do not find the whole business of seeing puzzling enough. (PI, II, 212)

Call it a dream. It does not change anything. (PI, II, 216)

Remarkably, the parallel between Wittgenstein’s dream-like insight and the illusion-like insight of his Buddhist counterparts becomes clearer still when we examine the relation between its practical affirmation of the conventional language-games that form human life and the critique that exposes them as devoid of any intrinsically necessary or self-evident ground:

The meaning of the word “to derive” stood out clearly. But we...wanted to see the essence of deriving. So we stripped those particular coverings off; but then deriving itself disappeared. (PI, §164)

Any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets. (PI, §198)

If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions, but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so. (PI, §242)

Would it not be possible for us...to have a feeling of being guided by the rules as by a spell? (PI, §234)

This merely shows what goes to make up what we call “obeying a rule” in everyday life. (PI, §235)

The fact that I use the word “hand” and all the other words in my sentence without a second thought, indeed that I would stand before the void if I wanted so much as to try doubting their meanings—shows that absence of doubt belongs to the essence of the language-game; that the question, “How do I know...” prolongs the language-game or else dispels it. (OC, 370)

My life consists in being content to accept many things.  
(OC, 344)

Like Chandrakīrti, then, Wittgenstein links the negative insight that dereifies conventions with the affirmative insight that uncritically accepts them, as perspectives showing two logically consistent aspects or “sides” of every language-game (OC, 420). Also, like Chandrakīrti, he aligns the insight that conventions are devoid of any intrinsic ground with ultimately critical analysis, and the insight that they work effectively in the absence of any such ground with superficially practical, non-analytic acceptance. The parallel is complete when we compare Chandrakīrti’s view of the evolutionary efficacy of illusion-like insight with Wittgenstein’s view of the efficacy of his dream-like insight to artfully shape a fictive human form of life:

“Aren’t you at bottom really saying that everything except human behavior is a fiction?” If I do speak of a fiction, it is of a grammatical fiction. (OC, 307)

One says that these sense-impressions can deceive us. But here one fails to reflect that the fact that the false appearance was precisely one of rain is founded on a definition. (OC, 354)

The game, one would like to say, has not only rules but also a *point*. (PI, §564)

Compare a concept with a style of painting. For is even our style of painting arbitrary? Can we chose one at pleasure? (PI, II, 230)

Words are also deeds. (PI, §546)

Even here,...[c]orrecter prognoses will generally issue from the judgements of those with better knowledge of human-kind. Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can.... Can someone else be a man’s teacher in this? Certainly. (PI, II, 227)



## 5. The Anthropology of Self-Correction: Objectivity and Altruism

Given the similarity in the modes of therapeutic insight prescribed by our three non-egocentrist philosophers, the final task in our comparative exploration is to see whether this parallel in self-corrective practice carries over into the final application of philosophy to human practice in general. In the outline of our exploration, this last task is: defining these nondual modes of self-transcendent insight as the critical and practical conditions for objective social knowledge and communication, and hence, as the conventional ground for a self-corrective anthropology aimed at reproducing free and responsible social agents.

While Nāgārjuna's opening and central focus in the *Reason* highlights the dereifying and illusion-like insights of Centrist analysis, his concluding focus is on preparing the practitioner to apply these twin contemplative modes to the final nondual performance of wisdom and compassion formulated in his *Jewel Rosary*. Nāgārjuna's closing focus in the *Reason* reframes Buddhist contemplative analysis in three steps that link the practice of transcendent insight to the art of cultivating objective compassion. These three link dereifying insight, illusion-like insight, and their integrated mastery to cultivating impartiality, empathy, and altruism, respectively. With these steps, then, the *Reason* reframes the practice of transcendent insight as the foundation of the non-egocentrist discipline of self-correction (*blo byang ba, buddhivisodhana*) mentioned in Chandrakīrti's *Commentary* and elaborated in the *Introduction*.<sup>75</sup>

As for the most basic of these, impartiality is linked with the analytic insight that dereifies habitual constructs of "I" and "mine," de-centering the defensive structure of self-enclosed worldviews and egocentric instincts. While philosophically we recognize this de-centering at work in the "positionlessness" of non-egocentrist thought, it is also generally recognized as "objectivity," the key feature in any intellectual open-mindedness, the door to any genuine understanding of unfamiliar views and perspectives. Here, Nāgārjuna reframes this cognitive breakthrough psychologically, as the impartiality which redresses the egocentric bias *for self as opposed to other*, and

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Hopkins, *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism* (1980) for a translation of Tsong Khapa's commentary, *dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rgya cher bshad pa dgongs pa rab gsal*.

so acts as the door to any empathic openness or sensitivity to the experience of others:

[Those] overwhelmed by mistaken knowledge,  
Are trapped by attachment in a process  
Of obsession and conflict,  
Clutching to truth in the [intrinsically] untrue.

Great souls are beyond disputes,  
[For,] they assume no [fixated] position.  
For those who have no position,  
How can there be opposition? (YŚ, 49–50)

Thus, the insight that dereifies “I” and “mine” is not only the logical precondition for the transcendence of any false self, but also the psychological precondition of self-transcendence in relation to others. In making this linkage, Nāgārjuna aligns the dereifying insight of his contemplative framework with the goal of transcendence (*niḥśreyasa*) in the nondual practice framework of the *Jewel Rosary*, where it is cultivated as the ultimate realization of self-interest in perfect freedom of mind and expression.

The second step in Nāgārjuna’s linkage connects the illusion-like insight that cultivates “self” and “world” as cooperative fictions with the recentering of “I” and “mine” within the relational reference frame of linguistic convention. While philosophically we recognize this re-centering in the consensualism of non-egocentrist method, it is also generally recognized as “empathy,” a key feature of any technical mastery, the way to the acquisition and renewal of any art embedded in the intersubjective mastery of language. Here, Nāgārjuna reframes this communicative mastery psychologically, as the openness to empathic involvement that redresses the bias *for self before other*, and so acts as the door to an empathic concern and responsiveness that puts others first:

When one has a place [for reified things],  
One experiences attachment and detachment;  
But the great souls, having no [such] place,  
Are neither attached nor detached. (YŚ, 58).

Thus, the insight that affirms the empty convention of “I” and “mine” is not only the practical precondition for the illusion-like development of a “great soul,” but also the psychological precondition for the **altruistic** culti-

vation of others' selves. In making this linkage, Nāgārjuna aligns the virtual insight of his contemplative framework with the goal of ascendance (*abhy-udaya*) in the nondual practice framework of the *Jewel Rosary*, where it is cultivated as the ultimate realization of public interest in a perfect environment of mutual cooperation and unlimited communicative art.

The third step in Nāgārjuna's reframing is his linkage of the mastery of insight's complementary dereifying and virtual modes with the enlightened performance of nondualistic wisdom and compassion. While philosophically we recognize this performance as the integrated mastery of liberative insight and therapeutic art in non-egocentrist philosophy, it is also generally recognized as "altruism," a key feature of any artful mentorship, the means of personifying any cultural tradition whose aim is to edify or heal. Here, Nāgārjuna reframes this cultural mastery psychosocially, as the unwavering commitment that transforms the self-enclosed life-cycle into a culture arena for the altruistic embodiment of liberative science and art:

Whoever contemplates freedom,  
And is not moved by the wavering mind,  
Crosses the ocean of intolerable existence,  
Which seethes with the snakes of addiction.

By the virtue [of writing this,] may all beings  
Gather the stores of merit and wisdom,  
And attain the two supreme [buddha bodies]  
Arisen from merit and wisdom! (YŚ, 59–60)

In making this linkage, Nāgārjuna not only places the *Reason's* self-corrective practice within the classical context of the interdisciplinary curriculum (*adhiśikṣā*),<sup>76</sup> but specifically aligns its nondual contemplative

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<sup>76</sup> In effect, YŚ 59 prescribes combining transcendent insight with concentrative quiescence (*vipaśyanā-shamatha*), a technique traditionally used for the mutually indispensable cultivation of wisdom (*prajñā*) and concentration (*samadhi*). In his review of this tradition as evidenced in Tsong Khapa's *Middle Transcendent Insight*, Thurman shows how Tsong Khapa derives the therapeutic necessity of joining insight with quiescence. Tsong Khapa first quotes a famous passage from the *Elucidation of Intention Sutra*: "He who practices quiescence and transcendent insight will be freed from the bondages of negative conditionings and of signs." Tsong Khapa then comments: "'Negative conditionings' here refers to instincts underlying mental processes, which instincts increasingly generate a distorted subjectivity. 'Signs' refers to the continuous habitual adherence to mistaken [self] objects which reinforce those

(cont'd)

framework with the goal of “cultivating transcendence with ascendance” (*nibhṣreyasa-abhyudayaśca-varadhana*) in the Mahāyāna anthropological framework of the *Jewel Rosary*, where it figures as the path to the integrated realization of self interest and public interest, personified in the inseparable truth and form bodies of buddhahood. So, when viewed in the larger context of Nāgārjuna’s work, the *Reason*’s ideal of the great soul (*mahātma*\*) who masters “contemplation of the void” figures as a transitional goal meant to open the practitioner to the enlightened altruist’s resolve to consciously evolve toward full enlightenment. This is why the hermeneutical hierarchy of the *Reason* anticipates the *Jewel Rosary*’s, helping the objective mind see the human body as the empty culture-medium for empathy:

The naïve are attached to forms;  
 The mediocre are detached from them.  
 Those with the highest intelligence understand  
 The nature of forms, and thus are freed. (YṢ, 55)

Compare the famous *Jewel Rosary* verses:

To some, [Buddha] teaches doctrines  
 That counteract vice;  
 To some, [doctrines] that help achieve virtues....  
 ...[Finally, he teaches] some the profound,  
 Awe-inspiring practice of enlightenment  
 Whose essence is the voidness that is compassion. (RA 4.95–96)<sup>77</sup>

As for Chandrakīrti, his own formulation of Dialecticist Centrist practice in the *Introduction* is essentially a reframing of the science of objective self-knowledge and the art of objective self-correction within the non-

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instincts. The former are abandoned by transcendent insight, and the latter by peaceful quiescence.” (TKSB, pha, f. 132a–b; Thurman, *Essence*, 131–132, bracket added)

<sup>77</sup> Both YṢ 55 and RA, 4.95–96 describe the three vehicles (*triyāna*) of disciples, hermit buddhas, and bodhisattvas, as forming a single continuum or vehicle (*ekayāna*) leading to the realization of buddhahood. The constant uniting this continuum is the progressive development of transcendent insight which gives all Buddhist practice its “singular flavor of freedom.” The progressive meditative and ethical techniques for its development range through progressive degrees of renunciation and empathy.

dual practice-paradigm presented in Nāgārjuna's *Jewel Rosary*. In the *Introduction*'s first verse, Chandrakīrti spells out this threefold reframing:

While disciples and hermit sages arise from lords of sages,  
buddhas evolve from enlightened altruists (bodhisattvas);  
and the causes of these heirs of the victors are nondual intel-  
ligence, the compassionate attitude, and the spirit of enlight-  
enment.<sup>78</sup>

In these three “causes,” further expanded in the three-verse closing summary of *Introduction* 6, we can recognize Nāgārjuna's threefold framing of the dereifying insight, illusion-like insight, and their nondual mastery, as impartiality, empathy, and altruistic commitment, respectively. Thus, in his *Commentary* on YṢ 50, Chandrakīrti links the contemplation of dereifying insight—which releases all dogmatic perspectives—to the nondual intellect which opens the door to both personal freedom of mind and unconditional or de-objectifying compassion (*dmigs med snying rje*) for others:

When one assumes a [righteous] position of one's own, one then enters into disputes with others because it has been fixed upon. Consequently those without any such [position]—the great souls—are free from conflict. Moreover, for those who already are free from any [fixated] position, it is no longer possible for another's position to be unassailable. For when you have no [fixed] position, it is impossible to see others as maintaining a [fixed] opposition. Now, even if there were such a thing as a position, without it being one's own position or another's position, it would be utterly irrelevant! (YṢV, ad k. 50ab)<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> MA, 1.1: *nyan thos sangs rgyas 'bring thub dbang las skyes / sangs rgyas byang chub sems dpa' las 'khrungs shing / snying rje'i sems dang gnyis su med blo dang / byang chub sems ni rgyal sras rnams kyi rgyu ll.*

<sup>79</sup> Cf. MA, 6.119: *rang gi lta ba chags dang de bzhin du / gzhan gyi lta la 'khrug gang rtog pa nyid / de'i phyir 'dod chags khong khro rnam bsal te / rnam dpyod pa na myur du grol bar 'gyur ll;* and MA, 6.224: *de ltar blos gros zer gyis snang ba gsal byas pa'i / rang gi lag na gnas pa'i skyu ru ra bzhin du / srid gsum 'di dag ma lus gdod nas skye med par / rtogs de tha snyad bden pa'i stobs kyis 'gog par 'gro ll.*

Chandrakīrti makes explicit the linkage implied by Nāgārjuna's closing verse between mastery of the two self-corrective insight modes and the practice of cultivating the ultimate and conventional spirits of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) which mature in the twofold embodiment of enlightenment:

The “store of merit” consists of all the immeasurable virtues achieved—except for wisdom itself and its causes—in order that countless realms of beings may come to understand. And the store of wisdom is all wisdom and the cause of wisdom totally dedicated to the achievement of buddhahood.

May all living beings who succeed in accumulating these two stores attain the unexcelled supreme [buddha-embodiments]. “Arisen” means created. That which has arisen from merit and wisdom [is what is meant by] “arisen from merit and wisdom.” What are those two? They are the form body and truth body. (YṢV, ad k. 60)

For Wittgenstein, as for Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti, the therapeutic work of philosophy is not done until it results in a changed form of life. Thus, Wittgenstein's repeated statements that philosophy “leaves everything as it is” (PI, §124) and does not “advance theses” (PI, §128) must be understood in the larger context of his mature work to mean that its dereifying insight frees the human speaker from false constructions, self-imposed obstacles to change, by “clearing the ground of language on which they stand” (PI, §118). The life work of non-egocentrist philosophy has only begun when egocentrist philosophy comes to an end:

The civil status of a contradiction, or its status in civil life: there is the philosophical problem. (PI, §125)

The confusions which occupy us arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work. (PI, §132)

The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question. (PI, §133)

The way to solve the problem you see in life is to live your life in a way that will make the problem disappear. (CV, 27)

All good teachings are of no avail. One must change *life*. (Or rather life's direction.) (CV, 53)

If the theoretical problem addressed by Wittgenstein's mature philosophy is reification, its practical concern is with the contradiction of conventions of subjective experience caused by modern egocentric philosophy's reification of "I" and "my private impressions." Thus, Wittgenstein's dereifying critical insight targets the ideas of intrinsically "private" experience rationalizing the "egocentric predicament"<sup>80</sup> as a prelude to his equalizing practice of bringing philosophy back to everyday "human agreement in language." His complementary dream-like insight accepts the illusory "language-game" as a means to train the empathic exchange on which the "natural history of human beings" depends. And, his aim of a "complete clarity" that uses both insights to master "the two sides of every language-game" is a transitional goal to prepare his reader to aspire to the greatness of genius by conscious cultivation of the critical and technical mastery of communication. Thus, Wittgenstein's contemplative philosophy of language finally translates into a philosophical practice of non-egocentrism; a practice whose end and means is to cultivate a form of life based on the communicative ground of human agreement in language, especially the fundamental language-games of equality, sympathy, and altruism.

The first aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophical practice reframes the dereifying insight into a practice of self-transcendent impartiality. Thus, his ultimate critical insight into the empty conventions of "I" and "mine" is not to deny the subject but to free it from egocentric misuses of language, to embrace its anonymous role in "civil life":

"Only I have got THIS."—What are these words for? They serve no purpose. —Can one not add: There is here no question of a "seeing"—and therefore none of a "having"—nor of a subject, nor therefore of "I" either? Might I not ask: in what sense have you *got* what you are talking about and saying that only you have got it? Do you possess it? You do

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<sup>80</sup> A term borrowed from Saunders and Henze, *The Private Language Problem* (1976).

not even *see* it. Must you not really say that no one has got it? And this too is clear: if as a matter of logic you exclude other people's having something, it loses its sense to say that you have it. (PI, §398)

In this passage, Wittgenstein reframes his dereifying insight as a non-egocentrist stance whose aim is not simply critical—to free the thinking subject from self-deception—but also practical—to open the human speaker to the interchangeable equality of “you” and “I,” the public convention on which private experience depends. Like the “positionless” stance of Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti's enlightened and non-egocentrist self, the selfless dispossession of Wittgenstein's dereified speaker opens the door to a new direction within the old form of life: away from the self-enclosed cycle of bias and conflict, towards the intersubjective “agreement” on which any communicative life depends. The practical premise of this new direction is the insight that privacy is not intrinsic to the subject, but an empty convention basic to the game of intersubjective agreement. This game assumes the grammatical rule that first-person reports are taken as authoritative in the language of personal experience. Thus, for Wittgenstein, the privacy of the “I” exists precisely as a “civil institution,” a form of cooperative contract between beings who speak. Privacy is a privilege we are trained to grant one another, the grammatical equivalent of “personal space” in the intersubjective field of language. Thus, any inequality in the use of the word “I” is not only logically incoherent, but practically self-defeating, since it contradicts the intersubjective exchange through which all human subjectivity evolves.

The affirmative insight that accepts the everyday game of “self” and “other,” “subject” and “object,” as a dream-like fiction of grammar here becomes Wittgenstein's way of cultivating the capacity for the spontaneous empathic exchange of perspectives that is basic to language's role as a medium of intersubjective agreement:

What is essential for us is, after all, spontaneous agreement, spontaneous sympathy. (1992, 699)

Anyone in such need who has the gift of opening his heart, rather than contracting it, accepts the means of cure in his heart. (CV, 46)

How am I filled with pity *for this man*? (PI, §287)



Seeing a living human being as an automaton is analogous to seeing one figure as a limiting case or variant of another; the cross-pieces of a window as a swastika. (PI, §420)

Look on the language-game as the *primary* thing. And on the feelings, etc., as you would a way of regarding the language-game, as interpretation. (PI, §656)

My attitude toward him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul. (PI, II, 178)

For Wittgenstein, then, perfectly mastering language as a medium of communication means integrating the self-critical insight that dereifies any egocentrist stance on the language-game with the empathic insight that sympathetically embraces its fictional rules, along with the stance others take on the game. And motivating this combined critical and practical mastery is a non-egocentrist commitment to embrace and extend the specifically human form of life on which communication in language is based: the altruism exemplified in human parents' first training of their child in the social conventions of language-use:

How do words refer to sensations?... A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child a new pain behaviour.... The verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it. (PI, §244)

It is a help here to remember that it is a primitive reaction to tend, to treat, the part that hurts when someone else is in pain; and not merely when oneself is—and so to pay attention to other people's pain behaviour, as one does *not* pay attention to one's own. (Ze, 540)

Get to know a new aspect from this special chapter of human behaviour—from this use of language. (Ze, 542)

Being sure that someone is in pain...and so on, are so many natural, instinctive kinds of behaviour towards other human beings, and our language is merely an auxiliary to, and further extension of this relation. (Ze, 545)

Finally, for Wittgenstein, philosophy entails an extension of natural altruistic behavior, in which one selflessly masters linguistic convention as the definitive instrument and medium through which human genius contributes to cultural evolution:

It strikes me that a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference. Hence, although it's *belief*, it's really a way of living, a way of assessing life. Instruction in religious faith, therefore, would have to take the form of a portrayal, a description of that system of reference, while at the same time being an appeal to conscience. And this combination would have to result in the pupil himself, of his own accord, passionately taking hold of the system of reference. (CV, 64)

That man will be revolutionary who can revolutionize himself. (CV, 45)

One might say: "Genius is talent exercised with courage." (CV, 38)

You can't be reluctant to give up your lie, and still tell the truth. (CV, 39)

The edifice of your pride has to be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work. (CV, 26)

But industry like that requires humility and an enormous capacity for suffering, hence strength. And someone who, with all this, can also express himself perfectly, simply speaks to us in the language of a great man. (CV, 71)

## 6. The Self-Corrective Anthropology of Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti

This overview of the *Reason* and its *Commentary* supports the thesis that the self-corrective procedure these texts prescribe is pivotal to their authors' philosophical systems, in that it links the complementary frameworks of objective self-knowledge and altruistic social agency assumed as foundational by the Universalist traditions of "profound view" and "magnificent deeds." Moreover, it helps overcome the hermeneutical obstacles we found limiting modern Centrist studies, such as the common misread-

ings we traced above to the implicit or explicit assumption of nineteenth century neo-Kantian epistemology as the philosophical foundation of modern text-critical disciplines and their methods. The alternate reference frame I proposed is based on comparing the therapeutic philosophy of non-egocentrism in Nietzsche, Freud, and Wittgenstein with the Centrist refinement of Shākyamuni's philosophy of selflessness (*anātmavāda*) by Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti. The gist of this framework is a reading of Centrist philosophy as a method of correcting the reifying mental habit underlying self-enclosed worldviews and self-defeating forms of life, including both main types of malignant "views of voidness" and the mystical and pragmatic excesses they rationalize. The traditional interpretive context of the *Reason* and its *Commentary* helps reveal the special role these texts play in relation to their authors' other major works as formulating Centrism as a philosophical language therapy and rational self-corrective procedure for reproducing psychologically objective self-knowledge and responsible social agency. A close reading comparing the *Reason* and its *Commentary* with the *Philosophical Investigations* of Wittgenstein, supplemented by references to other major works of the authors, reveals clear and consistent parallels between their respective language therapies and self-corrective procedures. I believe that these point by point parallels show that the comparative framework presented above provides a coherent reference frame for understanding and translating the technical concepts and language of Centrism in general and our texts in particular. If this conclusion strains common preconceptions of the historical and cultural relativity of philosophy, the findings supporting it speak all the more clearly for the relative universality of the condition which non-egocentrist philosophy treats.

In addition to straining our postmodern sense of cultural relativity, this comparative framework also conflicts quite directly with a main modern Indological consensus on Mahāyāna Buddhist history and thought. Far from the nihilistic skepticism or deconstructive mysticism modern and postmodern scholars have projected into Centrist thought, this comparative framework aligns Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti with some of the most liberating critical thought and effective therapeutic practices developed in the modern scientific West. Moreover, this post-critical, therapeutic aspect of Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti's contribution, largely overlooked by Western scholars, shows us a face of Buddhism that has been quite obscured by the scholarly caricatures of Theravāda rationalism and Mahāyāna decadence. Instead, it matches more closely with decidedly postmodern

concepts of science as a human practice of cultivating objective knowledge by optimizing our capacity for epistemological and historical self-correction. The challenge to our preconceived notions of absolute cultural and historical relativity emerges into focus when we consider that the condition diagnosed by therapeutic philosophers like Nāgārjuna, Chandrakīrti, and Wittgenstein is the very reification of evolving and conventional forms of life that breeds egocentric individuals and ethnocentric cultures. Far from being limited to any civilization or species, that condition is sadly universal. Yet in both the modern Western and ancient Buddhist scientific traditions, we humans beings are seen as well equipped to heal ourselves, owing to our highly evolved competence for altruistic life centered around communication. It is this very competence which makes the habit of reifying the convention of “I” seem all the more unnecessary. Hence, Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti, like their modern peers, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, take as the ultimate refinement of non-egocentrist philosophy a method which shows that human life has no reality beyond empty conventions of language, and that the living fiction of our evolution hangs on nothing more than the magnanimous use of such conventions. Of course, the final argument for the truth of this comparative interpretation of our texts is to be found in the cogency of our translation, to the study of which we now invite you.