

THE WISE ONE IN THE PRASANNAPADA

THE WISE ONE IN THE PRASANNAPADĀ

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the notion of the wise one in the Prasannapadā, a seventh century Indian Buddhist text, with the aim of clarifying the special position of those wise in the Buddhist way in the context of Mādhyamika thought. It will be shown that the wise one, according to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, has cultivated an extraordinary awareness of the real, of man's propensity toward mistaking the epithets of ordinary language for the real, and of his own ability to appreciate the truth of things by overcoming the limitations of conventional thought.

...paramārtha'parapratyayah śāntaḥ pratyātmavedya āryāṇām  
sarvaprapañcātītaḥ, sa nopadiśyate nā capi jñāyate...

Candrakīrti

(...what is higher or surpassing is not dependent on anything other than itself, it is at peace, it is known in and through itself by the wise; it is beyond the world of named things as such; it cannot be demonstrated nor even cognized.)

(as translated by. M. Sprung)

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is intended to be an exegesis of the notion of the wise one in the Prasannapadā, a seventh century Indian Buddhist text whose author, Candrakīrti, sought to give a faithful exposition of the philosophy of the Middle Way as presented in the metred couplets (kārikās) of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikās of Nāgārjuna, a second century Indian Buddhist monk and philosopher. Candrakīrti's "lucidly-worded" (prasannapadā) commentary incorporates the kārikās in the body of his own text, at times providing verse by verse elaboration of Nāgārjuna's cryptic treatise.

The study at hand will serve to document the presence, the use and the significance of the notion of the wise one, i.e. the man who has awakened to the way things are as taught by the Tathāgata (Buddha), in this philosophical-religious treatise (kārikās and commentary to be regarded as "the text"). The aim is to show that, despite the subtlety, range and complexity of the philosophical discussions contained therein, there is clearly an appeal to a non-discursive, experiential base which eludes definition in those discussions, yet is the actualization of the "reality" (tattva) implied by them.

The purpose of undertaking such an exegesis of the notion of the wise one (alternatively expressed as "the realized wise one", "the one wise in the Buddhist way", "the one who is on the way" etc.) is to anchor



firmly the philosophical discussions of the Prasannapadā to the concern for "all living beings" (sarvasattvā) that makes this text a Buddhist śāstra, and not merely an exercise in sophistry. Many of the discussions, indeed the entire approach of the text, could be easily misconstrued (for example, taken as nihilist) if one chose to ignore the appeal to those who supposedly embody, or actualize, the way things really are in this context. Students of philosophy, eager to draw comparisons between the work of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti and philosophers in the West, may unintentionally cut the Prasannapadā away from its moorings by ignoring the non-philosophical aspects of the text, leaving it to drift aimlessly in the currents of debate, seemingly without direction or destination.

Hopefully, this will not be the trend as the works of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, and of Mādhyamika thought as a whole, receive more attention in studies of philosophy and religion. Mādhyamika thought, one of the "schools" of Māhāyana Buddhism whose founding father is said to be Nāgārjuna,<sup>1</sup> has become much more accessible to the Western reader with the publication of the most complete English translation of the Prasannapadā by G.M.C. Sprung in 1979. Prof. Sprung's translation is based on the critically edited Sanskrit text entitled "Mūlamadhyamakakārikās de Nāgārjuna avec la Prasannapadā de Candrakīrti" of Louis de la Vallée Poussin, first published in St. Petersburg between 1903 and 1913.

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<sup>1</sup>(cf. Murti, Central Philosophy of Buddhism, p.87-103.

Poussin's Sanskrit text, based on three Sanskrit manuscripts and an earlier Tibetan version, provides the primary source material for the present study.

The translated portions of the Prasannapadā are drawn mostly from Prof. Sprung's translation for two reasons. Firstly, his "feel" for the material and fidelity to the original text is evident at every turn in his translation, which is still the most complete version available in any Western language. Secondly, this author was fortunate enough to have studied draft versions of several translated chapters of the text in seminar courses given by Prof. Sprung where a detailed examination of a number of passages was undertaken. This paper is, in part, an attempt to address some of the concerns that arose out of the study of Nāgārjuna at that time, and to give expression to elements of the text (like "the realized, wise one") that were not dealt with in that context.

Where Sprung's translation seems somewhat anomalous (often an accurate reflection of the original), the partial English translations of Stcherbatsky, Streng and Inada will be referred to. As well, May's partial French translation will be used, including some of his helpful notes. Despite numerous references to the Tibetan in Poussin's text, and later in May's partial translation (12 of 27 chapters) where both the Sanskrit and Tibetan text are provided, only the Sanskrit material in Poussin's edition will be given in the notes herein (with a couple of exceptions).

That the material for this paper is all but wholly based on Poussin's Sanskrit edition will, to some extent, determine its outcome or at least limit the validity of its conclusions; for practical reasons, this could not be avoided.

Regarding the definition of the notion of the wise one, there is a copious amount of material pertaining to this text from which one can derive a definite sense of what, or who, is being referred to. In the Prasannapadā, the Sanskrit terms "ārya", "yogī", "yogāvacara", "jina", "vidvaṃs" seem to be used interchangeably for "the wise one", "the realized, wise one" etc. in translation. In French, May renders "ārya" as "saint", "yogī" as "l'ascète" but the referent seems to be the same.

There is not much controversy regarding the use of such terms in a philosophical-religious context. It is widely appreciated that both Hindu and Buddhist traditions are replete with references to yogīs, i.e. practioners of some sort of "yogic" (mental, spiritual and physical) discipline, and it would be beyond the scope of this study to examine the wider implications of this topic in any detail. What is at issue here is the significance of the notion of the yogī etc. in this particular Madhyamika text, and on this one can be more specific.

The most common Sanskrit terms used in this context to refer to "the wise one" are yogī and ārya. Sprung elaborates on each one as follows:

yogī - one who is enlightened, who is free of the afflictions of everyday existence, who sees the truth of things, who is on the middle way. The term yogī takes the place, in the Prasanna-

padā, of the more religious term bodhisattva<sup>2</sup>

ārya - a wise man, i.e. one who has inseen the Buddhist truths, especially in the Mādhyamika sense; often a synonym for yogī<sup>3</sup>

This understanding of the terms coincides with that of Murti,<sup>4</sup> Conze,<sup>5</sup> de Jong,<sup>6</sup> May,<sup>7</sup> Stcherbatsky<sup>8</sup> and Poussin.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the sense of the terms to be taken in this study is of one who attained a measure of insight and wisdom (prajñā) from meditational experience, and from the study and appreciation of the Tathagata's instruction. Whether or not these "wise ones" are monks is not specified; one could make a case that they likely are monks, given that the yogī may refer to the bodhisattva in this context, but not all bodhisattvas are monks (as in the case of Vimalakīrti).

Further, it is not specified that the yogīs in this text are to be distinguished from those referred to in other Mahāyāna sources. In so far as the characterizations of the wise one are in accord with those given in other Mahāyāna texts, it may be supposed that the referent is virtually the same in each case (though for Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, the notion of the wise one and many other descriptive notions should not be reified).

To give some examples of how this notion is used elsewhere in

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<sup>2</sup> Sprung, p.279.

<sup>3</sup> Sprung, p.267.

<sup>4</sup> Murti, p.344.

<sup>5</sup> Conze

<sup>5</sup> Conze, Further Buddhist Studies, p.18.

<sup>6</sup> de Jong, "The Problem of the Absolute in the Madhyamaka School" in Jnl. of Indian Philosophy, vol. 2 ('72-'74), p.3-4.

<sup>7</sup> May, p.207, n.695; p.229, n. 793.

<sup>8</sup> Stcherbatsky, p.95.

<sup>9</sup> Poussin, p.541, n.2.

this way, one could turn to the Diamond Sūtra (Vajracchedikā) and the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, two texts which Candrakīrti has referred to in the Prasannapadā. In the Vajracchedikā, Subhuti says in an exchange with the Lord (i.e. Buddha),

This dharma which the Tathāgata has fully known or demonstrated - it cannot be grasped, it cannot be talked about, it is neither a dharma nor a no-dharma. And why? Because an Absolute exalts the Holy Persons.<sup>10</sup>

The sense of the "Holy Persons" (ārya-pudgalā) is clear in Conze's exegesis of this passage, though the meaning of the passage as a whole has many facets. Several points of his exegesis are particularly relevant here.

He suggests that the āryas are spiritually reborn saints who have cultivated a sense of detachment to everyday, worldly things after having turned "to the Path which leads to Nirvāṇa". They are in contradistinction to ordinary, foolish "worldlings" who "just vegetate along in a sort of dull and aimless bewilderment". This type of bewilderment can be overcome through spiritual practice, like meditation and textual study, in accordance with procedures set down by Buddhist tradition. Further, the āryas' true nature is derived from, nourished by and intimately linked with, even defined by, the "Absolute", i.e. the Unconditioned

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<sup>10</sup> yo'sau Tathāgatena dharme'bhisambuddho deśito vā, agrāhyaḥ so'nabhilapyah, na sa dharmo na-adharmaḥ. tat kasya hetoh? asaṃskṛta-prabhāvitā hy ārya-pudgalāḥ., Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, trans. by Edward Conze, Serie Orientale Roma, vol. 13. (Romé: Is.M.E.O., 1957) p.33.

(asamskr̥ta).<sup>11</sup> Ordinary folk are unaware of this, being trapped by duḥkha and avidyā.

In the Laṅkāvatāra, several passages which mention the notion of the wise one are relevant to this study. In conversation with Mahāmāti, the Blessed One speaks of the nature of his teaching:

In order to make it attractive to all beings, a picture is presented in colours. What one teaches, transgresses; for the truth (tattva) is beyond words.

Establishing myself in the Dharma, I preach the truth for the Yogins. The truth is the state of self-realization and is beyond the categories of discrimination.<sup>12</sup>

Significant here is the truth (tattva) taught by the Tathāgata<sup>13</sup> is one which is "beyond words" (hyakṣaravarjitam) and is "for the Yogins" (yoginām).<sup>13</sup> This is very much the case in the Prasannapadā, where tattva is often referred to in terms of the experience of the wise.

Shortly thereafter in the sūtra, the Blessed One speaks of what the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva must do after "he has gained a thorough understanding of Mind by means of his transcendental knowledge". He is supposed to discipline himself in "imagelessness", "the power added by

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<sup>11</sup> Conze, Buddhist Wisdom Books, p.38-39.

(He elaborates on what was paraphrased above by saying, "The idea is that the holy persons have 'arisen' from the Unconditioned, have been 'produced' from it, are 'brought forth' by it. It is a result of their contact with the Unconditioned that they become mighty and powerful, that they 'thrive'. ...they are 'revealed' by it". p. 39.)

(also see Conze, Vajracchedikā, p. 98-100.)

<sup>12</sup> Suzuki, Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, p.44.

<sup>13</sup> Saddharmalaṅkāvatārasūtram, ed. by P.L. Vaidya, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, vol. 3, p. 22 (Nanjio edition, p.48).

all the Buddhas by reason of their original vows" and "the self-realization attained by noble wisdom". Having done this,

...the Yogin should abandon his knowledge of Mind gained by means of transcendental wisdom, which still resembles a lame donkey; and entering the eighth stage of Bodhisattvahood, he should further discipline himself in these three aspects of noble wisdom.<sup>14</sup>

Here, the yogī is roughly equivalent to the Bodhisattva (-Mahāsattva), which is in accord with the sense of the term in the Prassannapadā as suggested by Sprung. Further, in the sūtra, the yogī partakes of "noble wisdom (āryajñāna)"<sup>15</sup> which likewise appears in Candrakīrti's text, though not in its three aspects.

A third selection from the Laṅkāvatāra will be of interest to the present study. In examining the meaning of mahāparinirvāṇa, the Blessed One says, to Mahāmāti:

...the great Parinirvāṇa is neither destruction nor death. Neither has it anything to do with vanishing; it is the goal of the Yogins.<sup>16</sup>

Once again, a similar theme involving the notion of the wise one is shared by the sūtra and Candrakīrti's text: nirvāṇa is "neither destruction nor death" and is the goal of the yogī (though for Mādhyamika, nirvāṇa is ultimately identified with a full appreciation of samsāra).

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<sup>14</sup> Suzuki, Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, p.44-45; Vaidya, p.22-23; (Nanjio, p.48).

<sup>15</sup> pratyātmāryajñānagatilakṣaṇa or "the self-realization attained by noble wisdom", Suzuki, Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, p.45; Vaidya, p.22; (Nanjio, p.49).

<sup>16</sup> Suzuki, Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, p.87.

("...it is the goal of the Yogins" is a translation of: "cyuti-vigataṃ ...adhigacchanti yoginaḥ" in Vaidya, p.41; Nanjio, p.99.)

The above selections from the two sūtras were intended to show that the notion of the wise one in other Buddhist sources has a definite correlation with that of the Prasannapadā, partly to provide a familiarity with the notion that will be useful in the exegesis of said notion that will follow. It will be seen that the appearance of this notion in the text will involve the themes already discussed, as well as those which are peculiar to the Mādhyamika approach.

The structure of this paper will conform, in part, to that of the Prasannapadā. By so doing, the paper can follow the progression of the discussions as they are presented in the text, becoming increasingly sweeping in the scope of their critique of false notions. Not all of the chapters in the text will be covered in this study, only those which include the notion of the wise one in some capacity. It will be seen that most chapters discussed figure prominently in the overall critique undertaken in the text. The same can be said of the notion of the wise one, as this study will attempt to show.



## CONCERNS AND AIMS OF THE TEXT

In the initial chapter of the Prasannapadā, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti outline their plan of attack against the pervasive ignorance of ordinary, reifying thought. Candrakīrti endeavours, in his commentary on Nāgārjuna's kārikās, to elucidate the broader concerns of the cryptic verses so he says:

We have to ask what is the origin, what the subject-matter and what the ultimate concern of this great treatise. In the Madhyamakāvatāra<sup>1</sup>, it was stated that the wisdom of a perfectly realize one<sup>2</sup> has its origin in an initial vow of dedication issuing from universal compassion going beyond all duality. In this sense Nāgārjuna, knowing unerringly how to teach transcendental insight, developed this treatise out of compassion and for the enlightenment of others. So much can be said about its origin.<sup>4</sup>

The origin of Nāgārjuna's treatise, and of Candrakīrti's commentary, comes from a Buddha's (and hence, a monk's) great compassion (mahākaruṇa) toward beings who are ignorant of the cause of their suffering, death and rebirth. Furthermore, being "graced with comprehension going beyond all duality", such a Buddha is able to apprehend the nature of affliction that is grounded in ignorance and understand that there is a way out of it. Thus, Nāgārjuna undertook his treatise, according

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<sup>1</sup>"Madhyamakāvatāra nāma"; Poussin ed., Bibliotheca Buddhica, IX.

<sup>2</sup>tathāgatajñāna, Poussin, 2.7.

<sup>3</sup>...ācāryāryanāgārjunasya viditāvīparītaprajñāpāramitānīteḥ, Poussin, 3.1.

<sup>4</sup>Sprung, p.32.

to Candrakīrti, with aim and intent similar to that of his master (i.e. the Buddha): for the enlightenment of others.

Candrakīrti, then, informs the reader what the subject-matter of Nāgārjuna's treatise consists of:

Neither perishing nor arising in time,  
 neither terminable nor eternal,  
 Neither self-identical nor variant in form,  
 neither coming nor going;<sup>5</sup>  
 Such is the true way of things, the serene  
 coming to rest of the manifold of named things,  
 As taught by the perfectly enlightened one  
 whom I honour as the best of all teachers.<sup>6</sup>

This is Nāgārjuna's own statement of the concerns expressed in his middle-way verses. That which is most real corresponds to this eight-fold negation, as the text makes some effort to point out. Sprung notes that "the true way of things" comes to mean "non-dependent, non-origination" for Nāgārjuna, which roughly means since things do not exist as independent entities as we are inclined to think of them, they are empty of the "being" we impart to them.<sup>7</sup>

If the subject-matter of the treatise and commentary is "the true way of things" (pratītyasamutpāda), Candrakīrti leaves no doubt about its "ultimate concern" (prayojanam):

The ultimate concern of the treatise is clearly stated to be nirvāṇa: the serene coming to rest of the manifold of all named things (sarvaprapañcōpaśama).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> pratītyasamutpādā, Poussin, 3.10.

<sup>6</sup> Sprung, p.33.

<sup>7</sup> Sprung, p.33 (footnote).

<sup>8</sup> Sprung, p.33.

Here, the soteriological aim of Nāgārjuna's treatise (and of Buddhism in general) is given. Nirvāṇa, a term which signifies the *raison d'être* of the Buddhist path and the like yet eludes precise definition, is linked to the realization of the futility of using ontological criteria (being/non-being, existence/non-existence) in the assessment of "reality" (tattva).

Given the origin, subject-matter and ultimate concern of his middle-way śāstra, Nāgārjuna dedicates his work to "the best of all teachers" (vadatāṃ varaṃ)<sup>9</sup> owing to his penetrating insight into pratītyasamutpāda<sup>10</sup>, to his great compassion for those who are ignorant of it and suffer the fate of desire predicated upon ignorance and owing to his consummate skill in teaching men the way out of this pervasive affliction known as "duḥkha".

In considering the notion of "the wise one" in this and subsequent sections of the Prasannapadā, it will become clear that he also partakes of this type of penetrating insight into things that coexists with an outstanding sense of compassion for ordinary folk who are not so blessed. He may or may not be a skilled teacher of the intricacies of "the middle

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~yah pratītyasamutpādam prapañcopaśamaṃ śivam  
deśayāmāsa sambuddhastam vande vadatāṃ varaṃ,  
Poussin, 11.15-16.

<sup>10</sup> "La sublimité du Tathāgata réside en ceci qu'il a correctement enseigné le Pratītyasamutpāda; avec la nature intime du Pratītyasamutpāda, le Tathāgata est inseparablement associé.", Poussin, p. 3 (note 4).

way", but having developed his awareness and concern for other in accordance with the teaching "of the only perfectly realized one"<sup>11</sup>, the wisdom (prajñā) to overcome the chronic and obsessive thirst (tṛṣṇā) for imperishability is his. He will incorporate that wisdom as his skill (upāya) to adapt it to everyday situations increases.

Candrakīrti, while commenting on Nagarjuna's opening verses, suggests that the way the wise man (ārya) comes to view pratītyasamutpāda "in its traditional, causal sense"<sup>12</sup>, is as follows:

Dependent origination is thus itself delusive because, in the comprehension of the wise man, nothing self-existent arises in it nor is there actual destruction, and by the same token, no actual movement.<sup>13</sup>

Here it is expressed that the insight of the wise man, the one who is on the way, has gone beyond the causal implications of pratītyasamutpāda to its more subtle meaning. What had been understood as a denial of a permanent self, or as a causal law to give credence to the notion that separately existing elements came together in various configurations to produce an apparently permanent ātman, is considered by the wise to be "delusive". Their insight has shown that "nothing self-existent arises in it nor is there actual destruction..." and the Mādhyamika philosophers argue that this is the correct view. Murti contends:

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<sup>11</sup> tathāgatasyaivaikasyāvīparītarthavāditvaṃ, Poussin, 12.1, Sprung p.35.

<sup>12</sup> Sprung, p.34 (note 5).

<sup>13</sup> sa evedānim sāmvyūtaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ 'svabhāvenānutpannatvād āryajñānāpekṣaya nāsminnirodho vidyate 'yavannāsminnirgamo vidyate, Poussin, 10.13-11.2; Sprung, p.34.

Pratītya-samutpāda is not the principle of temporal sequence, but of the essential dependence of things on each other, i.e., the unreality of the separate elements (naissvābhāvya, dharmā-nairātmya). The entire Mādhyamika system is a re-interpretation of Pratītya-samutpāda.<sup>14</sup>

If the wise have comprehended that pratītyasamutpāda is more than just a causal explanation of the existence of the dharmas (separate elements of existence), and Mādhyamika argues that it is beyond arising, perishing and so on, what does a "re-interpretation of Pratītyasamutpāda" suggest? Murti continues by saying:

It is now equated with Śūnyatā - the empirical validity of entities and their ultimate unreality. The middle path is the non-acceptance of the two extremes - the affirmative<sup>15</sup> and the negative (the sat and the asat) views, of all views.

Through "the non-acceptance of the two extremes", the wise one is letting things be as they are, fully aware that in the ultimate analysis, the names we ascribe to things that allow us to isolate them for our use and surveillance are empty (śūnya), "lacking both being and non-being".<sup>16</sup>

Expending energy on developing views about things based on the affirmation or negation of their distinguishing characteristics (lakṣaṇa) as the true apprehension of their intrinsic nature (svarūpa) is considered to counterproductive to release from duḥkha. The illumined mind (bodhi) of the wise one confirms that views (dṛṣṭi) about things

<sup>14</sup> Murti, p.7.

<sup>15</sup> Murti, p.7-8.

<sup>16</sup> Sprung, p.276.

<sup>17</sup> Sprung, p.273.

do not reveal the nature of pratītyasamutpāda. Candrakīrti says:

When dependent origination is seen by the wise (ārya) as it truly is because the manifold of named things (prapañca) - the duality of name and what is named, and so on - has ceased utterly, the manifold of named things comes to rest in it. Nāgārjuna holds that dependent origination is nothing else but the coming to rest of the manifold of named things.<sup>18</sup>

Instead of coming up with clever speculations about the nature of things, the wise overcome the limited horizon of everyday thought by putting to rest the "manifold of named things". One might ask, "What is the value of overcoming 'named things' (prapañca) in terms of nirvāṇa?" One answer might be:

When the everyday mind and its contents are no longer active, the subject and object of everyday transactions (vyavahāra) having faded out because the turmoil of origination, decay, and death has been left behind completely, that is final beatitude.<sup>19</sup>

The awareness that is attained by the wise, and advocated by Mādhyamika, is one which mirrors the things around it. Ultimate significance should not be placed on the distinctive characteristics of things; this could unsettle the mind that has cultivated an openness, a non-fixating purview of tattva. As things are known to be empty, "the subject and object of everyday transactions (vyavahāra)" do not continue to dominate one's awareness; things can be seen for what they really are, i.e. śūnya even in terms of pratītyasamutpāda. The wise one,

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<sup>18</sup> yathāvisisthapratītyasamutpādadarśane sati āryānāmabhidheyādi-lakṣaṇasya prapañcasya sarvathaparamāt 'prapañcānamupaśamo 'sminniti 'sa eva pratītyasamutpādaḥ prapañcopaśame ityucyate, Poussin, 11.6-8; Sprung, p.35

<sup>19</sup> cittacaitānāṃ ca tasminnapravṛttau jñānajñeyavyvahāranivṛttau jñātijñāramaraṇādīniravaśeṣopadravarahitatvāt 'śivaḥ, Poussin, 11.9-10, Sprung, p.35.

therefore, avoids the speculations about substance that suggest a realist (Sāṃkhya or Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika) or eternalist (Advaita Vedānta) position. Murti notes:

The Upaniṣads and the systems following the Brahmanical tradition conceive reality on the pattern of an inner core or soul (ātman), immutable and identical amidst an outer region of impermanence and change, to which it is unrelated or but loosely related. ...Not only did these systems accept the ātman, but what is more, they conceive all other things also on the substance pattern. The ātman is the very pivot of their metaphysics, epistemology and ethics.<sup>20</sup>

What is advocated by Mādhyamika, as confirmed by the experience of the wise ones, is the very denial of the efficacy of "the substance pattern" as being conducive to nirvāṇa. For the Mādhyamika, deliberations about ātman used in the search for tattva are thought to lead to a proliferation of theories about things which only hamper the release from afflicted existence. The wise have overcome the tendency to define the parameters of tattva using metaphysics. Instead, the wisdom (prajñā) they cultivate, especially through meditation, is deemed a deeper penetration into "the way things are in truth" (tathatā).<sup>21</sup> Mādhyamika argues, in accordance with this wisdom, that all views which makes claims about tathata are unintelligible. This might be alternatively stated as the ultimate concern of Nāgārjuna's treatise, i.e. the coming to rest of all named things (prapañca); in a word, nirvāṇa.

If all claims about "the way things are in truth" are unintelligible, if all dṛṣṭis are false (mṛṣā), what is the point of saying

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<sup>20</sup> Murti, p.10.

<sup>21</sup> Sprung, p.269.

anything in relation to nirvāṇa? Candrakīrti anticipates the objections of potential opponents by saying:

...if Nāgārjuna undertook this work with the purpose of demonstrating the falsity of all possible assertions (sarvadharmānām mṛṣātva) - whatever is false being non-existent - it follows that there are no bad deeds and, in their absence, no miserable lives. Nor can there be good deeds, and, in their absence, no good lives. But if there is no possibility of differentiating a good life from a bad, there can be no birth-death cycle in the Buddhist sense. And then there would be no purpose at all in undertaking any deed whatsoever.<sup>22</sup>

If all possible assertions are false, then the opponent can show that Nāgārjuna has in fact invalidated his own reasons for writing his treatise, has negated the experience of the wise and brought the entire Buddhist path into question. Indeed, given the characterizations of Mādhyamika as "śūnyavādin"<sup>23</sup>, it is not surprising that preceding objections of the sort mentioned by Candrakīrti would be brought forward. Though the Mādhyamika is "dubbed as rank nihilism", Murti argues that this assessment of their position is a mistaken one:

<sup>22</sup> Sprung, p.45-46.

(This type of objection, i.e. the suggestion that Mādhyamika advocates complete and utter falsity (or emptiness), is made repeatedly throughout the text, and is usually clarified in terms of their "non-position". Sometimes, a reference to the wise is made to show that those who have sufficient insight, understand the intent of the Mādhyamika critique and do not confuse it with nihilism.)

<sup>23</sup> "The third variety of Buddhist doctrine, viz. that everything is empty (i.e. that absolutely nothing exists) is contradicted by all means of right knowledge, and therefore requires no special refutation. For this apparent world, whose existence is guaranteed by all the means of knowledge, cannot be denied...", Śaṅkara, "Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya" II, 2, 32, in Thibault, vol. I, p.247.



There is no reason to single out the Mādhyamika as specially nihilistic. . . . The Mādhyamika rejects every view as falsification of the real. The rejection is, however, a means, the only means open to absolutism, to free the real of the accidental accretions with which the finite mind invests it through ignorance; it is not an end. It is confusion to regard the "no views<sub>of</sub> of the real" attitude of the Mādhyamika as a "no reality" view.<sup>24</sup>

Candrakīrti, himself, counters the anticipated objection of the opponent by stating what can be considered the strategy of Nāgārjuna's treatise:

In reply (to the opponent) we urge the essential falsity of things in order to counteract the inveterate commitment of the ordinary man to the reality of the everyday world as the reality.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, this is not a nihilist position. Urging "the essential falsity of things" is a teaching device, a means of overcoming the firm belief that the relation between name and what is named is ultimately real. Mādhyamika's insistence on "the essential falsity of things" is an attempt to put to rest the ordinary man's belief in the imperishability of the ātman. Furthermore, in urging the falsity (mṛṣātva) of even pratītyasamutpāda, Nāgārjuna is aiming his comments at those who have been initiated in the instruction of the middle path.<sup>26</sup> The two-fold nature of the Tathāgata's instruction, and Nāgārjuna's exposition of it will be discussed later in this work.

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<sup>24</sup> Murti, p.234.

<sup>25</sup> Sprung, p.46.

<sup>26</sup> (This indicates that Nāgārjuna has given consideration to those monks who may have either misunderstood the teachings of the Tathāgata in the canonical literature (sūtras) or are confused about which sūtras are for the general populace (neyārtha) and those which are for initiates (nītārtha). On this distinction, see Candrakīrti in Sprung, p.44-45 and Murti, p.254-255.)

Though critics of Mādhyamika seize upon several aspects (like mṛṣātva and śūnyatā) of the critique of ātman-based thinking, Candrakīrti shows that "the essential falsity of things" is not the understanding of "the realized wise ones who take nothing at all as either false (mṛṣā) or not false (amṛṣā)".<sup>27</sup> The wise, owing to their insight, are not limited by conventional understanding; thus, they are not bound and determined to think strictly in terms of false or not false, existence or non-existence, being or non-being. For those who, unlike the wise, are still bound by primal ignorance (avidyā), the comprehension of tattva depends on the willingness to first accept that the world they know in the ordinary sense is false. This is the first step on the path to realized awareness.<sup>28</sup> Candrakīrti indicates that he who does not free himself from the limitations of conventional ways of understanding the world, will not even reach the first step:

Now anyone who is in the grip of misbelief will never comprehend the essential falseness of all putative elements of existence: he persists incorrigibly in the belief that dependent things are self-existent. Being thus incorrigible and being committed to the belief that what is directly given in the form of the putative elements of existence is reality, he carries out actions and he cycles in the birth-death cycle;

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<sup>27</sup> (naiva tvāryāḥ kṛtakāryāḥ) kiṃ cidupalabhante yanmṛṣā amṛṣā vā syaditi, Poussin, 44.13-14; Sprung, p.46.

<sup>28</sup> "First of all one must attend to the emptiness of dharmas, i.e. one must understand what a dharma is, as distinct from a thing or person, must learn the Abhidharma teachings in their many details, and acquire some skill in reviewing everyday experiences in terms of dharmas. Those who omit to take this preliminary step will never get any further in this quest for 'emptiness' because they do not develop even the 'foundation' of that 'wisdom' which is the subjective counterpart of 'emptiness'." Conze, Buddhist Thought in India, p.244.

being rooted in misbelief he will not attain nirvāṇa.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the strategy of urging the essential falsity of things is neither aimed at the realized wise ones, nor is it to be used as evidence that the Mādhyamika is a nihilist. Rather, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti have laboured to free those who take apparent origination, decay and termination of things as the marks of reality.

If Nāgārjuna does urge the essential falsity of things, what of the objection of the ordinary man (i.e. one who believes that entities exist more or less independently of each other, or one who accepts the role of causality in the world) who says by such urging, Mādhyamika has brought the entire Buddhist path into question? Again, Candrakīrti provides us with an informed criticism of mṛṣātva in this context:

How can there be an adequate basis for affliction and freedom therefrom if things are false by their very nature?<sup>30</sup>

The response given to this objection shows how that which is false can be delusive, when taken as real:

...in the Vinaya it is told: "An artisan created a doll in the form of a young woman. Though not in reality a young woman it was just like the one in appearance. It became the object of true love and desire for a certain painter. Similarly, even things which are wholly false can provide, for the unenlightened, an adequate basis for affliction and freedom therefrom".<sup>31</sup>

Though avidyā (primal ignorance) and pratītyasamutpāda may be considered as false according to the wise, for the unenlightened they have an influ-

<sup>29</sup> Sprung, p.46.

<sup>30</sup> Sprung, p.46.

<sup>31</sup> Sprung, p.46-47.

ence which is counterproductive to salvation. Owing to this influence, they are subject to duḥkha which may be an empty notion for the realized wise ones, but is real enough for those who suffer its effects. To say that "absolutely nothing exists" for the Mādhyamika is to overlook the intention of his treatise, and to miss entirely the concern of his mentor, the Tathāgata.

In an attempt to have the Mādhyamika clarify his position, the opponent might contend that Mādhyamika's insistence that all things are false is itself a false claim. Furthermore,

If a Mādhyamika does not, in any sense at all, advance cognitive claims, how is your assertion "things do not arise spontaneously or because of another, or because of both or from no cause at all" to be understood? It has the form of a cognitive claim.<sup>32</sup>

What follows is the Mādhyamika reply:

Our reply is that this pronouncement is an assertion for the ordinary man because it is argued solely on a basis which he accepts. But it is not a cognitive assertion for those wise in the Buddhist way.<sup>33</sup>

Again, Candrakīrti encounters a potential objection with a reference to the way the wise comprehend "the Buddhist way". He claims that Mādhyamika does not advance any "cognitive claims" (nīścaya) at all in an earlier passage;<sup>34</sup> his so-called cognitive claims are not to be taken out of the context of criticizing the practises of conventional thought. The Mādhyamika claims that he is not formulating another theory of causality

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<sup>32</sup> Sprung, p.50.

<sup>33</sup> ucyate 'niscitamidaṃ vākyam lokasya svaprasiddhayaivopapattya nāryāṇāṃ, Poussin, 57.5-6; Sprung, p.50.

<sup>34</sup> Sprung, p.49-50.

or the like; rather, he is trying to show the unintelligibility of all theories whose purport is making assertions about the way things really are.

The opponent might then ask, "Is there no reasoned argument for the wise?", to which Candrakīrti replies:

How could we say whether there is or there is not? The higher truth, for the wise, is a matter of silence (tuṣṇīmbhāva). How then would everyday language, reasoned or unreasoned, be possible in that realm?

One might be able to argue, given the claim that the higher truth "is a matter of silence" for the wise, that the dialectic of the Mādhyamika eliminates the opportunity for any further philosophical exploration. This is true to some extent, but herein lies the depth of the Mādhyamika approach.

To regard Mādhyamika as strictly philosophy is to concentrate exclusively on their arguments, ignoring the more meditative aspects that pervade their thought. Stcherbatsky sees that Mādhyamika is both "philosophy and mysticism" and lucidly explains the limitations of

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<sup>35</sup> (opponent) kim khavāryānāmupapattirnāsti? (reply) kenaitaduktam-asti vā nāsti veti. paramārtho hyāryānām tuṣṇīmbhāvah 'tataḥ kutastatra prapañcasambhavo yadupapattiranupapattirvā svāt?, Poussin, 57.7-8; Sprung, p.50.

(On the Mādhyamika use of language, Sprung comments: "Language is born of and serves the timeless need of men to comfort and deceive themselves with a world of 'pretend' reality. It serves an intellectual faculty which is subject to 'kleshic' demands; all reasoning, based on the everyday understanding of language, must fail to be knowledge...", M. Sprung, "Non-Cognitive Language in Mādhyamika Buddhism", p.248.)

of reasoned argument in the apprehension of prajñā:

By its dialectic, its critical probe (prasaṅgāpādana) into all the categories of thought, it relentlessly exposes the pretensions of Reason to know Truth. The hour of Reason's despair, however, becomes the hour of Truth. The seeker now turns to meditation on the various forms of śūnyatā, and the practice of prajñāpāramitās. By <sup>36</sup>moral and yogic practices, he is prepared to receive the Truth.

Surely, there are those who remain unmoved by the suggestion that mystical intuition can provide more direct access to the truth than philosophy can. For some students of philosophy, the exclamation that, "This isn't philosophy", seems to be enough to dismiss the efforts of the Mādhyamika as clever and esoteric, but not serious enough to warrant further investigation.

The Mādhyamikas defend the efficacy of reason for dispelling the ignorance of false opinions, but in no way suggest it leads to nirvāṇa when untempered by prajñā. The way to truth, for the Mādhyamikas, does not confine itself to the path of discursive thought; that path has been well-travelled by philosophers but is not the only one open to the wise. As they are not confined to the use of reason in the search for truth, they are not bound to give a reasoned account of the world of particulars.

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<sup>36</sup>Stcherbatsky, Conception, p.58.

(Prof. Stcherbatsky, relying on suggestive metaphors, says, "In the final stage of Prajñā, the wheels of imagination are stopped, the discursive mind is stilled, and in that silence Reality (bhūta-tathatā) stoops to kiss the eye of the aspirant; he receives the accolade of prajñā and becomes the knight-errant of Truth.", Ibid., p.58)

The opponent might be inclined to ask:

But if the wise ones do not give a reasoned account how will they convey the idea of a higher truth to the ordinary man?

to which Candrakīrti offers the following reply:

The wise do not give a reasoned account of the everyday experience of the ordinary man. Rather, adopting for the sake of enlightening others, and as a means only, what passes for reasoning in the everyday world, they work for the enlightenment of the ordinary man.<sup>37</sup>

Here, the ultimate concern of Nāgārjuna's treatise is reiterated (sarva-prapañcōpaśama or nirvāṇa) in a different context. Once again, the role of the wise ones is central to the proper use and expression of the concerns of the Tathāgata. Taking their example from the realized wise ones, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti are able to use "what passes for reasoning in the everyday world" to refute the false views about tattva that emerge from such reasoning.

What is crucial in the preceding example is through prajñā, together with careful textual study, the limitations of reason in the apprehension of the way things really are become ever clearer to the wise. Indeed, prajñā-oriented experience like meditative practices on the various modes of śūnyatā distinguishes the wise one from ordinary men,

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<sup>37</sup> (opponent) yadi hyāryā upapattiṃ na varṇayanti kena khalvidanīṃ paramārthaṃ lokaṃ bodhayiṣyanti. (reply) na khalvāryā lokasaṃvyavahārena-upapattiṃ varṇayanti 'kiṃ tu lokata eva yā prasiddhopapattistāṃ parāvabodhārthamabhyupetya tayaiva lokaṃ bodhayanti, Poussin, 57.9-11; Sprung, p.50-51.

enhancing his ability to "reveal the Infinite by removing that which obscures it" beyond that of those who rely on reason to do the same.<sup>38</sup>

Being ignorant of prajñā, and hence, the significance of the Tathāgata's instruction, ordinary men will not come to know tattva until they realize that particular things are not "self-existent" (svabhāva). Candrakīrti reaffirms that the

...wise ones do not, in any way, take particular things as having essential natures. But ordinary men, whose thought, because of weak vision, has succumbed to the defect of ignorance, impute an erroneous self-existence to any and all particular things and suffer excessively. The wise ones then discourse with them using only such arguments as ordinary men accept.<sup>39</sup>

Again, the first step on the Buddhist path is the cultivation of śūnyatā; failing that, there can be no further progress. The attitudes that give rise to obsessive desire, so-called "kleshic" tendencies that ensnare and bind men to primordial ignorance (avidyā) if "erroneous self-existence" is imputed to particular things, must be overcome.

Though the cultivation of śūnyatā is advocated as the way of dispelling the kleśas,<sup>40</sup> emptiness is not presented as the ultimate expression of tattva. Conze notes that,

the Void is brought in not for its own sake, but as a method which leads to the penetration into true reality. It opens the way to a direct approach to the true nature of things (dharmatā) by removing all adherence to words, which always detract or

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<sup>39</sup> (evamihāpy) āryaiḥ sarvathāpyanupalabhyamānātmakeṇ bhāvānām-avidyātimirōpanatatanayanatayā viparītam svabhāvamadhyaropya kva cicca kaṃ cidviśeṣamatitarāṃ parikliśyanti pṛthagjñānāḥ. tānidānīmāryastatpra-siddhayaivopapattyā paribodhayanti, Poussin, 58.1-3 ; Sprung, p.51.

<sup>40</sup> Sprung, p.268.

<sup>38</sup> Conze, p.243.



abstract from reality instead of disclosing it. Emptiness is not a theory, but a ladder which reaches out into the infinite, and which should be climbed, not discussed. It is not<sup>41</sup> taught to make a theory, but to get rid of theories altogether.

In the introductory section of the Prasannapadā, an attempt has been made to focus the reader's attention on the origin, subject-matter and ultimate concern of Nāgārjuna's cryptic verses on the middle-way, and to prepare him for the issues that will be raised as the commentary proceeds. As we have seen, Candrakīrti has used the experience of the wise ones as a way of confirming the Mādhyamika interpretation of the Tathāgata's instruction and in order to illustrate the freedom from avidyā that realized wise ones attain.

Perhaps the most significant use of the notion of the wise one in the initial section of the text is in showing that emptiness (or "openness") is not merely a theory or intellectual exercise. Śūnyatā is not something which must be confirmed by the aspirant, but is, as Conze said above, "a method which leads to the penetration into true reality". The wise are of significance here because, according to Candrakīrti's earlier reply to the opponent, "paramārtho hyāryānām tuṣṇīmbhavaḥ", or "the higher (truth) is a matter of silence for the wise ones". They show to the accomplished philosopher, and the initiate alike, that śūnyatā is "a ladder which reaches out into the infinite", not

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<sup>41</sup>Conze, op.cit., p.243.

merely a theory of radical anātman. It is a method of overcoming avidyā, considered by the wise and by Mādhyamikas to be far more effective than tarka (argumentation).<sup>42</sup>

Śūnyatā, for the wise, must be cultivated along the path to the higher truth of realized awareness. The higher truth does not speak of emptiness to the wise. Rather,

...it is an experience of a different dimension - spaceless, timeless, nirvikalpa (beyond the province of thought and speech)...(it is to be) found at the supralogical, suprarational level of prajñā which one can mount to only by a life of moral and spiritual discipline. The Madhyamaka system is neither scepticism, nor agnosticism. It is an open invitation to every one to see Reality face to face.<sup>43</sup>

Once again, some may challenge that the preceding passage from Prof. Stcherbatsky is no longer in the realm of philosophy, making it more difficult to assess the claims made therein. One's task of examining the notion of the wise one in this context may not provide sufficient grounds for refuting such a challenge, but the alleged wisdom of those knowledgeable in the middle-way is so intriguing in character and so well-integrated into a number of Mādhyamika's philosophical positions, that it can hardly be ignored. This has already been shown in the few passages that have been taken from the text's introductory section.

In concluding the first chapter of the text, Candrakīrti says:

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<sup>42</sup> (Sprung suggests that tarka is "disputation which assumes there is proof in argument", p.269.)

<sup>43</sup> Stcherbatsky, op.cit., p.59.

...the endeavour of this first chapter is to establish that things do not really arise by opposing the perverse foisting (adhyāropa) of an essential nature on things. It will be the endeavour of the remaining chapters to invalidate and reject any and all<sup>44</sup> reifying distinctions (viśeṣa) which are foisted on things.

What follows will show that the notion of the wise one figures significantly in several sections of the text and is used by Candrakīrti in other places to further clarify the Mādhyamika position.

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<sup>44</sup>Sprung, p.51-52.

## THE DENIAL OF MOTION

Consistent with the Mādhyamika contention that dependent origination is unintelligible when regarded as ultimately real is Nāgārjuna's assault on ordinary notions like movement and rest. If origination, and decay, are considered to be mistaken representations of the real that ordinary men have come to rely upon, then Nāgārjuna insists that motion and rest should be viewed in the same light:

There is no motion, first, in what has been traversed, nor in what has not yet been traversed, nor in what, as something distinct from what has and has not been traversed, is just being traversed.<sup>45</sup>

If one were to give an example of motion per se, would he be able to say that the path he travelled indicated movement, or the path on which he would return indicated the same in a future mode, or that the path he was presumably traversing was indeed evidence of motion? Nāgārjuna would suggest that none of the above could be considered as intelligible examples of motion.

Nāgārjuna's argument turns on the insight that motion is spatially determined in terms of what "has been traversed" and "what has not yet been traversed"; the point in space between past and future movement, according to Mādhyamika, does not exist. Candrakīrti comments that,

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<sup>45</sup>Sprung, p.76.

...we never observe another, third sector of the path of movement unrelated to what has and has not been traversed called 'in traverse' (gamyamāna). In this sense, therefore, there is no motion in what is just being traversed. Being <sup>in</sup> motion cannot be expressed intelligibly (na prajñapyate).<sup>46</sup>

Though "being in motion cannot be expressed intelligibly", one is directed in this text to an understanding of motion, of the mover who moves and the movement that moves. Such an understanding is modelled on that of the wise, who, it is said, go beyond the relational conception of motion that is suggested by common sense.

Nāgārjuna attempts to show that motion, the mover and movement are fallacious when viewed from the perspective of the realized, wise one. Having shown that none of these indicate a self-existent nature, he concludes his argument (which is only briefly mentioned here) by saying, "Therefore there is no motion, no one moving and no space traversed".<sup>47</sup> One should not take this to indicate the utter denial of motion. In the ordinary sense in which language is used, Madhyamika would not deny that the description of "being in motion" is appropriate for a basic understanding of things as physical units.

However, should one suggest that motion is "real" in the way these Buddhists understand it or infer that since there is motion, there must be change, the Mādhyamika critique would bear down on him. Prof. Murti notes:

Change as transformation of things (causation) cannot be explained

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<sup>46</sup>Sprung, p.77.

<sup>47</sup>Sprung, p.89.

rationality. Change, as change of place or locomotion, is equally inexplicable. ...Nāgārjuna denies both motion and rest. Each is nothing by itself or together. ...Motion is denied because of the untenability of the ingredients that necessarily engender it. ...Movement is one sweeping act. It cannot be conceived, but only 'felt' and lived through.<sup>48</sup>

That motion "cannot be conceived, but only 'felt' and lived through" presents no problem for the wise, judging by this quotation that immediately follows Nāgārjuna's conclusions about motion:

As is said in the Akṣayamati Nirdeśa Sūtra, "'Coming', venerable Śāradvatīputra, is a word meaning union; 'going', venerable Śāradvatīputra, is a word meaning separation. Where there is no word for either union or separation, that is the language (padam) of the wise ones, because theirs is a language beyond ordinary words (apadyogena).<sup>49</sup> The movement of the wise ones is neither coming nor going'.

Not only is the language of the wise said to be "beyond ordinary words", apparently referring to their use of language which is guided by wisdom (prajñā) but also their own movement is characterized as "neither coming nor going".

That the padam of the wise goes beyond the mundane use and understanding of language is consistent with the emerging description of the wise as given in the introductory section. Regarding the use of language by the wise, Candrakīrti has already wondered, "How then would everyday

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<sup>48</sup> Murti, p.178, 183.

<sup>49</sup> yathoktamāry akṣayamatinirdeśasūtre. agatiriti bhadanta śāradvatīputra saṅkarṣaṇapadam etat. gatiriti bhadanta śāradvatīputra niṣkarṣaṇapadametat. yatra na saṅkarṣaṇapadam na niṣkarṣaṇapadam tadāryāṇaṃ padamapadyogena anagatirgatiscaryanam gatiriti., Poussin, 108.1-3; Sprung, p.89.

language, reasoned or unreasoned, be possible in that realm?"<sup>50</sup>

It can be argued that the wise go beyond ordinary words on the question of motion and rest as their understanding takes its power from realized awareness rather than conventional wisdom. In a sense, they dwell in the realm of the higher truth (paramārtha satya) "where there is no word for either union or separation".

Is the movement of the wise "neither coming nor going" because they partake of realized awareness that it is not oriented toward the characteristics of motion and rest? We are, once again, led to making an assessment of the loka of the realized wise one from a somewhat cryptic reference, which in Sanskrit is simply, "anāgatirgatiscāryānām gātiriti".<sup>51</sup> A literal English translation is, as Sprung has rendered it: "The movement of the wise ones is neither coming nor going". This seems a little obscure, but there are two occasions for clarity here. The first involves at least two other meanings for the root gam relevant to this excerpt. Though gam is very much the verb of motion, Sprung notes: "The further meanings of the verb gam must come to mind here: (a) attainment; (b) comprehension".<sup>52</sup> Thus, the attainment or comprehension of the wise is centred on "neither coming nor going".

A second clue to resolving the enigma regarding this cryptic phrase involving the wise is provided in another quotation attributed to the Tathāgata:

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<sup>50</sup> vide ante, p.13.

<sup>51</sup> vide ante, p.22, n.49.

<sup>52</sup> Sprung, p.89, n.1.

A man catches sight of a pretty female face in a mirror or a dish of oil. The foolish man, conceiving a desire for her, starts in pursuit of his love. But as the face does not pass into and exist in the reflection, he will never attain it. As he generates his passion in error, even so, you should know, are all the elements of existence.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, both the ordinary and the wise man perceive motion and change. However, the ordinary man foolishly mistakes it for the real, making motion, change and ultimately "all the elements of existence" (sarva-dharma) the basis for his aspirations, desire and action. For the wise, who have cultivated śūnyatā to the extent that they realize "there is no motion, no one moving and no space traversed", his passion will no longer be generated in error.

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<sup>53</sup> Sprung, p.89-90.



THE CRITIQUE OF VISION  
AND THE OTHER SENSES

For those who aren't persuaded that the refutation of motion and rest can be applied to sarvadharmā, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti undertake a critique of vision and the other senses. Indeed, they endeavour to show that vision as it is ordinarily conceived is unintelligible. In this critique, the experience of the wise is again cited in support of the Mādhyamika position.

The paradigm for the critique is the same as for the refutation of motion. Nāgārjuna tries to show that there is not an intelligible concept of vision, no agent of vision and no object of vision.

In the same way that "being in motion cannot be expressed intelligibly", Nāgārjuna wonders:

As a seeing activity which is presently not seeing is non-existent, how is it justifiable to speak of a seeing activity which sees?<sup>54</sup>

That is, the power of vision is considered in ordinary circumstances to exist in its own right, as if self-existent; however, can such a seeing activity "which is presently not seeing" be considered self-existent?

Vision, as the activity of seeing (darśanam), is unintelligible when analysed in and of itself. One may accept Nāgārjuna's argument

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<sup>54</sup>Inada, p.52.

that vision per se is unintelligible, but could counter with the reply that there is an agent of vision and an object which is perceived.

Candrakīrti cautions that this is not the case for,

As was said, 'The mover does not move', and so on, so it can be said, 'the agent of burning is not burned, and so on'. Similarly, 'the one seeing does not see'<sup>55</sup> is entailed, on the model of fire, by the analysis of motion.

As indicated by the analysis of motion, there is no agent of vision apart from the activity of seeing. Thus, a separate, self-existent notion of an agent of vision is unintelligible for Mādhyamika as a seer is nowhere observed "either detached from or not detached from the act of seeing".

As there is no separate notion of vision, nor of a seer, how can one speak of a self-existent object of vision? For Mādhyamika, such an object is not possible for,

If the seer does not exist, an object and an act of seeing, thus lacking any basis, will not be possible<sup>56</sup>; how then will the seer be established by their existence?

Owing to their interdependence, the separate components of vision are unintelligible when treated as independent notions. The same rationale applies to the other sense faculties, including the sixth sense which is thinking (manas).

What, then, is the significance of the critique of vision and the rest over and above the analysis of motion and how do the wise figure

<sup>55</sup>Sprung, p.92.

<sup>56</sup>Sprung, p.95.

in this critique?

Mādhyamika's critique of vision and the other sense faculties attempts to show the unintelligibility of subject-object distinctions used to explain sens-perceptions, and hence, the contents of consciousness are regarded as similarly unintelligible (nopapadyate).

Candrakīrti notes that if,

...the agent of seeing does not exist neither do seeing and its object, as has been explained. How then can the four factors - consciousness, contact, feeling and craving existence - be real? It follows that they are not real (na santi).<sup>57</sup>

Regarding the phenomenon of perception, Madhyamika assumes that the unenlightened use the model of agent, activity and object to account for sense experiences. As this model does not provide any traces of self-existent principles, it is rejected as nopapadyate. Similarly, consciousness and its objects, which depend on vision for their existence, must also be rejected. That being the case, the entire causal chain of saṃsāra is called into question.

The unenlightened, who (inadvertantly or not) structure their thinking in accord with the model of vision presented above, involve themselves in the "saṃsāric" chain that results. This is not the case for the wise. Candrakīrti confirms this in the following citation, attributed to the Tathāgata:

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<sup>57</sup>Sprung, p.95.

It is commonly supposed that visual consciousness arises in dependence on the organ of sight and the object; but the object is not based in the organ nor does the organ enter into the object. ...it is a misconception, a non-existent figment. The wise discerns, in meditation, how the contents of consciousness arise and vanish, are born and destroyed; he understands that consciousness neither comes nor goes, that it is a magician's trick, and devoid of being.<sup>58</sup>

Like motion, the senses and their objects are phenomena which "cannot be conceived, but only felt and lived through" as Murti has suggested. If the elements of sensual phenomena and of consciousness are devoid of being, one perpetuates misconceptions and further inflames the affliction of avidyā by theorizing about their alleged existence.

The wise one, in meditation, comes to know that the senses and consciousness are not to be seized upon as revealing the contents of tattva. Conze suggests that,

All the concrete content belongs to the interplay of countless conditions. Any 'own-being' that would, by contrast, be something of its own is seen to be no more than an abstraction, an empty spot covered by a word. Neither produced nor maintained by itself, a thing by itself is nothing at all. And this is equivalent to the insight into the emptiness of all dharmas.<sup>59</sup>

In the present discussion, vision (darśanam) is ordinarily spoken of as having "own-being", as if it were a "power" that existed in its own right. For the wise, who have insight into the "emptiness of all dharmas", this is clearly mistaken.

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<sup>58</sup> (The wise one discerns...) viññānanirodhasambhavaṃ viññānupād-  
avayaṃ vipaśyati, na kañiṃ ci gataṃ na cagataṃ śūnyamāyopama yogī paśyati.,  
Poussin, 121.1-2; Sprung, p.96.

<sup>59</sup> Conze, Buddhist Thought in India, p.240-241.

Neither the wise nor Mādhyamika utterly deny the conditional nature of the senses and consciousness. However, as they are determined by conditions (dependent on other factors for their existence), they cannot be regarded as indicative of the true nature of things. This world of relative reality, the world of named things (prapañca) must be overcome by the wise if śūnyatā is to be fully appreciated. Conze, continuing on this theme, says,

Whatever may seem to disturb this emptiness and the free flow of the wisdom which contemplates it, is of course actually there, but only conditionally, not on its own, as unsatisfactory appearance, ultimately unreal and unworthy of serious consideration. In this way the understanding of the conditioned, when carried on long enough, automatically leads to the appreciation of the Unconditioned.<sup>60</sup>

The critique of vision and the other senses (as well as consciousness) is undertaken by Mādhyamika because of its unintelligibility to them and in light of the "appreciation of the Unconditioned" that comes to the wise through meditation.

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<sup>60</sup> Conze, Buddhist Thought in India, p.241.

CONCERNING THE SKANDHAS

Though Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti have endeavoured to show that vision, the other senses and consciousness are lacking in svabhāva, the opponent might contend that material objects (like the body) are real and have not been refuted by Mādhyamika. Similarly, since the body (rūpa) and the other personal factors of existence (skandhas) have not been refuted, the senses "which belong to the factors of personal existence...will exist as well".<sup>61</sup>

Nagarjuna counters with the observation that rūpa (material form) cannot be perceived in the absence of the four elements: earth, air, fire and water.<sup>62</sup> Conversely, the four elements are nowhere observed in the absence of material form.

Here, Nāgārjuna is trying to show that rūpa-skandha as well as the other four (feeling, ideation, character dispositions and consciousness) skandhas, which were used by earlier Buddhists to account for personal existence, are not logically possible. Material form is not caused, nor uncaused, nor both caused and uncaused, nor neither caused nor uncaused by the four elements. Conversely, material form is not an effect, nor non-effect etc. of the four elements. Thus, to speak of the material

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<sup>61</sup>Sprung, p.98.

<sup>62</sup>Sprung, p.98, n.3.

form and the four elements separately is unintelligible.

Regardless of the previous critique of vision and the other senses, "a perceptible material object (rūpa) is not possible". Consequently, the wise do not make spurious, theoretical claims about personal existence or the objects of perception. Unlike the philosopher, whose orientation may demand a sensible account of personal existence and the like,

...the wise one (yogī), who sees things as they really are,  
Should not form any theories at all concerning objects.  
(Nāgārjuna)

The meaning is that he does not take objects to be the external base (ālambana) to which are attributed such characteristics as penetrable, impenetrable, veridically perceivable or not veridically perceivable, past or future, light or dark.<sup>63</sup>

One might be curious, given that the wise one "should not form any theories at all concerning objects", what would be his mode of expression concerning his insight into personal existence? Conze, referring to the psychological attitudes associated with the perfection of wisdom (prajñā-pāramitā), suggests,

...one may say that the attitude of the perfected sage is one of non-assertion. His individual self is extinct, and he will not assert himself in any way. And, since he has no belief in separate things, he will not affirm anything about any of them. Such an attitude of non-assertion must lead to logical rules which differ from those commonly held.<sup>64</sup>

Nagarjuna's relentless assault on such "commonly-held" notions as motion, vision and personal existence (to name but three) is evidence of the attitude of non-assertion, but can the wise one (as well as the Madhyamika)

<sup>63</sup> (the wise one...concerning objects) tattvadarsī yogīrūpagatān kāmścinna vikalpān vikalpayet., Poussin, 125.10-11; Sprung, p.100.

<sup>64</sup> Conze, "The Ontology of the Prajñāpāramitā" in Philosophy East and West, vol.3, no.2 (July '53). (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1953), p.125.

only use language non-assertively?

In his paper on language in Mādhyamika, Sprung notes,

...that verbal assertions, whatever else they may do for humans, do not serve to know anything in the way in which we ordinarily presume we know something, i.e. being able to say what something is.<sup>65</sup>

For the wise, to "form any theories at all" is a fruitless task, unless someone may be led to the contemplation of the dharmas by doing so. It is not possible for Mādhyamika to make any cognitively-valid claims, as language has no intrinsic validity for them.

Mādhyamika urges (as confirmed by the experience of the wise) the seeker to abandon his dependence on the limitations of language when exploring the unfamiliar reaches of truth. The language of personal existence, material form and the like can only take the seeker so far ; beyond that, he must overcome his obsessive reliance on the allure of cognitive claims. As Conze suggests,

If our basic anxiety is only perpetuated when we rely on something and is rooted out only when we give up this search for a firm support - what could be more conducive to depriving us of any stable support than a perpetual concentration on the self-contradictory nature of all our experience? If a peaceful attitude to other is the test of religious zeal, it can only be furthered by a doctrine which tells us not to insist on anything, not to assert anything.<sup>66</sup>

Though Nagarjuna has only dealt with rūpa-skandha in this section, the same type of argument would obtain for the other four skandhas. For Madhyamika, the burden of proof is not upon them to show the unintelligi-

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<sup>65</sup> Sprung, "Non-Cognitive Language in Mādhyamika Buddhism" in op.cit., p.247.

<sup>66</sup> Conze, "The Ontology of the Prajñāpāramitā" in op.cit., p.128.



bility of the factors of personal existence (as they do not make any claims to that effect). Rather, it is up to the opponent to demonstrate that the cognitive claims of the unenlightened (on motion, vision or material form) are intelligible. As the reader will see, Mādhyamika attempts to show that no such claims are logically possible, owing to the rigours of the madhyamā pratipad which relies on (in part) the experience of the wise.

## AN EXAMINATION OF DESIRE

One of the most pervasive afflictions of everyday life, as seen by Buddhists, is the affliction of desire (rāga). A task central to the spiritual development of the monk is the overcoming of desire in his everyday existence.

Given the Mādhyamika position that the unenlightened are subject to the afflictions (kleśas) fostered by ignorance of the way things really are, the opponent could argue that both the afflictions and the factors of personal existence exist because 1) afflicted existence (duḥkha) and its release are of prime concern to Buddhists and 2) as there is an afflicted state, so there must be something on which it is based.

As it was already noted in the story of the man seeing a woman's reflection,<sup>67</sup> passion generated in error is only conditionally real, i.e. real for the one so-afflicted but not for the wise one who is no longer subject to affliction.

Mādhyamika, aware of the perspective of the wise, proceeds to unravel the notion of desire. Candrakīrti notes:

The reasoning here would be that desire, conceived of as real by unsophisticated, ordinary people, would presuppose a person who desires and that he would either exist or not exist.

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<sup>67</sup> vide ante, p.24.

Nāgārjuna says that neither alternative makes sense.

If the one desiring were to exist prior to his desire, that is, quite apart from desire, desire would depend on the one desiring; given one desiring there would be desire. (Nāgārjuna) 68

Clearly, the examination of desire is going to take the form of the critique of motion, vision and the factors of personal existence.

As in the previous cases, Nagarjuna's attack focuses on the unintelligibility of the components of desire when taken separately. Desire (rāga) is not logically possible in the absence of one who desires (rakta), but one is not a rakta until he has rāga.

The opponent could suggest "...it makes sense to say that desire could arise in an existing person who desires".<sup>69</sup> However, Mādhyamika does not accept such reasoning; what appears to come in and out of existence, as desire and the other afflictions seem to, cannot be considered ultimately real. Referring to the opponent's statement above, Candrakīrti says,

But this cannot possibly be - a desiring person devoid of desire - and it would necessarily follow that even the wise ones could have desires.<sup>70</sup>

Desire and the other afflictions, motion, vision and the skandhas, are merely epithets for a complicated set of interrelated concepts. They are bridges over the gaps in understanding, attempts to build an intelligible world of ordinary experience.

Instead of focusing on the object of desire, Nāgārjuna demolishes

<sup>68</sup> Sprung, p.109.

<sup>69</sup> Sprung, p.110.

<sup>70</sup> na tvevaṃ saṃbhavati yadrāgāhito raktaḥ syādarhatāmapi rāgaprasaṅgāt., Poussin, 138.8-9; Sprung, p.110.

the notion of desire by suggesting that if rāga and the rakta be considered separate, how can they be perceived as simultaneous or conjoined?

He says,

Thus desire cannot be established either in conjunction with or independently of the one desiring  
As in the case of desire, none of the elements of existence can be established either as simultaneous or as not simultaneous.<sup>71</sup>

Nāgārjuna has argued that desire and the other afflictions, indeed all the elements of existence (sarvadharmā), are unintelligible in the light of Mādhyamika's penetrating critique. Is a similar critique undertaken by the wise on such notions as desire and the rest?

There seems to be no evidence to suggest that the wise would critically analyse the notion of desire and the rest, unless confronted by those who make spurious claims about such notions. It is the very fact that they have gone beyond such concerns that distinguishes them from the ordinary, unenlightened folk. Candrakīrti tries to show that the wise, through insight and practice, have overcome the habit of reifying the epithets of internal and external phenomena by citing from the Samādhirāja Sūtra :

Something which would be desire, either as the seat or object of desire...such an element of existence one never discerns directly nor perceives in any way. The one who does not discern such an element directly nor perceive it in any way is said to be without desire, without aversion, without delusion, to have a mind free from false belief: to be a realized man. He is said

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<sup>71</sup> sarvadharmā - "the elements of existence", Sprung, p.113 ; Poussin, 142.10.

to have crossed to the other shore; to have attained peace ...He is said to be free of the afflictions, master of himself, ...(one) whose mind is perfectly liberated by right practice, who has attained complete mastery over all thought. Such is called a śramaṇa.<sup>72</sup>

The "realized man", judging by the above, does not try to dwell on the existence or non-existence of the dharmas as a way of apprehending the real. Rather, as his approach is one of non-apprehension, his mind is open to the conditions of everyday experience without pasting labels on everything within his purview. He is indeed at peace because he "has attained complete mastery over all thought".

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<sup>72</sup> (the one who does not discern...realized man) sa taṃ dharmamasamanupaśyannanupalabhāmano'rakto'duṣṭo'mūḍo'viparyastacittaḥ samāhita ityucyate., Poussin, 143.3-4; Sprung, p.114.

loka as an empty framework of relative notions, can be developed through practice. It is a matter of clearing one's thoughts of "the deceptive pretense of things" rather than holding to a theory of śūnyatā. The seeker is being urged, in this context, to look beyond the synthetic character of his own thinking and to let go of the concepts he uses to define himself and his world. He should also let go of śūnyatā. Nagarjuna says,

The wise man (i.e. enlightened ones) have said that śūnyatā or the nature of thusness is the relinquishing of all false views. Yet it is said that those who adhere to the idea or concept of śūnyatā are incorrigible.<sup>74</sup>

Once again, what is understood as śūnyatā in this context is "the relinquishing of all false views" and not the apprehension or acquisition of yet another view or set of concepts. This is in accord with the "non-apprehension" of tattva suggested by Conze. The wise take śūnyatā to be "the mere ceasing to function of what stems from holding views (which) is not itself a real thing".<sup>75</sup> Those who seize upon śūnyatā as a substitute for an ātman-based perspective without really giving up their network of fixed concepts about the world are "incorrigible".<sup>76</sup>

For those who remain committed to the reality of the mundane world in the light of the experience of the wise, and the relentless

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<sup>74</sup>— śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭīnām proktā niḥsaraṇaṃ jinaiḥ  
yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatādrṣṭīstānasādhyān babhāṣire, Poussin,  
247.1-2; Inada, p.93

<sup>75</sup> Conze, "the Ontology of the Prajñāpāramitā", p.124.

<sup>76</sup> Sprung, p.150.

critique of the Mādhyamika, "there can be no dialogue".<sup>77</sup> Candrakīrti

illustrates the point with the following anecdote:

It is as if one man said to another, "I have no wares at all to sell you". If this other man were then to say, "Give me what you call those 'no wares at all'", how would he be able to take hold of any real wares?<sup>78</sup>

As "no wares at all" cannot be taken hold of, so śūnyatā cannot be objectified and regarded as some sort of absolute or common denominator of all things. Rather, it is the very absence of a common substratum underlying things that is being advocated. Those who claim that śūnyatā, as the absence of being in things, refers to what is ultimately real as well as being the gist of Tathāgata's teaching are said to be still holding on to a naive view of reality. Candrakīrti suggests,

That is why the great healers, the realized ones, greatly wise, having diagnosed this disease in the light of the great art of healing, do not attend to them.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Sprung, p.150.

<sup>79</sup> ato mahābhaiṣajñe'pi doṣasamjñitvātparamcikitsakaiḥ mahā-  
vaidyaistathāgataiḥ pratyākhyātā eva te, Poussin, 248.2-3 ; Sprung, p.150.

(SVABHĀVA) SELF-EXISTENCE

Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti have gone to considerable lengths to show that the notions of the everyday world are nopapadyate, that they are basically unintelligible. They have suggested that all such ideas of the world based on a naive realist perspective, that all things exist as particular entities until they pass out of existence, are untenable. They counsel the seeker to overcome this type of mental synthesizing and to become aware of the emptiness of the myriad of "things" on which one conceives his/her loka.

Though much has been said about śūnyatā thus far in the text, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti have not specifically dealt with svabhāva or self-existence until this chapter (svabhāva parikṣā). That which has a self-existent nature is considered by Mādhyamika to be real; anything other than this is śūnya, devoid of being. Candrakīrti does suggest what he means by svabhāva: "Self-existent nature means, etymologically, what is itself, through itself".<sup>80</sup> Clearly, what has a self-existent nature is unconditioned, not subject to arising and perishing as are particular things. Nāgārjuna suggests it cannot be otherwise for,

How can a self-existent nature be something created? Self-existent nature is not created nor is it dependent on anything other than itself.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Sprung, p.153.

<sup>81</sup> Sprung, p.153-154.



Concepts like motion and rest, the senses and their objects, the factors of personal existence and the rest dealt with are unintelligible owing to their lack of self-existence. Mādhyamika and the wise do not take those concerns as representative of the real; that which is real according to Madhyamika does not depend on subsidiary concepts or conditions to give it reality. Candrakīrti explains the connection between svabhāva and the experience of the wise as,

...what, arising from the optical defect of primal ignorance is, in whatever way, taken to be the everyday world of things (bhāvajāta), becomes, in virtue of going beyond ways of taking things, the world of the wise (āryānām viṣayatvam) who are free of the optical defect of primal ignorance; that and nothing else has a nature of its own; the wise name it "self-existence".<sup>82</sup>

The significance of the experience of the realized wise ones becomes clear at this point in the text. The realm of the wise (āryānām viṣayatvam) has already been characterized as beyond ordinary language and thought, untainted by delusion and passion, at peace. Now it is characterized as svabhāva, "that and nothing else has a nature of its own". The way things are for the wise (tattva) is said to be self-existence, fully having a nature of its own. As particular things are conditioned, arising and perishing in time, they are considered to be lacking own-nature by the wise. Candrakīrti suggests,

Self-existence in this sense - by nature not arising in time - is non-self-existence in the ordinary sense because it is simply non-existent ontically through not having a specific

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<sup>82</sup> ayidyātimiraprabhāvopalabdham bhāvajātam yenātmanā vigatāvidyā-  
timirānāryānamadarśanayoḡena viṣayatvamupayāti tadeva svarūpamesām  
svabhāva iti vyavasthāpyate, Poussin, 265.3-5; Sprung, p.156.

nature. This being so, it should be clear that there is no self-existence of particular things.<sup>83</sup>

The gulf of understanding between the ordinary sense of things and that of the wise is indeed a wide one. What is real in the ordinary sense - is, for the most part, delusive in the realm of realized wisdom; conversely, the way things really are is all but absent from conventional thinking. Yet, Mādhyamika has pointed out the identity of the way things really are with the realm of the wise and with self-existence. As the central threads of the text, like śūnyatā, tattva and svabhāva, become more closely interwoven, the limitations of ordinary language to elucidate the Madhyamika position become all the more obvious. For example, the particulars of mundane experience are considered to be empty; even the dharmas are regarded as śūnya. They are śūnya because they lack an uncreated, invariable nature. Yet, Candrakīrti wonders,

...what is self-existent nature? Original, invariable nature (prakṛti). What is original nature? Devoidness of being (śūnyatā).<sup>84</sup>

Devoidness of being is the self-existent nature in question; one might well note that 1) particular things lacking svabhāva have been character-

<sup>83</sup> Sprung, p.156.

(de Jong notes that particular things (bhāvas) "...are not real, because they cannot come into being. Nāgārjuna proves by reductio ad absurdum that "a thing" does not originate from itself, nor from something else; it does not originate from itself and something else, nor is it without cause. ...Therefore, the things which the layman considers as real are not real". J.W. de Jong, "The Problem of the Absolute", Jnl. of Indian Phil., '72 (vol. 2), p.2.

<sup>84</sup> Sprung, p.155.

ized as śūnya and 2) how can there "be" anything that has devoidness of being as its own-most nature? Candrakīrti continues the enigma:

And what is devoidness of being? Not being of the nature of substantial thing (naisvabhāva). What is not being of the nature of substantial thing? The way things really are (tathatā). What is the way things really are? Being as they are (tathābhāva): invariableness, steadfastness throughout all time.<sup>85</sup>

Self-existent nature is the same as original nature which corresponds to devoidness of being, yet devoidness of being is the very absence of a self-existent nature; this is why the bhāvas are said to be śūnya. Can svabhāva be characterized as suggestive of something different from the bhāvas of the mundane world when both are similarly devoid of being?

Ultimately, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti show that the emptiness of the delusive everyday is the same as the way things really are to the wise; there is no separate reality being proposed that would correspond to svabhāva. The notion of svabhāva is used by the wise ones, according to Mādhyamika, to demolish the belief in existence and non-existence to which the ordinary man is attached. By using svabhāva (own-most original nature) as the measure of the reality of particular things, the mundane world can be seen more clearly ~~for~~ what it is: a complex arrangement of interrelated, interdependent ideas and experiences and not the plurality of independently real entities that appears to arise and perish.

Thus, svabhāva is used primarily as a foil against the delusion of conventional thinking, and not as an accurate description of the way of the wise ones. It is merely a prajñapti, a designation that has no

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<sup>85</sup> Sprung, p.155-156.

corresponding referent as such. Sprung explains that this term has a general and peculiar sense in this context:

In general all words which would name anything are prajñaptis: that is, nothing is found in the object to which they point, which corresponds uniquely to that putative name. ...In its peculiar sense a prajñapti is only such a name as leads, via the Buddhist discipline, to the Buddhist truth. The term svabhāva, for example, which was analytically nonsense, yet led, by some hidden connection, unerringly to the truth of things. ...How is it that a prajñapti can guide or conduct, without giving knowledge in the ordinary sense?<sup>86</sup>

Though there is nothing which "corresponds uniquely to the putative name" of svabhāva, this term and others (like tattva, śūnyatā) can be used as guiding notions by those wise in the Buddhist way to help unenlightened folk overcome their obsession with the marks of existence and non-existence.

The obsession with existence/non-existence (or arising/perishing) of particular things, including the person, depends on the reality that is mistakenly assigned to the apparent distinctiveness of the bhāvas. Streng suggests that,

...a person who does not slip into the error of regarding these practical distinctions as ultimate facts is able to see that there is indeed neither one absolute substance nor many individual substances. Every object of perception or imagination requires a mental fabrication, and therefore every distinction participates in this fabrication.<sup>87</sup>

Should one go beyond an uncritical acceptance of the reality of particular things, but still maintain that the separate elements of existence

<sup>86</sup> Sprung, "Being and the Middle Way" in Mervyn Sprung ed., The Question of Being (East-West Perspectives). (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), p.133.

<sup>87</sup> Streng, Emptiness, p.52.

(dharmas) that make up the world of conditioned things are real, then he has mistaken the teaching of the Tathāgata and is afflicted by "primal ignorance".

It is not the intention of the wise, or Mādhyamika, to substitute a belief in a type of negative absolutism for belief in the reality of a pluralistic world. On the contrary, the one on the Way is urged to divest his mind of speculations concerning being, non-being and the like in his quest for enlightened awareness (prajñā). Nāgārjuna says,

Those who think in terms of self-existence, other-existence, existence and non-existence do not grasp the truth of the Buddha's teaching.<sup>88</sup>

That is, those who maintain the self-existence of the dharmas, or that consciousness, feeling and the other personal factors of existence arise and perish as the objects of perception are experienced ("other-existence" or parabhāva), or that things partake of existence (bhāva) and non-existence (abhāva), have not escaped the snares of delusive thought.

Not surprisingly, the realized wise ones are able to use the guiding notion of svabhāva without falling prey to the lure of absolutism that lurks within. As the wise do not conceive of things in terms of self-existence and the rest, they are not bound to demonstrate the efficacy of their theories of the way things really are. They urge the self-existence of things to counter the pervasive and firmly entrenched commit-

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<sup>88</sup> Sprung, p.158.

ment to "being" (in one form or another) of the unenlightened. Owing to this, their use of prajñaptis like svabhāva is "not contrary to reason because of their autonomous, incorrigible, perfect enlightenment about the true nature of all things".<sup>89</sup>

Though this may sound like an expression of veneration for the realized ones, Candrakīrti notes that as the notion of svabhāva is not contrary to reason when expounded by the perfectly realized ones (tathāgatas), then,

...the teaching of the revered Buddhas is valid knowledge (pramāna), the wise say, because it is in accord with reason (sopapattika) and free from contradictions. And also because it derives from realized wise ones who are completely free of any faults. It has authority because it yields the authentic truth of all things; and because it is an authentic guide for those on the way; and because the attains nirvāṇa if he bases himself on it.<sup>90</sup>

The notion of svabhāva, as well as tattva and śūnyatā, are "in accord with reason and free from contradictions" which allows them to be more effective as foils against the so-called reasoned arguments of the naive realist. Furthermore, such teaching is considered authoritative because it conduces to truth, provides guidance for initiates and laymen alike and ultimately provides liberation from the affliction of delusive thought.

That svabhāva is "in accord with reason and free from contradictions" can be suggested by Nāgārjuna's dialectic, but as Conze suggests, self-existent nature as śūnyatā is properly "non-apprehended" through meditation. He notes,

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<sup>90</sup> Sprung, p.158.

... (that the) definition of "own-being" is the starting point of the Mādhyamika system. It is offered not as a speculative assertion, but as the result of prolonged meditation on "conditioned co-production". Logical deduction may suggest that dharmas have no own-being at all, but ultimate certainty comes from meditational experience. ...All the concrete content belongs to the interplay of countless conditions. Any "own-being" that would, by contrast, be something of its own is seen to be no more than an abstraction, an empty spot covered by a word. Neither produced nor maintained by itself, a thing by itself is nothing at all.<sup>91</sup>

The well-spring of certainty in this context is insight gained through meditation. The use of reasoned argument is an appeal to the unenlightened to reconsider their beliefs about the world in a medium with which they are familiar. However, as Mādhyamika and the wise supposedly make no claims of their own, nothing can be said about svabhāva (or tattva and śūnyatā for that matter) that fully elucidates its reality. There is no direct access to the way things really are through language; indirect access is provided through the dialectical emptying of the categories of thought as per Nāgārjuna's critique.

Candrakīrti hints at the reality that is being sought, the reality that remains as the manifold of named things are put into proper perspective. Reality (tattva) is the way things really are for the wise, which is less a definition than an indication to the seeker to emulate the way of the wise in his quest for nirvāṇa. There is no other reality, in the fullest sense, than that of the wise. Sprung notes that Candrakīrti,

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<sup>91</sup> Conze, Buddhist Thought in India, p.240.

...does not have the yogī say anything :the wise man does not inform us how things are, really. Candrakīrti adopts what may be called a functional approach; he refers to a certain context - the yogī's world - and says that what is present there is self-existent; the way things are for the yogī is the way they truly are. ...The wise one, it is said further, taking things neither as existent nor as non-existent, proceeds on his way. In short, the way the wise man takes thin things is the only permissible understanding of the formulation concerning tattvam, the way things truly are: 'Not dependent on anything other than itself...' and so on.<sup>92</sup>

As svabhāva (tattva and śūnyatā) is beyond ordinary language and thought, giving expression to reality in the context of philosophical discussion is not an easy task. Hence, the experience of the wise is, once again, relied upon to help bridge the gap between the limits of the expressible to the limitless inexpressible.. Indeed, if the way of the wise is "the only permissible understanding of the formulation concerning tattvam", then one could hardly discount the significance of the wise in elucidating some of the most fundamental, yet enigmatic, aspects of the Prasannapadā.

The svabhāva parīkṣā provides ample evidence to support the contention that the wise, and their awareness, figures prominently in the central concerns of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. Given that Mādhyamika argues that ordinary expression cannot reveal the real, the way of the wise is invoked time and again to indicate that a proper and successful appreciation of the mādhyamā pratipad is not predicated upon any type of belief in existence. Candrakīrti states that the intention of this chapter:

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<sup>92</sup> Sprung, "Being and the Middle Way" in Op. cit., p.134.



...to repudiate the reality of things; to say things are not real is precisely the same as to say they have no self-existence.<sup>93</sup>

In the next section, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti turn their attention to the refutation of the notion of the self based on the way things are for those wise in the Buddhist way.

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<sup>93</sup>Sprung, p.164.

## SELF (ĀTMAN)

One of the most persistent, delusive views that is confronted in the Prasannapadā is the view that there is a self (ātman) as the essential, own-most nature of each person. The Mādhyamikas take this to be an example, if no the best example, of primal ignorance (avidyā) precipitating the delusion of ordinary thought. The yoke of this mistaken view must be broken before the seeker can advance in the cultivation of śūnyatā.

The refutation of the notion of self begins with a statement of concerns that an opponent might have in light of Mādhyamika's arguments thus far. Given that Mādhyamika has repudiated common notions like motion, the senses and the rest, this hypothetical opponent might be inclined to ask Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti,

...what then for you is the way things are really (tattvam)?  
And how does one attain (avatāra) to the way things are really?<sup>94</sup>

Candrakīrti's reply brings together the disciplined meditation on śūnyatā, the wisdom of the realized wise one and the notion of the putative self. As for tattva, Candrakīrti says,

It is the utter cessation of I-ing (ahaṅkāra) and mine-ing (mamakāra) in both personal and non-personal regard through ceasing to take anything whatsoever, whether personal or non-personal, as real in its particularity, that is for us the way things are really.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Sprung, p.165.

<sup>95</sup> Sprung, p.165.

This reiterates a basic point made over and over again in the text, though from a slightly different perspective, i.e. the way things are in truth is invariably given a negative denotation, presumably to discourage the reader (seeker or opponent) from mistaking the Tathāgata's teaching (as receded in the text) as any type of closet eternalism. Here, it is expressed as the "utter cessation" (parikṣaya) of injecting "I-ing" (ahaṅkāra) and "mine-ing" (mamakāra) in determinations regarding the real.

On attaining (avatāra) tattva, Candrakīrti suggests,

...The Madhyamakāvatāra should be consulted for details. To quote: "The yogī, discerning in his wisdom that all basic afflictions and defects whatsoever arise from holding the view that the person is real (satkāyadrṣṭi) and having inseen that the self (ātman) is the central concept of this view, does away with the self".<sup>96</sup>

To be aware of the way things are in truth is, in part, to do away with one of the most fundamental beliefs of ordinary existence. If anything, this implicit contrast between the awareness of the wise and the unenlightened shows the magnitude and difficulty of the task Mādhyamika has undertaken, i.e. to show the untenability of "holding the view that the person is real (satkāyadrṣṭi)" which is seen to be the seat of "all basic afflictions and defects".

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<sup>96</sup> satkāyadrṣṭiprabhavānaśeṣān kleśāñśca doṣāñśca dhiyā vipaśyan, ātmānamasya viṣayaṃ ca buddhvā yogī karotyātmaniśedhaneva, (Madhyamakāvatāra, VI, 120), Poussin, 340.8-11; Sprung, p.165.

(Poussin notes that "Il y a satkāyadrṣṭi quand il y a ahaṅkāra.", note 1, 340).

Given that the notion of the self provides the basic reference point for ordinary discourse, it would be difficult to totally eliminate its presence and continue to be expressive. What is being advocated here is not the total exclusion of the functional use of self as a convenient point of reference, but rather the view (dr̥ṣṭi) that the self is real cannot be regarded as intelligible. The refutation of self is in accord with the experience of the wise:

...the yogī, through not taking the self as real, abandons the view that the person is real, and having abandoned this view, discerning that all the basic afflictions come to an end, he enquires into the self: what is this so-called self which is the intended object of the notion 'I' (ahaṅkāraviṣaya).<sup>97</sup>

Candrakīrti's comments on how the wise have abandoned the view that the person (kāya) is real preface the enquiry into that which is the basis of "the intended object of the notion 'I' (ahaṅkāraviṣaya)". One implication of holding that the person is real is that the self (as the essential nature or "intended object" of the person) must be associated with the skandhas. Yet, as Nāgārjuna suggests,

If the self were identical with the factors of personal existence it would itself arise and perish; if it were other than them, it would not be characterizable in their terms.<sup>98</sup>

Nāgārjuna does not attempt an exhaustive study of the phenomenology of self here, but does want to convey the unintelligibility of views of self which maintain that an unchanging nature exists with which the factors of personal existence are intimately (if not indivisibly) associated. If

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<sup>97</sup> (what is this so-called self...) ko'yātma nāmeti yo'ahaṅkāra-viṣayaḥ, Poussin, 340.15; Sprung, p.165.

<sup>98</sup> Sprung, p.166.

the self were identical with, or conditioned by, the factors of personal existence,<sup>99</sup> then it could hardly be considered as self-existent or unchanging.

On the other hand, if the self were other than the skandhas, then there would be no point of talking of "self" as if it had a subjective dimension. But as self is an abstraction or an extension of personal existence, it must in some way partake of that mode of existence; to speak of an unchanging and eternal self, devoid of the impermanent and conditioned aspects associated with personal existence, is wishful thinking.

Thus, for Nāgārjuna, it makes no sense to speak of the self as identical with or different from the factors of personal existence. Neither alternative seems to express an intelligibility of self. The notion of self, consequently, must be regarded as delusive, misleading and empty. Those who maintain that a permanent, eternal self exists as the necessary substratum of experience are strongly urged to forsake their false views, or risk going astray in "the ocean of existence".<sup>100</sup>

How would one characterize a loss of self in this context? Given that self is an inference from the apparent immediacy of "skandhic" experience, Candrakīrti suggests that seeing through the fiction of self allows one to view the skandhas with a similar detachment:

<sup>99</sup>Candrakīrti takes the skandhas to be "1) bodily form, 2) experiencing, 3) seizing on the specific character of things, 4) shaping one's dispositions, 5) becoming aware of objects." Sprung, p.167.

<sup>100</sup>"Fools, envelopped by the darkness of bewilderment imagine

...just as, when a chariot has been burned, one does not perceive its parts because they have been burned too, so those on the way (yogīs), when they have realized that the self is not an entity, necessarily realize that their own factors of personal existence are not entities either.<sup>101</sup>

This might seem problematic, for one could easily wonder how he continues to identify, functionally, with (his own) bodily form, given that he repudiates any notion of self.

The Mādhyamika doesn't urge the seeker to assert the absolute non-existence of anything resembling a notion of self. The point of repudiating the notion of ātman in the text is to shake the reader from the habit of viewing personal existence (and by extension, worldly existence) in terms of entities. This mold of thinking in terms of self-existent entities must be broken if one is to appreciate the dynamic openness of things as revealed to unclouded awareness (prajñā).

Streng notes,

...the loss of self does not come about so much through absorption into something, but through an "emptying" of what seemed to be ultimately real.<sup>102</sup>

The importance of emptying the self at this point becomes clear, for if the self no longer figures prominently in one's experience, then more than a subtle change in one's approach to things will take place. A person would be less likely to believe that the variety of experien-

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that there is something eternal, a self, a pleasure in things which are in fact insubstantial, and therefore they go astray in this ocean of existence", in "Mahāyāna Vīmśika" karika 20 in G. Tucci, Minor Buddhist Texts, p.207.

<sup>101</sup> yathaiva hi dagdhe rathe tadaṅgānyapi dagdhatvānnopalabhyante, evaṃ yogino yadaivātmanairātmyam pratipadyante tadaivātmiyaskandha-  
vastunairātmyamapi niyataṃ pratipadyante, Poussin, 346.2-3; Sprung, p.169.

<sup>102</sup> Streng, p.165.

tial modes (that once accrued to him) are basic to an intelligible understanding of things. Such a person, like a realized, wise one, might indeed be free of the egocentric orientation of experience which is (for Mādhyamika) characteristic of conventional, unenlightened thinking. Candrakīrti makes the following observation:

The yogī - the one on the way - becomes free of the I-ing and mine-ing by the coming to an end of the self - the object of the I-sense and by the coming to an end of what is of interest to the self, that is the factors of personal existence taken as real - the object of the sense of "mine".<sup>103</sup>

In the preceding passage, Candrakīrti suggested that the "one on the way" becomes free of the self and of the skandhas, no longer believing them to be real. He anticipates the likely objection that one who is free in this way, must be said to exist; if the yogī exists, then he partakes of the self and the skandhas. Candrakīrti does not accept such an objection for Nāgārjuna says,

One who is free of I-ing and mine-ing does not exist factually. Anyone who thinks he sees one free of I-ing and mine-ing does not truly see.<sup>104</sup>

Not only does Nāgārjuna suggest that one like the yogī, "one who is free of I-ing and mine-ing does not exist factually", but he also says that in claiming to see one who is free of ahaṅkāra and nama-kāra, an observer

<sup>103</sup> ātmano 'haṅkāraṇaviśayasyātmanīnasya ca skandhādevastano namakāraṇaviśayasya ... jāyate yogī., Poussin 348.1-2; Sprung, p.170

<sup>104</sup> nirmano nirahaṅkāro yaśca so'pi na vidyate, nirmanaṃ nirahaṅkāraṃ yaḥ paśyati na paśyati., Poussin, 348.5-6; Sprung, p.170

would be mistaken.

There seems to be conflicting statements about the one who is on the Way and, in general, being free of ego-oriented experience. Candrakīrti, on the one hand, indicates that the yoqī is not subject to the activities of the skandhas (nor of self), yet Nāgārjuna proposes that one who has overcome these influences "does not exist factually".

It has become clear that if we characterize the wise one as an observable phenomenon, or if we suggest that he partakes of both personal existence and enlightenment as the unenlightened do of personal existence, then we have not reached a satisfactory understanding of the Madhyamika position. Not only are the skandhas "devoid of self-existence and without being" (skandha svabhāvatu śūnya vivikta) as is enlightenment itself (bodhi svabhāvatu śūnya vivikta), but "the one involved with both is devoid of self-existence" (yo pi caretsa pi śūnyasvabhāvah). This is the view of the wise (jñānavatah).<sup>105</sup>

We are fast approaching the point in this examination where a commitment ought to be made to a consistent approach of understanding the notion of the wise one as used by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. The appeal to the wisdom and experience of the wise has been made on many significant occasions in the text, mostly in support of positions already taken. However, as the text proceeded, all of the supposedly self-existent notions under scrutiny were shown to be unintelligible in the ultimate sense. Similarly, Nāgārjuna has stated that "one who is free

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<sup>105</sup> Poussin, 349.4-7; Sprung, p.170.



of I-ing and mine-ing does not exist factually".

The subject of this study, the notion of the wise one, must be considered to be lacking self-existence as 1) such a one, even for Nagarjuna, does not exist factually and 2) both personal existence and enlightenment, of which the wise one would be involved, are said to be śūnya.

What is the effect on this study to say that the principal theme is "devoid of self-existence"? Is the notion of the wise one used merely as a guiding notion for the initiated, as the prospect of future spiritual attainment or as a pseudo-authoritative source to support one's arguments? Is it, ultimately, of little impact on Nāgārjuna's treatise?

To say that the notion of the wise one is śūnya is to remain true to the middle path between naive realism and nihilism. As the Madhyamikas are loath to affirm the self-existence of any view, similarly they do not adopt the position of absolute non-existence. They are neither reality-affirming nor reality-negating in spite of attempts by their critics to brand them as nāstika.

Candrakīrti emphatically denies any real connection between Mādhyamika and nihilism:

...there is no identity of insight or of explanation between the Madhyamikas who have fully realized the real nature of things as it is (vastusvarūpa) and who expound that, and the nihilists who have not fully realized the real nature of things as it is, even though there is no difference in their theory of the nature of things.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Sprung, p.130.

The nihilist lacks the very thing that distinguishes the wise one from the unenlightened person, i.e. prajñā, so that in unraveling the confusion of everyday thinking he merely inverts the realist's position without freeing himself from the confines of the relativity of his own position.

Thus, in saying that the notion of the wise one is śūnya, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti are not contradicting the way they have used it throughout the text; rather, they do not assign to it any more reality than they would assign to affliction (duḥkha) or to enlightenment (bodhi). All of the above are relative notions, and have significance within the parameters of ordinary awareness. For Mādhyamika, this is the plane on which philosophy and other Buddhist concerns are meaningful; that they are not ultimately real, or non-dependently non-originated, does not alter the fact that some notions are useful in analysing the afflicted nature of the human condition and, hence, are conducive to overcoming it. The notion of the wise one, like that of affliction and enlightenment, is instrumental in helping the unenlightened appreciate the limitations of ordinary thought-constructions.

Using concepts like the self (ātman) to make sense of one's loka is tolerated in this context, but Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti urge one not to rely too heavily upon it as affliction is, in part, based on ātman-based thinking. Belief in self is not intelligible, as these two philosophers have convincingly argued in the present chapter (ātma parīkṣā in the text). They have attempted to show that the self is not identical with the skandhas, nor wholly other (nor both, nor neither), that the

realized wise one correctly apprehends the status of self and incorporates this into his awareness.

However, in order to avoid logical complications, Nāgārjuna does not assign any self-existence to the one who has this insight. Nāgārjuna says that such a one does not exist factually, but this is not taken to mean that he is espousing a type of nihilism. He is merely saying that the notion of the wise one, like other Buddhist notions, is a valid one relative to the soteriological aims of Mādhyamika thought.

We are still left, at this stage, with trying to get a better grasp of this notion. By its very character, though, such a notion would not be easily and precisely defined as has been suggested earlier in this study. When describing the realm of the wise, the language used is, at best, interpretive based on analogies which seem intelligible to conventional thinking but carry a higher truth. It is this higher truth, particularly of statements attributed to the Tathāgata, which reveals itself to the wise but not to the unenlightened.

Above all, this seems to be what sets the wise apart from the ordinary folk, i.e. the wisdom to intuit the higher, surpassing sense of Buddha-vaṇa and authoritative commentaries. To be fixated upon whether or not the wise one exists in the guise of this person or another is not of central importance in this context; rather, Nāgārjuna's concern is to break the association between the named world and what we take to be real. To speculate on the actual, phenomenal existence of the wise one does

little to further this concern.

In the next section of this study, the āryasatya parīkṣā in the text, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti show, perhaps better than anywhere else in the text, the significance of the wise in the context of Mādhyamika thought and how one might best understand the realm of those who have shared the Tathāgata's insight into the human condition.

## TWO TRUTHS, FOUR TRUTHS

The chapter on the four Buddhist truths (āryasatya)<sup>107</sup> marks the culmination of integrating the insight of the wise into the central concern of the text, i.e. the coming to rest of named things. This chapter provides the clearest example in the text, with the possible exception of the nirvāna parīkṣā which follows it, of the distinction of the two levels of truth implicit in the Tathāgata's teaching on the nature of existence.

Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti commence their elucidation of the four Buddhist truths with a lengthy presentation of potential objections to these truths in light of all that has been said in support of śūnyatā. The opponent could reasonably object:

If the entire everyday is devoid of self-existence nothing can come to be nor cease to be. It follows inexorably that, for you, the four Buddhist truths do not hold.<sup>108</sup>

This objection constitutes an understandable reaction to Mādhyamika's

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<sup>107</sup> (Sprung characterizes the four Buddhist truths as follows : "1) existence is afflicted (duḥkha) ; 2) afflicted existence has an origin ; 3) afflicted existence has an end ; 4) there is a path leading to the end. These are the āryan truths, often translated as the noble or holy truths. For Nāgārjuna they are the truths of the wise, i.e. truths for those who have penetrated Buddhism". Sprung, p.223).

<sup>108</sup> (Regarding the kārikās in this chapter, "we are treated to glimpses of a real genius at work", Inada, p.143. This is evident both in the structure of the argument and the topics covered.)

uncompromising repudiation of views that make claims about tattva, or the way things really are. As the text has quite clearly refuted the prospect of self-existence for the entire everyday (sarvam idam), then "nothing can come to be nor cease to be". If this were the case, then there would be no validity to the four Buddhist truths that account for the origin and end of afflicted existence (duḥkha).

Pursuing the objection further, the opponent correctly notes that only the wise are said to fully comprehend the nature of duḥkha, and that they can understand the personal factors of existence in that light. Thus,

As it is only for the wise (ārya) that the personal factors are afflicted by nature, the truth of afflicted existence (duḥkha-satya) is said to be a truth for the wise (āryasatya).<sup>109</sup>

What can be noted here, perhaps showing how thorough this objection is, is that while the ordinary person knows that existence can be painful (or afflicted) at times, the wise know that personal existence is itself (whether painful or pleasurable) is afflicted owing to its impermanence.

In the face of this expression of Mādhyamika doctrine, the opponent could insist that,

...if the wise truth of affliction is to make sense, things must come to an end and cease to be. If, however, because all things are devoid of self-existence, nothing comes to be nor ceases to be, there can be no affliction.<sup>110</sup>

If there were no affliction, then it would make no sense to talk of a

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<sup>109</sup> ata āryānāmeva duḥkhānata satyamiti krtvā duḥkhamāryasatyam-ityucyate, Poussin, 476.6-7; Sprung, p.224.

<sup>110</sup> Sprung, p.224.

truth concerning its origin, its cessation or a way leading to its cessation. If afflicted existence were completely śūnya, then there would also be no basis for distinguishing between the wise and the unenlightened, nor would there be any occasion for writing philosophical treatises of this type as all things would be similarly devoid of self-existence. Indeed, by such a total repudiation of the self-existence in things, Nāgārjuna could be characterized as rejecting the following:

...the reality of the attainments, the distinction between truth and untruth, and even transactions in the everyday world.<sup>111</sup>

In brief, the opponent suggests that the Mādhyamika undermines his own central concern, i.e. nirvāṇa, by his radical and uncompromising stand on the unreality of things.

One would not expect Nāgārjuna to succumb to his own sweeping objection and, of course, he does not. He notes that the opponent who would make such objections is not aware of śūnyatā, its use (prayojana) nor of its meaning (artha). Candrakīrti provides a clear statement of the use of śūnyatā at this point in the text:

...the absence of being is taught for the purpose of bringing the manifold of named things (prapañca), without exception, to perfect rest (upaśama). That is, the purpose of the absence of self-existence in things is to bring the entire manifold of named things to perfect rest.<sup>112</sup>

Bringing "the entire manifold of named things to perfect rest" is one of

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<sup>111</sup> ...phalasadbhāvamadharmam dharmameva ca, sarvasaṃvyavahāraṅśca laukikān..., Poussin, 489.9-10; Sprung, p.227.

<sup>112</sup> (ato) niraviśeṣaprapañcopasārthaṃ śūnyatopadiśyate tasmātsarva-prapañcopaśamaḥ śūnyatāyāṃ prayojanaṃ, Poussin. 491.1-2; Sprung, p.229.

the basic themes of the text, and one which is reiterated throughout the text; that it should be considered the use (or purpose) of śūnyatā reflects the Mādhyamika intention to avoid making ontic assertions in the text. Śūnyatā is only a device, an expedient means, by which the unintelligibility of the world of named things is exposed. It seems that Nagarjuna's critics (and "opponents") have not appreciated the intention behind his formulation of śūnyatā.

Candrakīrti says the meaning of śūnyatā is the same as pratītya-samutpāda (non-dependent, non-origination) and not abhāva (non-existence).<sup>113</sup> This may be another source of confusion for those who try to defame Nāgārjuna's critique of philosophical views (dr̥ṣṭi). Those who interpret śūnyatā as abhāva in this context do not understand the two-fold nature of the sayings of the Tathāgata, of which this text is but an elaboration.

Nāgārjuna says,

The teaching of the Buddhas is wholly based on their being two truths: that of a personal everyday world and a higher truth which surpasses it.<sup>114</sup>

A proper understanding of the "two truths" (satyadvaya), "the truth of the personal everyday world" (lokasaṃvṛtisaṭya) and "the higher truth which surpasses it" (paramārthasaṭya), is considered essential for those who seek an appreciation of "the teaching of the Buddhas" (buddhānāṃ dharmadeśanā).

The notion of the wise one again figures prominently in the text

<sup>113</sup> Poussin, 491.15-16; Sprung, p.229.

<sup>114</sup> dve satye samupāsritya buddhānāṃ dharmadeśanā, lokasaṃvṛtisaṭya ca satyaṃ ca paramārthataḥ, Poussin, 492.4-5; Sprung, p.230.



within the present discussion of the two truths. Having characterized the truth of the everyday as obscuring the true nature of things, as reciprocally dependent on particular things for which it serves as truth and founded on the dualism of knowing and that which is known, Candrakīrti proceeds to characterize the higher or surpassing truth (param-ārthasatya):

...what is higher or surpassing is not dependent on anything other than itself, it is at peace, it is known in and through itself by the wise; it is beyond the world of named things as such; it cannot be demonstrated nor even cognized.<sup>115</sup>

The higher, surpassing truth, one which "cannot be demonstrated, nor even cognized", nonetheless provides the basis for Nāgārjuna's formulation of the "true way of things" (pratītyasamutpāda) as "neither perishing nor arising in time" etc. in the initial chapter of his text. Logic (in the form of his four-fold syllogism), inference and perception cannot reveal truth in this sense; rather, as Candrakīrti says, "it is known in and through itself by the wise".

This is yet another important point in their text where the notion of the wise one is related to the expression of a theme developed in the text. In this instance, though, the role of this notion becomes all the more crucial in that the higher or surpassing sense of the teaching of

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<sup>115</sup> ...paramāsthā'parapratyayaḥ śantaḥ pratyātmavedya āryāṇām sarvaprapañcatītaḥ, sa nopadiśyate na cāpi jñāyate..., Poussin, 493.10-11; Sprung, p.231.

(For May, this is a "passage vigoureusement agnostique... (ou) la realite absolue est inaccessible meme a la connaissance metaphysique, au jñāna, a la prajñā. En fait, la prajñā se supprime dans le paramārtha", May, p.228, note 783.)

the Buddhas seems to be penetrated "in and through itself by the wise" (pratyātmavedya āryāṇām sarvaprapañcatitaḥ), confirming that the experience of the wise is foundational to a faithful interpretation of the Dharma. If the Prasannapadā itself is such a faithful interpretation, then it too relies on the experience of the wise, in addition to the strength of its arguments, to secure its validity.

Candrakīrti formulates his account of the higher truth in several ways, one of which was presented on the previous page. He also states:

What both makes sense (artha) and is surpassing (parama) is the higher or surpassing sense. That alone, taken as the truth, is truth in the higher or surpassing sense (paramārtha-satya).<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> paramaścāsāvarthasceti paramārthaḥ tadeva satyen paramārtha-satyaṃ, Poussin, 494.1; Sprung p.231.

(There is an abundance of secondary material on the notion of the "two truths" (satyadvaya) in Indian philosophy as a whole, and Mādhyamika philosophy in particular. Some of the following remarks are of special relevance to this study:

"saṃvṛti is nothing more than the target of paramarthic destruction; paramārtha requires saṃvṛti in order, by showing its hollowness, to make itself known. In the end, it is not possible, I believe, to make the relation of saṃvṛti intelligible in any theoretical terms available to us." Prof. Sprung, "The Mādhyamika Doctrine as a Metaphysic" in The Problem of Two Truths in Buddhism and Vedānta, p.50.

"The paramārtha is the utter absence of the function of Peason (buddhi) which is therefore equated with saṃvṛti. The Absolute truth is beyond the scope of discursive thought, language and empirical activity; and conversely, the object of these is saṃvṛtisatya. ...Devoid of empirical determinations, it is the object of the innermost experience of the wise. It is so intimate and integral that we cannot be self-conscious of it." Murti, "Samvṛti and Paramārtha in Mādhyamika and Advaita Vedānta" in Ibid., p.17.

"Paramārthasatya is, then, living in full awareness of dependent

Though a brief etymological account of paramārthasatya sheds some light on the meaning of the label, it is not the fullest description given in the text.

Perhaps the most descriptive account of the higher truth given in the text is in the characterization of the wise one that appears in this chapter. This is also the longest single characterization of the wise one and his awareness given in the Prasannapāḍā. Candrakīrti says,

The wise one on the way (yogī), having awakened to the fact that the personal world of the everyday arises solely from ignorance and is devoid of self-existence, and who understands that devoidness of self-existence is the higher truth of the everyday, does not fall into the extremes of dualism. He does not recoil to the belief that things are unreal because he has found no self-existence in them, thinking "what once was, now is not". He does not reject (na bādhati) the personal everyday world, which assumes the form of a reflection, outright, and so he does not reject outright actions and their moral consequences, the distinction between right and wrong, and so on. Nor, on the other hand, does he wrongly impute self-existence to everyday things in the higher sense; because he experiences such things as actions and their moral consequences as not self-existent; and because he does not experience them as self-existent.<sup>117</sup>

The above passage is as much an account of the two-fold truth of Mādhya-  
mika as it is a description of the wise one (yogī). Here, one can note that "the personal world of the everyday arises solely from ignorance" (saṃvṛtisatyam hyajñānamūtrasamutthāpitam) and is "devoid of self-exist-

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co-origination rather than in a limited, 'tunneled' awareness about the conditions of existence...without the desire for an unconditioned self-existent reality - which is just a fantasy, a mirage. ...From the perspective of paramārthasatya, both paramārtha and saṃvṛti are empty (dependently co-originated)." Streng, "The Significance of Pratītyasamut-  
pāda for Understanding the Relationship between Saṃvṛti and Paramārtha-  
satya in Nagarjuna" in Ibid., p.36-37.

<sup>117</sup> Sprung, p.232.

ence" (niḥsvabhāva). Not only has the wise one awakened (buddhvā) to the nature of the saṃvṛti, but he also "understands that devoidness of self-existence is the higher truth of the everyday" (tasya paramārthalakṣaṇāṃ śūnyatāṃ pratipadyamāna). Having awakened to this understanding of the two truths, "he does not fall into the extremes of dualism" (nāntadvaye patati).<sup>118</sup>

Already in the above passage, one can see that the understanding of the two truths can be a transforming one, taking a person away from the habit of dualistic thinking. Though recognizing that the saṃvṛti arises from ignorance, the wise one does not "recoil to the belief that things are unreal" (nāstitāṃ na pratipadyate). In other words, the wise one does not slip into nihilism because conventional understanding is said to arise from ignorance; indeed, even though saṃvṛti arises from ignorance the wise one does not reject it (na bādhyate).

However, being true to the middle path, the wise one "does not wrongly impute self-existence to everyday things in the higher sense" (na cāpi paramārthāṃ bhāvasvabhāvatvena samāropayati). This is not done arbitrarily, though, for "he experiences such things as actions and their moral consequences as not self-existent and because he does not experience them as self-existent" (niḥsvabhāvānāmeva padārthānāṃ karmaphalādi-darśanātsasvabhāvānāṃ cādarśanāt).

There are a couple of significant points from this extract which deserve further examination. In the passage, Candrakīrti seems careful

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<sup>118</sup> (all Sanskrit references to this passage are from Poussin, 495.3-8.)

to avoid setting-up a dualism in elaborating on Māgārjuna's claim that there is a two-fold nature to the Tathagata's instruction. He suggests that while the saṃvṛti is niḥsvabhāva, "devoidness (śūnyatā) of self-existence is the higher truth of the everyday" which indicates that the higher truth is primarily the refutation, or correct reassessment, of the "truth" of the everyday. One should not connect any positive ontology with the notion of paramārthasatya, given that it is basically a devoidness of empirical determination.<sup>119</sup> One sees an emerging identity between the two "levels" of truth, or the two types of awareness that the Tathagata's instruction aims at, which anticipates the radical non-dualism expressed in the nirvāṇa parīkṣā.

Secondly, Candrakīrti suggests that the wise one "does not recoil to the belief that things are unreal because he has found no self-existence in them"; in other words, the wise one does not adopt a nihilist position (a point which critics of Mādhyamika, like Śaṅkara, have failed to appreciate) even though he has realized that the everyday world is devoid of self-existence. The wise one is said to understand that the saṃvṛti is niḥsvabhāva, but also understands that the saṃvṛti is where duḥkha is further entrenched and perpetuated by language and wherein the possibility of enlightenment originates. Thus, he does not reject the lokasaṃvṛti, nor does he "reject outright actions and their moral consequences, the distinction between right and wrong, and so on" (karmakarma-

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<sup>119</sup> Murti, "Samvṛti and Paramārtha ..." in Ibid., p.17.

phaladharmādharmādikamapi na bādhatē).<sup>120</sup>

One can clearly see, from the above passage, that the notion of the wise one figures prominently in the discussion of the two truths in this text. The appeal to the experience of the wise in this regard is done to illustrate the significance of, and the relationship of, the saṃvṛti and the paramārtha without reifying either. Sprung notes:

Candrakīrti does not attempt further to define or distinguish saṃvṛti and paramārtha conceptually, he resorts to a description of the way a wise man, in practice, deals with the relation of the two. As if only in human existence itself could the two be related adequately. As if the existence, the being, if you like, of the wise man were itself the true relation and the only possible relation of reality and everyday things, or the only possible way in which everyday things can be real.<sup>121</sup>

If one tries to make sense of the two truths as presented by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti in this text without reference to the wise man, one would be hard-pressed to avoid interpreting the two-fold nature of the "teaching of the Buddhas" as nihilism or as dualism.

Neither one, indeed, is the position adopted in the text. One can say that there is no definition of the two truths as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti are not involved in the formulation of true propositions; all propositions can, in this context, be considered as saṃvṛti, so how could the higher truth be propositional? Here, the higher truth is an awareness, a method spontaneously applied by the wise in encountering "all things" (sarvadharmā), that actively relates and integrates non-conceptual,

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<sup>120</sup> Poussin, 495.6

<sup>121</sup> Sprung, "The Mādhyamika Doctrine..." in Ibid., p.51.

meditative experience with an uncompromising scepticism about the supposed intelligibility of the everyday named world. In this sense, it is the "life", "being" or awareness of the wise man which is "itself the true relation and the only possible relation of reality and everyday things", which seems to elude precise formulation.

## SUMMARY / CONCLUSIONS

The preceding discussion on the two truths provides the most significant use of the notion of the wise one in the Prasannapadā in terms of the length of the description of the yogī, the characterizations made therein and the significance of the wise one to the understanding of the two-fold truth itself. However, this is only one example of the use of the notion in the text; there are other examples that offer a variety of characterizations of the wise one. Some consideration should be given to this collection of diverse descriptions.

Another concern worthy of consideration at this point is the significance of the notion of the wise one to the text as a whole. In the discussion of the two truths, the wise one becomes the very locus of the higher truth as if his "existence" were the only plausible relation between the way things are in an everyday sense and the way they really are as taught in the four Buddhist (Noble) truths. However, not all instances of this notion in the text carry this much weight in the context of their respective discussions. One might be inclined to get an overview of the significance of the wise one in the text as a whole to determine, in part, the thrust of Nāgārjuna's and Candrakīrti's attack on everyday thinking.

Regarding the characterizations of the wise given in the text, it has been noted that the wise "do not give a reasoned account of the



everyday experience of the ordinary man"<sup>122</sup> yet they use everyday reasoning as a means only as they work for the enlightenment of all sentient beings. The wise ones "do not, in any way, take particular things as having essential natures" in contrast to ordinary men who "impute an erroneous self-existence to any and all particular things and suffer excessively".<sup>123</sup>

These passages suggest to the reader that the wise are to be distinguished from ordinary folk, in part, because of their insight into the way things really are, i.e. devoid of self-existence. Though there is such insight into the bhāvas, the wise do not devise a theoretical account of the ordinary, everyday world as it is considered to be unintelligible owing to its lack of svabhāva. Rather, the wise employ reasoning (upapatti) only to unravel the faulty reasoning which surrounds the life of the ordinary world (lokasaṃvṛti) like a fog.

It has been suggested that the yogī does not say anything at all, that he does not inform the ordinary man how things are "in truth" (tattva).<sup>124</sup> This is not only because the way things really are, or the way they are for the wise one, is beyond the range of "cognitive language", but also because the "attitude of the perfected sage is one of non-assertion".<sup>125</sup> This attitude permeates the entire text, as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti claim they are not advancing their own brand of negative meta-

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<sup>122</sup> vide ante, p.15

<sup>123</sup> vide ante, p.16

<sup>124</sup> vide ante, p.49.

<sup>125</sup> vide ante, p.31

physics.<sup>126</sup>

It is interesting to note how the wise are said to embody some of the teachings of the Tathāgata. It is not too surprising to read that the wise overcome the duality of name and what is named. Further, that the wise deny the efficacy of ātman as being conducive to nirvāṇa<sup>127</sup> is to be expected in this context as is the suggestion that the wise do not take particular things as self-existent (svabhāva) in their particularity.<sup>128</sup> Other characterizations of the wise are more problematic for this study, such as the contention that pratītyasamutpāda, as dependent origination, is itself delusive for the wise.<sup>129</sup> Supposedly, for them, there is nothing which could dependently originate.

One would not be remiss in wondering how the Buddhist understanding of causality is considered, in this text, to be delusive for those wise in the Buddhist way. One might become easily persuaded by potential objections to such claims, but the critique of ordinary (and by extension, philosophical) thinking becomes a type of self-criticism with the wise ones (and their perspective) used to deflate spurious interpretations of Buddhist concerns. For instance, though śūnyatā as "the relinquishing of all false views"<sup>130</sup> is non-apprehended as another view by the wise, it is no more than a guiding notion for them to enlighten those who are unaware of the full meaning of the Tathāgata's instruction. This indicates that one should not cling to notions like śūnyatā as being repre-

<sup>126</sup> vide ante, p.9.

<sup>127</sup> vide ante, p.7.

<sup>128</sup> vide ante, p.16.

<sup>129</sup> vide ante, p.4.

<sup>130</sup> vide ante, p.39.

sentative of the way things are to those who are fully realized; the notion of śūnyatā, like tattva and svabhāva, has no corresponding referent, so its validity must be considered in the light of its efficacy in conducing to nirvāṇa over and above its philosophical implications.

With even the central notions of the text regarded as ultimately delusive or unintelligible by the wise, one could anticipate that the notion of the wise one itself would meet the same fate. Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti do not make an exception in the case of the wise one; it, too, must submit to an examination of its intelligibility based on the criterion of self-existence (svabhāva), i.e. is it a self-existent notion? Like other views and notions examined by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, it fails to meet this challenge; even though the notion of the wise one is valid relative to the soteriological concerns of the text<sup>131</sup> and the higher and surpassing sense of truth in the text is a truth for (and only known by) the wise,<sup>132</sup> Nāgārjuna explicitly says that the "one who is free of I-ing and mine-ing does not exist factually."<sup>133</sup> This refers to the yoḡī.

As indicated earlier in this study, the suggestion that the wise one does not exist factually is problematic given that the wise one is characterized in a variety of ways in the text. One might wonder why Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti bother to describe the notion of the wise one, given that it is devoid of self-existence.

Being uncertain of the status of the notion of the wise one in

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<sup>131</sup> vide ante, p.60.

<sup>132</sup> vide ante, p.63.

<sup>133</sup> vide ante, p.56.

the text, one is led to re-examine this notion in light of the ultimate concern of the Prasannapadā and the importance of non-discursive awareness (or wisdom born from meditation) to that concern.

In his introductory chapter, Candrakīrti clearly states that the ultimate concern of the text is nirvāṇa which is taken to be "the serene coming to rest of the manifold of all named things" (sarvaprapañcopśāra). The emphasis is on freeing people from their attachment to delusive notions, which includes attachment to philosophical views, Buddhist or otherwise. Could this be achieved if "all named things" (sarvaprapañca) were not subject to the same scrutiny, to the same test of intelligibility?

Hence, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti must use the notion of the wise one as a guiding notion (prajñapti),<sup>134</sup> much as they do with sūnyatā, tattva, tathatā and the rest. The intention is to communicate the force of their objections to conventional thinking, using everyday language (vyavahāra) which is all they have at their disposal, without reifying the notions instrumental to their critique. The critique of the world of the everyday (lokasaṃvṛti), and of the philosophical views derived from it, is medicine for the chronic condition of avidyā; but once the symptoms are removed and the condition has been overcome, there is no

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<sup>134</sup> (Sprung says, "A prajñapti is a guiding notion, a notion which a long tradition of successful teaching finds effective in helping students toward clarity of mind that marks the wise man", in his Introduction to the Prasannapadā, p.18.)

longer any need for the medicine. Thus, such notions as the yogī etc., are meaningful to the extent that they help overcome the affliction of ignorance of the way things really are; that being accomplished, they are no longer significant.

If that is the case, what is the significance of the notion of the wise one within various discussions in the text, where the experience of the wise is often invoked to provide support for philosophical positions taken? To provide an answer to this question, one would likely give some consideration to Nāgārjuna's claim that "the teaching of the Buddhas" (buddhānāṃ dharmadeśanā) "is wholly based on there being two truths" (ḍve satye sarupāsritya); the teaching of the Buddhas, of which this śāstra is an elaboration, is true in an everyday sense and in a higher sense which surpasses it. So it is for the notion of the wise one; on the one hand, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti are able to appeal to the enlightened application of the Middle Way by the wise to support, or give further credence to, the "non-positions" which result from their critical endeavours; on the other hand, they do not suggest that such a notion has any validity beyond the concern of unravelling the web of delusive beliefs and views to which people become attached, and about which, philosophers endlessly debate. It is the spirit of the latter sense, that of paramārtha, which Candrakīrti evokes in the closing comments (attributed to the Tathāgata) of the nirvāṇa parīkṣā:

The saintly wise man, one truly realized, does not bring about either the coming to be or the ceasing to be of any element of existence whatever; nor does he claim to possess or to indubitably

cognize any element of existence whatever - and so on.<sup>135</sup>

Though the "saintly wise man" (bhagavan yogacāra) being the "one truly realized" (samyak pratipannā)<sup>136</sup>, is devoid of self-existence, the impact of the notion of the wise one on the text is considerable. Topics central to the text, such as śūnyatā<sup>137</sup> and svabhāva,<sup>138</sup> are said to be properly understood by the wise. The higher truth for Nāgārjuna is said to be a matter of silence<sup>139</sup> which is confirmed by the wise through meditation. Further, what the wise one discerns in meditation is the devoidness of self-existence of the contents of consciousness, undermining the efforts of philosophers who theorize about them.

It would be an overstatement to say that the notion of the wise one determines the path of argumentation in the text; this would be underestimating the subtlety of Nāgārjuna's approach, as well as the efficacy of the critique as a whole in casting a shadow of skepticism over a multitude of philosophical views whose purport is to give an

<sup>135</sup> na bhagavan yogacāra samyak pratipannaḥ kasya cidharmasyot-pādaḥ va nirodhaḥ vā karoti nāpi kasya cidharmasya praptimicchati nābhīsamayamiti vistarāḥ, Poussin, 541.3-5; Sprung, p.264.

<sup>136</sup> yogacāra - "the one practising yoga" = yogin, Poussin 541, n.2.

(Poussin gives the Tibetan as rnal hbyor spyod pa which is "the practice of systematic meditation, but more especially an expert in the art" in Das, Tibetan-English Dictionary, p.763. This may refer to the Yogacara school, but Poussin is not sure.)

<sup>137</sup> vide ante, p.48.

<sup>138</sup> vide ante, p.42.

<sup>139</sup> vide ante, p.13.

account of reality. However, one would not be remiss in suggesting that the world of the wise and the basic insight for this text come from the same source, or that the end result of Nāgārjuna's critique of all dr̥ṣṭis is the way things really are for the wise.

This is confirmed in the secondary source material. In a passage on "own-being" (svabhāva) already cited, Conze noted:

...the definition of "own-being" is the starting point of the Madhyamika system. It is offered not as a speculative assertion, but as the result of prolonged meditation on "conditioned co-production". Logical deduction may suggest that dharmas have no own-being at all, but ultimate certainty comes from meditational experience...<sup>140</sup>

If one does not accept, in this context, that "ultimate certainty comes from meditational experience" then one searches in vain for a position, be it a definition of "reality" or an expression of "truth", asserted by Nagarjuna in the course of his discussions. However, no such position is asserted. Given that Nāgārjuna himself emphatically states that, "no Truth has been taught by a Buddha for anyone, anywhere",<sup>141</sup> can one make a case that he does not follow this example himself?

Furthermore, if one were to doubt that ultimate certainty is a matter of meditational experience in the text, then one would be neglecting the characterization of the ultimate outcome of the coming to rest of named things<sup>142</sup> and of the higher, surpassing sense of truth (paramārtha-

<sup>140</sup> Conze, Buddhist Thought in India, p.240; (vide ante, p.48).

<sup>141</sup> na kva citkasya citkaściddharmo buddhena deśitaḥ, Poussin, 538.4; Sprung ,p.262.

<sup>142</sup> vide ante, p.6.

satya).<sup>143</sup>

These characterizations would give support to Stcherbatsky's claim that Mādhyamika is "both philosophy and mysticism" as cited earlier.<sup>144</sup> One can appreciate, in concurrence with Prof. Stcherbatsky, that Nāgārjuna's critique of dr̥ṣṭis,

...is put at the logical level of Reason; the answer is found at the supralogical, suprarational level of prajñā which one can mount to only by a life of moral and spiritual discipline. The Madhyamaka system is neither scepticism nor agnosticism. It is an open invitation to every to see Reality face to face.<sup>145</sup>

Though one might quarrel with the use of the term "mysticism" in this context, there is an experiential base (i.e. the world of the wise) being appealed to which is, in a sense, more primary than the critique of views carried out in the text. To limit oneself to the discussions contained within the text, without reference to this base, is to mitigate the significance of the text which is both a philosophical expression of genius and an appeal to non-conceptual religious wisdom (prajñā).

The aim of this study has been to show that there is a significant presence of non-conceptual religious wisdom in the kārikās of Nāgārjuna and the lucid commentary of Candrakīrti. This presence is expressed in "the world of the wise" (āryāṇam viśayatvam), "the language of the wise" (āryāṇam padam), "the wise one, who sees things as they really are" (tattvadarśī yogī) and other such epithets where this wisdom is spoken of as it is actively applied by those who embody it.

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<sup>145</sup> Stcherbatsky, op.cit., p.59.



The accomplishment of the aim of this study in no way intended to lessen the impact of Nāgārjuna's critique of views as it appears in the text. Many of the discussions therein are quite credible without reference to the notion of the wise one. It can be observed at this point that Prof. Sprung's work on Nāgārjuna (and Mādhyamika) is, to some extent, aimed at demystifying the philosophy of the Middle Way to show that it can stand on the strength of its arguments. This is necessary to make it more accessible in the West, and to make it more palatable to students of philosophy as a viable approach to philosophical problems.

Nonetheless, Prof. Sprung gives careful consideration to how one might express the "true way of things" in Mādhyamika thought in his introduction to the Prasannapadā:

...how then to say what the true way of things is? The Mādhyamika answer, and this is one way of stating the heart of their thinking, would, I believe, go like this: The way the enlightened man deals with things, is the way they are, is their truth. ...this makes no use of the notion of being; it implies that things become themselves only as they become integral to the way of an enlightened being: the middle way. 146

While one is not inclined to say that Sprung, or Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, put the notion of the wise one in the forefront of Mādhyamika thought, it has been shown that the wise and their experience do occupy an important place in the Mādhyamika critique of conventional understanding.

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<sup>146</sup>Sprung, p.23.

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