

Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism

doctrinal, linguistic and historical parallels and interactions between
Madhyamaka Buddhism & Hellenic Pyrrhonism

Matthew Neale, Regent's Park College, University of Oxford

DPhil. August 2014

Abstract

There have been recent explosions of interest in two fields: Madhyamaka-Pyrrhonism parallels and Pyrrhonism itself, which seems to have been misunderstood and therefore neglected by the West for the same reasons and in the same ways that Madhyamaka traditionally has often been by the West and the East. Among these recent studies are several demonstrating that grounding in Madhyamaka, for example, reveals and illuminates the import and insights of Pyrrhonian arguments. Furthermore it has been suggested that of all European schools of philosophy Pyrrhonism is the one closest to Buddhism, and especially to Madhyamaka. Indeed Pyrrho is recorded to have studied with philosophers in Taxila, one of the first places where Madhyamaka later flourished, and the place where the founder of Madhyamaka, Nāgārjuna, may have received hitherto concealed texts which became the foundation for his school.

In this dissertation I explore just how similar these two philosophical projects were. I systematically treat all the arguments in the Pyrrhonist redactor Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Against Dogmatists* and compare them to the most similar arguments available in the Madhyamaka treatises and related texts. On this basis, I ask whether the Pyrrhonists and the Buddhists would satisfy each other's self-identifying criteria, or what characteristics would disqualify either or both in the other's eyes. I also ask what questions arise from the linguistic and historical evidence for interactions between the Pyrrhonist school and the Madhyamaka school, and how sure we can be of the answers. Did Pyrrho learn Buddhism in Taxila? Was Nāgārjuna a Pyrrhonist? Finally I bring the insights of the living commentarial tradition of Madhyamaka to bear on current scholarly controversies in the field of Sextan Pyrrhonism, and apply the subtleties of interpretation of the latter which have developed in recent scholarship to Madhyamaka and its various difficulties of interpretation, to scrutinize each school under the illumination of the other. With this hopefully illuminated view, I address for example whether Sextus was consistent, whether living Pyrrhonism implies apraxia, whether Pyrrhonism is philosophy at all, and whether Madhyamaka is actually nihilism.

Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism

doctrinal, linguistic and historical parallels and interactions between
Madhyamaka Buddhism & Hellenic Pyrrhonism

Matthew Neale, Regent's Park College, University of Oxford

DPhil. August 2014

Long abstract

There have been recent explosions of interest in the relation of Madhyamaka to Pyrrhonism, and in Pyrrhonism itself, which seems previously to have been misunderstood and therefore neglected by the West for the same reasons and in the same ways that Madhyamaka traditionally has often been by the West and the East. Philosophers with some grounding in Buddhist philosophy have started to recognise not only that Pyrrhonism, the Greek path of σκεψις, seems to have many characteristics in common with Buddhism, and especially Madhyamaka, but also that the two fields have much to gain in insight from each other. Dreyfus and Garfield (2011) write, “There is much to be said for reading Madhyamaka in the context of Western Pyrrhonian skepticism,” and refer to “the fruitfulness of this particular cross-cultural juxtaposition.” And: “But this juxtaposition is not only a way to get a better understanding of Madhyamaka: It also sheds new light on the possibilities and tensions within Greek skepticism.”

The earliest inspirers of this “new wave” in the 50s to 70s noticed rather coarse parallels, such as in the structure of argumentation, notably the tetralemma, and what they saw as “nihilistic” and “pragmatic” leanings in both scepticism and Buddhism. Gradually more remarkable parallels started to be noticed. Edward Conze (1963) saw the parallel with Buddhism closest in the first stage, i.e. with Pyrrho. Thomas McEvilley’s work (1982) showed many more startling parallels. His most detailed treatment (2002) despite its monumental size and richness of information, was hardly read by scholars of Hellenic philosophy, and criticized for its occasional crass lapses, for the vaguer of its parallels, and for its transmission claims, by those few Indologists who considered it. Whilst there is controversy (not to mention extreme sensitivity) over a putative transmission and especially its direction, it would seem to be too rash to claim, as some have done, that the doctrinal parallels are merely accidental. Pyrrho, who while not necessarily the founder certainly became the figurehead for later Pyrrhonism, is after all recorded to have studied with philosophers, almost certainly in Taxila (in what is now Pakistan), one of the first places where Mahāyāna Buddhism, with which Madhyamaka was associated, later flourished, and the place where the founder of Madhyamaka, Nāgārjuna, may have received

hitherto concealed texts (*the Perfection of Wisdom* or *Prajñāpāramitā*), which became the foundation for his school, and into the understanding of which the school's treatises purport to be the entrance.

Conze may also have been misled by an idiosyncratic grasp of the Buddhist teachings. More recent studies display a more coherent understanding of Madhyamaka, as Jan Westerhoff (2009) points out: "The literature published over the last decades suggests the study of Nāgārjuna is becoming more mature." Inspired by Flintoff (1980), Adrian Kuzminski in his *Pyrrhonism: How the Ancient Greeks Re-invented Buddhism* (2008) can thus present the most sustained and accurate survey yet, though like his predecessors' the treatment is rather unmethodical. Like Conze, he finds Madhyamaka "the Eastern school most similar to Pyrrhonism", but unlike him sees this similarity in Sextus. Since Kuzminski's book others such as Dreyfus and Garfield (2011) have taken up the topic of Pyrrhonism-Madhyamaka parallels, but even less systematically.

In this dissertation I explore, for the first time in a systematic way, just how similar or otherwise these two projects were. The dissertation is structured thus:

Part I: General self-characterizations of the two projects

Basis

Path

Aims

Belief

Familiarization

Conduct

Part II: Specific critiques

Chapter 1: That there is no reason

Chapter 2: That there is no reality

Chapter 3: That there is no purpose

(Each with:)

Comparison of arguments

Summary and discussion

Part III: Interactions

Chapter 1: In the past

Survey of materials

Summary and discussion

Chapter 2: Mutual illumination today

Introduction

Selected topics

Conclusions and suggestions for further work

Appendix I: Transliteration systems

Appendix II: Translation rationales

Appendix III: Crucial source statements

Bibliography

In Part I of the dissertation I consider the general approach of the two projects, as laid out by the Pyrrhonist redactor Sextus Empiricus in the first book of his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and by the early Mādhyamikas. I compare what Sextus considers to be the basis, path, aims, beliefs, familiarization methods and conduct of Pyrrhonism with what the Mādhyamikas consider theirs to be. Since both projects set out clear criteria by which they identify themselves, Sextus in particular with his details on distinguishing Pyrrhonism from the various contemporary philosophies, and the Madhyamaka notably with their interpretation of the so-called “four seals of the Buddha Dharma”, I applied these criteria crosswise to decide to what extent, and on what grounds, each project would identify with the other.

In Part II I turn to a thorough survey of the detailed applications of these general deconstructive or critical methods to particular doctrinal fields in the respective projects. I classify them into three areas of critiques, namely those of reasons for beliefs, those of the nature of reality, and those of ethical purpose, since both Pyrrhonism and Buddhism make this tripartite division. I systematically treat all the arguments in Sextus’ *Against Dogmatists* (i.e. *Against Logicians*, *Against Ethicists* and *Against Physicists*) and the parallel arguments in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* II and III and compare them to the most similar arguments available in the Madhyamaka treatises (principally the early ones) and related texts (such as the *Perfection of Wisdom* or *Prajñāpāramitā* and in some cases the *Valid Cognition* or *Pramāṇa* literature). On the basis of the similarities and differences thus brought to light, I ask whether the Pyrrhonists and the Buddhists would satisfy each other’s self-distinguishing criteria, or else what characteristics would disqualify either or both in the other’s eyes.

In distinction to the doctrines *per se* and potentially accidental *parallels*, in Part III I examine (in Chapter 1) the historical evidence for *interactions* between the Pyrrhonist and Madhyamaka projects. I focus on the histories of Alexander’s expeditions, biographies of Pyrrho and his lineage, the historical accounts of Taxila and its gymnosophists in the Hellenic texts, the accounts of Taxila in the Tibetan and early Chinese histories of Buddhism in India, and the earliest biographies and hagiographies of Nāgārjuna and his lineages. Did Pyrrho learn Buddhism, or something else, or indeed anything, in Taxila? I evaluate the evidence for and against the claim by Richard Bett, one of the leading current scholars of Pyrrhonism, that Pyrrho could not have learnt anything sophisticated from Indian sages (Bett, 2000). I survey the

communication between Greeks and Indians in the centuries between Pyrrho and Nāgārjuna, including emissaries and embassies, and debates on Buddhist doctrine, and ask in particular whether there could have been transmission of philosophical doctrines between the two projects subsequent to Pyrrho and what kind of evidence for it would appear if there had been. I consider the hagiographies of Nāgārjuna and ask who the mysterious Nāga Chief of Taxila and the emissaries he sent to invite Nāgārjuna to his kingdom could have been: Greeks, Pyrrhonists, Buddhists, or none of these. Where did the *Perfection of Wisdom* texts that Nāgārjuna supposedly received there come from? Did he leave there a Pyrrhonist? I consider the magisterially supported recent theory of Walser (2005) that Nāgārjuna was a skilful diplomat *concealing* novel doctrines in acceptably Buddhist discourse under extraordinarily restrictive conditions, and apply it to the mythology of the *Perfection of Wisdom* texts and the origin of the Madhyamaka to suggest that comfortably Indian supernatural beings could have been deployed in them to conceal their doctrines' derivation from foreign wisdom traditions.

Finally I *enact* an interaction between the projects in real time, by bringing the insights of the living commentarial tradition of Madhyamaka and of recent academic scholarship to bear on current scholarly controversies in the field of Sextan Pyrrhonism, and applying the subtleties of interpretation of the latter which have developed in the last decades to Madhyamaka and its various difficulties of interpretation, in order to scrutinize each school under the illumination of the other. With this hopefully illuminated view, I address in particular whether the Madhyamaka is, as certain modern scholars such as David Burton have argued (Burton, 1999), nihilism in contradistinction to Pyrrhonism, whether Madhyamaka helps us decide if there is a clear distinction to be made between aporetic Pyrrhonism and Sextan Pyrrhonism, whether the Madhyamaka formulation of two realities can help in the controversies about what is supposed to motivate the Pyrrhonists, how Madhyamaka clarity on conceptuality and non-conceptuality might obviate confusion due to presenting Pyrrhonism as an objective philosophy rather than as a therapeutic practice, and whether the Madhyamaka can be brought to bear on the controversy in Sextus studies about degrees of suspension of judgment, and on some scholars' view that Sextus was a humble and rather unsuccessful philosopher.

Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism

doctrinal, linguistic and historical
parallels and interactions between
Madhyamaka Buddhism & Hellenic Pyrrhonism

Dissertation for the degree of DPhil

by

Matthew Neale

Regent's Park College, University of Oxford

August 2014

Contents

Introduction.....	1
The discovery of parallels between Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism.....	1
The parallel misunderstandings of Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism.....	3
The approach in this study.....	4
Part I: General Self-Characterization.....	6
AIM.....	6
METHOD.....	6
RESULTS.....	6
The Basis.....	6
The erroneousness of positive and negative belief.....	6
Non-absoluteness of characterizations of the way.....	8
Distinctness from negative dogmatism.....	8
Relative status of positive and negative dogmatism.....	8
Project origin in anomalies and a quest for a criterion of truth.....	9
The Path.....	9
Recourse to a reluctant named exemplar.....	10
Inspection.....	11
Ability to inspect.....	11
Investigation.....	12
Transcendence of doubt.....	14
Curing believers of their troubles.....	15
Belief as self-love.....	17
Matching the strength of the remedy to the strength of the illness.....	17
Conceptual failure.....	18
Exposée of contradiction between/among concepts and experiences.....	18
Deconstructive modes as a tool set against belief.....	20
Distribution-forcing arguments.....	26
Universal acid arguments.....	26

Abandonment of belief.....	26
Suspension.....	26
Four seals of correct teaching.....	29
Equal force	30
Aims	31
To transcend troubles	31
Compassionately helping others out of delusion.....	32
Belief	33
Qualified assent.....	33
Reasoning in accordance with appearances.....	36
Familiarisation (Meditation).....	37
Training in solitude.....	37
Conduct	38
Non-quietism.....	38
Guides of lifestyle.....	39
Circumscribed applicability of speech: mirror language.....	39
Self-voiding voiding expressions	41
Suspension-inducing manners of speech.....	43
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION	44
Part II: Specific Critiques	46
AIMS	46
METHOD.....	46
Analysis of Sextus' arguments.....	46
Division of topics	46
Buddhist texts consulted.....	47
Criteria for drawing parallels between arguments.....	47
Chapter 1: That there is no reason (animittatā)	51
Introduction	51
Comparison of Arguments	52

Any criterion, truth, sign or proof is either controvertible or unjustifiable.....	52
It is impossible to identify the “person”.....	54
It is impossible for body, senses and intellect to apprehend each other or themselves.....	55
Nothing can apprehend itself	55
Body, senses and intellect cannot apprehend each other	56
A 3-dimensional body is not perceived.....	56
The body is not found in its attributes.....	57
Whole/part rescue attempts lead to infinite regress	57
It is impossible to justify particular humans as authorities	58
Neither senses nor the intellect nor both can be criteria or access the true or signs	58
Controversy over what senses apprehend invalidates them as criterion or sign-finders.....	59
Senses are non-rational so cannot accommodate judgment, the true, or significance	59
What is sensed/signified differs according to individuals, dispositions and conditions	60
Criteria must judge combined sensibles but the senses cannot.....	60
The intellect is not established and cannot find itself never mind other things	60
If the senses are an intermediary, the intellect cannot apprehend objects.....	61
A combination of senses and intellect cannot know what is true.....	61
It is not permissible to invalidate sensation while validating intellection.....	62
Criterion and truth, proof and proven, are mutually dependent so unestablished.....	62
The validity of the measure is established by what it measures.....	63
If the criterion also identifies itself, the object of knowledge would too.....	63
Critiques are presented without our assent so we are invulnerable.....	65
Just being apparent does not make something true	66
Combinations of apparent and non-apparent being true invoke the faults of both	66
The true is characterized neither by itself nor in relation to something else.....	67
The true cannot be revealed	67
The true is not the persuasive.....	68
It is impossible for everything to be false	68
Propositions do not exist.....	69

To believe in propositions' meaningfulness is either arbitrary or circular	69
The incorporeal cannot be compound or effective	69
Expressions, propositions, words, utterances and proofs do not exist due to gradual enunciation	70
Predicative propositions do not make sense	71
Negative propositions do not make sense.....	72
Self-invalidation dilemmas can be immediately reversed on those who make them	73
Investigation is impossible for believers whether or not the issue is grasped	75
Disavowal of the counter-charge in reversal for pacification of beliefs (but not apraxia)	76
Inference and signification is either inconclusive, controvertible or circular.....	77
Speech is convention and cannot discover what is actually true	78
Sound cannot come into being	79
Neither meaningless not meaningful uttered sounds can be the locus of the true	80
The absurdity of an entirely mental reality.....	81
The critique is signs is of fabricated beliefs, not of ordinary conventions	81
Opposing the project contributes to it helplessly.....	82
Signs cannot be characterized independently or in relation	82
No chronological permutation of sign and signified makes sense	84
Faulting the refutation of signs with self-contradiction is a misunderstanding.....	85
Proof cannot relate to what is proven, whether included or excluded.....	86
Syllogisms addressing experience as separate from idea involve redundancy.....	87
Syllogisms about experience either fail or are redundant.....	88
What is proven cannot be non-evident or pre-evident.....	89
Destructive 2 by 2 permutative tetralemmas	90
Whether or not there is a definiendum, definition does not make sense	90
We avoid grotesqueness	91
Division of names into meanings does not refer to essences.....	91
Wholes are not divided into parts	91
Genera are not divided into species.....	92

Exposure of sophisms is impossible, otiose and useless.....	93
Summary and discussion.....	93
Chapter 2: Emptiness of nature (śūnyatā).....	97
Introduction.....	97
Comparison of Arguments	97
God as efficient cause cannot be established.....	97
Reversed argument from design	97
God’s sentience and eternity are incompatible	98
God’s virtue does not make sense.....	98
The problem of evil.....	99
Discrepancy among “signs of god” unresolved	99
Ex nihilo creation is absurd.....	100
God cannot originate.....	100
Problematization of beliefs in existence, or non-existence, of cause.....	100
Seeds and sprouts prove causation.....	101
Nature proves causation.....	102
Nothing in the world we know could occur without cause	102
Even an illusory world must have causation.....	103
With causeless arising, everything could come from everything.....	103
Asserting causelessness is negligible or absurd; asserting cause is groundless	103
Cause and effect are relative to each other, therefore only conceived and not existent.....	105
Lack of change proves lack of cause	105
Inherently creative matter would have nothing to work (on).....	106
Incorporeal causation is like corporeal	107
Contact between the corporeal and the incorporeal is impossible	107
Neither isolated nor combining causes make sense	107
A cause not requiring combination could only affect itself	108
A cause, requiring combination or not, would produce infinitely	108
The incorporeal cannot be active or passive	109

There can be no genesis of the corporeal from the incorporeal or <i>vice versa</i>	109
An existent thing cannot be produced	109
Agent and non-agent cannot perform action and non-action respectively	110
Agent and acted-upon cannot be the same or different	111
Cause cannot precede, co-exist with, or follow effect.....	111
Causes could not have singular or plural efficient powers	112
Neither the co-existent can influence each other nor the separated.....	113
Total contact and partial contact are impossible	113
Cause by mediated and immediate contact is impossible.....	114
Neither what exists nor what does not exist can change	114
Geometrical bisection is absurd.....	115
Numerical subtraction is impossible.....	116
Numbers being of units makes subtraction impossible	116
Addition is impossible.....	117
The whole and the parts do not make sense whether identical or different.....	117
The whole is not other than its parts.....	117
The whole is not equal to one, or some, or all of the parts.....	118
Whole and part are mutually dependent so not independently established	118
If there are parts, they cannot be parts of the whole, each other or themselves	119
Words do not make up a sentence	119
Absurdities apply equally if reality is entirely mental.....	120
Corporeality and incorporeality do not make sense	121
Bodies acted on make no sense because being acted on makes no sense.....	121
Physical and mathematical figures make no sense.....	121
A physical body is neither sensed nor conceived	122
If something makes no sense, neither does its privation	122
An incorporeal is neither sensed nor perceived.....	123
Physical bodies are not apprehended due to impermanence	123
Combinations of substances and/or qualities are impossible	123

Belief or disbelief in place is indefensible	124
Justifying place by its parts is invalid	124
Corporeal place would require place in turn	125
Place as void could not be occupied	125
Place is not the enclosing limits	126
Motion appears but on analysis does not make sense	126
Causal movement involves infinite regress.....	127
Nothing can move itself	128
A thing cannot move where it is or where it is not	129
Note: Recurring argument structure.....	129
A thing's movement contradicts its abiding anywhere	130
Movement is impossible in the present moment and location	130
Movement cannot begin.....	131
Discrete movement in discrete time is absurd.....	132
Rest is impossible	132
Beliefs in a temporally limited or an eternal universe lead to an impasse	133
What time is has not been established	134
If time were the period of motion of the universe, time would occur in time.....	134
Time as the measure of motion or rest occurs in itself and cannot measure motion.....	134
Time as an image of day and night must occur in itself.....	135
Day and night do not exist	135
Time is abolished with what it depends on	136
Time is not limited or unlimited	136
Time is not indivisible or divisible	137
The present moment does not make sense	138
Time cannot be temporary or permanent	139
Time cannot be a property of a property	140
Number is not identical to the numbered	141
Number is not different from the numbered	141

Change does not make sense	143
Neither the non-existent nor the existent can change	144
Change does not occur in the past, in the future or now.....	144
Change is not sensed or inferred	145
Things cannot come into being or cease to be.....	145
Neither the existent nor the non-existent comes into being.....	145
Coming into being is impossible from the non-existent or from the existent.....	148
Nothing ceases to be either.....	150
Neither the existent nor the non-existent ceases to be.....	150
The time of coming into being and ceasing to be cannot be identified	151
Summary and discussion	152
Chapter 3: Purposelessness (apraṇihitatā).....	159
Introduction	159
Comparison of arguments.....	159
The result of inspecting ethics is carefree undistracted calm	159
Qualifying ‘by nature’ means ‘for all’	160
Discrepancy demonstrates absence of essential ethical characterizations.....	161
A criterion of goodness is untrustworthy	162
The good as “what is desirable on its own account” makes no sense	163
Absolute evil cannot exist because absolute good does not	164
Neither those free of an evil nor those not free of it experience it	164
Pleasure changes into suffering; suffering can be useful.....	166
Victory is not always good.....	168
Ethical judgments can only be conventions because of disparity.....	169
Maximal happiness results from pacifying judgments not conforming to them	169
Belief in good and evil in themselves causes suffering but release is possible	171
Pursuing good produces evil	172
Those free of beliefs suffer only moderately, from the inevitable	173
The inactivity objection.....	174

Inconsistency objections	175
Inflaming the affections and failing to restrain them is evil	176
Believing in apprehensive presentations is either impossible, unfoundable or circular	178
A science of goodness does not make sense, whether or not it includes itself as good	178
Technical wisdom cannot be distinctly identified.....	179
Emptiness of the three spheres.....	180
Nothing is taught.....	181
Neither what exists nor what does not exist can be the subject taught	181
The true does not exist	182
Neither the obvious nor the obscure can be taught	183
Incorporeal qualities cannot combine to be corporeal	183
Objects of intellect do not exist.....	184
Refutation by dependence on the refuted.....	185
There is no expert.....	185
Non-experts cannot teach non-experts, just as the blind cannot lead the blind.....	186
One cannot become an expert	186
There are no meaningful expressions by which teaching could take place.....	187
Morality is either useless or damaging.....	188
Summary and Discussion.....	189
Part III: Interaction.....	193
Chapter 1: In the past	194
Introduction.....	194
Sources.....	195
Survey of material.....	196
Pyrrho and the naked sages of India	196
Between Pyrrho and Nāgārjuna	203
Nāgārjuna, Nāgāhvāya and the nāgas	206
Summary and Discussion.....	212
Chapter 2: Mutual illumination today.....	214

Introduction	214
Selected topics	214
Nihilism, negative dogmatism, and equipollence.....	214
Aporetic Pyrrhonism and early Madhyamaka	215
The status of the conventional	215
Impossible ethics	216
Refusing to inspect, refusing belief-purging	218
Trivializing suspension, refusing untroubledness	219
Speech for others: prasaṅga.....	220
Conclusions and suggestions for further work	221
Appendix I: Transliteration systems used	224
Appendix II: Translation rationales	225
Appendix III: Crucial source statements	230
Diṅnāga (Dignāga)	230
Pramāṇasamuccaya (PS): Compendium on Valid Cognition.....	230
Nāgārjuna	230
Mulamadhyamakakārikā (MMK): Root Middle Way Verses	230
Vigrahavyāvartanī (VV): Dispeller of Obstacles	230
Bibliography	231
Abbreviations for canonical texts	231
References	232
Primary sources	232
Secondary literature.....	238

Introduction

Therefore they call absolutely all things that affect humans' sense "τῶν πρός τι". This expression means that there is nothing at all that is self-dependent, or which has its own power and nature, but that absolutely all things have reference to something else...

Aulus Gellius on the Pyrrhonists¹

I pay homage to a blessing among speakers, the fully awakened one, who revealed dependent origination, the peace of pacifying conceptual proliferation.

Nāgārjuna on the Buddha²

The discovery of parallels between Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism

There have been recent explosions of interest in the relation of Madhyamaka to Pyrrhonism, and in Pyrrhonism itself, which seems previously to have been misunderstood and therefore neglected by the West for the same reasons and in the same ways that Madhyamaka traditionally has often been by the West and the East. Philosophers with some grounding in Buddhist philosophy have started to recognise not only that Pyrrhonism, the Hellenic Greek path of σκέψις (a term which came very unfortunately also to be applied to certain very different philosophies of the Academy), seems to have many characteristics in common with Buddhism, and especially Madhyamaka, but also that the two fields have much to gain in insight from each other. Dreyfus and Garfield (2011) write, "There is much to be said for reading Madhyamaka in the context of Western Pyrrhonian skepticism," and refer to "the fruitfulness of this particular cross-cultural juxtaposition." And: "But this juxtaposition is not only a way to get a better understanding of Madhyamaka: It also sheds new light on the possibilities and tensions within Greek skepticism."

The earliest inspirers of this "new wave", such as Gomez (1976) who considered Greek philosophy and the Pāli canon, Chatterjee (1977), Frenkian (1957a,b), and Piantelli (1978), noticed rather coarse parallels, such as in the structure of argumentation, notably the tetralemma³, and what they saw as "nihilistic" and "pragmatic" leanings in both scepticism and Buddhism.

Gradually more remarkable parallels started to be noticed. Edward Conze had been of the opinion (1963) that, "The European system closest to the Madhyamakas is that of the Greek Sceptics," but also opined: "The parallel with Buddhism is closest in the first stage, i.e. with

¹ *Noctes Atticae* XI: 5: 7

² *MMK* I: 1.

³ i.e. a fourfold series of choices such as: "Is it A? Or is it B? Or is it both A and B? Or is it neither A nor B?"

Pyrrho (360-275BC). In the last, with Sextus Empiricus (AD 160-210) it is barely perceptible.” Thomas McEvilley’s work (1982) showed many more startling parallels. In his most detailed treatment (2002) he argued that to believe that there was an Indian-to-Greek Madhyamaka-to-Pyrrhonist transmission would be to “succumb to a great temptation” and that we should rather believe that the transmission occurred, if at all, the other way. His monumental but at times careless work was hardly read by scholars of Hellenic philosophy, and criticized for its occasional crass lapses, and for the vaguer of its parallels, by those few Indologists who considered it such as George Thompson (2005, p. 54): “Sometimes the parallel will seem striking, sometimes not. But how do we distinguish a striking parallel from a weak one? And what do we accomplish, as historians if not as philosophers, by accumulating so many of them?”

These early works tend to demonstrate an uncertain understanding of Madhyamaka, but as Jan Westerhoff (2009) points out, “The literature published over the last decades suggests the study of Nāgārjuna is becoming more mature.” Everard Flintoff (1980) also considered parallels with other Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools. Inspired by him, Adrian Kuzminski in his *Pyrrhonism: How the Ancient Greeks Re-invented Buddhism* (2008) presents the most sustained and detailed survey yet. Like Conze, he finds Madhyamaka “the Eastern school most similar to Pyrrhonism”, but unlike him sees this similarity in Sextus, one suspects because he investigated the latter more thoroughly than Conze. He first distinguishes Pyrrhonism from scepticism, a distinction which crucially informs virtually every criticism he subsequently makes of other scholars’ work.⁴ He attacks McEvilley’s famous “temptation” claim and argues that it seems to stem from his misunderstanding of Madhyamaka as nihilism. And he weighs against this Flintoff’s argument that the most distinctive features of Pyrrhonism, such as ἐπιτοχή, suspension of, or holding off from, judgment, were not found in Greek philosophy before Pyrrho and his return from India. He then presents a number of the parallels between Pyrrhonism and Buddhism. Kuzminski supplements Flintoff with details in Strabo of Megasthenes’ dealings with Brāhmaṇas and Śramaṇas⁵ of various colours and the Pyrrhonic doctrines of the latter. He unsystematically surveys various Pyrrhonism-Madhyamaka parallels, in doctrine, practice, soteriology, methods (of argument) and goal (suspension of judgment and untroubledness), citing passages from Diogenes Laertius and Sextus for the Pyrrhonism and Candrakīrti and Nāgārjuna for the Madhyamaka. Then he moves onto the parallels between, on the one hand, Pyrrhonist use of appearances as their criterion and its undermining of the typical Western assumption of mind-body duality, and on the other hand the famous Buddhist “heaps” analysis of experience.

⁴ This, and his application of the term “skeptical” only to the Academics, which means his terminology is the exact reverse of Sextus (who applies “skeptical” only to Pyrrhonists), might seem perverse, until one considers how distant the modern English meaning of “skeptical” is from Sextus’. See “inspective” in Appendix II: Translation Rationales.

⁵ For Brāhmaṇas and Śramaṇas see Part III: Chapter 1.

The danger of discovering doctrinal parallels is distortions such as one finds whenever one philosophy is seen from the vantage of another. As Tuck (1990) writes of the post-Wittgenstein climate in the West, which saw its own reflection in Nāgārjuna's writings: "Nāgārjuna's celebrated warnings about the perils of wrongly understanding *śūnyatā*... or holding this non-position as if it constituted a philosophical position in itself... thus become doubly important in the new Western climate of skepticism about philosophical theorizing." The point being that people can be saying similar things for very different reasons, and possibly with different results.

Since Kuzminski's book others have taken up the topic of Pyrrhonism-Madhyamaka parallels. Dreyfus and Garfield (2011) believe Candrakīrti at least, according to Sextus, would not qualify as a Pyrrhonist, but would more accurately be described as an Academic sceptic. However, Sextus classifies some Academics as holding dogmatically to the judgment that we are unable to know anything⁶, which entails the familiar self-refuting inconsistency and, as Luca Castagnoli (2010) deals with at length, much philosophical agonising. To apply this Sextan classification casts unnecessary confusion around Candrakīrti who says very clearly, for example, "The nihilistic view is the cause of low rebirth and the source of all mistakes."⁷

One of the issues here is the status of conventional truth in Madhyamaka, which needs further examination after the beginnings in the collaborative effort to which Dreyfus and Garfield's paper belongs (Cowherds, 2011) and in Jan Westerhoff's recent study of Nāgārjuna (2009). Another, related issue, is the confusion which arises when a therapeutic method (which Sextus and Mādhyamikas assert their teaching to be) is (mis)taken for a system of ideas, as we shall see.

The parallel misunderstandings of Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism

Dan Arnold (2005, p. 120) notices, "The interpretive issues regarding Madhyamaka have some strikingly close parallels in the debate about the proper interpretation of the writings of the Hellenistic Skeptics." Kuzminski attributes Western distortion of Pyrrhonism into dogmatic doubt and mistaken conflation of Pyrrhonists and Academics to a series of thinkers, beginning with Hume, including Nietzsche, and culminating in such highly respected modern academics as M. F. Burnyeat (1980) and Martha Nussbaum (1994): "They assume that the Pyrrhonist must be detached and indifferent in all respects, when in fact Pyrrhonists advocate detachment and indifference only with regard to beliefs about non-evident things." (p. 24) This does injustice at least to Burnyeat and Nussbaum, who would I believe accept Kuzminski's definition, but he may

⁶ *OP* I: 220-235 – but not all, some interpretations of Arcesilaus and Carneades putting them much closer to Pyrrhonism (Hankinson, 1995, pp. 74-115).

⁷ *YSV* on *YS* 2-3

be more just in pointing out that, for whatever reason, they take Pyrrhonists' insistence on the deployment of any appearances and inferences to refute the reliability of any dogmatic assertion, not merely as a refutation of the reliability but also of what the assertion refers to. He says (ch. 2) that by basing arguments on a similar misunderstanding in the Aristocles passage in Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel*, Richard Bett, one of the leading current scholars of Pyrrhonism and scepticism, and the pre-eminent critic of the possibility that Pyrrho learnt from Indian sages (Bett, 2000), makes the same mistake: no matter how contentious the reliability of the passage may be, however, Bett is there self-consciously characterizing only Pyrrho and not later Pyrrhonists. Amusingly, Kuzminski later draws our attention to the fact that a Buddhologist, David Burton, has argued (Burton, 1999) that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are not comparable because this time *Madhyamaka*, in contrast to non-dogmatic suspensive Pyrrhonism, is the nihilistic dogmatism!

The misunderstanding in question here is of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka's undermining of beliefs, and is that when convinced to relinquish any belief, one tends to cling immediately to an alternative to it, as it were by dint of being so addicted to belief. And when the programme goes similarly to work on such alternatives, one finds herself robbed of anything to cling to and accuses the underminers of nihilism or negative dogmatism, i.e. either (1) clinging to an absence (in the ontological sense) or to an impossibility (in the epistemological sense), even though Sextus points out that the result of inspection is suspension and that such criticism of Pyrrhonism implies the critic has not been listening to what the Pyrrhonists actually teach; or (2) permitting every vice (in the ethical sense), even though Sextus and the Mādhyamikas⁸ clearly assert that *theirs* is the ethical way. The reply to the ontological charge has been put well in a more recent but less thorough comparison of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka (Dreyfus & Garfield, 2011):

To reject a dogma hence is precisely *to reject a dogma* but not to take its rejection as an alternative claim about fundamental ontology; it is to recuse oneself from that enterprise.
(p. 123)

The approach in this study

In Part I, I compare Sextan⁹ Inspection and Madhyamaka Thorough Inspection as *general projects*. In Part II, I systematically compare *their detailed critiques*. Finally in Part III, I

⁸ Note the spelling: by recent informal convention Mādhyamika is to Madhyamaka as Pyrrhonist is to Pyrrhonism.

⁹ The "Pyrrhonism" which will be surveyed is almost exclusively as described by Sextus Empiricus, rather than the "Pyrrhonism" of Pyrrho, say, or Aenesidemus as described in Photius. This has the advantage of avoiding controversy about attribution of the doctrines, at least initially.

investigate the *interactions* between the two projects, whether they influenced each other in the past, and whether they can illuminate each other now.

Part I: General Self-Characterization

AIM

To test the hypothesis that Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas engaging in their respective investigative projects *would identify each other as undertaking the same project*.

METHOD

The detailed criteria of self-characterization in the two projects will be identified (Sextus' as laid out in *OP I*) and classified into: basis, method, aimed-for result, belief, training and conduct.¹⁰ I will then ask whether each satisfies the other's criteria.

RESULTS

The Basis

The erroneousness of positive and negative belief

Sextus begins by classifying philosophical approaches into three: two erroneous approaches, namely (1) belief in discovered (and therefore discoverable) entities and absences, which he calls “dogmatic” and (2) belief that entities and absences are undiscoverable, which he attributes to certain Academics and which we can call “negatively dogmatic”; and (3) the approach of his own school, which does not rest on either of these extremes but continues to look into the matter.¹¹

An identification of two extremes, and self-characterization as the ones who possess the way to avoid or transcend them, is made in Buddhism generally. The definitions of what constitute the extremes vary in time and between schools. The general Buddhist characterization of the two extremes seems quite different to Sextus'. In a teaching accepted in similar forms by most Buddhist traditions¹², *the Discourse to Kaccayāna* in the Pāli canon¹³, the Buddha is recorded to have taught: “That ‘everything is,’ is one extreme, Kaccāna; that ‘everything isn't,’ is the second extreme; the Thus-Gone (Buddha) teaches a middle way that does not go on with either.”¹⁴ These extremes came to be referred to technically as ~“propounding the eternal” or more simply “eternalism”¹⁵ and ~“propounding cutting off/out” or more simply

¹⁰ This organisation of the characteristics of a project is the traditional Buddhist one.

¹¹ *OP I*: 1-4

¹² Versions of it are also found in the Tibetan and Chinese canons.

¹³ *SN 12: 15 (PTS: S ii 16)*

¹⁴ *sabbamatthī'ti kho kaccāna, ayameko anto. sabbam natthī'ti ayam dutiyo anto. ete te kaccāna ubho ante anupagamma majjhena tathāgato dhammaṃ deseti.*

¹⁵ Pali: *sassata vāda*; Sanskrit: *śāśvata vāda*

“annihilationism”¹⁶. In the Theravāda school (whose canon consists of these Pāli texts) it was considered that entities as referred to in the Buddha’s teachings escaped from these extremes because of the revelation that entities arise but are impermanent. The school thus laid emphasis on criticizing *belief systems* that obviously involved these extremes, most extensively in their canon’s first long discourse, *The Discourse on the Net of Brahma (Brahmajāla Sutta)*¹⁷.

However, the Madhyamaka, which took its name from the same basic expression of the freedom from the two extremes, characterized them in a more sweeping way, and here we are strongly reminded of Sextus: it claimed to demonstrate that adherence to *any* particular belief¹⁸, inexorably implied falling into (both) these extremes (to believe in the existence of anything constitutes the first, and to believe in the non-existence of anything constitutes the second), and thus aimed its guns not only at non-Buddhist belief systems but also at Buddhist schools which had come to claim that various ~elemental phenomena¹⁹ existed. Nāgārjuna says: “One who sees how cause and effect are produced and destroyed does not regard the world as really existent or non-existent.”²⁰ He says that this doctrine which passes beyond being and non-being is called “the elixir of the profound teachings of the awakened ones.”²¹

If one assumes the existence of an external reality, accessed or not by cognition (and that is something both Sextus and Nāgārjuna attack as we shall see), then one can separate the question of cognitive access to it from the question of things’ existence or otherwise in it; i.e. the epistemological is distinct from the ontological. Under such circumstances, Sextus’ extremes sound epistemological, and the Madhyamaka extremes sound ontological²² – and would both be subsumed under Sextus’ first. However, working from the viewpoint of an investigator of phenomena, the ontological/epistemological distinction is not easy to establish, and it is reasonable to expect that both Sextus and Nāgārjuna would have choice words to say to proponents of, for example, the supposed “cognitively inaccessible but underlying reality” allowed by the distinction. Furthermore, as in such Greek adjectives as ~free of differentiation²³, ~free of measure²⁴, and ~free of decision²⁵ (the three applied by Pyrrho to all things according to Aristocles²⁶), the rival interpretations of which as either subjective-epistemological (undifferentiable etc.) or objective-ontological (undifferentiated etc.) have exercised scholars a

¹⁶ *uccheda vāda*

¹⁷ *DN 1 (PTS: D i 1)*

¹⁸ *dṛṣṭi*

¹⁹ *dharmā*

²⁰ *RĀ I: 38: evaṃ hetu phalotpādāṃ paśyaṃs tat kṣayam eva ca | nāstitāmastitāṃ caiva naiti lokasya tattvataḥ*

²¹ *RĀ I: 62*

²² i.e. negative metadogmatism as distinct from negative dogmatism in Barnes’ terminology.

²³ ἀδιάφορα

²⁴ ἀστάθμητα

²⁵ ἀνεπίκριτα

²⁶ *ap Eusebius Praep. evang. XIV: 18: 1-5*

great deal²⁷, Sanskrit adjectives used by Madhyamaka such as ~free of apprehending²⁸ do not refer exclusively to an object or a subject but are contextual and so preserve the same “ambiguity”. How close these two projects’ characterizations of the two transcended extremes are is thus a complex issue that warrants in-depth study in itself.²⁹

Non-absoluteness of characterizations of the way

Sextus immediately and succinctly states that everything he will say about his way, which avoids the two extremes, is not absolute, but only a subjective record of how things happen currently to appear.³⁰

Similarly, in general Buddhism, when it is said that the Buddha understands the two extremes, and what transcends them, “even this understanding he does not believe to be ~ultimate truth³¹.”³²

Distinctness from negative dogmatism

Madhyamaka due to its more sweeping negations is more likely than general Buddhism to be accused of negative (epistemological or ontological) dogmatism, as Sextus’ arguments frequently were and are. Like Sextus³³, Nāgārjuna is aware of such accusations and is at pains to deny it. He says: “*Nirvāṇa* is said to be the destruction of the notion of entities *and non-entities*.”³⁴ He identifies people who because confused about being and non-being cling to the *latter* – and asks them rhetorically why they don’t cling instead to the *former*, since they have as much reason to.³⁵ Taking refuge in “awakening” (*bodhi*), he says, means one has no thesis to defend, and therefore no stake *in non-being* either.³⁶

Relative status of positive and negative dogmatism

However, unlike Sextus, Nāgārjuna holds that if this third way (his own) is not understood, it would (in terms of future consequences for the individual concerned) be *better to fall into the first*

²⁷ E.g. Svavarsson (2010, pp. 41-7), Hankinson (1995, pp. 60-65) and Thorsrud (2009, pp. 18-25).

²⁸ *anupalabdha*

²⁹ The difficulty Sextus seems to have faced communicating what Pyrrhonists *mean* by using such apparently objective adjectives (going by the inordinately repetitive insistence on “what appears to me now” in *OP* I throughout 187-209) should, I think, recommend caution when we read the Mādhyamikas’ (and perhaps even unsympathetic Aristocles’ presentation of Pyrrho’s) use of them.

³⁰ *OP* 4 end

³¹ *parāmasati*

³² *DN* 1 (PTS: *D* i 1): 42

³³ E.g. *OP* I: 226

³⁴ *RĀ* I: 42cd

³⁵ *RĀ* I: 57

³⁶ *RĀ* I: 60

extreme, of believing in entities, than to fall into the second, of believing that there are no entities, because at least in the former case one would hold that one's own actions had consequences.³⁷ But he goes on to re-assert the superiority of the third way: "However, when, by means of knowing³⁸, one has pacified the notions of non-being and being, one passes beyond [the dichotomy of] fault and merit: the excellent ones say this is liberation from bad *and good* arising."³⁹

Project origin in anomalies and a quest for a criterion of truth

Sextus mentions briefly what he believes to be the historical origin of his kind of project, to wit, "when people of talent were troubled by anomalies⁴⁰ in believed and experienced things⁴¹," which laid these open to question and "led them to begin to investigate what was true and what was false, such that through settling⁴² these questions they might ~be free of the troubledness⁴³ which arose as a result of them."⁴⁴

In the famous myth, the Buddha was also troubled by anomalies of course, but perhaps more ambitiously sought a way to transcend *all* kinds of suffering, not just the anxiety consequent upon discovering those anomalies.

The Path

In Madhyamaka, the path is defined in brief as "practising as a union the stocking up on the two things that are to be stocked up on". These two are goodness or merit⁴⁵ and knowing⁴⁶ and their development is distributed across six "perfections"⁴⁷. Goodness means developing the first three perfections: open-handedness⁴⁸, ethics⁴⁹, and patience⁵⁰; both goodness and knowing involve developing the fourth perfection, enthusiasm⁵¹; and knowing is developed by the fifth and sixth

³⁷ Most Buddhists would agree, but that the issue was not uncontroversial is suggested by Vasubandhu's *Bhāṣya* on *Abhidharmakośa* V: 19 presenting the view that annihilationism is at least ~conformable to liberation (*mokṣānukūla*).

³⁸ *jñāna*

³⁹ *RĀ* I: 43-5. The same point is made again at v. 57.

⁴⁰ ἀνωμαλίαν

⁴¹ πρᾶγμασιν

⁴² ἐπικρίσεως

⁴³ ἀταρακτῆσοντες

⁴⁴ *OP* I: 12

⁴⁵ *puṇya*

⁴⁶ *jñāna*

⁴⁷ *pāramitā*

⁴⁸ *dāna*

⁴⁹ *śīla*

⁵⁰ *kṣānti*

⁵¹ *vīrya*

perfections, ~mental composedness⁵² and ~deep understanding⁵³. Nāgārjuna says that stocking up on goodness is necessary for those who do not yet know the profound doctrine: “As long as this doctrine, which cuts off the sense of ‘I’, is not understood, take heed of the practices of open-handedness, ethics and patience.”⁵⁴ His student Āryadeva even says: “Generosity is recommended to people of the lowest ability; proper ethical conduct to those of middling ability; and stilling the mind to those of highest ability.”⁵⁵

Recourse to a reluctant named exemplar

The last name Sextus mentions to have been used of people engaged in his project is “Pyrrhoneans”, after Pyrrho, and he says why: “He appears to us to have applied himself to Inspection more thoroughly and more conspicuously than his predecessors.”⁵⁶ Of course Sextus entitled his own survey of Inspection *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and he refers to another work by himself called *Pyrrhoneia*.⁵⁷ Aenesidemus, who is supposed by Aristocles to have revived the project, is recorded by Sextus⁵⁸ and Photius⁵⁹ to have named a book after Pyrrho, in which he set out investigations: *Pyrrhonian Discourses*. In his shorter treatises Sextus refers several times to “those from/after⁶⁰ Pyrrho”⁶¹ and calls Timon “the expounder of Pyrrho’s discourses.”⁶² However both Galen and Diogenes Laertius, near contemporaries of Sextus, give us reason to ask *who* applied this name: Galen says that those engaged in Inspection refused to be named after a person, but rather wanted to be known by their state of mind (i.e. suspension, as we have seen), which might suggest that Aenesidemus and Sextus are at the scholastic end of the spectrum of Inspection.⁶³ And according to Diogenes’ sometimes fanciful *Lives*, one Theodosius is recorded to have written that they could hardly claim to be of Pyrrho’s mindset if they had failed to discover it, in his treatise *Skeptikoîs Kephalaíois*.⁶⁴ Diogenes says Pyrrho lived largely in solitude and once stripped and swam away to escape his students.⁶⁵

⁵² *samādhi*

⁵³ *prajñā*

⁵⁴ *RA* II: 25. Candrakīrti’s *Introduction* makes this a societal distinction when it says, having presented the first three perfections, “The Well-Gone One primarily taught the three dharmas of open-handedness etc. [i.e. plus ethics and forbearance] to laypeople.” (*MAv* III: 12)

⁵⁵ *CS* VIII: 14

⁵⁶ *OP* I: 7, end

⁵⁷ *AG* 282

⁵⁸ *AL* II: 215

⁵⁹ *Bibl.* cod. 212

⁶⁰ ἀπό

⁶¹ *AP* 1, 5

⁶² *AG* 53

⁶³ Galen, *Outlines of Empiricism*, opening line.

⁶⁴ *DL* IX: (11:) 70 It has been argued that the non-naming of Pyrrho was an Aenesidemian strategy to explain the (arguably then innovative) new use of the term “inspective”.

⁶⁵ *DL* IX: (11:) 69

Appealing to the exemplar of the Buddha or a buddha is expected of all Buddhists, who literally “go to the refuge of the Three Jewels”, the Buddha or buddhas, the Dharma and the Saṅgha. This triple recourse has recently been likened to the Epicureans rather than Pyrrhoneans.⁶⁶ It was not usual to name either people or texts as “Buddhist” (*bauddha*, literally “Buddha-people”): this term was how other schools came to refer to them in polemics. According to *the Connected Discourse, Samkhitta Sutta*,⁶⁷ the Buddha Śākyamūni was comically sharp about people considering themselves allied with him just because they had listened to some of his teachings: “Foolish people make a request to me but then, having been taught some Dhamma, consider themselves ~bound to follow me⁶⁸.” And in *the Brahma Net Discourse, Brahmajāla Sutta*, he says anyone who feels delighted when they hear his praises or angered when they hear slights of him “is harmed... you should admit only what is true as true.”⁶⁹

Inspection

The sixth perfection, of deep understanding, which (unlike the other five perfections) is taught to be *unique to Buddhism* among the religious and philosophical systems, came to be presented as depending on the ~Thorough Inspection⁷⁰ of reality⁷¹, commonly translated into English as “insight meditation” or “deep seeing”, although Nāgārjuna himself did not refer to his analyses with this term.

Sextus (in Greek) terms his own project σκέψις.⁷² This literally means “looking at” or “looking into” or “perceiving”, and also has a connotation of “thoroughly” or “analytically”.⁷³

Thus the two projects were identified using words which carry the same meaning in their respective languages. Etymologically they are also cognates.⁷⁴

Ability to inspect

Sextus does not say that σκέψις or Inspection is, on the one hand, automatic or, on the other, a fixed belief. He says it is rather a power or ability⁷⁵ and claims to mean the term in the simplest sense of “being able” to inspect, which means to consider all the various ways appearances and

⁶⁶ By Stephen Clark in his *Ancient Mediterranean Philosophy* (Clark, 2013, pp. 151-5).

⁶⁷ AN VIII: 63 (PTS: A iv 299)

⁶⁸ *mamaññeva anubandhitabbaṃ*

⁶⁹ DN 1 (PTS: D i 1) Such reluctance is hardly unique to Pyrrho and Buddha of course.

⁷⁰ *vipaśyanā*

⁷¹ *bhūta*

⁷² OP I: 7, 8-

⁷³ I give my reasons for translating the term as Inspection in Appendix II.

⁷⁴ See Appendix II.

⁷⁵ δύναμις

notions about a topic are in conflict. In effect the question is not, “Do you *believe* in Inspection?” but “*Can* you Inspect?”

In the sūtras defining *vipaśyanā* or Thorough Inspection it is called a *kauśalyam*, “a cleverness, skill (at); expertise (in)” from the root *kuśala*, “fitting (for); competent, able, skilful, clever (at); conversant (with)”.⁷⁶ It is remarkable that the Buddha was unusual in using this word and its privative *akuśala*, “inept”, rather than the plentiful other words available to him meaning “good”, “virtuous” and “evil”, “sinful” to advocate or discourage particular kinds of thought, speech and action, but that he was teaching thus in accordance with a worldview where there is no absolute right and wrong, but only temporarily appropriate means to achieve success based on temporary circumstances.⁷⁷ *The Saṃdhi Nirmocana Sūtra*⁷⁸ details how Inspection is performed: “The reflection-like object of single-pointed concentration should be thoroughly discerned [...] thoroughly sifted away, reckoned up, observed from every angle⁷⁹. [...] ~With proper analysis observe and master it.⁸⁰ That is what is known as Thorough Inspection. Thus awakening beings are skilled in Thorough Inspection.”⁸¹

In both projects, then, the practitioner is distinguished by a particular ability to inspect, an ability which can be developed.

Investigation

Sextus says⁸² that his school is called “seeking or investigative”⁸³ insofar as its project “to investigate”⁸⁴ and (as he has already said) “to inspect thoroughly or scope out”⁸⁵.

⁷⁶ See for example chapter VI of *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra*.

⁷⁷ We go into more detail on this issue in Part II: Chapter 3.

⁷⁸ The *Ārya Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* from whose 6th chapter this excerpt derives was especially associated not with Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka but with the *other* (and later) principal Mahāyāna school, the Yogācāra, founded by Asaṅga. The school explicitly aimed to correct annihilationist-inclined misunderstandings of reality encouraged in its view by earlier Madhyamaka arguments, and its sūtras were therefore described by Tibetan doxographers as a “third turning” of the wheel of the dharma, after the “second turning”, i.e. the wisdom sūtras associated with Madhyamaka, and the “first”, i.e. the teachings relating to individual liberation.

⁷⁹ *vivicyate pravivecanam parikalpanam paryavekṣanam*

⁸⁰ *viśiṣṭavibhāgo darśanam, adhigamaśca*

⁸¹ Incidentally the Sanskrit *mīmāṃsā*, *vicāra* and *vimṛś* are all represented in canonical Tibetan translations by (*mam par*) *dpvod pa*. So is *tarka* (the origin of our words “intricate” and “trick”) which in Buddhism generally carries a more negative connotation, not just “reasoning” but also “speculative conjecture”, something to be transcended. It would be interesting to investigate whether this rather blanketing translation (concealing as it seems to the opprobrium for philosophers’ speculative concept-mongering under a neutral term for investigation) helped (accidentally or on purpose) popularise the more analytical form of *vipaśyanā* which came to dominate in Tibet.

⁸² *OP I: 7*

⁸³ ζητητική

⁸⁴ ζητεῖν

⁸⁵ σκέπτεσθαι

Sanskrit is rich in verbs related to investigation. Although *man* is merely the usual word for “think”, its desiderative *mīmāṃsā*, “profound thought, reflection, consideration; investigation, examination, discussion” is far more specific, and used primarily to name of one of the three orthodox Hindu systems, the one which saw its own task as establishing the correct interpretation of the Vedas. It is, as far as I know, not used by either Nāgārjuna or Candrakīrti. However in the Pāli canon the related *vīmaṃsī*, “analytical investigator”, is used disparagingly in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*⁸⁶ of certain “seekers of the truth” who by reasoning through matters become attached to their own views.

*Vimṛś*⁸⁷, “work out”, is used by Nāgārjuna: “Error cannot occur in those who have already erred; error cannot occur in those who have yet to err; error cannot it occur in those who are erring right now: work out⁸⁸ by yourselves how error can occur!”⁸⁹

The common term however is *vicar-*, meaning “wander, proceed, investigate, ponder, discuss”⁹⁰. For example Candrakīrti asks of Nāgārjuna’s machinations: “What is the point of this investigation⁹¹ into whether conditions are possessed of potential?”⁹² It is also part of one canonical definition of Thorough Inspection, *vipaśyanā*. In the Indo-Tibetan tradition of Buddhism which preserves the most extensive collection of translations from Sanskrit Mahāyāna texts, there are two distinct forms of thorough inspection: one gradual, analytical and exoteric, codified most famously by Kamalaśīla in the most important canonical guide to exoteric meditations in the Indo-Tibetan tradition, *Stages of Meditation (Bhāvanākrama)*; and the other immediate, “recognitional” and esoteric, codified by such scholars as Sahajavajra in his *Explanation of 10-Verse “Thatness” (Tattva daśaka ṭīkā)*.⁹³ Kamalaśīla first gives a gradualist definition of thorough inspection: “Calm abiding⁹⁴ should be achieved first.⁹⁵ ‘Calm abiding’ is

⁸⁶ DN 1 (PTS: D i 1)

⁸⁷ Tibetan: *rnam par dpyod pa*

⁸⁸ *vimṛśa*

⁸⁹ MMK XXIII: 17-18, the only occurrence of the term in this text

⁹⁰ Tibetan: again, *rnam par dpyod pa* – the Sanskrit has a suggestive connotation of *going astray*.

⁹¹ *vicāra*

⁹² PP anticipating MMK I: 7

⁹³ In the Kagyu lineages of Tibetan Buddhism especially, this kind of *vipaśyanā* has been heavily emphasized, as can be seen for example in the chapter on the perfection of deep understanding (*prajñā*) from these lineages’ founder Gampopa’s exposition of the Buddhist path, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation (thar rgyan)*. For a discussion of this development in the Indo-Tibetan tradition see, for example, Mathes’ study of the Kagyu order (Mathes, 2003, pp. 201-). Nevertheless, there is a general preference in Tibetan Buddhism for emphasis on the analytical nature of *Vipaśyanā* which may be surprising, for example, to students of Theravāda *Vipassanā* or of Zen. As well as in *vipaśyanā* Madhyamaka reasonings are also deployed in the Tibetan tradition in debate, as a means to hone reasoning skills.

⁹⁴ *śamatha*

⁹⁵ Kamalaśīla’s emphasis on a non-distracted mind being pre-requisite became a bone of contention in later Tibetan polemics, the general consensus being that more advanced practitioners would be able to practise *śamathā* and *vipaśyanā* together. Sextus does not seem to suggest anywhere that one should train the attention before embarking on investigations, and this actually matches certain Indian texts better:

said to be that mind which has removed distraction to external objects and spontaneously and continually rests on the object of meditation with delight and ease. ‘Thorough Inspection’ is thorough investigation⁹⁶ of reality from within the state of calm abiding meditation.”

Transcendence of doubt

Sanskrit *vicikitsā*, “doubt, uncertainty, question, inquiry”, from the root *ci* with the prefix *vi*, related to the number 2 (cf. Latin *dubitare*) here meaning “divided or wavering between two options” occurs in the long excerpt from the *Sūtra on Seizing the Object of Contemplation* (*Dhyāyitamusṭi Sūtra*) cited twice by Candrakīrti⁹⁷ describing the doubting state of mind of a saint⁹⁸ who still has subtle clinging to “I” and “mine”, where it is said to be a cause of being catapulted into states without happiness: “Why? Because he discriminates among phenomena which are in fact unproduced. Thus he conceives doubt⁹⁹ and indecision¹⁰⁰ about the Thus Gone One.” The second citation is longer and ends with a description of the attainment of Buddhahood: “By means of a mind equal to space he does not see the Buddha, he does not see the dharma, he does not see the connection. Seeing all phenomena to be empty [of independent existence] he does not give rise to any doubt about anything. Free of doubt, he is free from clinging to existence. Free from clinging to existence, he is free of identifying appropriation, and he attains peace.” Doubt is part of the typical list of latent tendencies to be *eliminated* which Candrakīrti cites when discussing the first phase of engagement with the first of the four Noble Truths (suffering)¹⁰¹: “actual reality belief¹⁰², beliefs ~grasping extremes¹⁰³, perverse¹⁰⁴ beliefs, ~holding a belief to be absolute¹⁰⁵, holding ethical practices and religious observances to be absolute¹⁰⁶, doubt, desire, hostility¹⁰⁷, pride¹⁰⁸ and naivety¹⁰⁹.”

This then would appear to be a major difference between Madhyamaka and Sextan Pyrrhonism: we do not have any evidence that the latter recognizes any state equivalent to ~complete integrative awakening (*samyak sambodhi*) which is the locus of both freedom from

Bhāvaviveka for example says that analytical *vipaśyana* should be done first, and then *śamatha* (MH III: 13).

⁹⁶ *vicāra*

⁹⁷ *PP* on *MMK* XVI: 9 and again after XXIV: 40

⁹⁸ *arhat*

⁹⁹ *vicikitsā*

¹⁰⁰ *vimati*, literally “divided mind”

¹⁰¹ *PP* on *MMK* XXIV: 4

¹⁰² *satkāyadrṣṭi*

¹⁰³ *antagrāha*

¹⁰⁴ *mithyā*

¹⁰⁵ *drṣṭi parāmarśa*

¹⁰⁶ *śīla vrata parāmarśa*

¹⁰⁷ *pratigha*

¹⁰⁸ *māna*

¹⁰⁹ *avidyā*

belief *and* freedom from doubt. The issue however has been almost irremediably confused among scholars due to the traditional mistranslation of ἀπορία (see *infra* under “conceptual failure”) as “doubt” or (worse) “confusion”.

Curing believers of their troubles

The unprefixd *cikitsā*, interestingly, is one of the usual words in Sanskrit for the practice or science of medicine (referring especially to healing, one of the six traditional divisions) as when Candrakīrti says in celebration that the buddhas, “are the great ~kings among physicians¹¹⁰, healing¹¹¹ the disease of afflictions.”¹¹² And (citing *The Jewel Mountain Discourse, Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*): “[Phenomena’s] emptiness [of independent existence] is what purges all beliefs. That is why I have spoken of those who make emptiness a belief in itself as incurable¹¹³.” Nāgārjuna’s famous equivalent verse¹¹⁴ uses instead the less specifically medical term *asādhya*, “incurable, irremediable; insusceptible to proof, unreasonable with.” Candrakīrti explains that the Buddhas teach both no self and no absence of self, the latter to correct materialistic nihilism: “It is to prevent the wrong views of these people that the Buddhas, ... who are healers¹¹⁵ of the great disease of the afflictions, the great kings among physicians... have spoken sometimes of the self.”¹¹⁶ A treatise attributed to Nāgārjuna says: “Although they take to heart the way things are and do not violate this, yet [sages] carry on their discourse by means of names and concepts in keeping with the conventional truth. They do this with the intention of removing perversion prevalent in the world, and they do not quarrel.”¹¹⁷ Candrakīrti compares those who believe in entities and absences to people suffering from an optical defect: “For the sake of the cessation of the persistent illusion of the deluded, we declare, as would someone freed from an optical defect, ‘Things do not exist in themselves.’”¹¹⁸ Nāgārjuna compares the displeasure of applying the Mahāyāna precepts to the use of poison to cure poison, or a physician’s application of a bitter medicine, where supporting minor discomfort temporarily brings longer-term comfort.¹¹⁹

More generally, the metaphor of medicine for the spiritual path goes back to the sūtras, and is to this day central to the living teaching of Buddhism in colleges. The so-called “four metaphors” from *The Sutra Arranged Like A Tree* are: “You should think of yourself as someone who is sick, of the dharma as the remedy, of your spiritual friend as a skilful doctor, and of

¹¹⁰ *vaidya rājaiḥ*

¹¹¹ *cikitsaiḥ*

¹¹² *PP* on *MMK* XIII: 8

¹¹³ *acikitsyam*

¹¹⁴ *MMK* XIII: 8 and see discussion of “self-voiding expressions” *infra*.

¹¹⁵ *cikitsakaiḥ*

¹¹⁶ *PP* on *MMK* XVIII: 6

¹¹⁷ *MPPŚ* 64a-b (Ramanan, pp. 103-4)

¹¹⁸ *PP* on *MMK* XV: 11

¹¹⁹ *RĀ* IV: 72-7

diligent practice as the way to recovery.” The injunctions from *The Inquiry of Ocean Intelligence* (*Sāgaramatiparipṛccha Sūtra*) are invoked¹²⁰ on how to teach: “He that expounds the doctrine... must think of himself as of a physician, as the doctrine as if it were a medicine, as those that are to study as of patients.”

At the end of his outlines of Pyrrhonism, Sextus, a physician himself, sums up his project as a kind of medicine intended to heal¹²¹. Those who engage in this project are therefore like physicians¹²². Their words are remedies¹²³. The sick are those who hold beliefs. The symptom of the believers’ disease¹²⁴ is their arrogance, which prevents them attaining untroubledness. He compares the rashness¹²⁵ in them to the pathogen. For the process of expelling beliefs with something which is itself expelled he also invokes the simile of the purgative.¹²⁶

Nāgārjuna’s *Pulveriser* begins by asserting that it is a text which should be explained “in order to remedy the arrogance of those who are eager of discussion on account of the arrogance [produced in them] by their knowledge of logic.”¹²⁷ Candrakīrti describes: “Once discriminating conceptions and beliefs are present, then the afflictions which are born from adherence to beliefs will occur. Attachment to one’s own beliefs will lead to pride and arrogance. Moreover ill-will towards the beliefs of others will occur in turn. Originating from delusion, beliefs produce afflictions. Because in this way all beliefs and afflictions originate from the cause, apprehending entities, if one penetrates the essential nature of entities and ceases to apprehend them, beliefs will be abandoned. When beliefs are abandoned, afflictions are also purified.”¹²⁸ Bhāvaviveka says, “With the torture caused by adhering to a proposition, one is never worthy of tranquility.”¹²⁹

¹²⁰ E.g. by Butön (1931, p. 76).

¹²¹ ἰασοθαί: The Epicureans’ use of the medical metaphor predates Sextus’, however, and certain interpretations of Ancient Greek philosophy in general emphasize its therapeutic character, notably for example Pierre Hadot (2004).

¹²² ἰατροὶ

¹²³ βοηθήματα

¹²⁴ πάθος

¹²⁵ Τῆι προπετεία: Incidentally, if we consider the Sanskrit cognate *prapat-* meaning “fly away, fly towards, fall, hurry away” we find that in Candrakīrti’s commentary on Nāgārjuna’s root verses it occurs only three times, and in citations of sūtras: twice in the same passage of the *Āryadhyāyitamūṣṭi Sūtra* supporting *MMK* XVI: 9 and XXIV: 40 where the Buddha uses it to describe how someone who still hypostatizes a reality even though phenomena do not arise, because affected by inclination (*kāṅkṣā*) and doubt (*vicikitsā*) about an Awakened One’s Awakening, or uncertainty and wavering (*vimati*) about the Tathāgata, rushes headlong (*prapatati*) to Hell; and once in the *Āryamāradamana Sūtra* supporting *MMK* XVI: 10, where Māra has fallen (*prapatita*) to the surface of the earth in bondage and complains, only for Mañjuśrī to say the bond of craving-imbued belief in “I” is worse.

¹²⁶ *OP* I: 206 Purgatives in Greece were often used to cure madness.

¹²⁷ *VP* 1

¹²⁸ *YŚV* on *YŚ* 47

¹²⁹ *MH* III: 23ab

Belief as self-love

Elsewhere Sextus says that the problem is that the believers are “self-lovers”¹³⁰, which causes them to prefer their own judgment to others’ without grounds.¹³¹

Āryadeva says: “Being attached to your own position and disliking another’s position, you will not attain *nirvāṇa*. There is no tranquility for one who lives in the opposition (consequent upon holding views).”¹³² And: “For the worldly, their own position, like their own birthplace, is attractive.”¹³³

Matching the strength of the remedy to the strength of the illness

The variety of *degrees* of arrogance in the believers is like the variety of *strengths* of disease in people infected by this pathogen. Sextus explains that the words of Inspection are chosen by strength of persuasiveness to match the strength of rashness in the believers, just as remedies are chosen by strength to match that of an ailment. For these arguments’ action on the rashness and arrogance of the believers he uses the term ἀνασκευάζεσθαι, usually employed in medicine to refer to the reversal of the actions of a disease and a restoration or rebuilding of the health of the organism.¹³⁴

Nāgārjuna presents the typical Mahāyāna hermeneutic when he says¹³⁵, “Wisdom [*prajñā*] is one; the Buddha speaks of it through various names in accordance with the capacity of the person to whom he speaks.” Āryadeva, his student, relates this to medicine explicitly: “The Buddhas have mentioned what is real, what is unreal, what is both real and unreal, and what is neither real nor unreal. Indeed, does not everything called ‘medicine’ depend on the illness being treated?”¹³⁶ The simile of matching the remedy to the illness is also used extensively in the non-canonical *Milinda Questions* (*Milinda Pañha*), a didactic debate between the monk Nāgasena and the Greek king Menander.¹³⁷ The king voices his suspicion about the way the Buddha seems to have come up with more and more rules over time for his community, while supposedly being all-seeing, and Nāgasena replies: “He laid down the rules only when the need arose, just as a skilled physician only prescribes medicine when the need arises, even though he knows all the medicines in advance of the disease’s arising.”¹³⁸ Later on this theme is developed: the king wonders why, then, the Buddha did not simply share everything he knew about these “diseases and remedies” all

¹³⁰ φίλαυτοι

¹³¹ *OP* I: 90

¹³² *CŚ* VIII: 10

¹³³ *CŚ* XII: 24

¹³⁴ *OP* III: 280-1

¹³⁵ *MPPŚ* 190c (Ramanan, 1966, p. 286)

¹³⁶ *CŚ* VIII: 20

¹³⁷ We discuss its historical signification in Part III.

¹³⁸ *MP* VI: question 2

at once? Nāgasena replies that making all the restrictions general knowledge from the beginning would have dissuaded people from entering the community out of fear.¹³⁹ Elsewhere Nāgasena compares *nibbāna* to medicine: “Like medicine, it protects beings who are poisoned by the afflictions¹⁴⁰, cures the disease of suffering and nourishes like nectar.”¹⁴¹ But it is still principally the dharma (revealed by the Buddha) for which this metaphor is used: “ ‘Certain medicines, O king, have been made known by the Blessed One by which he cures gods and men. They are these: the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of success, the five controlling faculties, the five moral powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the eightfold noble path.¹⁴² With these medicines the Blessed One cures men of wrong views, wrong thought, wrong speech, wrong actions, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness and wrong concentration.¹⁴³ He rids them of desire, hatred and delusion, pride, actual reality belief, doubt, restlessness, sloth and torpor, shamelessness and recklessness and all other defilements.”¹⁴⁴

Conceptual failure

One of the most distinctive features of Sextan Inspection as compared to investigations recorded in the texts of other schools of Greek philosophy is the impasse or deadlock to which investigations into mutually exclusive beliefs lead.¹⁴⁵ Sextus says that his approach was referred to as “aporetic” in two ways: by some because of the habit of raising difficulties and investigating; and by others because of not affirming or denying.

The texts of Madhyamaka, like Sextus’, are characterised by the habit of conducting investigations as far as impasses. In particular, the central text, Nāgārjuna’s *Root Verses*, is composed almost entirely of breath-takingly swift impasse-accomplishments, many so swift as to seem almost suspicious.

Exposée of contradiction between/among concepts and experiences

These impasses are signalled by Nāgārjuna “discovering” contradictions either with experience (what “is found”¹⁴⁶) or with logic¹⁴⁷. The word used for these impasse-destined arguments is *prasaṅga*. It literally means “case” as in “in *that* case...”. Its derivative *prāsaṅgika* was chosen

¹³⁹ *MP XIV*: question 68

¹⁴⁰ *kilesa*, Sanskrit *kleśa*

¹⁴¹ *PTS: Miln XV*: question 80

¹⁴² These 37 factors are the canonical summary of the entire exoteric Buddhist teaching in all schools.

¹⁴³ i.e. the opposites of the eightfold noble path.

¹⁴⁴ *MP XVI*

¹⁴⁵ *OP I*: 7. I defer a discussion of Woodruff’s distinction between aporetic and sceptical Pyrrhonism until Part III, after the detailed comparisons between the two projects in Part II.

¹⁴⁶ *vidyate*

¹⁴⁷ *yukti*

to represent the interpretative tradition that held these arguments to be expressed solely *ad hominem*, for the benefit of the opponent, without any belief commitment on the part of the speaker. The choice becomes clearer when one appreciates that the Sanskrit has delicious implications of “illicit pursuit” and “indulgence”, as if the Mādhyamikas were saying, “Let us indulge your insane beliefs for a moment and see in that case what the consequences are – namely the contradiction both with experience and with reason.”¹⁴⁸

The central statement Sextus makes about the what constitutes the skill of σκέψις is that it involves “setting things against”¹⁴⁹ things. He points out¹⁵⁰ that the “things” thus opposed include both ~objects of mind¹⁵¹ and appearances¹⁵². Generally in Buddhism mind as a capability is added to the five senses to make six capabilities, but whether their objects are conceptual is important: the Mādhyamika Jñānagarbha (describing the circumscribed way of being¹⁵³) says that appearances “are of two kinds: conceptual¹⁵⁴ and non-conceptual¹⁵⁵.”

Later Sextus says that chief constitutive principle of Inspection is in there being, he thinks, for every account/explanation/discourse/utterance¹⁵⁶ an equal one to be opposed¹⁵⁷ to it.¹⁵⁸ Nāgārjuna similarly says¹⁵⁹, “Indeed from a proposition¹⁶⁰, a counter-proposition¹⁶¹ derives. And neither of them is truth¹⁶².”

Intriguingly, like the Buddhists, who as a result of Thorough Inspection, come to see principally conceptual thought rather than unconceptualized direct perception as an obscuration, Sextus occasionally lets on that he intends principally to disparage logical reasoning by means of his reductios. For example, when accused of refuting appearances, his riposte is that he does not, but he appends the concession that in Inspection reductios constructed of perfect logical reasoning are sometimes used which are indeed “refutations of appearances”, i.e. whose conclusions are in

¹⁴⁸ *Saṅga* literally means “sticking to, clinging to, touching, contacting; relation to, association with, intercourse with; addiction to, devotion to, propensity for, selfish attachment to, desire for, wish for, cupidity about” and the prefix *pra* is used principally to mean “forward, in front” but (according to the lexicographers) with a whole series of subsidiary meanings, one of which is “worldly convention” (*vyavahāra*).

¹⁴⁹ ἀντιθετική

¹⁵⁰ *OP* I: 9

¹⁵¹ νοητά

¹⁵² φαινόμενα

¹⁵³ For more discussion of the two ways in which something can be said to be, see “belief: qualified assent” *infra*.

¹⁵⁴ *savikalpa*

¹⁵⁵ *nirvikalpa*

¹⁵⁶ λόγον

¹⁵⁷ ἀντικειῖσθαι

¹⁵⁸ *OP* I: 8-10, 12. Bury’s translation here of λόγον as “proposition” seems unwarrantedly restrictive.

¹⁵⁹ *RV* 104/II: 4cd*

¹⁶⁰ *Pakṣa*: the word also means “wing” and “party (of adherents)” and thus strongly suggests that any view is a partial view.

¹⁶¹ *pratipakṣa*

¹⁶² *nārthataḥ*

conflict with appearances, but that the audience is expected as a result to question *the validity of logical reasoning* rather than that of appearances, since (one imagines) appearances are so much more direct and undeniable to us. This is, he says, used as a tool to make believers realise that the beliefs they hold about undemonstrables based expressly on logical reasoning have a shakier base than they had imagined.¹⁶³

Deconstructive modes as a tool set against belief

Sextus gives a long presentation of classified argument types, called modes or “tropes” after the Greek τρόποι, by which investigations are carried out as far as such contradictions.

There is a group of ten, revealing the *interdependence* of phenomena with, or the *relativity* of phenomena to:

- (1) what animal is perceiving,
- (2) which person is,
- (3) which sense is,
- (4) circumstantial conditions,
- (5) position,
- (6) mixture,
- (7) quantities,
- (8) other phenomena generally,
- (9) frequency and
- (10) locality of customs, beliefs and theories.

There is a group of five attributed to Agrippa pointing out:

- (1) discrepancy,
- (2) infinite regress,
- (3) relativity (as in the first ten),
- (4) unwarrantedness of assertion or “hypothesis”, and
- (5) circular reasoning.

There is a group of two, that phenomena cannot serve as:

¹⁶³ *OP I: 20* It should be noted that this contributes to a criterion of action, not of truth: it is not that Sextus believes the senses are *true*er than the intellect. Comparison between difficulties about Sextus’ presentation of appearances and the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist controversies over whether perception involves concepts would be fruitful here, though rather beyond the scope of this survey.

- (1) their own criteria, or
- (2) the criteria of others.

And there is a group of eight attributed to Aenesidemus attacking causal explanation on the grounds of:

- (1) non-apparentness of causes,
- (2) misattribution of causes,
- (3) explanation of order by disorder,
- (4) over-stretched analogies into the non-apparent,
- (5) attribution of causes according to unshared outlooks,
- (6) double standards when considering other schools' teachings versus their own,
- (7) inconsistency with appearances and hypotheses, and
- (8) the explanation of the doubtful with the doubtful.

Madhyamaka's most famous classification of deconstructive argument types is into four¹⁶⁴ or five reasons (or "axioms") that resolve the middle way. They are:

- (1) the diamond or Vajra Slivers¹⁶⁵ which investigates a thing's *cause*, i.e. whether it makes sense to say that it was caused by itself, by something else, by both, or by neither;
- (2) the refutation of existent and non-existent results¹⁶⁶ which investigates a thing's result, i.e. whether it can produce something existent or non-existent;
- (3) freedom from singularity and plurality¹⁶⁷ which investigates essential identity, i.e. the impossibility of establishing anything singular, and therefore anything plural;
- (4) great relativity or interdependent co-production¹⁶⁸ which investigates all reality, i.e. whether anything exists independently or in itself; and
- (5) refutation of the four alternatives for production¹⁶⁹ which investigates both cause and effect, with two variants: (a) whether any of the permutations of non-

¹⁶⁴ The earliest reference to the (a?) four-fold classification seems to be in a text attributed to Bhāvaviveka, *MAS* 6: "...the four reasons, i.e. the refutation of the four alternatives for production, and the rest." (Tillemans, 1984, pp. 371-2 n. 16) However *MAS* may be by a much later (8th century CE or later) author (Rueg, 1990, p. 68).

¹⁶⁵ *rdo rje gzegs ma'i gtan tshigs, vajrakaṇahetu*

¹⁶⁶ *yod med skye 'gog gi gtan tshigs, *sadasadutpādapraṭiṣedhahetu*

¹⁶⁷ *gcig du bral gyi gtan tshigs, ekānekaviyogahetu*

¹⁶⁸ *rtan 'brel chen po'i gtan tshigs, mahāpratītyasamutpādahetu*

existent and existent cause and effect make sense; (b) whether any of the permutations of singular and plural cause and effect make sense. (5) is sometimes included in (1) in a list of 4, and sometimes inserted after (2) in a list of the 5.¹⁷⁰

So we can see that the Pyrrhonists' ten modes, on interdependence or relativity, are included in the Mādhyamika (4), which is considered the heart of the Buddha's teaching, and equivalent to the "emptiness which expels all beliefs": "Whatever arises in interdependence, is itself emptiness,"¹⁷¹ and, "Anything that arises in interdependence is inherently calmed,"¹⁷² and, "When one understands, 'This is because of that,' the nets of bad beliefs all vanish."¹⁷³ It is for this discovery alone that Nāgārjuna praises the Buddha at the opening of his treatise.

For the first mode of the ten, Sextus surmises that animals' cognition must vary, firstly on the grounds that they differ in physical constitution especially of their senses (and he gives many examples); and secondly on the grounds that they appear to differ in their preferences (and among many examples he mentions the fact that saltwater is good for fish to ingest but damaging to humans). "As a water vessel is variously perceived by beings – nectar to celestials, for humans plain drinking water, to spirits a putrid ooze of pus and blood, for the water serpents and the fish a place to live in, while it is space to gods who dwell in the sphere of infinite space – so any object, live or dead, within the person or outside, is differently seen by beings according to the results of their [mental, verbal and bodily] actions." This verse is part of the inherited suite of sayings, used by Madhyamaka in teachings on the illusory, mentally constructed nature of conceived objects,¹⁷⁴ and exemplifies the first of Sextus' ten dependencies. For example Candrakīrti says: "As it is with sense faculty such as an eye seeing unclearly, etc., so it is with a craven spirit seeing a flowing river as pus."¹⁷⁵ Another example comes from a text attributed to Nāgārjuna: "About one single external object divergent judgments can prevail. That form which is pleasing, precisely that may seem different to others. In respect of the same female body, a mendicant ascetic, a

¹⁶⁹ *mu bzhi'i skye a'gog gi gtan tshigs, catuṣkoṭyutpādapratīṣedhahetu*

¹⁷⁰ This number and order of reasons occurs in Kamalaśīla's *MĀl* – but he presents the reasons without naming them.

¹⁷¹ *MMK XXIV*: 18ab

¹⁷² *MMK VII*: 16

¹⁷³ *ŚS 73* (the last verse of the treatise)

¹⁷⁴ Similar verses were used by the Cittamātra school to justify the *complete denial* of an external world. See for example Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasamgraha* II: 14: 1 (Tibetan ed. and tr. in Lamotte (1973)) where only 4 "species" are mentioned – humans, gods, animals and ghosts (although this list is elaborated by its commentators such as *Asvabhāva (Ngo bo nyid med). And Vasubandhu's *Vimśatikāvijñāptimātratāsiddhi* refers (v. 3) to ghosts seeing pus only because of their own projections.

¹⁷⁵ *MAV VI*: 71ab, where he is refuting the Cittamātra comparison between the ghost and someone with defective vision, on the grounds that the former's perception is *not* deceptive.

passionate man and a dog entertain three different notions of it – as a corpse, an object of sexual desire and something to eat, respectively.”¹⁷⁶

Again, among the ten, the second dependency, on the different people observing, leads to the conclusion that nothing can finally be said about the object of their observation. This fact and the previous related one are employed in the Buddhist teachings to train the mind in order to break its attachments, aversions and delusions – i.e. to be free of the afflictions. For example Āryadeva says: “Some desire it, others are repelled by it, others confused by it: thus there is no [real] object for desire [etc.] to have. Apart from conceptualization, the existence of desire and so forth is not found. What intelligent person would believe to be real something that is only a conceptual construct?”¹⁷⁷ The esteem in which this recommendation was held is then expressed in the famous line: “Merely to entertain the prospect that this might be true tears cyclic existence to shreds.”¹⁷⁸

The climax of Sextus’ exposée of the third dependency, on the senses, is the reminder of the possibility that our senses are limited and thus that there is no way of knowing what qualities of an apprehended object are not apprehended, or what apprehended qualities truly belong to the object. The same implication is drawn from the water/pus/nectar example *supra* (and by extension the diverse perception of all phenomena such as pillars, pots, etc.) by the much later Tibetan scholar Ju Mipham¹⁷⁹, who explicitly connects the example with the deconstruction of concepts that are considered to refer to real objects, and with the typical Madhyamaka deconstruction of identity and difference (which in turn includes one argument in Sextus’ eight mode¹⁸⁰): “When a single instance of water appears as different substances to different sentient beings, some say there is a single object of perception, and that all perceptions of it are valid. If water had some kind of essential nature, valid *and* invalid cognitions of it would be impossible. If the various objects that seem to be there [to the various sentient beings] were distinct things, [the notion of] perceiving *the same* pillars, vases, etc. [even by similar sentient beings] would be impossible... Some say there is merely wetness [as a basis], for if there were not actual different aspects of the same substance, [the notion of] *various* perceptions [i.e. of one thing] would be impossible. If what [one being sees as] water, pus and so forth, is not present to others, what would be the basis of [the perception of] water, pus, etc.? Moreover what would happen to this basis, wetness, in the case of beings in the realm of infinite space [which see it as space, not

¹⁷⁶ *BCV* 19–20. The mendicant sees her as a corpse as part of his meditative training as an antidote to the tendency towards desire. See for example *the Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness (Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta)*, *DN* 22: section 6.

¹⁷⁷ *CŚ* VIII: 2–3

¹⁷⁸ *CŚ* VIII: 5cd

¹⁷⁹ In the reply to the sixth question (6.1 – 6.2.1.3.1.2.1) in his *Beacon of Certainty (nges shes sgron me)* tr. Pettit (2002). For presentations of the more realist (Gelugpa) position which Mipham is attacking, see Cozort (1998, pp. 113–23) and Cabezón & Mkhas-Grub (1992, pp. 334–44).

¹⁸⁰ *OP* I: 137

wetness]? If wetness were the *same* as water, it could not appear as pus, etc.; if it were *different* from water, liquidity would never be perceived in [water]. [Thus] it is not possible for there to be a common object of each distinct perception, because it is not possible for a suitable common substance to appear in different ways. If one accepts an analytically [determined] basis other than a dependently designated one, one must establish its existence in reality — However you look at it, it’s illogical.” He goes on to issue, however, a typical Madhyamaka warning that one not misunderstand this to mean that the object does not exist at all, which applies equally to interpretations of Sextus’ argument: “If the common object were non-existent, there would be no object [for any sentient being], as in [the doctrines of the school advocating] Mind Only, and one would have to accept that consciousness itself is the object, which is logically unsound.”

In the course of examples for the fourth kind of dependency, of phenomena on circumstances, Sextus raises the issue of whether so-called “sane” individuals can be said to be any less dominated by changing levels of humours, and therefore in any more natural a state, than the so-called “insane”, in which case there seems to be no grounds to privilege the former. This matches exactly the controversy among various Madhyamaka interpreters of whether there are degrees of deceptiveness in circumscribed being (“conventional truth”) which evolved quite late in Madhyamaka’s history. Nāgārjuna (2nd century) does not subdivide circumscribed being at all. Candrakīrti (7th century) says that those considered to have “correctly” operating sense organs and those considered to have “defective” sense organs are *both* deceived, the former insofar as they believe what is sensed to be, finally and truly, and that they are thus only distinguished as either correct or deceived according to (deceived) convention in the world.¹⁸¹ Śāntideva accepted that practitioners of meditation gained insights that outweighed the beliefs of ordinary people and even other practitioners whose minds were less developed.¹⁸² Jñānagarbha (c. 8th century) used the terms “correct” (*tathya*) and “incorrect” (*atathya*) circumscribed being, which led to controversy over what exactly “correct” could mean given that all circumscribed being is supposed to be illusory.¹⁸³ Later still in Tibet the Nyingmapa Rog gi ban sde (1166-1244) defined “correct” as “seeming to perform a function according to [illusory] appearances” and “incorrect” as not so doing, which makes sense so long as one is considering similar sentient beings. By the time of the Gelugpa Se ra rje btsun Chos kyi rgyal msthan (1469-1546) the controversy over how logic could acceptably be used in Madhyamaka had led to the sharp distinction between Speaker’s Discourse (*Svātantrika*) Madhyamaka and Opponent-Conforming (*Prāsaṅgika*) Madhyamaka, the latter seen as more exalted, and he asserts that in this system it is not appropriate to distinguish

¹⁸¹ MAV VI: 24

¹⁸² BCA IX: 3-5

¹⁸³ This distinction would appear to be exactly that between “conforming Pyrrho” and “mad Pyrrho” in the interpretations of the stories about his conduct.

correct and incorrect circumscribed being, except when conforming to the vocabulary of the opponent.

Sextus' first "special argument" for relativity at the end of his exposition of the eighth mode¹⁸⁴, that two things supposed to be non-relative must either differ from relative phenomena or not, such that if they do they are in a relation of difference with them and therefore relative, whereas if they do not they are themselves relative, is similar to Nāgārjuna's dilemma¹⁸⁵ between two definitions of a "different thing", as being absolutely different or not from the thing from which it is supposed to differ: if it is absolutely different, then it cannot carry the quality "different" (since this would have no referent), but if it is not different, it cannot be called "a different thing".

Equivalents of Agrippa's five modes are found frequently in Madhyamaka. Nāgārjuna's approach to discrepancy is rather more catastrophic: "Since there is desire, aversion and confusion about the very same thing, they are created by concepts and those concepts are not about anything real."¹⁸⁶ Infinite regress is often invoked.¹⁸⁷ In the Pramāṇa school's rules for dialectic, as taught in Dharmakīrti's *Vādanyāya (Guidance for Disputation)*, fallacies are called *asādhanāṅga vacana*, "statements that variously miss the target", and what Agrippa calls "hypothesis" is called "non-justification or non-statement of a constituent of proof". Candrakīrti (after a protracted deconstruction of the tenets of the Mind Only School¹⁸⁸, in which all their objections are shown to depend on unjustifiable assumptions) says: "However you may answer and whatever you may say, it all appears to us as mere hypothesis¹⁸⁹, which brings the disputation to a close."¹⁹⁰

In two of Nāgārjuna's most famous particular investigations self-established and mutually established criteria are investigated and found to be absurd.¹⁹¹ More generally in his principal treatise's succinct chapter¹⁹² on phenomena's "being in themselves" (*svabhāva*) he points out that if no phenomena can be established as existing in themselves, to try to establish them as ~existing by means of other phenomena (*parabhāva*) is a manifestly vain enterprise, since those other phenomena, not being established in themselves, would have no power by means of which they might establish anything else.

Aenesidemus' eight modes against causal explanation are all deployed by Madhyamaka, as we shall see in our detailed survey of applications of the arguments in Part II.

¹⁸⁴ *OP* I: 137

¹⁸⁵ *MMK* XIV: 5-7

¹⁸⁶ *ŚS* 60

¹⁸⁷ *anavastha*, e.g. *MMK* VII: 3; *VV* 32; *PP* on *MMK* I: 1 etc.

¹⁸⁸ *MAV* VI: 45-66

¹⁸⁹ *pratijñā* = hypothesis, assertion, proposition yet to be proven

¹⁹⁰ *MAV* VI: 67

¹⁹¹ *VV* 30-50 and *VP* 2-20

¹⁹² *MMK* XV: 3

Distribution-forcing arguments

This, while not expressly used by them to characterize themselves, is a distinctive argument structure which both Sextus and Madhyanaka employ a great deal. By it they intend to draw our attention to an equivocation in a single term between a generality and a specificity. They take a belief, and make the implied (and unavoidable) distribution across the generality explicit: the opponent then rebels against this absurd distribution by asserting particularity, which ends up contradicting her original belief in the generality.¹⁹³

Universal acid arguments

Both projects, having refuted one entity, then go on to refute other supposed entities which are defined by the believers in relation to it or as depending on it. So by extending these deconstructions, the entire edifice of beliefs is gradually dissolved away.

Abandonment of belief

Sextus adds to the central statement of what constitutes Inspection: “For we believe that as a consequence of this we come to hold no beliefs.”¹⁹⁴

Nāgārjuna’s main treatise begins and ends with reference to the abandonment of beliefs. He begins with an homage to the Buddha as the one who taught the pacification of conceptual proliferation. More directly, he concludes with reverence to the Buddha who, out of his compassion for us holding us close, demonstrated the Dharma in order for us to “abandon all beliefs”.¹⁹⁵ Āryadeva describes the doctrine of emptiness as the *threshold* to the destruction of all beliefs.¹⁹⁶

Both Sextus and Nāgārjuna also qualify what they mean by ceasing to hold beliefs, in response to opponents’ objection that this would entail inactivity.¹⁹⁷

Suspension

Sextus describes his own school as “suspensive”¹⁹⁸ because of the state of mind, “suspension”¹⁹⁹ produced in the investigator *after* investigation.²⁰⁰ He says this state of suspension *precedes*

¹⁹³ We will see how this plays out in Part II: Chapter 2.

¹⁹⁴ *OP* I: 12

¹⁹⁵ *MMK* 0 and XXVII: 30

¹⁹⁶ *CŚ* XII: 16

¹⁹⁷ See Belief: qualified assent.

¹⁹⁸ ἔφλεκτική

¹⁹⁹ ἐποχή

²⁰⁰ *OP* I: 7

untroubledness²⁰¹ and that the former was accidentally found to lead to the latter (by which he means to emphasize the surprising fact that the effortful seeking of untroubledness in the establishment of beliefs by analysis had been the exact opposite of what actually discovered it) and he gives the simile of the infuriated court painter of Alexander throwing a cloth at his canvas and admiring the accidental result, the smear accomplishing the very effect he had wished to achieve with his brush but had been unable to.²⁰²

Nāgārjuna says: “When one affirms being, there is a seizing of awful and vicious beliefs, which arise from desire and hatred, and from that contentions arise,”²⁰³ and, “By taking any standpoint whatsoever, one is attacked by the writhing snakes of the afflictions. But those whose mind has no standpoint are not caught.”²⁰⁴ There are several equivalent terms used for this state of mind in the Buddhist texts. Perhaps the commonest is (in Pāli) *nibbuti* or (Sanskrit) *nivṛtti*. *Nivṛ* means “ward off, restrain; surround; (caus.) withhold” and *nivṛt* means “turn back, cease, not belong to, be ineffective or useless”. Thus *nivṛtti* means “turning back; ceasing; inactivity; suspension or ceasing to be valid (of a rule); prevention”. In general Buddhism the word is used to refer to what happens to the mind when it understands and thereby transcends eternalism and annihilationism: the Buddha, the *Brahmajāla Sutta*²⁰⁵ claims, “understands what ~transcends them²⁰⁶, yet even this understanding he does not believe to be ultimate²⁰⁷. And ~free of an ultimate²⁰⁸, he has realized by himself suspension²⁰⁹”.

In Madhyamaka, as we might expect, this “suspension” extends to all notions of being and non-being, and both subject and object. Candrakīrti begins his exposition²¹⁰ of Nāgārjuna’s arguments by describing the suspension of subject-object dualism which happens when the noble ones see interdependent co-arising: “When there is ~no onward activity²¹¹ of mind and mental content, when the conventions²¹² ‘the knower’ and ‘the thing known’ are suspended²¹³, because the calamity of origination, decay and death is left behind without a trace, there is peace.” Here too we see that suspension is said to be a pre-condition for peace. And when Nāgārjuna chides, “Trifling intellects see things [in terms of] existence and non-existence; they do not see what should be seen: the pacified, peace,”²¹⁴ Candrakīrti comments that what they do not see is

²⁰¹ *OP* I: 8

²⁰² *OP* I: 25-30

²⁰³ *YṢ* 46

²⁰⁴ *YṢ* 51

²⁰⁵ *DN* 1 (PTS: *D* i 1): 42-

²⁰⁶ *uttarītaraṃ*

²⁰⁷ *parāmasati*

²⁰⁸ *aparāmasato*

²⁰⁹ *nibbuti*

²¹⁰ *PP*

²¹¹ *na pravṛtti*

²¹² *vyavahāra*

²¹³ *nivṛtti*

²¹⁴ *MMK* V: 8

nirvāṇa, which is “~the supreme truth/meaning/goal²¹⁵ ~without decay, death or proliferation²¹⁶”, “the emptiness-nature” and “the peace-nature” insofar as “the ensnaring net of all concepts having been left behind, it is the nature of the suspension of ‘the knower’ and ‘the known’.” After an analysis of the supposed steps of perception Nāgārjuna says, “If [the seen] is not prior to, simultaneous with, or subsequent to, seeing, it is not found, and the concepts ‘it exists’ and ‘it does not exist’ are suspended.”²¹⁷ Of Nāgārjuna’s famous verse, “The Victorious Ones have proclaimed that emptiness is the elimination of all beliefs; anyone who believes in emptiness is incurable,”²¹⁸ Candrakīrti comments, “The ~mere suspension of acquired beliefs²¹⁹ is not an entity [in itself].”

This desistance is not only used of the *experiencing subject* however; its use of objects implies a cessation or disappearance: e.g. “One who supposes that at one time there is a particular nature of something and who later ~perceives this to have ceased²²⁰ believes in non-being, because he repudiates what he previously held to be existent.”²²¹ Candrakīrti also quotes the Buddha’s use of the term²²²: “There is no phenomenon which has ceased or existent phenomena; and the non-existent cannot be born. If one goes along thinking, “This exists,” or, “This does not exist,” suffering will not ~be pacified²²³.”

It is not just suffering which is called “pacified” but, again, conceptual proliferation: this verb “pacify” (*śam-*) and especially its derivative *upaśam*, “to become calm or quiet, to cease, to become extinct” have an almost identical function to *nivṛtti* in the Madhyamaka discourse. The verb *upaśam* is used to describe again what happens to conceptual thought as a result of investigation. For example, Nāgārjuna says: “All object-apprehension²²⁴ ~coming to a halt²²⁵, ~conceptual proliferation²²⁶ coming to a halt, is peace.”²²⁷ And commenting (in advance) on the opening verse of Nāgārjuna’s main treatise Candrakīrti says: “When dependent origination is seen as it is by the noble ones, because conceptual proliferation – the duality of the signifier and what is signified, etc. – has utterly ceased²²⁸, conceptual proliferation comes to rest²²⁹ there. It is said [sc. by Nāgārjuna] that interdependent co-origination is nothing other than the coming to rest of

²¹⁵ *paramārtha*

²¹⁶ *ajaram amaram aprapañcam*

²¹⁷ *MMK IX: 12*

²¹⁸ *MMK XIII: 8*

²¹⁹ *dṛṣṭikṛtāṇāṃ nivṛtti mātram*

²²⁰ *nivṛttim ālambhate*

²²¹ *PP on MMK XV: 11*

²²² *PP on MMK XXV: 3*

²²³ *śāmyati*

²²⁴ *upalambha*

²²⁵ *upaśama*

²²⁶ *prapañca*

²²⁷ *MMK XXV: 24* The reason for continuing, afterwards, to investigate, would be compassion for others still mired in actual reality beliefs.

²²⁸ *uparam*

²²⁹ *upaśam*

conceptual proliferation.” Later²³⁰, on the nature of the self, Candrakīrti quotes from *The Āryatathāgataguhyā Sūtra*: “Then the Awakening Being named Calmed-Mind²³¹ said to the Worthful One [the Buddha]: ‘The Worthful One speaks of “ceasing, ceasing²³²”. What is this so-called “ceasing”? And with respect to the ceasing of what does one speak of this “ceasing”?’ The Worthful One said: ‘Child of Noble Lineage, when one speaks of ceasing this means the ceasing of affliction²³³. ‘Ceasing of afflictions’ means the ceasing of conception²³⁴, distinct ideation²³⁵ and mental invention²³⁶... [which] means the ceasing of ~acquiescent cognition²³⁷ and taking [things] to heart²³⁸... [which] means the ceasing of ~mistaking the false for the true²³⁹... [which] means the cessation of reasons²⁴⁰ and/as objective reality²⁴¹... [which] means the cessation of insufficient understanding, becoming and thirst... [which] means the cessation of the creation of “I” and “my”... [which] means the cessation of the belief in annihilation and eternity... [which] means the cessation of ~actual reality belief²⁴².’ ”

Four seals of correct teaching

If ἐποχή is indeed so profound a *nivṛtti* (equated as we have seen with *nirvāṇa*), then the connection between suspension and untroubledness which Sextus says is the culmination of Inspection is the fourth of the so-called “four seals of Dharma”. Longchen Rabjam says, “A Buddhist is someone who holds the Three Jewels sacred sources of refuge and accepts the four seals that define Buddhist doctrine.”²⁴³ Butön present the four seals as an explanation of the word Dharma, “what holds”.²⁴⁴

They derive from sūtra, where they are described as a summary of the entire (84000 treasuries of) Dharma: in the shortest of the three *Inquiries of Ocean Nāga King* (*Sāgaranāgarājapariprccha*), the Buddha says: ““With the fact that (1) nothing composite lasts²⁴⁵,

²³⁰ *PP* commenting on *MMK* XVIII: 6

²³¹ *Śāntamati* – the very name incorporates the past participle of *śam-*.

²³² *upaśama*

²³³ *kleśa*

²³⁴ *saṅkalpa*

²³⁵ *vikalpa*

²³⁶ *parikalpa*

²³⁷ *samjñā*

²³⁸ *manasikara*

²³⁹ *viparyāsa*

²⁴⁰ *hetu*

²⁴¹ *ārambhaṇa*

²⁴² *satkāyadṛṣṭi*

²⁴³ *Treasury of Philosophical Systems* (*grub mtha' mdzod*) Chapter III cf. Barron’s translation as “four axioms” (Longchen-Rabjam; Barron, Richard (tr.), 2007, pp. 66-8).

²⁴⁴ (Butön-Rinchen-Drup, 2013, p. 19)

²⁴⁵ ‘*du byed thams cad mi rtag par*

[...] (2) everything that is associated with the contaminating is suffering²⁴⁶, [...] (3) nothing has a self²⁴⁷, [...] and (4) *nirvāṇa* is peace²⁴⁸, one fully engages with the knowledge of the great awakening ones' inexhaustible revelations. Serpent Chief, when these four lines of instruction on the laws of reality are recited, whoever recites them recites eighty-four thousand treasuries of the laws of reality.”

On the first criterion, Sextus does speak of the treachery of conditions in his discussion of ethics²⁴⁹, so would seem to pass it, but also deconstructs change²⁵⁰, so would there seem not to pass it. But then neither would the Mādhyamikas in this sense, who while similarly decrying the treachery of conditioned phenomena²⁵¹, likewise deconstruct impermanence²⁵²: the first seal only applies to transactional reality, things' circumscribed way of being, not to their ultimate nature.

On the second, Sextus like the Madhyamikas characterizes all beliefs as involving having a stake in an undecidable issue and thus the cause of trouble, so would seem to pass.²⁵³

The third refers to exactly the deconstructions we have referred to, presented more usually in the Buddhist case as phenomena being empty of existence in themselves, and that emptiness itself being empty, i.e. not an ontological absence, which Sextus' suspension of judgment on the objects of beliefs seems also to express, so he would seem to pass.

Equal force

Sextus explicitly defines σκέψις or Inspection as discovering the ~equal force²⁵⁴ of *phenomena* and *noumena* which had been considered to be mutually exclusive. He says it is this discovery which provokes conceptual failure (see *supra*).²⁵⁵

The equality²⁵⁶ of all objects (of senses and mind) is something discovered, according to Madhyamaka, in *vipaśyanā*, but this would seem to be more explicitly in a deep sense related to suspension of conceptualization. Candrakīrti cites a sūtra called *The Noble Truth-Reacher Secret, Aryatathāgataguhya* in which the Buddha refers to this discovery about objects of the senses and

²⁴⁶ *Zag pa dang bcas pa'i chos thams cad sdug bsngal bar*. “Contaminating”, Tibetan: *zag pa*, Sanskrit: *āsrava*, literally “seepage”, is a technical term used to refer to the localization of self-identity which occurs when consciousness is impelled (i.e. seeps) through sensory and mental experience into particularized phenomena due to loss of open awareness.

²⁴⁷ *chos thams cad la bdag med par*

²⁴⁸ *mya ngan las 'das pa zhi bar*

²⁴⁹ See for example Part II: Chapter 3: Pleasure changes into suffering; suffering can be useful.

²⁵⁰ See Part II: Chapter 2.

²⁵¹ e.g. CŚ I

²⁵² e.g. *MMK* XXIII: 13-14

²⁵³ See “Belief” *infra*.

²⁵⁴ ἰσοσθένεια

²⁵⁵ *OP* I: 8

²⁵⁶ *samatā*

of the mind.²⁵⁷ It occurs in the course of the Buddha’s explanation of the referent of the term *upaśānta*, “having calmed down”, the past participle of the verb *upaśam* we met when considering suspension: “ ‘Just as the fire burns due to there being fuel and is extinguished through there being no fuel, the mind burns due to their being an object and calms down due to there being no object... In this way, an awakening being, skilful in means, is completely purified by the perfection of deep knowing²⁵⁸, and understands all objects as equal...’ ”²⁵⁹ Nāgārjuna explicitly draws attention²⁶⁰ to the link between analysis, withdrawal from judgment and the pacification of antagonistic beliefs when he says: “After thorough investigation²⁶¹ the judgments that ‘this is true’ or ‘that is true’ are not observed, so which knowledgeable person would assert in ~antagonistic debate²⁶² that ‘this’ or ‘that’ were true?” Although it is a remarkable difference that while Sextus speaks throughout of *equal force* (of discrepant phenomena and explanations), the Mādhyamikas speak throughout of entities’ lack of existence in themselves or *emptiness*, these may be two ways to express the same thing: the verse quoted at the opening of a treatise attributed to Nāgārjuna indeed equates emptiness and *equality*²⁶³ of all dharmas.²⁶⁴

Aims

To transcend troubles

Sextus says²⁶⁵ that the point of Inspection is to transcend the troubles of belief, and in reactions to unavoidable events in the environment ~to be moderate in feeling²⁶⁶. He adds that this untroubledness²⁶⁷ was originally only discovered *accidentally* in the course of quest for the criterion to distinguish the truth from falsehood.²⁶⁸ He explains²⁶⁹ the meaning of untroubledness as undisturbedness²⁷⁰ and tranquility²⁷¹ of soul.

²⁵⁷ *PP* on *MMK* XVIII: 6

²⁵⁸ The perfection of deep knowing (*prajñāpāramitā*) referring, we should recall, not to some conclusive belief but to the discovery of all phenomena’s lack of existence in themselves and the baselessness of all beliefs.

²⁵⁹ For *upaśānta* (a participle of *upaśam*) see the earlier part of this citation in the discussion of “suspension” *infra*.

²⁶⁰ *YŚ* 42

²⁶¹ *vicāra*

²⁶² *vivāda*

²⁶³ *mnyams nyid*

²⁶⁴ *BCV*, opening verse of summary.

²⁶⁵ *OP* I: 25

²⁶⁶ μετριοπάθειν

²⁶⁷ ἀταραξία

²⁶⁸ *OP* I: 26, 28

²⁶⁹ *OP* I: 10, end

²⁷⁰ ἀοχλησία: This term is also found in Epicurus and in medical treatises.

²⁷¹ γαληνότης

This “accidental” discovery is strikingly reminiscent of the Mādhyamikas’ “causality-transcending” insight into virtue and non-virtue lacking essence, which is taught to be essential for liberation.²⁷² It is noteworthy that the rationale of the Buddhist path is to pacify *kleśa*, “troubles, importunities, afflictions”, which are produced due to clinging to beliefs²⁷³. Mādhyamikas make the connection between untroubledness and the vision of ~relativity or interdependent co-arising²⁷⁴. For example, Āryadeva says: “By the destruction of delusion, all the mental afflictions will also be destroyed. When interdependent co-arising is seen, delusion does not occur.”²⁷⁵ We can also note the connection with (a re-interpretation of) the doctrine of karma, as made by Nāgārjuna thus: “In brief, the nihilistic belief is that actions have no consequences, and it produces demerit²⁷⁶, leads to arising in joyless states and is called wrong belief; and in brief, the belief that everything exists is that actions have consequences, and it produces merit²⁷⁷, leads to arising in joyful states, and is called right belief. However, when through ~pristine knowing²⁷⁸ one has calmed down the notions of existence and non-existence, one passes beyond fallenness²⁷⁹ and goodness: the excellent ones say this is liberation from arising in joyless *or joyful* states.”²⁸⁰ And: “A follower of the doctrine of nonexistence goes on to arise in joyless states; a follower of the doctrine of existence goes on to arise in joyful states; one who knows ~how things really are²⁸¹ through full knowledge takes no stand on these two and attains liberation.”²⁸²

Compassionately helping others out of delusion

Sextus concludes his outlines of Pyrrhonism with the statement²⁸³ that his school, “~out of love of humanity²⁸⁴ desires words as far as is possible to cure the believers’ arrogance²⁸⁵ and rashness²⁸⁶”. Elsewhere he stresses that his aim is therefore not destructive: “Even if we do actually argue against experienced phenomena, we do not make such arguments because we want to destroy such phenomena, but as a way of exposing the rashness of believers.”²⁸⁷

²⁷² See Part II: Chapter 3: “Maximal happiness...”.

²⁷³ *dr̥ṣṭi*

²⁷⁴ *pratītya samutpāda*

²⁷⁵ *CŚ VI: 10cd-11ab*

²⁷⁶ *apuṇya*

²⁷⁷ *puṇya*

²⁷⁸ *jñāna*

²⁷⁹ *pāpa*, also: “evil”

²⁸⁰ *RĀ I: 43-45*

²⁸¹ *Yathā bhūtam*: a notable un-Sextan phrase.

²⁸² *RĀ I: 57*

²⁸³ *OP III: 280*

²⁸⁴ *διὰ τὸ φιλόανθρωπος εἶναι*

²⁸⁵ *οἴησιν*

²⁸⁶ *προπέτειαν*

²⁸⁷ *OP I: 20*

Nāgārjuna instructs: “Do not recite the doctrines of nihilists. Give up pride-fuelled debating.”²⁸⁸ Āryadeva says, “The doctrine of the buddhas was not taught for the sake of academic debate. Nevertheless, it destroys others’ contentions...”²⁸⁹ Candrakīrti says²⁹⁰: “For the goal of the cessation of the persistent illusion of the deluded [...] we say this not through involvement in annihilationism, but because ~the principal object is concern to help others²⁹¹.” And he is not alone: the root distinction of the Mahāyāna was of course the vow to become Awakened for the sake of all sentient beings, to act as their guide.

Belief

Qualified assent

Sextus is repeatedly at pains to point out that although the conclusion of investigation into beliefs is conceptual failure (impasse) and suspension, the subsequent state of untroubledness is not vegetable inactivity but instead involves operating according to what we might call “local conditions”. The first time he refers to this in the *Outlines* is to qualify his statement that Inspection involves setting mutually exclusive explanations or discourses in opposition in order to leave off holding beliefs. The qualification he makes is that when he says “leaving off belief” he does not mean all refraining from all kinds of assent: for he ~gives assent²⁹² to the affections necessitated by the sense-impressions, but does not assent to non-evident²⁹³ such as claims made about them²⁹⁴ – he assents for example to the affections necessitated by the appearance, heat, but not to the claim, “The air is hot,” or, “The air is making me hot.” The issue crops up again when Sextus considers whether it is appropriate to say that Inspection is a system²⁹⁵. He says that if a system is defined by a coherent set of beliefs adhered to, and “belief” is taken to mean assent to what is not evident, then it is not appropriate.²⁹⁶

This distinction between “assent to affections necessitated by appearances” and “assent to the non-evident” corresponds closely to the Buddhist distinction between the correct and incorrect beliefs about the “circumscribed way of being” of things as believed by the world. As Śāntideva

²⁸⁸ *RA* II: 168

²⁸⁹ *CS* XII: 15

²⁹⁰ *PP* on *MMK* XV: 11

²⁹¹ *parahita vyāpāra parāyaṇānām*

²⁹² συνκατατίθεται

²⁹³ ἀδήλων

²⁹⁴ *OP* I: 13

²⁹⁵ αἴρεσιν

²⁹⁶ *OP* I: 16. Modern theologians and crypto-theistic philosophers should especially note the denial of the validity of coherence.

puts it, “The manner in which something is seen, heard, and cognized is not refuted here but the conceptualization of its true existence, which is the cause of suffering, is rejected here.”²⁹⁷

Let us first clarify the doctrine of ~the two kinds of ‘is’²⁹⁸, propounded in a unique way by the Madhyamaka. Nāgārjuna says²⁹⁹: “The laws of phenomena revealed by the Awakened One are genuinely based on the two kinds of ‘is’, the circumscribed³⁰⁰ ‘is’ in the world, and the ultimately true³⁰¹ ‘is’.” At the time of Jñānagarbha this basic distinction was still made in the same way.³⁰² Jñānagarbha elaborates: “ ‘The circumscribed’ is exactly ~according to appearance³⁰³; the latter is something else.”

“Appearance” in Sanskrit³⁰⁴ is ambiguous, suggesting neither subjectivity (“I experience...”) nor objectivity (“It appears...”) exclusively. This non-duality seems to be what scholars find so difficult about Sextus’ treatment. Stough³⁰⁵ claims Sextus “identifies” ~the thing which appears³⁰⁶ with the impression received by the subject. Bailey agrees: “It seems indisputable that Sextus regards φαινόμενα and φαντασίαι as identical.”³⁰⁷ But they cannot resist the temptation to slide into dividing the subject and object again: “Any satisfactory account of the mature Pyrrhonist’s actions would have to treat them as the product of his beliefs about the way things phenomenologically appear to him.”³⁰⁸ But this is what Sextus explicitly questions: “It is investigated whether [the object] is in reality such as it appears.”³⁰⁹

Jñānagarbha elaborates: “Whatever appears to [ordinary people] even including cowherds, women, etc. occurs in a circumscribed sense, but not in reality, because an actual

²⁹⁷ BCA IX: 25: *yathā dr̥ṣṭam śrutam jñātam naiveha pratiśidhyate | satyataḥ kalpanā tvatra duḥkha hetur nivāryate*

²⁹⁸ *Satya dvaya* is often translated as “two truths”. For discussion of my choice of translation, see Appendix II.

²⁹⁹ MMK XXIV, 8

³⁰⁰ *saṃvṛti*

³⁰¹ *paramārtha*

³⁰² It is made for example by him at SDV 3.

³⁰³ *yathā darśana*

³⁰⁴ *Darśana* (like the Tibetan *snang*): it is a delicious phenomenological fact that this is a *present* participle of the same verb, *dr̥ś*, “see”, the feminine of whose *past* participle is *dr̥ṣṭi*, “belief”, “view”. (Garfield, 1996)

³⁰⁵ (1969, p. 119)

³⁰⁶ τὸ φαινόμενον

³⁰⁷ (2002, p. 218)

³⁰⁸ *Op. cit.* p. 219

³⁰⁹ OP I: 22 One is also tempted to ask what a *non-phenomenological* appearance might be! And then there is the vagueness of the English expression “the *way* something appears”. Furthermore it is worth being extremely circumspect with the verb “appear”: “Heat appears,” means equivocally that heat is the underlying object, which *causes* the appearance, or that it is the appearance itself (without any such metaphysical claim). An analogous difference can be drawn between “an appearance *of* heat” and “an appearance, heat” – further muddled by the former also potentially meaning the latter if the genitive is taken to be appositional, as English allows. And as if that were not enough there is the equivocation in “appearance” (as in many such nouns in English) between the process of appearing and its result.

object, corresponding to appearances, is held [by them] to be certain.”³¹⁰ That is, an ordinary person mistakenly relates to circumscribed “realities” as though they were the ultimate truth.

Now, turning to the right and wrong way to assent: as we have seen, the cardinal error for the Mādhyamika is *satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*. The term has been translated in many ways. It literally “means actual [*sat*] (corpo)reality [*kāya*] belief [*dr̥ṣṭi*]” and was taken by the Theravāda school to refer to the belief in an existent personal self. However the Mahāyāna is distinguished by its extending this “error of selfhood” beyond the personal self to all phenomena, so in our context perhaps the most felicitous explanatory rendering in English has been “believing the relative to be ultimate”³¹¹ or, using the terms for the two *satya* that I have chosen, “believing the circumscribed ‘is’ to be the ultimately true ‘is’”. So what Sextus appears to be doing in Madhyamaka terms is distinguishing what *is*, circumscribedly, and what is (mistakenly) believed of it, namely that it *is*, finally and truly. A detailed presentation of how to understand this “actual reality belief” is given in *The Āryatathāgataguhyā Sūtra* and Candrakīrti cites it in his commentary on Nāgārjuna’s seemingly bizarre claim that the Buddha did not teach self, or no self, or some combination of them.³¹² In this sūtra the Buddha describes at length and variously what it is to understand this mistaken “actual reality belief”: it is not to give rise to such conceptions as a self, or indeed any beliefs, but not to hold onto the belief in (or the view of) this non-rousing. Understanding of “actual reality” is referred to by the “three doors to liberation”: empty (of particular being)³¹³, signless³¹⁴, and purposeless³¹⁵: he says that actual reality never existed, and has always been an invention or a fantasy, and then immediately refines this to say that it is not even something which could be considered the object of an invention or an imagination: “It is not imagined; it is not analytically conceptualised.”³¹⁶ The same sūtra synonymizes pacification of actual reality belief and pacification of certain kinds of assent or acquiescence: “The calming down of afflictions means [...] the calming down of ~acquiescent cognition³¹⁷, [...] ~taking [things] to heart³¹⁸, [...] ~mistaking the false for the true³¹⁹, [...] causation and objective reality³²⁰, [...] insufficient

³¹⁰ *SDVV* on *SDV* 3: *mthong ba dang mthun par dngos po'i don nges par 'dzin pa'i phyr ro*

³¹¹ This is the choice of Ramanan (1966).

³¹² *PP* on *MMK* XVIII: 6

³¹³ *śūnya*

³¹⁴ *animitta*

³¹⁵ *apraṇihita*

³¹⁶ *Na parikalpyate na vikalpyate*: here we begin to feel the cumbersomeness of English: these two terms are passive verbs in the Sanskrit, without any separable adjectival sense (either as “unimagined” or as “unimaginable”), and even the subject “it” has no equivalent in the Sanskrit syntax. English by the way it is set up is afflicted with inevitable reifying suggestiveness.

³¹⁷ *samjñā*

³¹⁸ *manasikara*

³¹⁹ *viparyāsa*

³²⁰ *ārambhaṇa*

understanding, becoming and thirst, [...] the creation of “I” and “mine”, [...] the belief in annihilation³²¹ and eternity³²²... [which] means the calming down of ~actual reality belief.”

Nāgārjuna writes: “Those who do not understand the distinction between these two ways of being fail to comprehend the profound reality of the Awakened One’s teachings. Without relying on the conventional, the ultimate cannot be indicated; without realizing the ultimate, suffering cannot be transcended.”³²³

Reasoning in accordance with appearances

In the course of explaining how Inspection might justly be considered a system, Sextus mentions³²⁴ that it involves not just suspension-inducing reductios but also “reasoning in accordance with appearances” in order to discover “how it is possible to live rightly”. What he means by that is a life “comfortable to the customs³²⁵ of our country, and its laws³²⁶ and institutions³²⁷, and to our own instinctive feelings³²⁸.” Later he stresses somewhat wearily, apparently much bothered by attacks on his project made on ignorant grounds, that appearances are not refuted; and he clarifies that by feelings he means “affective sense-impressions³²⁹ which ~induce our assent³³⁰ involuntarily.” “These,” he says, “are ‘the appearances’.”³³¹

Candrakīrti says: “If... phenomena are investigated, apart from suchness as their nature, nothing else is found. And so the truth of everyday convention should not be subjected to investigation.”³³² Arnold eloquently argues that Candrakīrti makes such statements in order to dismiss attempts to assert supposedly *better* versions of the conventional that by their ontological claims would conflict with the central Madhyamaka doctrine of interdependent co-arising as emptiness.³³³ Sextus is frequently read here as advocating something like a withdrawal of belief from only certain topics, namely philosophical ones³³⁴, but Madhyamaka is very clear that assent to the conventional does not mean restricting oneself to particular topics. For example, when

³²¹ *uccheda*

³²² *sasvatā*

³²³ *MMK XXIV: 8-10*

³²⁴ *OP I: 17*

³²⁵ ἔθη

³²⁶ νόμους

³²⁷ ἀγωγάς

³²⁸ οἰκεῖα πάθη

³²⁹ τὰ κατὰ φαντασίαν παθητικῆν

³³⁰ ἀβουλήτως ἡμᾶς ἄγοντα εἰς συγκατάθεσιν

³³¹ *OP I: 19*

³³² *MAV VI: 35*

³³³ (Arnold, 2005, pp. 117-9)

³³⁴ i.e. what gets named “urbane scepticism” as distinct from “rustic” (Sextus-Empiricus, 2000, p. xxiii) – the second term deriving from Galen’s *On the Differences in Pulses* 8: 711K (Pellegrin, 2010).

Nāgārjuna says, “We do not speak without assenting to the conventional,”³³⁵ it is actually part of a correction of a misunderstanding on the part of the opponents of his statement, “All things are empty [i.e. lack being in themselves].” They argue that to say all things lack being in themselves is like trying to prevent sound by saying “be quiet”. Nāgārjuna patiently points out that it is not own-being-less phenomena that are being prevented or refuted, for that would effectively be asserting own-being-*endowed* phenomena³³⁶; it is rather the own-being which is being refuted, by means of words which are effective exactly because *they themselves also lack own-being*, so the opponents’ “be quiet” analogy is inappropriate. It seems to me that this is what Sextus is getting at by his “correct life”, which he explicitly says is not just about ethics – but rather the correct use of conventional language according to local customs while recognizing that what ordinary people believe about that language (and their thoughts in it) is *rash and inappropriate*. However, Sextus never goes as far as the Mādhyamikas, to say that there is a state of pristine knowing for which all conceptual proliferation has ceased, even though conventions are still respected.

Familiarisation (Meditation)

Training in solitude

As we have seen, at least in Kamalaśīla’s *milieu*, it was expected that Thorough Inspection would be undertaken after training in pacification³³⁷, gaining ~confident control³³⁸ over the attention, or at least in conjunction with it.³³⁹ For this, solitude was strongly encouraged. For example, in the sixth chapter of *The Āryasaṃdhinirmocana Sūtra*, an authoritative manual for such training, the Buddha is recorded as having advised, as a preparation, “sitting in solitude at a remote place, completely absorbed inwardly.”³⁴⁰ Śāntideva begins the instructions on pacification in his chapter on mental equipoise with a description of the childishness of ordinary people dominated by their uncontrolled minds, and concludes: “Thus, on account of one’s association with someone else, one encounters adversity. I shall happily live alone with ~unafflicted mind³⁴¹. / One should flee far from a fool. One should gratify the encountered person with pleasantries, not with the intention of intimacy, but in the manner of a kind and impartial person. / Taking only what benefits Dharma, like a bee taking nectar from a flower, I shall live everywhere without

³³⁵ VV 28

³³⁶ Incidentally this is a distribution-forcing argument. See *supra*.

³³⁷ *śamatha*

³³⁸ *praśrabdhi*

³³⁹ The subject of the relative importance and sequence of calming and analysis was controversial from the beginning. See Walser’s discussion (2005, pp. 157-66). In the *Kīṭāgiri Sutta* (MN 70; PTS: M I 473) it is stated that which of the two is useful depends on the trainee’s propensities.

³⁴⁰ Chapter VI

³⁴¹ *Akliṣṭa mānasa*: it is worth noting the clearly quantifiable meaning of *akliṣṭa*, “untroubled”: while “untroubledness” is elsewhere coupled with *nirvāna* as the *culmination* of the path, here a presumably less absolute untroubledness is a prerequisite of *walking* it.

acquaintance, as if I had not existed before.”³⁴² Diogenes Laertius reports³⁴³ that Antigonus of Carystus recorded that Pyrrho “would withdraw from the world and live in solitude³⁴⁴, rarely showing himself to his relatives,” and that this was in response to his companion Anaxarchus being reproached by “an Indian” for courtly fawning.

Sextus nowhere however suggests there are preconditions for Inspection, except to say that those that discovered it were “of great nature”³⁴⁵, and we know nothing about his personal life. The Mādhyamikas similarly referred to themselves as “of great selfhood”, however. For example Nāgārjuna, having shown how the acceptance of entities as real leads to beliefs, afflictions and disputes, calls³⁴⁶ the one who does *not* entertain such a wrong cognition and who thus has no proposition to make or dispute to wage a “great self”³⁴⁷.

Conduct

Non-quietism

“We cannot remain wholly inactive,” Sextus says.³⁴⁸ As we have already seen, the qualified assent he makes, to affections necessitated by appearances – and not to claims about the non-evident – is what allows him to live life. It is, he says³⁴⁹, what distinguishes Inspection from the “persuasiveness”-ethic of the New Academy: “without holding beliefs, ~to conform to life³⁵⁰, so that we might not be inactive³⁵¹.”

The connection between not constructing beliefs and not falling into unworldly quietism is made by Nāgārjuna when he says, “Worldly norms are not violated.” That this is not easy to understand he admits: “Being ignorant about what those who go by the way things are have said, one comes to fear this immaculate pronouncement.”³⁵² Āryadeva says: “If there is something that can be done, this teaching does not lead to withdrawal from all action.”³⁵³

³⁴² *BCA* VIII: 14-16

³⁴³ *DL* IX: 63

³⁴⁴ ἔρημάζειν – from which our “hermit”.

³⁴⁵ *OP* I: 12, μεγαλοφυῆ: probably a genetic accolade; cf. Sanskrit cognate *mahā-bhūta*, “great being” or “great element”.

³⁴⁶ *YS* 50

³⁴⁷ *mahātma*

³⁴⁸ *OP* I: 23

³⁴⁹ *OP* I: 226, end

³⁵⁰ ἐπομένων τῷ βίῳ

³⁵¹ ἀνενεργητοί

³⁵² *SS* 70

³⁵³ *CS* VIII: 9 For more on this see Part II: Chapter 3: Inactivity objection.

Guides of lifestyle

Sextus describes, as we have seen, the lifestyle of someone engaged in Inspection as comfortable to the country's customs, laws and institutions and to her unavoidable feelings. Later he reiterates that “Adhering to appearances, we live in accordance with the normal rules of life, without believing in them,” and he elaborates on how the appearances and normal rules regulate such a life without being believed in: by means of “nature's guidance” (sense and thought capabilities), “affections” (the unavoidable – such as hunger and thirst), “the tradition of customs and laws” (principally the conventional distinction between piety and impiety), and “the instruction of the arts” (insofar as they are adopted).³⁵⁴

Candrakīrti cites a discourse of the Buddha's from the *Jewel Pile (Ratnakūṭa)*: “The world contends with me. I do not contend with the world. What is agreed upon in the world to exist, I too agree that it exists. What is agreed upon in the world not to exist, I too agree that it does not exist.”³⁵⁵

In Buddhism generally the monastic disciplines of the various schools present exemplary cases for their rules which also evince conformity with local custom.³⁵⁶

Of central importance in evaluating whether the two projects here would concur is how much of a stake each have in “piety” and especially a particular brand of it.³⁵⁷

Circumscribed applicability of speech: mirror language

As we mentioned, at the outset Sextus is keen to point out that what is said in his entire treatise is not to be taken as a statement of belief about the way things actually are, but provisionally as what appears at that time.³⁵⁸ Later he anticipates in particular that his elaborate exposition of the verbal formulae frequently employed by Pyrrhoneans will cause confusion, so says explicitly that these ideas are not held as beliefs. He distinguishes this approach from those who imagine that what they say refers to an underlying reality: “For whereas the believer posits the things about which he is said to hold beliefs as ~really existent³⁵⁹, one engaged in Inspection does not posit these formulae as really existent at all.”³⁶⁰ A sentence later, he repeats this yet again, as though aware of others' liability to misunderstand.³⁶¹ In this sense, among the Greek schools, the Pyrrhoneans are unique. Their style of arguments is not just dialectical; it is dialectical while

³⁵⁴ *OP* I: 23-24

³⁵⁵ Chapter 1: *trisaṃvaranirdeśaparivarta*, in *PP* on *MMK* XVIII: 8, cf. in the Pāli canon *SN* III.

³⁵⁶ See for example Cabezón (1991).

³⁵⁷ I approach this difficult point, armed with the survey of ethical comparisons from Part II: Chapter 3, in Part III: Chapter 2.

³⁵⁸ *OP* I: 4

³⁵⁹ ὑπάρχον

³⁶⁰ *OP* I: 14

³⁶¹ *OP* I: 15, end

forswearing endorsement of a common referent of the parties' terms. It is *ad hominem* argumentation, “not in the pejorative sense of an irrelevant attack on someone’s character, but because it relies solely on the proponent’s own views.”³⁶²

The Madhyamaka, uniquely among the Indian schools, make the same qualification. Nāgārjuna says: “Although the disciples of Buddha understand ‘no I’ still they speak in terms of ‘I’ following the world; it is not that they entertain the notion of an underlying ‘I’.”³⁶³ And³⁶⁴: “This speech [of mine, refuting the real being of all phenomena] ~does not itself belong to real being³⁶⁵.” And, notoriously: “~I do not have any thesis³⁶⁶, so no such fault [as applies to such theses] applies to me.”³⁶⁷ Nāgārjuna’s statement is perhaps the most succinct expression we have of the Madhyamaka endeavour to restrict themselves in logical argument to the tenets held by their opponents: this allows them to reveal the illogicality or contradiction with experience in those tenets without ever having to offer replacements. How this is not nihilism is also explained by pointing out that nihilism requires a commitment too: “By taking refuge in Awakening, there is no thesis, to be thought or developed. Having no stake in the doctrine of non-existence, how could one be thought to be one of its advocates?”³⁶⁸ A distinctly psychological process is described, of progressively deeper understanding. Although he frequently characterizes phenomena using the term “emptiness”³⁶⁹, referring to their lacking any ~existence in themselves³⁷⁰, Nāgārjuna comes clean to say³⁷¹: “Nothing is to be said to be empty, or non-empty, or both, or neither: these are narrated³⁷² only for the purpose of ~instructive communication³⁷³.” The culmination is expressed thus: “When ~the field of action³⁷⁴ of thought ceases, there ceases³⁷⁵ ~anything for language to refer to³⁷⁶: the way phenomena are is without arising or perishing, i.e. *nirvāṇa*.”³⁷⁷ Similarly Āryadeva, in a chapter devoted to this extraordinary kind of communication, in response to an opponent’s objection, ““If emptiness is established by means of your arguments, then [at least] your arguments are not empty!”” counters: “[Your] propositions

³⁶² (Thorsrud, 2009, p. 5)

³⁶³ *MPPŚ* 64a (Ramanan, p. 103)

³⁶⁴ *VV* 24

³⁶⁵ *na svābhāvīkam*

³⁶⁶ *Nāsti ca mama pratijñā*: Incidentally the Sanskrit *pratijñā* is cognate with Greek κατάγνωσις, “judgment, condemnation”.

³⁶⁷ *VV* 29

³⁶⁸ *RA* 60

³⁶⁹ *śūnyatā*

³⁷⁰ *svabhāva*

³⁷¹ *MMK* XXII: 11

³⁷² *kathyate*: cf. Sextus’ ἱστορικῶς ἀπαγγέλλομεν (*OP* I: 4)

³⁷³ *prajñāpty-*

³⁷⁴ *gocara*

³⁷⁵ *nivṛttam*

³⁷⁶ *abhīdhātavyam*

³⁷⁷ *MMK* XVIII: 7 Note that such seemingly dogmatic assertions should always be taken in the context of the Mādhyamikas’ further analysis showing that to believe in absence of such qualities is equally absurd.

[about reality] are not different to [our] arguments. Thus [our refuting] argument is not really existent.”³⁷⁸ Elsewhere he furnishes us with an evocative simile: “In order to refute false conceptualisations, we expound a refutation but there is really nothing to be refuted. It is like the case of the foolish person who, seeing a mirage in summer and letting the false idea of water arise in himself runs towards it. If one who knows says to him, ‘There is no water,’ he then destroys the false idea but he *does not destroy the water* (which was never there).”³⁷⁹ Similarly Nāgārjuna says his speech operating on beliefs is like a conjured person which can affect another conjured person, or we might say a person in a film who can affect someone else in a film. Candrakīrti, responding to the objection that a critique of the meaningfulness of language would apply equally to the Madhyamaka and render it impotent and therefore negligible, says: “[You object:] ‘Speaking thus, you are yourselves confounded... You only argue to defeat your rivals!’ ... [We reply:] *A reflection is not real, but using it we nevertheless smarten our appearance.* In just the same way it should be understood that arguments have the power *to cleanse wisdom’s face...*”³⁸⁰

Self-voiding voiding expressions

Sextus sheds further light on what he means, by characterising such speech, which in various ways robs the opponents’ ideas of certain reference to reality, as also robbing itself of that certain reference! He says³⁸¹ such speech literally ~cancels itself or is expressed to be cancelled out³⁸². Modern logicians have agonised a great deal over this due to their field’s overlooking the *process* or *therapeutic* aspect of thought and communication.³⁸³ In his supplementary notes on the formulae of Inspection Sextus gives the famous simile of the purgative³⁸⁴ which purges the humours from the body and ~carries itself out³⁸⁵ as well.³⁸⁶ In his disproof of proof he links this to two further similes – fire consuming itself and using a ladder to climb only to kick it away.³⁸⁷

The central metaphor of the Madhyamaka is the emptiness³⁸⁸ of phenomena. When we read in translation Nāgārjuna’s famous description³⁸⁹ of emptiness as the expeller of all beliefs, and of those who thus believe in it as beyond help, what might escape us is that in the Sanskrit both “expeller” (*niḥsarāṇa*) and “beyond help” (*asādhyān*) have heavy medical connotations.

³⁷⁸ CS XVI: 21

³⁷⁹ ŚŚV on ŚŚ X: 12

³⁸⁰ MAV VI: 171-5

³⁸¹ OP I: 14, end, and 15

³⁸² συμπεριγράφει, περιγράφεσθαι

³⁸³ (Castagnoli, 2010)

³⁸⁴ τὰ καθαρτικά

³⁸⁵ συνεξάγει

³⁸⁶ OP I: 206

³⁸⁷ AL II: 480-1

³⁸⁸ śūnyatā

³⁸⁹ MMK XIII: 8 *

Nihsarana, “(causing) flowing out”, is in fact related to the noun *sara*, meaning “cathartic, purgative, laxative”³⁹⁰ and *asādhyā* literally means “incurable”.³⁹¹ The simile comes from the *Kāśyapa Chapter, Kāśyapaparivarta* of the *Jewel Heap, Ratnakūṭa*: “It is like this, Kāśyapa. Should some man be sick, and should a physician give medicine to him, and should that medicine, having evacuated all his diseases, not itself come to be cleared from his viscera, what do you think, Kāśyapa? Shall the sick man be freed of sickness if that medicine, having evacuated all the diseases settled in his viscera, would not itself depart his viscera?’ Kāśyapa said, ‘No, Blessed One. The disease of that man would be more serious if that medicine, having evacuated all the diseases, was settled in his viscera and would not depart.’³⁹² The worthwhile one said, ‘Just so, Kāśyapa, *śūnyatā* is the remedy for all items of belief, but then, Kāśyapa, one for whom *śūnyatā* itself becomes a belief I speak of as incurable.’”³⁹³

As in Sextus’ simile, then, this emptying process is also reflexive. As Candrakīrti says in his *Introduction* to Nāgārjuna’s treatise, “That all things lack particular being is what the Sage described as emptiness. And by the nature of this very emptiness, emptiness, he said, is also empty. This emptiness of what is known as emptiness is ‘the emptiness of emptiness’: it was set forth to counteract the thought that emptiness is something real.”³⁹⁴ Nāgārjuna links the voiding and self-voiding to the fact that both the phenomena in question and his own questioning speech are part of the interdependent nexus: “If things existed in themselves they would exist without causes and conditions. However, they do not exist like this. Therefore they are said to be without autonomous being, and because they are without autonomous being, empty. Therefore it follows that my speech, arising in interdependence, is in the same way without autonomous being, and because it is without autonomous being, it is empty.” Āryadeva reports a sparring with an opponent over the Madhyamaka’s emptying formulae: “[If you object,] ‘Some phenomena must exist because your refutation exists; else if there is no refutation, then other phenomena exist [unrefuted],’ [we reply,] the refutation is like what is refuted.”³⁹⁵ Bhāvaviveka, remarkably, uses both the ladder and fire similes for the progressively deeper understanding with respect to the two kinds of being: “Insight is [...] the stairs to the throne of release, and the fire that burns the fuel of the mental afflictions. [...] The insight that has as its basis the domain of the six senses and their objects is known as ‘conventional insight’. Insight causes the remainderless destruction of the net of conceptualizations. When insight is still, free of all conceptual projection [...] then it is insight

³⁹⁰ In turn from the root *śr* meaning “flow” in all senses and the origin of English “stream” and “street”.

³⁹¹ Even the term *śūnyatā* itself has etymological connections with medical terms: *śūna*, “bloated, swollen and hollow” and *śundhayati, śodhayati* “remove impurities or noxious substances”.

³⁹² We discuss this with respect to Aristocles’ mockery in Part III: Chapter 2.

³⁹³ Candrakīrti cites this passage to support his commentary on *MMK XIII: 8*. Compare the non-reflexive purgative simile in the Pāli canon, in the *Discourse on Purging, Virecana Sutta, AN X: 108 (PTS: A v 218)* where the Eight Rightnesses of the Noble Path acts as purgatives to their wrong opposites.

³⁹⁴ *MA VI: 185-6*

³⁹⁵ *ŚŚ X: 1*

belonging to the ultimate nature of reality. [...] It is a matter of steps: indeed without the stairs of correct conventional being, the ascent to the highest throne cannot be performed.”³⁹⁶

Suspension-inducing manners of speech

Sextus lists³⁹⁷ some verbal formulae commonly used by Pyrrhonists to carry out the project as described. The royal formula of Pyrrhonism, “Not more...”³⁹⁸, has no equivalent in Madhyamaka, but its import may, as we have seen, be related by “sameness” and its synonymity with emptiness.³⁹⁹ On non-assertion, Sextus says the Inspective philosophers refuse to assert or deny anything, and not because they wish to imply something about reality itself but merely to state that they are currently in that condition.⁴⁰⁰ Nāgārjuna says, “In reality [the Buddha] has not taught any dharma,”⁴⁰¹ and of course, “I have no thesis.”⁴⁰² The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* (*Daśabhūmika Sūtra*)⁴⁰³ speaks of ten kinds of equality among phenomena by which one enters the ground of perfect wisdom, the tenth of which is their equality insofar as they are neither asserted nor denied. “I am in suspense”⁴⁰⁴ expresses the mental state that we have seen is expressed in Madhyamaka as *nivṛtti*.⁴⁰⁵ “I determine nothing,” and, “All things are undetermined,”⁴⁰⁶ Sextus links explicitly to not affirming or denying again, in both cases stressing that the meaning is that “it *appears so* at that juncture to the inspective person”. On, “All things are unapprehended,” and, “I am unapprehending,”⁴⁰⁷ he again emphasizes that this characterizes how things appear, not how they are by nature. We have seen that Nāgārjuna frequently speaks of things ~not being found⁴⁰⁸ in experience. And he less frequently uses verbs related to apprehension of objects, “If, with correct pristine knowing, one sees that which, because of the condition of being naïve, arises, no origination or destruction whatsoever is apprehended.”⁴⁰⁹ “Perhaps”, “possibly”, and “maybe”⁴¹⁰ have no obvious equivalents in the Madhyamaka verbal forms, but they are used to undermine believed propositions by means of their insertion into the latter implying also the counter-proposition equally being affirmed, as in Sextus’ last formula, “to

³⁹⁶ *MH* III: 6-12

³⁹⁷ *OP* I: 187-

³⁹⁸ *OP* I: 188-191

³⁹⁹ See “equal force” *supra*.

⁴⁰⁰ *OP* I: 192-3

⁴⁰¹ From *ŚS* 70.

⁴⁰² *VV* 29

⁴⁰³ Candrakīrti’s MAv is taught in Tibetan colleges to be a commentary on *MMK* and this sūtra.

⁴⁰⁴ *OP* I: 196

⁴⁰⁵ See “Suspension” *supra*.

⁴⁰⁶ *OP* I: 197-9

⁴⁰⁷ *OP* I: 200-1

⁴⁰⁸ *na vidyate*

⁴⁰⁹ *YŚ* 10. The Sanskrit word for “is apprehended” is *upalabhyate*, *labhyate* being cognate with the Greek *lepsis*.

⁴¹⁰ *OP* I: 194-5

every argument there is an equal argument opposed,”⁴¹¹ a critique which is as we have seen also made by Nāgārjuna when he says, “If there is a proposition, there is a counter-proposition.” He characteristically goes one step further than Sextus, however, when he adds, “And neither of them is truth.”⁴¹²

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Of the 33 ways the projects characterize themselves that we have considered here, then,

2 of the Mādhyamikas’ self-characterizations appear *different* to Sextus’: their assertion that for those who do not understand Inspection, eternalist belief is better than annihilationist belief; and their assertion that doubt (in the form of two-minded wavering) is transcended by means of Inspection (although the issue of whether such wavering is found at Sextus’ impasses is difficult to resolve);

15 of the Mādhyamikas’ self-characterizations appear *similar* to Sextus’ but with minor differences: the erroneousness of both positive and negative beliefs, and the distinction from negative dogmatism (the difference arising in both cases when the epistemological/ontological distinction is emphasized); project origin in anomalies and the quest for truth; exposée of contradictions; recourse to a named exemplar (the exemplar being different!); deconstructive modes; distribution-forcing; suspension; the four seals; equal force (the difference being that Madhyamaka seems to see the equality as more radical); transcendence of troubles; reasoning in accord with appearances (Sextus without Madhyamaka’s explicit transcendence of conceptuality); training in solitude (for Pyrrho if not for Sextus); conventionality as a guide for lifestyle (but potentially with a greater stake in what constitutes piety for the Mādhyamikas); and suspension-inducing manners of speech; and

15 of the self-characterizations are *closely equivalent*: the non-absoluteness of the characterizations; the exemplar’s reluctance to be followed; what Inspection is; that it is an ability to inspect; that investigation is carried out; that believers are diseased and to be cured of their belief-based illness; belief as self-love; the matching of remedies to the illness; deconstructive modes; universal acid arguments; compassionately helping others out of delusion; qualified assent; non-quietism; and the circumscribed applicability of speech.

⁴¹¹ OP I: 202-5

⁴¹² RĀ II: 4cd: *pakṣāddhi pratipakṣaḥ syādubhayaṃ tacca nārthataḥ*

It would seem then that the two sides largely would accept each other as undertaking the same project. We now turn to how closely they resemble each other in applying these principles.

Part II: Specific Critiques

AIMS

We now turn to the arguments the two projects, Sextan Inspection (σκέψις) and Madhyamaka Investigation, deploy in their detailed critiques of beliefs or alleged certain knowledge about specific topics and throughout ask:

- (1) whether individuals engaging in the two projects would accept each other's arguments as successfully prosecuting their own intentions, i.e. whether each would accept the other as within the same fold, and if not, on what grounds the exclusion would be made; and
- (2) whether interpretations of either project's detailed application might illuminate the other's.

METHOD

Analysis of Sextus' arguments

I considered Sextus Empiricus' major treatises (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism: OP, Against Logicians: AL, Against Physicists: AP, Against Ethicists: AE*)⁴¹³ and analysed all their arguments. *OP* II and III with a few exceptions closely follow the sequence of topics in *AL*, *AP* and *AE*, in that order, such that it was possible to interleave the former in the latter. The combined arguments were then fitted into a branched classification, which could then be used as a fast index to them when trawling the Buddhist texts for equivalents.

Division of topics

Sextus considers various classifications of philosophical beliefs but for his analyses settles on the tripartite one⁴¹⁴ – into (1) the “logical” (what is true and how it is grounded in criteria, signs, and proof), (2) the “physical” (theories of causation and the make-up of the physical world and of mathematics) and (3) the “ethical” (what the purpose of life is). In each case he exposes the vanity of claiming certainty in these beliefs.

Intriguingly, in Buddhism, from its inception, liberation from delusion was taught to have three entrances or doors (*trimokṣa mukha/dvāra*): signlessness (*animittatā*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and purposelessness or wishlessness (*apraṇihitatā*). Originally referring to the ascetic-provoked psychological state of an arhat, they came with the inception of the Mahāyāna to be applied to all

⁴¹³ For the equivalence with the traditional but misleading citation of these texts as *Adversus Mathematicos (M)* see the abbreviations before the bibliography.

⁴¹⁴ The typical post-Aristotelian division.

phenomena. The three were now explicitly associated with *middle way investigation*, as its *discovery* (and not a creation): in the *Kāśyapaparivarta* the Buddha says: “The real investigation of dharmas does not *make* dharmas empty because of emptiness, [rather] dharmas are *already* empty,” and similarly, *mutatis mutandis*, for the other two, then, “Insofar as there is no essencelessness of dharmas as an essence [itself] and insofar as no essence is found, such indeed is the investigation, Kāśyapa, that is said to be the true investigation of dharmas and to be the middle way.”⁴¹⁵ As for *what* discoveries are referred to, the *Ratnakūṭa* collection includes a sūtra called *The Demonstration of the Inconceivable State of Buddhahood* where Mañjuśrī asks the Buddha what the state of supreme enlightenment is as attained by the Buddha and receives this reply: “It is the state of *emptiness*, because all beliefs are equal. It is the state of *signlessness*, because all reasons are equal. It is the state of *purposelessness*, because the three worlds are equal.”⁴¹⁶

Since these “three entrances to liberation” match Sextus’ divisions and the import of his arguments almost exactly, I will use these as my broad headings.

Buddhist texts consulted

These are the primary sources listed at the beginning of the bibliography.

Criteria for drawing parallels between arguments

It should be realised that “argument” here is not used in the strict sense (in propositional logic) but can apply to a series or even system of propositions. Furthermore, I extract arguments at various levels of premisses or justification. For example, one argument, that because there are equally convincing arguments for and against the existence of cause it is unfounded to favour the belief in its existence over the belief in its non-existence or *vice versa*, is found in both projects, but the details of the premisses, i.e. the justifications for the two sides, differ in some details. Despite these differences, I classify the broad argument among those which have similar content

⁴¹⁵ (Walser, 2005, pp. 117-8) The later Mahāyāna would reinterpret them yet again: in the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* the Buddha says: “Mahāmati, when I speak about the *tathāgatagarbha*, sometimes I call it ‘emptiness’, ‘signlessness’ and ‘purposelessness’ [...] or ‘nirvāṇa’ [...] or similar expressions.” Cf. the translation by Red Pine *aka* Porter (2012) p. 110

⁴¹⁶ “The three worlds” is a typical technical term succinctly expressing the ethical implications of *karma* or action, namely the subsequent arising of personal existence in one of those worlds (the desire realm, the form realm and the formless realm), where exactly depending on the nature of the *karma*. Cf. translation *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras* by C. C. Chang (1983) p. 27. There are other ways of defining the doors to liberation: for example, ŚŚ I: 13 links signlessness (not purposelessness) with ethics; *MPPŚ* says emptiness is everything’s non-substantiality, signlessness is not believing in determinate natures, which *give rise* to afflictions, and purposelessness means not resolving to do deeds *that arise* from the afflictions (Ramanan, pp. 294-7).

in the two projects. So this should not be taken to imply that the premisses of the argument are justified in exactly the same way in the two projects.

Drawing parallels between arguments expressed in different languages requires some awareness of the idiosyncracies of the individual languages themselves. Sextus' treatises are of course in Greek, and the Buddhist texts I consider are almost all in Sanskrit, the remainder either in Pāli (which is in turn very closely related to Sanskrit) or in Tibetan translations made from Sanskrit⁴¹⁷. Now Tibetan is in the Tibeto-Burman language group and thus bears very few syntactic similarities to Sanskrit, but these canonical translations were rendered in a formalized way reproducing the Sanskrit sentence structure so closely, and using such strictly controlled vocabulary equivalence based on specially prepared dictionaries, that blind back-translations can be made which are almost identical to the originals. Thus in this study we effectively have in most cases a comparison to make between an argument in Hellenic Greek and arguments in Sanskrit. If the ordinary deployment of grammar in the two languages were radically different this could make comparison very difficult. However we are somewhat lucky in this case insofar as Greek and Sanskrit are closely related Indoeuropean languages, so closely related in fact that in many instances meaningful Greek can be produced from Sanskrit by means of transcription rules, without translation.⁴¹⁸ Furthermore for the purposes of this research, for an English-speaking community, it is relevant that English too, as an Indoeuropean language, is related to both Greek and Sanskrit, and that, although both of those are dead languages, both have significant bodies of translations into, and scholarly studies in, English, and, in the case of Madhyamaka, thanks to the presence of Tibetan Buddhism and its continuous living commentarial tradition, we have uncommonly vivid access to the meanings of these ancient texts. What all this means is that there is little which is obscure due to the constraints on accuracy imposed by our ability to translate these languages into English. However some important Madhyamaka root texts are not discursive but mnemonic and in verse: the style of the verses is frequently so sparse that without commentary they are unintelligible. Furthermore Sanskrit is a language with enormous flexibility for deriving words from each other, especially (but not only) by compound-formation, which makes for an extreme richness of allusive possibilities even in simple expressions. Thus, even when the meaning has been narrowed down by commentary, it is important to be aware that a particular Sanskrit expression is frequently hypernymous to an entire suite of English

⁴¹⁷ It is the peculiarity of study of Sanskrit Buddhist texts that Tibetan translations should be so important, insofar as many of the original Sanskrit texts have now been lost, through the resurgence of Hinduism and the depredations of Islam in India from the 10th Century CE onwards. It should be noted also that just because a Sanskrit text is extant does not mean it is more reliable than the Tibetan translation, as for many texts such "originals" are manuscripts from Nepal whose copying, done by communities who no longer understood the language they were writing, is sometimes infamously inaccurate.

⁴¹⁸ The full Greek declension system of the definite article can be produced from Sanskrit using a dozen or so transcription rules, for example. The reverse is not possible, however, due to Sanskrit's more extensive declension and conjugation systems.

alternatives.⁴¹⁹ As we shall see, this means that it is sometimes possible to equate what seem to be distinct arguments in English to a single argument in Sanskrit.⁴²⁰ A related issue which comes up repeatedly, is unavoidable, and should be borne in mind throughout, is the tendency in English as in many modern languages (due to fixation of word order, loss of complex declension and conjugation, written word separation, etc.) inevitably to suggest reified syntactic parts (such as an independent subject, which subsequently undergoes some process) whereas Sanskrit and to some extent Greek could avoid this (due to mobile parts of speech, sophisticated declension and conjugation, fusedness of words into compound-like blocks, etc.).

For each argument in Sextus' treatises, I consider three elements:

its content,

its form, and

the specific examples (cases, similes & metaphors) used to support it.

I note from the Buddhist texts arguments with shared content, with shared form, or with shared examples. Shared content can range from what amounts to a natural Greek-Sanskrit translation, or a paraphrase with identical implications, (both of which I class as "*close equivalents*") to arguments which overlap in meaning but are not mutually inclusive, such as arguments with the same conclusions made from different premisses (and these I class as "*similar arguments*"). I then list unshared arguments used by Sextus⁴²¹, and ask whether there are any which actually *counteract* the Madhyamaka project. It will be noticed that I do not subject the arguments to criticism in themselves unless this is relevant to the comparison: this does not mean I find them equally persuasive!

⁴¹⁹ Hypernymy is the phenomenon of one expression (in this case in Sanskrit) having a semantic field which includes those of a series of other expressions (in this case in English) which are each narrower and therefore potentially mutually distinct.

⁴²⁰ In these cases I have usually endeavoured to provide the original Sanskrit for reference, along with what I consider a minimally hyponymous English translation (i.e. the one which covers as much as possible of the semantic field of the Sanskrit), in appendix III.

⁴²¹ Due to the limitations of this study, and the vastness of the Mādhyamikas' corpus of writings (unlike Sextus'), I consider only the unshared arguments that occur in Sextus' works. Ideally of course account would also be taken of all unshared arguments that occur only in the Madhyamaka texts. Here I limit myself to the most flagrant instances of them. To have qualms about whether two philosophical schools can be viably compared like this is, I believe, very over-cautious here: there is little evidence that either the Pyrrhonists or the Mādhyimakas' ever considered themselves to be a single philosophical school, and the chief exponents of both are separated by centuries. Nāgārjuna's texts vary in doctrinal content very sharply with the course of his career, such that little beyond the name "Madhyamaka" unites them, and even that name can be unreliable: the great 11th-century Nyingma scholar Rongzom Mahāpaṇḍita for example spent much of his career attacking "Madhyamaka" despite being what is now called a Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika, because he used it of what is now called Svātantrika Madhyamaka. (Köppl, 2008)

Chapter 1: That there is no reason (*animittatā*⁴²²)

Introduction

The texts of both projects, Sextan Inspection and Madhyamaka, include thorough and radical critiques of what we may say in general are considered to be the “reason” or “grounding” (λόγος, *nimitta*) for beliefs. In this chapter for comparison I deal with all the arguments from Sextus’ *Against Logicians* (AL I & II)⁴²³ and the allied arguments in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (OP II), because they constitute a strictly delimited set of arguments relating only to this topic. Sextus considers broadly four kinds of reason for believing something:

1. the standard of validity or authority in cognition⁴²⁴ (to decide which beliefs are true),
2. “the true” itself,
3. indicative signs (revealing what is true but hidden) and
4. proofs or demonstrations (of what is true)⁴²⁵.

This is not, as far as I know, a typical division of the material that Buddhists would make. For them, within so-called “valid means of cognition” or “epistemic instruments” (*pramāṇa*) considered most broadly, two were their principal concern: firstly direct perception⁴²⁶ (which Sextus deals with in 1 and 2 and a little in 3) and secondly inferences⁴²⁷, whether they be from signs (which Sextus deals with in 3) or by means of proof (in 4). These two were to be classified within Yogācāra Buddhism, moreover, as the only two kinds of *pramāṇa* acceptable at all, from Dignāga (c. 480-540 CE) on. “The true” in Buddhist terms is the object of valid cognition, the *prameya*⁴²⁸. Personal (including divine) and scriptural authorities (which Sextus considers as part of 1), while denied validity in all schools of Buddhism, were still discussed with non-Buddhists under the heading of *pramāṇa*. We shall see that while the various Buddhist schools accepted and denied various combinations of these criteria and authorities, the project with which we are here principally concerned, Thorough Inspection (*vipaśyanā*) as performed by the Madhyamaka Buddhists, just like the Inspection (σκέψις) performed by the Sextan Pyrrhonists, systematically undermines the credibility of *all* these supposed authorities.

⁴²² Taking *animittatā* as defined by the Ratnakūṭa sūtras (see “division of topics” *supra*). It had other meanings in earlier Buddhism and other schools.

⁴²³ This rather antiquated title is used for convenience of reference, but it should be noted that Sextus is attacking a much broader category than what are now called logicians – rather, anyone who deploys these λόγοι or rationalizations of belief, so a better modern English translation of the treatise’ title would be something like *Against Rationalizers*.

⁴²⁴ κριτήριο

⁴²⁵ Sextus says explicitly that these are a subset of “signs” (OP II: 134)

⁴²⁶ *Pratyakṣa*: it is to be noted that it includes not just the five kinds of sense perception but also ‘mental’ perception – for example the remembering of sensation.

⁴²⁷ *anumāna*

⁴²⁸ This term is grammatically related to *pramāṇa* as the potential object to the instrument or agent.

I draw Madhyamaka equivalents mainly from two texts of Nāgārjuna, *Dispeller of Obstacles (Vigrahavyāvartanī)* and *Pulverizer (Vaidalyaprakaraṇa)*, since these texts focus most particularly on deconstructing epistemology.

Comparison of Arguments⁴²⁹

Any criterion, truth, sign or proof is either controvertible or unjustifiable

Sextus' opening argument in his treatment of reasons for belief⁴³⁰ is what appears to be a devastating critique of the illogicality of the idea of a supposed criterion of truth. He points out that any assertion that a criterion can be identified is, if not certified by a criterion itself, a mere assertion whose opposite can be as effectively asserted and which can therefore be dismissed, or, if with the certification of a criterion, either based on a circular fallacy and equally unfounded, since this certifying criterion would be in the same predicament (i.e. yet to be established as such), or involving an infinite regress on any attempt to establish it, each certifying criterion requiring certification by another, *ad infinitum*.

Identical or very similar controvertible-or-unjustifiable dilemmas are deployed subsequently so many times against so many specific cases of authority, throughout his treatise, that we can be justified in calling it Sextus' "master argument" against them. For example it is deployed against several kinds of supposed criteria – namely the assertion⁴³¹ that the human being is the criterion (made generally by any living being, or specifically by a human, which latter of course involves the additional fault of begging the question), that a non-human living being (ζῷον)⁴³² is the criterion, and that some particular human being is the criterion⁴³³, that the so-

⁴²⁹ Sextus begins with a huge section (*AL* I: 27-262) reporting the firmly-held views of many other philosophers and schools on the criterion, not with the intention to persuade us of their merit but seemingly to underline their lack of consensus and by extension of trustworthiness. I do not have the opportunity here to compare these doctrines with the Buddhists' (and much less with their interlocutors') although there are interesting parallels between Anacharsis the Scythian's refutation of authority and Śākyamuni's (especially given the Scythia/Śaka/Śākya connection), and between Gorgias' refutations and the Mādhyamikas'; and the case of mistaking the rope for a snake until the impression is tested, which Sextus attributes (*AL* I: 187-7; *OP* I: 227-8) to Carneades, is a staple of Indian philosophy which seems to have first been used by Āryadeva to suggest what happens when one sees through the delusion of ordinary beliefs (*HV* 1 – but the authorship of the treatise is contested and it is given to much later Dignāga in the Chinese canon, and cf. McEvilley (1982, pp. 25-6)).

⁴³⁰ *OP* II: 19-20

⁴³¹ *OP* II: 34-36

⁴³² *OP* II: 36. The term covers animals, spirits and gods. By translating the term as "animal", Bury and later Annas and Barnes conjure up images of Cheshire cats and such being the source of all knowledge, and conceal the obvious and most interesting applicability of the argument, namely to the assertion of the authority of God.

⁴³³ *AL* I: 315-316 where instead of pointing out the infinite regress Sextus merely points out that a further criterion is required and that no such further criterion has been established.

called “apprehensive presentation” is the criterion⁴³⁴, and indeed against any claims to authority made with or without recourse to justificatory criteria and proofs⁴³⁵. Again, in his subsequent analysis of assertions of what is true⁴³⁶, Sextus deploys the same dilemma: they are either controvertible or invoke a proof, which must in turn either be declaredly false and thus absurdly self-defeating or declaredly true and thus involve the circularity of the true establishing the true, or the unfoundable infinite series of each true thing needing another for its founding. He shows that exactly the same difficulties face those who assert that a certain selection of apparent things⁴³⁷, or of non-apparent things⁴³⁸ or of both⁴³⁹, is what is true. And yet again in his treatment of sign, and specifically whether it is an object of sense or intellect, he finds that the controversy over it means the sign itself if it is not to be trivial requires pointing out (by a further sign), which causes an infinite regress, no matter what kind of justifications (such as other signs, criteria or proofs) are invoked.⁴⁴⁰ The more complex critique of the true being the apparent or the non-apparent or a combination is also applied to supposedly apparent and non-apparent signs.⁴⁴¹ Finally, the argument is used to destroy the credibility of proofs, and repeated with the extra (or, one suspects, superfluous) subtlety added by dilemmas between general and particular certifying and certified proofs, and tested and untested certifying proofs, and random or selected particular certifying proofs,⁴⁴² or by attempted certification by a sign,⁴⁴³ or by applying it to the individual premisses as supposedly certified by apparent or non-apparent phenomena.⁴⁴⁴

As we have seen, the criterion of truth, accessing the true, the sign and proof all come under what in Buddhism is termed *pramāṇa* and gets translated as “valid means of cognition”. Nāgārjuna deploys the same master argument, the controvertible-or-unjustifiable dilemma, against *pramāṇa* generically, in the context⁴⁴⁵ of refuting opponents who, like Sextus’ dogmatic opponents, insist that there are such things as objects of knowledge, and that they are all established by valid means of cognition: he asks them how the valid means of cognition in turn

⁴³⁴ *OP* II: 77-78; *AL* I: 427-9 where Sextus points out both the further criterion’s lack of establishment and the infinite regress trying to establish it begins.

⁴³⁵ *AL* I: 336-343

⁴³⁶ *AL* II: 15-16; *OP* II: 85

⁴³⁷ *AL* II: 19-22; *OP* II: 88-9 These arguments deploy the additional subtlety that the justifications too would have to be either apparent (and involve the same difficulty as the “justified”) or non-apparent – with the consequent absurdities of needing establishment in turn either by the apparent (which is circular) or the non-apparent (beginning an infinite regress).

⁴³⁸ *AL* II: 26-9; *OP* II: 90 These arguments against selecting “some of the non-apparent” exactly mirror those against “some of the apparent” immediately preceding them, except *AL* is erroneously missing the problematizing of a non-apparent criterion for the selection (as requiring infinite regress), presumably due to a scribal error.

⁴³⁹ *AL* II: 30; *OP* II: 91-3

⁴⁴⁰ *AL* II: 177-82; *OP* II: 121-3

⁴⁴¹ *OP* II: 124-9

⁴⁴² *OP* II: 182; *AL* II: 340-52

⁴⁴³ *OP* II: 183

⁴⁴⁴ *AL* II: 357-9

⁴⁴⁵ *VV* 31-32

are established, and points out that they must choose between on the one hand their not being established by valid means of cognition, in which case their thesis that all objects of knowledge are established that way is abandoned⁴⁴⁶, and on the other hand their being established by (other) valid means of cognition, which would lead to an infinite regress. Elsewhere⁴⁴⁷ in the context of a series of objections⁴⁴⁸ to the idea that there are objects of knowledge and valid means of cognizing them, he has the same dilemma put slightly differently: he explicitly asks for “a special proof or difference” between objects of knowledge on the one hand and valid means of cognition on the other which might rescue the latter from the accusation of not being established any more than the objects they are supposed to establish. Since no special proof or difference is proffered⁴⁴⁹, he declares the same quandary between abandoning the thesis and infinite regress. Later in the same treatise he like Sextus is happy to apply the same dilemma against belief in proofs: “If the steps [of the syllogistic proof] indeed prove what is yet to be proved, they themselves will also either be something proven that proves or something unproven. But if they are something proven that proves, then also for those proofs by means of which they have become proofs, other proofs will have to exist; and since for these latter also there will be others, the absurd consequence of *regressus ad infinitum* occurs. Or else if for these [steps] further [proofs] do not exist, it will be necessary [for you] – after your assertion that the whole [syllogism] is proven by its steps – to admit either the rationale for the difference or the destruction of the assertion.”⁴⁵⁰

It is impossible to identify the “person”

Next in the analysis of criteria, Sextus presents a series of arguments⁴⁵¹ which show that the “person” who, almost everyone agrees, is the one who applies epistemic instruments and thus “comes to know” things, cannot be precisely identified. First of all he debunks various definitions of “human” given by philosophical schools, by showing that they are speculative and disagree with each other, that they identify properties (many not even definitive anyway) rather than the

⁴⁴⁶ This formulation of course is not quite the same as Sextus’ in most of the instances of his application of the argument, where he says instead that this effectively makes the criterion/authority a mere assertion which can be legitimately controverted by merely asserting its opposite. However, in the case of generic proof being invoked to justify generic proof, he reproduces Nāgārjuna’s argument exactly: “It will not be capable of establishing itself, unless, indeed, it is accepted by assumption as capable of establishing something. But if, once, things are accepted by assumption and are trustworthy, what further need is there to prove them [*i.e.* has not the thesis that proving them is necessary been abandoned], since we are able to accept them on the spot and consider them trustworthy without proof because of the assumption?” (AL II: 343)

⁴⁴⁷ VP 5. Incidentally, the commentary on this verse cites the opponents’ use of the simile of the balance, for whose different employment by Sextus see the argument on self-adjudicating criteria.

⁴⁴⁸ VP 1-20

⁴⁴⁹ Later the opponents do proffer such: they argue that the valid means of cognition also identifies itself, as discussed later (with AP I: 430).

⁴⁵⁰ VP 40 *

⁴⁵¹ AL I: 263-282; OP II: 22-28

property-holder, and that none of these definitions seem to include every human and exclude every non-human.

Although presented in the terms familiar from the other schools or philosophers, this debunking is reminiscent of the arguments against the existence of the “person”⁴⁵² in the Buddhist texts. The person is said to lack identifiable entity-hood, and this ~lack of inherent identity of the person⁴⁵³ forms the basis of the analytical meditations on the experiencing *subject* in the Madhyamaka treatises, the remaining analytical meditations, on the experienced phenomenal *objects*, being termed the ~lack of entitihood of phenomena⁴⁵⁴. A large section of Nāgārjuna’s main treatise⁴⁵⁵ is devoted to demonstrating that the experiencing person cannot be established as existing itself.

It is impossible for body, senses and intellect to apprehend each other or themselves

Next Sextus has a long section⁴⁵⁶ conceding for the sake of argument that the person (as a putative criterion) might be identified, and considering how such a criterion might be apprehended. All permutations of the body, the senses and the intellect are considered as potentially apprehending themselves and each other, and we will deal with them in turn.

Nothing can apprehend itself

That anything should apprehend itself is shown by Sextus to be impossible because of the apprehending thing and apprehended thing each logically entailing that the other be excluded, i.e. something apprehending could not be apprehended, and something apprehended could not be apprehending, both as subject and object and in a time sequence.⁴⁵⁷

Nāgārjuna frequently has recourse to arguments of this kind⁴⁵⁸, which are stated most generally as agent and patient either being conflated or excluding each other. Considering Buddhism as a whole arguments against reflexive agency can be divided into two principal kinds: those deployed against the belief (supported by the simile of the lamp illuminating itself and other

⁴⁵² *pudgala*

⁴⁵³ *pudgala nairātmya/nirātmavā*

⁴⁵⁴ *dharmā nairātmya*

⁴⁵⁵ *MMK IX-XII*

⁴⁵⁶ *AL I: 283-314; OP II: 29-33*

⁴⁵⁷ *AL I: 285-6*

⁴⁵⁸ For example, *MMK IV* begins with a critique of a common theory that matter evolves from itself (1): “Apart from the matter which causes evolution, [some other] matter cannot be conceived; or, apart from [evolved] matter, the [evolution-making] causal matter is not seen.” And (6ab): “The assertion that the evolved and the evolver are the same is not acceptable.” This argument is applied to all aspects of the experienced world (7): “Feelings, perceptions [about feelings], compositional factors and intellect should be thought of in the same way as matter.”

things) that epistemic instruments simultaneously establish themselves and other phenomena, and those ranged against the Yogācāra school's doctrine of ~reflexive awareness⁴⁵⁹. In arguments against the latter, Śāntideva deploys⁴⁶⁰ the simile of a sword being unable to cut itself, uses Nāgārjuna's dismissal of the lamp simile on the grounds that the lit lamp can never be dark⁴⁶¹, and then dismisses the idea that something not blue can make itself blue.

Body, senses and intellect cannot apprehend each other

That the body, senses and intellect should apprehend each other is shown by Sextus to be impossible because of their different natures and their having therefore to change into each other in order to achieve the apprehending, which would be absurd.⁴⁶²

While the Buddhist texts do not single out the body *in toto* as a potential criterion, they do speak (in debate) of the action of the senses, direct perception⁴⁶³, and the deductions of the intellect⁴⁶⁴ as potential criteria. Indeed, in later Yogācāra Mahāyāna these were to be the only two criteria the Buddhists accepted⁴⁶⁵, and then with many reservations and only in the context of debating with non-Buddhist schools. What is significant here is that one of these reservations was that the two criteria had *different objects*, the action of the senses having inconceivable particulars as their objects and the deductions of the intellect having conceivable universals as their objects. This was, and still is, considered a uniquely radical separation of the spheres of the senses on the one hand and the intellect on the other.⁴⁶⁶ However, awareness of this radical separation was not an innovation of Dignāga. Nāgārjuna, addressing philosophers who asserted four criteria – perception, inference, analogy and scriptural authority – says⁴⁶⁷ they cannot establish each other (or themselves).

A 3-dimensional body is not perceived

Sextus points out⁴⁶⁸ that we do not perceive depth, or we would see silver pieces under their coating of gold, so a supposed 3-dimensional body is not perceived.

⁴⁵⁹ *svasaṃvedana*

⁴⁶⁰ *BCA IX: 18-22*

⁴⁶¹ *VP 10*

⁴⁶² *AL I: 288-310*

⁴⁶³ *pratyakṣa*

⁴⁶⁴ *anumāna*

⁴⁶⁵ Dignāga/Dinnāga *Pramāṇasamuccaya* I: 2: “The valid means of cognition are the action of the senses and the deductions of the intellect. The objects of cognition are defined [respectively] as two.” Dignāga's texts became the foundational scripture for the entirety of Mahāyāna Buddhist epistemology. Incidentally on the personal names involving “nāga” (and Dignāga's first teacher was named Nāgadatta) see Part III.

⁴⁶⁶ *Pramāṇasamuccaya* I: 3cd *

⁴⁶⁷ *VV 51 (part)*

⁴⁶⁸ *OP II: 30 (end)*

The general form of this argument is used by Āryadeva, taking the case of a pot: “There is no perception even of the entire form, since it has near, far, and in-between parts.”⁴⁶⁹

The body is not found in its attributes

Sextus points out that what we apprehend is “probably” the attributes of the body rather than the body itself.⁴⁷⁰

Śāntideva deconstructs the body in the same way but with more detail, listing its components.⁴⁷¹ Incidentally this is the beginning of his investigation of phenomena’s lack of existence in themselves (having complete the person’s lack of existence in itself) and is the first of the four foundations of mindfulness which make up *vipaśyanā* meditation.

Whole/part rescue attempts lead to infinite regress

In the same section Sextus mentions various ways the opponents might try to escape from the difficulties of self- and mutual apprehending, including the idea that part of something rather than the whole of it might do the apprehending. He answers them by pointing out that the part would still need to apprehend itself even if it apprehended the rest, and to perform a like rescue on that would initiate an infinite regress.⁴⁷²

In Madhyamaka critiques of epistemology, this escape attempt, presented by the simile of the lamp illuminates both itself and other things, is also dismissed but on different grounds: if it could illuminate itself, Nāgārjuna says, darkness would obscure itself and so be inapprehensible.⁴⁷³ Arguments of more closely similar *form* occur on other topics. For example, Buddhapālita, commenting on Nāgārjuna’s refutation of the notion of *contact* between something and either itself or something else⁴⁷⁴, explains that the problem with a rescue attempt made by invoking *partial* contact, attempted because whole contact implies union (which is absurd) is that this would only result in the same problem of whole contact between the parts, and thus cause an infinite regress.

⁴⁶⁹ CS XIII: 4

⁴⁷⁰ OP II: 30 (start)

⁴⁷¹ BCA IX: 78 ff.

⁴⁷² AL I: 311-313

⁴⁷³ VP 11

⁴⁷⁴ Commenting on MMK XIV: 8ab (tr. Saito p. 196).

It is impossible to justify particular humans as authorities

Next comes a series of arguments⁴⁷⁵ showing the want of grounds for selecting particular humans or all humans as authorities, first the master-argument against authority that we have already seen, and then more common-sensical arguments⁴⁷⁶ against establishing authority on the basis of their age, industry, intelligence or backing. These are not as far as I know found in Madhyamaka texts. It should not, however, be overlooked that they are entirely in the spirit of the general Buddhist teachings denouncing external authority. For example, in the famous *Kālāmā Sutta*⁴⁷⁷ the Buddha tells the people of Kesaputta that it is not by means of tradition⁴⁷⁸, or from reports⁴⁷⁹, or by means of another's seeming capability⁴⁸⁰, or indeed through one's loyalty to one's own teacher, that one knows what is profitable and what is not profitable, but rather when one knows for oneself. One might note that both Candrakīrti⁴⁸¹ and Śāntideva⁴⁸² refer to various levels of perceptive clarity, even among the worldly, but especially considering meditative training leading to ever more extreme perceptive clarity which invalidates the perceptions of the less trained. Nevertheless, this is a separate issue from accepting external authority, as Gedün Chöpel's commentary on Nāgārjuna amusingly puts it: since our understanding is that of an insect, it is by the understanding of an insect that we judge among others and select those we claim are lions of understanding!⁴⁸³

Neither senses nor the intellect nor both can be criteria or access the true or signs

Next⁴⁸⁴ Sextus concedes for the sake of argument that it could be established that people are or some person is a valid cognizer, and asks by what instruments they might cognize anything. Like the Buddhists (see above) he considers two possibilities: the senses and the intellect. And like the Madhyamaka, for the reasons we are about to explore, he finds that neither qualifies as *a criterion for what actually is*. The same failure is discovered in their supposedly *accessing what is true*.⁴⁸⁵ And later still there is a parallel refutation of the senses or the intellect being able to apprehend the supposed *signification of signs*.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁷⁵ AL I: 314-334; OP II: 37-46

⁴⁷⁶ AL I: 320 ff.

⁴⁷⁷ AN III: 5: 2: 5

⁴⁷⁸ *paramparāya*

⁴⁷⁹ *itikirāya*

⁴⁸⁰ *bhabbarūpatāya*

⁴⁸¹ MA_v VI: 66-74

⁴⁸² BCA IX: 3-5

⁴⁸³ Ch. 2, part 9, tr. in Lopez (2007).

⁴⁸⁴ AL I: 343 (end)-367; OP II: 48-69

⁴⁸⁵ AL II: 40-47

⁴⁸⁶ AL II: 176-275

Controversy over what senses apprehend invalidates them as criterion or sign-finders

The senses alone cannot be the criteria, says Sextus, because those who say so differ among themselves as to whether the senses apprehend real objects.⁴⁸⁷ Later he will use the same argument against those who believe that the indicative sign is an object only of the senses.⁴⁸⁸ Then, in what amounts to the same argument re-expressed, he deploys in characteristic fashion⁴⁸⁹ a kind of false concession, here to the idea that the senses could be justified by intellect, only to withdraw it immediately by saying there could be no ascertainment of the criterion⁴⁹⁰ – and he will say the same of the ascertainment of the sign⁴⁹¹ – because the senses are in conflict and therefore in question, but by the hypothesis (i.e. the assumption we are testing – that the senses alone apprehend the true or the sign) nothing else (such as intellect) is permitted to establish them either.

I do not know of a Madhyamaka text which deploys discrepancy among opponent schools' theories of perception, but on the discrepancies in the sensed we have already seen the Madhyamaka parallels in our discussion of the first four of the ten modes.⁴⁹²

Senses are non-rational so cannot accommodate judgment, the true, or significance

Furthermore the senses are irrational, whereas a judgment based on a criterion – or, as he will say later (attributing the argument to Aenesidemus)⁴⁹³ a judgment of the true, or again one based on the supposed signification of a sign⁴⁹⁴ – is a rational assertion.

The assertion of the non-conceptuality of sensation is as we have seen made by the Buddhist valid cognition texts⁴⁹⁵. Nāgārjuna says, “Direct perception cannot establish inference,” in the course of refuting all the permutations of various criteria's self- and mutual establishment.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁸⁷ *OP* II: 49

⁴⁸⁸ *AL* II: 183-86

⁴⁸⁹ This style of argument is the Mādhyamika's “*prasaṅga*”: see Part I: “Circumscribed applicability of speech”.

⁴⁹⁰ *OP* II: 49

⁴⁹¹ *AL* II: 183-7

⁴⁹² See Part I: “Deconstructive modes as a tool set against beliefs”.

⁴⁹³ Only in *AL*, II: 40-7

⁴⁹⁴ *AL* II: 207

⁴⁹⁵ *Pramāṇasamuccaya* I: 3cd *

⁴⁹⁶ *VV* 51

What is sensed/signified differs according to individuals, dispositions and conditions

And again⁴⁹⁷, by the modes of suspension, senses operate differently according to disposition and conditions. Sextus' section on the sign similarly concludes with the summary judgment that an indicative sign should by nature indicate the same to all, but clearly does not – and he mentions differences of memory as a reason – so there is no such thing as an indicative sign.⁴⁹⁸

We have already considered the parallels here under the ten modes.⁴⁹⁹

Criteria must judge combined sensibles but the senses cannot

Sextus also mentions⁵⁰⁰ the fact that to perceive an object requires the operation of memory and a combination of sensible characteristics. For example, “a human is a combination of colour and size and form and certain other peculiarities,” but the combination is not an object of sight, hearing, smell, etc.

Āryadeva, in the course of a chapter refuting the belief that the senses perceive objects, makes a similar point, giving the example not of the human but of the pot: it is not its form alone, but rather the combination of form, smell, etc., so the pot is not directly perceived. If only one part is perceived, the whole is not perceived, since one part does not make the whole. If it did, the other parts – smell etc. – could be seen as well (etc.). Thus the pot itself in its totality cannot be seen at all.⁵⁰¹

The intellect is not established and cannot find itself never mind other things

Sextus adverts⁵⁰² to the controversy over whether intellect exists and asks how it might be resolved – not by intellect, since this is in question, but not by anything else, since by hypothesis only the intellect is capable of being the criterion. Even if it were apprehensible, he goes on⁵⁰³, there is interminable controversy over where it comes from, what it is made of, where it is, and so on. He invokes the simile of an architect who needs rule and compass to judge straightness and crookedness: similarly the intellect would have to be clear about itself before it can judge anything else. Moreover different people display different intellects, he adds⁵⁰⁴, and to settle the disputes involves the arbitrariness or circularity consequences already considered. The same points are made against the intellect accessing what is true: intellect alone is not enough because

⁴⁹⁷ *OP* II: 51-6; *AP* I: 345 (end) -6

⁴⁹⁸ *AL* II: 274

⁴⁹⁹ Part I

⁵⁰⁰ *AL* I: 346 (end)-7 (start)

⁵⁰¹ ŚŚ VI: 1-2

⁵⁰² Only in *OP* II: 57

⁵⁰³ *OP* II: 58; *AL* I: 348-9

⁵⁰⁴ *OP* II: 59-62; *AL* I: 351

when, as must be the case, not everyone's intellection is identical, there is unresolvable debatableness about the intelligibles.⁵⁰⁵

These are very similar to arguments deployed elsewhere whose parallels we consider there: nothing apprehending itself (*supra*), the validity of the measure (*infra*), and the master argument against criteria (*supra*).

If the senses are an intermediary, the intellect cannot apprehend objects

The last argument against the idea that the intellect alone is the criterion invokes⁵⁰⁶ the philosophers' own assertion that the senses are the intermediary between the intellect and the object. If that were the case, says Sextus, the intellect is not contacting the objects at all.

Nāgārjuna has occasion⁵⁰⁷ to answer the assertion that intellection (*buddhi*) is the valid means of cognition, in dialogue with the non-Buddhist and realist Nyāya school, and draws attention to a similar problem Sextus does here, even without invoking the intermediary status of the senses. The realists say, "In regard to a pot, the intellection of the pot is the valid means of cognizing it, and the pot itself is the cognized object." Nāgārjuna replies, "Because it [either the intellect or the pot] is a condition [for the cognition], [one, the intellection] is not a cognition and [therefore furthermore the other, the pot] is not the cognized." In his commentary he does introduce the senses: he specifies that because it is asserted (by his opponents) that the intellection can only arise by means of the connection of the sense organs with the object, the pot is a condition *for* the valid cognition. Therefore intellection is not the means of cognition and the pot itself is not what is cognized.⁵⁰⁸ To paraphrase him: if the intellect were the actual means of cognition, why would it need the help of the object and the senses?

A combination of senses and intellect cannot know what is true

A combination is not enough, he says⁵⁰⁹, because it would either be of all sensibles and intelligibles, in which case there would have to be simultaneously true and false things and simultaneously existent and non-existent things (due to the diversity of senses and intellects), or of some sensibles and intelligibles, which he rather mysteriously dismisses as "the matter in question". I presume this is a variant on the invalidity of a criterion establishing itself that we have already considered.

⁵⁰⁵ AL II: 44-5

⁵⁰⁶ AL I: 352-3

⁵⁰⁷ VP 19

⁵⁰⁸ *gang gi phyir dbang po don phrad pa las blo skye bar 'dod pa de'i phir bum pa ni rkyen du gyur pa nyid yin pa dehi phyir blo ni tshad ma ma yin la bum pa yang gzhal bya ma yin no*

⁵⁰⁹ AL II: 45 (end) -7

It is not permissible to invalidate sensation while validating intellection

Sextus attacks Democritus' and Plato's setting of intellect over and above sensation (the apparent), on two grounds. One problem he points out⁵¹⁰ with a series of examples (dragon girls, winged people, Socrates, the gigantic cyclops, pygmies and the centaur) is that all concepts need prior experience (even though they might be produced from them not merely by resemblance but also by exaggeration, diminution and re-combination), so are invalidated when such experience is invalidated. Another he formulates as a dilemma: conceptual cognition is believed to be true either groundlessly, in which case it can be dismissed, or with reason, which is impossible, since the justification cannot be by hypothesis something apparent to the senses, but if it is non-evident it in turn requires justification. The fact that the untrustworthiness of sensation implies the untrustworthiness of intellection will be raised again in the discussion of proof.⁵¹¹

The problem Madhyamaka has with intellect's conceptualizations is rather specific: the ordinary mind's tendency to behave as though they successfully characterize how things are, which is erroneous and leads to suffering. Hence the swathe of deconstructions discovering that they do not get at the way things are, and based on that discovery frequent assertions that the reality believed in on the basis of conceptualization is illusion.⁵¹² Sextus' other reason is the master argument against the criterion again, as used in the Madhyamaka.

Criterion and truth, proof and proven, are mutually dependent so unestablished

Sextus has this argument as applied⁵¹³ to the specific case of the Porch philosophers' definition of the apprehensive presentation, though it applies more generally. It says that among mutually differing presentations (to the senses and the intellect) the criterion is "apprehensiveness", and the definition of this is a presentation which is an imaging and imprinting of a real object; but when we ask what constitutes a real object, their only answer is one which excites an apprehensive presentation. So in order to understand either, we must have already have understood the other, so neither of them can ever be understood, for "both await confirmation from the other". He invokes the same problem when later⁵¹⁴ refuting belief in "the true", and again against sign and the signified⁵¹⁵, and yet again against proof and what it proves.⁵¹⁶

Nāgārjuna has the argument at the climax of one critique of the notion of knowing truth, applied⁵¹⁷ to any valid means of cognition (*pramāṇa*) paired with a validly cognized object

⁵¹⁰ AL II: 56-60

⁵¹¹ AL II: 356

⁵¹² RĀ 109-13 (II: 9-13)

⁵¹³ AL I: 426

⁵¹⁴ AL II: 67-8 and again explicitly against the "apprehensive presentation" at AL II: 85-6

⁵¹⁵ AL II: 164

⁵¹⁶ AL II: 335

⁵¹⁷ VV 46-50

(*prameya*). He points out that if you believe that objects are established by means of cognition, and means of cognition by objects, then neither object nor means of cognition is established for you. How would the valid means of cognition establish their objects if the former were not yet established, the two only establishable by means of each other and not by anything else? And conversely how would the validly cognized objects establish the valid means of cognition under these circumstances? And he concludes with the simile of the father (progenitor) and son (progeny) producing each other (since they are defined with respect to each other), and thus both becoming progenitors and both progeny.⁵¹⁸

In his other critique this argument constitutes the very opening⁵¹⁹: the means of knowing and the knowable object are confused, because it is only when the latter comes into being that the former does, and only when the former exists that the latter can be such. Thus they establish each other, and the knower becomes known by the known, and the known therefore the knower of the knower. Because of this mutual dependance they are not ever established in themselves.

The validity of the measure is established by what it measures

The two projects also invoke the same similes here. Sextus, at the beginning of his analysis of “the truth”, invokes successively the two directions of dependence. First he states⁵²⁰ in passing that it is obvious to everyone that if the valid criterion cannot be established by those who believe in a criterion (as his preceding arguments have shown), the truth which it supposedly establishes similarly cannot. Then a little later he gives⁵²¹ the examples of a rule requiring straight objects, and a balance known weights, to be validated, to show that without the truth there is no possible criterion. As Nāgārjuna puts it⁵²², the means of valid cognition are not established because their cause, the cognized, is not established. And he also invokes the example of measuring instruments: “You may think that these knowable objects are established by the means of valid cognition, just as things to be measured are established by means of measuring instruments. But how are the means of valid cognition established?”

If the criterion also identifies itself, the object of knowledge would too

Twice Sextus refers to a kind of objection the opponent might make to the principal logical difficulty with asserting a criterion with which he began, namely that the asserted criterion does not require a further criterion to certify it as such since it can certify itself.

⁵¹⁸ The same simile is invoked for the mutual dependence of cognizer and cognized by Śantideva, *BCA IX*: 113-4. Cf. also *ŚS* 13.

⁵¹⁹ *VP* 2-3

⁵²⁰ *AL II*: 2

⁵²¹ *AL II*: 3; *OP II*: 94

⁵²² *VV* 47

This objection is first⁵²³ put in the mouth of a Porch philosopher defending *one* proposed criterion, the “apprehensive presentation”. His reply is that in that case, the converse would have to be said of the object of knowledge, namely that it establishes itself and the criterion, since the two, presentation and presented object, while the criterion (“apprehensiveness”) has not yet been established, are similar.

Later⁵²⁴ it occurs as a more general defence against the principal logical attack on *any* assertion of a criterion. The defendant invokes three similes to escape the infinite regress of criteria, of the straight thing (which shows itself and other things straight), the balance (which weighs itself and other things), and light (which reveals itself and other things). Sextus’ answer here is different: he says that to invoke such similes is childish since in all three cases some superior criterion is in operation, and indeed is the reason these things are made, whereas what they are supposed to exemplify is a criterion higher than which there are no others.

Nāgārjuna’s opponents in two treatises make⁵²⁵ the same attempt to rescue their criterion from the same charge of illogicality with the same assertion, that the valid means of cognition do not merely establish the object of knowledge but also themselves. Interestingly, they even invoke the same simile, of light: “Regarding the point that there are no valid means of cognition for the valid means of cognition, the valid means of cognition, like lamplight, establish themselves and the other [i.e. the object].”

Nāgārjuna also replies in each treatise that the simile is invalid, but to take one instance⁵²⁶ his rebuttal is different to and rather more extensive than Sextus’. First he deconstructs the opponent’s idea that the lamplight illuminates what is dark by showing that there is no such illumination, either by contact of light with dark, since that would require contrary properties at one point, or by action at a distance, since there is no mechanism, just as a sword cannot cut what it does not contact. The opponent protests that there are mechanisms for action at a distance, such as the baleful influence of planets. Nāgārjuna retorts that if that were the equivalent mechanism, any light could illuminate all dark spaces everywhere. He then shows that darkness does not exist in itself, and further that light cannot be considered as an example of something which illuminates itself, since it cannot have darkness within it and illumination is considered to be the dispelling of darkness from something. He concludes with a specific simile related to Sextus’ first reply: if light could illuminate itself and other things then darkness would be able to obscure itself and other things. The point being that the opponents are superimposing conceptualizations (“illumination”) on a case situation (light and darkness) which is better described by saying that darkness is mere absence of light, and thus revealed to be an invalid simile for cognition. Another

⁵²³ AL I: 430-1

⁵²⁴ AL I: 441-2

⁵²⁵ VP 6

⁵²⁶ VP 7-11

of Sextus' opponents' similes, of the balance, is intriguingly mentioned in Nāgārjuna's immediately preceding argument⁵²⁷, representing however not a criterion which also judges itself but instead, in the course of an opponent's objection to the attack on criteria, the fact that what is discovered (a thing's weight, say) cannot be discovered without the discoverer (a balance) – to which Nāgārjuna retorts with the principal logical critique with which we began.

To another instance⁵²⁸ of this objection, which cites the opponents' treatise ("The lamp illuminates itself and other things; likewise the valid means of cognition establish themselves as well as other things,"⁵²⁹) he replies with a more elaborate and yet different rebuttal⁵³⁰: to say that light illuminates itself would require dark light being made light light, but of course dark light has never existed. If nevertheless it were conceded that it illuminates itself, it would similarly burn itself. He then gives the destructive dilemma for illumination between action by contact and at a distance as before. Finally he returns to the notion of a self-establishing criterion and says that if this were so, then the valid means of cognition would be established independently of objects of knowledge. So what? asks the opponent. He replies that they would thus be valid means of cognizing nothing.

Critiques are presented without our assent so we are invulnerable

Sextus' treatise on the criterion concludes⁵³¹ with a rebuttal of the typical objection made to the inquirers' dilemmatizing, that they themselves assert the non-existence of the criterion either with the certification of a criterion, in which case they are contradicting themselves, or without, in which case they can be ignored since it is a bare unsupported assertion no more persuasive than its opposite.

He retorts that he *does not assent* to the arguments for the non-existent of the criterion but presents them as a direct antidote *to the assent which his opponents give* to their beliefs. If one assents to such things, the arguments have meaning and consequence. If one does not, neither Sextus' dilemmatizing arguments nor the one his opponents are now reflecting at him, signify anything.

This objection with its extraordinary rebuttal has a close parallel in Nāgārjuna's treatise, though here in the matter of the existence or non-existence not specifically of criteria and their objects, but more generally of any phenomena. The objection of his opponents, which opens the

⁵²⁷ VP 5

⁵²⁸ VV 33

⁵²⁹ It comes from the (non-Buddhist) Naiyāyika School's *Nyāya Sūtra*, II: 1, 18. It would be fruitful to see how many more Stoic doctrines can be found in their texts.

⁵³⁰ VV 34-41

⁵³¹ OP II: 79; AL I: 443-4

treatise⁵³², is that the Mādhyamika assert phenomena's lack of existence in themselves by means of an argument which either is accepted to exist in itself, in which case they are contradicting themselves, or accepted as not existing in itself, in which case they can be ignored since it has no power to affect existing things.

The reply⁵³³ is rather more elaborate than Sextus' but bears a marked resemblance to it. If all phenomena do indeed lack existence in themselves then it is wrong to say that because the argument, as a phenomenon, does likewise then it does not affect them: instead they are seen to be on an equal footing ontologically. What is meant by phenomena being devoid of existence in themselves is not their non-existence *tout court* but their profound interdependence such that perceptions of phenomena as things in themselves are delusion, like the perceptions of water in a mirage. And because Nāgārjuna does not perceive his own argument as a thing existing in itself, he does not have the same illusions about it as the opponent does, and so his own argument is not vulnerable to the kind of attack it seems to them to be making!

Just being apparent does not make something true

The cases that Sextus invokes to remind us of this are that to some it is apparent that nothing is true⁵³⁴ (which is incompatible with taking that appearance itself to be true), the experiences of people in their dreams⁵³⁵ (which are incompatible with those of people who are awake), the psychotic delusions of the insane (which are incompatible with the experience of the supposedly sane majority) and contradictory appearances in general (since they are incompatible each other).

Illusions, phantoms and dreams are the last three of the stock examples of what appears but is not true, used frequently⁵³⁶ in the Prajñāpāramitā literature (which Madhyamaka purports to explain).

Combinations of apparent and non-apparent being true invoke the faults of both

The move which Sextus makes at the end of the refutations of all or some, of apparent or non-apparent, being true, that rescuing combinations involve the faults of both, is a common structure in Madhyamaka. For example, Buddhapālita comments on the opening verse of Nāgārjuna's main treatise, which denies the origination of anything from itself, something else, both or neither, saying of the third alternative, the combination, "It would result in both faults."

⁵³² VV 1-2

⁵³³ VV 21-24, 29-30

⁵³⁴ OP II: 88

⁵³⁵ This and the remaining two from AL II: 18

⁵³⁶ For example in chapter 32 of *the Diamond Sūtra*, *Vajracchedika Sūtra*.

The true is characterized neither by itself nor in relation to something else

Sextus makes a distinction between ~those things which are by means of specific character⁵³⁷ and those in relation to something else⁵³⁸, and argues that neither can be true.⁵³⁹ By the specifically characterized he (in line with his interlocutors) means things which always act in the same way because it is their nature to do so, and by means of a refutation of some true thing identified in itself, he points out that people are at variance over what is true so it could not be so by nature.

This nature is what the Buddhist philosophers refer to as a thing's supposed *svabhāva* (self-being). In this sense *svabhāva* is used as synonymous with *svalingaṃ* (self-mark) and *svalakṣaṇa* (self-sign). For example Nāgārjuna refers⁵⁴⁰ to the common example of fire as ~having the identifying mark (*svaliṅgavān*) of burning. The Madhyamaka reasoning goes further and points out that such a thing, if it exists, cannot do *anything*, because “it is not constructed, and not dependent upon anything else.”⁵⁴¹ Such a being-in-itself cannot turn into something else.⁵⁴² The existence of such entities precludes their being able to interact with anything.⁵⁴³ This is their *reductio ad absurdum* of their opponents' doctrine of *svabhāva*.

For the relative, Sextus reflects the doctrines of his opponents back to them: that relatives are only concepts and become their opposites depending upon perspective.

Similarly Nāgārjuna points out⁵⁴⁴ that since, for example, when there is “short” there is “long”, neither exist by themselves, and that long/short, subtle/coarse, virtue/vice, etc. “cease in the consciousness of reality [...] In this meditative state [...] they] all cease. All that appeared earlier to consciousness because of not knowing reality, will then cease for the consciousness that knows reality.”⁵⁴⁵

The true cannot be revealed

In response to a dense series of arguments⁵⁴⁶ against senses and intellect as criterion Sextus attributes to Aenesidemus, which reproduce the points we have already considered, the opponents object that it is not insofar as things appear that they are true but due to a cause⁵⁴⁷ which reveals them. Aenesidemus (Sextus?) rhetorically calls upon them to identify this mysterious cause, but in any case goes on to present a *reductio ad absurdum* of this supposed revealing “cause” on the

⁵³⁷ τῶν κατὰ διαφορὰν: Bury translates this as “absolute”.

⁵³⁸ τῶν πρὸς τι

⁵³⁹ AL II: 37-9

⁵⁴⁰ MMK X: 5

⁵⁴¹ MMK XV: 2cd

⁵⁴² MMK XV: 8cd

⁵⁴³ ŚS 16

⁵⁴⁴ RA I: 49

⁵⁴⁵ RA I: 93-7

⁵⁴⁶ AL II: 40-47

⁵⁴⁷ αἰτίαν

grounds that it itself would either have to appear (and thus contradict the opponents' rescuing assertion that the true is not the apparent) or not (and thus itself need revealing, since it is in itself imperceptible, by either the apparent or the non-apparent, and so on *ad infinitum*).

This is part of a suite of arguments brought against signs, which we consider *infra*.

The true is not the persuasive

Sextus ends his section on the general difficulties with the idea of “the true” with a short denial of “the persuasive”⁵⁴⁸ being a candidate. His reasoning is that what persuades some does not persuade others. The rescuing objection that what persuades *the majority* is the true is dismissed by pointing out that this so-called majority could all be under the influence of the same particular condition, in which case they could just as well be taken numerically to be “one” (like the condition) rather than many, and thus no longer the majority.⁵⁴⁹

The closest equivalent to this is in the Madhyamaka presentation of conventional reality. Candrakīrti's *īlīkā* commentary on Āryadeva's *Catuhśataka* presents the parable (later much used in Sufism) of the poisoned rain that drives people insane, and which a pre-warned king has eventually to drink in order to remain accepted by his crazed population, as a demonstration of how the conventional, transactional reality of the majority is unrelated to the way things are.⁵⁵⁰

It is impossible for everything to be false

The refutation of the assertion that everything is false begins Sextus' refutation of a series of particular dogmatic beliefs about the true and the false. His⁵⁵¹ is the self-contradiction objection, that the very statement that everything is false would itself, as a thing, have to be false, and thus reverse itself.

Interestingly the same objection is levelled *at* rather than *by* Nāgārjuna in response to his disclosure that all established theories, literally “final provens” (*siddhānta*) are unjustified. The opponents opine: “If you hold that everything is unestablished, then you at least hold that final belief!”⁵⁵² His punning response, that there is no beginning of belief, so there certainly can be no finality of it, refers to his having deconstructed the earlier elements of proof.⁵⁵³

⁵⁴⁸ τὸ πιθάνον

⁵⁴⁹ cf. Aristotle *Metaph.* 4: 1009b

⁵⁵⁰ (Lopez, 2007, p. 49 n. 2)

⁵⁵¹ *AL* II: 55

⁵⁵² *VP* 32 *

⁵⁵³ We consider this *infra*.

Propositions do not exist

Sextus next⁵⁵⁴ deals with the Porch philosophy of the incorporeal expression (*lekton*), and in particular deconstructs the proposition, it being the locus of true or false. We will see that there are various parallels with his reasoning in the Madhyamaka analyses. And once propositions have been shown thus unstable, Sextus can remind us in order to shake our belief in particular instances of them, such as proof⁵⁵⁵.

To believe in propositions' meaningfulness is either arbitrary or circular

He identifies⁵⁵⁶ the first impasse in a now familiar way: a mere assertion of the meaningfulness of propositions can be countered by a mere assertion of their meaninglessness, but if on the other hand one attempts to justify their meaningfulness, one must use propositions, themselves in question still, so the very best argument will be begging the question. Elsewhere⁵⁵⁷ he will deploy the argument to undermine the sign, since (according to the believers) the sign is a kind of complex proposition, underlining along the way the equal invalidity of attempts to justify its existence by means of other signs, or by means of proofs, since these are also propositions.

We have already seen this argument used by the Madhyamaka against the establishment of valid means of cognition, and Nāgārjuna also says⁵⁵⁸ like Sextus here that a proposition would have to be established by other expressions, and that this would lead to an infinite regress.

The incorporeal cannot be compound or effective

He next⁵⁵⁹ draws attention to the contradiction in the Porch philosophy between their belief that expressions are compounded of parts, and their belief that expressions are incorporeal, on the grounds that it does not make sense to say that something incorporeal has parts.

This belief is not taken issue with in the same terms as far as I know by the Mādhyamikas, perhaps because it was not held by their contemporaries,⁵⁶⁰ and Nāgārjuna's discussion of expressions⁵⁶¹ focuses on them physically unfolding rather than as abstractions.

Later⁵⁶² he finds another contradiction, between this supposed incorporeality, and the idea that the incorporeal cannot effect anything, parallels to which we consider elsewhere.⁵⁶³ In this

⁵⁵⁴ AL II: 70-

⁵⁵⁵ AL II: 336

⁵⁵⁶ AL II: 76-8

⁵⁵⁷ OP II: 107-8; AL II: 258-61

⁵⁵⁸ VP 40 *

⁵⁵⁹ AL II: 79

⁵⁶⁰ There is however an extensive problematization of the belief that Brahman as eternal unitary non-corporeal sound created the universe on the grounds of the impossibility of plurality in conjunction with it in Śāntarakṣita's *TS* ch. V.

⁵⁶¹ especially VP 48-9, 62

case then they cannot point anything out, which contradicts the opponents' belief that signs are both intelligible and incorporeal.

Expressions, propositions, words, utterances and proofs do not exist due to gradual enunciation

Finally he provides what might strike us as the most peculiar of refutations of the meaningfulness of expressions, namely that since they are expressed over a period of time, at any one time they do not exist in their entirety, such that there is even no entity in fact of which one might say that one happened at a particular instant to be expressing part of it. He gives as his examples the jussive first sentence of the *Iliad*, and the word “fury” within it, and the proposition, “Socrates exists,” and the word “Socrates” within it. Later⁵⁶⁴ when dealing with those who believe that uttered sounds are the locus of the true he uses the same argument against “long uttered sounds” in a dilemma between that and indivisible (i.e. minimal momentary) sounds. And his last argument against the true being located in the uttered sound is that same dilemma yet again, between the simple (“Dion”) and the complex (“Dion exists”) utterance, the latter again gradually enounced so not existing as a complete entity at any particular time. Elsewhere⁵⁶⁵ an identical argument will be deployed against the sign because it is supposed to be a significant proposition, and to proofs in general, due to the sequentiality of their premisses.⁵⁶⁶

Āryadeva applies a general refutation, made on grounds of partition, of the existence of perceivable entities, to the example of a sentence and its component syllables: “Indeed, in every case, whatever is part of a greater whole is also itself a whole composed of parts. Thus even a syllable of a sentence does not have its own existence here.”⁵⁶⁷ This might be considered to differ rather from Sextus' argument in that reference is made only to the partition of the sentence as a conceivable entity rather than the gradual enunciation of the parts, but Nāgārjuna in his detailed refutation of the existence of syllogisms refers like Sextus to this sequential expression of the sentence to demonstrate that it is not established: having noted the partition thus, “Since the whole [syllogism] does not exist separately in each part, it does not exist in the collection of them,”⁵⁶⁸ he adverts to the chronological unfolding, “Moreover, because the whole is not established as existing in the past, present or future, the parts do not exist,”⁵⁶⁹ and concludes with Sextus' argument almost verbatim: “Moreover, because the members of the syllogism are expressed

⁵⁶² AL II: 262-4

⁵⁶³ See Part II: Chapter 2

⁵⁶⁴ AL II: 132

⁵⁶⁵ OP II: 109

⁵⁶⁶ OP II: 144

⁵⁶⁷ CS XIII: 6

⁵⁶⁸ VP VII: 34

⁵⁶⁹ VP VII: 36

sequentially, when one member is there, the others are not there. [...] The syllables are likewise unestablished.”⁵⁷⁰ Similar arguments occur elsewhere in his treatises, such as the refutation⁵⁷¹ of the existence of a mantra or magical sentence, based on its lack of existence in the constituent syllables.

Predicative propositions do not make sense

There follows⁵⁷² in Sextus an argument which some scholars claim⁵⁷³ must be corrupt whereby an attributive proposition, “Socrates is walking,” is shown to be senseless on the grounds that “walking” is not true of the whole of Socrates (in particular it is not true of the sum of his physical body and his soul) or a part of him (because each part is too small to possess the predicated quality).

Assuming for a moment this argument is not corrupt, we can find approximations to it in Madhyamaka, both to the specific refutation of the soul or the body being the subject of movement, and to the general refutation of predication. Specifically, Āryadeva refutes⁵⁷⁴ the idea that the soul is the agent of movement on the grounds that the incorporeal, being intangible, cannot move the corporeal. And a chapter of Nāgārjuna’s principal treatise⁵⁷⁵ is devoted to refuting the idea that something physical can be said to move. Candrakīrti’s famous seven-fold whole/part analysis of the chariot⁵⁷⁶ is a simile for the impossibility of identifying the personal “self” or soul⁵⁷⁷ with respect to the aggregates (body and mind), and two of the refuted possibilities are that the ātman is the parts or the collection of the parts.

The general point being made, the impossibility of predicating anything of a grammatical subject, is one which crops up quite regularly in Madhyamaka, usually though on grounds different to those Sextus invokes here, namely of the pre-predicated subject not making sense or not being reconcilable with what is subsequently predicated of it. Thus, says Āryadeva, it is impossible to predicate “being existent” of a pot the way the Vaiśeṣikas do, because that would mean the pre-predicated pot would have to be non-existent⁵⁷⁸; and it is impossible to predicate “being one” of a pot the way the Naiyāyikas do, because the subject is a particular entity but the predicate is a universal quality, so the two cannot be connected⁵⁷⁹.

⁵⁷⁰ VP VII: 48 * -9

⁵⁷¹ In VS ap Kamaliśīla’s *Pañjikā* (123a 5-124b 7) on Śāntarakṣita’s *Madhyamakālaṃkāra Vṛtti*.

⁵⁷² AL II: 100-102

⁵⁷³ e.g. Bett (2005) p. 109 n. 45: “Not [...] a remotely plausible argument. [...] Perhaps there is a larger portion of text missing.”

⁵⁷⁴ CŚ X: 5

⁵⁷⁵ MMK II

⁵⁷⁶ See Part II: Chapter 2 on wholes and parts.

⁵⁷⁷ ātman

⁵⁷⁸ CŚ XIV: 3

⁵⁷⁹ CŚ XIV: 4

Negative propositions do not make sense

Sextus next⁵⁸⁰ problematizes negation on the basis of the contradiction between what negators do (which is perform an interchange between the real and the unreal in either direction) and what they are (real, unreal, or both). He refutes the possibility of negators negating by deploying a curious Plato-esque⁵⁸¹ assertion that anything (such as a negator) added to a proposition must change the latter in line with its own nature, as an addition of something either real, or unreal, or a combination of both – such that if, say, a negator being added to a proposition is held to be *real* it must always add *reality* to a proposition and while it could conceivably thus convert an unreal (i.e. untrue) proposition into a real (true) one, it could not convert (as negators appear also to do) a real proposition into an unreal one.

There are a number of critiques of negation in Madhyamaka, the most extensive of which⁵⁸² is enounced in dialogue with the Nyāya school: the latter’s attack on the Mādhyamika declaration of “emptiness” (i.e. their utterance that things believed to exist in themselves must also be empty of existence in themselves) – made on the grounds that to declare everything not to have existence in itself is a negation of each thing, each thing necessarily being something real if the negation is to be real, i.e. on the grounds that the declaration of emptiness is self-contradictory – is simply reflected back to the Naiyāyikas: they are effectively making a declaration of *non-emptiness*, negating therefore not each thing’s existence in itself but its *lack* of existence in itself, each *lack* necessarily therefore being something real if *their* negation is to be real. (Incidentally, although the belief that negation must be of a real thing was explicitly a doctrine of the Nyāya, it must also have been a general belief – for instance Nāgārjuna in a general comment says⁵⁸³ that although it is wrong to say that things have existence in themselves, it is also wrong to say they lack existence in themselves, since that would imply their existence in themselves could make sense, which it cannot.)

In addition to the table-turning manoeuvre, Nāgārjuna next declares⁵⁸⁴ that he is not actually negating (denying) anything, but merely pointing out that reality lacks anything which could be singled out in the first place, to be negated or to be said to be lacking or anything else, and he gives the simile of pointing out, to someone who has been tricked by a mirage, that there is no water in it. That is, to overturn an objection to things’ emptiness of existence in themselves, firstly he is content to use the convention of negation, in the specific sense of *denials*, which we

⁵⁸⁰ *AL* II: 103-7

⁵⁸¹ I make this comparison advisedly with Sextus at *AL* II: 91-2.

⁵⁸² *VV* 61-9 in response to 11-20

⁵⁸³ *MMK* XV: 7

⁵⁸⁴ *VV* 63-7. Incidentally this is a clear example of mirror language being deployed, since Nāgārjuna’s two points would not be consistent if he actually believed them, whereas both effectively destroy the Nyāya position.

might say in Sextus' classification are the negations which convert real propositions into unreal ones, and secondly he switches to a deeper analysis where he points out he is not making a denial of something potentially real but deploying what perhaps in Sextus' scheme might be classified as an unreal negator, negating something (like the water in a mirage) which was never there, to leave only the real (sand and heat). Nāgārjuna is effectively saying that the conventional negations deployed both in the Nyāya attack (which produces the real from an assertion of the unreal) and in his table-turning counter-attack (which produces the unreal from an assertion of the real) are *both delusory*, not because (as *per* Sextus' argument here) the nature of the negator (be it real or unreal or both) is irreconcilable with the natures of the pre-negated and/or post-negated proposition, but because in reality nothing exists in itself which might be the object of any negation whatsoever. Things' existence in themselves (*svabhāva*) is not something he ever believed, but the consequence for his opponents who do believe in it is that things lack *svabhāva* – but this emptiness can only be relevant to the believers. This is sometimes expressed by saying that emptiness itself is empty: “It is explained in this way to prevent the notion that emptiness is an entity.”⁵⁸⁵

So clearly here the two projects reach the same conclusion, but by different methods in this case. However elsewhere Sextus does employ those very methods – the table-turning refutation and the disavowal of it as a belief in itself – as we shall now see.

Self-invalidation dilemmas can be immediately reversed on those who make them

We have seen that Nāgārjuna, when under attack here for refuting something – which his opponents claim he must therefore understand and which therefore must be a real thing (which would invalidate Nāgārjuna's refutation) – turns the tables on them and says that in that case they must accept that their own refutation of Nāgārjuna's refutation is also of something which *they* must have understood and which must therefore be a real thing (which invalidates *their* invalidation). Indeed this is just one instance from a treatise of his⁵⁸⁶ which is almost entirely composed of a dazzling sequence of such manoeuvres. Āryadeva also uses them.⁵⁸⁷

At the very outset⁵⁸⁸ of his arguments against the reasoners, and at the beginning of his inquiry into proof⁵⁸⁹, Sextus deals with the objection that when the Inquirers are inquiring into (i.e. refuting⁵⁹⁰) some particular belief, either they understand the belief, which is tantamount to

⁵⁸⁵ Candrakīrti, *MAv* VI: 185

⁵⁸⁶ *VV*

⁵⁸⁷ e.g. *CS* XVI: 3-5

⁵⁸⁸ *OP* II: 1-11

⁵⁸⁹ *AL* II: 330

⁵⁹⁰ Although he does not explicitly say “refuting”, given that his analyses are all made up of reports of the believers' affirmative beliefs on the one hand and refutations of them on the other, it is clearly principally the refutations which are in question here since it is principally *the outcome of the refutation* – and not the

assenting to it themselves, or they do not understand it, in which case they are not qualified to speak about it. He replies first of all⁵⁹¹ with a clarification of the kind of assent (i.e. a pre-conception which is not a perfect apprehension) that would be involved in having a “search image” at the outset of an investigation, then derives several absurd consequences from his opponents’ charge (that pre-conception and apprehension are the same) which they must accept if they level that charge at others. Firstly the various schools of believers could not refute *each other* without affirming each other’s doctrines either; this is a consequence Nagārjuna did not mention. The second absurd consequence he derives⁵⁹² is however almost exactly Nāgārjuna’s table-turning manoeuvre, but put rather less succinctly: the inconsistency charge, Sextus says, applies equally to his opponents, since their beliefs (*NB* their beliefs in general, however, not just – as Nāgārjuna’s argument here has it – those about refutation) are either the result of immediate impression or investigation, but clearly they cannot be the former since there is interminable dispute about non-evident phenomena, whilst if the latter there is an insoluble dilemma, one which is also enounced in Madhyamaka, namely between the redundancy of inquiring into something already understood, and the unacceptability of naming the subject of inquiry if it is not understood (see “Inquiry is impossible...” below). In the course of his refutations of signs, he also deals with an objection formulated as, “Whether you allow that signs exist or not, they must exist – for even if they are asserted not to, this assertion must have significance,” by a similar reversal⁵⁹³ thus: “Whether your signs are held to exist or not, they cannot exist – for even if they are held to, what you are asserting has been shown to be both unreal and to be deployable against signs.”⁵⁹⁴ Later still, in the context of refuting the premisses of proofs, on the grounds that they are apparent phenomena, apparent phenomena being in question, Sextus will refer to a similar objection from the believers, that any argument which claims to overthrow appearances overthrows itself, since appearances are more reliable than arguments, and because the argument is either mere assertion and immediately controvertible, or justified in turn, and that by means of either the non-apparent, which is less trustworthy still and therefore impotent, or by means of the apparent, which is tantamount to conceding that appearances *are* more reliable than arguments.⁵⁹⁵ His reply is another example of the table-turning manoeuvre: appearances being discrepant with each other and with intelligibles, either all are true (in which case contradictory facts can be

affirmation – of an entity (namely, the disclosed absurdity of believing in it) which cannot be reconciled with the idea of having, in advance, a “search image” for it (which presumably cannot be absurd if the inquiry is to make sense).

⁵⁹¹ In both *OP* and *AL*.

⁵⁹² In *OP* only, however – so this passage may well be what Sextus is referring to at *AL* II: 337 when he says, “To these people a reply will be made at some later time.”

⁵⁹³ Περὶ τροπῆς: Sextus uses this word explicitly at *OP* II: 187.

⁵⁹⁴ *OP* II: 132-3; and *AL* II: 295-7, where Sextus is explicit about the fascinating way that with these reversing arguments, just following the logic as believers can only bat us backwards and forwards between affirmation and denial.

⁵⁹⁵ *AL* II: 360-1

correct), none are true (which contradicts the opponents' intention), or some are – but this selection is either made arbitrarily (and hence can be dismissed immediately) or with justificatory arguments – but attempting to support appearances with arguments is tantamount to conceding that appearances are less reliable than arguments.⁵⁹⁶ And at the conclusion of his entire treatise, the equivalent objection is raised by the opponents about refutations of proof in general, and answered, in more detail than elsewhere but with the same import.⁵⁹⁷

Investigation is impossible for believers whether or not the issue is grasped

If, Sextus says, the beliefs are supposed to be due to an investigation having been carried out, i.e. the result of a sequence of reasoning, then that investigation itself must have been begun either while its matter was clearly apprehended or not. A matter *not yet apprehended* would (according to his opponents' charge) make an investigation supposedly “into it” actually irrelevant, for one would not be discovering anything about the matter on question, and indeed it would make more sense to say that the investigation came first to establish what was to be apprehended! The alternative, that the matter had already been apprehended, would make a subsequent investigation superfluous, since once it has been perfectly apprehended, what more could there be to find out?⁵⁹⁸ The same dilemma moves Sextus at the beginning of his investigation into proof⁵⁹⁹ to take pains to say the definition of proof is not being assented to as a real entity but used to generate a preconception for the purpose of investigation. The dilemma is only destructive for those who believe that entities can be affirmed and denied existence.

As usual Nāgārjuna puts the same point rather more elegantly in his refutation of the possibility of reasoning⁶⁰⁰. The bare sūtra says the case of reasoning is “the same as with doubt”⁶⁰¹, and in the commentary on the sūtra he explains: “The investigation is either in relation to a known object or an unknown object. In the case of it being in relation to a known object, what is investigated? Yet if it is in relation to an unknown object, likewise what is investigated? There is no third alternative.”

⁵⁹⁶ AL II: 362-6

⁵⁹⁷ OP II: 185-91; AL II: 465-81

⁵⁹⁸ OP II: 9

⁵⁹⁹ AL II: 321

⁶⁰⁰ *Tarka*, here used synonymously with analytical investigation, *vicāra* (VP 50). Nyāya however use *tarka* in the specific sense of arguments to refute opponents and they regard it as an extreme (and generally invalid) form of reasoning as opposed to *vāda* which they hold to be respectable.

⁶⁰¹ “Doubt”, incidentally, is dealt with equally succinctly at VP 21: “There can be no such thing as doubt about something, whether that thing is apprehended or not, because these two are respectively an existent [which is therefore evident and indubitable] and a non-existent [i.e. there is no entity there about which there might be doubt or certainty].”

Disavowal of the counter-charge in reversal for pacification of beliefs (but not apraxia)

Such a disavowal is Sextus' typical follow-up to the table-turning manoeuvre or the deployment of reversing arguments. We saw, at the conclusion of his refutations of the criterion of truth⁶⁰², that he was keen to clarify that the table-turning charge is not something he believes himself, merely something that the opponents must accept as being just as plausible as their own original charge. He exempts himself from the disputation citing the equal plausibility of the two positions, and thus refrains from assent to either, finding – and recommending to his opponents – suspension instead. The same self-exemption is made after the table-turning manoeuvre on those who believe in the sign, where the contrast between, on the one hand, believing in *either* the affirmative objections or destructive refutations and, on the other, seeing that *both fail*, is made very clear⁶⁰³, and again after the manoeuvre is performed on those who rely on appearances to support the premisses of proofs,⁶⁰⁴ and yet again after the tables are turned on those objecting to refutations of proof in general.⁶⁰⁵

As we have seen, Nāgārjuna, in the discussion of negation, in the course of which he matches his opponents' charge (against his denial of things' existence in themselves) of self-invalidation with the countercharge (against their charge) of like self-invalidation, also disavows the counter-charge⁶⁰⁶, by saying that from his own side he is not denying anything, since there is nothing meaningful to deny. Elsewhere he says, "It is *the idea*, of a thing [conceived as established but] which has not been established, which is negated,"⁶⁰⁷ and as is notorious his general position is that he does not have any position.⁶⁰⁸ But while it is clear that he sees the charge and the counter-charge to be equally persuasive (what Sextus would call "equipollent") *for his opponents*, he is – characteristically – more confident than Sextus in characterizing the consequences, particularly for what we can say about *what is real*, of the equipollence of two opposite discourses about the real: it is not just that we are unable to choose between them, but that we have *transcended* them, because it cannot be that either of them refer to anything actually real. Elsewhere he sums up the situation thus: "If there is a proposition, there is a counter-proposition, *and neither is actually true.*"⁶⁰⁹ In this case then he points out that it is senseless to deny anything, not to mention to deny the denial, because there is nothing there in the first place to deny.⁶¹⁰ To put it another way, Nāgārjuna's suspension is a complete pacification of beliefs

⁶⁰² *OP* II: 79; *AP* II: 443

⁶⁰³ *OP* II: 133; *AL* II: 298

⁶⁰⁴ *AL* II: 363

⁶⁰⁵ *AL* II: 473-6

⁶⁰⁶ *VV* 63-67

⁶⁰⁷ *VP* 16

⁶⁰⁸ *VV* 29

⁶⁰⁹ *RA* 104 (II: 4) *

⁶¹⁰ *VV* 63

about what is actually real: I suspect Sextus' is too but scholars' confusion over how to reconcile this with the practical criterion (which we can see is easy with the doctrine of the two truths) has ensured that for some this remains a controversial question. The closest Sextus comes to expressing the disavowal of the counter-charge as complete pacification of beliefs about what is real (the ultimate truth) despite maintaining a practical criterion (the circumscribed transactional truth) is perhaps at the climax of the wrangling about appearances as justification for believing the premisses of proofs. He says that the best conclusion that can be drawn from (what are after all merely) *apparent* premisses is an *apparent* conclusion, "necessary for practical purposes"⁶¹¹ but not a conclusion about what is actually real, which he ascribes to the inventions of those who assume things rashly.⁶¹²

Inference and signification is either inconclusive, controvertible or circular

Sextus next considers⁶¹³ the conditional sentence, "If X then Y," and yet again forces its advocates onto the horns of the dilemma between controvertible mere assertion and impossible justification. The problem with justification here is expressed as begging the question: if the consequence's validity is justified, the justification itself, if non-negligible, would have to depend on the very validation mechanism which is being sought by appealing to it. Variations of this argument occur elsewhere. For example, a syllogism's conclusion is either pre-evident, in which case it is redundant, or non-evident, in which case we are caught on this same dilemma, between the validity of its logical progression from antecedent to consequent being either mere assertion and therefore controvertible or with justification in turn and therefore begging the question.⁶¹⁴ And again the significance of a sign is either obvious in advance, in which case the sign has no purpose, or not obvious, in which case again we are suspended between controvertible assertion and impossible justification.⁶¹⁵ The same argument is deployed successively against the Porch's definitions of arguments inconclusive through inconsistency, bad form and deficiency⁶¹⁶, because their opposites, the consistent, the well-formed and the complete arguments are liable to the same destructive dilemma.

We have already seen how Nāgārjuna deploys⁶¹⁷ the same dilemma against supposedly valid means of cognition. In the common vocabulary of the Buddhists and their opponents it is normal to include inference⁶¹⁸ in valid means of cognition, so the Madhyamaka's

⁶¹¹ τῶ ἀναγκαίῳ πρὸς τὴν χρεῖαν

⁶¹² AL II: 368

⁶¹³ AL II: 118-23

⁶¹⁴ OP II: 110-16

⁶¹⁵ AL II: 265-8

⁶¹⁶ OP II: 151-5; AL II: 435-46; OP II: 193

⁶¹⁷ VV 31-2; VP 5

⁶¹⁸ *anumāna*

problematizations of the latter, which as we saw exactly match Sextus', apply to the former as an instance of them of course. More specifically in his refutation of syllogistic inference, Nāgārjuna says⁶¹⁹ that the reason (for a conclusion) does not exist either, "because there is no reason for the reason." In his commentary on this sūtra he explicitly presents Sextus' dilemma: either justification is believed necessary, in which case there is *regressus ad infinitum* of reasons, or it is believed unnecessary, in which case the "reason" is meaningless and furthermore just like this "reason", everything else would have to be establishable without reason.

Speech is convention and cannot discover what is actually true

Sextus' last argument against expressions and propositions is a rather unconvincing denial⁶²⁰ of the validity of the dialecticians' classification of conjoined propositions as entirely false if any one of their component propositions is false. He rejoins that there is just as much reason to classify them as "no more true than false" because of the idea of mixing. He gives the example of black and white, which when conjoined make grey rather than black. Like others of these "mixing" arguments this one is not found as far as I know, in Madhyamaka.

However it leads Sextus on to some pronouncements on the nature of language which have very close parallels in Madhyamaka indeed. Because his opponents object that in ordinary language a tear in one part of a garment compels us to say that the entire garment is torn, Sextus points out that we must concede that ordinary language uses terms that are "misapplied"⁶²¹. He says, "It does not at all investigate into ~what is true by reason of nature⁶²², but into ~what is so by reason of [general] belief⁶²³."

Nāgārjuna in one treatise discusses the nature of the connection between words and referents, and points out that since one word can be applied to many different referents, and since to one referent many words can be applied (including in different languages), neither is there a real naming-word or a real thing-being-named.⁶²⁴ Elsewhere he explains that despite pointing out that no phenomenon arises or ceases, the Buddha spoke of things, and their arising and ceasing, "for a practical purpose".⁶²⁵ This is intimately related to the two kinds of "is"⁶²⁶, which we have

⁶¹⁹ VP 42 *

⁶²⁰ AL II: 124-7

⁶²¹ Καταχρηστικοῖς, AL II: 129. Bury translates this rather wildly as "inexact". Interestingly, another nuance of the word (as used in Ptolemy) is "serviceable": the two significations sum up very well the Buddhist *vyavahāra*, transactional conventions, i.e. *saṃvṛtisatya*, concepts used as rules of thumb while they drive us to achieve aims and succeed, but which cannot be established as referring to the truth.

⁶²² τὸ πρὸς τὴν φύσιν ἀληθές

⁶²³ τὸ πρὸς τὴν δόξαν

⁶²⁴ VP 54-55

⁶²⁵ *kāryārtham*, YS 21

⁶²⁶ *satya dvaya*

seen is a central doctrine of Madhyamaka, ~what is true in the ultimate sense⁶²⁷ and the circumscribed⁶²⁸, conventional transactional⁶²⁹ reality and there too we see language and concepts confined⁶³⁰ to the latter. As for the first, the Prajñāpāramitā literature states, “All words for things in use in the world must be left behind... the deathless, supreme, unequalled knowledge is then attained.”⁶³¹

Sextus goes on to give three examples of how language is useful but not truthful: when we say that we dig a well, weave a cloak and build a house. In each case at the moment of beginning the action the object of the action does not exist, so how can the action act on a non-existent object? And by the time the object *does* exist, the action must already have reached completion, so how can we avoid redundancy when we say that the action is then performed on the object?

This conception, of an action or process carried out on an object, is frequently faulted by Nāgārjuna on the same grounds (namely that it involves either contradiction or redundancy): for example, crossed space cannot be crossed because its crossing is already done, and as-yet-uncrossed space cannot be crossed because there is a contradiction (and to be thorough he adds that the space supposedly “currently in the process of being crossed” is not being crossed because that involves both faults)⁶³² – so it is unacceptably woolly to declare, as we do, that someone “crosses a space”; and again, neither the youth nor the elderly person ages, the former because there is contradiction, the latter because of redundancy⁶³³ – so it is unacceptable to say, as we do, “someone ages”; and again, neither milk nor curds curdles, for the same reasons⁶³⁴; generally, then change is impossible, because neither the changed thing nor the unchanged thing can change.⁶³⁵

Sound cannot come into being

He goes on to apply a similar, but rather less convincing, critique to uttered sounds⁶³⁶ since some claim that they are the locus of the true: he says⁶³⁷ they do not exist either while they are coming

⁶²⁷ *paramārtha satya*

⁶²⁸ *saṃvṛti*

⁶²⁹ *vyavahāra*

⁶³⁰ In early Madhyamaka; later writers became laxer and laxer about forbidding language access to what is true in the ultimate sense.

⁶³¹ *Ratnaguṇasamcayagāthā* I, 27: “*yāvanti loki parikīrtita dharmanām~a(/ā/u)... amṛtaṃ ti jñānu paramaṃ na tu yo pareṇa*”. (Yuyama, 1976, pp. 15-16)

⁶³² *MMK* II: 1-5

⁶³³ *MMK* XIII: 5

⁶³⁴ *MMK* XIII: 6

⁶³⁵ *MMK* XIII: 4-6

⁶³⁶ Φωνή. Bury translates this “speech”; Bett prefers “utterance”. It is the word the Inspectives use of their own speech to show its similarity with the voices of animals.

⁶³⁷ *AL* II: 130 (end)-131

into being, since they do not yet exist – and in this they are like the house being built and the ship – nor when they are remaining silent, as everyone agrees.

This is the same as the simplest version of the Madhyamaka argument against the arising of phenomena. As Nāgārjuna says⁶³⁸, in reply (say the commentaries) to the objection that it is valid to say that an entity arises because of the future existence of that entity, “But when it does not exist, what sort of thing could then arise?” Some of the commentaries go more finely into the issue, imagining the objection that while the coming into being is in progress, although the final entity does not yet exist, some other entity does, and it is on the basis of this latter that the final entity comes into being: they dismiss this by pointing out that if it is something other than that final entity which is acting as the support for coming into being, again it is not the final entity which comes into being.

Neither meaningless not meaningful uttered sounds can be the locus of the true

Sextus’ next dilemma⁶³⁹ seems easily soluble: since meaningless utterances obviously cannot be true (or false), we are inclined to think that the true can be located in the meaningful utterance. But Sextus points out that if the utterance were the locus for it, then people who did not speak Greek could understand that a meaningful Greek utterance were true, which is obviously not the case.

Nāgārjuna similarly dislocates the word from the referent with reference to the variety in languages: “Names constructed by convention are seen to be of multiple forms.” And the commentary elaborates: “For instance the cow is called by different names by people of different groups, owing to the difference of languages in the countries, and also the same thing is called in Sanskrit *piṇḍarasa* and by other names and expressions in other languages.”⁶⁴⁰ This argument occurs as part of his refutation of the possibility of two people debating being sure they are talking about the same thing.

This is Sextus invoking what in Buddhism called *pratītya samutpāda*, interdependent co-arising: that the true (like everything else) arises out of a nexus of inter-related phenomena, including the aware subject (the non-Greek speaker in Sextus’ example). Others noticed it: Aulus Gellius describes⁶⁴¹ the Pyrrhonists as asserting that all phenomena are interdependent, that “there is nothing at all that is self-dependent or which has its own power and nature, but absolutely all things have ‘reference to something else’ and seem to be such as their appearance is while they are seen...”

⁶³⁸ *MMK* VII: 17cd

⁶³⁹ *AL* II: 133-4

⁶⁴⁰ *VP* 54

⁶⁴¹ *Noctes Atticae* XI: 5: 7

The absurdity of an entirely mental reality

Sextus' last bone of contention⁶⁴² is with those who assert that the locus of truth is in the motion of thought, i.e. that no external thing is true, which he summarily dismisses as absurd. He adds that there could be no consensus due to the variety of intellects (and by the way he ignores here a chance for the usual mere assertion versus circular justification dilemma) and that we would be forced to declare all such motions true, which is impossible.

The Madhyamaka took the claim that the external world does not exist rather more seriously: the other discourse of Mahāyāna, the Yogācāra, asserted just that, so there are a number of elaborate later Madhyamaka refutations of this doctrine, the most well known of which is probably Candrakīrti's⁶⁴³, which he begins by saying, "When is there such a thing as a thought without an external object?" and ends by interpreting certain sūtras in which the Buddha taught the unreality of the external world, and which are taken by the Yogācāra to support their doctrine, as of provisional intent, leading up to the final teaching, emptiness. In the course of his argument he makes a point⁶⁴⁴ similar to Sextus': if reality were all mental there would be no ordered structure, and although he does not say explicitly that the doctrine is absurd, we can be confident he implies it when he recommends⁶⁴⁵ that his opponents go and tell ordinary people there is no external reality in a debate: "We will side with the winner."

The critique is signs is of fabricated beliefs, not of ordinary conventions

Sextus devotes considerable effort to debunking⁶⁴⁶ the so-called indicative sign, i.e. the sign which is supposed to reveal what is non-evident. The first example of non-evident phenomenon that the dogmatists assert to be revealed by such a sign is the soul.⁶⁴⁷ In his introduction to the critiques of signs, while giving the Porch's classification of the various kinds of objects of knowledge and signs, Sextus distinguishes the ordinary world's suggestive⁶⁴⁸ sign – in which two phenomena are usefully remembered as occurring together, such as smoke and fire – from what he calls the dogmatic philosophers' "private invention", the indicative⁶⁴⁹ sign – which supposedly reveals hidden "truths" such as the soul – and confines his attack to the latter, saying that not only do the practitioners of Inspection not attack the ordinary world but they even lend support to it by

⁶⁴² *AL* II: 137

⁶⁴³ *MA* VI: 45-97

⁶⁴⁴ *MA* VI: 78

⁶⁴⁵ *MA* VI: 83

⁶⁴⁶ *AL* II: 141-299; *OP* II: 97-133

⁶⁴⁷ *OP* II: 101; *AL* II: 155

⁶⁴⁸ (ὑπο)μνηστικόν

⁶⁴⁹ ἐνδεικτικόν

assenting undogmatically to what it relies on.⁶⁵⁰ Later he is scathing about the idea that the sign is a syllogism, pointing out that when dogs (following signs, it must be admitted) track their prey they are not, presumably, invoking syllogistic reasoning.⁶⁵¹

Candrakīrti similarly says, “The truth of everyday convention should not be subjected to analysis.”⁶⁵² But that this truth similarly excludes such non-experienceable doctrines as the soul is also stated clearly: “The soul as it is imagined by the non-Buddhists [is...] construed as real, through it has no reality in ordinary experience.”⁶⁵³

Opposing the project contributes to it helplessly

Both projects make this claim, but for different reasons. Sextus says⁶⁵⁴ that the more beliefs his opponents assert against the deconstructive critiques the better because the result is ever more insoluble controversy and equipollence between the various arguments, such that the believers themselves contribute to the appropriate conditions for suspension: “The person who appears to contradict us [...] is actually supporting us.”

As usual for the Madhyamaka it is not so much the equipollence which is important but the ultimate failure of assertions of belief of any kind even on their own terms. The grand climax to Nāgārjuna’s overturning of a whole gamut of objections to emptiness, in which again and again the fault his opponents are finding in him is revealed to apply instead to them, is his declaration: “Everything works for the person for whom emptiness works; nothing works for the person for whom emptiness does not work.”⁶⁵⁵ In particular in his main treatise the vanity of attempts to refute emptiness is declared openly and abruptly at the conclusion of a brief but highly counter-intuitive analysis of components of experience: “For anyone who objects to a refutation based on emptiness, everything they say will beg the question and so will not be an applicable objection. For anyone who finds flaws in an explanation based on emptiness, everything they say will beg the question and so will not be an applicable flaw.”⁶⁵⁶

Signs cannot be characterized independently or in relation

Sextus’ argument here⁶⁵⁷ is similar to what he said about the true being particularly characterized or relative⁶⁵⁸, but here there is a much closer Madhyamaka equivalent. His problem is that while

⁶⁵⁰ *OP* II: 100-3; *AL* II: 151-8

⁶⁵¹ *AL* II: 269-71

⁶⁵² *MA* VI: 35cd

⁶⁵³ *MA* VI: 26

⁶⁵⁴ *AL* II: 160

⁶⁵⁵ *VV* 70 * A very similar statement occurs at *MMK* XXIV: 14 *

⁶⁵⁶ *MMK* IV: 8-9

⁶⁵⁷ *AL* II: 163-5

⁶⁵⁸ *Supra*, “The true is characterized neither by itself nor in relation to something else.”

no one would be stupid enough to argue that a sign is something identifiable by itself, presumably because if it were it would not relate to anything else and so could not reveal anything else (which would obviously contradict the definition of the sign), asserting on the other hand that the sign and the signified are relative (the only alternative) involves two difficulties: firstly that the sign and the signified are in mutual dependence so both never reach establishment, and secondly that this mutual dependence means that they have to be apprehended at the same time, which makes a mockery of the idea that one (the sign) is supposed to disclose the other (the signified).⁶⁵⁹ These same consequences are raised later⁶⁶⁰ in the context of an argument which purports to show that the sign can neither be of the evident or the non-evident, where they are combined with a reiteration of the distinction between a suggestive sign (although there he does not invoke this term) and an indicative sign, and incidentally those who believe in such distinctions are rather indelicately condemned as “perfectly stupid”! And elsewhere the argument is used to destroy one kind of sign very dear to the belief-mongering philosophers, namely proof.⁶⁶¹

Well, then, a thing’s inactivity and uncognizability, inescapably implicit in believing it to be independent, is the absurdity in believing in *any* entities as actually existent according to the Madhyamaka – and this means not just entities such as signs which even conventionally are spoken of as relating to something else (and whose conflict with a supposition of independent identifiability Sextus is here content to refer to, and glancingly at that), but *all* entities, since the very fact of cognizing them requires a relation to the cognizer (a depth to which Sextus does not analyse here).

The consequences derived from the supposition of relationality have closer Madhyamaka equivalents. Firstly, the exposée of the impossibility of establishing a pair of entities when they are mutually dependent is a staple of Madhyamaka. Nāgārjuna performs it, for example, on characteristics and what they characterize: since characteristics do not exist without something to characterize, and similarly characterized things do not exist without characteristics, there are no characteristics and nothing characterized.⁶⁶² More specifically, he applies it to the pair of entities of which sign and signified are a special case – namely the supposed valid means of coming to know something, and the object knowledge of which is arrived at by those means – and reproduces Sextus’ argument exactly: “If you think the objects of valid cognition are established by establishing the valid means of cognition, because the objects require the means, and conversely that the means are established by the objects, because the means require objects, then

⁶⁵⁹ The same contradiction between disclosure and relational existence is invoked against the sign at *OP* II: 117-20 and again against the sign conceived as the antecedent in a syllogistic inference at *AL* II: 272-3

⁶⁶⁰ *AL* II: 171-5

⁶⁶¹ *OP* II: 169-70; and *AL* II: 453-61 explains elaborately why mutual dependence implies lack of actual establishment.

⁶⁶² *MMK* V: 4-5 Since the characterized is some supposed underlying external reality characteristics as critiqued by the Madhyamaka seem to fit into Sextus’ presentation of the indicative sign.

neither the objects nor the means are established.”⁶⁶³ He goes on⁶⁶⁴ to spell out how neither can establish the other until it itself is established, so we are caught in a Catch-22. He adds a further consequence that Sextus does not invoke here: namely, that there is hopeless degeneration from clarity in the terms, because we are effectively allowing not just the sign to signify the signified thing, but also the signified thing to signify (i.e. identify) the sign, and he gives the analogous case of the fatherer and the fathered: if they are identified through their mutual relation, then the fathered fathers the fatherer as much as *vice versa*, so the fatherer ends up being fathered by what he fathered, and we can no longer identify clearly who is the fatherer and who is the fathered. Again, most succinctly, in his sweeping analysis of the idea of a prior entity, Nāgārjuna says: “Someone is made evident by means of something; something is made evident by someone. But how can someone without something, or something without someone, be manifested?”⁶⁶⁵ And: “The valid means of cognition and the validly cognized object are conjoined and therefore interdependent. Thus neither can be established in itself.”⁶⁶⁶

And as for Sextus’ other consequence, the Madhyamaka also has frequent recourse to the problem that if there are simultaneous entities, neither can be dependent on the other. So, for example, after refuting the establishment of passion and the impassioned person on the grounds of their mutual dependence as above, Nāgārjuna goes on to point out: “Moreover it cannot be that the impassioned person and the passion arise together, because the impassioned person and the passion would then be independent of each other.”⁶⁶⁷ More to our purpose he says (in the course of an analysis which we will examine more closely on Sextus’ next point) that it is not possible for the means of discovery to exist at the same time as what is discovered, because in that case each cannot be the cause or the effect of the other.⁶⁶⁸

No chronological permutation of sign and signified makes sense

Sextus then⁶⁶⁹ extends this into a disclosure of the absurdities in *all* chronological permutations of the indicative sign and what it supposedly indicates: the indicative sign cannot be apprehended *after* what it signifies, because in that case the sign would be redundant and therefore not a sign and the signified would be evident and contradict the believers’ definition of what an indicative sign is supposed to point to (the non-evident); it cannot be apprehended *at the same time as* what it signifies because the definitions imply a disclosure in time which could not be instantaneous;

⁶⁶³ VV 46

⁶⁶⁴ VV 47-50

⁶⁶⁵ MMK IX: 5

⁶⁶⁶ VP 2-3

⁶⁶⁷ MMK VI: 3

⁶⁶⁸ VP 12 (commentary, last branch of the trilemma)

⁶⁶⁹ AL II: 166-70

and it cannot be apprehended *before* what it signifies, because then it would have nothing to relate to, the signified thing not yet existing, and so it could not be a sign of anything.

Such chronological analysis is a staple of Madhyamaka argumentation. Taking the signified as an example of a result and the sign as an example of a condition for that result, we have something close the general case of this argument at the outset of Nāgārjuna's principle treatise.⁶⁷⁰ More similarly to Sextus here is the deconstruction of the impassioned person and their characteristic, passion, which he later recommends should be applied to all phenomena which are believed to occur together (in the way that sign and signified most certainly are).⁶⁷¹ Most closely of all, Nāgārjuna leads us on an identical thorough analysis of all the chronological permutations of the valid means of cognition and the object it allows us to cognize (part of which we have already encountered on the previous topic) in which he says: "The valid means to cognition [*sc.* the sign] may exist before the object of cognition [*sc.* the signified], or after it, or the valid means of cognition and the object may exist at the same time. Among these, if (a) the valid means of cognition existed *before* the object to be cognized, thanks to what should it be called 'a valid means of cognition'? There is no object of cognition thanks to which the valid means of cognition could exist and [thanks to which] something could be ascertained by [that] valid means of cognition. Or else, if (b) it existed *after* it, given that the object is cognized already, what could possibly be a valid means of cognizing it? It is not admitted that something not yet arisen could be a valid means of cognizing something which has already arisen, because (1) there would occur the absurd consequence that [other non-existent entities,] even the hare's horns would turn into valid means of cognition of it, and because (2) something which has not arisen cannot co-exist with something which has arisen. Or else if (c) it exists *at the same time*, this is not possible either, in the same way that since the two horns on a cow arise at the same time, each cannot be the cause or the effect of the other."⁶⁷² These are exactly Sextus' arguments, although it is notable that some of the branches are put in quite different terms to his.

Faulting the refutation of signs with self-contradiction is a misunderstanding

In the final section of the deconstruction of sign, as we have seen, Sextus responds to two objections from the believers, which he overturns by the table-turning manoeuvre before as usual declaring equipollence of opposed arguments and suspension, but also in this case dismisses on the basis of their being *false accusations* based on a misunderstanding.⁶⁷³ The objections' form is reminiscent of the master-argument Sextus deploys against *their* belief in various supposedly valid means of cognition throughout the treatise. Firstly, object the opponents, the arguments

⁶⁷⁰ *MMK* I: 5-7

⁶⁷¹ *MMK* VI: 1-3

⁶⁷² *VP* 12 (commentary)

⁶⁷³ *OP* II: 130-3; *AP* II: 275-98

purporting to refute signs are either merely asserted, in which case they can be immediately controverted by mere assertions of the existence of signs, or made together with justifications, but these latter being signs themselves (of the justness of the original argument) can only be invoked, presumably, if they exist – thus the one who deploys such justifications for the argument against signs contradicts that very argument and concedes that signs exist. Secondly, the refuting arguments are either significant or not. If they are not they can be neglected, but if they signify something then they are again signs, and again their content, the refutation of signs' existence, is contradicted, and using those arguments is tantamount to conceding that signs exist. Instead of just performing a table-turning manoeuvre, Sextus replies here that the indicative sign is being refuted, by means of suggestive signs – that is to say, it is not that his refuting arguments *indicate* that the existence of indicative signs is absurd (which would indeed be self-contradictory), but that the refuting arguments *are suggested* to the mind and held in the memory and “affect us”, even though they do not refer to anything real.

Although I feel Sextus is being a little elusive here, it is tantalizing to consider that what he might mean is something similar to what Nāgārjuna says about his own refutations of all things' existence in themselves, when his opponents make a similar objection: if, they complain, those refutations are empty of existence in themselves, they can be neglected, whereas if they are not, their content is contradicted and the existence of entities in themselves is effectively conceded; Nāgārjuna replies by saying that his opponents' objection is based on a misunderstanding. He concedes happily that his own arguments are indeed empty of existence in themselves, so there is no need for special pleading, but that he adds that they continue nevertheless (or rather for that reason) to carry out their task of establishing for us that things are thus empty by means of operating in interdependent co-origination, which he then goes on to describe, and for this mechanism he invokes the simile of one phantom successfully obstructing another even though it is not real.⁶⁷⁴ Given that it is taught that one needs to become familiar with the disclosure of emptiness, perhaps there is some similarity here with what Sextus means by the suggestive sign being held in the memory and affecting us.

Proof cannot relate to what is proven, whether included or excluded

Having dismissed the idea of a generic proof on the rather obvious grounds that an argument without real premisses is not an argument at all, Sextus unfolds a fascinating exploration of the failure of conceptual thought due to the absurdities consequent upon the way it simultaneously sets delimitations and connections, when he investigates whether the very idea of proving

⁶⁷⁴ VV 1-2, 21-23.

something specific makes sense or not.⁶⁷⁵ He foists on his opponents the dilemma between proof being composed of both the premisses and the conclusion or being composed only of the premisses. If it is composed of both, it will be non-evident and thus require proof itself, since it includes a part (the conclusion) which is by definition non-evident; worse, if it exists in itself thus (with the conclusion included in it), it cannot relate to anything *other than* itself which we might consider “the proven thing” unless we say this proven thing is a second conclusion (the first being the included one), which is absurd. On the other hand, if the proof is defined as the premisses alone, it is impotent, not even a complete proposition, just a hanging fragment, “If this is true, then...” which no one will accept.

Nāgārjuna’s refutations of the reason⁶⁷⁶ in a conclusive syllogism, which we could at a stretch translate as proof, includes a dilemma between its identity to and otherness than the thesis⁶⁷⁷ to be proven: “Whether the proving reason is different from the thesis to be proved, or not different, in either case there is no proving reason.” There are also various arguments in Madhyamaka on related topics that can be rephrased in terms very close to Sextus’. The impossibility of considering any entity (not just a proof) to relate to another by means supposedly of the relation of otherness⁶⁷⁸ starts to look like Sextus’ argument here if applied to proof: Is the proof one thing, and the conclusion something else, or not? If it is something else, i.e. entirely other, it cannot depend on the premisses. If it is not, there is nothing else to relate it to. The difference is in that last consequence: whereas Sextus is saying that a second conclusion would be necessary, Nāgārjuna’s problem applied here is that the adjudication of “otherness” has been lost. Nāgārjuna’s elaborate deconstruction of the causal relation can also be applied to proof: if the result (the conclusion) is truly other than the cause (the proof), they cannot be related one to the other, i.e. nothing is identifiable as proved and nothing as proof; but if the result is *not* other than the cause (i.e. the proven is somehow in the proof), this is self-multiplication and no external result (conclusion) can ever be arrived at.⁶⁷⁹

Syllogisms addressing experience as separate from idea involve redundancy

Sextus presents an involved series of disclosures of the redundancy in and therefore inconclusiveness of the 5 kinds of “syllogisms not needing justification” asserted by the Porch, which all depend on the arguments’ repetition of the syllogistic consequence, this repetition being due to the fact that the Porch divide the syllogism into a theoretical part, i.e. the universal

⁶⁷⁵ *OP* II: 173-6; *AL* II: 385-90

⁶⁷⁶ *hetu*

⁶⁷⁷ *pakṣa*

⁶⁷⁸ *MMK* XIV: 5-7, an argument arising out of an examination of how the sense organs and objects are supposed to connect.

⁶⁷⁹ *MMK* XX: 19-20

concomitance (e.g. whenever there is smoke there is fire), and an applied part (e.g. there is smoke here, therefore there must be fire here)⁶⁸⁰. The five variants are as follows: the first is of the type, “If A (e.g. there is smoke), then B (there is fire), but in fact A (there is smoke here), therefore B (there is fire here);” the second, “If A, then B, but in fact not B, therefore not A;” the third, “A and B are mutually exclusive, but in fact A, therefore not B;” the fourth, “A and B are comprehensive and mutually exclusive, but in fact A, therefore not B;” and the fifth, “A and B are comprehensive and mutually exclusive, but in fact not A, therefore B.” In each case, Sextus argues, (although he only deals with the first type in detail,) the application (the “in fact” clause and its consequent) are a complete syllogism, which renders the universal concomitance (the earlier clause and consequent) redundant.

Intriguingly, just as Sextus’ Porch opponents express syllogisms involving redundant repetition, so do Nāgārjuna’s Nyāya opponents in his treatise against their logic. Their syllogism is similar to the Porch’s, except they include an elucidating example case with the universal concomitance, and the parts are traditionally in a different order, and with even more redundancy, a backward-then-forward formulation: “Here B⁶⁸¹, because in fact A⁶⁸²: and always if A then B (as in an example case)⁶⁸³, but in fact here A⁶⁸⁴, therefore here B⁶⁸⁵.” Nāgārjuna has as little patience as Sextus with the redundancy: “If the thesis is proved by the reason, then the absurd consequence occurs that the universal concomitance and exemplary case and the remaining [clauses] have no reason. If you think that it is proved merely by means of the reason, then the the universal concomitance and exemplary case and the remaining [clauses] will become redundant, because the purpose [of the syllogism] is accomplished by mere reason. Conversely, if it is admitted that the universal concomitance and exemplary case perform the proof, then the reason becomes useless.”⁶⁸⁶

Syllogisms about experience either fail or are redundant

This is followed by the overturning of categorical syllogisms of Aristotle *et al.* on grounds of their being non-evident or redundant.⁶⁸⁷ For example, in a syllogism of the type, “A is B; B is C; therefore A is C,” the intermediate step is, Sextus says, either non-evident or obvious. If it is non-evident, then it is not accepted as a logical necessity of course and the syllogism breaks down. But if it is evident (due to our past experience), then as soon the first phrase is considered, the

⁶⁸⁰ *OP* II: 159-62; and *AL* II: 440-2, which only deals with the first.

⁶⁸¹ i.e. the proposition to be proved (*pakṣa*, *pratijñā*).

⁶⁸² i.e. the reason (*hetu*).

⁶⁸³ i.e. the universal concomitance with an example (*udāharaṇa*).

⁶⁸⁴ i.e. the application to this case, literally “leading up” (*upanaya*).

⁶⁸⁵ i.e. the conclusion, literally “stopping point” (*nigamana*).

⁶⁸⁶ *VP* 44-6 (commentary)

⁶⁸⁷ *OP* II: 163-6

third is implied, such that the syllogism should be, and is sufficiently, expressed as, “A is B; therefore A is C.” Thus Sextus finds the Aristotelian syllogism either indefinite or at fault through redundancy.

Nāgārjuna presents a similar dilemma, but between not *lack* of evidence but *contradiction* of evidence, on the one hand, and redundancy again, on the other, against the Naiyāyikas’ syllogism: “The thesis and the reason are either different or not different. If they are truly different, what can occur? [For example,] given the thesis, ‘The wool is white,’ if it is asked what the reason is, and it is, ‘because it is black,’ this is not admitted, because whiteness is not proven by a black prover. However if the reason and the thesis are not [different], what can occur? Given the thesis, ‘The wool is white,’ if it is asked what the reason is and it is, ‘because it is white,’ this is not able to prove it, but is in the same predicament as what is to be proven.”⁶⁸⁸ That is to say, such a syllogism is either out of line with reality, and thus fails as a syllogism, or in line with reality, and therefore superfluous. Alternatively we can produce the Aristotelian syllogism by reformulating the Nyāya syllogism without the elucidating example case: “A (this place) is B (a place full of smoke), and B (a place full of smoke) is always C (a place where there is fire), therefore A (this place) is C (a place where there is fire).” Thus “Here A is C” is the thesis (and the stopping point), “A is B” is the reason (and the leading clause), “B is always C” is the universal concomitance. And all of Nāgārjuna’s complaints apply.

What is proven cannot be non-evident or pre-evident

Here we can identify an interesting link between two seemingly distinct kinds of argument that we have seen both Sextus and Madhyamaka deploy: the master argument against valid means of cognition on the one hand and the conceptual impossibility of processes on the other. Sextus argues here that neither proving the non-evident nor proving the pre-evident makes sense, on the grounds that the proof would thus respectively either require further proof or be redundant: if the non-evident is proven, the conclusion clearly requires further establishment; and the pre-evident, being pre-evident, does not require proof, so a proof would be redundant!⁶⁸⁹

So in one sense we can see this as similar to criterion-destroying dilemma between the impossibility of justification and controvertibility that as we now know both Sextus and Madhyamaka deploy very extensively, where instead of controvertibility we have redundancy (since in this case we are testing the proposition about reality against an experience of something evident). But at the same time it is a specific case of the general kind of arguments Sextus also deployed specifically against the notion of building a house etc. and Nāgārjuna deployed against the notion of churning milk etc. – namely that these notions do not make sense because they

⁶⁸⁸ VP 41

⁶⁸⁹ OP II: 168; AL II: 451-2

effectively assert two mutually exclusive ideas, that the acted-upon entity is *the same* before and after the process (because the same word, such as “house” or “milk” is used before and after) and *different* before compared to after the process (because it is a process involving a change in that entity). Just as we ordinarily say, “I build a house,” we also ordinarily say, “I prove a conclusion.” But in both cases if the product were already an entity, there would be no need for the process – the building or the proving. But if it is not an entity, then there is nothing there – either to build or to prove – and the result of the process is a failure – the building of a non-house and the establishment of a non-conclusion.

Destructive 2 by 2 permutative tetralemmas

Incidentally, elsewhere⁶⁹⁰ Sextus has a destructive tetralemma between all the possible permutations of evident and non-evident premisses and conclusions, redeploying previous arguments. That this *form* is a Madhyamaka staple⁶⁹¹ hardly needs pointing out, as so far studies of Pyrrhonist-Madhyamaka parallels have tended to focus on just this form of argument.

Whether or not there is a definiendum, definition does not make sense

Sextus goes on to demolish another cherished invention of the belief-mongers, the idea that something can be defined. If, he argues⁶⁹², one tries to define a definiendum which has not yet been identified, then one would be applying characteristics to an unknown entity, which is absurd. On the other hand, if the definiendum has already been identified, then reciting characteristics is description merely, and does not contribute to that identification. Thus in neither case does definition make sense, and since there is no third alternative, definition does not make sense at all. He goes on to apply this conundrum to the supposed communication of a definition (from teacher to pupil).⁶⁹³

Nāgārjuna elegantly encapsulates both these points when he says, “Something without defining features does not exist anywhere at all. Since there is nothing without defining features, to what do defining features apply? Defining features do not apply to what has them, nor to what does not; neither do they apply to something other than what does or does not have them. If defining features have no way to apply, it makes no sense to say that there should be something defined. If the defined is senseless, its defining features cannot exist either. Therefore the defined does not exist, and the defining features have no existence either.”⁶⁹⁴ Elsewhere⁶⁹⁵ he

⁶⁹⁰ *OP* II: 177-9; *AL* II: 391-5

⁶⁹¹ See the 5 great arguments under Part I: “Deconstructive modes”.

⁶⁹² *OP* II: 207

⁶⁹³ *OP* II: 208-10

⁶⁹⁴ *MMK* V: 2-5

succinctly invokes the problem of circular establishment: “A defining feature does not exist without the thing being defined; the thing being defined does not exist without a defining feature. Thus they are both conditioned, and neither exists in itself. Neither can establish the other or itself since what does not exist cannot establish anything.”

We avoid grotesqueness

In the course of his attack on definitions, Sextus points out⁶⁹⁶ that they rather obscure than clarify issues, and he gives some comical examples of how reciting supposed defining characteristics of something rather than just using the conventional word for that thing will reduce ordinary people to bemusement or even hilarity.

Although Madhyamaka does not make this point about their opponents’ definitions *per se* they do clearly share the same ethos of employing what is acceptable in the world, and the same amused suspicion that it is their opponents and not they themselves who are likely to be rejected by ordinary people. For example, Āryadeva is clearly enjoying himself when he points out⁶⁹⁷ that there are those among his opponents who assert that “virgin girls contain foetuses, food contains excrement, houses exist apart from their components, and cloths exist apart from their threads...” and he asks: “Who will believe and accept this? Our teaching on the other hand [...] is in accord with the beliefs of the people of the world.”

Division of names into meanings does not refer to essences

Sextus next attacks the supposed division of names into significations by pointing out that names are mere conventions, as is shown by different languages applying different names to the same thing, so cannot get at the essence of things as the believers claim.⁶⁹⁸

Nāgārjuna says, “Names are made by convention and seen to be of many forms,” and his commentary refers to various languages’ words for cow, and for “what is called in Sanskrit *piṇḍarasa*”.⁶⁹⁹

Wholes are not divided into parts

There follow⁷⁰⁰ arguments that are summarized versions of those presented on the topic of physical reality (especially subtraction) so we defer our treatment until there.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁵ ŚS 27

⁶⁹⁶ OP II: 210 (end)-11

⁶⁹⁷ ŚS X: 6

⁶⁹⁸ OP II: 214

⁶⁹⁹ VP 54

⁷⁰⁰ OP II: 215-18

Genera are not divided into species

In arguments closely analogous to those (in his treatment of physical reality) against number, Sextus says that the universal cannot equal its instantiations in number (since it would no longer be common among them) or subsume them in its oneness, because this would imply either wholly or partially subsisting in its instantiations. But it cannot be wholly because there is not enough to go around. And it cannot be partially because then each instantiation would only be associated with a part of the universal, rather than the universal, and further the parts subsisting in each instantiation could not be the same – because of the preceding problems of being enough to go around – or different – because then, again, there is no commonality. He goes on to emphasize the problem of different species having mutually exclusive characteristics and how to combine that in a genus supposedly including them all, whether actual or potential.⁷⁰²

Śāntarakṣita deconstructs the subsistence of the composite in its components in eerily similar terms: “If it subsists in them, it could subsist in one component exactly in the form that it subsists in another, or in some other. There is no third possibility. But it is not possible for it to subsist in one exactly in the form that it subsists in another, because it is already embraced within its fold by the latter. If it were not so, then it would not be subsisting in that either. Just as a baby does not occupy the lap of a second nurse, so a substance embraced in one could not subsist in another [component]. If the composite essentially related to one component subsisted in some other component occupying a place other than that of the said component, then it would mean that the two components occupy the same place and are essentially one and the same, because they are not differentiated. If on the other hand the composite subsists in the other component in another form, then as occupying two places the composite could not be one, especially as differences in form must constitute difference in the thing itself. If it be held that the subsistence of the composite in the components is of the nature of ‘inherence’, the same considerations as above follow also with equal force. And again, if it subsists in its entirety then it becomes liable to being regarded as many. As for its subsistence in part, that is not what is held [by you], and the composite would not be one. And it would not subsist anywhere at all.”⁷⁰³

Āryadeva’s attacks the Nyāya theory of universals being instantiated in particulars in a rather different way. He considers the genus “existents” characterized supposedly by being existent. How that universal character is supposed to participate in particulars which by definition here do not yet have the property of existence is his difficulty.⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰¹ See Part II: Chapter 2 *infra*.

⁷⁰² *OP* II: 219-228

⁷⁰³ *TS* 607-14

⁷⁰⁴ *CŚ* XIV: 3 ff.

Exposure of sophisms is impossible, otiose and useless

The next invention of the belief-mongers Sextus demolishes is the exposure of sophisms⁷⁰⁵, which he points out would require them to be able to establish what constitutes a true argument (which he has by now deconstructed in great detail with arguments whose parallels we have considered), would if useful rather than obvious (like the exposure of equivocal words) require expert knowledge such as medical which they lack (an argument not as far as I know deployed by Mādhyamikas), and would be superfluous because even by their own doctrines false conclusions must depend on false premisses if the argument is sound – such that their interminable analyses of how various sophisms are fallacious are redundant: they can be avoided by starting with the observations of ordinary life without belief-mongering. It is very remarkable that both of the examples of such avoidable sophisms he invokes here (and calls “trash”) are arguments he deploys elsewhere to further his own project, as do the Mādhyamikas – Diodorus the Megaric’s argument against motion in a position or not in a position⁷⁰⁶, and the non-production either of the existent or the non-existent, one of the great arguments⁷⁰⁷ of the Madhyamaka!

Summary and discussion

Of the 70 or so arguments deconstructing grounds for belief, then, Sextus deploys:

16 which *do not have equivalents* in the Madhyamaka texts as far as I know: the rather unnecessary refutation⁷⁰⁸ of the idea that everything non-apparent is true on the basis that this would involve assenting to mutually exclusive facts; the refutations of the more exotic of the Porch dogmas, namely the “presentation” (as an impression on the regent part)⁷⁰⁹, the definition of propositions as being opposable by means of adding a negator (a refutation incidentally made on the rather exasperating grounds that the negator could be in the wrong place to invert the entire proposition⁷¹⁰, or, in an extension of Plato’s theory of contribution, because “to add a negator” would not make sense, the negator causing rather a diminution than an addition⁷¹¹); the argument from discrepancy among *theories* of perception; the idea that ideas cannot be a better standard than the senses because they are derived from them; the argument against the specifically Epicurean distinctions among sense presentations⁷¹²; the refutation of one false component falsifying an entire

⁷⁰⁵ OP II: 229-58

⁷⁰⁶ See Part II: Chapter 2.

⁷⁰⁷ *Sadasadutpādapraṭiṣedhahetu*: see Part I: “Deconstructive modes” and Part II: Chapter 2.

⁷⁰⁸ AL II: 24-5; OP II: 90 (part)

⁷⁰⁹ OP II: 62-; AL I: 370-; AL II: 400-1

⁷¹⁰ AL II: 87-90

⁷¹¹ AL II: 91-2

⁷¹² AL II: 55

conjoined proposition on the grounds that the false and true could equally be considered to mix⁷¹³; the argument reflected back at the Porch that the incorporeal cannot be compound; the assertion of the diversity in expertise in practical matters being due entirely to different people's frequency of observations of those matters and not therefore dependent on the existence of indicative signs⁷¹⁴; the implication in a proof's being non-evident that its premisses must be too⁷¹⁵; the destructive dilemma against assumptions, between wronging oneself if the assumed fact is true because one lacks confidence and wronging reality if the assumed fact is false⁷¹⁶; the attack on "reasoning from assumptions" on the grounds that it is tantamount to assuming what is concluded and therefore redundant⁷¹⁷; the attack, on backward validation of assumptions by means of testing what they imply, on the grounds that there is no such reverse logical pervasion, i.e. that infinite and various explanations can be invoked for one result⁷¹⁸; the classical argument against induction⁷¹⁹; and the charge of circularity levelled against syllogisms because they produce a universal premiss from individuals (by induction) and an individual from a universal premiss (by deduction)⁷²⁰. None of these contradicts the Madhyamaka project, and many attack specific Greek schools' doctrines;

21 arguments which correspond to *similar* arguments in Madhyamaka: the impossibility of identifying the person; whole/part rescue leading to infinite regress; the impossibility of justifying particular humans as authorities; the intellect not contacting its object; combination of senses and intellect not being able to know what is true; the assertion of invulnerability due to presenting critiques without believing them; rescues by combining extremes involving the faults of both; persuasiveness being dissociated from truth; the impossibility of everything being false; propositions not existing; the incorporeal not being effective; predication not making sense; negative propositions being impossible; that opposing the project contributes to it; proof not being relatable to what is proven, whether included or excluded; syllogisms about experience either failing or being redundant; definition of the defined or undefined not making sense; the claim to avoid grotesqueness; the impossibility of dividing wholes into parts; or of dividing genera into species; and exposure of sophisms being impossible, otiose or useless; and

⁷¹³ AL II: 124-7

⁷¹⁴ AL II: 191

⁷¹⁵ OP II: 181; AL II: 329-34

⁷¹⁶ AL II: 371

⁷¹⁷ AL II: 374

⁷¹⁸ AL II: 377

⁷¹⁹ OP II: 204

⁷²⁰ OP II: 194-203

33 arguments which have *close equivalents* in Madhyamaka: criteria of truth being either controvertible or unjustifiable; nothing apprehending itself; senses and intellect being unable to apprehend each other; three-dimensional bodies not being perceived; bodies not being found in their attributes; senses and intellect not being able to act as a criterion or access the true or signs; discrepancy among the senses undermining the object; senses being unable to judge because non-rational; senses being unable to combine sensibles; intellect not being able to establish itself or anything else; the anti-criterion master argument applied to the intellect; the unestablishment due to mutual dependency of criterion and truth, and of proof and proven; the validity of measurers being established by what they measure; the implication in a criterion being able to establish itself that its objects should be able to too; just being apparent not entailing being true; the true not being characterized in itself or in relation to anything else; belief in propositions' meaningfulness being either arbitrary or circular; expressions not existing due to gradual enunciation; the reflection of self-invalidation accusations to the accuser; investigation being impossible either of the investigated or uninvestigated; disavowal of the counter-charge in a reversal; inference and signification being either inconclusive, controvertible or circular; speech being convention that cannot discover truth; sound not coming into being; neither meaningful nor meaningless sounds being the locus of the true; the absurdity of an entirely mental reality; the critique of signs being of fabricated beliefs not of conventions; the impossibility of characterizing signs indendently or in relation; no chronological permutation of sign and signified making sense; faulting the refutation of signs with self-contradiction being based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the refutation; the impossibility of proving either the evident or the non-evident; the equipollence of experienced motion and the argument against it either in a position or not; and the equipollence of experienced production and the great argument based on the existent and the non-existent not being produced.

It is clear that the vast majority of Sextus' argumentation here, against the gamut of *reasons* invoked by the believers for holding their beliefs, would be immediately recognized by Mādhyamikas as succesfully carrying out their own project, and of those 30 % are *similar* to, and 47 % *close equivalents* of, actual Madhyamaka arguments.

As for argument *forms*, in both projects we see the use of destructive dilemmas, trilemmas, and more sophisticated forms of branching quandary, notably the two-by-two tetralemma; opponents' objections and replies, including especially attacks reflected back in exact equivalent terms against them and a subsequent disavowal of both; reductios; the dismissal of similes as inappropriate; the use of the opponents' vocabulary only in order to show its absurdity while not assenting to any of it, and in particular the privileging of one's own unassented-to

argumentation from self-deconstruction and consequent immediate negligibility on the grounds that deconstructions only apply to those with an assenting and therefore deconstructible attitude, etc.

As for *similes and cases*, *different* ones are deployed on 3 points: building a house or ship or digging a well or weaving a cloth versus getting old or curdling milk on processes being impossible; diseases making honey seem bitter versus the parable of the maddening rain on majority as authority; and the human versus the pot on senses being unable to combine sensibles. *Identical* ones are deployed on 5 points: the measuring instrument being established by what it measures, the balance⁷²¹ and the lamplight⁷²² as similes for the criterion, father and son for mutual dependence, and illusions and dreams for conceived reality.

The use of different examples in the two projects does not necessarily count against there having been transmission of the doctrines they exemplify, since the rationale would presumably have been to make the point with vivid local cases, but similarly identical examples are not strong evidence for transmission either, since the everyday aspect of human life from which the examples would be derived inevitably has many common elements across unconnected cultures. We have, however, seen on the topics of this chapter a striking number of parallel arguments which are both highly counter-intuitive and probably unique among the philosophical schools of their respective regions, which while possibly the result of independent discovery of such insights also encourages one at least to consider investigating possible historical connections. While on most topics the two projects deployed non-parallel argument forms freely, suggesting independent development, the similarities of linguistic structure to Sextus' in some cases, especially in Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṃgraha* on the problem of universals, were so striking as almost to be eerie, and I would strongly advert to this as a rewarding tangent for further exploration.⁷²³

⁷²¹ This is also used in the Naiyāyikas' *Nyāya sūtras*: see tr. Jha (1999) vol. 1.

⁷²² Also used by Chrysippus.

⁷²³ We undertake some preliminary exploration of the historical possibilities in Part III.

Chapter 2: Emptiness of nature (śūnyatā)

Introduction

Both Sextus and the Mādhyamikas were concerned to undermine beliefs about physical reality. In this chapter for comparison I consider arguments from *Against Physicists* and the allied arguments in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* III, because they constitute a strictly delimited set of arguments relating only to this topic.

Comparison of Arguments

God as efficient cause cannot be established

Sextus begins⁷²⁴ by saying he will attack central rather than peripheral beliefs in order most efficiently to bring down the edifices of the believers and so begins with causality, noting that these believers assert material and efficient causes, and that he will begin with the efficient. Of these, one of the most important to his opponents seems to be that of god, so he starts with that.

Nāgārjuna's root treatise begins with an analysis of causes and conditions, and Buddhapālita begins his commentary on it by linking belief in an ~almighty god⁷²⁵ to the subjects it deconstructs: "People [...] are roaming in the dark world and believe in almighty god, time, particles, matter, independent existence, and so forth."

Reversed argument from design

Sextus presents various forms of the argument from design, that there is order and intelligence in the universe which must therefore have been created by an intelligent entity.⁷²⁶

Śāntarakṣita reports this as having been set forth by Aviddhakarṇa, an ancient member of the Naiyāyika (Logicians') school.⁷²⁷ It is the first argument presented in Śāntarakṣita's treatise by the Naiyāyika theists, and it is the first to be refuted in the ensuing section⁷²⁸ of refutations, on four grounds: the notions of composite and conjunction being merely assumptions⁷²⁹; the notion of an underlying object which is perceived by two senses being untenable⁷³⁰; the lack of

⁷²⁴ AP I: 1-12

⁷²⁵ *Īśvara*: the word is used principally for the all-powerful and omniscient creator deity.

⁷²⁶ AP I: 75-122

⁷²⁷ TS 47-8 Generally speaking to consider justifications made by the Mādhyamikas' opponents for their beliefs would take us very beyond from the limits of our study, but in this case it is interesting to note that the four Madhyamaka refutations of this justification listed here do *not* occur in Sextus.

⁷²⁸ TS 56-93

⁷²⁹ TS 56-57

⁷³⁰ TS 58-60

entailment of artifice from structure⁷³¹; and the lack of general applicability of the potter metaphor (as an argument for sole creatorship) as demonstrated by the equally persuasive anthill metaphor⁷³².

Sextus does not deploy these but one argument he gives against it has a Madhyamaka parallel. He reports one proponent of a version of argument from design was Xenophon: if our possessing a bit of intelligence means the universe must possess a lot, and hence must be god. Against this he opposes a reversed argument, that in that case our possessing a bit of gall, phlegm and blood means the universe must possess a lot, and hence must be gall- and blood-making, which is absurd.⁷³³

Bhāvaviveka uses a similar but rather more biting reverse argument, that the lack of intelligence in the world proves that an intelligent being could not have created it.⁷³⁴

God's sentience and eternity are incompatible

Sextus presents a series of variants of this argument, one of which he attributes to Carneades,⁷³⁵ and a related dilemma between it being complex (and therefore perishable) and simple (and therefore without sentience)⁷³⁶.

Bhāvaviveka says: "Because of multiplicity, the senses of the 'almighty' would make him like a slave. So the 'one, eternal almighty' is not established – and indeed it would seem the reverse is the case."⁷³⁷ But his problem with its simplicity is the diversity of creation: "If the almighty is one and not diverse, how can he be the cause of a diversity of effects?"⁷³⁸

God's virtue does not make sense

Sextus argues that a whole gamut of virtues only make sense in terms of the difficulties they transcend, whereas the susceptibility to such difficulties and god's supposed imperishability and invincibility are incompatible, leaving only the alternative that god is unvirtuous, which is obviously contradictory to supposedly divine qualities.⁷³⁹

⁷³¹ *TS* 61-62

⁷³² *TS* 63-65

⁷³³ *AP* I: 95-6

⁷³⁴ *MH* IX: 101-2

⁷³⁵ *AP* I: 139-47

⁷³⁶ *AP* I: 180-1

⁷³⁷ *MH* III: 219

⁷³⁸ *MH* IX: 105

⁷³⁹ *AP* I: 152-77

Bhāvaviveka problem with god’s virtue is different though: “If one claims the lordship of the almighty is by means of virtue, then the almighty is not almighty since he depends on virtue.”⁷⁴⁰

The problem of evil

Sextus has a version of the argument against belief in god made on the grounds that there is evil in the world: evil in the world is incompatible with god being provident, able to prevent evil, and willing to do so, such that conceptualizing god guarantees blasphemy.⁷⁴¹

Bhāvaviveka is less delicate about the paradox: “If the almighty is the creator of actions, then he himself would also have to burn in the hells. However if it is beings other than himself who have to burn in the hells, then completed actions are lost: no effects follow. In addition, the cause of suffering would be permanent, so how could suffering ever be pacified? Clearly as long as a fire is burning its heat is not exhausted.”⁷⁴² He describes at some length moral injustices which are irreconcilable with a supposed almighty creator, and concedes that if he existed he would certainly deserve the name his devotees give him, “The Dreadful One”⁷⁴³.

Discrepancy among “signs of god” unresolved⁷⁴⁴

Sextus points out that discrepancy among conceptions of god raises the difficulty that its existence is not evident, which in turn then requires proof either by the evident (which cannot be associated with it to become a proof) or the non-evident (which leads to circularity, by which he seems to mean here infinite regress of proof)⁷⁴⁵.

This is an application of his arguments against sign whose parallels we consider elsewhere.⁷⁴⁶ Bhāvaviveka’s version of the argument from discrepancy puts the latter in the words, rather than people’s characterizations of, the gods: “Each of the gods claims separately that he alone is responsible for the creation of the world. So whose word here is true and whose is false? This doubt remains to be resolved.”⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴⁰ *MH IX*: 99; and *IX*: 96 alludes to the pre-existence of what defines virtue

⁷⁴¹ *OP III*: 9-12 The fact that this argument is disingenuously introduced as against conceptualizing god and out of fear of blasphemy rather than as a straight refutation of the belief in god, which it clearly is, probably tells us something about the atmosphere in which Sextus was writing.

⁷⁴² *MH IX*: 103-4

⁷⁴³ *Rudra. MH IX*: 107-13

⁷⁴⁴ This and the ensuing argument from evil are introduced as leading to suspension of judgment with regard to whether god exists, *in themselves* rather than in equipollence against opposing arguments.

⁷⁴⁵ *OP III*: 6-8

⁷⁴⁶ See Part II: Chapter 1

⁷⁴⁷ *MH IX*: 89

Ex nihilo creation is absurd

To Nāgārjuna is attributed a very short treatise dedicated to establishing that a divine creator does not exist⁷⁴⁸: it consists of two main arguments, neither of which Sextus uses here, but both of which have equivalents in Sextus' general attack on causality. The first deploys one of the Five Great Madhyamaka Arguments⁷⁴⁹, that neither something existent nor something non-existent can be caused to be (the first since it already exists, and the second since it would be the creation of nothing), and nor can a non-existent be rendered existent due to the contrary properties in the transition, so the very notion of creation of any kind is absurd.

Such radical scrutiny of the very concept of production is found in Sextus, and attributed by him to Aenesidemus, in a general attack on causation but not with specific reference to a creator god.⁷⁵⁰

God cannot originate

The second argument of *ĪKN* deploys a version of another of the Great Arguments, the Vajra Slivers: such a creator could be neither unborn (because he would not yet exist) nor born: birth from itself being impossible (like the sword cutting itself, the dancer standing on his own shoulders, the son being his own father) and birth from something else both contradicting the associated claim that god exists before anything else does, and being illogical since that cause in turn would require cause *ad infinitum*.

Sextus presents the teeming discrepancies in the notion of how *the notion* of god originated but does not refer to origin of god itself. He deconstructs causality in general elaborately, including by means of an *ad infinitum* argument, however referring not to how the cause came to act, but to what happens to the results.⁷⁵¹

Problematization of beliefs in existence, or non-existence, of cause

In the introduction to the section on causation Sextus begins with a declaration, “the practitioners of Inspection assert that cause is no more existent than non-existent. And that they do not do so inconsiderately one may learn from the arguments adduced on either side.”⁷⁵² He goes on for the rest of the section to present arguments *for* the existence of cause, most of which are very common-sensical⁷⁵³, and then (many more) arguments *against* the existence of cause, including

⁷⁴⁸ *ĪKN*

⁷⁴⁹ namely *sadasadutpādapratiṣedhahetu*

⁷⁵⁰ *AP* I: 267-276

⁷⁵¹ *AP* I: 222. See also the various other deconstructions of cause *infra*.

⁷⁵² *AP* I: 195

⁷⁵³ *AP* I: 196-206; *OP* III: 17-19

many counter-intuitive arguments⁷⁵⁴. Finally, in view of the equal force (for him) of the contradictory arguments, he suggests that “an impasse thus be conceded on these matters.”⁷⁵⁵

Nāgārjuna similarly begins his root treatise with a declaration that various beliefs in existence or non-existence of cause are ungrounded.⁷⁵⁶ But he problematizes such beliefs in a rather different way. In the elaborate subsequent arguments, which are largely counter-intuitive, he shows that neither belief, in existence or non-existence of cause, can be justified rationally, even by itself (i.e. without reference to the equipollent contrary arguments). Thus his critique focuses more closely and consistently than Sextus’ on concepts and the entities they are supposed to refer to. He explicitly concludes that through these reflections, such conceptions⁷⁵⁷ as of existence and non-existence (of cause, etc.) are turned back or cease.⁷⁵⁸ From such a standpoint, those who continue to conceptualise thus are said to be engaging with dreams or illusions or fairy cities.⁷⁵⁹ Such a naïve mentality takes these conceptualizations to have real identifiable referents whereas they do not, so the phenomena are considered (from the point of view of the knowing) to have ~concealing or circumscribed being⁷⁶⁰ i.e. to be merely transactional⁷⁶¹. However for the mind which has seen conceptualization for what it is, conceptualized phenomena’s illusoriness has been discovered. ~Ultimately truthful being⁷⁶² is direct perception of “thusness”⁷⁶³. Neither of these two kinds of being, circumscribed or ultimately truthful, can be understood without the other.⁷⁶⁴ Conventions, in so far as life is led according to them, are not to be refuted.⁷⁶⁵

Seeds and sprouts prove causation

Both Sextus (lifting from the Epicureans)⁷⁶⁶ and Śāntarakṣita (lifting from the Naiyāyikas)⁷⁶⁷ invoke the common-sense example of the seed causing the sprout as a clear refutation of the supposed non-existence of cause, although Śāntarakṣita is countering specifically those who assert “that things arise by themselves”.

In both cases the deployment dialectical or “mirror” speech⁷⁶⁸: neither Sextus nor Śāntarakṣita finds the argument completely convincing, as is made clear by Sextus’ final

⁷⁵⁴ AP I: 207-357; OP III: 20-28

⁷⁵⁵ AP I: 358

⁷⁵⁶ MMK I: 1

⁷⁵⁷ kalpanā

⁷⁵⁸ *nivṛttā* (See Part I: “Suspension”). MMK IX: 12cd

⁷⁵⁹ MMK VII: 34

⁷⁶⁰ *samvṛti satya*

⁷⁶¹ *vyavahāra*

⁷⁶² *parama artha satya*

⁷⁶³ *tathatā*

⁷⁶⁴ MMK XXIV: 8-10

⁷⁶⁵ MA_v VI: 35

⁷⁶⁶ AP I: 196

⁷⁶⁷ TS 113-4

⁷⁶⁸ This metaphor comes from Candrakīrti. See part I on the circumscribed applicability of speech.

conclusion (an impasse) and by the famous Madhyamaka critique, which Śāntarakṣita accepts, of viewing the seed and the sprout as causal and resultant entities⁷⁶⁹.

Nature proves causation

Sextus' specific simile of the sculptor's workshop (lifted from the Stoics for dialectical use)⁷⁷⁰ is not found as far as I know in the Madhyamaka texts but the fact that the justification from nature was invoked in contemporary debate is shown by denial of its validity in a non-Buddhist text cited by some Madhyamaka commentaries⁷⁷¹. The more general intent, the impossibility of things arising without *cause* (as opposed to specifically without *designer*), is however asserted⁷⁷² and this assertion justified in commentaries.

Nothing in the world we know could occur without cause

Sextus mentions arising and ceasing, increase and decrease, moving and stopping,⁷⁷³ physical and mental effects, the ordering of the universe, and everything else⁷⁷⁴.

Nāgārjuna asserts⁷⁷⁵ that causeless phenomena are “not found” but does not justify the assertion. With time the commentaries on his text develop ever more elaborate justifications: that if there were no cause, everything could arise from everything and effort would be pointless⁷⁷⁶, there could be no effects and nothing could be perceived or known, like the scent and colour of a lotus in the sky⁷⁷⁷, and phenomena would either continually exist everywhere or never exist anywhere⁷⁷⁸, all of which is contradicted by our experience of the world where things have particular times and places and certain features but not others⁷⁷⁹.

⁷⁶⁹ E.g. commentaries on *MMK* I and *MAv* VI: 8-20, 32, etc., deriving from *the Rice Seedling Discourse, Śālistamba Sūtra*. See for example Dorje (2008, pp. 143-240).

⁷⁷⁰ *AP* I: 197

⁷⁷¹ E.g. Mabja tr. Doctor p. 156: “The sun rising and falling, the pea being round and the thorn long and sharp, the colour and shape of the peacock – all this is not by anyone's design; it occurs by itself.”

⁷⁷² *MMK* I: 1

⁷⁷³ *AP* I: 200

⁷⁷⁴ These latter phenomena and the earlier ones in *OP* III: 17

⁷⁷⁵ *MMK* I: 1

⁷⁷⁶ Buddhapālita on *MMK* I: 1d, tr. Saito p. 10.

⁷⁷⁷ Candrakīrti *PP* on *MMK* I: 1, tr. Sprung p. 43. The sky lotus, a lotus which literally grows out of empty space, is a stock metaphor for the impossible. Candrakīrti is here quoting his own treatise *MAv* VI: 99.

⁷⁷⁸ Dharmakīrti *PV* I: 35a-b: an epistemological treatise mainly for non-Buddhists rather than a Madhyamaka treatise for “insiders” but this verse is quoted as an authority by later Madhyamaka commentators, such as Mabja.

⁷⁷⁹ E.g. Mabja on *MMK* I: 1, tr. Doctor p. 156-7

Even an illusory world must have causation

Sextus dismisses⁷⁸⁰ the objection (to the idea that phenomena prove cause,) that the world's phenomena are illusory (and therefore need no real cause) by saying if this were so there must still be a reason why things appear to us differently than they are.

Similarly Candrakīrti points out⁷⁸¹ that even defective vision, which is his stock metaphor for how we mistakenly believe that how things appear is how they are, has causes and conditions – namely eye disease, etc.

With causeless arising, everything could come from everything

Sextus presents⁷⁸² the argument that if there were no cause, anything could come from anything, and enjoys some absurd examples such as various species of living thing producing different species and places famous for particular climates experiencing wildly different climates.

Buddhapālita, explicitly commenting⁷⁸³ on Nāgārjuna's assertion that causeless phenomena are not found, presents the same argument exactly, and Candrakīrti's more general argument⁷⁸⁴, that things could arise at anytime anywhere, is cited by subsequent commentaries on the same assertion. Neither gives examples, however.

Asserting causelessness is negligible or absurd; asserting cause is groundless

Sextus' last contribution from those who *believe* in causality is the delightful argument⁷⁸⁵ that someone who asserts that there is no such thing as cause is either making a bare, unsupported assertion, in which case opposite assertions carry equal force and they can be ignored, or making the claim because they have grounds for so doing – deploying a recourse to explanation which shows they accept causality and thus refute themselves. Later⁷⁸⁶, in the arguments *against* cause he includes the reverse argument that someone who asserts that cause exists is either making a bare, unsupported assertion, in which case opposite assertions carry equal force and they can be ignored, or making the claim out of the conviction that they have good cause to – but this would, on the one hand, be an attempt to support a questionable claim by exactly that which is in question, so in fact is also bare assertion and, on the other, would itself in turn require justification, and that justification require justification, *ad infinitum*.

⁷⁸⁰ AP I: 201 and OP III: 17 end

⁷⁸¹ MA_v VI: 54 – and the later commentaries on Nāgārjuna such as Mabja (tr. Doctor p. 157-8) cite this verse while commenting on the unfindability of causeless phenomena as asserted in MMK I: 1

⁷⁸² AP I: 202-3; OP III: 18

⁷⁸³ On MMK I: 1, tr. Saito p. 10

⁷⁸⁴ MA_v VI: 99

⁷⁸⁵ AP I: 204-6; OP III: 19

⁷⁸⁶ OP III: 23

An extensive series of pairs of arguments of very similar form (without the argument about infinite regress) and various content is presented by Nāgārjuna. Here I will consider only a selection as there are very many. For one, says⁷⁸⁷ an opponent of the Madhyamaka, someone who makes the assertion that all things lack peculiar existence must either include their own assertion, in which case as something lacking peculiar existence it does not have the power to refute things having peculiar existence, or else not include their own assertion, in which case they are contradicting themselves.⁷⁸⁸ Nāgārjuna replies⁷⁸⁹ that, quite to the contrary, it is only by itself being *included* in the category of lacking peculiar existence that the assertion has the power to *refute* peculiar existence, and he introduces the famous example of illusionists' figures (we would say characters in a film) having the power to block each other exclusively through belonging to that same illusion (the film). Again, says⁷⁹⁰ the opponent, someone who makes the assertion that there is *no* peculiar existence in fact must believe that there *is* peculiar existence, in order for the negation to make sense, in which case they are contradicting themselves, or else does not believe it, in which case the negation does not make sense, and its contrary, peculiar existence, is established. Nāgārjuna replies⁷⁹¹ in a Sextus-like exact turn-around by saying someone who negates *lack* of peculiar existence must believe that there *is* lack of peculiar existence, in order for *that* negation to make sense, in which case they are contradicting themselves, or else does not believe in that lack, in which case the negation does not make sense, and its contrary, lack of peculiar existence, is established.

One of Nāgārjuna's opponent's arguments⁷⁹² of this form also has almost the same *content* as Sextus' believers in causality: either your *reason* for making the assertion (that there is no peculiar existence in this case rather than that there is no reason) has no peculiar existence, in which case you are making a bare assertion and it can be matched with an equally persuasive opposite assertion, or else it has peculiar existence, in which case you are contradicting yourself. However the reply is not an exact turn-around this time: we are late in the treatise, during whose arguments Nāgārjuna has gradually been exposing the general opposition between things as considered to have peculiar existence, and things' ability to relate to each other in interdependence, so here he merely says that this is the same as an earlier argument⁷⁹³ the opponent has made, namely that it makes no sense to say that the discovery of the true nature of peculiar existence is like discovering that a mirage is a mirage and not water; because in that

⁷⁸⁷ VV 1-2

⁷⁸⁸ This, of course, is the famous attack on Sextan inquiry, which is still somehow popular even though Sextus answers it. We consider his version and how closely it parallels Nāgārjuna's in the chapter on critiques of truth.

⁷⁸⁹ VV 21-24

⁷⁹⁰ VV 11-16

⁷⁹¹ VV 61

⁷⁹² VV 17-18

⁷⁹³ VV 13-16

discovery the initial experience of water and the discovery that it is a mirage both have peculiar existence. His reply⁷⁹⁴ to this was that it is only because the earlier and later experiences *lack* peculiar existence that the discovery, which also lacks peculiar existence, can be made.⁷⁹⁵

Cause and effect are relative to each other, therefore only conceived and not existent

Sextus begins his list of arguments *against* believing in the existence of causality by saying⁷⁹⁶ that particular causes and their effect can only be recognized with respect to each other, and since they are thus relative, they are just conceived⁷⁹⁷, and not something which exists⁷⁹⁸.

Nāgārjuna says⁷⁹⁹ similarly that causes and conditions are only recognized as such because they have been seen to give rise to the effects but that unless they have thus acted there is no way to distinguish them from other phenomena which would not be considered causes and conditions. Whilst he is not concerned in this specific case (causality) with emphasizing that circularity of mutual establishment implies conceptualization but no other existence, he does make that point about agency⁸⁰⁰ (i.e. the mutual establishment of agent and action), and he makes the general and more deeply cutting point elsewhere⁸⁰¹ that mutual establishment of two entities does not make sense, because when something is established on the basis of something else, that latter thing must be established, but in a circular situation it would have simultaneously to be established and not established, which is absurd.

Lack of change proves lack of cause

On this point Sextus refers⁸⁰² to arguments elsewhere in his treatises which show that the ideas that things come to exist or cease to exist, or that things affect each other, or move, are all mistaken. If these ideas of change all refer to non-existent things then it makes no sense to speak of what caused the change.

⁷⁹⁴ *VV* 65-7

⁷⁹⁵ See also Part II: Chapter 1 “Self-invalidating dilemmas” and “Disavowal of the counter-charge”

⁷⁹⁶ *AP* I; 207 (end)-8, which refers to the circularity of mutual establishment as being analogous to that of establishing proof (see chapter on critiques of reason), and *OP* III: 20 (end)-22 where the circularity is spelt out.

⁷⁹⁷ ἐπινοεῖται. Cognate with Pali *abhiññatā* and Sanskrit *abhiññatā* which both have a technical sense of extraordinary knowing powers attained through meditation but which in general usage (perhaps shedding more light on the Greek term) refer to *knowledge in the form merely of recollection acquired through personal experience*. (This is the usual sense in Candrakīrti, for example.)

⁷⁹⁸ ὑπάρχει

⁷⁹⁹ *MMK* I: 5 for example

⁸⁰⁰ *MMK* VIII: 12

⁸⁰¹ *MMK* X: 10-11

⁸⁰² *AP* I: 209

The very opening of Nāgārjuna’s main treatise⁸⁰³ is an homage (to the Buddha) for the teaching of interdependent co-arising, which pacifies conceptual proliferation, showing that things neither cease to nor come to exist, are neither impermanent nor permanent, are neither identical nor various, and neither come nor go (alternatively – and neither move nor stop moving⁸⁰⁴). Early in the treatise he says⁸⁰⁵ that since things do not exist, lacking as they do any particular way of being, to ask what caused them would make no sense. We can note that unlike Sextus Nāgārjuna does not limit himself here to temporal variation (change) but includes identity and difference, which we might term attributive variation.

Inherently creative matter would have nothing to work (on)

Sextus criticizes⁸⁰⁶ a theory he attributes to Stoic⁸⁰⁷ and Epicurean⁸⁰⁸ physics, that the corporeal⁸⁰⁹ acts as a cause (agent) affecting the corporeal (patient), by deploying a distribution-forcing argument: insofar as what is creative of the corporeal is defined by its own corporeality, all corporeal reality would be creative. For the opponent who believes that causes must act on some passive matter in order to produce their effect, Sextus points out that there would be no non-creative corporeal matter left over to be this passive recipient of the influence of the causal matter: there would be nothing for the cause to act on.

Nāgārjuna presents a related argument⁸¹⁰ with important differences. He says that forms⁸¹¹ matter might assume *separate from* form-creator⁸¹² are not observed. The commentaries⁸¹³ say this is a reference to the theory that the elements create physical reality. He differs with Sextus on why this should be a problem – rather than there being no *passive* other matter available to be acted on, belief in which perhaps was not common among Nāgārjuna’s disputants⁸¹⁴, he draws attention to the fact that such separated *resultant* matter is not found (in our experience). The fact that he goes on to say that if there were such separable matter, it could not be or have been influenced so it would have to be causeless, tells us his main concern here is

⁸⁰³ *MMK* I: 0

⁸⁰⁴ The Sanskrit prefix *nis* (here applied to the verb “go”) can have the sense of “away” or a privative sense. The Tibetan translation of the homage reads the former.

⁸⁰⁵ *MMK* I: 10

⁸⁰⁶ *AP* I: 214

⁸⁰⁷ *AP* I: 211

⁸⁰⁸ *AP* I: 212 (end)

⁸⁰⁹ σῶμα

⁸¹⁰ *MMK* IV: 1ab

⁸¹¹ Sanskrit: *rūpa*

⁸¹² Sanskrit: *rūpakāraṇa*. This term is ambiguous – it could mean “form-as-creator” or “the creator of form”. In the Tibetan translation a genitive is used, which one might think is reading the latter meaning, and English translations from Tibetan tend to follow that, but in fact in Tibetan a genitive is also used to show apposition, so the ambiguity is maintained.

⁸¹³ E.g. Mabja, tr. Doctor p. 206

⁸¹⁴ Witness the tendency to characterize what Greeks called “affection” as “contact” in the Indian schools.

the conceptual problem which arises again and again in his treatise, namely the basic undefensibility of the notions of sameness and difference. Sextus does not go so far here as to invoke the absurdity of even the notion of effects and causes being different things.

Incorporeal causation is like corporeal

Sextus critiques⁸¹⁵ a theory which he does not explicitly attribute to any particular school, that the incorporeal is cause of/on the incorporeal, on the same grounds as the theory that the corporeal is cause of/on the corporeal, namely that there would be no non-causative incorporeal entity left over for the causative to act on/create, or no way to identify why one incorporeal entity should be an effect rather than a cause.

Although (see above) his arguments for corporeal-on-corporeal were rather different, Nāgārjuna makes⁸¹⁶ the same step from applying them to a corporeal-corporeal system, called in the Buddhist jargon the first of the five “aggregates”, form, to applying them to an incorporeal-incorporeal system, namely the other four “aggregates” aside from form – sensations, feelings, compositional factors and consciousness.

Contact between the corporeal and the incorporeal is impossible

Sextus argues⁸¹⁷ that since contact between such radically different entities is inconceivable, there could be no influence between them.

Āryadeva uses⁸¹⁸ the same argument to refute those who believe that an incorporeal soul drives the movements of the body: that an intangible entity cannot drive physical movement. Nāgārjuna has⁸¹⁹ a deconstruction of the theory (taught by some Buddhist schools⁸²⁰), that sight (for example) arises through contact between a (corporeal) object, the (corporeal) eye and (incorporeal) visual consciousness, which is then extended much further than Sextus’ to include the absurdity of *any* contact.

Neither isolated nor combining causes make sense

Sextus attributes⁸²¹ this dilemma and the detailed reductios of its branches⁸²², (and possibly some of the subsequent critiques,) to Aenesidemus.

⁸¹⁵ *AP* I: 215

⁸¹⁶ *MMK* IV: 7

⁸¹⁷ *AP* I: 216

⁸¹⁸ *CŚ* X: 5

⁸¹⁹ *MMK* XIV

⁸²⁰ For example the Sarvāstivāda. See Dhammajoti (2009).

⁸²¹ *AP* I: 218

⁸²² *AP* I: 219-222

The bare dilemma is also found in Nāgārjuna⁸²³ but with different reductios as we shall see.

A cause not requiring combination could only affect itself

Sextus presents this as the first horn of a dilemma, the other being that a cause acts in combination.

For the Madhyamaka a cause able to act while separate would entail the absurd consequence that each of the combining causes of a result would each have to be able to produce the result without the others.⁸²⁴ Candrakīrti also presents a similar consequence⁸²⁵ entailed by things considered to evolve themselves, which is not quite the same thing.

A cause, requiring combination or not, would produce infinitely

The final section critiquing “corporeal” causation in Sextus includes a series of arguments⁸²⁶ depending obliquely on the fact that considering something to be causal either in itself or through combination with certain other phenomena involves the absurdity that it could not stop being causal and would therefore continue to produce the effect endlessly, and then applies⁸²⁷ the same argument to incorporeal causes and effects.

Candrakīrti presents⁸²⁸ the same argument, that something causal in itself would cause endless reduplication.⁸²⁹ but with rather different terminology: whereas Sextus focuses on the *number* of phenomena in this system, i.e. on the multiplication itself, which relates closely to other general arguments in his treatise on the absurdity of addition⁸³⁰, Candrakīrti remains focused on the specific problems for causality, and is actually (according to later commentaries at least) addressing particular philosophical schools’ doctrines in his critiques: the Sāṅkhya (Enumerators), who by considering that causation is a process occurring in an underlying ~pre-creational substance⁸³¹, are (he says) in reality asserting that the cause and the effect are the same, i.e. that things are intrinsically self-evolving; and a number of Buddhist schools who asserted that an effect is produced when the causes and conditions for it come together, i.e. things are other-produced. For the former, the problem with intrinsically self-evolving things is the equivalent of Sextus’ argument for an isolated cause – in isolation, if causal, it must continually be causal, so

⁸²³ *MMK* I: 11ab, XX

⁸²⁴ e.g. Buddhapālita on *MMK* I: 11ab

⁸²⁵ *MAv* VI: 8-9

⁸²⁶ *AP* I: 221-2

⁸²⁷ *AP* I: 223

⁸²⁸ *PP* on *MMK* I: 1; *MAv* VI: 8-9

⁸²⁹ Noticed by McEvilley (2002, p. 461) who points out it is an Eleatic argument resembling Zeno’s.

⁸³⁰ See *infra*.

⁸³¹ *prakṛti*

the effects will never stop being created. Candrakīrti adds an additional consequence which only applies to a causal system and is neglected in Sextus' numerological focus: that since it is producing itself, a self-caused entity's *effects* are also causal, so there would be an exponential proliferation of entities, rather than Sextus' linear proliferation.

The incorporeal cannot be active or passive

Sextus' justification for this argument⁸³², not found exactly in Madhyamaka (but see the argument for the impossibility of interaction between incorporeal and corporeal *supra*), is that the incorporeal is intangible.

There can be no genesis of the corporeal from the incorporeal or vice versa

Sextus argues⁸³³ that for the corporeal to produce the incorporeal or *vice versa* one would have to contain the nature of the other, which would be as absurd as saying that a plane tree contained the nature of a horse, or a horse that of a human, for example.

The idea that the corporeal cannot give rise to the incorporeal is taken as given in Buddhist discussions of (incorporeal) consciousness: Dharmakīrti presents the argument abruptly⁸³⁴ as a proof that consciousness cannot be produced by the material brain, and commenting on this Devendrabuddhi elaborates⁸³⁵ that if it could, then incorporeal consciousness could also arise in stones, water, and so on.

An existent thing cannot be produced

Sextus goes on⁸³⁶ in his critique of incorporeal -corporeal genesis to say that even if it were possible for one to contain the nature of the other, the genesis of one by the other would be impossible since that one, being an existent thing already, would not need anything to produce it again.

Nāgārjuna has⁸³⁷ the same argument⁸³⁸ applied generally to *all* causal relations: for the existent thing, what role could causes and conditions play? It comes as one horn of a dilemma, the other being what role causes and conditions could play for a *non-existent* effect! It is one of

⁸³² AP I: 223 (end)

⁸³³ AP I: 225

⁸³⁴ *Explanation of Valid Means of Cognition (Pramāṇavarttika)* II

⁸³⁵ De(Pe) 20a3 = D(De) 18a:1, see Dharmakīrti tr. Franco in Franco, *Compassion and Rebirth*, p. 105.

⁸³⁶ AP I: 226 but there is a much fuller treatment of this in AP II: 326-7 which we will deal with in the critiques of physics.

⁸³⁷ MMK I: 6cd, XX: 21, and in several other places in MMK.

⁸³⁸ The parallel is noticed by McEvelley (2002, pp. 460-1) who points out that it can be traced to Parmenides.

the Great Madhyamaka Arguments⁸³⁹, and it is interesting that it occurs in a series of arguments Sextus attributes to Aenesidemus.

Agent and non-agent cannot perform action and non-action respectively

The next section of the text attributed to Aenesidemus points out⁸⁴⁰ that to conceive of either a moving cause causing a moving effect or a still cause holding still a still effect would confound the cause and the effect indistinguishably, and the examples are given of a child running with a hoop (which movement is causing which?) and the sides or top of an arch (which is stilling the fall of which?). So, he says, “we will not say” these things, and his conclusion is that “nothing is a cause”.

Nāgārjuna has at one point⁸⁴¹ a more general argument (which could be considered to include this one) about any kind of agent and action (not just moving and stilling): he declares that an agent does not perform an action, and a non-agent does not perform a non-action. The absurd consequences he draws, however, are not the confounding of cause and effect. Firstly (with relevance to the hoop example) he says, due to the conceptual nature of an agent as something *other* than an action, they would be imaginable *separately* and therefore an action could exist *without* an agent or *vice versa*. Secondly, in the case of a non-agent somehow “performing” a non-action, (with relevance to the arch sides/top example) there is no rationale for establishing either an agent or an action, because nothing has happened.

Elsewhere⁸⁴² however Nāgārjuna presents a specific argument exactly parallel to Sextus’ about burning, actually as one horn of a dilemma, namely that if what is burnt (fuel) were the same as what does the burning (the fire), then the acted-upon and the agent would be the same, and this is later⁸⁴³ extrapolated to causes and effects, wholes and parts, the characterized and its characteristics, and all other such pairs. So we could reformulate it as, “If what is moved were the same as what moves it, the acted-upon and the agent would be the same,” which is Sextus’ hoop argument. The other horn of Nāgārjuna’s dilemma is parallel to the earlier argument about action and agent: if what is burnt (fuel) is different from what burns it, then either could exist without the other, and fire would burnt continually even in the absence of fuel (for example).

⁸³⁹ *sadasadutpādapraṭiṣedhahetu*

⁸⁴⁰ *AP I: 227-9*

⁸⁴¹ *MMK VIII: 1 ff.*

⁸⁴² *MMK X: 1*

⁸⁴³ *MMK X: 15*

Agent and acted-upon cannot be the same or different

Sextus does not present the previous argument, for the absurdity of cause from motion or stillness, in the context of the dilemma between agents being the same as acted-upon and their being different, but in the context of the tetralemma between moving or holding causes causing moving or still effects, in all permutations. (The crosswise permutations are rejected on the same grounds as the corporeal- incorporeal causation presented earlier – that they have contradictory natures, just like heat cannot chill and cold cannot warm.) However, later, in the course of presenting⁸⁴⁴ a destructive dilemma between causes having the nature of cause in themselves and through combination with what they act on, he reproduces Nāgārjuna’s generalized argument about agent and acted-upon, even with the same specific example⁸⁴⁵, fire: If fire were distinct from fuel, it would burn forever even in the latter’s absence.⁸⁴⁶ This is then developed into arguments relating to singular or plural causal powers (see below).

Cause cannot precede, co-exist with, or follow effect

Sextus first introduces⁸⁴⁷ this argument as part of an exposition of the circularity, mutual dependence and therefore merely conceptual existence of cause and effect, and later⁸⁴⁸ elaborates it as part of a destructive trilemma construed according to temporal permutations of cause and effect as either respectively prior and later, or simultaneous, or respectively later and prior.

These three arguments are also presented by Nāgārjuna, in a variety of contexts. In almost identical words he at one point presents a destructive dilemma⁸⁴⁹ between a cause or condition occurring *before* an effect, i.e. with the effect not yet in existence, which would have nothing with respect to which to be identified as such, and a cause or condition occurring *at the same time as* the effect, i.e. with the effect already in existence, which would have nothing to do. Elsewhere, he states⁸⁵⁰ that the nature of things is not in their causes and conditions, and the commentaries explain that if their nature were there, this would be equivalent to them already existing at the same time as the causes and conditions, which could not therefore have any influence on them.

In his chapter⁸⁵¹ specifically devoted to the absurdities entailed by how causes and conditions are supposed to combine to give rise to effects, he presents the same trilemma⁸⁵² as Sextus: if the causes and conditions are earlier, the results would have to be uncaused; if

⁸⁴⁴ AP I: 238-245

⁸⁴⁵ Noticed by McEvelley (2002, p. 462).

⁸⁴⁶ AP I: 242 (start); MMK X: 1c-2a

⁸⁴⁷ OP III: 20-22; we have already dealt with the mutual dependence argument above.

⁸⁴⁸ OP III: 26 (end)-28; AP I: 232-236

⁸⁴⁹ MMK I: 5-6

⁸⁵⁰ MMK I: 3

⁸⁵¹ MMK XX

⁸⁵² vv. 6-8 as noticed by McEvelley (2002, p. 461).

simultaneous, product and producer would have to exist at the same time; if later, the results would arise causelessly. He then extends this to refute⁸⁵³ all permutations of past, present and future causes and effects.

There is an instance here of a shared example used for different purposes. Sextus' examples of effects being prior to their causes are a harvest prior to sowing, and a son before (and therefore older than) a father. Śāntideva however uses father and son as examples of the mutual dependence of cause and effect⁸⁵⁴ and we have seen Nāgārjuna compare divine self-originatedness to a son being his own father⁸⁵⁵.

Causes could not have singular or plural efficient powers

On this issue there are arguments with the same form and content but they give such different examples that it might not be immediately obvious how similar the reasoning is. On the impossibility of singular efficient power, Sextus points out⁸⁵⁶ that the sun does not merely dry but also wets (ice or wax by melting it). The (late) Mādhyamika Jñānagarbha, who popularizes the destructive tetralemma between the four permutations of singular and plural causal powers and effects, one of the Great Madhyamaka Arguments,⁸⁵⁷ refutes the idea of a singular causal power producing a single effect by referring to the example of vision and pointing out that the eye does not merely see but also produces the next instance of itself: if the previous moment of an eye's existence were *only* able to give rise to the next moment of its continuous existence⁸⁵⁸, then everyone would be blind (because it could not also give rise to the sight); whereas if it were only able to give rise to the sight, its own physical continuum would be cut off (because it could not give rise to the next moment of its continuous existence).⁸⁵⁹

The other horn of Sextus' dilemma is that the sun, conceived of as having plural causal powers, would have to exert them all in every case of causation, i.e. would have (for example) both to dry and wet everything. Jñānagarbha's closest equivalent is in the branch of his tetralemma dealing with multiple causes and multiple effects, still on the example of seeing: if one imagines (as his opponents do in response to his earlier criticism) that the eye can do *more than one* thing (both see and continue itself, for example) then its effects would each have to be as multiple as the causal powers (he does not spell this out but he means that the continued eye

⁸⁵³ vv. 12-14

⁸⁵⁴ *BCA IX*: 114

⁸⁵⁵ *IKV*

⁸⁵⁶ *AP I*: 247

⁸⁵⁷ one of the two variants of the *catuṣkoṭyutpādapratishedhahetu*

⁸⁵⁸ This idea of a causal physical continuum derives from Buddhist Ābhidharma.

⁸⁵⁹ *SDV 14* and its author's own commentary (see tr. Eckel p. 80).

would also have to be seen, and the sight itself would also have somehow to be continued from an earlier sight, for example).⁸⁶⁰

Once again we see here a certain “increasing of scrupulousness” about what we might mean when we blithely conceive and speak of effects being caused by causes, until the sloppiness and inaccuracy of these notions is revealed.⁸⁶¹

Neither the co-existent can influence each other nor the separated

This argument is found both in Sextus, who specifically opposes⁸⁶² the separated and the *coexistent*⁸⁶³, and Nāgārjuna, whose extensive and elaborate critique⁸⁶⁴ opposes the separated and the *connected*⁸⁶⁵. Aside from the shared justifications based on the absurdity of whole or partial contact (see below) Nāgārjuna goes on to present an exposée, of the impossibility of two things being related to each other by the relation of “otherness” because it would require simultaneous mutual independence and mutual dependence, which is not found in Sextus’ extant works.⁸⁶⁶

Total contact and partial contact are impossible

A subtle and highly counter-intuitive argument in critique of causation by contact, that total contact would be union and therefore impossible, but that partial contact does not help us because the parts considered to contact would in themselves be whole and therefore liable to the same absurdity, and that to attempt to rescue those parts from union by again invoking partiality would involve us in infinite regress, is found in nearly identical terms in Sextus⁸⁶⁷ and in Buddhapālita⁸⁶⁸.

⁸⁶⁰ Sextus’ opponents’ objection here that the different effects are due to different passive substances and circumstances leads him to refer to his earlier retort, that in such cases it makes no sense to distinguish the agent and the acted-upon out of the complex.

⁸⁶¹ I have associated this in Sextus with passages attributed to Aenesidemus, and although Sextus does not state clearly where the passage from Aenesidemus in the section critiquing causation arguments ends, it would appear that we are still here dealing with Aenesidemus’ arguments.

⁸⁶² AP I: 252-7

⁸⁶³ σύνεστιν, συνόν, συνδυάζοι

⁸⁶⁴ MMK XIV

⁸⁶⁵ *samsarga*

⁸⁶⁶ McEvelley (2002, pp. 459-60) thinks that this passage of Sextus could act as a commentary on verses in Nāgārjuna on the impossibility of sameness and difference (MMK XVIII: 10 and XX: 19-20).

⁸⁶⁷ AP I: 258-262

⁸⁶⁸ Commenting on MMK XIV: 8ab (tr. Saito p. 196)

Cause by mediated and immediate contact is impossible

Sextus argues⁸⁶⁹ that mediated contact is not really contact (because something intervenes) but that immediate contact means union.

This is similar to Āryadeva's famous argument against atomic discreteness: that an atom if it contacts others has sides i.e. parts and thus is not indivisible, so if it is truly indivisible it cannot have sides and contact would become union, i.e. all atoms would collapse into a single atom.⁸⁷⁰

Neither what exists nor what does not exist can change

This⁸⁷¹ is the first of a series of arguments Sextus presents which push, in a recognizably Mādhyamika and counter-intuitive fashion, the idea of existence to its logical conclusion, namely existence of things in themselves, and therefore independently of each other or inherently, and therefore unchangeably. Sextus says that insofar as something exists and has its own nature⁸⁷² it is not affected, and the non-existent has no substance that might change; Nāgārjuna says⁸⁷³ that no matter whether something is or is not, in itself or by its own nature⁸⁷⁴, then there can be no change.⁸⁷⁵

The examples given are very similar in the two projects: for Sextus⁸⁷⁶, Socrates while alive cannot die, because he would thus possess contrary properties (living and dying), and while dead cannot die, because he would thus die twice. Nāgārjuna uses exactly the case of neither the living nor the dead person dying⁸⁷⁷ and a similar one⁸⁷⁸, that a person while young does not age, because she would thus possess contrary properties (youth and agedness), and while aged does not age, because she would thus be doubly aged.

Both thus assert that change requires the impossible situation of the contrary properties existing in the same substrate at the same time, but their remaining examples are different: while Sextus invokes⁸⁷⁹ the facts that softening iron requires iron which is simultaneously hard and soft, and blackening a white object requires an object which is simultaneously white and black,

⁸⁶⁹ AP I: 265-6

⁸⁷⁰ CS IX: 14-15

⁸⁷¹ AP I: 267-8 as applied to causation, but there is a much fuller general account of this with multiple examples at AP II: 334-350 which we deal with in the section on the critiques of physics.

⁸⁷² φύσις

⁸⁷³ MMK XIV: 9

⁸⁷⁴ *svabhāva*

⁸⁷⁵ See Appendix II for the common etymological origin of Greek φύσις (*phu-*) and Sanskrit *sva-bhāva* (*bhū-*).

⁸⁷⁶ AP I: 269

⁸⁷⁷ IKV

⁸⁷⁸ MMK XIII: 5cd has the bare negations and the commentaries present their justifications (e.g. BuddhaPāṭita tr. Saito p. 138).

⁸⁷⁹ AP I: 272-3

Nāgārjuna invokes⁸⁸⁰ the fact that turning milk into yoghurt requires a substance which is simultaneously milk and yoghurt.

Their development of the arguments is also slightly different. Whereas Sextus adds finally a *reductio* based on time, that for the hard to soften in order to become soft would require invoking the quality of softness (in the changing period) before that very same quality (in the result) had been produced, Nāgārjuna adds finally a reduction in line with the frequent focus on the absurdity of sameness and difference in his treatise, that the eventual state, such as curd, cannot be considered either the same as or different to the initial state, the former for the reasons already given, and the latter because (taking “difference” to its logical conclusion) that would mean water could also produce curd.

Geometrical bisection is absurd

As part of his deconstruction of subtraction, Sextus first⁸⁸¹ considers the case of subtraction from geometrical figures, a topic as far as not considered in the Buddhist texts. However some of arguments he levels against them have parallels used for other purposes in *Madhyamaka*.

The conflicts he reveals between their theorized figures and experienced ones are that: the so-called “long but breadthless line” is not a line that anyone has ever experienced or could ever experience⁸⁸²; and the cutting of bisection cannot make sense because the supposed bisector could not act as the cutter of abstract figures in any comprehensible way, due to the irreconcilable difference between cutters, which are physical things, and these figures, which are abstract and intangible⁸⁸³. He later⁸⁸⁴ adverts to the general impossibility of considering the intangible to be subtractible from the material or *vice versa*.

The logical incoherences he points out between different elements of their system of definitions are that: a line made of points, if of an odd number of points, could not be bisected without allowing either splitting of unsplitable points or unequal equal resultant sections⁸⁸⁵, and neither could a circle for the same reasons⁸⁸⁶; and the line or circle cut cannot make sense because of various absurd consequences such as its supposed component “points” being either split or sliding around⁸⁸⁷.

⁸⁸⁰ *MMK* XIII: 6ab

⁸⁸¹ *AP* I: 281-294

⁸⁸² *AP* I: 282

⁸⁸³ *AP* I: 286

⁸⁸⁴ *AP* I: 296

⁸⁸⁵ *AP* I: 283

⁸⁸⁶ *AP* I: 284-5

⁸⁸⁷ *AP* I: 289-93

These all broadly relate to the Madhyamaka refutation of atomism, on the grounds for example that the supposedly indivisible particles must be divisible into parts which touch and parts which do not, or they would coalesce into a single particle.⁸⁸⁸

Numerical subtraction is impossible

Sextus next⁸⁸⁹ turns to the physical situation in which we believe we subtract Y from X. The only case, he argues, that can be ordinarily understood is if X is bigger than Y, since if X is smaller than Y “subtracting Y” from it is obviously meaningless⁸⁹⁰, and if X is equal to Y this would not be subtraction but removal⁸⁹¹ – and furthermore would involve conceptual absurdities revealed by scrutinizing what exactly is supposed to be left over that might be considered something that has been subtracted from – either the original quantity, which must therefore have been doubled by the operation (since the “subtracted quantity” also presumably now exists), or nothing, which would require us to conceptualize having subtracted something from nothing⁸⁹².

Arithmetic is, as far as I am aware, not considered in the Buddhist texts. However this close scrutiny of the process of subtraction as impossible either from what has not yet been, or from what has already been, subtracted from, is an application of the general problematization of change to which we have seen both Sextus and Madhyamaka resort often, other applications being the impossibility of digging a well which is either not yet or already dug⁸⁹³, and of the death of a person who is either still alive or already dead⁸⁹⁴.

Numbers being of units makes subtraction impossible

Sextus next⁸⁹⁵ reveals a series of absurdities consequent upon conceiving of number as a number of units from which subtraction can be made. These, and the arguments against addition coming next, are examples of distribution-forcing arguments⁸⁹⁶ used in Madhyamaka but not on arithmetic. Considering the subtraction of (say) a unit from all the units implies splitting unsplitable units or removing them all. And it is not possible to evade absurdity by claiming that it is the resultant reduced amount from which the subtraction is actually being made, since this would involve conceiving an additional reduction to that amount in order to allow that there had been a subtraction. Worse, the same problems of dividing the indivisible or removing all units

⁸⁸⁸ *CŚ IX*: 12-16

⁸⁸⁹ *AP I*: 297-320; the same arguments occur in *OP III*: 85-93

⁸⁹⁰ *AP I*: 301 and the corresponding sentence in *OP III*: 86

⁸⁹¹ *AP I*: 298 and *OP III*: 86 (part)

⁸⁹² *AP I*: 299

⁸⁹³ *AL II*: 129

⁸⁹⁴ Sextus *AP II*: 346; Nāgārjuna *ĪKN*

⁸⁹⁵ *AP I*: 311-320 and *OP III*: 89-93

⁸⁹⁶ See Part I: “Distribution-forcing arguments”.

remains, unless a further claim of subtraction having been made from a lesser resultant subtracted-from number is put forth, which however leads to an infinite regress.

Addition is impossible

Sextus next⁸⁹⁷ shows similar absurdities consequent upon our ordinary ideas of addition, such as the fact that it is either distributive, in which the added-to and the being-added have to be equal to each other or indivisible units have to be divided, or an addition to the resultant sum, which did not exist at the time of the addition so would be an addition to nothing.

The whole and the parts do not make sense whether identical or different

After a brief foray⁸⁹⁸ into various schools' assertions, Sextus next⁸⁹⁹ deals with the absurdities consequent upon believing in wholes and parts, whether or not the whole is considered to be identical to or different from its parts.

Nāgārjuna exemplifies⁹⁰⁰ the basic dilemma with a case Sextus does not use: a medicine not being made up of its ingredients. Given Sextus' background as a physician it is noteworthy that this example is not used.

Candrakīrti's famous deconstruction of wholeness and parthood, actually a deconstruction of definable entities in general, taking the case of a chariot, involves what appears at first glance to be a rather more elaborate sevenfold analysis⁹⁰¹, to investigate whether it can be considered (1) other than its parts, (2) to own its parts, (3) identical with its parts, (4) in its parts, (5) to contain its parts, (6) the mere fitting together of the parts, or (7) the shape of the parts when fitted together. Clearly Sextus explicitly deals with (1) and (3). However within his basic dilemma he deals with arguments that are similar to the others too, as we shall see.

The whole is not other than its parts

Sextus again invokes arguments both from experience⁹⁰² and from logic⁹⁰³. In our experience, it has always been the case that when we remove all the parts of something, we remove the whole thing, which tells against the whole being something different from the parts. And merely relying

⁸⁹⁷ *AP* I: 321-7 and *OP* III: 94-6

⁸⁹⁸ *AP* I: 331-7

⁸⁹⁹ *AP* I: 338-58 and *OP* III: 98-101

⁹⁰⁰ **VS* 2

⁹⁰¹ *MAv* VI: 151-67 This entire section on the simile of the chariot, part of the refutation of the personal self, and its autocommentary, have recently been translated from the Tibetan and discussed by James Duerlinger (2013).

⁹⁰² *AP* I: 339 and the equivalent sentence in *OP* III: 99

⁹⁰³ *AP* I: 340; the argument is not found in *OP*

on the definitions of the terms, the whole is supposed not to lack any part – thus, apart from the parts, it would not be a whole even by definition.

Candrakīrti similarly says⁹⁰⁴ that experientially the chariot does not exist independently of its parts, and points out that when the whole chariot is burnt, so are the parts.⁹⁰⁵ Then he uses this as a simile for the logical problem of establishing whole and parts: “When the fires of wisdom burn the owner of the parts [i.e. when one analyses the chariot in the sevenfold way and cannot find it], the parts too are consumed.”

The whole is not equal to one, or some, or all of the parts

In the course of this argument, Sextus refutes the idea that *only one or some* of the parts might be the whole, by pointing out that this has the effect of making the rest *not* part of the whole, and of contradicting the definition of whole (“not lacking any parts”). The more commonsensical notion that the whole is *the sum of all* the parts he refutes by pointing out that once the parts are all there, to call them the whole would be an exercise in redundant nomenclature.

Candrakīrti points out that the chariot cannot be considered identical to all its collected parts using a rather Sextan distribution-forcing argument that Sextus does *not* use here, that each of the parts would become a chariot!⁹⁰⁶ An argument of Śāntakrakṣita’s can be equated with the problem of the whole subsisting in some of the parts, in that the whole would no longer be a unity, or that indeed no whole would be there.⁹⁰⁷ The redundancy point is made by Nāgārjuna, in the context of the 5-step syllogism, that to invoke a “whole” when all the parts are already there would be like introducing a phantom 6th step.⁹⁰⁸

Whole and part are mutually dependent so not independently established

Sextus makes this point⁹⁰⁹ by drawing the analogy with right and left, and with above and below.

Candrakīrti says that without the chariot yet being established, one cannot talk of parts since there is not yet a part-possessor to have them.⁹¹⁰ The commentaries specify: the chariot is just an imputation, made on the basis of the parts, which in turn are also imputations made on the basis of theirs. Thus there is no establishment in either direction, from parts up or from the whole down. The same sevenfold analysis can be applied to any mutually dependent pairs to show that

⁹⁰⁴ *MAv* VI: 151a

⁹⁰⁵ *VI*: 161cd

⁹⁰⁶ *MAv* VI: 151d-152ab

⁹⁰⁷ *TS* 613, the argument against a composite subsisting partially in its components

⁹⁰⁸ *VP* 35 commentary

⁹⁰⁹ *AP* I: 344

⁹¹⁰ *MAv* VI: 152cd; 161ab

neither can be established.⁹¹¹ Āryadeva makes the point of a pot considered as a compound of components such as form: “Form is a component of the pot, and thus it is not the pot itself. [Likewise for the other components: so the pot as component-possessor does not exist.] Since the pot does not exist, the components – form and so forth – do not exist.”⁹¹²

If there are parts, they cannot be parts of the whole, each other or themselves

Sextus’ next attack⁹¹³ is a stepwise ambush: after luring us for argument’s sake into the valley of the acceptability of “wholes made of parts”, he assails us successively with the problems of defining the parts as constitutive of a whole, of each other, and of themselves: if they completed the whole, they would, Sextus argues (forcing the distribution), have to be completing each other, since the whole has been accepted as the sum of parts. This idea of the parts completing each other is then ridiculed, as in the case of the hand being considered to complete the foot because both are considered parts of, and thus not other than, the body. Finally, then, Sextus points out that the only alternative left to believers in wholes and parts seems to be that the parts each complete themselves, an obviously bizarre notion, which Sextus presumably includes for completeness and rhetorical flourish.

Āryadeva makes the same point when attacking the Nyāya doctrine of the whole existing in the parts, with a remarkably similar case – of the foot and *the head*: “If the foot and the head are not different from the body [as you claim], how is it that the foot is not in the head?” (Incidentally, Sextus later gives three more cases of the absurdity of parts completing the whole, the first of which⁹¹⁴ is, with curious needless almost-repetition⁹¹⁵, that of *the head* completing the body.) The context for Āryadeva’s argument is rather different however: it occurs in the course of his attack⁹¹⁶ on the “universals and particulars” doctrine of the Naiyāyika realists, because they say that particulars exist within a universal in the same way that limbs and organs exist as parts of the human body: not different to it, but not the same either.

Words do not make up a sentence

Sextus chooses a sentence from Homer and uses it as the third case of the previously mentioned distributive arguments, that a part considered to complete a whole must thereby be partly completing itself (since it is included in the whole), which is clearly absurd since it would thus

⁹¹¹ See for example Mipham’s detailed elaboration (Chandrakirti & Mipham, 2005, pp. 298-304).

⁹¹² *CS* XIV: 9

⁹¹³ *AP* I: 345-7; *OP* III: 100-1

⁹¹⁴ *AP* I: 348

⁹¹⁵ The messiness of including, in a sequence presented as though it were new, an argument already presented in its proper position, which is sometimes a feature of Sextus’ texts, would be expected if they were the result of note-taking in lectures, say.

⁹¹⁶ *ŚS* III: 7-8

have to be both bigger and smaller than itself, and partly completing something which is other than itself and does not include it (i.e. the rest of that whole), which is similarly meaningless.⁹¹⁷

Nāgārjuna says that a mantra is not made up of its syllables but that there is interdependence⁹¹⁸, and applies different whole/part problems to refute the belief that a syllogism is made up of its parts.⁹¹⁹ Before the syllogism is established one cannot speak of part of it.⁹²⁰ It does not exist in the separate steps so does not exist in their aggregation. If the whole is the same as the aggregate of parts, they could not be plural – since they would be one like the whole.⁹²¹ If you assert the parts establish the whole, they either do so while themselves needing establishment (which would lead to infinite regress) or not so needing (in which case the initial assertion that the whole needs establishment needs a special explanation or to be abandoned).⁹²²

Absurdities apply equally if reality is entirely mental

Sextus' section on wholes and parts concludes with a very interesting refutation of a slippery objection to the absurdity of wholes and parts.⁹²³ Some object that while the absurdity is indeed entailed by wholeness and parthood, these exist in our consciousness and not as part of reality: one just projects them *onto* a thing which is real. Sextus' reply to them is that this thing must then also be in our consciousness, because we do not say these entirely mental parts are parts of our own idea (leaving the non-mental reality somehow unconnected) but parts of the thing so it too must be entirely mental. He first suggests that this entirely mental reality is absurd, but some opponents then claim that this is exactly what they mean, in which case, he goes on to say, all the aforementioned difficulties apply just as much to this mental reality as to reality conceived of as non-mental.

The same objection has been made to the Madhyamaka deconstructions – namely that they refer to language but not to reality itself which is somehow untouched by them. It is answered similarly by saying, “Whatever you think is left after analysis, apply the analysis to that.”⁹²⁴

⁹¹⁷ AP I: 350-1

⁹¹⁸ VS 1

⁹¹⁹ VP 33-40

⁹²⁰ i.e. the mutual dependence argument *supra*

⁹²¹ i.e. the other side of the numerical problem of equating whole and parts *supra*

⁹²² This deploys the exact form of Sextus' arguments against criteria. See Part II: Chapter 1

⁹²³ AP I: 352-7

⁹²⁴ Khenpo Sherab Zangpo, personal communication.

Corporeality and incorporeality do not make sense

This leads onto disclosure of the absurdities entailed by beliefs in corporeal⁹²⁵ and incorporeal⁹²⁶ realities, beginning with the corporeal.

Bodies acted on make no sense because being acted on makes no sense

Specifically the definition⁹²⁷ of bodies as what are acted upon by causes is dismissed⁹²⁸ on the grounds that agency and passivity have already been refuted.

This is an example of a “universal acid” argument often deployed by Madhyamaka too⁹²⁹, though there are no examples with this specific topic linkage. Nāgārjuna says, for example, that because conditions are not established, the entities they are supposed to establish are not in fact established by them.⁹³⁰

Physical and mathematical figures make no sense

Sextus next makes a breathless detailed analysis⁹³¹ of the beliefs of the mathematicians about figures in 2 and 3 dimensions and laws about them, based on redeployment of arguments used elsewhere, most of which have approximate equivalents in Madhyamaka, although not as far as I know ever used in it specifically against mathematical figures: the impossibility of incorporeals creating the corporeal⁹³², the chronologically impossibility of causative combination⁹³³, the impossibility of atomism (including whole and partial contact), and movement (e.g. in the formation of a line from a point)⁹³⁴, the inconceivability of figures defined as combining perceivable and impossible qualities (such as a breadthless line) be it by resemblance to, composition of, analogy with, or increase/decrease (including the supposedly rescuing notion intensification⁹³⁵ – e.g. of the narrowness) of, the perceivable⁹³⁶.

⁹²⁵ *AP* I: 366-440 (end); *OP* III: 38-49

⁹²⁶ *AP* II: 1- as introduced at the end of *AP* I although much of the discussion in *AP* II is in fact related to corporeal reality too; *OP* 49-55 is explicitly only about incorporeals and then continues, again, into topics which also relate to corporeal reality.

⁹²⁷ Attributed by *AP* to Pythagoras

⁹²⁸ *OP* III: 38; *AP* I: 366

⁹²⁹ See Part I

⁹³⁰ *MMK* I: 13

⁹³¹ *AP* I: 367-437; *OP* III: 39-46

⁹³² *AP* I: 368-370. See “There can be no genesis of the corporeal from the incorporeal” *supra*.

⁹³³ *AP* I: 371-5. See arguments against combining causes *supra*.

⁹³⁴ *AP* I: 376-89, 418-36. See the arguments against contact *supra* and movement *infra*.

⁹³⁵ ἐπιτάσιν

⁹³⁶ *AP* I: 390-417 Incidentally the warning about the perils of conceptual proliferation behind the argument against conceptualization by privation (I: 410-11) is sharply reminiscent of Tibetan polemics against the more realistic interpretations of Madhyamaka. While Sextus accuses the mathematicians of being able to conceive of flesh without vulnerability which would absurdly leave it invulnerable or bodies without solidity which would leave them fluid, by the same argument they use for conceiving of lines without

A physical body is neither sensed nor conceived

Sextus concludes⁹³⁷ the treatment of bodies with this general dilemma. In particular, the argument against body being sensed is that any reasonable conception of body is of a complex of qualities, including size, resistivity and colour, whereas the senses are only simply receptive⁹³⁸ to their respective objects. If the body is not sensed, there is no experience from which intellect could derive a notion of body.

Āryadeva similarly shows how senses do not perceive a physical pot because it is a complex and senses have distinct fields.⁹³⁹ More generally Madhyamaka undermines the entire notion of sense-perception as involving object and sense organ⁹⁴⁰. Although the dilemma Sextus presents here is not emphasized in Madhyamaka, Āryadeva does allude to the difficulty at the conclusion one critique of perception: the intellect does not see, and the eye does not know.⁹⁴¹

If something makes no sense, neither does its privation

The general form of this argument, which Sextus uses⁹⁴² to show that incorporeals are as absurd as bodies, is a staple of Madhyamaka. Nāgārjuna says: “There is no absence which exists without dependence.”⁹⁴³ This mutual dependence is even encoded in the Sanskrit language: the extreme of believing in non-existence, often translated into English as “nihilism” or (better) “annihilationism”, is termed *uccheda vāda*, literally “propounding cutting out”, with the strong implication that something identifiable has been asserted as *removed*. By pointing out that asserting the removal of something which (on analysis) cannot be identified is just as absurd as asserting the existence of something which (on analysis) cannot be identified, the Madhyamaka claims to escape both extremes.

breadth, Mipham accuses Tsongkhapa of conceiving pillars without inherent existence, which would absurdly leave them with a non-inherent existence resistant to analysis. (Pettit, 2002)

⁹³⁷ *AP* I: 437-440 (end); *OP* III: 47-49. As is often the case, while the conclusion in *AP* is that the thing under scrutiny, here body, “is nothing”, *OP* carefully reminds us that this refutational conclusion of the analysis is in despite of “the apparent existence” of the thing.

⁹³⁸ ἀπλοπαθεῖς

⁹³⁹ *CŚ* XIII: 1-9

⁹⁴⁰ E.g. *MMK* XIV; *CŚ* XIII; *ŚŚ* V-VI

⁹⁴¹ *ŚŚ* V: 8

⁹⁴² *OP* III: 49-50

⁹⁴³ *na hy abhāvo 'sti yo 'nupādaya vidyate*. From *MMK* XXV: 8cd

An incorporeal is neither sensed nor perceived

Sextus shows that none of a range of beliefs held by the various philosophical schools about sense perception could make incorporeal entities available to it.⁹⁴⁴ The alternative, that they are apprehended by intellect, is refuted⁹⁴⁵ because to prove it would require using what is in question, the intellect, or with recourse to the corporeal. This latter then, being in dispute too, would need establishment, either from another corporeal (leading to infinite regress) or from the incorporeal (in question, i.e. we are wrecked on circularity).

The disclosure of the circularity of asserting an incorporeal means of coming to know of the incorporeal is an instance of the deconstructions of the criterion whose exact Madhyamaka parallels we have already seen⁹⁴⁶.

Physical bodies are not apprehended due to impermanence

Sextus also alludes in passing to the Heracleitean doctrine of continual flux and Plato's that things become rather than are to support his arguments against believing in bodies.⁹⁴⁷

Madhyamaka addresses the equivalent doctrine in Buddhism, impermanence⁹⁴⁸, and highlights the paradox that to assert that a thing is impermanent depends on believing that it lasts long enough for this characteristic to be apply to it, and this lasting contradicts the characteristic.⁹⁴⁹

Combinations of substances and/or qualities are impossible

The impossibility of individual senses apprehending complex structures leads Sextus naturally on to consider combinations and whether they might be apprehended. He reports that the believers hold to substances and qualities, and having dismissed the *prima facie* absurdities of either only substances or only qualities being combined, he refutes the combination of both with yet another distribution-forcing argument⁹⁵⁰: he gives the example of mixing a cup of hemlock with ten cups of water, and points out that if the mixture is as the believers assert, this would require the particles to be matched (because otherwise "unmixed" water particles would remain), and therefore for the resulting volume to be either twenty cups (because the ten of water must have received a matching ten) or two (because the one of hemlock must have received a matching one), neither of which is the case of course.

⁹⁴⁴ *OP* III: 51-52 (earlier part). For comparisons see "The incorporeal cannot be active or passive" *supra*.

⁹⁴⁵ *OP* III: 52 (latter part)-53

⁹⁴⁶ Part II: Chapter 1

⁹⁴⁷ *OP* III: 54

⁹⁴⁸ *anityatā*

⁹⁴⁹ *MMK* VII: 22-23; *CS* XV: 13

⁹⁵⁰ For the general presentation of such arguments see Part I.

Nāgārjuna deconstructs the idea of mixing more finely. In the course of refuting the elements as entities in themselves he considers them as substances with characteristics and asks if they can be mixed or not: “If each exists in itself, why is it that like fire without fuel there is no earth without solidity, water without cohesion or air without mobility? [...] It is impossible for the three not to arise dependently. How could what exists individually by means of existence in itself be mutually dependent? How could what does not exist individually by means of existence in itself be mutually dependent? If they do not exist individually but in fact when one is there the other three are also there, then if they are unmixed they are not all in the same place, whereas if they are mixed they do not exist individually. Since the elements each do not exist individually, their characteristics do not exist individually either. And what does not exist individually cannot predominate over the others when they are mixed together. Their characteristics are regarded as only conventionally real.”⁹⁵¹

Belief or disbelief in place is indefensible

Sextus’ next⁹⁵² long section deals with justifications for beliefs in void⁹⁵³, place⁹⁵⁴ and space⁹⁵⁵, and arguments against those beliefs. Although this is arguably an exposition of equipollence of opposed argumenets leading to suspension, it is notable that the initial justifications for belief, which are in any case reported as being put forth by *others*, are refuted severally and peremptorily in the immediately ensuing section⁹⁵⁶, and that the subsequent arguments are all destructive responses to a variety of beliefs attributed the Porch⁹⁵⁷ and to the Peripatetics⁹⁵⁸.

Justifying place by its parts is invalid

Sextus reports⁹⁵⁹ on certain unnamed people who assert that since right/left, up/down, before/behind exist, place must, because the former are parts of the latter. He refutes this using a wholes/parts argument similar to the ones we have seen: that to assert right/left etc. as parts of

⁹⁵¹ *RA* 86-90

⁹⁵² Next, that is, in *AP* (II: 1-36); in *OP* it occurs rather later (III: 119-135), after the investigation of movement. On this topic both *OP* (as usual) and *AP* (unusually) are explicit in deploying rational justifications for disbelief *and* belief, “in accordance with the custom of the practitioners of Inspection... to justify suspension...” (*AP* II: 6)

⁹⁵³ κενόν, cognate with Sanskrit *śūnya*, empty

⁹⁵⁴ τόπος

⁹⁵⁵ χώρα

⁹⁵⁶ *AP* II: 13-19; *OP* III: 122-3 (start)

⁹⁵⁷ *OP* III: 123 (latter part)-130; *AP* II: 20-29

⁹⁵⁸ *OP* III: 131-4 and different refutations in *AP* II: 30-35

⁹⁵⁹ *AP* II: 7 and *OP* III: 120

“place” in order to establish “place” is begging the question, since “place” has not yet been established such that parts of it could be spoken of.⁹⁶⁰

When Āryadeva introduces the belief that space must exist because a body can occupy different regions of it, and gives the example of the sun initially being in the east, later above, later still in the west, etc., it is in the context of reporting beliefs of his realist opponents, which he (as usual) refutes immediately.⁹⁶¹ And although, as we have seen, Madhyamaka does deploy the deconstruction of wholes and parts on grounds of circular establishment⁹⁶², his method here is different: his opponents believe that composites are impermanent but define space as permanent, so he merely points out that sectioning space as in the example means it must be a composite, and therefore impermanent, while simultaneously (by their definition) permanent, which is absurd.

Corporeal place would require place in turn

Sextus dismisses the idea that place could be corporeal, because then as a body it itself would require a place, and so on *ad infinitum*.⁹⁶³

The form of this argument is used by Nāgārjuna⁹⁶⁴ against the three characteristics (arising, lasting and ceasing) of conditioned entities, themselves being conditioned (in order to be able to relate to the conditioned), on the grounds that they in turn would bear the three characteristics, and those three again in turn, *ad infinitum*.

Place as void could not be occupied

The alternative, that place is occupied void, is examined in the circumstance of gradually being occupied. It can neither remain nor not remain with occupation. If it remains with occupation it would be simultaneously empty and full. If it does not remain, it either moves away (which would make it a body and also absurdly prevent it receiving the supposedly occupying object) or perishes (but only bodies perish).⁹⁶⁵ Elsewhere Sextus’ last argument against belief in place⁹⁶⁶ is that while place on the one hand cannot be eternal, because things move, it cannot be transient either, since then it would have to come into being, and he refers to his refutation elsewhere of the impossibility of anything coming into being.

Śāntarākṣita has an argument presenting a roughly similar difficulty to opponents who believe space is eternal. He says that space is not an entity at all because it is devoid of

⁹⁶⁰ AP II: 13 and OP III: 122

⁹⁶¹ ŚŚ IX: 11-12

⁹⁶² See discussion of wholes and parts *supra*.

⁹⁶³ AP II: 20;

⁹⁶⁴ MMK VII: 3

⁹⁶⁵ AP II: 21-22; OP III: 129

⁹⁶⁶ OP III: 134 (end)

potentiality. If it lacked momentariness, it could not exist, because permanent things cannot perform any fruitful activity, either successively or all at once. If it performs a function (such as accepting, here) it must be a composite and therefore impermanent, which contradicts its definition (according to his opponents).⁹⁶⁷

Place is not the enclosing limits

Specifically against the Peripatetic definition of place that it is “the limit of what encloses insofar as it encloses” such as the surface of air moulding around the body, Sextus points out⁹⁶⁸ that the two requirements of the definition contradict each other – insofar as on the one hand a body in the process of occupying a place needs the place already to exist to move into it, and on the other hand the place cannot pre-exist because it is supposed to mould itself around the object once it has already fully occupied the place. We can see that this is a specific application of the anti-occupation argument *supra*. The ensuing⁹⁶⁹ dilemma between place being ungenerated or generated leads to yet another iteration of the quality-contradiction argument: the place must be generated to be able to mould at all according to the definition, but cannot be generated *before* occupation (because there is nothing to mould around) or *after* occupation (since it would be generated twice).

The form of this argument is found in Nāgārjuna’s critiques, for example in the case of movement: a mover cannot become a mover before it starts to move (contradictory) or after (redundant and duplicatory)⁹⁷⁰.

Motion appears but on analysis does not make sense

After a very brief survey⁹⁷¹ of those who believe in motion and those who refute its existence (he gives in passing⁹⁷² their central argument, the infinite divisibility of trajectory), Sextus presents⁹⁷³ a third class, those who engage in Inspection, for whom it “no more exists than does not exist”, and describes this as the outcome of the discrepancy between the fact that it appears to exist from experience but appears not to upon philosophical investigation.

Here Sextus comes close to enunciating the Madhyamaka doctrine of *satya dvaya*, the two levels of “is”. Nāgārjuna says: “The world is seen as real⁹⁷⁴ by those who are far away. But it is not seen by those who draw near to reality by examining what is real; for them the world is

⁹⁶⁷ TS 385-394

⁹⁶⁸ OP III: 131

⁹⁶⁹ OP III: 132-3

⁹⁷⁰ MMK II: 9-11

⁹⁷¹ OP III: 65; AP II: 45-48

⁹⁷² AP II: 47-8

⁹⁷³ OP III: 65; AP II: 49

⁹⁷⁴ *yathābhūtam*

like a mirage free of objective signs.”⁹⁷⁵ While the Mādhyamikas do not use the expression, “Motion no more exists than doesn’t exist,” they do say that one must rely on the circumscribedly (conventionally) existing phenomena to realize that these very phenomena cannot be found ultimately even though they appear – such that the “no more” formula expresses well the result of Madhyamaka analysis, a state of mind in which it is recognized that existence and non-existence are seen to be *equally inapplicable*. The kind of teaching of the Buddha which Madhyamaka treatises are seen specifically to explain, the Prajñāpāramitā, include the Heart Sutra, with its famous line which presents in abrupt form Nāgārjuna’s point about the inseparability of the two kinds of “is”: “Form is emptiness⁹⁷⁶; emptiness is form; form *is but*⁹⁷⁷ emptiness; emptiness *is but* form.”

Motion was clearly seen as fundamental as much in Madhyamaka as Sextus: Nāgārjuna’s second topic in his main treatise⁹⁷⁸, after the analysis of conditions, is the analysis of motion.

Sextus goes on to raise a series of objections to the various schools’ ideas of movement, based on their excluding various things accepted by common sense as movement, such as circular motion (which does not fit in the definition of movement as linear), revolving motions (which do not fit in the definition of movement as transitional), bodies in motion from one viewpoint but still from another (stillness clearly not being motion), and so-called minima (partless points or lines made of them) in revolving motion in their own place.

Causal movement involves infinite regress

After a brief treatment⁹⁷⁹ of the commonsensical justifications for belief in movement, based on the evidence of fact (both via the senses and via the mind by “concurrent recollection”⁹⁸⁰) Sextus begins an exposition of the various ways movement has been refuted logically, the first of which⁹⁸¹ is that if movement is supposed to occur by means of influence from something else, that thing must also be kinetic rather than still and thus itself require a mover, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Various instances of this kind of argument are found in Madhyamaka. Nāgārjuna makes the point most generally when he says⁹⁸², “The effect is not constituted by the phenomena it is conditional on: since those phenomena it is conditional on are not self-instigated, how can the effect that arises conditionally on such non-self-instigated phenomena be instigated by those phenomena?” We could paraphrase for the specific case of a thing’s movement being considered

⁹⁷⁵ *RA* I: 52-3.

⁹⁷⁶ “Emptiness” refers specifically to the phenomenon’s lack of existence in itself.

⁹⁷⁷ *prthak*: or, “not separate from” or “nothing except” or “not without”

⁹⁷⁸ *MMK* II

⁹⁷⁹ *AP* II: 62-69; *OP* III: 66

⁹⁸⁰ συμνημόνευσιν: cf. Sanskrit *saṃsmaraṇam*, “recollecting, calling to mind” from *saṃsmr*

⁹⁸¹ *OP* III: 67-8; *AP* II: 76

⁹⁸² *MMK* I: 13

conditional on another's thus: "A thing's movement is not constituted by some other movement it is conditional on: since the movement it is conditional on is not self-instigated, how can the movement that arises conditionally on such non-self-instigated movement be instigated by that movement?" Whilst this falls short of pointing out the infinite regress explicitly, it highlights the slight of hand which entails it (when the unacceptable lack of instigation-source is pushed back one step in a causal chain that comes to have no end).

Sextus in a more developed version of the same argument⁹⁸³ says that if an escape from this absurdity is attempted by saying that the causal phenomenon itself does not actually move but just changes (and that that change prompts the resultant motion), then it is possible to invoke the impossibility of change he has proved elsewhere – for example in the arguments against subtraction and addition⁹⁸⁴. Even if one were to entertain hypothetically this kind of influence, he points out that it is incompatible with some of his opponents' belief in atoms, which are considered not liable to such changes.

Nothing can move itself

Sextus goes on⁹⁸⁵ to point out the logical difficulty in the reflexive action of something "moving itself" – all related to the object having to be simultaneously moving and still, in two places at the same time in accordance with the direction of propulsion, and simultaneously one and two in number.

Madhyamaka's attack on reflexive action as we have seen deploys similes, such as the sword being unable to cut itself, the acrobat standing on his own shoulders, and the son being his own father.⁹⁸⁶ On motion Nāgārjuna presents a dilemma between the agent of motion and motion being the same or different, and for the reflexive branch says: "If motion and the agent of motion were identical, then it would follow that action and agent are one,"⁹⁸⁷ for this the commentaries provide the simile that a cutter does not become the cutting. He also exposes⁹⁸⁸ a different problem, arising not exactly from the reflexivity of the transitive verb "move itself" but from distinguishing motion from its subject, i.e. from believing that "a mover moves". It would undergo *two* movements, one by virtue of its being a mover, and the second by virtue of it moving. Thus it itself would become *two*, since neither movement can occur without there being something to move. If one insists that it be, instead, *one*, then there can only be one movement, in which case either the epithet "mover" or the verb "moves" becomes superfluous – but these in

⁹⁸³ *AP* II: 70-74

⁹⁸⁴ See *supra*.

⁹⁸⁵ *AP* II: 83-4; *OP* III: 68-9

⁹⁸⁶ e.g. *ĪKN*

⁹⁸⁷ *MMK* II: 19

⁹⁸⁸ *MMK* II: 5-7

turn both entail the absurdity of a single object possessing mutually exclusive properties at the same time: either a non-mover would be able to move, or a mover would be able not to move.

A thing cannot move where it is or where it is not

Sextus next⁹⁸⁹ reports a “weighty” argument (which elsewhere he calls “trash”!⁹⁹⁰) attributed to Diodorus Cronos the Megarian, that a thing cannot either move in its own place, since (reality being reducible to indivisibles) it must thus fill that space and thus be still there, or in some other place, since there is nothing there to attribute motion to.

Nāgārjuna similarly points out that a thing does not move where it is, nor where it has yet to move. It is part of a trilemma, the third being that a thing does not move where it has already moved.⁹⁹¹

Note: Recurring argument structure

Diodorus however stated that it was possible for a thing *to have moved* even though it could not *be moving*. Sextus then⁹⁹² presents five attacks which have been made on this argument: it is obviously absurd to say that something may have moved but may not move; there is no problem with movement in a single place (as in revolution); to force a dilemma of “either where it is or where it is not” precludes the ordinary notion of motion as from one place to another, so is irrelevant; place can be used in a broader sense as entire trajectory rather than currently occupied place; and the dilemma makes the syllogism inconclusive. Then⁹⁹³ he presents rebuttals of these attacks in respective order: multiple marriages having taken place and a ball having bounced show that it is possible for something to have occurred when it cannot be occurring⁹⁹⁴; revolution suffers the same difficulties as translational motion when the revolving object’s parts are considered; it does not matter that the *concept* of motion is different because the *actuality* of motion is being deconstructed, and furthermore even the concept is successfully deconstructed if one asks when the transition is supposed to occur, and if one points out that to assume the place to which the object is to move is to assume motion and thus circular; some broader place was clearly not meant in the original argument, and even if it were if movement in lesser space is impossible

⁹⁸⁹ AP II: 85-90; OP III: 71

⁹⁹⁰ OP II: 242, 244 (part): See Part II: Chapter 2: “Exposure of sophisms”

⁹⁹¹ MMK II: 1: *gataṃ na gamyate tāvad agataṃ naiva gamyate / gatāgatavinirmuktaṃ gamyamānaṃ na gamyate*

⁹⁹² AP II: 90 (end)-97 (start); OP III: 71 (part), 72, 75: in OP only three attacks are mentioned (omitting the tense discrepancy and the syllogism’s inconclusiveness) and they are presented with their rebuttals ensuing immediately after each one, whereas the attacks and rebuttals form two separated blocks in AP.

⁹⁹³ AP II: 97-112; OP III: 72-5

⁹⁹⁴ These rebutting cases are reported as Diodorus’ own choices and, unlike the other rebuttals, Sextus adds his own counter-argument that he finds them unconvincing, relying as they do on blurring the lines between singular and plural, or on particular verbs’ linguistic quirks.

this also discounts movement in the greater space; and the dialecticians themselves accept that if “if either A or B, then C” then “if not-C, then neither A nor B”.

The attacks and the arguments rebutting them have as far as I know no exact content parallels in Madhyamaka. However it is interesting to note that this is Sextus’ only example of the so-called scholastic “Recurring Argument Structure” (where an argument with justifications, then a list of various objections to it, and then a second list of those objections together with respective refutations of them, are presented) which Beckwith (2012) reports as generally considered by scholars to be an innovation in mediaeval scholasticism unknown in the Classical and Hellenic Greek texts, and traces through Islamic texts to what he considers its original source – Buddhist scholastic texts of the early Yogācāra school. Is this an example of the recurring argument structure in a Greek source which scholars have overlooked? And does this example show influence on Greek thought from Yogācāra?⁹⁹⁵

A thing’s movement contradicts its abiding anywhere

Sextus next presents two more of Diodorus’ arguments against the movement of entities that he however dismisses as sophistry. The first⁹⁹⁶ is that it is impossible for something which is abiding in a place to be also moving. Perhaps he is objecting to word-play (on the static connotations of “abide”), but this would seem to be an abrupt but valid instance of the argument (much used by Sextus and Nāgārjuna) against the possibility of an entity’s changing (such as someone not dying either while alive or dead).⁹⁹⁷

A more general argument is found in the Madhyamaka’s deconstruction of “the transience of entities” as some final characterization of reality. Its most abrupt instance is in Āryadeva’s destructive dilemma between identity and difference of the entity and its transience: he asks how, if they are identical, this “entity” could abide even for a moment (such as to be characterized as *anything*, impermanent included) since it is immediately passing away.⁹⁹⁸

Movement is impossible in the present moment and location

Sextus next presents two of Diodorus’ arguments which he deems more useful to *skepsis*. The first⁹⁹⁹ is that if movement occurs, it must be able to occur now, and that present moment is indivisible, because if it were divisible the past and future portions could be separated off as not

⁹⁹⁵ Or is the “Recurring Argument Structure”, as I suspect, not peculiar enough to warrant seeking paths of influence at all, but rather one which arises inevitably when a somewhat complicated issue is treated systematically?

⁹⁹⁶ AP II: 112 (end)

⁹⁹⁷ Not to mention it concurring eerily with Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle in modern physics!

⁹⁹⁸ CS XI: 20 The other branch of the dilemma is that if the entity and its transience are on the other hand *separate*, we are left with a pre-characterizedly eternal entity being characterized as transient.

⁹⁹⁹ AP II: 119

present, whereas the concept of motion requires division of time. The second¹⁰⁰⁰, which follows logically, is that if movement occurs, it must occur across indivisible places, which requirement again precludes motion, according to the arguments already considered above.

Nāgārjuna as we have seen at the outset of his chapter¹⁰⁰¹ on movement forces his opponents into this same difficulty by pointing out that (1) there is no movement in what has already been moved through or moved over (i.e. in the past or in the completed trajectory)¹⁰⁰² because the movement there and then is finished, and that (2) there is similarly no movement in what has yet to be moved through or over (i.e. in the future or in the trajectory about to be begun), but that (3) apart from these two, i.e. in the infinitely small present moment or current location, movement cannot be conceived. It is natural for Nāgārjuna to begin with this argument because it forces the opponent to argue that something in the current instant/place can still be considered to be moving, i.e. in itself, which leads to the double-motion absurdities we have already covered¹⁰⁰³.

Movement cannot begin

The alternative, that movement is gradual across infinitely divisible space, is next¹⁰⁰⁴ refuted, on the grounds that no moment of beginning could thus be found which could not be further divided.

Nāgārjuna also refutes the beginning of motion, but on rather different grounds, deploying not the infinite divisibility of the trajectory but the unfindability of the moment of beginning, in a way more reminiscent of Sextus' arguments elsewhere against translations (such as Socrates not being able to die either while alive or while dead): motion does not begin in what has been moved through/over (i.e. the past or the completed trajectory); nor does it begin in what has not yet been moved through/over (i.e. the future or the trajectory about to be embarked on); nor does it begin in what is (already) moving. When/where, then, could motion begin? Prior to the beginning of motion, there is no beginning of motion, either in what is moving or in what has moved/been moved through/over. And how could there be motion in what has not yet moved? Since the beginning of motion cannot be conceived in any way, how can we posit past, current or future motion?¹⁰⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰⁰ AP II: 120

¹⁰⁰¹ MMK II

¹⁰⁰² This way of expressing it sounds rather cumbersome in English but is much more natural in Sanskrit, where the verb "go" (gam) can take a direct object (its time or place), unlike English where we must use the phrasal verb such as "move through" to allow such an object, and where the normal words for future and past come from the verb "go" – respectively *anāgata*, "the not yet come" and *gata*, "what has gone" respectively.

¹⁰⁰³ under "nothing moves itself" *supra*

¹⁰⁰⁴ AP II: 139-142; OP III: 78

¹⁰⁰⁵ MMK II: 12-14

Discrete movement in discrete time is absurd

Sextus next¹⁰⁰⁶ considers movement in the context of the Epicurean doctrine that both space and time are atomic or discrete, i.e. composed of “indivisible units”. He begins by reiterating Diodorus’ two-place problem¹⁰⁰⁷, which is effective for them, then adds a new argument: that if the number of units between two approaching bodies is odd, they will not be able to meet, since this would require either (1) repelling each other from a distance before they come to the median point, or (2) one occupying it first and thus not travelling at the same speed, or (3) both occupying it at the same time, in which case it would be divisible into two places of occupation; and that circular motion of a radial row would be impossible; and that everything would have to travel at the same speed.

The belief in *matter* and time composed of indivisibles is found in the Vaibhāṣika school, which Madhyamaka frequently attacks, but these specific reductios, taking the cases of the odd-numbered trajectory, the circle, and the equal speed of all motions, do not as far as I know occur in Madhyamaka texts.¹⁰⁰⁸ However they can all be extrapolated from Āryadeva’s famous deconstruction¹⁰⁰⁹ of atomism of matter (such as was believed in by the non-Buddhist Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school) by pointing out that if the supposedly “indivisible” atoms are bonded to each other in a particular arrangement as is believed, they must each have a part which is involved in bonding in a particular direction and a part which is not, so in fact they *cannot* thus be indivisible, etc.

Rest is impossible

Nāgārjuna applies¹⁰¹⁰ exactly the same arguments to rest as he did to motion. He first points out that neither a mover or a non-mover can be considered to be resting, because the former would require the subject to have contradictory properties at the same time (movement insofar as it is a mover, but rest insofar as it is resting) and the latter would entail a duplication of resting (one insofar as it is a non-mover, and a second insofar as it is resting) and thus a duplication of subjects (since for there to be a resting there must be something to be resting). And, secondly, there can be no coming to rest, either of what has already moved, or of what has yet to move, or what is currently moving.

Sextus does not transpose here his arguments against motion, but contents himself with noticing certain glaring contradictions in the particular beliefs of his opponents. He points out

¹⁰⁰⁶ AP II: 142-154; OP III: 70

¹⁰⁰⁷ See under “A thing cannot move where it is or where it is not” *supra*.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Is this because the Vaibhāṣika, while they asserted indivisible atoms of matter, did not consider location to be at discrete points but in a continuum of space?

¹⁰⁰⁹ CS IX: 12-19 and the commentary

¹⁰¹⁰ MMK II: 15-17

that they believe that everything is in flux, which contradicts the possibility of anything being at rest, and that they believe that what is at rest must be under the influence of something, an influence which has already been found absurd¹⁰¹¹, and in any case is in their system a kind of movement, which hardly squares with it being called “rest”. Furthermore incorporeals are not liable to such physical influence by definition.

Beliefs in a temporally limited or an eternal universe lead to an impasse

In the introduction to his investigation of time, Sextus says¹⁰¹², “~We have brought to impasses¹⁰¹³ ‘body’ and ‘place’, and we shall try also to investigate ‘time’, for perhaps the discourse about this, of those physicists who suppose the universe eternal¹⁰¹⁴ and those who assert that it was constructed¹⁰¹⁵ in some particular time, ~shows itself to be at an impasse¹⁰¹⁶.”

The Buddha also found fault with these two theories. Whether the universe is eternal or not was the first of the list of questions which he famously refused to answer, or rather to which he denied asserting either answer, as in *the Discourse to Vacchagotta (Vacchagotta Sutta)*¹⁰¹⁷ of the Pāli canon, the eponymous wanderer greets the Worthful One, sits, and asks him if the cosmos is eternal. The Buddha replies that that is not his assertion. So the wanderer asks whether it is then transient. But the Buddha denies asserting that too. In the illustrious parable of the poisoned arrow in *the Shorter Discourse to Malunkya (Cula Malunkya Sutta)*¹⁰¹⁸ he gives his reason for not asserting either answer: it is one of the questions which are said to be profitless to consider. The eponymous elder is on record there as having refused to accept that the Buddha would not commit himself one way or the other, and having gone to interrogate him about it. The Worthful One replies by rebuking him as a fool seeking to make grievances, and points out that it is not by holding either belief that one leads a good life, for whatever one believed there would still be birth, aging, death and distress, the details of whose destruction he, the Buddha, is making known right there and then. Again, both positions are among the beliefs listed in *the Discourse on Brahma’s Net (Brahmajāla Sutta)*¹⁰¹⁹, as being erroneous due to insufficient understanding.

Nāgārjuna explores at some length *why* the Buddha disdained such beliefs, in his examinations of *nirvāṇa* and beliefs.¹⁰²⁰ There he says that beliefs in the temporariness or eternity of the universe depend on belief in limited phenomena, but that with the insight which

¹⁰¹¹ See the investigation of causality (Part II: chapter 4) *supra*.

¹⁰¹² *AP* II: 169

¹⁰¹³ ἡπορήσαμεν. Bury has “discussed the difficulties”.

¹⁰¹⁴ αἰώνιον

¹⁰¹⁵ συνεστάσθαι

¹⁰¹⁶ ἄπορος φανείται. Bury has “will appear to be hopeless”.

¹⁰¹⁷ *SN* 44: 8 (PTS: *S* iv 395)

¹⁰¹⁸ *MN* 63

¹⁰¹⁹ *DN* 1

¹⁰²⁰ *MMK* 25 and 27 respectively.

has discovered “emptiness”, i.e. the fact that phenomena in themselves cannot be found on analysis, it is clear that there could be nothing of which one might say either that it is eternal or that it is not, or that it is a mixture of the two, or that it is something other than these two. He adds that these beliefs arise through mistakenly believing oneself to have existed before or to be other than what existed before, and so relates the unanswerability to the exposure of the absurdities inherent in believing in sameness and difference.

What time is has not been established

Sextus begins his detailed investigation into time as usual by surveying beliefs about it among the philosophical schools.¹⁰²¹ He draws attention¹⁰²² in general to the unsolved discrepancies between them, then more specifically shows the absurdities implied by each one.

If time were the period of motion of the universe, time would occur in time

Such beliefs entail other absurdities too, Sextus goes on to say¹⁰²³, including the fact that, since these people also believe motions occur in time, they would have to assert that time (as a motion) occurs in time. He considers the two possibilities: that a time occurs in itself, which means an entity which is simultaneously 1 and 2, i.e. obviously absurd, or that one time occurs in another. But since only one time is “present” this would mean that the present would have to occur in the absent or vice versa, both clearly absurd.

An argument closely akin to the basic reductio is Āryadeva’s attack¹⁰²⁴ on the belief that the duration (of a thing or an event) is proof of time passing: he says that if the duration is considered to occur in time¹⁰²⁵, then duration itself cannot be time (since then time would occur in itself). He adds that the alternative, that the duration of the thing does not occur in time, is also impossible, since then nothing would ever come to an end.

Time as the measure of motion or rest occurs in itself and cannot measure motion

And Strato’s correction to “in motion or at rest” is dismissed¹⁰²⁶ on the grounds that it not less than Aristotle’s belief would require time (as whatever might measure motion) to exist in time; and because time thus, since it is exactly coextensive with motion or rest, cannot measure, or be measured by, them, but if one were to insist on one of these alternatives the latter (rather than

¹⁰²¹ *OP* III: 136 ff.; *AP* II: 170 ff.

¹⁰²² *OP* III: 137-40, deploying the first of the five modes; this step is absent from *AP*.

¹⁰²³ *AP* II: 172

¹⁰²⁴ *CŚ* XI: 19

¹⁰²⁵ *gal te dus la gnas yod na gnas pa dus su mi 'gyur ro*: Another of the many possible English translations of this sentence begins, “If time has duration, duration cannot be in time.”

¹⁰²⁶ *AP* II: 177-80

Strato's version) would make slightly more sense anyway because at least motion and rest (unlike time) are perceivable.

The first problematization is the same as was applied against the beliefs in time as the period of the motion of the universe, and thus analogous to Āryadeva's exposée of duration. The second is effectively accusing the Peripatetics of not adding any information by their definition of time but merely giving an already named phenomenon (motion or rest) another name ("time") and then saying that it is the measure of itself, Madhyamaka parallels to which criticism I consider in the analysis of the definition.¹⁰²⁷

Time as an image of day and night must occur in itself

The last of the specific philosophers to come under Sextus' hammer is Epicurus¹⁰²⁸, for defining time as an image¹⁰²⁹ of day and night. These include the problems we have already seen of defining time as being in time (since the hours which make up a day exist themselves in time if it is called the day).

Day and night do not exist

One anti-Epicurean argument has a Madhyamaka ring: Sextus' first point¹⁰³⁰ for the Epicureans is that they thus render time unreal, since day and night are both unreal in the present moment. His manner of argument is to remind the Epicureans that they divide the day into hours, and aside from the current hours all the other hours do not currently exist; and then he applies the same reductive argument in turn against the hour as being divided into minutes, only one of which is current. He does not pursue any further this train of thought.

Although I do not know of a Madhyamaka argument which specifically refers to divisions of the day like this, we have seen that Madhyamaka radically undermines the idea of duration by pointing out that, while permanent entities or events do not make sense, neither do transient ones, since one is ascribing to them a characteristic, namely transience, that itself removes their capacity to remain long enough to have characteristics ascribed to them.¹⁰³¹ In what amounts to a proof of Sextus' point that past and future hours of the day do not exist now and past and future minutes of the hour do not exist now, Āryadeva refutes¹⁰³² those (for example, among the Buddhists, the Sarvāstivāda or "proponents [of the doctrine] that all exists") who assert that past, present and future all exist, by pointing out that this is the same as saying that they exist in the

¹⁰²⁷ See Part II: Chapter 1.

¹⁰²⁸ AP II: 181-8

¹⁰²⁹ φάντασμα

¹⁰³⁰ AP II: 181-4

¹⁰³¹ See "Physical bodies are not apprehended due to impermanence" *supra*.

¹⁰³² ŚŚ IX: 9-10

present, which would make a nonsense of past and future. If his opponents object that the past and the future have peculiar characteristics (of pastness and futurity respectively), Āryadeva points out that, again, these supposed characteristics (just like transience) are among those which undermine the possibility of there remaining anything to which any characteristic might be ascribed: “The past,” he says pithily, “is not past.”

Time is abolished with what it depends on

Sextus next moves on to what he calls “direct arguments” against the belief in time, which are not aimed at particular schools’ definitions. He has this to say to those who believe time depends on motion or rest: that these two have been abolished, so time must be abolished along with them.¹⁰³³

This is a universal acid argument, and Nāgārjuna’s¹⁰³⁴, that time could not exist without what it is considered to be dependent on, but that there is *no existent entity at all* upon which it might depend, is rather more acidic!

Time is not limited or unlimited

Sextus next introduces¹⁰³⁵ a dilemma between limited and unlimited time. On the one hand, time cannot be limited, because a prior limit would imply that there were a time before time began; and a posterior limit would imply that there were a time after time ceased to be, neither of which make sense due to the simultaneous presence of the characteristics of existence and non-existence.

Nāgārjuna’s principal treatise has a chapter¹⁰³⁶ on the absurdity of prior and posterior limits, not just of time but of any phenomena, which is considered again to be a commentary on the Buddha’s refusal to answer the question about whether the universe is eternal or transient. In his commentary on this Buddhapālita cites a clear statement of Āryadeva¹⁰³⁷ making the same point as Sextus but for a different purpose: “A beginning, a middle and an end are not possible prior to something arising.” Nāgārjuna explains¹⁰³⁸ the connection between such analyses and freedom from dogmatic beliefs thus: “If there was an inception-point there would certainly also be clinging in the form of beliefs. How can what is interdependently co-originating have a first and a last? ... [No,] the world, free of prior and posterior limits, appears [to have them] in the manner of an illusion. When one realizes that it is an illusion which *seems* to start and end, recognizing the illusoriness one is not bewildered by it. But one who does not recognize this longs for [what appears]. One who with intelligence comes to see that existence is like a mirage or an illusion is

¹⁰³³ *OP* III: 140

¹⁰³⁴ *MMK* XIX: 6

¹⁰³⁵ *AP* II: 189-91; *OP* III: 140-2

¹⁰³⁶ *MMK* XI

¹⁰³⁷ *CŚ* XI: 5

¹⁰³⁸ *YŚ* 14-17

not corrupted by beliefs about a prior and a posterior limit.” Such assertions might seem to imply that he considers the universe unlimited, but he also draws attention¹⁰³⁹ to the equivocation in the concept of “limit” by asking, if there were a limit to the world, how there could be anything beyond it¹⁰⁴⁰ (since that would contradict the idea of there being a limit) but, if there were no limit to the world, how there could be anything beyond it (since there would be no point “beyond” which one might locate something).¹⁰⁴¹

Sextus says time on the other hand cannot be unlimited, because there would be no delimitation between past, present and future, and so all would be conflated and absurdly present now. He also has a separate argument¹⁰⁴² for the non-existence of time, in which he argues that since the past no longer exists and the future does not yet exist, time, which is supposed to be composed of them, cannot be held to exist. We have already seen¹⁰⁴³ Āryadeva showing the absurdity of believing the past and future to exist now. Elsewhere at rather greater length he points out¹⁰⁴⁴ that such a belief allows anything at all to exist immediately, and that it contradicts the evident impermanence of phenomena because it implies that everything exists at all times. If the opponents object that the past and future are differentiated from the present by their peculiar characteristics, of having passed and of futurity, Āryadeva asks how “the past” can now be thus characterized, no longer existing to be characterized as anything. On the other hand it would be just as senseless to say that it has not passed thus, since then it could not be the past at all: not having passed, it must still be functioning and not have ended! He has problems with a future present now too: a pot produced in the future would already be present. If it is objected that the future pot exists as something not created, that would imply it must be uncreate, i.e. permanent, so the future would itself be permanent.

Time is not indivisible or divisible

Sextus’ next destructive dilemma¹⁰⁴⁵ relies on the doctrine that to be divisible, a unit must be measurable by a part of itself. Time, according to his opponents’ beliefs, is certainly not undivided, but divided, into past, present and future. However, by their own doctrines, it cannot be, since the three parts of time cannot measure each other without losing their own

¹⁰³⁹ *MMK* XXVII: 21

¹⁰⁴⁰ Literally “other world”, *paraloka*.

¹⁰⁴¹ Incidentally that, contrary no doubt to the Buddha’s recommendation, there was a great deal of debate among Mahāyāna Buddhists about the sense in which the universe could be said to be without limit is clear from the fact that successive translations of the Nirvāṇa Sūtra into Chinese asserted that saṃsāra was limitless and limited.

¹⁰⁴² *AP* II: 192

¹⁰⁴³ In the discussion of Sextus’ attack on the Epicureans, *supra*.

¹⁰⁴⁴ *CŚ* XI: 4-6

¹⁰⁴⁵ *AP* II: 193-6; *OP* III: 143

characteristics: for example, if the present were to measure the past, it would have to exist in the past, so would lose the characteristic of being present; and so on.

Nāgārjuna's closest argument to this is about the three divisions of time as considered interdependently produced, as we shall see in comparison to Sextus' equivalent, *infra*.

The present moment does not make sense

Sextus turns next¹⁰⁴⁶ to the belief that, although the past and future do not exist now, the present moment does and attacks it with a destructive dilemma between an indivisible moment and a divisible moment.

He first cites Timon by name on the point that the present moment cannot be indivisible because, if it were, change and such processes as motion would be rendered impossible since no change can happen in an infinitely small period. He adds that it would separate the present from any connection with the past and the future, because the "past-facing" or "future-facing" edges would be inadmissible, and in turn the middle part between them would be impossible.

The contradiction between indivisibility of the moment and change is also explicit in Madhyamaka, for example in Nāgārjuna's contention¹⁰⁴⁷ that movement other than where something has (already) moved, i.e. in the past, and where it has not (yet) moved, i.e. in the future, cannot be discovered. Something similar to Sextus' finding fault with a present moment disconnected from past and future by its indivisibility can be read into Nāgārjuna's dismissal¹⁰⁴⁸ of the belief that the three time periods could be independent of each other: he says that if there is no way of relating them to each other, they cannot be established. For example, without referring to the past, the present and future cannot be established.

Sextus dismisses the alternative, that the present moment is divisible, on the grounds that the portions into which it might be divided would have to be considered either to be non-existent, which would make time non-existent, or existent, in which case some portions would have to be past and future, which would contradict their supposed characterization as not being existent in the present. This of course especially applies to those who believe that the present is the anterior limit of the past and the posterior limit of the future, since to be these things it or portions of it would have to become respectively past and future, which would contradict it being present.

In a similar way the other branch of Nāgārjuna's destructive dilemma above is that if the three periods of time are established by relation to each other (rather than asserted to be independent and disconnected) then they would have to become each other. For example, he says that if the present and the future are considered to depend on the past then they must exist at the

¹⁰⁴⁶ AP II: 197-202; OP III: 144-6

¹⁰⁴⁷ MMK II: 1

¹⁰⁴⁸ MMK XIX: 3

same time as the past, i.e. in the past, so all three times would become one, all would be indistinguishable according to existence or non-existence, and all would lose their defining characteristics.

Time cannot be temporary or permanent

Sextus' next destructive dilemma¹⁰⁴⁹ concerns whether time can be considered to be permanent, or as he says ingenerable and imperishable, or temporary, or as he says generable and perishable. It cannot be permanent, he points out, since this contradicts the defining features of its components, future, present and past, insofar as they are asserted to be changing into each other. But neither can it be temporary, he says, since the idea of the components changing into each other is contradicted by his opponents' belief that something existent cannot be produced by or turn into the non-existent, the contradiction arising from the fact that they assert that the future is what does not yet exist and the past is what no longer exists. i.e. both the past and the future are non-existent, yet the present, which is existent, is supposed to be produced by one and to turn into the other.

Nāgārjuna gives¹⁰⁵⁰ the same destructive dilemma: neither a non-static time nor a static time is apprehended, so he asks how such a thing might be known. The commentators on this verse give different grounds to Sextus' – that if time were non-static, i.e. in movement, that movement would have to occur within some super-time, which is absurd; whereas a static time would permit no past/present/future distinction since all would have to exist together – but that the Mādhyamikas were however similarly concerned to point out that the existent cannot be produced by or turn into the non-existent will be clear when we consider Sextus' arguments for coming into being and ceasing to be *infra*.

The very same grounds as the Mādhyamikas' are invoked, however, in Sextus' ensuing argument, a destructive trilemma between time being generable, ingenerable, or partially generable.¹⁰⁵¹ And indeed he elaborates on the absurdity of the super-time for a supposedly non-static time, insofar as time would thus have to occur within itself or some time would have to occur in another time. Just as in his refutation of the beliefs of the Platonists, Porch and Peripatetics *supra*, time occurring within itself would imply something being able simultaneously not to exist (since it is just about to occur) and to exist (since the locus for the occurrence must

¹⁰⁴⁹ AP II: 203-214; OP III: 147-50

¹⁰⁵⁰ MMK XIX: 5

¹⁰⁵¹ Incidentally, it is interesting to note that Sextus adds this as a separate argument, whereas logically it could easily have been fused with the previous one. The separate enunciation might have been a slightly unctuous way of signalling that the particular arguments had derived from different sources or lineages, besides carrying an obviously greater rhetorical power.

first be there); and one time occurring in another would require the three periods' distinguishing features to be abandoned.

Āryadeva ridicules¹⁰⁵² this idea of time nesting within time even more elaborately by introducing the canonical three defining features of a generable and perishable entity, namely that it comes into being, is, and ceases to be, and considering each of these in itself as a generable and perishable entity, such that for each of them, each of the three stages (namely coming into being, being, and ceasing to be) occur. Thus “ceasing to be” itself apparently comes into being, and “being” itself apparently ceases to be, and so on. Nāgārjuna succinctly identifies¹⁰⁵³ the problem with this, as well as its alternative: if coming into being, being and ceasing to be were themselves characterized by the characteristics of generated things, this would continue *ad infinitum*; but if they were not, they would not be generated at all, i.e. nothing could come into being, be, or cease to be.

Incidentally Sextus finishes by faulting the third lemma, that time is partially generable and partially ingenerable, with the absurdities of both. Such third lemmas could be added to most of Sextus' dilemmas but are usually not. It is rather curious that one is deployed here. Trilemmatizing (or indeed tetralemmatizing) in this way is a staple of the Madhyamaka approach, however, as in the famous opening attack on generation from self and other and both and neither in Nāgārjuna's main treatise, commenting on which Buddhapālita exposes the faults entailed in turn by the beliefs in production of something from itself and from something else, then says that a thing cannot be generated by both, from itself and from something else, because both faults would be involved.

Time cannot be a property of a property

Epicurus' description of time as a symptom of a symptom is refuted on a series of grounds whose parallels in Madhyamaka we have seen elsewhere: that properties do not make sense separated from their substances, the universal acid argument that the substances (such as day, and motion) of which time is supposed to be the symptom are undiscovered¹⁰⁵⁴, that (as before) time would end up occurring in time, and incorporeals would be the properties of incorporeals – which Sextus thinks is unlikely.¹⁰⁵⁵

Nāgārjuna elegantly mocks the belief of attributes separable from the attributed-to: “Nowhere does there exist any such thing as an existent without an attribute,” and uses a universal

¹⁰⁵² *CS* XV: 12

¹⁰⁵³ *MMK* VII: 3

¹⁰⁵⁴ ἀνεύρετά. Bury has “undiscoverable”.

¹⁰⁵⁵ *AP* II: 238-47. Unlikely is “οὐ πιθανόν”, and this context makes one wonder if it might not also have meant “untestable”.

acid argument to add that under these conditions the idea of an attribute in itself absurd: “An existent devoid of attributes being unreal, where would an attribute be applied?”¹⁰⁵⁶

Number is not identical to the numbered

Next¹⁰⁵⁷ Sextus presents at some length the doctrines of the Pythagoreans about number. At the beginning of his inquiry into number he first¹⁰⁵⁸ deploys their own proof that number cannot exist as something identical to numbered items. They state that if something, a plant, say, is indeed 1, then anything which is *not* a plant *could not* be 1.

Similarly, Āryadeva, at the inception of his extensive dialectical refutation¹⁰⁵⁹ of the belief (held by the realist Naiyāyikas) that generalities or general characteristics, including number, inhere in (or, as we might say, are participated in by) particulars, throws down the gauntlet by declaring that it is not possible to establish that the substance of something and its properties, such as “existence” and “oneness”, are *identical*. He states the fault rather cryptically: if this were true “everything would be at the same time established, and unestablished, and mistakenly conceived.” The commentary on the second consequence, that everything would be unestablished, is relevant to us: it points out that if a pot were identical to its quality of “existence”, for example, then anything *other* than a pot would be *non-existent*. However this is not because the pot has “stolen” the entire quality, leaving nothing for anything else (as the Pythagoreans would have it): it is because by becoming the universal “existence”, the pot loses the particularity “being a pot” and so there is not even any pot: thus in turn the universal characteristic cannot exist since it has nothing to be instantiated in or associated with. Thus he says the opponents have to admit that for them there is no reasonable type “existence”.¹⁰⁶⁰

Number is not different from the numbered

Sextus balances this with a proof¹⁰⁶¹ that the Pythagoreans’ replacement belief, that number has primacy over the numbered as a participated-in type, is just as problematic, due to obvious absurdities and what he calls “the impasse to which one is brought by the genus”¹⁰⁶². First of all, he points out, it is *prima facie* absurd to say, as the Pythagoreans suggest we circumspectly should, that for example individual humans are somehow not human, or that a thing is not itself

¹⁰⁵⁶ *MMK* V: 2

¹⁰⁵⁷ *AP* II: 248-84

¹⁰⁵⁸ *AP* II: 285-90

¹⁰⁵⁹ *ŚŚ* III

¹⁰⁶⁰ The universal/particular problem of properties being “stolen” is also found in *Madhyamaka*: see for example the case of genera, which Sextus considers analogous, at Part I: Chapter 1: “Genera are not divided into species” and the simile of the baby in the nurses’ laps.

¹⁰⁶¹ *AP* II: 291 ff.

¹⁰⁶² ἡ κομιζομένη κατὰ τοῦ γένους

singular, say, but can be said to be singular through its participation in the type “singularity”. Secondly, the type is never perceived – either with the instantiations or as something separate from them. Thirdly, and here Sextus deploys one of his most delicious arguments, the type “singularity” itself (for example) could not either be singular or plural. If it were singular, then either only *one* instance could participate in it *fully* (leaving the same absurdity as the Pythagoreans invoked against the ordinary idea of number, that the number would be somehow stolen by one instantiation and thus denied all the others by it) or *all* instances could participate in it *partially*, in which case they would all become *fractions* of one rather than one (since it would be a fraction in which they were participating), and the singularity itself, by having parts at all, would become plural. The only alternative, that the type “singularity” were plural, would mean these “singularities” themselves would have to participate in turn (by this doctrine) in a super-type singularity in order to be considered “singular”, which would involve all the same absurdities again for that super-level of participation. The only escape, to say that this plurality of singularities were somehow “singular” without needing participation, would entail that one accord the same redundancy to the first level of participation (or be accused of special pleading), in which case the ordinary idea of number would have to be accepted (and the doctrine of participation in types abandoned).

In the course of refuting a series of “extreme views” of the (realist) Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school, Āryadeva deals¹⁰⁶³ with their doctrine, very similar to the Pythagoreans’ one being scrutinized here by Sextus, that number (as well as other properties, such as “existence”) is a universal which by inherence¹⁰⁶⁴ with a particular phenomenon confers number on that phenomenon (a doctrine which comes up in this instance as an attempt to justify the belief in the substance of the particular instantiation of it), but his refutation is on quite different grounds, much simpler than Sextus’, namely the senselessness of connection between a particular and a universal: “[You say: ‘The pot *possesses* “oneness”; it is not itself “one”.’ We reply:] Connection can only occur between similar things. [But a material pot and a universal quality are not similar, so they cannot be connected,] and thus the pot cannot possess the quality. Thus, the pot is not ‘one’.”¹⁰⁶⁵ Later¹⁰⁶⁶, refuting a doctrine of the Buddhist Sautrāntika school, he extrapolates to number in general: just as “being one” cannot characterize the pot, because the pot cannot be separated from its characteristics, neither can it be characterized as “being plural”.

Sextus’ problematization of the Pythagorean doctrine of number by type-participation is a complete application of what became the central argument of the Madhyamaka, known as

¹⁰⁶³ CŚ XIV: 4

¹⁰⁶⁴ *samavāya*, literally “concomitance”

¹⁰⁶⁵ Note that this is an absurd consequence *for his opponents*, since they have said that the pot can be one because pot and number are different but connected.

¹⁰⁶⁶ CŚ XIV: 7

“neither one nor many”¹⁰⁶⁷, one of the four Great Arguments of the Madhyamaka. Nāgārjuna’s presentation¹⁰⁶⁸ is, as often, rather cryptic: “Without one there are not many; without many one is not possible. Therefore things which arise in interdependent co-origination are signless [*animitta* i.e. they cannot be pointed out or identified or, in this case, counted].” And, “The create and the uncreate are not many and not one, not there or absent or in some combination of presence and absence. All possibilities are included in these delimitations.”¹⁰⁶⁹ Āryadeva puts the point¹⁰⁷⁰ more thoroughly: every entity that is thoroughly examined is found to lack indivisible and absolute oneness, insofar as it can be divided into parts, and if there is no oneness, there can be no other-than-oneness i.e. plurality. His commentators elaborate on how it is that oneness is not found. For example the Tibetan Rendawa points out that just as the great elements do not exist without reciprocal dependence, in the same way the developments from the elements do not exist without the elements, or else there would be the absurd consequence that things would come into being causelessly. Given that mind and mental functions, and bases for characterization and characteristics, likewise do not exist without reciprocal dependence, there does not exist any singularity in things by any standards. And thus plurality does not exist either, for plurality is based on the accumulation of units.

Incidentally Āryadeva goes on to point out that his realist opponents’ acceptance of the attribution of oneness to a phenomenon also contradicts their own doctrines, since these have it that all phenomena are, in one sense, “triple”. And as for what this “tripleness” refers to, Rendawa reports that in the Naiyāyika doctrine atoms of earth are three-fold, having what are called substantiality, oneness and existence *per se*; and qualities also are threefold having what they call quality *per se*, oneness and existence *per se*. Therefore, since in their tradition all existents, atoms and so on, have precisely three aspects, nothing whatsoever of alleged oneness exists. Likewise also for the Sāṃkhya (another non-Buddhist school) no single thing whatsoever exists since for them everything is of the nature of the three so-called universal principles, namely lightness, motility and inertia.

Change does not make sense

Sextus devotes a short section¹⁰⁷¹ specifically to the impossibility of change. He begins by referring to the deconstructions elsewhere of corporeal and incorporeal reality (since what is believed to change must presumably be one of these) and of causal influence and being influenced (since change is generally believed to be caused).

¹⁰⁶⁷ *ekānekaviyogahetu*: See Part I: “Deconstructive modes”

¹⁰⁶⁸ ŚS 7

¹⁰⁶⁹ ŚS 32

¹⁰⁷⁰ CŚ XIV: 19-20

¹⁰⁷¹ OP III: 102-8

Neither the non-existent nor the existent can change

His first new argument¹⁰⁷² is that the non-existent cannot be considered to change, since clearly there is nothing there which might change. On the other hand, if the existent *insofar as it is existent* changes, then it must change into something other than existent, i.e. into something non-existent. Though our first reaction to this might be to object that the intention in saying “change” was not “insofar as it is existent”, Sextus is forcing us to reflect on what exactly the intention might be since we are asserting that such change is possible as an attribute for *everything which is existent*. It is an example of the distribution-forcing argument we have already encountered.¹⁰⁷³ If we want to escape from the implication that it is these things’ very existence which must change, we must assert that there is something else other than existence which is shared by all existents and that it is this which changes.

Nāgārjuna’s presentation¹⁰⁷⁴ of the same absurdity does not explicitly use a distribution-insisting argument, but draws on the fact that this dilemma arises due to our (erroneous) belief in things as things in themselves: he asks what could change if a thing is nothing in itself; but if it is on the contrary something in itself, he asks how it could be correct that it might change. That is to say, its supposed property of changing would contradict its supposed property of being something in itself.

Change does not occur in the past, in the future or now

Sextus goes on to point out¹⁰⁷⁵ that there is no change in the past or the future because they are not currently existent. On the other hand the present moment appears to be unreal, and even if accepted must be indivisible, thus discounting the possibility of change.

We are by now familiar with this style of argument in the Madhyamaka, as exemplified in the opening of Nāgārjuna’s examination of motion, where he says there can be no movement in the past or the future, but that nothing remains other than these two in which it might occur. He makes the same point¹⁰⁷⁶ of coming into being: “That which has come into being, that which has yet to come into being, and that which is in the process of coming into being – none of these come into being. This has been explained in [the analysis of] the moved, the yet to move and the moving.”

¹⁰⁷² *OP* III: 104-5

¹⁰⁷³ See Part I: “Distribution-forcing arguments”

¹⁰⁷⁴ *MMK* XIII: 4

¹⁰⁷⁵ *OP* III: 106-7

¹⁰⁷⁶ *MMK* VII: 14

Change is not sensed or inferred

His last argument¹⁰⁷⁷ is a destructive dilemma between change apprehended by the senses and change apprehended by the intellect. The former is dismissed by reference to the fact that those who believe in change say it depends on concurrent recollections, whereas the senses are only capable of individual reception of their stimuli. The latter is dismissed by reference to the undecided controversy about the reality of intellect-based or mental reality.

The Buddhists from Dignāga on, as we have seen, in debate with non-Buddhist schools, treated sense perception just as Sextus describes here, as involving direct pre-conceptual private reception of actual sense stimuli, but they perhaps more provokingly presented inferences as involving concepts whose content was considered “mistaken” because actually derived only from transactional social behaviour and communication, i.e. a merely imputed reality. We have already had occasion to consider this radical dichotomy between the two “sources of cognition” (*pramāṇa*). That the mistakeness of inferences’ content was not uncontroversial among the Buddhists is testified to by the subsequent refinements of the *pramāṇa* theories.

Things cannot come into being or cease to be

Sextus’ last and climactic section¹⁰⁷⁸ in the deconstruction of physical reality is a series of exposées of the absurdities entailed by the beliefs that phenomena come into being and cease to be.

The *raison d’être* of Madhyamaka, as we have seen, is to explain a particular class of the Buddha’s discourses, the Prajñāpāramitā or Perfection of Wisdom. A dominant theme in them is that no phenomena come into being¹⁰⁷⁹. So we would expect this subject of Sextus’ to be particularly rich in parallels from Madhyamaka, and indeed this is what we find.

After an initial survey¹⁰⁸⁰ of the assertions of various schools and philosophers about genesis, Sextus begins the inquiry by a summary reference¹⁰⁸¹ to deconstructions elsewhere of time, motion, agency, addition and subtraction, change and contact, since genesis is inconceivable without them. Then he turns to new arguments.

Neither the existent nor the non-existent comes into being

Sextus presents¹⁰⁸² a destructive dilemma between believing of coming into being that it is an existent phenomenon or a non-existent one which does so. A non-existent cannot, since there is

¹⁰⁷⁷ *OP* III: 108

¹⁰⁷⁸ *AP* II: 310 ff.

¹⁰⁷⁹ E.g. *Aṣṭasāhasrika Prajñāpāramitā*, chapters II, V, XXIX

¹⁰⁸⁰ *AP* II: 311-18

¹⁰⁸¹ *AP* II: 319-25; the deconstruction of addition and subtraction also referred to in *OP* III: 100

¹⁰⁸² *AP* II: 326-7; *OP* III: 112-13

nothing there to carry a property such as “coming into being” or to be acted upon. As for the alternative, that something existent comes into being, *OP* has the point that insofar as it is existent, it could only come into being from something else, which would therefore have to be something non-existent, another distribution-insisting argument. In *AP* Sextus does not invoke a distribution-insisting argument but merely points out that if something is existent, it is redundant to conceive of it coming into existence: it is already there!

In Nāgārjuna’s deconstruction of generative conditions, his principal treatise’s first chapter, whose intent, the major commentaries claim, is to prove that nothing comes into being, he says¹⁰⁸³ that a productive condition is not appropriate for either an existent or a non-existent. Later¹⁰⁸⁴ explicitly deconstructing “coming into being” he refers back to that verse: “Neither an existent nor a non-existent can properly be said to come into being, as was taught before with ‘For neither an existent nor a non-existent...’ ” A later chapter deals expressly with coming into being and ceasing to be, and there he says, for example¹⁰⁸⁵, that there is no coming into being for what is finished, and that there is no coming into being for what is not finished. The branches of this dilemma are dealt with at rather greater length by Āryadeva in his elaborate refutation¹⁰⁸⁶ of the idea that composite things can exist in themselves, where¹⁰⁸⁷ in very Sextan fashion he draws the opponents through the mangle on the issue of their rescuing assertion (once the existent and non-existent coming into being have been refuted) that it is some intermediate half-come-into-being thing which is said to be coming into being. He reminds them that anything in the process of coming into being is said not yet to have come into being, and thus accuses them of asserting that there is no difference between what has come into being and what has yet to. So, he mocks, why not also conceive that the pot which is not there is the same as the pot which is? And so on. The supposedly “intermediate” position is more succinctly denied in another treatise of Nāgārjuna¹⁰⁸⁸, where he also deploys the same supporting arguments as Sextus (in *AP*) for the principal dilemma: what exists does not come into being since it already exists; what doesn’t exist does not come into being because it isn’t there; something which simultaneously exists and doesn’t exist does not come into being because of the contradiction between these properties. Thus, he says, exactly as Sextus does, that there is no coming into being, and no ceasing to be. He then paraphrases rather lyrically that what has been born cannot be born, and what has not been born cannot be born, and that which is being born has partly been born and partly not been born, so cannot be born either. Sextus’ first supporting argument for a non-existent being unable to come into being has a close equivalent in Nāgārjuna’s deconstruction of productive conditions, where

¹⁰⁸³ *MMK* I: 6ab

¹⁰⁸⁴ *MMK* VII: 20

¹⁰⁸⁵ *MMK* XXI: 7

¹⁰⁸⁶ *CŚ* XV

¹⁰⁸⁷ v. 21

¹⁰⁸⁸ *ŚS* 4-5

he points out¹⁰⁸⁹ that something non-existent cannot carry the property of being associated with particular conditions: “If a thing is non-existent, how can it have a condition?” His next point¹⁰⁹⁰ is identical to Sextus’ first supporting argument against an existent coming into being: “If a thing is already existent, what would a condition do?” Āryadeva elaborates¹⁰⁹¹ that what is already existent cannot come into being, since there is nothing to establish with respect to something which is already established. There is no generation at the time when something has already been generated. Incidentally Āryadeva’s chapter begins with the obvious absurdity, not emphasized by Sextus here though it could have been, of the idea that a non-existent might come into being: “How can something which is not there arise at all?” He then asks the same question of something which *is* there. Nāgārjuna links¹⁰⁹² this analysis to the discovery of interdependent co-arising: he says that someone who imagines that even the subtlest existent [*bhava*] comes into being is an ignoramus who does not see what it means for phenomena to be interdependently co-originated.

Sextus’ distribution-insisting argument here which takes the idea of “other” to its logical extreme has a parallel in Nāgārjuna but the absurd extreme to which it is taken is different in the two authors. Sextus applies it to the case in the dilemma, “the existent”, which is being considered here as solely defined by its characteristic of “existence”, such that something “other” than it must be “non-existent”. (Incidentally, if it is suspected that this is sophistical, one should ask what other characteristic than “existence” might apply similarly to the whole class, against which “otherness” might otherwise be measured.) Nāgārjuna sees a different extreme in the idea of coming into being from “other”, namely that if the latter is truly “other” there could be no way of establishing its special connection to what it is purported to produce, which means that someone who asserts this manner of coming into being must also assert that everything comes from anything else. For example he says¹⁰⁹³, “A different thing depends on a different thing for its difference. Without a different thing, a different thing wouldn’t be different. [Yet] it is not tenable for that which depends on something else to be different from it.” And in particular this kind of reasoning is applied by the major commentaries to Nāgārjuna’s opening statement in his principal treatise: “Neither from itself nor from something else, nor from both nor causelessly, does anything anywhere come into being.” So while considering the idea, “An existent comes into being from something else,” Sextus focuses on the extremity of identifying a class of “existents” and the consequences of otherness from that, whereas Nāgārjuna focuses on the

¹⁰⁸⁹ *MMK* I: 6c

¹⁰⁹⁰ 6d

¹⁰⁹¹ *CŚ* XV: 2-4

¹⁰⁹² *YŚ* 12

¹⁰⁹³ *MMK* XIV: 5

extremity of the notion of “otherness” and the consequences of applying it to a thing’s coming into being.

Coming into being is impossible from the non-existent or from the existent

Sextus next turns his attention to that *out of which* coming into being is believed to occur. He briefly surveys¹⁰⁹⁴ some illustrative examples of singular and plural origins, and among the examples of multiple things becoming by combination a new thing, one, the woof and warp forming the robe, is one of the stock examples for belief in generation that is attacked in the Madhyamaka treatises. In his subsequent inquiry he argues¹⁰⁹⁵ that coming into being is impossible either from a non-existent or from an existent or existents. That coming into being is impossible from a non-existent is, he says, clear because if there is nothing there there is nothing with the power to produce anything. Coming into being from the existent is considered for a singular existent and plural existents. If one were to accept that there could be coming into being from a singular entity, that entity would have to become other than itself (by increase or decrease or change) while being itself. If one held that plural existents could be the origin, Sextus points out that so long as 2 remain, a third cannot come into being; and so long as 3 remain, a fourth cannot. And he refers briefly to his own arguments against the substance of the human, which the translator Bury says are at *AL I*: 263 ff. and 288 ff., but neither of these passages deals with the absurdity of combination giving rise to results. Presumably Sextus is referring to *AL I*: 276-8, but there the point is the simple one: that if the result is not produced in the separate components, it will not be produced in their combination either.

Nāgārjuna denies¹⁰⁹⁶ all the permutations of Sextus’ last two dilemmas succinctly: “From an existent an existent does not come into being; from an existent a non-existent does not come into being. From a non-existent a non-existent does not come into being; from a non-existent an existent does not come into being.” The same four permutations are refuted¹⁰⁹⁷ by Āryadeva where his intention is to destroy the opponents’ defence of their belief in coming into being, being and ceasing to be, which they make on grounds of the patent existence of the entities which undergo them (and thus arise, as existents, out of, and return to, non-existence). Indeed he presents the same fourfold permutation twice, for “coming into being”, and for “becoming” or “turning into”, respectively. We have already considered the popularization¹⁰⁹⁸ by the later

¹⁰⁹⁴ *AP II*: 328-30

¹⁰⁹⁵ *AP II*: 331-9

¹⁰⁹⁶ *MMK XXI*: 12

¹⁰⁹⁷ *CŚ XV*: 14

¹⁰⁹⁸ e.g. *SDV 14* and its author’s own commentary. See “Causes could not have singular or plural effective powers” *supra*.

Mādhyamika Jñānagarbha of the destructive tetralemma resulting from all the permutations of singular and plural causes and effects.

The justifications given for these assertions are the same as Sextus'. On the idea that the existent can arise from the non-existent, Candrakīrti in his commentary on Nāgārjuna's verse gives a memorable elaboration on a stock Madhyamaka simile for the impossible: a barren woman's daughter bearing a son.

The belief that a singular existent produces something was central to the teachings of the non-Buddhist Sāṃkhya school, who asserted that generation was in fact a process of transformation of the ~pre-create substance¹⁰⁹⁹. Āryadeva in his refutation of this doctrine focuses¹¹⁰⁰ on the difficulty which arises from this idea due to the thing in question being believed to exist in itself, and reproduces Sextus' argument: something in itself cannot become something in itself since what exists in itself does not change. In the course of attacking the Sāṃkhya Āryadeva discloses (in his chapter refuting the belief in the effect as existing in the cause)¹¹⁰¹ a large number of absurdities consequent upon the belief Sextus is addressing here. He begins with the basic self-contradiction in the idea that the resultant (later) state is somehow identified with the causal (earlier) state: if, as his opponents say, because of the arising of the fruit, existence is not lost, i.e. if their beliefs escape the charge of annihilationism by means of their assertion of the existence of the result, then since for them annihilationism and existence are contraries, because of the loss as they express it of the cause, existence is lost insofar as it applies to the cause, and thus they do not escape the charge of annihilationism. This is akin to Sextus' later charge¹¹⁰² of implying something "perishes into the non-existent". The general contradiction is put¹¹⁰³ by Nāgārjuna in his analysis of the idea of something existing in itself: if a thing in itself existed, what could transform into something else? Āryadeva employs¹¹⁰⁴ this argument in his deconstruction of generation: a thing in itself cannot arise from something else in itself, since what exists itself cannot arise from something else, and he emphasizes by way of explanation that a thing in itself does not change into something else in itself since what exists itself cannot change.

As for plural existents generating something, Sextus' exact argument occurs in the Madhyamaka. For example, Nāgārjuna asks¹¹⁰⁵ how, when the effect cannot be found in individual or united conditions, something not in the conditions could come from the conditions.

¹⁰⁹⁹ *prakṛti*

¹¹⁰⁰ *CŚ XV: 15a*

¹¹⁰¹ *ŚŚ VII*

¹¹⁰² *AP II: 336*

¹¹⁰³ *MMK XV: 9cd*

¹¹⁰⁴ *CŚ XV: 14*

¹¹⁰⁵ *MMK I: 10*

Later on¹¹⁰⁶ he presents a sophisticated attack on the commonsensical idea that results come into being when causes and conditions “assemble” or “combine” in some way, which reads like a defence of Sextus’ rather cryptic arguments. He points out that this makes sense neither when we believe the result to have come into being at the time of the combination nor when we believe it not to have done at that time. He then considers the three chronological permutations of the result and the combination: if the result is later then it cannot be connected to the combination any more than any other phenomenon; if it is simultaneous it cannot have arisen from the combination; and if it is earlier, it must be causeless and the combination must have no effect. As for Sextus’ later application of his argument in the face of objections based on various experiences of what seems to be generation, in which he asks whether or not the actual (as the result) contains anything more than the potential (in the cause), in Nāgārjuna’s approach this is an instance of the difficulty, when presented with a supposed translation, for example from conditions to an effect, of finding where the power to produce the effect of the translation comes from. Although Nāgārjuna’s question is literally, “How could something not in the conditions come from the conditions?” clearly he is making the same point as Sextus, as he might as well have said, paraphrasing the Pyrrhonist, “If it does not come from the conditions, it must come from nothing.” This argument, incidentally, is closely related to Sextus’ problematization¹¹⁰⁷ of the combination of numbers.¹¹⁰⁸

Nothing ceases to be either

Sextus says that it is absurd to say that anything ceases to be, for the same reasons as the absurdity of coming into being.

Nāgārjuna similarly says that when the arising of any entity is not tenable, then the cessation of any entity is not tenable, but is in this expression, unlike Sextus, focusing on the latter being a *consequence* of the former (rather than a parallel to it), since if nothing has come into being, then there are no things, so what could it be that is supposed to cease to be? However, as we shall see, the Madhyamaka like Sextus uses the very same argument structure against ceasing to be.

Neither the existent nor the non-existent ceases to be

Sextus gives¹¹⁰⁹ the parallel arguments as expected, rather briefly: in the case of a non-existent, there is nothing there which might be considered to cease to be, and ceasing to be as a supposed

¹¹⁰⁶ *MMK* XX: 1-8

¹¹⁰⁷ *AP* II: 302 ff.

¹¹⁰⁸ Incidentally, to these dilemmas, the Madhyamaka add one which Sextus does not consider, but could well have added: that neither the dependent nor the independent comes into being. (*YS* 19)

¹¹⁰⁹ *AP* II: 344-5; *OP* III: 113-4

transition into non-existence would in any case be redundant, but in the case of an existent, the properties of existing and ceasing to be are contradictory.

“A thing that exists,” says Nāgārjuna, “cannot undergo a cessation... A thing that does not exist cannot have a cessation...”¹¹¹⁰ Similarly in the chapter devoted expressly to coming into being and ceasing to be, he says¹¹¹¹ that what is finished cannot be destroyed, and what is not finished cannot be destroyed. To make the point about the redundancy and impossibility of a non-existent ceasing to be Nāgārjuna employs¹¹¹² a rather memorable simile: “Moreover for a non-entity, cessation would be untenable, just as a second beheading of the same person cannot be performed.” Like Sextus, he says¹¹¹³ that a single thing being at once an entity and a non-entity is untenable. And elsewhere¹¹¹⁴ he reconciles this with the irrefutable appearances of things ceasing, in the characteristically haughty way: “While [the ignorant] imagine that ceasing to be pertains to an existent thing which ‘dissolves’, the ones who have realized [how things are] are convinced that ceasing to be of a created thing is an illusion.” As usual, while Sextus might prefer to express the balance between appearances and logical unfindability, we might say that the Mahāyānists combine both sides of the balance in their assertion of appearances as illusions.

The time of coming into being and ceasing to be cannot be identified

In what amounts to a recapitulation of previous arguments with examples, Sextus concludes¹¹¹⁵ his inquiry into coming into being and ceasing with the impossibility of Socrates being born when he does not exist and when he does exist; of him dying while alive or dead; of a wall collapsing while entire or in fragments (an example which he attributes to Diodorus Cronos); and in general of phenomena coming into being or ceasing while they exist or while they do not exist.

We have already considered the close Madhyamaka parallels. For example Nāgārjuna has¹¹¹⁶, “A young man does not age, and an old man does not age either,” and adds an example that Sextus does not use, that if milk became curds, milk must be curds while at the same time not being curds.

¹¹¹⁰ *MMK* VII: 30ab, 31ab

¹¹¹¹ *MMK* XXI: 7cd

¹¹¹² *MMK* VII: 31

¹¹¹³ *MMK* VII: 30

¹¹¹⁴ *YS* 7

¹¹¹⁵ *AP* II: 346-50; in *OP* the two Socrates cases come before the general form of the argument, at III: 110-1

¹¹¹⁶ *MMK* XIII: 5

Summary and discussion

We have considered, according to our sectioning here of Sextus' words in *AP* and *OP* III (a sectioning which, it should be noted, telescopes many of the arguments against the geometers into a single argument), 118 arguments, among which, to consider first their contents:

about 50 have *no equivalents* in Madhyamaka as far as I know: the arguments for suspension about the origin of the notion of god made from discrepancy in the ways the Greek philosophers have surmised that we reach a notion of god¹¹¹⁷; the dismissals of the notion of god originating by convention and legislation on the grounds that this would lead to a diversity in notions about god which is not found; the dismissal of god originating from deification on the grounds that it is circular; the dismissal of the notion originating by reverence of the beneficial on the grounds that defining the reverence-worthy descends into ludicrousness by a sorites argument; the dismissal of the notion originating in hallucinations or dreams involving giants on the grounds of the latter being even more fantastic so no explanation, and of circularity again; the dismissal of the notion referring to humans' divine qualities again on the grounds that they are circular; - the arguments for god's existence¹¹¹⁸, from universal agreement; and on grounds of many "absurdities" (such as piety, holiness, wisdom, justice, prophecy and unsurprisingly honouring god, all becoming impossible) ensuing from god's absence; and on the grounds that arguments against it can be refuted; - the arguments for not believing in god¹¹¹⁹ on grounds that its mobility and infinitude are incompatible; that it could not be incorporeal (because it could not act) or corporeal (since it would be perishable); that its ability to speak and its lack of physical speech organs are incompatible; that its supposed appeal to all mankind and its speaking a particular language are incompatible; and that divine entities cannot be clearly distinguished from non-divine, as show by sorites-style arguments; - that God's existence or absence and the soul prove causation¹¹²⁰; the incorporeal not being active or passive; cause not being by surface contact or permeation¹¹²¹; and cause not being mediated or immediate; the impossibility of subtraction due to each number's inclusion of infinity through iterative summation of overlapping parts of itself and of the parts of the sum in turn etc.¹¹²²; subtraction of units; addition; combination; the application of Agrippan modes to what the fundamental elements of reality are, corporeal (earth, water, air, fire, etc., or some combination of

¹¹¹⁷ *AP* I: 12-49

¹¹¹⁸ *AP* I: 60-137

¹¹¹⁹ *AP* I: 138-90

¹¹²⁰ *AP* I: 199

¹¹²¹ *AP* I: 254-7

¹¹²² *OP* III: 87, *AP* I: 302-306

these) or incorporeal (number, limits, qualities, ideas)¹¹²³; place being demanded by the directions; the argument for place existing from the example of people being sometimes “here” and sometimes “there” and of Sextus talking where his teacher had talked before¹¹²⁴, and of Plato being able to replace Socrates, the latter being dead¹¹²⁵, and its refutation as assuming what is to be proved;¹¹²⁶ the argument invoking bodies as support for place¹¹²⁷, and its refutation on the basis of body being in dispute¹¹²⁸; the argument that certain substances are found when measured to be heavier or lighter depending, seemingly, on having been displaced from their natural place, e.g. water weighing more because it is moving down to its natural place (below) and fire being light because of moving to its natural place (above)¹¹²⁹ and its refutation on the grounds that it is likely that such movement occurs due to other causes and constraints, not because of some “natural place”¹¹³⁰; the argument that since the thing *out of which* something exists (the passive matter), and the thing *because of* which it exists (the cause) exists, and the thing *on account of* which it exists exists, then, it is argued, so must the thing *in* which it exists (the place) exist¹¹³¹; the reference to the beliefs of the ancients such as Hesiod that Chaos is the place that contains all things, and refutation by dismissing Hesiod as not a philosopher, referring to the famous story of Epicurus beginning philosophy by asking the obvious question: “Where did the chaos come from?”; the argument that if place were matter or shape, it would be embodied, move and change state, but it is not and does not but is the locus where those changes occur¹¹³², and that shape is inseparable from matter so moves, whereas place does not¹¹³³; the specific argument against the Porch that place cannot be one dimension or three dimensions (and merge with the object)¹¹³⁴; the argument against place being the limits of the 3D figure on the grounds that the interval is the enclosed and corporeal, whereas place is supposed to enclose and be incorporeal, and that the limits are inseparable from the occupying body whereas place is not¹¹³⁵; the three specific refutation of the Peripatetic cosmology¹¹³⁶ on the grounds that God could not be

¹¹²³ AP I: 358-364; OP III: 30-36

¹¹²⁴ OP III: 120 (part)

¹¹²⁵ AP II: 8

¹¹²⁶ AP II: 14; OP III: 122 (part)

¹¹²⁷ AP II: 9 (start); OP III: 121 (part)

¹¹²⁸ OP III: 122 (part)

¹¹²⁹ AP II: 9 (latter part); OP III: 120 (part)

¹¹³⁰ AP II: 16;

¹¹³¹ AP II: 10; OP III: 121 (part)

¹¹³² AP II: 24-25

¹¹³³ AP II: 26

¹¹³⁴ AP II: 125-8

¹¹³⁵ AP II: 27-9

¹¹³⁶ AP II: 30-32

the limit or something other than the limit¹¹³⁷, the impossibility of the limit being corporeal or incorporeal¹¹³⁸, and the impossibility of anything being the place for itself, on the basis of mutually incompatible properties and impossibilities of number¹¹³⁹; the argument against “something which moves by nature” based on what the direction of movement might be, either all directions cancelling each other out, in one direction, or by radiating and converging¹¹⁴⁰; the argument from discrepancy over what is in our power to dismiss arguments for movement based on impulse or purpose¹¹⁴¹; the apparently specious sorites argument against movement in the greater portion when successive further stationary portions (even up to thousands) are added it¹¹⁴² and Sextus’ abrupt rebuttal; the absurdities entailed by the rather freakish doctrine of the Porch, that movement occurs all at once over infinitely divisible space¹¹⁴³; Strato the Peripatetic’s doctrine that while space is continuous, time is not, and thus that movement occurs across continuous space in sudden leaps, and its refutation on the grounds of the difficulties resulting from dividing the space over which an object of a particular speed passes in a minimum of time, and the necessity of asserting that the object must simultaneously occupy that entire space, and thus simultaneously carry the properties (such as all the temperatures) conferred by the environmental conditions along that spatial trajectory¹¹⁴⁴; the beliefs that time is the motion of the universe¹¹⁴⁵, or that it was *the period* of such motion¹¹⁴⁶, and their obscure and unpersuasive refutations on the grounds that these both imply that time is itself that universe in motion, i.e. a particular state of that physical entity¹¹⁴⁷, and that time and universe cannot be the same on the grounds of their absences’ differential conceivability¹¹⁴⁸; the three problems with time being the universe’s period of motion, namely that rest might just as well as motion be considered to be time, that the motion of the universe is unchanging so such that time must also be unchanging, and that the motion of the universe is inconceivable to some such as Aristarchus and subterranean dwellers who at the same time can still conceive of time¹¹⁴⁹; the refutation of Aristotle’s belief that time is the measure, by concurrent recollection, of earlier and later instances of something in motion, on the grounds that it does not account for time passing for things at

¹¹³⁷ *AP* II: 33

¹¹³⁸ *AP* II: 34

¹¹³⁹ *AP* II: 35

¹¹⁴⁰ *AP* II: 77-82

¹¹⁴¹ *OP* III: 70

¹¹⁴² *AP* II: 113-7

¹¹⁴³ *AP* II: 123-139; *OP* III: 77-80

¹¹⁴⁴ *AP* II: 155-65

¹¹⁴⁵ The Platonists according to Bury.

¹¹⁴⁶ The Porch according to Bury.

¹¹⁴⁷ *AP* II: 170 (end)

¹¹⁴⁸ *AP* II: 171

¹¹⁴⁹ *AP* II: 173-5

rest¹¹⁵⁰; the specifically Epicurean absurdities, that images of the day and night, say, would have to exist in images of the day and night, since the former exist in time and the latter are time, and that the cyclical end of the universe (which the Epicureans assert) would destroy time, because day and night no longer occur then¹¹⁵¹; the problematizations of the various philosophical schools' beliefs about the substance¹¹⁵² of time and their discrepancies' insolubility¹¹⁵³ including the Heracleiteans' assertion that time is corporeal¹¹⁵⁴ on the grounds that bodies would rest in bodies, or time in time, and that time would be refuted by refuting the "first body", and the Porch's notion of "something" and with it its instantiations on the grounds that it cannot be a body or incorporeal¹¹⁵⁵.

about 45 are *similar* to actual Madhyamaka arguments: god as efficient cause not being established; the reversed argument from design; god's sentience and eternity being incompatible; god's virtue not making sense; the problem of evil; discrepancy among signs of god being unresolved; ex-nihilo creation being absurd; god not being able to originate; problematization of cause's existence and non-existence; absurdity or negligibility of asserting causelessness; groundlessness of asserting cause; inherently creative matter having nothing to work on; incorporeal creation being like the corporeal; contact between corporeal and incorporeal being impossible; a cause not requiring combination only being able to affect itself; the inability of the incorporeal to be active or passive; there being no genesis of the corporeal from the incorporeal or *vice versa*; the agent not performing action and the non-agent not performing non-action; singular and plural causal powers being impossible; cause by mediated or immediate contact being impossible; geometrical bisection being absurd; numerical subtraction being impossible; the distribution-forcing arguments on numbers including each other; wholes and parts being absurd; words not making a sentence; physical and mathematical figures being non-sensical; body not being conceived; the inapprehensibility of impermanent entities; the impossibility of combinations of substances and/or qualities; the invalidity of asserting place on the grounds of its parts; corporeal place requiring place in turn; place as void not being occupied; the impossibility of place being the enclosing limits; the implication of infinite regress in causal movement; nothing being able to move itself; movement not being able to begin; discrete motion in discrete time being impossible; rest being impossible; the belief in temporally limited or eternal universe leading to impasses; time

¹¹⁵⁰ AP II: 176

¹¹⁵¹ AP II: 181-8

¹¹⁵² τῆς οὐσίας

¹¹⁵³ AP II: 215-229

¹¹⁵⁴ AP II: 230-33

¹¹⁵⁵ AP II: 234-7

defined as motion having to occur in itself; time defined as motion or rest having to occur itself and not being able to measure; time as an image occurring in itself; time periods not existing; the impossibility of divisible and indivisible time; and of time being a property of a property; and

about 45 have *direct equivalents* in actual Madhyamaka arguments: seed and sprout proving cause; nature proving cause; changing things proving cause; even an illusory reality proving cause; in causelessness everything making everything; cause and effect being relative and therefore only conceived and not real; lack of change disproving cause; isolated and combining causes being senseless; combining causes leading to infinite proliferation; the existent and the non-existent not being produced; the agent and the patient not being the same or different; the cause not being before, with, or after the effect; cause and effect not being co-existent or separated; total and partial contact being impossible; the existent and the non-existent not changing; a changing existent possessing contradictory qualities; the whole not being other than the parts; and not being equal to them; the whole and part being in mutual dependence and thus unestablishable; the impossibility of parthood of anything; the fact that deconstruction does not just destroy the mental; active and passive corporeals not making sense; the physical body not being sensed; the equal senselessness of things and their privations; the incorporeal neither being sensed nor apprehended by intellect; motion appearing but not making sense; a thing not being able to move where it is or where it isn't; the impossibility of movement in the present; time being abolished along with what it depends on; the impossibility of the limited world and of the unlimited world; the absurdity of the present moment; time not being temporary or permanent; number not being equal to the numbered; number not being different from the numbered; change not making sense; the impossibility of the existent or the non-existent changing; the impossibility of change in the past, present or future; change not being apprehended; there being no coming into being or ceasing to be; the impossibility of the existent or the non-existent coming into being; and of the same ceasing to be; and of the same being the origin of what comes into being; and the time of coming into being and ceasing to be being impossible to identify.

As for argument types, we have seen that both Sextus and the Madhyamaka employ on these topics as usual the dilemma, trilemma and tetralemma, and combinations of these; frequent reductios; elaborate deconstructions of a phenomenon with parallel deconstructions of its opposite; “mirror language” (adoption of the opponents’ terms for exposées, without needing to believe them); the exact answering of attacks on self-contextualising claims by equivalent re-

contextualisation of the attack¹¹⁵⁶; the use of gauntlet arguments to encourage opponents to make absurd claims which can then be shot down¹¹⁵⁷; the combined use of arguments proving in succession opposite conclusions; the balancing of appearances as evidence for phenomena with logical arguments as counting against them; distribution-insisting arguments revealing equivocation in ordinary concepts; exposées of circularity, *ad infinitum* arguments and exposées of doctrines’ conflict with experience; and much brief cross-referencing to deconstructive arguments elsewhere undermining related topics, emphasizing the nature of these arguments as a kind of universal acid which spreads from topic to topic dissolving everything in its path. Sextus, we have seen, uses the recursive argument structure at one stage, and on these topics makes a great deal of use of other schools’ doctrines and how they contradict each other.

And as for similes and cases, most on these topics are unshared, and indeed many of Sextus’ are explicitly taken from specific schools’ presentations of their own doctrine. He alone deploys around a score – humans coming from horses coming from trees, harvesting the unsown, softening iron, blackening the white, the sun’s causal powers, the cups of hemlock and water, Plato replacing Socrates, water and fire (for “natural” movement), the compasses, multiple marriages, the bouncing ball, temperatures and hues along a gradient, subterranean peoples and the blind, the classes of plants, humans, trees and of horses, and the collapsing wall. The Madhyamaka alone deploy around a dozen – fairy cities, mirages, consciousness from rocks, vision, milk curdling, the chariot and the medicine (both striking absences from Sextus), the poisoned arrow, the pot, illusions, the son born to a barren woman’s daughter, and the twice-decapitated man. Similes and examples both Sextus and the Madhyamaka use include approximately a dozen – the seed and the sprout, the sculptor’s workshop, fire and fuel, the ageing/dying man, father and son, parts of the body (though Sextus uses hand and foot while Āryadeva uses head and foot), sentences and their parts, the cloth and its threads and again the person being born and dying or growing old.

So on these topics we can see that of the arguments as we have divided them, approximately 32% are used in the same way in both projects, and another 32% used in a similar way. And the degree of parallelness was strongly sensitive to topic, geometrical figures and arithmetic¹¹⁵⁸ being unmentioned in the Madhyamaka texts (i.e. an overlap of 0%), while on the topics of coming into being, ceasing to be, change and motion almost all the deconstructive arguments were paralleled in all their details (i.e. an overlap of almost 100%). Some topics were restricted to particular Madhyamaka texts, such as those against god occurring almost exclusively

¹¹⁵⁶ As exemplified by the critiques of assertions of cause and of causelessness

¹¹⁵⁷ and in Sextus’ case what appear to be gauntlet arguments without the subsequent ambush!

¹¹⁵⁸ Seyfort Ruegg (2010, pp. 1-12) discusses the relative influence of mathematics and grammar on different societies’ philosophical development, noting that grammar was the more important for Indian philosophy, and draws some interesting speculative parallels between the use of *śūnya* and *pratisaj-* in Sanskrit grammar and in Madhyamaka.

in Bhāvaviveka's. Whether such disparities constitutes evidence for arguments on certain topics (such as coming into being) circulating either in the form of oral tradition or actual texts, or whether it simply reflects the peculiar characteristics of the philosophical schools being attacked, is very difficult to establish without a very extensive study incorporating all of the doctrines of all the other schools with which these two projects were in contact. However McEvilley's surmise¹¹⁵⁹ that a text or texts specifically of Aenesidemus' might have been in circulation as far as the centres of Buddhist philosophy and explain the "sudden" appearance of these kinds of argumentation there is circumstantially supported by the extraordinary frequency of parallel arguments on Aenesidemus' favourite topics, causality and physical change. What remains is extensive and detailed study of the linguistic structures deployed on these topics and a consideration of actual historical possibilities for transmission and assimilation.¹¹⁶⁰

¹¹⁵⁹ (2002, pp. 503-5)

¹¹⁶⁰ See Part III.

Chapter 3: Purposelessness (apraṇihitatā)

Introduction

Among the Pyrrhonists' treatments of beliefs in various fields, their attack on beliefs about ethics and morality seems to be the most difficult for modern scholars to appreciate, and for that reason the one on which the most light is potentially thrown by a comparison with Madhyamaka. On this issue, just as on the others we have considered, both projects again involve an elaborate array of arguments against beliefs about reality held by other philosophical schools and ordinary people. But aside from their refutations of particular ethical beliefs, both projects claim still to pursue an identifiable path and thus perform a radical recasting of ethics and morality. In the case of Sextan Pyrrhonism this seems to be the very thing which has made it so unpalatable, both to some of the immediately subsequent thinkers and to many modern scholars. We will also then investigate whether the Madhyamaka's recontextualization of ethics is comparable.

Here as might be expected we follow the sequence of topics set out in *Against Ethicists* (AE) and the allied arguments in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (OP III: 168 ff.).

Comparison of arguments

The result of inspecting ethics is carefree undistracted calm

Sextus opens by stating¹¹⁶¹ that the result of investigation is that we will acquire a perfect inspective frame of mind and thus, as he cites Timon as saying (actually in praise of Pyrrho's qualities), pass our lives “in great ease¹¹⁶² and calm¹¹⁶³, devoid of care¹¹⁶⁴, uniformly free from distraction¹¹⁶⁵.”

These qualities are also taught to be the result of certain kinds of Buddhist training. We have already seen that, in the same sūtras which teach Thorough Inspection¹¹⁶⁶, “ease”¹¹⁶⁷ of body and mind is taught to be the result of training oneself in pacifying the mind. Kamalaśīla says¹¹⁶⁸, “‘Calm abiding’ is said to be that mind which has pacified distraction¹¹⁶⁹ in external objects [of

¹¹⁶¹ AE 1

¹¹⁶² ῥῆστα

¹¹⁶³ ἡσυχίης

¹¹⁶⁴ ἀφροντίστως

¹¹⁶⁵ ἀκινήτως κατὰ ταυτά

¹¹⁶⁶ vipaśyanā

¹¹⁶⁷ praśrabdhi, used technically in instructions on śamatha to refer to the result, confident ease of mind: related to the common word for devotional faith, śraddha, it derives from the root śrambh-, “to be easy and confident”, which, like the Greek ῥᾶστος (ῥῆστος) – with which it may be cognate – on the negative side can also carry connotations of carelessness and negligence.

¹¹⁶⁸ in BK II *

¹¹⁶⁹ vikṣepa; this term is rather more specific than Timon's, referring to the scattering of mind with connotations of looseness, indulgence and neglect

the senses] and continually and naturally rests on the internal object of meditation with delight and ease.” It is worth mentioning that the qualities are considered the result not of Thorough Inspection itself but of the requisite accompanying calm abiding, the latter (unlike the former) held to be common to many non-Buddhist systems. Nāgārjuna however opens his principal treatise¹¹⁷⁰ with an homage to the Buddha on the grounds that he “taught the calm¹¹⁷¹ which is the pacification of all conceptual proliferation”, and that kind of freedom from conceptualizations, *is* taught to be associated with Thorough Inspection, and unique to Buddhism. And the fruit of the Buddhist path is as we have seen expressed as freedom from cares or afflictions¹¹⁷². Undividedness of attention¹¹⁷³ and equanimity¹¹⁷⁴ are commonly mentioned virtues to be developed on the path.

Qualifying ‘by nature’ means ‘for all’

After surveying various schools’ assertions of what is good, bad, or due indifference, Sextus begins¹¹⁷⁵ the investigation proper by drawing out what he sees to be the implication of stating, as many belief-mongers among the philosophers do, that some particular action is good, bad, or worthy of indifference, not merely by circumstances but ~in itself or *by nature*¹¹⁷⁶, namely that this is equivalent to asserting that everyone (given similar circumstances) would concur in finding that action good, or finding it bad, or reacting to it with indifference. To clarify the idea of a particular action having the nature of goodness etc. and thus being interpreted equally by all people, Sextus invokes the simile of fire having the nature to burn and thus burning everything equally, and ice having the nature to chill, even though he is refuting the belief in these natures.

To take the simile itself first, as well as the idea that fire possesses the quality of “burning” being used generally in Buddhist texts as an illustrative example of entities possessing characteristics, Nāgārjuna’s principal treatise includes an entire chapter where even the belief in the elements of this simile, fire and what it burns, is deconstructed, and one of the branches of his various quandaries is the implication of believing fire to be something in itself, independent of what it burns: “If fire is something other than what is burnt, then it occurs without something to burn. Such a fire is eternally aflame even without being ignited. In addition lighting it is

¹¹⁷⁰ *MMK*

¹¹⁷¹ *śīva*

¹¹⁷² *kleśa*

¹¹⁷³ *ekacittatā*, literally one-mind-ness

¹¹⁷⁴ *upekṣā*, a term which generally has the connotation of “overlooking” or “disregarding” but was used in Buddhist technical jargon for the fourth “mental residence of purity” (*brahmavihāra*), a freedom from getting involved in particular phenomena which is achieved by uprooting of our ordinary tendencies to discriminate among them.

¹¹⁷⁵ *OP III*: 179-82, 190 and indifference at 191-3; *AE* 69-78

¹¹⁷⁶ ἔστι τι φύσει ἀγαθὸν... κακόν... See Appendix II on the etymological connection between φύσις and Sanskrit *bhū*, *svabhāva*.

pointless and is a non-action.”¹¹⁷⁷ As we have seen on other topics¹¹⁷⁸, the Mādhyamikas find fault in general with *any* phenomenon believed to have qualities *by nature*, or in other words in itself, independently of other phenomena, but they do not even allow that this would make the phenomenon equal as an experience for everyone: they point out what Sextus does not go so far as to say, namely that this supposed independence would also prevent *all* interaction including dependence of the experiencer’s experience on the phenomenon, such that there would not merely be an equal experience for all, but rather a lack of experience. Thus, to say that an action is good by nature is to utter an absurdity, something logically impossible: the characterization renders the thing characterized characterless, so the action would have simultaneously to have and to lack the same characteristic. Nāgārjuna says, “If you perceive entities¹¹⁷⁹ as truly existing¹¹⁸⁰ due to their own existence¹¹⁸¹, then you perceive entities as being without causes and conditions. You will also reject effect, cause, agent, means, action, arising, ceasing, and fruit.”¹¹⁸² Nāgārjuna’s opponents in another treatise assert¹¹⁸³, “Good elements are good by their nature in themselves, and the same distinction holds for the other elements,” and Nāgārjuna replies with a dilemma between contradiction of the definition “by nature” and an eternally frozen non-interactive reality: “If an entity good by nature by itself arose dependently, then it is by something *other than* itself, so how can it be thus by itself? But if you think something good by itself arose without dependence on anything, then there would be no practice. [...] All things, through existing in themselves, would be eternal.”¹¹⁸⁴ In short while any action qualified morally in a particular way “by nature” is according to Sextus a possibility but would have to be qualified thus for all observers in similar circumstances, which is contrary to the emphatic conflicts among ethical beliefs observed in the world (in an insoluble mess of perceptions and ideas), according to Nāgārjuna it would be eternal, non-interactive, and thus unobservable anyway.

Discrepancy demonstrates absence of essential ethical characterizations

Once he has clarified what the implications of belief in phenomena’s ethical natures (good, bad, or worthy of indifference) are, namely uniformity in reaction (be it attraction, revulsion or indifference) to each of them, Sextus goes on¹¹⁸⁵ to show how this uniformity conflicts with our experience, which is rather one of diverse reactions and beliefs. He says, “If things which

¹¹⁷⁷ *MMK* X: 2

¹¹⁷⁸ See for example the discussion of Sextus’ arguments against absolute truth (*AL* II: 37-9) and his dismissal of the absolute sign (*AL* II: 163) in Part II: Chapter 1

¹¹⁷⁹ *bhāvānām*

¹¹⁸⁰ *sadbhāvam*

¹¹⁸¹ *svabhāvāt*

¹¹⁸² *MMK* XXIV: 16-17

¹¹⁸³ *VV* 7

¹¹⁸⁴ *VV* 53-5

¹¹⁸⁵ *AE* 71-4; *OP* III: 179-82

activate by nature activate all people alike, while we are not all activated alike by the so-called good things, then there is nothing good by nature.”¹¹⁸⁶ The same argument is later¹¹⁸⁷ applied to the so-called “art of life”, i.e. the science of distinguishing between what is good and bad and living accordingly.

Āryadeva echoes him (in the course, incidentally, of defending what his opponents perceive as a pessimism in the Buddhist texts, namely their initial insistence on unhappiness) when he points out¹¹⁸⁸ that the same object is for some goodness, for others ill, and for others neither, and therefore that because goodness cannot thus be identified in itself, it does not exist in itself.

A criterion of goodness is untrustworthy

Amid this discrepancy, Sextus says¹¹⁸⁹, to select any particular version as superior is not possible. If no criterion is deployed, then to accept one version implies to accept any version, which is impossible. But if any one version’s particular assertion of *its own* superiority is to be trusted as the criterion, all versions’ assertions to that effect about themselves must also be trusted, which again is impossible; but if one version’s assertion of the value *of another* is to be trusted, that first version’s value in yet another version’s assertions would also have to be trusted, and that in turn by another, *ad infinitum*, without any hope of a foundational or source valuation. Therefore there is no way to resolve the discrepancy among conflicting versions of how to live ethically.

This is of course a particular application, namely to the problem of ethical living, of Sextus’ master argument against the criterion of truth, whose extensive parallels in Madhyamaka we considered in Chapter 1. As far as I know there is no instance in the Madhyamaka texts of applying it specifically to ethics, but as we saw Nāgārjuna presents the argument against the supposedly valid means of cognizing truth as a general one, i.e. as applying to any kind of truth, ethical included. Furthermore there is some evidence that, in consideration of how we should live, it would be an application of the general deconstruction that the Buddhists would invoke very readily: according to one famous discourse, when appealed to by people bewildered by discrepancies between ethical systems, the Buddha himself, far from invoking a criterion, says: “Yes, Kālamās, you may well doubt! You may well waver! What has given rise in you to wavering is something deserving of doubt.”¹¹⁹⁰

¹¹⁸⁶ *OP* III: 182

¹¹⁸⁷ *AE* 171-4; *OP* III: 239

¹¹⁸⁸ *ŚŚ* I: 5

¹¹⁸⁹ *AE* 175-7; there is an argument hinting at the same criterion problem for natural good at *AE* 75-8 and *OP* III: 182

¹¹⁹⁰ *alañhi vo, kālāmā, kañkhitum alaṃ vicikicchitum. kañkhanīyeva pana vo thāne vicikicchā uppannā: AN* III: 65 (PTS: *A* i 188)

The good as “what is desirable on its own account” makes no sense

Sextus’ next major attack¹¹⁹¹ is on the popular definition of good as something which is desirable on its own account. He presents this as a dilemma between admitting that the desire (i.e. the desiring) itself is desirable on its own account or admitting that what is desired is. The desire cannot be desirable in itself, since we want desires to be fulfilled, and at fulfilment the desire is destroyed by the action it supposedly drives (e.g. hunger by eating to satiation). But the desired thing cannot be desirable in itself either since it must either be separable from the perceiver (i.e. be subject to a supposedly objective morality) or belong to her (i.e. be subject to a subjective morality). However it cannot be separable from her because it would either have to act without an effect, which is nonsense, or with an effect (an agreeable feeling), which means the desired thing is desirable for its effect and not in itself (contradicting our definition). Furthermore neither can the desired thing belong to the perceiver because it cannot belong to the body or to the psyche: if it belonged only to the body it could not be perceived, and if it belonged only to the psyche it would still be the subject of controversy (since different psyches hold different things to be good); and the psyche, itself the subject of controversy, would have to be established as the criterion, which has been shown impossible; and furthermore the manner in which the psyche is supposed to be influenced by the desired thing involves school-specific difficulties: since the Epicureans assert that the psyche is made of atoms they cannot explain how pleasure arises; since the Porch assert that impressions on the will displace each other, virtue as a complex of co-exercised apprehensions could not arise; and since Plato asserts that the psyche is a mixture of divided and undivided essence, and of the nature of sameness and otherness, and is numbers, he prevents the psyche from being receptive to the good.

Although there is the usual stylistic difference, between Sextus’ laboured spelling out and the Mādhyamikas’ elegance to the point of crypticness, these arguments are all found in Madhyamaka texts. First of all on the problem with considering desire and the desirable, Āryadeva quips¹¹⁹² succinctly, “If desire itself were pleasurable, there would be no need for women.” He continues on the topic of sex to repeat Sextus’ point about the object of desire also not being pleasurable but its effects: “Even with sex, the pleasure arises from something other than her. What reasonable person would claim that it is caused by his lover alone?” He also has Sextus’ point that the body is not the locus of pleasure: “Pleasure is experienced as something alien to the body.”¹¹⁹³ We have considered the parallels of the arguments against the body and the psyche as potential criteria elsewhere¹¹⁹⁴.

¹¹⁹¹ *OP* III: 183-90; *AE* 83-9

¹¹⁹² *CŚ* III: 12

¹¹⁹³ *CŚ* II: 10

¹¹⁹⁴ Part II: Chapter 1

Incidentally Nāgārjuna devotes a chapter of his principal treatise¹¹⁹⁵ to the matter of desire, the desired object and the desirer, but he analyses the conceptualization of a desirer desiring a desired thing on the basis of whether a pair such as desirer and desiring can be considered the same or different while they are held to be “co-existent”. This leads him in a very different and rather wilder direction to Sextus’ – namely to a total demolition of the idea of co-existence, which he then extrapolates from the case system of desire to all phenomena.

Absolute evil cannot exist because absolute good does not

Sextus extrapolates¹¹⁹⁶ from the foregoing arguments against what is good by nature to what is bad, pointing out that they are conceived in mutual relation.

Unsurprisingly Nāgārjuna concludes his deconstruction of the “good by nature” by extending it¹¹⁹⁷ in the same way: “The same defect exists for what is *not* good and for what is worthy of indifference...” That he then extends it even to “what leads to liberation, etc.” is important to note, since Madhyamaka is often accused of being negative dogmatism: it is clear in this instance that Nāgārjuna does not hold that there is *by nature* some ethical way which transcends ordinary ideas of good and bad, but that practices identified as operating with a profundity of insight (i.e. the vision of emptiness¹¹⁹⁸) by which the good and the bad are not categorically distinct are still identified according to convention (albeit among those considered to possess that insight) and context.

Neither those free of an evil nor those not free of it experience it

Sextus’ in his next argument against evil¹¹⁹⁹ takes the case of folly¹²⁰⁰ (which the Porch held to be evil) and then extrapolates to all evils. Those free of an evil do not experience that evil because there would be a contradiction, i.e. for them it is not bad. However, if they are already evil in that way, they do not experience this supposed evil as an evil but as a good (for that is why they adopted it and did not avoid it); so, for them too it is not bad. Thus, for the example, folly, it is not bad for the wise¹²⁰¹, because if it were they would not be wise; but neither is it for fools, because they embrace rather than avoid it. What Sextus seems to be getting at is that to the two states, the state of being wise and the state of being a fool, there can be no common phenomenon which is *in itself* folly (or folly *by nature*), only something which appears to be folly to one person

¹¹⁹⁵ *MMK VI*

¹¹⁹⁶ *AE 90*

¹¹⁹⁷ *VV 56*

¹¹⁹⁸ *śūnyatā*

¹¹⁹⁹ *AE 91-5*

¹²⁰⁰ ἡ ἀφροσύνη

¹²⁰¹ οἱ φρόνιμοι

(the wise) and to be wisdom to another (the fool). Incidentally this throws into question how to identify who is wise and who is foolish.

On the one hand, in *form* this is similar to the typical Madhyamaka argument against entities supposed to relate two individuals' states crosswise, such as Nāgārjuna's refutations of logical investigations¹²⁰² (where the subject to be investigated is what relates the result of an investigation to the absence of knowledge at the beginning of an investigation) and doubt (where the doubtful phenomenon is what relates what is the result of overcoming not knowing, and thus indubitable, to what is not known at all)¹²⁰³. For example, to take the second, for the one with respect to whose perception there *is* something, there cannot be doubt, because it is indubitably evident; and for the one with respect to whom there *is not* anything, there cannot be doubt, because there is nothing there about which one might have doubts. If we recast this for folly, which as far as I know is not treated with this exact form of argument in the Madhyamaka texts, substituting "the wise" for "the one with respect to whom there is something", we have: for the wise there cannot be folly because everything is wisely understood; for the unwise there cannot be folly because there is no available wisdom by means of which one might see folly.

On the other hand, in its *conclusion* (but not in both branches of its dilemma) the argument has a counterpart in Nāgārjuna's refutations of error¹²⁰⁴; but here the form of the argument is the one used elsewhere by Sextus and Nāgārjuna on the impossibility of change, either of the not-changed or the changed. Nāgārjuna points out¹²⁰⁵ that neither the non-erroneous person, nor the erroneous, can err, adding for thoroughness what Sextus does not here, namely that even someone supposedly *in the process* of erring cannot err. Candrakīrti's explanatory commentary¹²⁰⁶ elaborates that if the non-errant person erred (and here he echoes Sextus' argument) then the wise ones, the Buddhas, could err – they would err even when "the eye of knowing" had reached awakening within them at the termination of naivety¹²⁰⁷, and of the dullness of mind and the inability to see properly associated with that naivety (a prospect which, it is taken as given, is absurd); on the other hand (and here he produces a different problem to Sextus) it would be *redundant* and indeed *an absurd reduplication* to say that the erroneous person errs – for the erring must already have taken place for them to be qualified as erroneous, so there would be no need to make an association with some further erring. The third option, that it is the one in the process of erring who errs, is firstly dismissed as absurd, on the grounds that the

¹²⁰² VP 50

¹²⁰³ VP 21

¹²⁰⁴ *viparyāsa*. The term means literally sitting (*āsa*) in reverse (*vipari-*) and is sometimes translated as "mistake". In Buddhist technical language it is used to refer to the three "root afflictions", namely folly (*moha*) and the two afflictions derived from it, namely desire (*rāga*), which is foolish attraction, and aversiveness (*dveṣa*, related to *dvi*, "two"), which is foolish repulsion.

¹²⁰⁵ MMK XXIII: 17-18; I reverse the order of the two dismissals to match Sextus for clarity's sake.

¹²⁰⁶ PP

¹²⁰⁷ *avidyā*

first two alternatives, non-erroneousness and erroneousness, cover all possibilities; but even conceding its possibility, it would have to be a combination of the first two, whose problems he then repeats succinctly: insofar as she borrows from the non-erroneous she could not err, “because this does not err”, while insofar as she borrows from the erroneous she could not err, “because it already has erred”. Nāgārjuna concludes mockingly: “Work out for yourselves, then, in whom exactly this error is meant to occur!” So here we can see that Nāgārjuna differs from Sextus in stressing, not that a fool could not recognize folly (as such) due to her quality of folly (and its mistaken relation to what is prudent), but that a fool need not and cannot be assigned folly in addition to the folly by dint of which she is already considered a fool. So rather than highlighting, as Sextus does, the contradiction between the idea of a phenomenon being foolish by nature and the necessity of stating that it is foolish to some but (seemingly) wise to others, Nāgārjuna prefers to highlight the logical fudge in the conventional concept that someone can come to err, changing from being non-erroneous to erroneous (just as he does elsewhere¹²⁰⁸ for the concept that someone can age, changing from being not old to being old, etc., as we have seen). This means that if we generalize the two arguments to other evils or acts, as is recommended, they will be generalized in rather different ways: to take, for example, the evil of stealing jewels, Sextus would presumably say that for the jewel thief there is no evil in stealing jewels (otherwise she would not do it), whereas Nāgārjuna would probably say (rather more abstrusely) that for a particular instance of a jewel-thief stealing a jewel, the jewel-thief could not steal it either while not being a jewel-thief, because of the conflicting attributes, or while being a jewel-thief, because she must already have stolen it to be identified as such.

Pleasure changes into suffering; suffering can be useful

There ensues a rebuttal of objections from various schools, and in the course of responding to the Epicureans by applying the same arguments from diversity of belief to pleasure and toil (because they believe them to be respectively good and bad in themselves) Sextus invokes¹²⁰⁹ a further, empirical, argument against the Epicureans, namely that pleasures, which they consider good in themselves, are frequently experienced as unpleasant when repeated. He goes as far as to point out¹²¹⁰ how pleasures and pains are inextricably linked together, in both directions: he gives on the one hand the examples of drunkards, gluttons and lechers whose pleasures lead to poverty and illness, and on the other of gaining knowledge, wealth, a beloved and health by means of toil and pain.

¹²⁰⁸ *MMK* XIII: 5

¹²⁰⁹ *AE* 98

¹²¹⁰ *OP* III: 195-6

Both these aspects are staples of the Buddhist texts. The turning of pleasure into suffering is of course for the Buddhists not just a phenomenon to be invoked to counterbalance a particular philosophical school's belief in pleasure as something good in itself but moreover a pervasive character of everyone's experience which is to be drummed into disciples on the Buddhist path. In the crucial twelve-fold formulae of interdependent co-origination¹²¹¹, it is taught that feeling (for example pleasurable feeling) allows craving (for example the craving to repeat it), which allows clinging (for example clinging to phenomena associated with that pleasant feeling), which allows fixated or identified-with being, which allows the whole gamut of suffering. More basically, the teaching of the impermanence of all things is very often in the Buddhist teachings directly related to the treachery of pleasures: pleasures are impermanent, and according to Āryadeva therefore not actually pleasurable: "What is impermanent is constantly harming; and what is harming cannot be pleasurable. Thus all that is impermanent is said to be suffering."¹²¹² In the earlier chapters of his treatises he is scathingly insistent on pleasure being inseparable from suffering, and weaker than it¹²¹³, and rarer than it¹²¹⁴. One leads to the other. "The body that experiences pleasure becomes the vessel for suffering."¹²¹⁵ "What was not intended at first [i.e. suffering] only increases."¹²¹⁶ "Desire increases because of pleasure... it is painful because of separation from what one desires."¹²¹⁷ He gives¹²¹⁸ the example of the love of a father for his son and says, "Because of such attachment, worldly people go to lower existences." And indeed he enjoins¹²¹⁹ that one should constantly avoid the creation of future lower existences due to momentary pleasures. For surrendering to the latter he provides the rather startling simile of a leper, blinded by craving to scratch, scratching his sores, oblivious to the harm his craving is causing,¹²²⁰ We can see that for Āryadeva it is not just the evils of venereal disease or poverty which are ensuant upon sex but (in contrast to what Sextus says about the desire being – though only temporarily, he might admit – extinguished by its fulfilment) the psychological evil of the longer-term conditioning in and *intensification* of the desire – what is referred to in the twelve links as "craving"¹²²¹. Elsewhere¹²²² he gives more, memorable similes: the "goodness" which is perceived by the discrimination between good things and ill while it does produce temporary joy also is a cause of suffering, like delicious food mixed with poison, which

¹²¹¹ As invoked, for example, by Nāgārjuna in *MMK* XXVI.

¹²¹² *CŚ* II: 25

¹²¹³ *CŚ* II: 9

¹²¹⁴ *CŚ* II: 3-5, 11-13

¹²¹⁵ *CŚ* II: 6

¹²¹⁶ *CŚ* II: 20

¹²¹⁷ *CŚ* VI: 1, 3

¹²¹⁸ *CŚ* I: 15

¹²¹⁹ *CŚ* II: 19

¹²²⁰ *CŚ* III: 14

¹²²¹ *ṭṣṇā*, Pāli: *taṇhā*, cognate with English "thirst"

¹²²² *ŚŚ* I: 31

causes at first delight but upon digestion pain, and like fire, which for cold people at a certain distance warms them comfortingly, but as it approaches begins to burn them. Most strikingly of all, perhaps, Śāntideva compares enjoying the objects of the senses to licking honey along a razor's edge.¹²²³

Conversely Āryadeva also refers¹²²⁴ to the necessity of going through the pain of giving up the householder's life to train in the dharma. Śāntideva invokes¹²²⁵ the simile of a surgical operation for the Mahāyāna training in awakening more generally, pointing out that we have for aens undergone the painful trials of ordinary life, “yet the suffering involved in my awakening will have a limit: it is like the suffering involved in having an incision made in order to destroy and remove greater pain.”

Victory is not always good

Against a claim¹²²⁶ made by the believers that “the fair”¹²²⁷, i.e. traditionally heroic qualities (such as courage, and striving for victory), are good because even animals (such as bulls and cocks and lions) strive in them and people fighting for land or family will sacrifice themselves, comes a series of rather common-sensical arguments, some of which certainly concur with Buddhist teachings, but which one feels Sextus would not take as far as the Buddhists do in most cases. The first, that animals are not wise enough to appreciate heroism as such, is hardly an uncommon idea. The crux of the second is that defeat is sometimes better than victory. Sextus' point seems to be that the ordinary tendency is to seek victory for one's own side even when what one is fighting over is a matter worthy of indifference, such that we should recognize that victory itself too is often a matter worthy of indifference or that defeat is often fairer.

Buddhism's injunctions launch such a thorough-going attack on the traditional virtues of victory, courage in battle, and heroism, in contrast to Sextus' mild tempering of them, that merely to note the parallel with him seems rather to understate their importance. Not seeking victory is one of the foundations of the Mahāyāna mind training methods. “I will take defeat upon myself and offer the victory to others,” says the fifth of the famous *Eight Verses of Mind Training* written by Geshe Langri Thangpa. Śāntideva says, “The victorious warriors are those who, having disregarded all suffering, / vanquish the foes hatred and so forth [within themselves]; common warriors slay only corpses.”¹²²⁸ The fact that animals appear to share this so-called “virtue” is used to *undermine* its status: for example the historian Tāranātha reports a certain Arhat named

¹²²³ BCA VII:

¹²²⁴ CS I: 23-5

¹²²⁵ BCA VII: 22

¹²²⁶ AE 99-100; OP III: 193

¹²²⁷ τὸ καλόν, cf. Sanskrit *kalyāṇa*. See Part III: Chapter 1

¹²²⁸ BCA VI: 20

Uttara’s condemnation of the violence of Mahādeva (i.e. Śiva) and the curses of Kapila (the sage who is considered to be the originator of non-Buddhist scriptures such as the *Mahāhārata* and the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahā Purāṇa*) thus: “If courage is a virtue, then why should lions and tigers not become objects of worship?”¹²²⁹

Ethical judgments can only be conventions because of disparity

In an elaboration on the non-essentiality arguments we have already seen, Sextus indulges in a long and rather lurid exploration¹²³⁰ of practices on whose ethical correctness different human communities hold different opinions, and concludes that therefore these practices (and by extension, since there will always be communities we have not heard from, *any other* practice) cannot ever be characterized as ethical or not *by nature* but are merely matters of convention¹²³¹ and only valid in context¹²³².

Generally Buddhist schools hold that the Buddha emphasized this point too. We have seen that according to one discourse¹²³³ of the Theravāda canon, when the Buddha was approached by people (from Kesaputta) who sought him because they were bewildered by the conflicting ethical instructions of a series of spiritual teachers, his reply was not to judge among them but to say instead that it was quite proper for them to hesitate and waver. Āryadeva highlights the contextuality and convention-dependence of such ordinary judgments when, in dialogue with opponents who cite religious observances as an authoritative guide to ethics, he points out that, “The social requirements of religious duty conform to whatever is the established custom of a given society. Thus it seems that conventional customs are stronger than religious duty.”¹²³⁴ Detailed explorations of the bewildering diversity of what was considered ethical behaviour at their time are found in the Buddhist texts.¹²³⁵

Maximal happiness results from pacifying judgments not conforming to them

Sextus next makes the concession that good or bad might by nature exist, but on that basis launches an attack on the possibility (asserted by the belief-mongers) that discrimination between them might be able to lead to happiness. His first point¹²³⁶ is that it is those who engage in inspection, and not those who engage in belief, who, by investigating the notion of a happy and

¹²²⁹ Cf. Tāranātha (1970, p. 41) and Tāranātha (2001, p. 24).

¹²³⁰ *OP* III: 198-234

¹²³¹ νομιστά

¹²³² πρὸς τι

¹²³³ *Kālāmā Sutta*, *AN* III: 65 (PTS: A i 188)

¹²³⁴ *CŚ* VII: 19

¹²³⁵ for example the pretty exhaustive lists in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, *DN* 1 (PTS: *D* i 1)

¹²³⁶ *AE* 110-12

equable life as distinct from an unhappy one, by reaching an impasse about such things, and by suspending judgment, maximize happiness and minimize unhappiness. He will invoke a series of justifications for this claim, but first of all we can notice that the claim itself is something held in common with the Madhyamaka.

For example, Nagārjuna says¹²³⁷ that while on the one hand it is nihilism to say that there are no ethical consequences to actions – such a wrong view leading to loss of goodness and to suffering (albeit temporary) – and on the other it is an example of the (mistaken) belief in actual being to say that there *are* ethical consequences to actions – such a salutary view leading nevertheless to strengthened goodness and happiness (albeit temporary) – ~pristine knowing¹²³⁸ stills *both* beliefs, transcending demerit *and* merit, and this is liberation¹²³⁹. These two tiers of ethical value (without and with *jñāna*)¹²⁴⁰ are referred to in Buddhism as respectively mundane ethics, whose goal is “ascension”¹²⁴¹ and world-surpassing ethics, whose goal is “that than which there is nothing more splendid and beautiful”¹²⁴². All ethical systems are seen as evaluating ethics on the first tier; Buddhism, notably, declares itself unique in evaluating ethics on the second tier. Āryadeva compares the first to labourers working for a wage (temporary happiness inextricably linked with suffering), whereas (according to the second) *nirvāṇa* or extinction of suffering results from knowing reality as it actually is and cannot be achieved by any amount of good work.¹²⁴³

It should be noted that the surpassing of the threefold classification of acts as good, bad or neutral is not (on the Indian side) a Madhyamaka invention. For example in the *Dīghanakha Sutta* of the Pāli canon¹²⁴⁴ after describing the *vipaśyanā* practice of examining the body and the feelings the Buddha states that the result will be that one will become disenchanted with the feelings that something is good or bad or neutral, and that this disenchantment leads via dispassion to liberation.

¹²³⁷ *RĀ* I: 43-5

¹²³⁸ *jñāna*

¹²³⁹ *mokṣa*

¹²⁴⁰ presented very clearly in *RĀ* I: 3 ff.

¹²⁴¹ *abhyudaya*, Tibetan: *mngon mtho*, referring to the arising of further existence in states of happiness and good luck such as the divine realms and the human realm

¹²⁴² *niḥśreyasa*, Tibetan: *nges legs*, referring to no more arising of further existence in engaged states, but the totally liberated awareness of the Unmatched Perfect Complete Awakening of a Buddha. While this canonical Tibetan translation is definite about superiority, the Sanskrit, it should be noticed, like the Buddhist term for suspension (*nivṛtti*) and the extinction of suffering (*nirvāṇa*), has the telling slippery equivocal prefix *niś* meaning both “not” and “entirely”. This should be related to the slipperiness of the characterizations of finally true reality as the understanding of actual reality belief in the Mahāyāna sūtras (see Part I: “Belief”: “Qualified assent”).

¹²⁴³ *CŚ* VII: 23 and commentary

¹²⁴⁴ *MN* 74 (PTS: *M* I 497) – a discourse incidentally in whose opening ridicule of self-contradicting proclamations the Buddha sounds remarkable Sextan.

Belief in good and evil in themselves causes suffering but release is possible

Sextus next denies¹²⁴⁵ that it is possible to live equably¹²⁴⁶ and happily while holding beliefs about things being good and evil, because these two are respectively pursued and avoided, and such effort is disturbance¹²⁴⁷, the cause of every unhappy state in humans. He draws attention to various kinds of suffering in addition to the anxiety of suffering and avoiding evils, and lacking and seeking goods: those who are suffering evils add a sense of personal injury and depression; those who are enjoying good fortune are agitated by exulting joy, proud, effortfully possessive and jealous, and fearful of the loss of fortune and the return of evils. Since these evils are to be shunned, the beliefs in good and evil which produce them are to be shunned.

It is only, he concludes¹²⁴⁸, by realizing that nothing is by nature more to be striven for than avoided or *vice versa*, but is instead contingent on occasion and circumstances, that one can live well-spirited and untroubled, not elated (by good things because they are good) and not depressed (by evils because they are evil), and thus accepting occurrences which take place of necessity, be liberated¹²⁴⁹ from the distress¹²⁵⁰ of beliefs, be they beliefs that something bad is at hand or something good.

Buddhism teaches that humans and other animals and indeed all personal entities wander through the universe¹²⁵¹, wanting to be happy and to avoid difficulty, but cycling inexorably through difficulty¹²⁵². The cycle means that temporary states of happiness within it are not sought by the wise because they are recognized as leading, due to personal entities' apparent ~further existence¹²⁵³, to more difficulty, perhaps of a ferocious nature. Thus seeking these temporary states of happiness by means of stocking up on goodness¹²⁵⁴ is characterized as “impure”: Āryadeva says, “To strive for [the result of] goodness and reject evil is the essence of movement towards further existence [in *samsāra*].” His opponents ask then what “*not* moving towards further existence” might be, and he replies: “It would be the renunciation of both goodness and evil.” The commentary explains that “renunciation” here means that the mind does not attach itself to anything, and when the mind does not attach itself to good works, there is no further existence in any form.¹²⁵⁵ The aggravating factor of attributing circumstances to oneself which

¹²⁴⁵ AE 110-118, 128-30, 140-7; OP III: 115, 237-8, 236

¹²⁴⁶ ευρόως, lit. “flowing well”, alluding to the Porch’s definition of happiness; cf. Sanskrit *susrotas*, “flowing well”.

¹²⁴⁷ ταραχὴν, cf. Sanskrit *klesin*, “causing pain or suffering”. See Part III: chapter 1: trouble.

¹²⁴⁸ AE 118 *

¹²⁴⁹ ἐλευθερούμενος

¹²⁵⁰ ὀχληροῦ, cf. Sanskrit *sukleśa*, “the very distressing”.

¹²⁵¹ *samsāra*: In modern Indian languages this is the normal word used for “the world” or “life” as an experience.

¹²⁵² *duḥkha*

¹²⁵³ *punar bhāva*, what gets very misleadingly translated as “rebirth” or (worse) “reincarnation”

¹²⁵⁴ *punya*

¹²⁵⁵ ŚŚ I: 26, 28

Sextus sketches is encapsulated by the second of what are known as the “four seals of the dharma” in Buddhism – namely that phenomena associated with “seepage”¹²⁵⁶ into the limited personal self are (in themselves) suffering.¹²⁵⁷

The release Sextus alludes to is also the rationale for the Buddhist path. At the climactic conclusion to one of his longest treatises, and the one which focuses the most on ethical matters, Nāgārjuna puts forward what is almost verbatim Sextus’ concluding claim: “By seeing [their] lack of existence by nature¹²⁵⁸, the thirst for conjoining with the good and the thirst for disjoining from difficulty are destroyed. Thus there is ‘release’.”¹²⁵⁹

Pursuing good produces evil

Sextus adds¹²⁶⁰ the common-sensical argument that in the pursuit of good people frequently engage in evils “nextdoor”, as he quaintly puts it, and he gives the examples of the greed for money from holding wealth to be a good thing, vainglory from holding fame to be, and decadence from holding pleasure to be. The momentary slackening of distress on accomplishing the desire is soon overwhelmed by jealousy over it before their community, ill will (presumably towards others who might pose a threat to their keeping it), and envy (presumably of those who have more).

Unsurprisingly, such a commonplace wisdom also has its place in the Madhyamaka texts. Śāntideva mentions, in his contemplation of the rationale for the practice of patience directed to beneficial ends, as an example of patience directed to the wrong ends, the case of men who in the course of pursuing women become obsessed and deprive themselves of food¹²⁶¹; as another example of what to avoid, the case someone who only commits evil and causes (the good works needed for) life to degenerate for the sake of material gain¹²⁶²; and in his contemplation of the rationale for advocating that we endure rather than respond to insults, the evil of appreciating being praised, namely that praise distracts us and undermines our salutary disillusionment with cyclic existence such that instead there arises envy towards those who have good qualities and the very qualities praised are destroyed¹²⁶³. Then in his treatment of developing mental pliancy and familiarity with reality, in a long passage intended to increase disillusionment with cyclic existence, he says that the result of self-satisfaction with one’s wealth, honour and popularity is

¹²⁵⁶ *āsrava*, karmic “outflow”

¹²⁵⁷ See for example the third and shortest of the three sūtras in the Tibetan canon called *Ārya sāgaranāgarāja paripṛccha* *

¹²⁵⁸ *svabhāva*

¹²⁵⁹ *RĀ* 363 *

¹²⁶⁰ *AE* 119-27

¹²⁶¹ *BCA* VI: 35

¹²⁶² *BCA* VI: 61

¹²⁶³ *BCA* VI: 98

attachment and misery¹²⁶⁴; that pursuing desires gives rise to misfortunes such as murder, slavery, flaying, suffering in hellish realms, notoriety and indeed all forms of evil¹²⁶⁵; and that for the sake of satisfying their desires ordinary people exhaust themselves all day, travel far from loved ones, sell themselves and incidentally leave illegitimate children, fight as slave-like soldiers in wars, mutilate themselves and others, and burn themselves alive¹²⁶⁶.

Those free of beliefs suffer only moderately, from the inevitable

Sextus distinguishes the suffering due to belief from that due to necessity, for example suffering hunger or thirst. While the reasoning of Inspection can remove the former, it cannot remove the latter, even though inspective people only experience it moderately in comparison to the belief-mongers.¹²⁶⁷ He gives the example of a surgical operation where the patient suffers moderately from the inevitable pain but the onlookers faint, so deeply disturbed are they due to their own beliefs about what is happening.

In Buddhism too a distinction is made between inevitable suffering, such as hunger and thirst, and suffering due to the exacerbating constructions of belief, the latter being amenable to *vipaśyanā* practice. In the Madhyamaka it is taught that one is known as a “noble” awakening being from the moment that one directly sees emptiness (the interconnectedness of all things which means they lack existence in themselves) onwards. This moment is given the label “entering the first territory¹²⁶⁸”. A number (totalling ten or several more depending on the kind of teaching) of further territories are traversed by means of meditative familiarization with this sight of emptiness, until complete freedom is attained in the territory of “complete awakening to understanding”. Whether such noble beings suffer pain, and if they do, how, seems to have been a matter of some controversy¹²⁶⁹, but before that entrance to the first territory is reached, as a so-called “ordinary” being one will, it is taught, suffer pain. Candrakīrti, for example, referring to the startling practice recounted in certain sūtras of awakening beings giving away their very flesh as food out of overwhelming compassion for the starving, says¹²⁷⁰, “When the mind arises that is

¹²⁶⁴ BCA VIII: 17-18

¹²⁶⁵ BCA VIII 39-40

¹²⁶⁶ BCA VIII: 73-8

¹²⁶⁷ AE 148-61; OP III: 236 (part)

¹²⁶⁸ *bhūmi*

¹²⁶⁹ The total vision of truth is taught in later technical treatises such as Asanga’s *Madhyāntavibhāga* (in its second chapter) to be obscured by two veils (*āvaraṇa*) – a coarser one related to the afflictions (*kleśa*), which is overcome first, and a subtler one related to cognition. Whether the first is completely overcome by the vision of emptiness as one enters the first territory is a matter of fierce polemics between the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and is rather beyond the scope of this study.

¹²⁷⁰ In his commentary on his own MA I: 15. The root verse reads: “The pain one feels from cutting one’s own flesh to give it away brings the suffering of others in the hell realms and so forth directly into one’s own experience, and awakens one’s enthusiasm for striving to cut off that suffering.” Since the topic is noble awakening beings in the first territory, it would suggest that even they feel pain, but the autocommentary interprets the verse to refer to ordinary awakening beings and Tibetan commentators point

incredibly happy to give, then even when one is still an ordinary individual, one will cut one's own flesh and give it away, and *because one is still an ordinary individual*, when one does that, *one will experience pain*. But the consequence of this pain is to bring into one's own experience the suffering of those in the hell realms and other lower realms, and one realizes that their suffering is thousands of times worse than the suffering we feel just by cutting off part of our hand and giving it away." In this verse we have a clear statement that pain, at least before one enters the first territory, is inevitable. And like the Sextan inspective, the Buddhist *vipasyin* reaps a fruit of the resulting insight (even while still an ordinary being): diminished affliction¹²⁷¹.

The inactivity objection

Sextus' opponents object¹²⁷² that a person who gave up beliefs about which things are good in themselves and which are bad in themselves, and thus was no longer inclined to choose the former and avoid the latter, would be confined to a state of inactivity. All life, they claim, consists of such choices and avoidances, so to give up those is effectively to give up life, and remain like a vegetable.

In his chapter devoted to giving up, by means of insight into their lack of existence in themselves, not only evils but also good works, Āryadeva faces opponents similarly loath to giving up both. "But to renounce good works too, one must stop acting altogether."¹²⁷³ The commentary adds, with a rather Buddhistic concern for consequences not emphasized here by Sextus, that it would be like making pots only to break them, because the actions performed whose consequences might be positive and happy conditions are cast aside.

The replies given to this objection from the two authors are in this case however rather different. While Sextus draws attention to the distinction between the two kinds of criteria, or what Buddhism calls the two kinds of "is" (the ultimately true "is", i.e. what can finally be said to be, versus the circumscribed "is", i.e. what is successful as a rule of thumb), and points out that the opponents have failed to understand that the inspective person does not live ~by philosophical justification¹²⁷⁴ but chooses and avoids ~according to observance without philosophy¹²⁷⁵, Āryadeva here eschews the overt presentation of the two truths which he could have made and instead separates out levels of spiritual training chronologically, into a path where one begins by discriminating between evils and good works, but where once one reaches a certain "purity" one is ready to accept the way to *nirvāṇa*, which depends on giving up good works as such too, and

out explicitly that noble beings do not feel pain. E.g. Tsultrim Gyatso in his commentary says, "A superior bodhisattva [*sc.* noble awakening being] will experience no pain."

¹²⁷¹ *kleśa*

¹²⁷² *AE* 162-3

¹²⁷³ *ŚŚ* I: 32

¹²⁷⁴ κατὰ τὸν φιλόσοφον λόγον

¹²⁷⁵ κατὰ τὴν ἀφιλόσοφον τήρησιν

he invokes the simile of a cloth which must be washed before it is dyed. This seems to involve rather more caution than Sextus' characterization: to match Āryadeva's point he would have to add the proviso that until one is skilled in Inspection one should still pursue good works, and the fact that he does not is another indication of his less consequentialist concerns. Āryadeva's opponents go on¹²⁷⁶ to make a particular objection, namely that while they see that evil is given up using the standard of the good they do not see by what standard the good might be given up, to which his answer *does* invoke the two kinds of truth: "the signless" which he says is superior is one of the ways *what ultimately is* is pointed to by words. The commentary defines "the signless" as "when all defining characteristics are no longer thought of, when all conceptions are gotten rid of, when the mind is not attached to any past, present or future phenomenon since phenomena do not exist in themselves, and when there is nothing to depend on." It adds, with a supporting citation from a sūtra, that without the three entrances to liberation the supreme goal (the omniscient state of the Buddha) is not attained.

In a more succinct presentation, Āryadeva admits that one might be afraid, wondering, since nothing exists in itself, why one should bother to do anything, and explains: "If there is something that can be done, this teaching does not lead to withdrawal from all action."¹²⁷⁷ He does not explain how such action might occur but goes on to reiterate that there is no tranquility for those who are attached to their own beliefs, and that while acting (on the basis of the belief that things exist in themselves) leads to the perpetuation of cyclic existence, not acting (on the basis of such belief) brings about *nirvāṇa*.¹²⁷⁸

Inconsistency objections

Sextus' opponents also accuse him¹²⁷⁹ of a certain hypocrisy since, they believe, an inspective person who has supposedly attained the untroubledness consequent upon liberation from beliefs about what is in itself good or bad will nevertheless quail before a tyrant who commands the objectionable, and, like anyone else, comply. He replies¹²⁸⁰ that this objection too betrays a misunderstanding of Inspection, and that such a victim would be guided no doubt by preconceptions in accordance with customs and inherited norms¹²⁸¹, and thus would still distinguish what to choose from what to avoid, but would be free of the believers' additional anxiety related to their beliefs.

¹²⁷⁶ ŚŚ I: 33

¹²⁷⁷ *kun yod ma yin ci bya zhes| khyod la 'jigs pa skye 'gyur grang| gal te bya ba yod na ni| chos 'di zlog byed mi 'gyur ro|*

¹²⁷⁸ CS VIII: 9-11

¹²⁷⁹ AE 164

¹²⁸⁰ AE 166

¹²⁸¹ τῆ κατὰ τοὺς πατρίους νόμους καὶ τὰ ἔθη προλήψει

This reply might seem not quite to answer the objection but it does answer it very well if Sextus intends what the Mādhyamikas express as the two kinds of “is”, i.e. that even though seeing (what ultimately is,) the lack of existence in themselves of good and bad, the victim still operates according to (what circumscribedly is,) convention, and within context can use preconceived rules of thumb in order seemingly to achieve preconceived goals, such as in this instance to survive, even though (or rather, as the Mādhyamikas would say, *because*) all the preconceptions involved are of entities which do not exist in themselves.

In a late chapter of his principal treatise¹²⁸² Nāgārjuna faces an accusation of inconsistency, though it is expressed rather differently to the one made against Sextus: the doctrine of emptiness, it is objected, claims to lead to *nirvāṇa* but in fact destroys the path there. He replies as Sextus does: “We say here that you do not understand the intent,” and goes on to make an exposition of the two kinds of “is” and how they are inextricably related. He compares someone who through insufficient intelligence misunderstands emptiness to someone who is bitten by a snake he holds wrongly or struck by a magic spell he has miscast, and turns the tables to show how it is belief in entities’ existence in themselves, and not seeing emptiness, which prevents the attainment of *nirvāṇa* and is therefore that it is the opponents and not he who is being inconsistent.

Inflaming the affections and failing to restrain them is evil

Sextus’ next argument¹²⁸³ against the arts of life proposed by the various schools of believers in philosophy depends on a rather remarkable negative characterization of human feeling or “affections”¹²⁸⁴. He first notes that the failure of the various systems of beliefs to restrain¹²⁸⁵ individuals who are each inclined to particular affections. Instead, he says, in these systems the desire¹²⁸⁶ is actually kindled or inflamed¹²⁸⁷ (the Peripatetics inflaming the love of wealth and reputation by holding these as good things, the Epicureans further inflaming¹²⁸⁸ the love of pleasure similarly, the Porch the love of reputation). He says all these so-called “arts of life” are therefore cases of defending the evils of humanity rather than of benefiting anyone.

¹²⁸² *MMK* XXIV

¹²⁸³ *AE* 178-80

¹²⁸⁴ πάθος, πάθη

¹²⁸⁵ καταστέλλεσθαι, passive of καταστέλλω, literally to arrange down, cf. Sanskrit *pratisidh-* drive away, restrain, prohibit, giving *pratisedha*, (keeping back, denial, negation); and *pratiskhalita*, warded off, from *skhal*, collect, stop, etc. For cognateness of κατα and *prati* see Wharton (1882).

¹²⁸⁶ ἐπιθυμία, cf. Sanskrit *abhidhū-*, shake, and *abhidhvasta*, shaken, afflicted

¹²⁸⁷ ἐκπυρσεύεται

¹²⁸⁸ προσεκκαίεται

This closely matches the Buddhist characterization of such affections – called technically “contact”¹²⁸⁹, meaning the coming together of three things – sense organ, sense object and moment of consciousness related to that sense. (Not just the five senses but also a sixth mental “sense” are meant.) In the Buddhist system contact is one of the twelve links of interdependent co-origination, which are considered to constitute painful cyclic life: once there is contact there are instances of perception¹²⁹⁰ about this as good, bad or worthy of indifference; once there is perception there can be instances of thirst¹²⁹¹ for it (or avoidance of it); once there is thirst for it there can be instances of clinging¹²⁹² to the enjoyment of it; and this is what ushers in the coming-into-being of sentient beings and on the basis of their birth, the whole gamut of suffering. As it says in *The Rice Seedling Discourse, Śālistambha Sūtra*, “The union of the three is contact. By contact comes sensation. Close to sensation comes thirst. The development of thirst is clinging to existence. From this clinging springs the action that leads to arising again and existence. The manifestation of the elements caused by this is ‘birth’. The ripening of the elements is old age, decay and death. When one dies or becomes deluded or is deeply attached to oneself, the inner burning is ‘pain’; the crying out is ‘lamentation’; the arising of joylessness connected with the five kinds of consciousness is ‘misery’; the mental unhappiness connected with memory is ‘despondency’; and all the other like unhappinesses are the kinds of ‘despair’.”¹²⁹³ The simile of setting on fire we notice here is a stock of the Buddha’s teachings on the way affections lead to clinging. In the famous *Discourse on the Condition of Being Aflame (Ādittapariyāya Sutta)*¹²⁹⁴ he presents the six senses and their objects and their particular instances of consciousness as “aflame”, and for each of them in turn says: “Contact is aflame, and whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact [of each sense or of the mind, with its object and consciousness] whether this is perceived as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain, that too is aflame. Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of desire, the fire of aversion, and the fire of delusion¹²⁹⁵. Aflame, I say, with birth, aging, death; and with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses and despairs.” He goes on to say that it is by becoming disenchanted¹²⁹⁶ with all these flaming phenomena that one can achieve dispassion¹²⁹⁷ and be complete liberated¹²⁹⁸ and know it, thus have completed the spiritual path. *Nirvāṇa* literally means extinguishing – the extinguishing

¹²⁸⁹ *sparśa*

¹²⁹⁰ *vedanā*

¹²⁹¹ *tṛṣṇā*

¹²⁹² *upadāna*

¹²⁹³ As quoted by Śāntideva in his *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (Śāntideva, 1922, p. 211).

¹²⁹⁴ *SN XXXV: 28 (PTS: S iv 19)*

¹²⁹⁵ These are the three canonical “afflictions” (*kleśa*).

¹²⁹⁶ Pāli: *nibbindati*, equivalent to the Sanskrit *nirvidati* (get rid of, be disgusted with) but probably also related to or influencing/influenced by *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*)

¹²⁹⁷ *virāga*

¹²⁹⁸ *vimuccati*

of these flames. A Mahāyana sūtra¹²⁹⁹ relates this to the doctrine of emptiness when the Buddha says: “The heart-mind burns because of the object [of the senses or of the mind]. The one who does not construe an object does not burn¹³⁰⁰, and not burning is called ‘having calmed down’... Just as the fire burns due to there being fuel and becomes calm through there being no fuel, the heart-mind burns due to their being an object and becomes calm due to there being no object.”

Believing in apprehensive presentations is either impossible, unfoundable or circular

Attacking as an example case specifically the Porch’s ethical system, Sextus deploys¹³⁰¹ the arguments we have already seen against their so-called apprehensive presentation: that if it is unjudged it is untrustworthy while if judged by another, that other needs yet another, and so on *ad infinitum*. Furthermore the apprehensive presentation and the apprehended object are defined with respect to each other so involve circularity. We have already considered the exact parallels with Madhyamaka arguments on this issue.¹³⁰²

A science of goodness does not make sense, whether or not it includes itself as good

In this next dilemma¹³⁰³, one branch is a reiteration and the other is a new argument. If the science of goodness does not include itself as a good, Sextus says, we can apply to it previous arguments against good and evil and matters of indifference which showed their non-existence in themselves, which contradicts the definition of a science that it should deal with real entities. Worse, if it is supposed to include itself as a good thing, then it must absurdly exist before itself, since the subject matter of any science must exist before that science is developed. Sextus here does not go any further but we might add that since the already-existent version of itself is also supposed to include itself, and so on, there is infinite regress.

So this is actually a slightly different formulation of the now familiar argument against measures standardizing themselves whose parallels in Madhyamaka we have already considered. For example, Nāgārjuna says, “Measures cannot standardize themselves, for this would imply an infinite regress of measures.”¹³⁰⁴ Although the technical word “epistemic instrument”¹³⁰⁵ is certainly broad enough to cover ethical standards, as far as I know there is no Madhyamaka

¹²⁹⁹ *Āryatathāgataguhyā Sūtra* cited in *PP* on *MMK* XVIII: 6

¹³⁰⁰ *jvalati*

¹³⁰¹ *AE* 182-3; *OP* III: 241-2

¹³⁰² See Part II: Chapter 1

¹³⁰³ *AE* 184-7

¹³⁰⁴ *VP* 5. See Part II: Chapter 1

¹³⁰⁵ *pramāṇa*

application of this deconstruction specifically to some kind of “art of life”, presumably because such a notion was not taught by any contemporary philosophical schools.

Technical wisdom cannot be distinctly identified

Sextus’ next challenge¹³⁰⁶ to the idea of a technology of life is that its purported product, “wisdom”¹³⁰⁷, cannot be distinguished from the behavioural “products” of those who lack such a technology, and therefore that it does not meet the requirements of the definition of a science as having some special field of expertise. An objection from the belief-mongers, that though the product of this science is similar to that of ordinary people, its origin (in wisdom) is distinct, is met by Sextus’ request that they explain how to tell from the product the identity of its origin (plus a rather insulting reference to their stubbornness).

There does not seem to be anything sharply characteristic in these points, although we might note that Buddhism generally lumps all religious ethical systems together with non-religious ones as “worldly” ethics, because whatever happiness they secure can only be a temporary one within the inevitable cycling of the world, unlike Buddhism itself, which purports to teach complete liberation from this cyclicity.

However the opponents’ next objection, that the origin of their “scientific” ethical conduct, in wisdom, is identified by its fixed orderedness, is met with the significantly more remarkable point that it is sooner sensitivity to the diversity of contexts and therefore diversity of approaches which is afforded to the wise rather than some fixed way of behaving. “For no one,” Sextus says, “preparing themselves to meet many and varied occurrences, is ever able to preserve the same order [or programme of conduct], and least of all the wise person¹³⁰⁸, who is aware both of the instability¹³⁰⁹ of fortune and the insecurity¹³¹⁰ of events.”

Now one of the defining features of the Mahāyāna is its famous (and sometimes notorious) doctrine of ~skilfulness in means¹³¹¹. Whereas non-Mahāyāna Buddhism teaches a rather fixed set of behavioural discipline of repression and development, the Great Vehicle adds a third kind of ethical practice – “benefiting others” – and states for the first time that by means of the conjoined development of wisdom¹³¹², the active deep cognition of reality, and

¹³⁰⁶ AE 197-209

¹³⁰⁷ φρόνησις

¹³⁰⁸ ὁ ἔμφορον, a word (like the Sanskrit *buddha*) used generally for those who have come to their senses from sleep or a swoon, etc.

¹³⁰⁹ ἄστατον, cf. Sanskrit *asthān*, non-permanency, hence *asthāyin*, *asthita*, transient (“unstaying”), *asthiti*, want of order

¹³¹⁰ ἀβέβαιον cf. Sanskrit *adr̥ḍhan*

¹³¹¹ *upāya kauśalya*: the Sanskrit word translated as “means” breaks down into “going [*aya*] towards [*upa*]” (as referring to one’s goal) and was commonly used of traditional military stratagems (sowing dissension, bribery, negotiation and open assault) as well as in personal conduct.

¹³¹² *prajñā*

compassion¹³¹³, the closely related recognition of one’s own connectedness with other sentient beings, the trainee, called now a *bodhisattva*, an “awakening being”, a buddha-to-be, is endowed with cleverness in these stratagems, which afford a superior kind of conduct, because she or he is by means of them sensitive to context and knows how to act skilfully in order to benefit other living beings, even though this action may involve breaking disciplinary rules as it seems to an outsider. Famous examples from the sūtras are the stories of Captain Goodheart killing the pirate Black Spearman to prevent him killing everyone on board his ship and the ascetic Star-Pleaser (Tārāramaṇa) breaking his vow of chastity to marry a merchant’s daughter to prevent her from killing herself out of unrequited love.¹³¹⁴ It is taught that vast stocks of goodness were earned by both due to these seemingly transgressive acts. Along the same lines *The Sūtra on the Inexhaustible Stores of Wisdom* from the Ratnakūṭa collection praises, among other things which Śrāvakayānistis would no doubt find appalling, awakening beings’ assumption of appearances attractive to lustful people and their sexual seduction of the latter, in order to teach them the dharma before abandoning them.¹³¹⁵ In the later tradition the awakening beings’ conduct came (ironically) to be codified too as a series of eighteen root infractions and forty-six secondary infractions of the vow to attain Awakening. Two of the latter are codifications of the faults incurred by failing to perform these controversial strategic acts: number ten, “complying with minor precepts when the situation demands one’s disregard of them for the better benefit of others,” and, number eleven, “not committing one of the seven negative actions of body and speech when universal love and compassion deem it necessary in the particular instance.”¹³¹⁶

Emptiness of the three spheres

Sextus continues his assault on the art of living by imagining for the sake of argument that such an art exists, but showing by an elaborate series of problematizations that in the general case of teaching the three entities involved – the putative subject to be taught, the teacher, and the method

¹³¹³ *karuṇā*

¹³¹⁴ That these were part of mainstream teaching and not some elitist esotericism is indicated by their having been much popularized by Patrul Rinpoche in his influential *kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung, Words of my Perfect Teacher* (Rinpoche, 1998, p. 125).

¹³¹⁵ (Chang, 1983, pp. 149-63)

¹³¹⁶ The forty-six are divided into groups, each of which represents one of the six “carriers to the further shore” or *pāramitā*. These two constitute the second pair of two pairs of infractions classed as destroying the second *pāramitā*, “the superior ethics [which carry] to the further shore”, the earlier pair being turning away from those who breach their ethical discipline and failing to uphold apparent ethical discipline in the eyes of others and thus causing them to lose their open-mindedness about the positive possibilities of these practices. The seven negative actions are the non-mental actions from the usual list of ten: three of the body (killing a living being, taking what has not been given, and sexual misconduct) and four of the speech (lying, divisive speech, harsh speech and idle speech).

of teaching – cannot be established, and reminding us¹³¹⁷ that all these problems relate to the particular case of teaching the art of life.

Although this threefold division is natural enough not to warrant too much attention, it is perhaps worth mentioning nevertheless that in the Mahāyāna teachings the recommendation of the recognition of the lack of existence of the three spheres of any action (i.e. the object, the agent and the action) as entities in themselves is one of the three stock ways of pointing out the distinguishing features of a Mahāyāna practice, called “the emptiness of the three spheres”.¹³¹⁸

Nothing is taught

Sextus’ refutation of a subject taught as something which exists in itself is matched by another very distinctive claim made by the Mahāyāna, that nothing is taught even by the Buddha. “While the phenomena of the world are not abolished, in truth as it really is the Buddha never taught any doctrine,” says Nāgārjuna.¹³¹⁹

Neither what exists nor what does not exist can be the subject taught

The subject taught he refutes by a series of dilemmas. The first is that whether or not it exists it cannot be taught.¹³²⁰ If it does not exist, there is nothing there to carry any properties, including the property of being taught or of being true, so there is contradiction; furthermore this implies that the non-existent is reality, because it is held (by the opponents) that teaching can only be of what is true and real, and this is clearly absurd; teaching also fails, since what is not there cannot excite any impressions in the student; and even if one accepts that something non-existent can be taught, it must be by dint of its non-existence, which involves all the same faults, or by dint of its existence, which is paradoxical; and since the true is believed to be existent and real, the non-existent must be something other than the true and the real, i.e. one would be teaching the false, which is absurd. On the other hand, if the art of living does exist, it can only be taught either by virtue of being existent, in which case everything existent would also be taught leaving nothing untaught and rendering teaching thus impossible,¹³²¹ or by virtue of something other than existence, which is to say non-existent, which contradicts the fact that all the subject’s characteristics are existent.

¹³¹⁷ *AE* 243 ff.; *OP* 270 ff.

¹³¹⁸ It is in fact the second of the three so-called excellences of Mahāyāna practice, the first being the initial generation of *bodhicitta*, the intention to attain awakening to complete understanding for the sake of all sentient beings, and the third being the dedication (*pariṇāma*) of the root of goodness accumulated to others.

¹³¹⁹ *ŚS* 70. This is related to the impossibility of an object of intellect existing in itself: see “Objects of intellect do not exist” *infra*.

¹³²⁰ *AE* 219-23; *OP* III: 256-8

¹³²¹ Thus from *AE*. The argument in *OP* III: 257 does not seem to make sense, at least in Bury’s translation.

This is rather messy but similar to the Madhyamaka argument against production of the existent and the non-existent that we have already seen¹³²²: “If a thing is non-existent, how can it have a condition? If a thing is already existent, what would a condition do?” Applying this to the production of knowledge in the student by means of teaching as the condition, we have something like Sextus’ argument: “If the thing taught is non-existent, how can there be teaching of it? If the thing taught is already existent, what could teaching of it do?”¹³²³

On the specific issue of whether *wisdom* can be taught, Buddhapālita compares¹³²⁴ those who have not seen emptiness but talk of it to a blind man repeating others’ words about the beauty of a place, and a bribed witness. Bhāvaviveka’s terminological distinction between the actual ultimate and the ultimate which is spoken of is illuminating, namely that they are “non-transmissible” and “transmissible to others” respectively.¹³²⁵ The canonical praise of the Dharma in all Buddhist schools includes that it is “understood individually by oneself, the wise person.”¹³²⁶

On the good life, Āryadeva shows that due to discrepant reactions there is nothing good by nature, then applies the Vajra Slivers to the establishment of happiness: coming from itself would paradoxically conflate producer and produced, but coming from another, since its cause like itself would have not to be essentially established, and this would lead to an infinite regress.¹³²⁷

The true does not exist

Another of Sextus’ dilemmas¹³²⁸ relating to the subject matter of a supposed teaching is between teaching the false and teaching the true. The first is absurd by the believers’ own tenets because they assert that the false is non-existent while the subject of teaching is existent, i.e. they would thus contradict themselves. (This is a repetition of an argument in the previous dilemma.) But the second is impossible because of all the arguments ranged against the true and how it is discovered, i.e. the problematization of the criterion of truth, presented elsewhere. We have considered the parallels to these already.¹³²⁹

¹³²² *MMK* I: 6cd.

¹³²³ Cf. also the impossibility of doubting either what one understands or what one does not understand (*VP* 20).

¹³²⁴ commenting on *MMK* XVIII: 7

¹³²⁵ *aparyāya* vs. *saparyāya*: MAS 4

¹³²⁶ *paccattam vedītabbo viññūhīti*

¹³²⁷ *ŚŚ* I: 5 and commentary

¹³²⁸ *AE* 232, out of sequence with the equivalent in *OP* (III: 253).

¹³²⁹ I.e. the parallels to arguments in *AL* in Part II: Chapter 1 *supra*.

Neither the obvious nor the obscure can be taught

The next dilemma Sextus presents¹³³⁰ is between teaching what is obvious, which is unnecessary (since it is obvious to the learner as well as the teacher) or what is obscure, which is impossible (since it is obscure to the teacher as well as the learner). The same arguments are later¹³³¹ used against teaching either a supposedly *sensed* corporeal object (which Sextus says must be obvious to all) or a supposedly *intelligible* corporeal object (which Sextus says is obscure to all, as demonstrated by the interminable controversies over such things); again¹³³² against teaching something technical in the course of a dilemma between teaching something non-technical or technical, the non-technical not requiring teaching and the technical being either obvious or obscure again; again¹³³³ against the method of teaching if it is held to be by means of the evidence of the senses; and yet again in the course of an elaborate demolition of expertise in life, where Sextus' fourth argument¹³³⁴ is a destructive dilemma between the learner learning this expertise without comprehension and with it, which is a variant of the obvious/obscure argument: if they learn without initial comprehension, they do not learn anything, whilst if they learn with initial comprehension, the learning is superfluous.

We have already seen in the Madhyamaka a very similar refutation of *doubting*. Nāgārjuna says¹³³⁵, “Neither what is perceived to be there nor what is not perceived to be there can be doubted,” and explains that if it is perceived as there it cannot be doubted, and if it is not perceived as there, there is nothing identifiable to have doubts about. Later, referring to this refutation of doubt, he extrapolates from it to refute *investigating*, either into what is known (which is superfluous) or what is not known (which has no identified object, so is impossible).¹³³⁶ As far as I know, in Madhyamaka texts, this refutation is not explicitly applied to *teaching*, though as is clear it is quite in keeping with them.

Incorporeal qualities cannot combine to be corporeal

Sextus also presents¹³³⁷ a dilemma between teaching a sensed corporeal thing and an intelligible corporeal thing. The first is found impossible for the same reason as already stated – that what is sensed (such as something white) is obvious so does not need teaching. But here he says the alternative, the supposed intelligible corporeal thing, cannot actually be corporeal, i.e. it is an impossibility, because it is taught to be a combination of qualities (size or dimensions, solidity,

¹³³⁰ *OP* III: 254

¹³³¹ *OP* III: 255 summarily; and in detail in *AE* 229

¹³³² *AE* 233

¹³³³ *AE* 240, 266

¹³³⁴ *AE* 246; *OP* III: 271-2

¹³³⁵ *VP* 21

¹³³⁶ *VP* 50

¹³³⁷ *AE* 227-8

etc.) which are all incorporeal, and a combination of incorporeals cannot somehow become corporeal.

Here again we see something akin to the Buddhists' radical separation¹³³⁸ of the objects of sense or direct perception on the one hand and the objects of intellection or inference on the other. A series of attacks on the idea of abstracted qualities somehow producing a sensed object is made by Āryadeva against opponents who believe in entities arising due to the combination of a substrate with qualities such as existence, number, "potness" and such like. If one believes that one senses a pot, which to be meaningful must mean a complete pot, then the fact that perception is only partial (e.g. the sight of one side) must mean that the sensed object is not the complete pot, i.e. not a pot. This problem, he goes on to say, is not solved by saying that the parts of the pot are perceived and therefore the whole pot inferred, because the parts in their individual entirety suffer from the same imperceivability, so are thus not established themselves in order to be used to establish something else. It is then that the opponents invoke the idea of qualities combining to produce the entity: they say that the form is perceived. Āryadeva replies that to think of qualities as mutually distinct like that or even mutually non-distinct leads to an impasse: if shape and colour, for example, are considered distinct, then when the eye perceives one it cannot perceive the other; if however they are not mutually distinct then the sense of touch sensing shape also senses colour. He goes on to problematize the supposed combination of these qualities (such as existence and oneness) with the substrate – such a belief requiring the substrate to somehow exist even before it combines with the quality of existence, for example, which is obviously absurd. So we can see that Āryadeva finds many more problems with supposed intelligible corporeal things than Sextus, but certainly agrees with him on the necessity of refuting them.

Objects of intellect do not exist

If the subject taught is not sensed, Sextus goes on to say¹³³⁹, then it must be something intelligible, but he notes the kinds of entities habitually invoked by the believers in the philosophies – such as Plato's forms and the Porch's sound-expressions and such physical concepts as the void or space or time – and refers to his own refutation of all of them in other treatises. If they cannot be established then it does not make sense to say that they are taught either.

Again this general point is very much in line with the Madhyamaka. We have seen how they also refute the concept as something which exists in itself and sound-expressions as things in themselves¹³⁴⁰, as well as various concepts developed in physics¹³⁴¹. And the so-called teachings of the Buddhas are not exempted from this characterization. Nāgārjuna says of the Buddha's

¹³³⁸ *Pramāṇasamuccaya* I: 3 *

¹³³⁹ *AE* 230-1

¹³⁴⁰ See Part II: Chapter 1

¹³⁴¹ See Part II: Chapter 2

teachings what Sextus could have very well have said of the Pyrrhonists’: “Since all entities are empty of existence in themselves [or by nature], the Buddha taught the doctrine of the interdependence¹³⁴² of their arising. The ultimate truth consists of this doctrine of emptiness. The Buddha, while holding to worldly conventions, thus conceived the world properly. Worldly phenomena are not abolished, but in reality as it actually is the Buddha never taught a doctrine. Nevertheless the ignorant do not understand what the Buddha said and are afraid of this stainless speech.”¹³⁴³

Refutation by dependence on the refuted

Sextus concludes the section against belief in a subject taught by pointing out that if there is no such thing then also the teacher, the learner and the method of teaching also lack existence in themselves, because these latter depend on the former existing.¹³⁴⁴ He also uses¹³⁴⁵ the refutation through dependence on the refuted when considering the impossibility of expertise about the art of living, since art in general, and the art of living in particular, has already been dismissed.

This method of refutation as we have already seen is a common enough argument form in the Madhyamaka (and in Sextus) on various other topics – for example Nāgārjuna’s argument that if the person who is supposedly seeing does not exist then there is no sense in asserting seeing or the object seen¹³⁴⁶ or that since there is no talking and nothing talked about, there can be no debate by means of talking¹³⁴⁷. It is the “universal acid” argument.¹³⁴⁸

There is no expert

Sextus turns now from the subject to be taught to the person supposedly qualified to teach it – the “expert” – and shows with a range of arguments¹³⁴⁹ that there is no such thing.

This presentation of the impossibility of authoritative persons in the matter of discovering wisdom, including wisdom about how to live, which is of course a sharp rebuke to the Porch doctrine of a Sage, is strongly reminiscent of the general ethos of the teachings of the Buddha, especially as they are recorded in the Pāli canon of the Theravāda school. Here¹³⁵⁰ the Buddha is

¹³⁴² or “relationality”, Sanskrit: *pratītya*

¹³⁴³ ŚS 68-70

¹³⁴⁴ AE 234 and with variants at *OP* III: 265 (the method of teaching being impossible when the teacher and subject have been refuted) and at *OP* III: 269 (apprehension is impossible therefore teaching the apprehension of an art of life is impossible).

¹³⁴⁵ AE 236

¹³⁴⁶ *MMK* III: 6

¹³⁴⁷ *VP* 52

¹³⁴⁸ See Part I: “Universal acid arguments”

¹³⁴⁹ AE 235-8; *OP* III: 259-65 and these general refutations of teaching of expertise are applied to the case of expertise in life at AE 243-7; *OP* III: 270-2

¹³⁵⁰ in the *Kālāmā Sutta*, *AN* III: 65 (PTS: A i 188)

reported to have declared baldly that one does not come to know whether something is ethically good or bad by relying on the seeming capability¹³⁵¹ of other people, or by relying on the idea that a certain person (including the Buddha) is one's teacher. In the canonical expressions for the veneration of the Buddha's discoveries, the *dharmā* or laws of the phenomena of awakening, by means of their six distinguishing features, in all schools, the sixth is that the laws are ~something seen directly or individually or personally, by those with discernment¹³⁵². The erroneousness of the conceptualization of the Buddha in himself as existing (or not existing, or indeed as anything) is dealt with at length by Nāgārjuna¹³⁵³, and he concludes by rebuking "those who project concepts onto the Awakened, who is forever beyond such projections": he says they "are impaired by these projections and fail to see the Awakened One."

Non-experts cannot teach non-experts, just as the blind cannot lead the blind

Sextus includes in his refutation of experts by means of the various permutations of expert and non-expert the point that if non-experts were supposed to teach non-experts, this would be like the blind leading the blind.¹³⁵⁴

This metaphor, though perhaps not especially startling, is also found in the Buddha's teachings: in the *Cāṅki Discourse* to the young priest Bhāradvāja of the Brahmanical religion¹³⁵⁵, referring specifically to the method of education advocated by the Brahmanical priests claiming authority on matters they themselves have not seen clearly, namely the contents of scripture, in this case the Vedic hymns, into which they indoctrinate new recruits by means of repetition and injunctions of faith, the Buddha says, "Suppose there were a row of blind men, each holding on to the one in front of him: the first one doesn't see, the middle one doesn't see, the last one doesn't see. In the same way, the statement of the priests turns out to be a row of blind men, as it were: the first one doesn't see, the middle one doesn't see, the last one doesn't see. So what do you think, Bhāradvāja: this being the case, doesn't the faith of the priests turn out to be groundless?"

One cannot become an expert

In the course of his refutation of that permutation of experts and non-experts in teaching which seems most conventionally appealing, namely that whereby an expert would teach a non-expert, Sextus presents an argument from the impossibility of change, specifically here that the non-expert cannot become an expert either while being a non-expert, due to contradiction (and Sextus

¹³⁵¹ Pāli: *bhabbarūpatā*, Sanskrit: *bhavyarūpatā*

¹³⁵² Sanskrit: *pratyātmaṃ veditavyo vijñaiḥ*

¹³⁵³ *MMK XXII*

¹³⁵⁴ *AE 235; OP III: 259*

¹³⁵⁵ *MN 95 (PTS M ii 164)*

invokes similes attributed to Anacharsis¹³⁵⁶ of someone blind from birth seeing colours or deaf from birth hearing sounds), or while being an expert, due to the new expertise's redundancy¹³⁵⁷. Later, specifically against the art of life, Sextus asks if the non-expert learns without prior comprehension or with it. We have already considered this dilemma. Within its second branch, i.e. if they learn with comprehension, he adds that such comprehension does not just lead to redundancy but also contradicts their status as supposedly not yet wise in the expertise of life, i.e. they could not have come to comprehend it while they supposedly did not comprehend it.¹³⁵⁸

The like of this we have now encountered several times. Nāgārjuna's general argument against change is the same as Sextus', that it cannot occur for something which is still itself (because of contradiction) or for something which has become something else (because of redundancy) but he gives rather different examples of this – namely that a youth cannot age and milk cannot curdle.¹³⁵⁹ He also gives¹³⁶⁰ the case of birth being impossible for what has already, and what has not yet, been born – and for that matter even for some supposed intermediary between the born and the unborn since that would have simultaneously to possess the contradictory qualities of having and not having been born.

Anacharsis' examples of the blind seeing or the deaf hearing sound more like the stock one the Madhyamaka uses to speak not of change *per se* but of the erroneousness of conceiving that phenomena arise due to particular causes and conditions: the impossibility of extracting oil from sand¹³⁶¹. In both cases it is a characteristic in the substance which even in conventional terms prevents it from changing in the way supposed: i.e. a blind person cannot be expected ever to see because of the characteristic of lacking functioning eyes, and sand can never be expected to produce oil due to its characteristic of lacking the required chemicals.

There are no meaningful expressions by which teaching could take place

Sextus goes on¹³⁶² to consider a second putative method of teaching, by means of expressions, and presents a dilemma between teaching by meaningless expressions, which is clearly absurd, and teaching by means of meaningful ones, which obviously seems intuitively right, but against which he launches another destructive dilemma, this time between expressions which are meaningful in themselves or by nature, and those which are meaningful by convention among people. The former are not found in our experience, because they would have to be comprehensible no matter

¹³⁵⁶ Bury points out that these comparisons are ascribed to Anacharsis the Scythian sage of Solon's time (circa 590 BCE); cf. *AL* I: 55.

¹³⁵⁷ *AE* 237-8 and specifically against the art of life at *AE* 247; *OP* III: 264

¹³⁵⁸ *AE* 247

¹³⁵⁹ *MMK* XIII: 5-6; Āryadeva presents the same argument and the curdling example at *CŚ* XV: 4

¹³⁶⁰ *ŚS* 5

¹³⁶¹ See for example the commentaries on *MMK* I: 5, I: 11, IX: 7, and XX: 3.

¹³⁶² *AE* 241-3; *OP* III: 267-8

which languages one did or did not speak, which is clearly not the case. So the latter would seem to be a preferable option, but Sextus wrecks it on the rocks of a form of the obvious/obscure argument we have already considered, applied to the learner of the expressions whose meaning is by convention: either they already know the convention, which makes teaching it them absurd, or they do not know it, in which case there is nothing identifiable which is being transmitted.

Of course the Madhyamaka also refute the belief that a word can mean something in itself. Nāgārjuna, for example, says, “We do not say that a name is something which is actually existent. Just as entities lack existence in themselves, so too is the name without being in itself. For this reason it is empty, and being empty it is not actually existent.”¹³⁶³ And as we have seen, elsewhere he also makes the point about language variety.¹³⁶⁴ And the parallels with the dilemma between meaning the meaningless or meaning the meaningful, and with the impossibility of an entity operating in a particular way by nature, and with the obvious/obscure dilemma, we have already presented.¹³⁶⁵

Morality is either useless or damaging

Sextus concludes his treatise on ethics by imagining for the sake of argument that the art of life exists and further that it can be taught, but on that basis goes on to attack the idea that it could bring any benefit.¹³⁶⁶ The attack is made in terms of a problematization of the process of discipline. For those whose natural inclination is not towards evil but to good discipline is redundant; but for those whose natural inclination is not so harmonious, not only does it not remove the perturbations of their inclinations, but it compounds them by creating continuous internal conflict. He is in effect accusing of hypocrisy a rule-based ethical or moral code, i.e. one involving mere discipline or control due to the imposition of the standard of a particular way of appearing to behave, and thus would appear to favour an ethics based on transformation of inner processes, especially those related to beliefs, as we have seen.

The principal revolution the Buddha is celebrated for launching within the Brahmanical tradition is that he asserted the primacy of *intention* in the capacity for certain acts to lead to certain consequences. That is to say he re-interpreted pre-existing notions of good and bad *form* (the English word is etymologically related to *dharma*) as referring to the mind rather than the appearance of the body and the sound of the speech. This is evinced in all strata of Buddhism, from the focus on *citta* (mind, heart, intention) even in the Śrāvakayāna ethical teachings, through skilfulness in means in the Mahāyāna, to dropping notions of purity versus impurity in the Vajrayāna. Whereas karma had meant the correct performance of ritual, in the Buddha’s teaching

¹³⁶³ VV 57

¹³⁶⁴ VP 52-4

¹³⁶⁵ *supra*

¹³⁶⁶ AE 210-14; OP III: 273-7

it came to mean the intentionality of the act. *The Dhammapāda, Steps in Dhamma*, begins with a famous assertion of the primacy of the mind¹³⁶⁷: “At the inception of all phenomena is the mind; mind is their lord; they are fabricated by the mind.” Having said that, the Buddhist teachings include a great diversity of attitudes to the idea of ethical or moral discipline. Among the Mahāyānists Śāntideva is somewhat unusual in characterizing¹³⁶⁸ the spiritual path as such an inner war. Sūtras which emphasize skilfulness in means are full of warnings about the dangers of fixated discipline. For example in the dramatic *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* the more famous of the literalist followers of the Buddha’s monastic discipline successively and tremulously refuse to visit the layman Vimalakīrti on his sick-bed because he so successfully rebuked them in the past for pious literalism in ethics. However I do not know of any text in which discipline is explicitly problematized on the grounds that it increases disturbance until we come to consider the Vajrayāna teachings. It is here, and in particular in their most exalted presentations of the so-called *mahāmudra* (“total seal”) and *rdzogs-chen* (“total integration”), that one finds such statements as these: “In such an immaculate field of play [...] why try to change anything? Deluded innocents enter a structured path of dharma practice. [...] The instructions of monkey-like teachers without insight is fraught with false conceptions of preparation and technique.”¹³⁶⁹ And: “The ancient ascetics, focusing a passionate will, became utterly lost in the afflictions of strenuous effort [...] this virulent disease.”¹³⁷⁰

Summary and Discussion

Of just under 50 points Sextus considers on this topic, then,

approximately a dozen have *no equivalent* in Madhyamaka as far as I know: the argument against the Epicureans’ belief that pleasure is good on the grounds that base animals would have to be included as good¹³⁷¹; the arguments against “the fair” (such as courage) being naturally good because it occurs in animals, on the grounds that its opposites (such as cowardice) do too¹³⁷²; and the other against it on the grounds that such actions as seem “fair” are often instrumental, for the sake of other goods (such as safety)¹³⁷³; the argument that succour cannot be offered for trouble in the pursuit of the good by those who believe

¹³⁶⁷ *manas*

¹³⁶⁸ *BCA*

¹³⁶⁹ From *The Stirring of Primal Dynamic Elegance, rtsal chen sprugs pa* (Nyingma tantra collection, Thimpu recension vol. *Ka*, 98-100). This text and the next represent two of the five early transmissions of Vairotsana the translator (8th Century CE).

¹³⁷⁰ From the *The Soaring of the Great Garuda, khyung chen lding ba* (vol. *Ka*, 87-91)

¹³⁷¹ *AE* 97

¹³⁷² *AE* 103; *OP* I: 193

¹³⁷³ *AE* 106-9

in that pursuit, because they either contradict themselves to dissuade the sufferer from it or recommend alternatives which lead to even greater agitation in their pursuit due to investment in the conversion in motives¹³⁷⁴; the arguments against the Porch ethics on the basis of their own teaching of the unattained Sagehood and the unreality of constructed arts¹³⁷⁵, and due to their indistinguishability, unpalatability and impossibility of legal application¹³⁷⁶; the dissonance between the Porch's belief that incorporeal word-sounds are taught and the teaching of corporeals¹³⁷⁷, and between the Porch and Epicurean definitions of the corporeal on the one hand, as a combination of dimensions and qualities, and on the other the belief that what is taught is sensed – since such combinations require intellect¹³⁷⁸; the sorites-style argument against becoming an expert¹³⁷⁹; the comments made, one suspects, for rhetorical effect through thoroughness, that if an expert were to teach an expert, there would be nothing to teach or to learn, and that for a non-expert to teach an expert is an obvious absurdity¹³⁸⁰; or the arguments against teaching the art of living based on the fact that the wise cannot recognize (and therefore teach those afflicted with) lack of wisdom, whether their own wisdom was added to, or displaced, the lack of wisdom in themselves¹³⁸¹, whether recognition is by means of senses or intellect¹³⁸², and whether unwisdom itself or its results are used for identification¹³⁸³;

about a dozen are *similar* to actual Madhyamaka arguments: that the good cannot be what is desirable in itself; that neither those free of evil nor those not free of it experience it; that victory is not a virtue; that the standard of good cannot measure itself; that structured wisdom about ethics cannot be identified; that neither what is the case nor what is not the case can be taught (or produced); that neither what is obvious nor what is obscure can be taught (or investigated); that incorporeal qualities cannot combine to be corporeal; that experts cannot be identified; that non-experts cannot teach non-experts; and that morality is either useless or damaging; and

¹³⁷⁴ AE 131-39

¹³⁷⁵ AE 181; OP III: 241

¹³⁷⁶ AE 188-96; OP III: 243-9

¹³⁷⁷ AE 224

¹³⁷⁸ AE 225

¹³⁷⁹ OP only, III: 260-3

¹³⁸⁰ AE 235; OP III: 239

¹³⁸¹ AE 248-9

¹³⁸² AE 250-2

¹³⁸³ AE 253-6

about two dozen arguments are *close equivalents* of actual Madhyamaka arguments: that the result of the inspection of (ethical and other) beliefs is calmness and undistractedness; that “by nature” implies “equally according to all”; that discrepancies in ethical beliefs imply lack of essential ethical characterization for any phenomena; that the criterion of truth and the supposed apprehensive presentation cannot be found; that desire is not desirable in itself; the extension of the refutation of the good to the bad and to what is worthy of indifference; that pleasure changes into suffering; that suffering can be beneficial; that ethical judgments are context-dependent and a matter of mere convention; that it is pacifying ethical judgments rather than conforming to them which maximizes happiness; that beliefs in good and evil increase suffering; that there is liberation from trouble in the pacification of these beliefs; that inevitable pain remains even when afflictions due to belief have been removed; that pursuing the good leads to evils; that the inactivity objection does not work; that the inconsistency objection applies not to inspective philosophy but to the beliefs of the objectors; that inflaming the affections is bad; that the three spheres (agent, action and object) lack existence in themselves; that nothing can be taught; that the true does not exist; that objects of intellection do not exist; that one cannot become an expert while one is or is not an expert; and that there is no teaching either by meaningless or by meaningful expressions.

Thus we can see that more than 75% of the Sextus’ arguments, roughly enumerated, are common to the two projects, 25% of them with similar intent and justification and more than 50% of them with the same intent and justification. In most of these cases the detailed supporting arguments too are common to both projects with the same intent, so the enumeration of parallels as a score does not do justice to their extensiveness.

When it comes to remarkable exemplary cases and similes however there are many fewer that are common to the two projects on this topic besides the commonplace examples of virtues leading to vices. Only the similes of burning for the affections, and of the blind leading the blind for non-experts supposedly teaching non-experts, and the mentioning of fire as an exemplary case for something possessing a certain quality by nature, are found *exactly thus in both* projects. *Sextus alone* uses many similes such those derived from Anacharsis of the blind seeing and the deaf hearing for the impossibility of becoming an expert, as well as the examples of hunger etc. for kinds of suffering which are inevitable even when beliefs are pacified. Furthermore *the Mādhyamikas alone* use a number of striking similes, including that of licking the honey along the razor’s edge for the enjoyment of pleasure, the crushing of oil from sand for the arising of phenomena from particular causes and conditions, and perhaps most notable the characterization of phenomena which seem to be experienced but about which it is not justifiable to have any

certain beliefs as like illusions, mirages, etc.,¹³⁸⁴ as well as the startling case of the trainee awakening being experiencing inevitable pain when offering his or her own flesh.

We can tentatively conclude that these projects do seem to have reached a very similar, and remarkably counter-intuitive, kind of insight about the phenomena of our experience, so similar and with such similar supporting arguments on this topic that one suspects them of at least in part deriving it from a common source or even one from the other, but that the application of that insight in order to point it out to others by means of the texts we have surveyed involves material which is certainly not shared by both projects – such as Sextus’ frequent references to the special doctrines of the rival Greek schools (the Epicureans, the Porch and the Platonists especially) and the Mādhyamikas’ occasional mention of certain elements of the cosmology of the path of awakening beings, such as generosity with one’s own body, as presented in the Mahāyāna sūtras.

Is Madhyamaka more “religious” than Pyrrhonism? Thorsrud notices that Pyrrhonist arguments “could indeed serve religious ends”, “by clearing away the impediments to genuinely reverent affective states.”¹³⁸⁵ And this matches the placing of two Nāgārjuna’s main treatises in the scheme of the later Indo-Tibetan tradition: as clearing the ground. McEvelley voices a common prejudice when he says the Pyrrhonist purpose is psychological, to attain untroubledness, whereas the Buddhist purpose is “religious”, to escape “transmigration”.¹³⁸⁶ This overlooks both the psychological therapeutic emphasis in Madhyamaka that we have now seen extensively, and the Mahāyāna’s startling re-interpretation, including Nāgārjuna’s spectacular critique, of *bhāvasaṃkrānti*, the transference of existence.¹³⁸⁷ If anything Nāgārjuna would appear to be reading an ethical system very close to Sextus’, based on liberation from engagement with one’s own projections about what is right and wrong, or existent or non-existent, into an earlier vocabulary of transference. To examine this more closely is senseless without some consideration of the historical context of the two projects, so it is to this that we now turn.

¹³⁸⁴ It should not be overlooked however that that Sextus reports that Pyrrho’s companion as far as India, Anaxarchus, along with Monimus, “likened existing things to a painting of a scene and supposed them to resemble the impressions experienced in sleep or madness.” (*AL* I: 88)

¹³⁸⁵ (Thorsrud, 2011)

¹³⁸⁶ (McEvelley, 1982, p. 25)

¹³⁸⁷ *MMK* XXVII; and *Bhāvasaṃkrānti Sūtra*: “Nothing passes from this world to another world.” And *PSH* 5: “*mi ’pho bar yang mkhas rtogs bya* - The learned understand that there is no transference taking place.”

Part III: Interaction

In Chapter 1, I evaluate the evidence for the various hypotheses that have been put forward that there has or has not been *historical interaction* in their formation, an influence in either or both directions, or common influence from a shared source. In Chapter 2 I allow the projects to *interact now*, to explore how modern scholarly discussion of certain issues in each project can be applied fruitfully to the other.

Chapter 1: In the past

Introduction

What may be said about the historical connection between the two projects? Was there shared inheritance, horizontal transmission or influence, uni-directional in either direction or mutual?

Similar phenomena can of course arise in separate cultures independently, i.e. without the necessity of there having been either direct transmission between them or to each of them respectively from some third party or parties.¹³⁸⁸ “A truly rigorous defense of diffusion claims like McEvilley’s will therefore have to go beyond the mere drawing of parallels, since such parallels will at best be merely suggestive.”¹³⁸⁹ Clearly though such parallels in doctrines are less likely to be due to independent discovery, and more likely to be due to some kind of transmission, in proportion as the nature of the doctrines in question becomes more counter-intuitive or difficult to discover or see, for the people who have come to hold those doctrines.

The majority of doctrines presented by Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka do indeed seem to be extraordinarily counter-intuitive, and extraordinarily difficult to discover and see,¹³⁹⁰ so we can surmise that they also appeared thus to our illustrious predecessors. And in this they stand out among the doctrines being presented by the various other philosophical schools at the times when, and locales where, these two projects were operating. Bett, to take the Hellenic side, believes that Pyrrho’s route to untroubledness, which he argues is *via* a withdrawal of trust in sensations and opinions due to the view that things are in their natures indeterminate, “sets Pyrrho conspicuously apart from the main current of Greek philosophy.”¹³⁹¹ The process of accidentally discovering untroubledness, when certain adjudication is necessarily withdrawn due to equipollence of mutually irreconcilable phenomena and reasons, which Sextus attributes to the Pyrrhonists, is also, as far as I know, unique among the Greeks.

This shared uniqueness in itself might not get us very far. Alerted nevertheless to the *suggestion* that in this case there might have been some kind of transmission, here I turn to the historical evidence for and against it. Now Greece and India were very far apart; and between them stood a great many diverse cultures. And that is before we consider the dimension of time: if these unusual doctrines were transmitted from some common source, the evidence of such a transmission would be found in the earlier cultures, probably (but not necessarily) of that intermediate geographical region. So to evaluate the evidence properly, one would potentially have to be expert not only in the Greek culture at the time of early Pyrrhonism, and Indian culture at the time of early Madhyamaka, and not only in the cultures geographically intermediate

¹³⁸⁸ (West, 2009, pp. 1-25)

¹³⁸⁹ (Thompson, 2005, p. 54)

¹³⁹⁰ A cursory survey of the bemusement, paradox-weariness and even hostile irritation common in the modern scholarship on both is sufficient argument for this claim, I think.

¹³⁹¹ (Bett, 2000, p. 170)

between them, but also in the early cultures of at least these regions, and realistically speaking even cultures outside that geographic region if it were clear that these latter had had relations to any of the former ones. How many people could boast of such extensive expertise? And yet without it, we will always deserve the criticism levelled by any expert in any of those fields when she notices, in someone researching such a transmission, a lack of learning in her own field: “if an author can be so wrong and careless here, where we have some competence to be able to judge, how can we trust him to be right and careful in all of those other areas where we ourselves are not so competent?”¹³⁹²

It is with such reservations burning in my mind that I introduce my investigation here, as someone who is certainly no expert on the cultures intermediate between Greece and India, either in the period of early Pyrrhonism and early Madhyamaka, or before. However in this case, if we are merely concerned to establish the physical possibility of a transmission, we have the remarkable circumstance of the Greek and Indian cultures having met face-to-face with (and subsequent to) Alexander’s expeditions, and the remarkable event of the Pyrrhonists’ exemplar Pyrrho having travelled to India with him and associated with Indian sages. This potentially rescues us from the necessity of trawling the intermediate cultures, and allows us a much more modest, and much more practicable, aim: to evaluate the evidence for physical meeting(s) or textual transmission having taken place there, between people familiar with the respective projects, Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, such as would have afforded the possibility of the transmission of doctrines one way or the other.

While so little is known of Pyrrho¹³⁹³, and even less of Sextus Empiricus, and little but the names and locations of the people Diogenes Laertius claims bore the banner of Pyrrhonism between them, and next to nothing of the historical Nāgārjuna and the inception of the Mahāyāna movement with which his Madhyamaka is now associated, it is unlikely that clear conclusions will emerge, but by examining the circumstances surrounding some key events in the known history of the two projects we shall at least be able to say with confidence whether or not transmission was possible *given what we know*. By drawing together evidence from usually mutually isolated fields and sources we will perhaps also be in a better position to evaluate whether claims that recent scholars have made about a historical transmission – or a lack of one – are justifiable.

Sources

The Buddhist “histories” of India, notoriously, are found principally in treatises intended explicitly to teach reverence for the dharma rather than to provide “mere” facts, such as

¹³⁹² These words come from the Vedic specialist George Thompson in his review (2005) of Thomas McEvilley’s magnum opus *The Shape of Ancient Thought* (2002).

¹³⁹³ (Bett, 2000, p. 1)

Tāranātha¹³⁹⁴'s and Butön¹³⁹⁵'s treatises. For the Greek view, texts relevant to this encounter and its consequences include, besides Diogenes Laertius' *Lives* which is the sole explicit account of it, Arrian of Nicomedia (c. 86 – c. 160 CE)'s *Alexandrou Anabasis (Expedition of Alexander Inland)* and *Indica*¹³⁹⁶, Strabo's *Geography*, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, Diodorus Siculus' *Library of World History*, Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, Quintus Curtus Rufus' *Historiae Alexandri Magni*, Junianus Justinus' *Historiarum Phillipicarum*, and Appian's *History of Rome: The Syrian Wars*.

Survey of material

Pyrrho and the naked sages of India

Diogenes Laertius (fl. c. 3rd century CE)'s life of Pyrrho states, in the very opening, that Pyrrho

“... joined Anaxarchus, whom he accompanied on his travels everywhere, so that he even forgathered¹³⁹⁷ with naked sages¹³⁹⁸ in India, and magi. This led him to adopt a most noble philosophy, taking the form of non-apprehending and suspension;¹³⁹⁹ to quote Ascanius of Abdera¹⁴⁰⁰; he denied that anything was honourable or dishonourable, just or unjust. And so, universally, he held that there is nothing existent in truth, but conventions and custom¹⁴⁰¹ govern human action; for no single thing is in itself any more this than that.”¹⁴⁰²

¹³⁹⁴ Tāranātha (1575-1634)'s *dam pa'i chos rin po che 'phags pa'i yul du ji ltar dar ba'i tshul gsal bar ston pa dgos 'dod kun 'byung* is probably the Tibetan historical account of Indian Buddhism most highly respected by scholars nowadays. I have used the Tibetan text (2001) and the translation by Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya (1970), and their comparisons to those into Russian by V. P. Vasil'ev and into German by A. Schiefner, both published in St Petersburg, in 1869. Tāranātha though late mentions his sources as early: Kṣemendrabhadra of Magadha's history in 2000 verses (which ends with King *Rāmapala); Indradatta's *Buddhapurāṇa* in over 1200 verses (up to the four Sena rulers); and Bhaṭṭaḥaṭi (or Bhāḍaghāṭi)'s similarly long *Account of the Succession of the Preceptors*: all are now lost.

¹³⁹⁵ Bu ston rin chen grub (1290-1364)'s *bde gshegs bstan pa'i gsal byed chos kyi 'byung gnas* has been translated in Butön-Rinchen-Drup (1931) and Butön-Rinchen-Drup (2013).

¹³⁹⁶ Arrian's sources included the contemporary accounts of Nearchus (c. 360 – c. 300 BCE), companion in the penetration into Bactria, and subsequently the naval leader of the expedition from what is now Pakistan to Susa; the polymath Eratosthenes of Cyrene (c. 276 – c. 194 BCE); and the ethnographer and explorer Megasthenes of Asia Minor (c. 350 – c. 290 BCE) who was sent as an ambassador of Seleucus I, almost certainly to Candragupta Maurya.

¹³⁹⁷ συμ-μίξαι

¹³⁹⁸ γυμνοσοφισταί

¹³⁹⁹ ὄθεν γενναιότατα δοκεῖ φιλοσοφῆσαι, τὸ τῆς ἀκαταληψίας καὶ ἐποχῆς εἶδος εἰσαγαγών

¹⁴⁰⁰ It is not clear whether this attribution is referring backwards, forwards, or both. In any case nothing is known about this Ascanius.

¹⁴⁰¹ νόμῳ δὲ καὶ ἔθει

¹⁴⁰² DL IX: 61

It is generally accepted that this occurred through Pyrrho's being a member, like the philosophers Anaxarchus (c. 380 – c. 320 BCE) and Onesicritus (c. 360 – c. 390 BCE), of Alexander's entourage during the latter's progress into India. "This" in the Diogenes passage has been taken variously to refer to the association with the sages in India, magi, Anaxarchus, or (which is the most probable) all of these. Here I restrict myself to considering his mixing with "the naked sages in India" as at least a potential contributory factor to the adoption of this "noble philosophy". This will require us to inquire into who they were and where they mixed.

Who the naked sages were

Although it has been suggested that they might be Jain ascetics, since one of the two sects of Jainism go entirely naked, we should not make too much of the word "naked", since Philostratus for example uses the term of Egyptian priests¹⁴⁰³ and Strabo mentions one ascetic's "naked servants wearing loin-cloths"¹⁴⁰⁴. Furthermore Arrian mentions both *sages* and *naked sages*. The former crop up in his criticism of Alexander's insatiable desire for conquest, when he says:

"In this connection I commend the Indian sages¹⁴⁰⁵, some of whom, the story goes, were found by Alexander in the open air in a meadow, where they used to have their disputations¹⁴⁰⁶, but they did nothing more than stamp on the ground they stood on. When Alexander enquired through interpreters¹⁴⁰⁷ what their actions meant, they replied: 'King Alexander, each man possesses no more of this earth than the patch we stand on; yet you, though a man like other men, except of course that you are restless and presumptuous, are roaming over so wide an area away from what is your own, giving no rest to yourself and others. And very soon you too will die, and will possess no more of the earth than suffices for the burial of your body.'¹⁴⁰⁸

The latter appear in the context of attacking Alexander for a different weakness, love of fame:

"For when on his arrival in Taxila he saw those of the Indian sages who go naked, a longing came to him that one of these men should live with him, since he admired their endurance. The oldest of the sages, called Dandamis (the others being his disciples), said

¹⁴⁰³ (Parker, 2008, p. 255)

¹⁴⁰⁴ Strabo XV: 1: 73

¹⁴⁰⁵ τοὺς σοφιστάς: not mentioned as naked here.

¹⁴⁰⁶ διατριβαί

¹⁴⁰⁷ δι' ἑρμηνέων

¹⁴⁰⁸ *Anabasis* VII: 1: 5-6

he would not join Alexander nor let any of the others do so; in fact he is said to have replied that he himself was just as much a son of Zeus as Alexander, and that he had no need of anything Alexander could give, since he was contented with what he had; he saw, moreover, that Alexander's companions were wandering about over all that land and sea to no profit, and that there was no limit to their many wanderings. He did not yearn then for anything that Alexander could give him, and equally did not fear being denied anything Alexander might control. So long as he lived, the land of India was all he needed, producing fruits in season; and when he died, he would merely be released from an uncomfortable companion, the body.”¹⁴⁰⁹

Strabo describes the meeting between Onesicritus and this sage (2 miles out of Taxila) in detail: his doctrines include separating the mind from pleasure and pain, and using austerity to strengthen their ~discerning knowing¹⁴¹⁰. He criticizes the Greeks for valuing customs higher than nature and fearing frugality.¹⁴¹¹ Strabo goes on¹⁴¹² to recount the famous story of the younger “sage” Calanus¹⁴¹³, who was considered weak in self-discipline by the others, and joined Alexander's entourage until he had himself immolated with great pomp and to the sound of “hymns to the gods” (i.e. he was probably a Brāhmaṇa) in Susa. That there might have been much more transmission of doctrines going on than meets the eye is suggested by Arrian's casual reference to Lysimachus, one of Alexander's seven bodyguards¹⁴¹⁴, being “one of those” (who were the others?) who attended on Calanus for instruction. Megasthenes¹⁴¹⁵ divides these Indian sages into two kinds, transliterated directly into Greek as βραχμᾶνας and σα(ρ)μᾶνας/ γαρμᾶνας, from the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* and *śramaṇa*.¹⁴¹⁶ In this era *brāhmaṇa* (literally “specialist in *brahman*¹⁴¹⁷”, the self-existent divine expansive energy manifested in religious power and knowledge and responsible for creating all things) would refer to the priests officiating at rituals of the Vedic religion and more generally to those learned in the Vedas, neither of whom would have gone entirely naked. Aristobolus saw two at Taxila, performing austerities and eating with Alexander.¹⁴¹⁸ *Śramaṇa* (literally “exerter”¹⁴¹⁹) would refer to any of a number of communities of spiritual seekers and practitioners who did not belong to the former class because

¹⁴⁰⁹ *Anabasis* VII: 2: 2-4; the sage Dandamis is called Mandanis by Strabo

¹⁴¹⁰ γνῶμα cf. Sanskrit cognate *jñāna*, one of the two “stocks” (see Part I: “Path”).

¹⁴¹¹ Strabo XV: 1: 63-5

¹⁴¹² VII: 3

¹⁴¹³ Sanskrit *Kalyānas*, “The Virtuous”?

¹⁴¹⁴ VI: 28: 4

¹⁴¹⁵ Strabo XV: 59

¹⁴¹⁶ The variant spellings in the Greek are the result of variants in the Indian languages: for *śramaṇa*, Pāli has *samaṇa*.

¹⁴¹⁷ From the root *brh*, “expand”, “grow”, “become strong”.

¹⁴¹⁸ Strabo XV: 61

¹⁴¹⁹ From the root *śram*, “exert”, “tire”, “subdue”.

they did not rely on the Vedic texts or the rituals laid out in them, including those exerting themselves in the manner of the teachings of the Buddha, Mahāvīra¹⁴²⁰, Ajita Keśakambali¹⁴²¹, and Gośāla Maskariputra¹⁴²², and others. Megasthenes goes on to subdivide the *śramaṇa* into forest-dwellers, who are respected, celibate, eat fruits and leaves, and are resorted to by kings for prophecy and divine blessings; and physicians, who are described as begging for alms, staying in one posture all day, performing rites, not living in the open air, and being resorted to by the common people for cures and fertility.¹⁴²³ That the latter almost certainly included Buddhists is shown by his mentioning that among them were celibate *women*: the Buddha was unique in allowing women into his *saṅgha*.¹⁴²⁴ Megasthenes’ statement¹⁴²⁵ that suicide was not a dogma among the philosophers, but was seen as the impetuosity of youth, might seem to point to his not having met Jains, for whom we now know that the supreme method to enter *nirvāṇa* was believed to be starving oneself to death,¹⁴²⁶ but Candragupta, to whom he was sent as ambassador, adopted Jainism and ultimately starved himself.¹⁴²⁷ There are accounts in the Buddhist texts, on the other hand, of disciples misinterpreting the Buddha’s teaching and committing suicide, for example the (possibly didactic and fictional) account in the Vinaya¹⁴²⁸ of the 60 monks a day who killed themselves while unsupervised doing the meditation on the repulsiveness of the body, where the Buddha issued a firm prohibition effectively equating suicide with murder. Strabo reports that “certain writers” add another group, opposed to the Brāhmaṇa, the “Pramnae”, who were natural philosophers and ridiculed the former as fools and quacks, and were contentious and disputatious, of four kinds – “mountain” (who, wearing deer-skins, and carrying pouches of drugs and charms sound like wandering yogis), “naked” (including women and undergoing 37 years of endurance¹⁴²⁹), “city” (who change the skins for linen in the city, have long braids in a head-band and beards) and “neighbouring” (not described, perhaps a subset of the last).

¹⁴²⁰ I.e. the Jains.

¹⁴²¹ “The Unconquered One, who wears the Cloak of Hair” – i.e. the *Cārvāka* (“sweet talking”) or *Lokāyata* (probably “aimed at the world” i.e. worldly) school of sceptical philosophers.

¹⁴²² “The One Born in a Cow Stall, son of the Mendicant Bearer, of the Bamboo Cane” – i.e. the *Ājīvaka* (“followers of special rules with regard to livelihood”) school.

¹⁴²³ Strabo XV: 60

¹⁴²⁴ Clement of Alexandria refers to the forest-dwellers and the followers of “Βουττα” but it is not clear if he means they are the same, a subset or a different kind of *śramaṇa*. (*Strom.* P. 305 A, B)

¹⁴²⁵ Strabo XV: 68

¹⁴²⁶ The practice of *sallekhana*, “austere penance”, considered the most pious of acts. Suicide generally is nevertheless condemned in Jainism.

¹⁴²⁷ (Allen, 2012, p. 372)

¹⁴²⁸ Vinaya III: 68-71. This, however, is generally believed to be a late addition for teaching purposes, and the attitude of the early Buddhist community to various kinds of suicide seems to have been rather complex (Delhey, 2006).

¹⁴²⁹ Calanus in the story is described as having completed these 37 years so would presumably belong here.

Where Pyrrho and the sages met

Where did Pyrrho “foregather” with these naked sages? Diogenes does not specify any more than “India”¹⁴³⁰. Arrian and Strabo tell us in some detail of Alexander’s advances in India. Neither mention Pyrrho but other philosophers’ meetings with them are recorded. The city where Alexander’s forces seemed to spend the longest time, receive the warmest welcome, and meet sages was Taxila.¹⁴³¹ Alexander was welcomed by the King of Taxila, Ambhi, and this king remained with him for some time afterwards, during the 326BCE campaign against King Porus (Sanskrit: *Paurava*). It was here that another member of Alexander’s entourage, Onesicritus, was sent out of the city to meet some naked sages.

Taxila is important in the Buddhist texts and mentioned under two main names: the familiar Greek version is a transcription of Takṣa(ka)śilā¹⁴³² and another version is Aśmaparānta¹⁴³³. Takṣaka is the name of a nāga king and it may have been he who gave the city its name.¹⁴³⁴

Where else did Pyrrho go? When did he return to Greece and how? We do not know.¹⁴³⁵ And how many other Greek philosophers were there with him? Nearby, in Bactrian Ai Khanoum (possibly Alexandria on the Oxus, but probably a different city founded by Antiochus I¹⁴³⁶, and a centre of Hellenic culture for two centuries until a nomad invasion around 145 BCE,) the “Clearchus” who inscribed Delphic precepts on a tomb dated to around 300-250 BCE is generally identified as the Peripatetic philosopher Clearchus of Soli, another student of Aristotle.¹⁴³⁷

Whether Pyrrho learnt from Indian sages

Certain recent scholars of Pyrrhonism would appear to be in competition to be the most witheringly deprecatory about the hypothesis of any such doctrinal transmission, particularly in the western direction, or even parallels. Bett, on the issue of Pyrrho’s antecedents, devotes one

¹⁴³⁰ Not the modern state of India, of course, which Alexander never entered, but areas now in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

¹⁴³¹ Strabo I: 28

¹⁴³² The root *takṣ* means to cut especially to chisel, plane or chop; *śilā* is a kind of rock; hence “cutting rock” which is how it appears in Tibetan (*rdo ’jog*) and Chinese translations although some of the latter apparently read the second part as *śīrṣa* meaning the top part or the head – hence “severed head” (Watters, 1904, p. i 241) possibly an alternative name referring to the story of Takṣaka’s sentence (*infra*).

¹⁴³³ This is the name Tāranātha uses. Again, *aśma* means stone, especially precious stone, and *parānta* means utmost or furthest.

¹⁴³⁴ In Tibetan *’jog po*. He occurs prominently in the *Mahābhārata* at the very opening, when he was driven there from Kurukṣetra by Arjuna leading the Pāṇḍavas. His story is of the end of the bloody feud between Nāgas and the Kuru tribal union when the boy sage Āstika (sometimes Āstika), son of a Nāga mother and a brāhmaṇa father, intervenes to prevent Takṣaka’s execution and initiates a long-lasting peace.

¹⁴³⁵ Fox (1973, p. 475) has him return after Alexander’s death but cites no support for this idea.

¹⁴³⁶ (Lyonnet, 2012)

¹⁴³⁷ See the second inscription (but the first to be discovered) in Robert (1968), pp. 421-6.

section out of ten, and it is his last, to “Pyrrho and the Indians”¹⁴³⁸ in which for him it is those who encounter Pyrrhonism “*for the first time*” who may notice such parallels, the implication presumably intended being that such novices do not fully understand it yet and so have jumped the gun. Whilst he accepts that other evidence (from Sextus and from Plutarch) corroborates that Pyrrho was a member of Alexander’s expedition to India, such that “there seems to be no good reason to suspect Diogenes’ source,” he immediately doubts Diogenes’ source for saying that Pyrrho developed his distinctive philosophy as a result of talking to the Indians. Though he concedes that the state Pyrrho is recorded as having achieved, an apparent ability not to notice pain, is both highly unusual among the Greeks (since even the Cynics put up with pain rather than fail to notice it) and certainly brings to mind certain famous states achieved by Indian ascetics, he attacks the vagueness of drawing parallels with “Eastern thought” (commendably), then, more specifically, the vagueness of lumping Pyrrhonists together with Pyrrho while drawing such parallels, the suggestion that the tetralemmatic form of argument which Pyrrho (and Sextus) use derived from Buddhism, and what he calls “the most serious problem of a detailed Indian influence”, namely the difficulties of translation. Let us consider these specifics one by one.

He finds the characterization of Pyrrhonists (by which he means principally Aenesidemus and Sextus) as being like Pyrrho objectionable on the basis of his now largely accepted argument, that Pyrrhonists themselves would have called Pyrrho a negative dogmatist rather than a Pyrrhonist, even though none of the Pyrrhonists (Aenesidemus, Sextus or Diogenes) is recorded as having done, and indeed all of them are recorded as having called him the model of Pyrrhonism. I think we should recall that Bett’s argument is made on the basis of the one-line third-hand report made of Pyrrho’s teaching in a Christian bishop’s text designed to aggrandize the Christian accounts of their founder by belittling the philosophical systems (heresies), a report moreover whose chain of three reporters includes two who are seethingly hostile to Pyrrhonism.

Bett criticizes¹⁴³⁹ the advocacies¹⁴⁴⁰ of the transmission from India to Greece of the tetralemma (found in the “unanswered questions” in several of the Buddha’s discourses and less clearly in the “eel-wriggling” sophistry of the his contemporary Sañjaya as recorded for example in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* of the Pāli canon¹⁴⁴¹, and in Timon’s presentation of Pyrrho’s doctrines according to Aristocles *ap* Eusebius¹⁴⁴²). While he admits that it is an “attractive hypothesis” given the remarkable parallel, he believes it is only plausible if the *way* the tetralemma is deployed is also paralleled. The Buddha’s “unanswered questions” are, he rightly points out,

¹⁴³⁸ The passage (Bett, 2000, pp. 169-78) is also the longest of the ten.

¹⁴³⁹ (2000, pp. 170-6)

¹⁴⁴⁰ Namely by Flintoff (1980) and Frenkian (*Scepticismul Grec si Filosofia Indiana*, 1957a). The latter is summarized in Frenkian (1957b) but unfortunately I have not been able to consult either.

¹⁴⁴¹ *DN 1* (PTS: *D i 1*). Sañjaya’s philosophy is discussed, and held up without much evidence or subtlety as a likely candidate for the origin of various “sceptical philosophies” including Pyrrhonism, by Barua (1921) pp. 325-32.

¹⁴⁴² *Preparations for the Gospel* XIV: 18

about a restricted set of metaphysical topics, not (as in Pyrrho's and Nāgārjuna's tetralemmatic formulations) about everything. Furthermore he reads the Buddha as advocating turning away from such questions to find truth "at a different level", something he cannot find in Pyrrho. What is interesting is that neither of these criticisms applies to Mahāyāna Buddhism, where the tetralemma is frequently deployed on all phenomena, and where separating the two kinds of "is", namely what conventionally is and what ultimately is, in order to transcend the former in favour of the latter, is explicitly characterized as an error.¹⁴⁴³ This raises interesting questions about transmissions between the Greeks and the Mahāyāna which we consider *infra*.

And lastly Bett does not believe that either the Greeks' or the Indians' linguistic skills could have been sufficient for there to be a transmission of material so subtle as philosophy, and the *coup de grâce* seems to be delivered by a primary source, the Cynic philosopher Onesicritus' report¹⁴⁴⁴ of an Indian sage (Mandanis¹⁴⁴⁵) explicitly saying that trying to teach him through the three vulgar interpreters would be like passing clean water through mud. (Tellingly, Bett transfers this objection to Onesicritus' mouth!¹⁴⁴⁶) But, aside from the question of Onesicritus' reliability (which Strabo himself despairs of¹⁴⁴⁷), we might ask: Were all the Greeks and Indians so hampered? Not previously: Alexander encountered Greek-descended communities on the way to Taxila (the Branchidae, supposedly settled between Balkh and Samarkand by Xerxes, *who were bilingual*, and the people of Nysa)¹⁴⁴⁸, and Pāṇini's (pre-Mauryan) grammar refers to *yavanānī*, the feminine form of *yavana*, applied according to a commentary to *yavanāllipyāṃ*, Greek writing.¹⁴⁴⁹ And certainly not subsequently, of course: Philostratus' admittedly rather hagiographical *Life of Apollonius*, composed around 222-235 CE, has the eponymous hero self-consciously follow Alexander's footsteps in the first century CE, to stay with the Parthian king Phraotes (who advocates vegetarianism and speaks fluent Greek) at Taxila for 3 days, and then to stay at the naked sages' fortress of Parax/Paraka for 4 months conversing with them in Greek.¹⁴⁵⁰ Aramaic had been spoken at Taxila (and written in Kharoṣṭhī script) by the time Alexander stayed there: the city had been absorbed into the Achaemenid Empire at the time of Cyrus the Great and as shown by the frequent references in the Jataka stories by the 4th century BCE it was a centre of

¹⁴⁴³ Pace Murti (1955) whose influential view that emptiness is the Buddhist absolute has now been generally discarded.

¹⁴⁴⁴ *ap* Strabo XV: 1: 64

¹⁴⁴⁵ i.e. Dandamis

¹⁴⁴⁶ *Op cit.* p. 177.

¹⁴⁴⁷ E.g. I: 28

¹⁴⁴⁸ (Thapar, 1997, p. 164) (Narain, 1957, p. 3)

¹⁴⁴⁹ *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 4: 1: 49, commentary by Kātyāyana. Some scholars believe the latter to be rather later, though, says Narain (1957, p. 1 n. 5), which allows the possibility that at Pyrrho's time the knowledge was of Greek women, not of Greek writing!

¹⁴⁵⁰ (Parker, 2008, pp. 288-94) Incidentally on the way he and the king "hunt dragons" (nāgas) on the plains...

learning drawing people from all over India.¹⁴⁵¹ Are we to believe that in such circumstances, all translation suffered the same impediments as the Onesicritus-Mandanis exchange?¹⁴⁵²

Between Pyrrho and Nāgārjuna

Alexander and “the first appearance of the Mahāyāna in this world”

Candragupta, the Indian king who took back the lands the Greeks had briefly invaded, was taught by the Brāhmaṇa Cāṇakya *aka* Kauṭilya, probable author of the *Arthaśāstra*, at Taxila, according to the *Mahāvamśa*¹⁴⁵³. Plutarch says Alexander first met Candragupta when the latter was a stripling¹⁴⁵⁴ although he was already a mercenary warrior then so probably at least 18.¹⁴⁵⁵ The Purāṇas and Viśākhadatta’s *Minister’s Ring (Mudrārākṣasa)* tell that after Alexander returned to Babylon Cāṇakya settles a private grudge by instructing Candragupta how to be a king, to depose his enemy Mahāpadma Nanda.¹⁴⁵⁶

Most remarkably, Tāranātha says the first appearance of Mahāyāna Buddhism in this world was shortly after the reign of Mahāpadma, when Mañjuśrī¹⁴⁵⁷ took the form of a monk and appeared to King “Moon Guard” of Oḍiviśa¹⁴⁵⁸ and taught him (according to the exoteric tradition which the historian favours) what would come to be considered the most central of the Perfection of Wisdom texts, namely the *8000 Verses*.¹⁴⁵⁹ The king’s name in Tibetan, *Zla ba srung ba*, can be resanskritized as either Candrarakṣita or Candragupta, although the latter occurs as *Zla ba sbas pa* in the Tibetan translation of the *Candravamśa*.¹⁴⁶⁰

Taxila was to become one of the first centres of the flourishing of the Mahāyāna. In his chapter on the beginning of the extensive spread of the Mahāyāna, in the period subsequent to the Third Council, Tāranātha begins with an account of a householder named Jaṭi (Twisted Hair) of

¹⁴⁵¹ (Marshal, 1918, pp. 8-9)

¹⁴⁵² One might add that Mandanis’ reluctance is strongly reminiscent in any case of the typical guru’s profession of reluctance to teach, designed to test the sincerity of the student!

¹⁴⁵³ (*Mahāvamśa*, 1908)

¹⁴⁵⁴ Plutarch 62: 9 Tarn (1948, p. 275) suspects this report to be untrue but Allen (ch. 4) identifies the older king Candragupta (as Androcottus or Sandrocottus in Greek) and the younger Sisicottus mentioned by Arrian (IV: 30, V: 20) and (as Sisocostus) by Curtius, on the basis of the likely Sanskrit original for the latter, Śaśigupta, like Candragupta, meaning “moon protected”.

¹⁴⁵⁵ (Allen, p. 365)

¹⁴⁵⁶ Tr. in Viśākhadatta (2005).

¹⁴⁵⁷ “Gentle Splendour”: the awakening being or bodhisattva archetypally specializing in the Prajñāpāramitā or perfection of wisdom. It is for this reason that of the two main lineages of Mahāyāna, namely Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, the former is known as Mañjuśrī’s as distinct from the latter, Maitreya’s. On the evidence for a Central Asian origin of Mañjuśrī and the Prajñāpāramitā see “Disguising heresy, saving face?” *infra*.

¹⁴⁵⁸ i.e. Odessa (Sircar, 1971, p. 167 ff.)

¹⁴⁵⁹ He says the followers of tantra however assert that the text was the *Compendium on Thusness or Tattvasaṃgraha* (i.e. *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgrahanāma Mahāyānasūtra*, not to be confused with the Mādhyamika Śāntarakṣita’s treatise of the same abbreviated name).

¹⁴⁶⁰ See n. 25 in Tāranātha tr. Chimpa & Upadhyaya (1970, p. 90).

Aśmaparānta, who invited various masters¹⁴⁶¹ to teach there and supported 300,000 monks for 12 years.¹⁴⁶² That this man was a major force in the increase of the Mahāyāna is also indicated by Butön recording the prophecy of his complete awakening from *the White Lotus of Compassion Sutra*: “In the northern borderland, in the city of Takṣaśilā, a householder named Jaṭānika will appear. He will pay homage to my body and my disciples, and after 1000 aeons in the Age of Good Luck, in the world called Mahāvvyūhasvalaṃkṛta, he is to become the Buddha Samantaprabha.”¹⁴⁶³

Emissaries, sent sages, Aśoka and the Greeks, the dharma officers and Timon

Megasthenes often spoke of visiting Sandracottus (Candragupta), king of the Indians,¹⁴⁶⁴ to whom he had been sent as an ambassador,¹⁴⁶⁵ and was “in his company.”¹⁴⁶⁶ Deimachos was subsequently sent as an embassy by Seleukos to Candragupta’s son, Bindusāra, who is known to the Greeks as Amitrochates or Allitrochates from his Sanskrit alias Amitraghāta (“slayer of enemies”),¹⁴⁶⁷ and who requested that a Greek philosopher be sent to him.¹⁴⁶⁸ A King Porus or Pandion is recorded to have sent a group embassy bearing a diplomatic letter in Greek to Caesar Augustus just before the Common Era by Nicolaus of Damascus, who met the embassy (of which three had survived) in Antioch. They included the same *śramaṇa* who went on to immolate himself in Athens.¹⁴⁶⁹

The late and not very impartial *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* of Kalhaṇa (c. 12th century CE) suggests that Buddhism at the time of Candragupta’s grandson, Aśoka, was associated with foreigners, at least by Brāhmaṇas: it refers to his successor Jalauka overcoming the Bauddha heresy and expelling the *mleccha* – the usual term for barbarians – from the country.¹⁴⁷⁰ Aśoka’s rock edict no. 5 speaks of Dharma *mahāmātras* (high officials) working among all sects for the establishment of Dharma and the welfare of those who are devoted to it, “among the [Bactrian]

¹⁴⁶¹ The Vaibhāṣika Bhaṭṭāraka (Most Venerable) Vasumitra of Maru and Bhaṭṭāraka (Most Venerable) Ghoṣaka of nearby Thogar (Tukhāristan). The latter too was a Vaibhāṣika, a major figure of Puruṣapura Council, where he composed a commentary on the Vibhāṣa, and may have founded the Western branch of it, at Balhika (Balkh): see Litvinsky *Kushan Studies in USSR, ap Tāranātha* (1970, p. 96).

¹⁴⁶² (1970, p. 96)

¹⁴⁶³ (1931, pp. 109-110)

¹⁴⁶⁴ Arrian, *Anabasis* V: 6: 2. Brunt is careful to note that in the Greek “many” does not refer to the visits but to the mentions: “πολλάκις δὲ λέγει ἀφικέσθαι παρὰ Σανδράκοττον τὸν Ἰνδῶν βασιλέα, ...”

¹⁴⁶⁵ Strabo XV: 1: 36; II: 1: 9

¹⁴⁶⁶ Arrian, *Indica* V: 3

¹⁴⁶⁷ (Allen, 2012, p. 369)

¹⁴⁶⁸ Athenaios (3rd century CE). *Deipnosophists* 14: 652f – 653a, cited in McCrindle (1893): the request was made of Antiochus, who replied that it was illegal in Greece to sell philosophers.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Strabo XV: 1: 15. For more on these embassies see Priaulx (1873, pp. 63-).

¹⁴⁷⁰ However, Narain (1957, p. 9) doubted Jalauka’s enemies were Indo-Greeks since he doubted the latter had reached Kashmir.

Greeks, the Kambojas, the Gandharas... and the other people of the west.”¹⁴⁷¹ Graeco-Bactrians were also among internal envoys sent by Aśoka, e.g. Dhammarakhita to Sopara (near Mumbai). Rock edict no. 13 says the Dharma, thanks to his emissaries to foreign lands, has conquered “where the Greek king Antiochus rules, beyond there where the 4 kings, Ptolemy, Antigonus, Magas and Alexander rule... Here in the king’s domain among the [Bactrian] Greeks, the Kambojas... everywhere people are following Beloved of the Gods (i.e. Aśoka)’s instructions in Dharma.” These kings have been identified as Antiochus II (who ruled over the Seleucid Empire¹⁴⁷²), Ptolemy II Philadelphus (with whom the preceding warred, and who had become king of Egypt¹⁴⁷³ in 283 BCE), Magas his half-brother (who broke away and founded Cyrene¹⁴⁷⁴ around 277 BCE), Antigonus II Gonatas of Macedonia, and Alexander II of Epirus (approximately modern Albania) who drove him out.¹⁴⁷⁵ *Antigonus and Ptolemy Philadelphus knew Timon, Pyrrho’s principal student, personally.*¹⁴⁷⁶ An inscription of Aśoka in Aramaic was found at Taxila (at the Sirkap site, being used as building material c. 200 BCE).¹⁴⁷⁷ (Taxila was the site of the revenge of Aśoka’s second main wife Tiṣyarakṣitā when her advances on their son Kuṇāla are spurned: she tricks Aśoka to gain access to his seal which she then uses to order Taxila’s king, named as Kuṅjarakarna (Elephant Ear), to have Kuṇāla blinded.¹⁴⁷⁸) There are other inscriptions by Aśoka in Greek and bilingual ones in Greek and Aramaic, from Kandahar.¹⁴⁷⁹ It was under this king that the Buddhist council took place which subsequently sent missionaries across India and its borderlands, including to the Graeco-Bactrians.¹⁴⁸⁰ The use of the Greek language continued in India through to the first centuries CE, even after the “sunset” there of Hellenic culture.¹⁴⁸¹

¹⁴⁷¹ (Thapar, 1997, p. 379) The “Greeks” here are Bactrian Indo-Greeks. For the history of the meaning of the word *yona*, *yavana*, etc. see Narain (1957, pp. 165-9).

¹⁴⁷² This included the place of origin of the Pyrrhonist Euphranor mentioned by Diogenes as a student of Timon among four mentioned by Hippobotus of Sotion (*DL IX*: (ch. 12:) 115).

¹⁴⁷³ Here, Diogenes says, Euphranor’s Pyrrhonist student and great grand-teacher of Aenesidemus, Eubulus lived (*DL IX*: (ch. 12:) 116), and Aenesidemus later revived Pyrrhonism, according to Aristocles (*ap Eus. XIV*: 18), and Hecataeus of Abdera, whom Diogenes considers Pyrrho’s student (*DL IX*: (ch. 11:) 69), travelled extensively (writing the material on Egypt included by Diodorus Siculus in his *Bibliotheca*) in the time of Ptolemy I, who had of course been with Alexander in India.

¹⁴⁷⁴ It was from here, incidentally, according to Diogenes, that the grand-teacher of Aenesidemus, the Pyrrhonist Ptolemy, hailed: he revived the school from its lapse after Timon according to Menodotus (*DL IX*: (ch. 12:) 115-6). It is perhaps worth noting that Diogenes’ lineage shows an anticlockwise progression from North Africa through Syria to Asia Minor.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Thapar (1997, pp. 165, 210-11) however doesn’t think the emissaries can have been very successful, since references to them disappear in later inscriptions, and no western source appears to mention them.

¹⁴⁷⁶ *DL IX*: (ch. 12:) 110

¹⁴⁷⁷ Incidentally Narain (1957, p. 31) rejects for many reasons the notion, deriving from Tarn (1951), that what was being built was a new Greek-styled city under Demetrius I.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Tāranātha (1970, p. 76) and Tāranātha (2001, p. 55).

¹⁴⁷⁹ (Scerrato, 1958, pp. 4-6)

¹⁴⁸⁰ According at least to the (southern) *Mahāvamsa*, but this event (of around 253 BCE) is not mentioned in the (northern) *Aśokāvadāna*.

¹⁴⁸¹ (Colledge, 1967)

Nāgasena and King Menander of Sāgala

The Bactrian Greek king Menander¹⁴⁸² ruled over Ariana (the Kabul region), Hazara and the Swat valley Gandhāra (including Puṣkalavatī and Taxila) from c. 150 to c. 110 BCE and at some point annexed the Indus delta and the Saurāṣṭra peninsula.¹⁴⁸³ He may also have ruled in Mathurā.¹⁴⁸⁴ Two Buddhist texts, the *Debate of Menander (Milinda Pañha)* of the Theravāda, included in the Burmese Pāli canon, and the Chinese *Discourse of the Almsman Nāgasena (Nāgasenabhikṣu Sūtra)*, recount a debate between him and the monk Nāgasena, and use it to present a kind of catechism of Buddhist doctrine of their own schools. With their significant differences, both are nevertheless considered versions of an earlier text, possibly in Greek. The former says the debate happened in Sāgala, 85 miles from Kashmir (and about the same distance from Taxila), but that king was born in an Alexandria 1400 miles away, i.e. somewhere in Bactria, which would mean he was raised in a predominantly Greek culture but came to occupy Buddhist regions.¹⁴⁸⁵ The text is a dialogue between the king, who has many tricky problems with issues in the Buddhist teachings, and the mysterious Nāgasena, who gives such flooring replies that the king (along with his retinue) ultimately accepts the Buddhist doctrines. As Bronkhorst says, “Its very existence is a testimony that Greeks discussed religious and related questions,”¹⁴⁸⁶ and he points out that under such conditions of developed rationalistic discourse, the likelihood of mutual influence is increased. He is suspicious about the appearance of such debate in the north-west in this period: “A tradition of rational debate does not develop automatically, even in complex societies.”

Nāgārjuna, Nāgāhvāya and the nāgas

Nāgārjuna is supposed according to the popular Indo-Tibetan legend to have learnt his radical new doctrines from the nāgas of the country of the Nāga King Takṣaka. There are two versions of this event by Tāranātha. The earlier, tantric version¹⁴⁸⁷, has that Nāgārjuna needed nāgas as builders for monasteries. He called them by the mantra of Kurukullā, the daughter of Takṣaka. Two women and their entourage arrived, emitting the perfume of sandalwood which they said they needed to protect themselves from the pollution of men. When Nāgārjuna requested this

¹⁴⁸² He was a successor of Demetrius, another Greek king interested in Buddhism (Bagchi, 1946). Demetrius is identified with the invader of Saketa and Mādhyamika(!) mentioned in Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* (III: 2); and with Kṛmiśa the *yakṣa*, who fights the vehemently anti-Buddhist king Puṣyamitra, in the *Divyāvadāna* (XXIX). This Kṛmiśa the *yakṣa* is also mentioned at the end of the *Aśokāvadāna* as being encouraged to fight Puṣyamitra by another *yakṣa* called Daṃṣṭrānivāsin (who offers him his daughter in marriage to this end – see Strong (1983) p. 293-4). Puṣyamitra’s nemesis is referred to merely as “a Greek” in Kālidāsa’s *Mālavikāgnimitram*; and named as “Dattamitri” in *Mahābhārata* I: 139 (Sagar, 1992, pp. 91-4).

¹⁴⁸³ (Narain, 1957, pp. 74-100)

¹⁴⁸⁴ (Fussman, 1993, pp. 91 n. 61, 111-) Narain disagrees.

¹⁴⁸⁵ (Pesala, 2009)

¹⁴⁸⁶ (Bronkhorst, 2009, p. 113 n. 244)

¹⁴⁸⁷ *bka’ babs bdun ldan*, tr. in Tāranātha (2007).

sandalwood for his Tāra shrine, they invited him to the nāga country, whither he travelled and where King Takṣaka instructed him and conferred on him the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, as well as dhāraṇīs and treatises on “Madhyamaka investigative logic”. Butön’s version¹⁴⁸⁸ says that Nāgārjuna met two *boy nāgas*¹⁴⁸⁹ (while he was teaching the errors of Śāṅkara’s *Nyāyālaṅkāra*), wanted *clay and moulds* to build monasteries (in penance for having paid for monks’ food with illegitimate alchemical gold), taught the dharma in their country, and took two Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, almost all the *100,000-Verse (Śatasāhasrika) Sūtra* and the *Small Word (Svalpākṣara)* from them, and that he befriended them and converted most of them, “except those who were not present in the nāga country.” Thenceforth he was known as Nāgārjuna, “Nāga” because, just as the nāgas are born in the infinite ocean, he was born in the oceanic *dharmadhātu*; just as nāgas recognize no limits to their abode, he transcends the extremes of being and non-being; just as they possess wealth, he possesses the treasures of the scriptures; and just as they have fiery eyes, he has fiery insight, burning beliefs and illuminating mental darkness; and “Arjuna”, the one who has secured power, because he commands over the doctrine; and destroys the world’s evil power.¹⁴⁹⁰ The Chinese biography attributed to Kumārajīva, which is considered rather more reliable as a historical source, has him exclaim to the “great Nāga king” (who is not named) that what he studies in the seven jewel chests opened for him is ten times what he has studied in Jambudvīpa (India).¹⁴⁹¹

Tāranātha’s later record¹⁴⁹² is that a companion of Āryadeva named Nāgāhāva/Nāgāhvāya¹⁴⁹³, an ācārya from the south, whose real name was Tathāgatābhadrā, was invited *seven times* by the nāgas to their country, expounded many Mahāyāna Sūtras, clarified a few points of “the Vijñāna Madhyamaka¹⁴⁹⁴”, was a *disciple* of Nāgārjuna, spent many years as a teacher at Nālanda, and composed a *Praise of the Heart (Hṛdayastotra)* and the *Praise of the Three Kāyas (Kāyatrayastotra)* translated in the Tibetan canon, which oddly is there attributed to Nāgārjuna (and as far as I know no treatises of the canon are attributed to Nāgāhvāya).¹⁴⁹⁵

¹⁴⁸⁸ (1931, p. ii 124)

¹⁴⁸⁹ This is how the story has been received, but in old Tibetan *bu* could refer to children of either sex.

¹⁴⁹⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 128.

¹⁴⁹¹ (Walleser, 1923) Note that this means if the country is non-mythical, it is outside India.

¹⁴⁹² Tāranātha (1970, pp. 126-7) (2001, pp. 93-4) – and he does not present any record of Nāgārjuna being invited to the nāgas’ country.

¹⁴⁹³ *klu bos*, “nāga-calling”: Tāranātha gives the first Sanskrit name in transliteration thus but Nāgāhvāya fits the meaning of *klu bos* better.

¹⁴⁹⁴ *rnam rig gi dbu ma*

¹⁴⁹⁵ More confusion is injected by the wording of the prophecy, supposedly of Nāgārjuna, in the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, since it prophesies “the one called ‘nāga’, *nāgāhvayaḥ sa nama*” (Nanjio, 1923, p. 286).

Who or what are nāgas?

The *Mahābhārata* opens with the genocide effected on the “Nāgas”, there probably referring to an ancient *kṣatriya* clan, at Taxila: perhaps their subsequent association with the mythical snake creatures was a way of alleviating the societal guilt of that event. Nāgas crop up with alarming regularity and supernaturalness¹⁴⁹⁶ in the native histories of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, more often than not it is when they are being *tamed* (i.e. converted to the Buddhist practice, e.g. Vikrīḍa by Lalitavajra), and even at crucial junctures of the Buddha’s life. A nāga was said to have taught Vararuci one of the important commentaries on Pāṇini’s grammar from behind a screen until he was revealed to be a giant yawning snake.¹⁴⁹⁷ They are often associated with medicine¹⁴⁹⁸, wealth¹⁴⁹⁹, and water (as residing in it and as producers of rain). Many Buddhists’ names included “nāga”¹⁵⁰⁰ and they are renowned for protecting Buddhism¹⁵⁰¹. That at least in some cases a human type (or perhaps race) is meant is suggested by some kings being described as related to Nāgas: King Devapāla, the builder of Somapuri, is described by some¹⁵⁰² as being fathered by a Nāga and born wearing a ring bearing Nāga script, and as having a grandson King Dharmapāla who conquered a large empire, was a patron of Jñānapāda and Haribhadra (the important commentator on the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*) and “filled all directions with the Prajñāpāramitā”; others¹⁵⁰³ reverse the two kings’ names. Also, since the Greeks’ influence on the art of Gandhara and Mathurā in the early centuries of the common era is well-known¹⁵⁰⁴, it is noteworthy that *nāgas* are traditionally accredited the principal artists (bringing thitherto unknown techniques of metal-casting, engraving and painting) during the time of Nāgārjuna on in these areas, whereas *yakṣas* had been under Aśoka, and before that “*devas* appearing as humans”¹⁵⁰⁵.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Nāgārjuna himself refers their leaders’ multiple heads and consequent difficulties with crown jewels (*Suḥr̥llekha* 35).

¹⁴⁹⁷ Tāranātha (1970, pp. 112-3)

¹⁴⁹⁸ E.g. the story of Vasunetra, who obtains medicine from them, in Tāranātha (1970, p. 137).

¹⁴⁹⁹ E.g. the rich nāgas of Draviḍa who help Rahulabhadra in the period of King Dharmapāla.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Aside from Nāgārjuna, Tāranātha mentions Nāga, the “vastly learned” monk whose repeated advocacy of the so-called “Five Principles” of Bhadra was instrumental in one of the first major schisms of the Buddhist sangha into 4 schools (1970, pp. 80, 82) – he is called Nāgasena (Klu’i sde) in the 15th century *Blue Annals* (Roerich, 2007) and Butön (1931, p. 96) mentions Nāgasena as being a contemporary of Bhadra, but if the Third Council resulting from the schism was truly under Aśoka this Nāgasena is alive over a century before Menander’s interlocutor –; *ācārya* Nāgamitra the grand-teacher of Buddhapālita (pp. 148, 186); Dignāga; and his Vatsiputriya preceptor Nāgadatta (p. 181-); the tantric Nāgabodhi (p. 215); and others.

¹⁵⁰¹ Such that they are prophesied to abandon the lands of the ordained when the Dharma degenerates, be horrified by monks’ mutual murder and insulting their preceptors, and to take back statues and images back to their realm (Butön-Rinchen-Drup, 1931, pp. ii 173, 177).

¹⁵⁰² According to Tāranātha (1970, p. 280).

¹⁵⁰³ Such as Butön (1931, p. 156).

¹⁵⁰⁴ (Lamotte É., 1958)

¹⁵⁰⁵ Tāranātha (1970, pp. 347-8).

Nāgas are also associated with *vipaśyanā*. According to Tāranātha¹⁵⁰⁶, at the time of King Sudhanu, the Nāga King¹⁵⁰⁷ of Kashmir and his entourage were tamed by a master named Madhyāntika (when the angered nāga created a storm, a feat incidentally often credited to nāgas, which nevertheless could not disturb the master’s robes): subsequently many monasteries develop there and the Buddha had apparently predicted that this area would become important for the practice of *vipaśyanā*.

Disguising heresy, saving face?

Walser’s fascinating and sophisticated recent study¹⁵⁰⁸ of Nāgārjuna and the inception of the Mahāyāna depicts him boldly but convincingly as the cunning leader of a social movement, concerned to secure alliances with local Buddhist sects (by attacking the doctrines of their rivals) and shrewdly to get Mahāyāna texts accepted and propagated by non-Mahāyāna Buddhists in a highly restrictive atmosphere, principally by reading Mahāyāna doctrines back into the earlier discourses’ vocabulary (such as *śūnyatā*, which had earlier referred to the psychological unsatisfactoriness of samsaric phenomena but now described the ontological deconstruction of objects of belief, and *kṣaya*, which had described the ascetic-driven *destruction* of *āśrava* or defilements on attaining arhatship but was now equated with the unarisenness of all phenomena) and reinterpreting the criteria for canonicity.¹⁵⁰⁹ He makes “emptiness accessible to reasoned analysis” for the first time.¹⁵¹⁰ Most relevant for us is the startling introduction some time in the early centuries CE of “conformity to *dharmatā*” as a third criterion of canonicity (in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vināya* and Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*), which was explicitly equated with interdependent co-arising, i.e. relativity, and thus opened the door to the whole gamut of the new deconstructive reasoning which purported to prove that doctrine.¹⁵¹¹

In the face of all this chicanery, one is tempted to ask whether the befuddling mythology haunting the Prajñāpāramitā and other early Mahāyāna sūtras, and even perhaps the accounts relayed by later historians such as Tāranātha and Butön placing early Mahāyāna squarely in South

¹⁵⁰⁶ In chapter 3 (1970, pp. 29-30).

¹⁵⁰⁷ Named by various schools as Auduṣṭa, Hulut’u, Apalāla, or Alāpalu. *Op. cit.* n. 3, p. 29.

¹⁵⁰⁸ (Walser, 2005)

¹⁵⁰⁹ I would caution, however, that in his glee at depicting Nāgārjuna as scheming and underhand something Walser neglects to emphasize is that *exactly the same data* can be explained by the Mahāyāna’s own doctrine of compassionate action leading to expression of the doctrine in terms the listeners will understand. He would seem a little too rash with such assertions of intention behind texts’ apparently concealing phraseology as “just to get them copied” etc. – even if such copying can be related to the express compassionate aim once the texts’ contents are considered. And sometime his pet theory leads him to absurdly strained readings (e.g. on p. 263, interpreting the deconstruction of impermanence of entities in *RĀ* 66-70 as “avoiding any direct contradiction with the school that advocates momentariness” when it is hard to imagine anything contradicting it more spectacularly). One might add there is a suspicious echo of modern academia in his theory, a Nāgārjuna more concerned with “impact” than with the truth!

¹⁵¹⁰ *op. cit.* p. 182

¹⁵¹¹ (Walser, pp. 108-110)

India, could similarly be attempts to conceal new doctrines' provenance from foreign (Central Asian, Bactrian, Greek, etc.) wisdom traditions in acceptably traditional and comfortable Indian terms, and for the same reason – *to ensure their propagation*, especially in the newly xenophobic and patriotic atmosphere after the fall of the Mauryan empire, the end of its foreign alliances, and renewed threats to the Indian population from the various peoples to the north-west.¹⁵¹²

A very difficult issue aside from the activity of concealment is whether the seeming novelty of Mahāyāna doctrines and arguments requires us to invoke a foreign origin or whether, for example, reactivity to perceived extremes in Abhidharma doctrines would be enough to explain them. Over the last century various scholars have adverted to evidence for a foreign origin (generally beyond NW Indian) for the Mahāyāna¹⁵¹³: Sylvain Lévi argued for a Tokharian origin for Mañjuśrī¹⁵¹⁴, Charles Elliot for a Persian (Zoroastrian) origin for Amitābha and possibly Kṣitigarbha¹⁵¹⁵, Étienne Lamote for a NW Indian and Central Asian origin for important Mahāyāna texts¹⁵¹⁶, and Xinru Liu (on the basis of traded luxury items mentioned) for a composition of various Mahāyāna sūtras in the corridor from central Asia, through Afghanistan or Kashmir, Taxila, and Nāsik to Barygaza.¹⁵¹⁷ Walser grounds this consensus by considering other textual evidence (which reveals a paucity of Mahāyāna texts, the earliest being a Kusāṇa period *Aṣṭasāhasrika* from Bamiyan dated by its script to the third century CE), inscriptions (which suggest a transmission from central Asia to Gujarat and eventually to central India), pilgrims' accounts, and doxographies.¹⁵¹⁸ Nāgārjuna appears to be the first thinker in India to use logic not just against real categories but even against propositions¹⁵¹⁹ and Bronkhorst suspects this is due to contact with Greeks in the north-west, their rationalistic influence noticeable there as far back as the early Sarvāstivāda.¹⁵²⁰ It was the Mahāsāṅghikas, with whom Nāgārjuna was most associated in his early career, who held that understanding¹⁵²¹ was sufficient for liberation, leaving mental absorption¹⁵²² as rather superfluous, and that constitutive thought¹⁵²³ still operated in the highest states of trance.¹⁵²⁴ Pre-Mahāyāna there are no refutations of phenomena's arising and ceasing, coming and going (although nirvāṇa had been characterized like that).¹⁵²⁵

¹⁵¹² (Thapar, 1997, pp. 228-66)

¹⁵¹³ (Walser, pp. 20-22)

¹⁵¹⁴ (Lévi, 1912)

¹⁵¹⁵ (Elliot, 1957, p. 3:220)

¹⁵¹⁶ (Lamotte É., 1954, pp. 386-)

¹⁵¹⁷ (Liu, 1997, pp. 93-4)

¹⁵¹⁸ pp. 22-58

¹⁵¹⁹ (Bronkhorst, 2009, p. 136) (Jacobi, 1911) (McEvelley, 1981) (Hayes, 1988) (Siderits & O'Brien, 1976)

¹⁵²⁰ (Bronkhorst, 2009, pp. 190, 112-4)

¹⁵²¹ *prajñā*

¹⁵²² *samādhī*

¹⁵²³ *samjñā*

¹⁵²⁴ (Walser, p. 233)

¹⁵²⁵ (Walser, pp. 175-6)

Diplomatic concealment might explain why, for example, Alexander *is not mentioned once* in any Indian text. As a thought experiment, we might ask: In the suite of Indian mythological figures, which would best mythologize (i.e. conceal the identity of) purported Hellenic Greek and Bactrian sages in the north-west? We know of course that the Greeks travelled along waterways in boats: large sections of the histories of these explorations and invasions are concerned with description of the rivers and oceans and whether and how they are navigable¹⁵²⁶, as well as mentioning sacrifices to the water-god Poseidon, whose image importantly and unusually appears on the reverse of Greek coins at Taxila.¹⁵²⁷ Of course nāgas as inhabitants of and travellers in water are a staple of Indian Buddhist lore. More wildly, could Sāgara Nāga King the eponymous inquirer in three major Mahāyāna sūtras¹⁵²⁸ (*Sāgaranāgarājapariprccha sūtras*), including the one defining the four criteria to identify what constitutes Dharma¹⁵²⁹, refer to a Bactrian Greek king at Sāgala (e.g. Menander)? Could Takṣaka Nāga King whom Nāgārjuna met to receive these radically new texts (*Aṣṭasāhasrika* and *Śatasāhasrika sūtras* and treatises on Madhyamaka logic) refer to the Yona king at Takṣakaśilā (i.e. Agathocles or even Alexander himself)? This is speculation of course, but worth investigating further.

If foreign texts (such as Greek or Central Asian deconstructive logic texts) or translations of them reached Indian Buddhists (as material books or memorized recitations), what would the evidence for this in the monasteries look like? At least two schools' codes of discipline include the circumstance of the recitation of heretical texts, which is the first reaction we would expect, as usual read back into the time of the Buddha in order to elicit his authoritative pronouncement on its (il)legality: "All the monks were reciting heretical books. All the white-robed ones [i.e. the lay Buddhists] scolded them, saying, 'These *śramaṇera Śākyapūtras* are not sincere in the joys of the holy life: they have forsaken the Buddha's sūtras and the discipline, chanting these heretical books. All the monks accordingly informed the Buddha. The Buddha said: 'This is not permissible.' There are various monks who have received heretical path treatises and who do not know shame. Smṛti¹⁵³⁰ said, 'The Buddha permits us to chant heretical texts; we do not incur this

¹⁵²⁶ Arrian, *Indica*, books I-V, and VI (which also discusses how rainfall patterns swell them) which all rely heavily on Megasthenes. Book XVIII turns to the subject of how the fleet navigated the rivers and later the oceans, mentioning in XX: 10 that victims were offered to Poseidon, and the remaining books to XLIII detail river and sea journeys and are based on the accounts of the commander of the fleet Nearchus. Also Strabo I: 26-7 tells Alexander's course by rivers.

¹⁵²⁷ The head being Antimachus Theos (Narain, 1957, p. 48).

¹⁵²⁸ Including, notably, the one which presents the four identificatory seals of the Mahāyāna dharma *or its equivalent*. *

¹⁵²⁹ See Part I: "Four seals of correct teaching".

¹⁵³⁰ This name strongly suggests that the dialogue is metaphorical: *smṛti* ("remembered") is the technical term in Brāhmaṇa religion for scriptures introduced later than, and in addition to, *śruti* scriptures literally "heard" – i.e. the Vedas.

shame.’ The Buddha said, ‘In order to subdue heretical paths, it is possible to chant heretical books. However one may not follow a book if it gives rise to beliefs.’¹⁵³¹

And what of those foreigners who *joined* the monasteries?¹⁵³² It might even be the exigencies of novices studying the dharma *in a foreign language* which are being alluded to when another school’s code says that the reason teaching indistinctly is a *duṣkṛta* (faulty act) is that by teaching clearly and distinctly, “sons of *devas*... of *yakṣas*¹⁵³³... of *nāgas*... of *gandharvas*... and animals can be converted,”¹⁵³⁴ i.e. the possibility that distinct peoples whose native languages were not Sanskrit or Prakrit could be intended here by the “mythological” terms is worth investigating further.¹⁵³⁵

Whether or not the theory of Nāgārjuna the cunning diplomat in this specific sense is true, more broadly we are reminded of Favorinus’ view in the time of Hadrian, that the Pyrrhonists were good not just in the courts but also in the court, because through freedom from attachment to any particular doctrine they could adapt more easily to changes in political power.¹⁵³⁶ The Muslims making the early invasions of India called the Buddhists “the children of opportunity” because of the ease with which they pragmatically accepted Islam.¹⁵³⁷ And 4th century Gregory of Nazianzus, Archbishop of Constantinople, complains that, “Sextuses and Pyrrhos... like a dire and malignant disease have infected our churches.”¹⁵³⁸ In both cases the new powers came to dominate utterly, and the inspectives, who *were still looking* and thus had no stake, were displaced by “witnesses”¹⁵³⁹, testifying to the new “faiths”, loudly (with safety in numbers) staking their lives on their societies’ acquiescence to what they affected *to have seen*.

Summary and Discussion

In this very brief survey we have seen that Bett’s “water through mud” hypothesis, that one Indian teacher’s reluctance can be extrapolated to argue that language translation problems prevented Pyrrho learning philosophy from any of the sages of the NW borderlands of India, is almost impossible to credit in the face of the evidence, which includes Alexander’s having encountered

¹⁵³¹ From the Chinese *Mahīśāsaka vinaya* (T 1421, 174b7-12) excerpt slightly adjusted from tr. in Walser (2005, p. 133), who reports (p. 310 n. 23) that the *Sarvāstivāda vinaya* (T 1435, 274a25-b11) also permits the reading of heretical texts for the sake of refutation.

¹⁵³² According to the *Milindapañha*, many Bactrian Greeks became Buddhist.

¹⁵³³ Let us recall that the Greek king Demetrius was replaced by a *yakṣa* in the *Divyāvadāna*: see note on Menander *supra*.

¹⁵³⁴ From the Chinese *Dharmagupta vinaya* (T 1428, 639a16-24) tr. in Walser (2005, p. 137).

¹⁵³⁵ To test these hypotheses I have in mind something like the investigations into the historicity of certain events portrayed in the *Iliad*, sparked by Heinrich Schliemann’s speculations, for example, or Hans Peter Duerr (2011)’s exploration of possible actual events behind the story of Jason and the Argonauts – plus a vivid sense of the need for a carefulness lacking, for example, in Robert Graves’ (1955) efforts.

¹⁵³⁶ (Clark, 2013, p. 183)

¹⁵³⁷ (عبد الحميد i.e. `Abd al Hamīd, 2007)

¹⁵³⁸ *Oration* XXI: 12

¹⁵³⁹ martyr, μάρτυρ, شهيد

two bilingual Greek-speaking communities there, the formal use of Aramaic in educational institutions at Taxila where most of the recorded encounters took place, and the knowledge of Greek writing in Indian texts of the time. We have seen that other Greek philosophers were in the region then – at least Onesicritus the Cynic, Anaxarchus, and Clearchus the Peripatetic – and that a number of Greeks including one of Alexander’s bodyguards habitually received instruction from Indian sages. The sages Megasthenes encountered throughout his time in India certainly included Buddhists but those at and around Taxila at this time may not have done.

We have noted the plentiful channels of communication and travel open between Indian and Greek states (both Bactrian Greek states at the borders and the Greek kingdoms further west as far as Cyrene) in the ensuing three centuries, not to mention the ongoing presence of Greeks within India: emissaries were sent and returned, including ones charged specifically with establishing the Dharma, embassies were sent and returned, philosophers were sent for, letters were delivered, and long-distance travellers included *śramaṇas* reaching Athens and Greeks reaching Magādhā in East India. In particular we have noted personal connections between certain Pyrrhonists and kings to whom Dharma emissaries were sent in Cyrene, Egypt and Macedonia, the existence of texts recording elaborate dialectical exchanges on Buddhist doctrine between Greeks and Indians in the North West, and the phenomenon of the new appearance of dialectical argumentation among certain Buddhist schools, and the new emphasis on analytical rather than contemplative *vipāśyanā*, in the region at this time.

We have seen accounts of wisdom texts of the Mahāyāna, which was to flourish at Taxila, being transmitted to the Indians from apparently mythical figures – the *8,000 Verses* to Candragupta by a monk in the form of Mañjuśrī, whose origin has been traced to Central Asia; and the *100,000 Verses* and others to Nāgārjuna and/or his student by nāgas. We have adverted to various scholars’ theories that various phenomena associated with Mahāyāna in India originated in the NW borderlands and Central Asia, and in view of the extraordinarily restrictive conditions on text reproduction in Buddhist communities recommended investigation into whether the movement’s mythologized elements might not constitute the concealment of foreign elements in comfortably unhumiliating Indian terms, for example “nāgas” possibly standing for Greeks (and Bactrian Greeks) because of the association of both with water. And we have noted that the phenomena we would expect in the records of monastic life among the Buddhists from foreign wisdom texts (and students) being assimilated thus are exactly what we find.

Chapter 2: Mutual illumination today

The treatise of Ārya Nāgārjuna is medicine for some, poison for others.

-from an ancient Indian song¹⁵⁴⁰

In listening to the arguments of a sceptic, you are breathing a poisonous air.

-R. B. Girdlestone, first principle of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford¹⁵⁴¹ and Hebrew scholar

Introduction

A great deal is to be learnt by applying scholarly insights, which have developed through the *separate* study of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, *crosswise* on various difficult points. Given the limitations of this study I here advert to a few that have struck me forcibly and leave the rest to recommendations for further study.

Selected topics

Nihilism, negative dogmatism, and equipollence

Both projects have been accused of nihilism, in ancient and modern¹⁵⁴² times. Some scholars have drawn attention to the apparent emphasis in Madhyamaka on establishing the ultimate truth beyond appearances and justifications as distinct from what they see as Sextus' emphasis on equipollence of discrepant appearances and justifications. "The ultimate truth, in a sense, is that there *is* no 'ultimate truth' – a fact, however, that is itself proposed as ultimately true."¹⁵⁴³ Thus they conclude that if Sextus' project and resultant state is taken to be "Pyrrhonist", the Mādhyamikas cannot be, but would be better characterized as negative dogmatists. Some of the terminology seems to support this: for example, the apparent connection between *parama artha satya* (ultimately meaningful being) and *param* or "furthest shore", whose privative *apārya*, "without issue or decision", we compared to the Greek ἀπορία for conceptual failure.

However we should be careful not to overlook the possibility that the two projects could be using different terminology to describe the same process. Nāgārjuna points out: "Though the Buddhas have spoken of duration, origination, destruction, being, non-being, low, moderate and

¹⁵⁴⁰ sung by local children during the decade-long debate between advocates of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra according to the historian Tāranātha (1970, p. 205).

¹⁵⁴¹ residence at which institution I enjoyed for the writing of this dissertation!

¹⁵⁴² E.g. Wood (1994) on Madhyamaka.

¹⁵⁴³ (Arnold, 2005, p. 120)

excellent, by force of worldly convention, they have not done so in an absolute sense.”¹⁵⁴⁴ It is important not to interpret “not spoken of these existing in an ultimate sense” as meaning “spoken of these in an absolute sense as not existing”. I.e. for the Mādhyamika, in the *parama* meaning phenomena are *apārya*.

Aporetic Pyrrhonism and early Madhyamaka

Woodruff introduced¹⁵⁴⁵ the idea that we can distinguish between aporetic and sceptical Pyrrhonism (which he attributes to Aenesidemus and Sextus respectively) even though Sextus says they are not distinct. The former is mainly concerned with refutations, and the latter with equal force of beliefs and refutations. This relates to the previous point. We have noticed many instances of arguments attributed to Aenesidemus more closely matching the pan-refutational style of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva insofar as they problematize issues by revealing the illogicality of concepts rather than by pointing out conflicting equally persuasive conceptual arguments. This might lead us to draw parallels between ethically-focused Buddha and Pyrrho in the early periods of the projects, Aenesidemus and these early Mādhyamikas in their middle periods, and in their later periods, Sextus and later Mādhyamikas such as Śāntarakṣita, who as we have seen, like Sextus, brings in many positive doctrines of his opponents without accepting them but in order to undermine the opposite beliefs.

However the picture may be more complex: the Madhyamaka demonstrates, by inspection, that the “refutation” or “negation” of a thing is an unavoidable absurd consequence of the uninspected belief in the thing, *for the believer*. We could interpret the “Aenesidemian” arguments this way. That is, they are not assertions of the absence of these things but of the paradox hidden behind the belief in the thing (such as causality). Furthermore, very often, Nāgārjuna will present pairs of absurd consequences (usually entailed by choosing one or other lemma of a straightforward dilemma such as “Are they the same or different?”) in mutual opposition, to show that neither of two opposite beliefs makes sense, and the two refutations’ equal persuasiveness is clearly a consciously deployed device. Thus the “equal force” method and the refutational one are not so easily separable as Woodruff might have us believe, at least for Madhyamaka, and possibly also for Pyrrhonism.

The status of the conventional

On the issue of how much or what kind of credence is to be given to the conventional, Madhyamaka offers a confident rejoinder to supposed inconsistencies found in Sextus by certain

¹⁵⁴⁴ ŚS 1

¹⁵⁴⁵ (Woodruff, 1988)

modern scholars. For example, Bailey opines that Sextus has to believe that his opponents will accept his dodgier arguments as valid,¹⁵⁴⁶ and that in order to drive action unpleasantness (such as that of viewing the believers' suffering) must be believed to be unpleasant.¹⁵⁴⁷ Madhyamaka retorts: until one sees correctly, ignorance of the way things are, in particular mistaking what circumscribedly is for what ultimately is, is what drives everything. Once one sees correctly, i.e. sees interdependent co-origination, all phenomena's lack of existence in themselves, one is from one's own side free of the conditioning of ignorance, but others continue to believe in their own delusions, and this one now sees clearly. There is thus a depersonalized automatic "compassionate" response inseparable from that insight, acting necessarily by the skilful means of the conventions these unfortunates understand. Could Sextus' love of mankind be the Mahāyāna's *mahākaruṇā*, "great compassion", inseparable from insight?

It would be fruitful for scholars of Sextan Pyrrhonism to consider the controversy about this in the Indo-Tibetan tradition and scholarship. Gedün Chöpel presents a succinct classification of Mādhyamikas based on their presentation of the conventional when he writes, "Those who assert the presentation of the conventional as their own system are Svāntarikas, and those who assert it as a system of others are Prāsaṅgikas."¹⁵⁴⁸ That he considers the latter superior is clear when he writes that, "...as long as one is deferential to the perceptions of the world, even though one has already attained the path of vision, there is no choice but to remain in the system of the vulgar."¹⁵⁴⁹ McClintock (2010) explores in detail what we have called matching the remedy to the illness, and what she calls¹⁵⁵⁰ "the sliding scale of analysis", in Śāntarakṣita, and whether it actually undermines all logical communication.

Impossible ethics

The possibility of leading an ethical life under the onslaught of inspection and belief-purging of the Pyrrhonist or Madhyamaka variety is questioned in almost every major scholarly introduction to these projects. More recently the temptation to "ground" Sextus' ethics has manifested in, to take a good example, Machuca's 2011 discussion of what he calls "moderate ethical realism", but which others have called "situational ethics", in *AE*. He is referring to what we have characterized as equivalent to skilfulness in means in Madhyamaka.¹⁵⁵¹ However he considers that such an approach must depend on holding three beliefs: that nothing is by nature good or bad, that everything is good or bad by context, and that attainment of untroubledness is possible by

¹⁵⁴⁶ (2002, p. 228)

¹⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 230-

¹⁵⁴⁸ Verse 189 translated in Lopez p. 101

¹⁵⁴⁹ Verse 211, Lopez p. 107

¹⁵⁵⁰ following Dunne (2004)

¹⁵⁵¹ See Part II: Chapter 3: "Technical wisdom cannot be distinctly identified"

holding these two beliefs. And this clashes with what, he believes, Sextus must also do: namely, suspend judgment about whether good and bad are by nature or not. I feel this is an example of addiction to propositionality: it is possible after all to formulate the notion “to suspend judgment about whether I suspend judgment”, a notion whose exact import one might usefully try to work out! The Mādhyamikas may rescue us here: we have seen¹⁵⁵² that since despite their characteristic conclusions that everything is empty, including emptiness itself, Nāgārjuna “comes clean” at one stage to say, “‘It is empty,’ is ~not to be voiced¹⁵⁵³. Nor is, ‘It is not empty,’ nor that it is both, nor that it is neither. It is *narrated*¹⁵⁵⁴ only for the sake of instruction.”¹⁵⁵⁵ Shall we wade in with discrimination and ask for a particular thing whether he *really* means it is empty or not? Surely the point is that these two ways of expressing himself have appropriate and different contexts, just like two different medicines, whose matching to the disease both projects explicitly claim. Furthermore characterization of concept-surpassing states (such as Nāgārjuna’s *nivṛtti* certainly is and Sextus’ ἐπιτοχή could well be) by means of the very concepts surpassed will inevitably take the form of paradoxes, such as the ones we have seen in our survey: the ultimate truth being that there is none, for example, and that words are used to point out the wordless. We have seen how Sanskrit uses the equivocal prefix *nis* to reflect this, such that “suspension” in Sanskrit¹⁵⁵⁶ is simultaneously completely turning away and not turning away; and we have seen Bhāvaviveka’s “twofold” ultimate truth – communicable and non-communicable. Such paradoxes are familiar in both fields, and indeed any that deal with the limits of language¹⁵⁵⁷; what seems to get overlooked by certain scholars of Pyrrhonism is that they reflect something about logic (a self-reversal embodied in it in fact) and not something about the concept-surpassing state and the project which leads to it.

Another attempt to ground Sextus’ ethics is made by Bailey, whose exasperation at how Sextus can help the believers given that their suffering is supposedly not something intrinsically unpleasant to him¹⁵⁵⁸ reminds us of Śāntideva’s opponents: “If no sentient being exists in itself, what is compassion for?” He replies: “For one who is accepted through delusion, for the sake of the task.” His opponents ask: “If there is no sentient being, whose is the task?” He replies: “True. The effort too is due to delusion. Nevertheless, in order to pacify suffering, delusion with regard

¹⁵⁵² See Part I: “Circumscribed applicability of speech”

¹⁵⁵³ *na vaktavyam*

¹⁵⁵⁴ *kathyate*

¹⁵⁵⁵ *MMK XXII: 11*

¹⁵⁵⁶ *nivṛtti*

¹⁵⁵⁷ They arise in such investigations by Sextus, Kant, Wittgenstein, Russell and others (Garfield & Priest, 2002).

¹⁵⁵⁸ (Bailey, 2002, p. 232)

to one's task is not checked."¹⁵⁵⁹ There is a rich literature on this issue in the Tibetan commentaries¹⁵⁶⁰, which could fruitfully be brought to bear on these scholars' difficulties, related to what status exactly "illusory appearances" might have when nothing is ever *not* illusion.

Refusing to inspect, refusing belief-purging

Having read Sextus' works, one is bound to be puzzled by how some modern scholars insist on trying to establish *by deduction* what Sextus (who shows that *deduction does not make sense*¹⁵⁶¹) *really believed* (despite saying his aim is to *end belief-mongering*¹⁵⁶²), and how to present these supposed beliefs (of the man who multifariously *undermines the validity of logical propositions*¹⁵⁶³) in *logical propositions*. One, for example, presents Sextus on appearances thus: "It appears that *p* but I do not believe that *p*."¹⁵⁶⁴ Sextus is never so absurd, and to assent to the affections necessitated by an appearance is certainly not the same as asserting that a certain proposition about what is happening appears to be the case while not believing it! It would seem some scepticologists would rather do anything than *inspect*. They would seem to share a certain obsessiveness about the inspective arguments with Aristocles, who complains, "But in truth there is no similarity between the cathartic drug and their argument! For the drug is secreted and does not remain in the body: the argument, however, must be there in people's souls, as being always the same and gaining their belief, for it can be only this that makes them incapable of assent."¹⁵⁶⁵ To them the Buddha's question to Kāśyapa is pertinent: " 'Shall the sick man be freed of sickness if that medicine, having evacuated all the diseases settled in his viscera, would not itself depart his viscera?' Kāśyapa said, 'No, worthy one. The disease of that man would be more serious if that medicine, having evacuated all the diseases, was settled in his viscera and would not depart.' The worthy one said, 'Just so, Kāśyapa, *śūnyatā* is the remedy for all items of belief, but then, Kāśyapa, one for whom *śūnyatā* itself becomes a belief I speak of as incurable.'"¹⁵⁶⁶ Since Nāgārjuna distinguishes himself from such unfortunates, can the Pyrrhonists not? While successive studies of Pyrrhonism seem to set out to establish what Pyrrhonists actually believe, Madhyamaka explicitly is an all-out attack on *dr̥ṣṭi*, belief or view. Can Sextus be read in this way, and be similarly consistent? Who is actually suffering from this purgative retention?

¹⁵⁵⁹ *BCA IX: 75-6: yadi sattvo na vidyeta kasyopari kṛpeti cet| kāryārthamabhyupetena yo mohena prakalpitaḥ|| kāryam kasya na cetsattvaḥ satyamīhā tu mohataḥ| duḥkhavyupaśamārtham tu kāryamoho na vāryate||*

¹⁵⁶⁰ e.g. the commentary of Khenpo Kunzang Palden (Pelden, 2010).

¹⁵⁶¹ *AL II*

¹⁵⁶² *OP I: 12*

¹⁵⁶³ *AL II: 71 ff.* See Part II: Chapter 1.

¹⁵⁶⁴ (Bailey, 2002, pp. 223-5)

¹⁵⁶⁵ Aristocles *ap Eusebius Preparations for the Gospel XIV: 18*

¹⁵⁶⁶ cited in *PP* on *MMK XIII: 8*

Āryadeva quips: “Worldly people, who cannot comprehend this teaching at all, attribute the fault to the sage.”¹⁵⁶⁷

Trivializing suspension, refusing untroubledness

Suspension is sometimes discussed as though it were a threat to pure philosophizing. For example one scholar writes, on the matter of whether Sextus’ characterization of Plato as an inspective philosopher is correct or not, “On this issue, suspension of judgment is a tempting alternative.”¹⁵⁶⁸ The implication is almost that suspension is an escape clause for those who are too lazy to do the maths *on a particular topic*. Does Sextus put forth different degrees of suspension? Can someone who upholds beliefs in one area be in suspension in another? The Mādhyamikas would say not. Āryadeva declares: “Whoever sees one thing as it really is, sees how all things really are. One thing’s emptiness [of existence in itself] is precisely all things’ emptiness.”¹⁵⁶⁹ This is related to a general tendency among certain modern scholars to refuse, flatly, what Sextus claims about suspension – that untroubledness can follow upon it. Bailey opines¹⁵⁷⁰ that the Pyrrhonist must be “satisfied” that they have failed to find any justification in examined beliefs (or, according to Burnyeat¹⁵⁷¹, he would be anxious rather than tranquil,) so he must have some “tentative beliefs about matters of objective fact”. Here we might gain confidence from Āryadeva’s assertion, that untroubledness is impossible unless clinging to beliefs is relinquished.¹⁵⁷² Some of the Mādhyamikas’ words for their investigations appear to have a distinctly decisive air. For example, *nirūpa*¹⁵⁷³, “conclusive investigation” or “identification”¹⁵⁷⁴; *nirṇī*¹⁵⁷⁵, “conclusive determining”¹⁵⁷⁶; and the very common *niści*¹⁵⁷⁷, “ascertain”¹⁵⁷⁸. This seems at first blush easier to reconcile with the idea of pacifying disturbances, but again caution is important: note again the Sanskrit prefix *nis* with its delicious ambiguity, such that what is being concluded is a failure to find a basis for a conclusion.

¹⁵⁶⁷ CŚ XII: 2

¹⁵⁶⁸ (Bonazzi, 2011, p. 12)

¹⁵⁶⁹ CŚ VIII: 16

¹⁵⁷⁰ (Bailey, 2002, p. 222)

¹⁵⁷¹ (Burnyeat M. F., 1980)

¹⁵⁷² CŚ VIII: 10

¹⁵⁷³ Tibetan: *nges par rtogs pa*

¹⁵⁷⁴ *PP* in three places, commenting on *MMK* XIII: beginning, XVI: 6 and XXV: 5. It sometimes otherwise has the meaning “identifiable in shape” and occurs once in Candrakīrti’s explanation of the word *rūpa*, “form” (*PP* on *MMK* XXIII: 7): “Form is what is identifiable in shape, and can be broken up.”

¹⁵⁷⁵ Tibetan: *gtan la dbab pa*

¹⁵⁷⁶ *RĀ* I: 57

¹⁵⁷⁷ Tibetan: *nges pa*. The Sanskrit root of this verb, *ci*, may be cognate with the Greek ζῆταιν. See Appendix II, “Investigation”.

¹⁵⁷⁸ E.g. *PP* on *MMK* XXI: 11 and anticipating 12

Speech for others: prasaṅga

Aristocles, followed by countless successors, mocks Pyrrho *et al.* for self-refutation and cannot understand that their speech might have different import depending on the listener. He takes ἀνεπίκριτα etc. as characterizations which *must be known* about knowing, not as the inevitable implications (revealed by Inspection) of the believers' beliefs *for the believers*.¹⁵⁷⁹ He fears ethical nihilism, because he cannot understand the distinction between pragmatic and ideological ethics. The background to such misunderstandings is an assumption of an objective reality, and therefore a conviction that someone who professes objective knowledge is in a stronger position than someone who refrains from so doing, who is at best “humble”. Sextus' reminder that all that Pyrrhonists say is a narration about what appears to them (a recognition, which his opponents clearly lack, of verbal limitation to circumscribed reality, the Mādhyamikas would say) is for one scholar “indeed a peculiar way to begin a philosophical writing.” Sextus, for him, “is not producing a universal discourse, which is, however, one of the classical characteristics of philosophical discourse. His aim is *more humble*.”¹⁵⁸⁰ This is to imply that Sextus would be happy to let the believers belief-monger away, and quietly to insert his own musings at a lower level of urgency – whereas in fact he mercilessly and relentlessly tears apart their beliefs, notably that in an external reality, and depicts them, rather unhumly, as *diseased*. There is a tendency among scholars to suggest Sextus is guilty of what we might call *anticipatory* suspension.¹⁵⁸¹ If we are right in analogizing the projects, we can attribute something of the Mādhyamikas' confidence to Sextus too: none of the believers' doctrines so far has impressed him, and they are fools for being impressed themselves.

¹⁵⁷⁹ Again the tiresome reversion-to-the-propositional, which is (like the assumption of objective reality) unfortunately very common in scholarly critiques of Pyrrhonism: he is not sure – but is he sure he is not sure? One might add: is he sure he is unsure whether he is unsure? And: is he sure he is unsure whether he is unsure whether he is unsure? – *ad nauseam*. First of all it is not at all clear what it might mean even to say, “I am unsure whether I am unsure,” since it would seem to allow the possibility of being simultaneously unsure and sure; furthermore such lazy escapees are riding rough-shod (with, one imagines, their eyes clenched shut) over Sextus' plea not to be making universal claims, but to be curing believers of their arrogance.

¹⁵⁸⁰ (Marchand, 2011) Italics mine.

¹⁵⁸¹ “Sextus, of course, suspends judgment...” (Barnes, 2007, p. 23)

Conclusions and suggestions for further work

We have considered three broad and independent points: how similar the two projects are, whether there has been any connection between them, and whether study of either can illuminate study of the other.

For the first we considered the general projects in terms of their self-characterizations (Part I) and then the detailed applications (Part II). We saw that the Sextan Pyrrhonists and the Mādhyamikas characterize their own projects in remarkably similar ways, such that on almost all criteria they would accept each other as engaging in the same project. Two differences we discovered, however, were that the Mādhyamikas recognize a pre-wisdom state during which, they assert, it is better to fall into positive dogmatism than to fall into negative dogmatism for ethical reasons; and that they speak of the final state of untroubledness as transcending doubt. On the issue of doubt, in the sense of two-minded wavering, which Madhyamaka claims ultimately to transcend, is it involved in or transcended by Sextus' ἀπορία? We also noticed the difficulties involved in establishing the exact semantic range of private adjectives related to cognition in both projects, and how this was closely related to whether the projects could be described as negative metadogmatism: this would make a fascinating linguistic study, especially since one of the innovations of the Mahāyāna seems to have been to shift use from a psychological and subjective emphasis to one which encompasses the entire nature of reality, and one crucial point would seem to be the syntax of Sanskrit, which seems to allow non-dual expressions and diffuse negations, whether this is happening in Sextus' Greek, and the difficulties of presenting this in languages such as English.

We saw that there was some variety in how close the detailed applications of the two projects were depending on topic. The closest parallels were undoubtedly on beliefs about how or whether we cognize (the criterion of truth, proof, and signs) where about half Sextus' arguments were found to have close equivalents in Madhyamaka, on beliefs about causation and change, where almost all had close equivalents, and on beliefs about ethics, where more than half did. What would be very fruitful, if ambitious, here would be to study the doctrines of all the opponent schools of both projects, so that it can be gauged how closely "aporetic" arguments in each case mirror those doctrines, i.e. how rigorously each applied the principal of speaking words as therapy for the opponents' sake, and whether the startling differences in treatment of certain topics (such as arithmetic and geometry) is explainable with reference to the opponents.

On the possible historical interactions we merely scratched the surface of the relevant materials and there remains a great deal to investigate. We saw that potential channels of transmission were present in the centuries between Pyrrho and Nāgārjuna, thanks to the circumstances especially of the North West borderlands of India, but also the activities of the Emperor Aśoka, and the persistence Greek and Bactrian Greek communities in and near India,

including Buddhists. If Pyrrho learnt Buddhism it could not have been Mahāyāna, but if he or his students or other Greek philosophers engaged with Buddhists in reasoned debate as they seem to have done extensively, there is the possibility that Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism might have been partly a result of this engagement, and perhaps partly of the Greeks' earlier engagement with "magi" in Central Asia. A worthwhile study would examine in detail the sūtras whose origin seems to be in this region, and its pre-existing wisdom traditions, including of course the Bön religion with its parallel wisdom sūtras, reverence for Nāgārjuna, and explicitly Persian origins. The Śāka and Parthian invasions towards the end of the period we considered, as well as the nature of religious and philosophical teachings likely to be encountered along the major trade routes, and a detailed consideration of the trends in artistic expression and their propagation in this period, would also have to be taken into account. It would be worthwhile to examine closely historical evidence from the Seleucid Empire and the North African Diadochi states on relations with India and kings such as Aśoka. The hypothesis of the mythological concealment of foreign sources of wisdom texts needs thorough evaluation. A closer textual comparison of Śāntarakṣita's texts with Sextus' looks promising. In particular the vast Prajñāpāramitā and related texts (many still currently available only in Tibetan or Chinese) deserve thorough examination and their supernatural figures to be read with this hypothesis in mind. Who might they be? By gaining a detailed idea of the interactions and migrations of various peoples in the region over the period in which these texts were drawn up, it may be possible to demythologize them, and perhaps even identify their sources.

Finally in our cross-applications of scholarship between the two fields on a few selected topics, we may have clarified several issues. The thoroughly suspensive nature of Sextus' Pyrrhonism alerted us to a new reading of the Madhyamaka emphasizing the easy-to-overlook but in fact radical slipperiness of its characterizations of what is ultimately real. The frequency of opposed pairs of deconstructive arguments in Nāgārjuna suggested to us that Woodruff's aporetic/sceptic distinction may be a hasty over-simplification. I adverted to the usefulness of applying the clear Madhyamaka presentation of conventional, circumscribed reality to controversies about what motivates Sextus, in particular in his ethics, where the Mādhyamikas as "honorary extra Pyrrhonists" provide us with a larger data set than Sextus' isolated example, and help us see that grounding Sextus' ethics in beliefs is not a requisite, if we can understand the consistency in the Mahāyānists great compassion, arising inseparably from insight, for sentient beings which through that very insight are seen not to exist! We noted the temptation among scholars of reversion to propositionality, and the Madhyamaka helped us identify that this is due to an aversion to engaging in the practice of Inspection. We noticed that the clear Madhyamaka presentation that there are not degrees of emptiness but that there are diverse therapeutic contexts obviates a number of controversies about Sextan suspension, and by means of the Mādhyamikas'

lack of Greek tact we could more easily see the error of certain popular characterizations of Sextus as merely humble or, worse, some kind of philosophical failure.

Appendix I: Transliteration systems used

Greek occurs as is.

Sanskrit, being less familiar, I transliterate in IAST.

For Tibetan I have used the Wylie Roman transliteration.

Appendix II: Translation rationales

belief < δόγμα, dṛṣṭi

I prefer Annas and Barnes' choice of "belief" over "dogma" because Sextus uses the term of any fixed belief about reality and certainly not just of teachings by a religious body which are supposed to be taken unquestioningly on faith. There is some controversy about whether Sextus intended all beliefs, which I discuss in Part III.

dogma>belief

impasse, impassibility < ἀπορία, apāram

Bury translates with terms relating to "doubt" which carry an unwanted connotation of believing that a particular belief is false; and "confusion" which suggest unwarrantedly that the inspective philosophers are somehow being less clear than the believing ones.

The Greek term signalling this impasse is ἀπορία meaning literally "no passing or crossing", and thus "dire straits" and "want of resources".¹⁵⁸² It also occurs frequently as the verb ἀπορεῖν and in other forms. The equivalent adjective, ἄπορος, is the privative of the noun πόρος, "a means of passing across a river or through a strait" and by extension "a way through" or "resource". The cognate of πόρος in Sanskrit is, by the usual replacement of the Greek vowel "o" by the Sanskrit short or (when stressed) long "a" and the usual conversion of the final sibilant into an aspirant¹⁵⁸³, *pārah*, meaning similarly in that language "bringing across", "the far bank of a river", "a crossing", and deriving from the related roots *pr*, "bring across", and *pṛ*, "to fulfil, complete, satisfy". The privatives *apārah* and *apāram*, "not (having) an opposite shore" or "without a crossing"¹⁵⁸⁴ form compounds such as *apāraṇīya*, "unattainable"¹⁵⁸⁵ and *apārayat*,

¹⁵⁸² On the distorting later translations of this term connoting lack of confidence see the appendix on translation rationales.

¹⁵⁸³ Only in the final position – before dental, palatal and retroflex consonants the sibilant is retained as *s*, *ś* or *ṣ* respectively.

¹⁵⁸⁴ The Pāli cognate *apāram* occurs in an enigmatic, wildly diversely translated, and (for our purposes) very significant verse of the Theravāda *Dhammapada* 385 (26: 3): "yassa pāraṃ apāraṃ vā pārapāraṃ na vijjati | vītaddaraṃ visaṃyuttaṃ tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ - The one who finds neither passage nor impasse nor passage-(which-is?-)-impasse, who is unshackled and carefree, that one I call a holy person." Importantly (given the Greek Buddhist culture of Gāndhāra), this verse also occurs in fragments in the first-century CE (Brough, 2001) Gāndhārī *Dhammapada* (I: 35): "yasa pari avare ca para ... | vikadavara visaṇṇota tam aho brommi brammana" It also occurs in the Patna Dharmapada (40, III: 7) of the Sammitiya and there is a very similar verse in the Sarvāstivāda's *Udānavarga* (XXXIII: 24). The centuries-later Theravāda commentaries however assign to *apāraṃ* the meaning "worldly" and by extension "the external sources of sensation".

¹⁵⁸⁵ The Pāli cognate *apāraṇeyya* occurs in the Jātaka (Past Births of the Buddha) (e.g. vi: 36) with this sense.

“powerless”. More relevantly to our focus here, *pārya* means as a noun “issue, end or decision” and as an adjective “successful, effective, decisive” and the neuter *apāram* was used in India by the Sāṃkhya philosophical school¹⁵⁸⁶ as a technical term referring to the mental state of acquiescence to the impossibility of reaching a satisfying conclusion.¹⁵⁸⁷

It is very intriguing to notice the connection to *pārami*, “extremity”, *pāramita*, “reached the other shore”, and *parama*, “remotest” or “most excellent”.¹⁵⁸⁸

inspection < σκέψις, *vipaśyanā*

Paśyana is a participle from the root *paś* meaning “see, behold, look at, observe, be a spectator on, look on, live to see, find out, learn with a spiritual eye, think over, examine.” The prefix *vi-* gives a sense of “thoroughly” or “analytically”. Thus for *vipaśyanā* we have “(thorough) inspection”. (From the same root *paś* comes *anupaśyanā* (Pāli *anupassanā*), the usual word for ongoing (*anu*) contemplation of a particular topic.)

Σκέψις is cognate with Latinate words in *scop-* (and hence English “scope”) and (via metathesis of the *k* and *p*) *spic-* (hence English “spy”, “-spect”, “spectrum” and even “species”) relating to seeing. These all derive from the Proto-Indo-European root *spek-*, whose direct cognate exists in Sanskrit as *spaś*¹⁵⁸⁹ meaning “to see, to behold, to perceive, to espy” where it forms a defective system¹⁵⁹⁰ of words from the same root *paś* from which the Buddhist terms derive, but it is older: *viśpaś* occurs in the Ṛg Veda as “one who spies”.¹⁵⁹¹

Very interestingly, Aristocles on the Pyrrhonists even uses a form of the verb “inspect” with the Greek equivalent δια of the Sanskrit *vi* prefix: διασκεψεσθαί.¹⁵⁹² This term had “lost currency” by Aristocles’ time (1st century CE).¹⁵⁹³ Would this suggest a final date for a potential Greek-Indian transmission in either direction?

Although σκέψις is about *looking* carefully through an issue, modern English words relating to vision usually have an inappropriate connotation of stasis. “Looking through” and

¹⁵⁸⁶ An atheistic dualistic system supposedly founded by the sage Kāpila, and whose central text dates back at least to the second century CE, one of the six classical Āstika systems (which recognized “existence”, as opposed to the Nāstika or “Non-existence” systems like Buddhism, and were “orthodox” insofar as they recognized the scriptural authority of the Veda).

¹⁵⁸⁷ (Monier-Williams, 1920)

¹⁵⁸⁸ e.g. “*sarva ceto vaśitā parama pārami prāptaḥ śramaṇa ity ucyate*, he/she is called a *śramaṇa* who has attained to the most excellent extremity of mastery of all thought,” part of a traditional list of epithets of an *arhat*, found in various Mahāyāna sūtras such as *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, and *Samādhirāja sūtra* cited by Candrakīrti in *PP* on *MMK* VI: 10. Cf. May (1959, p. 105 n. 253).

¹⁵⁸⁹ There is a shift from Proto-Indo-European palatal *k* to spirantic sibilants in the so-called Satem languages including Sanskrit (Ghosh, 2006, p. 7). For the Greek-Sanskrit cognateness see Wharton (1882).

¹⁵⁹⁰ i.e. lacking certain derived forms

¹⁵⁹¹ I: 189: 6. (Incidentally, the sibilant change from *spaś* to *śpaś* is due to a sound rule about the preceding v.)

¹⁵⁹² (Chiesara, 2001, p. 89)

¹⁵⁹³ (Dumont, 1972, pp. 141-2)

“scoping out” are close but difficult to mould into nouns and adjectives to parallel the Greek. I avoid “scepticism” due to its current very different connotation of pre-emptive dogmatic doubt and irreligiousness, and the “ism” implying a party. > inspective

inspective, practitioner of inspection < σκεπτικός, vipāśyin

Literally (the one) capable of or engaging in σκεψις (see “inspection”). I avoid “sceptic” whose modern meaning is highly inappropriate: “one who refuses to believe”, strongly implying an irrational tendency to suspicion and even fear, *opposed in a prejudicial way* to belief, especially religious belief. It is therefore an extraordinarily (and suspiciously) misleading way to represent the Hellenic σκεπτικός, which means “one who inspects thoroughly”, the very person who is *not* influenced by irrationality and fearlessly subjects even the most sacred and taboo beliefs to scrutiny. “Inspector” now unfortunately suggests the police, a connotation I have attempted to avoid by deploying phrases such as “practitioner of inspection” and the adjective “inspective”.

investigation < ζήτησις, cikit-, ciketi

The Greek words related to the root ζιητ- are probably cognate with Vedic verb¹⁵⁹⁴ *ci, ciketi*, etc.: the τ<>k equivalence is common, as evinced for example by Greek τί and Sanskrit *ki* meaning “what, how, whence, wherefore, why”. As for the Greek letter ζ (*dz*) and the Sanskrit *c*: that the latter may have been a plosive sibilant is suggested by the fact that when the first Tibetan translations of Sanskrit texts were made the unvoiced consonant *c* was represented by the Tibetan plosive sibilant consonant pronounced like English *ts* rather than the one pronounced like English *ch* and its voiced counterpart *j* was transliterated in Tibetan as *dz*.

Ciketi means “observe, fix the gaze upon, seek for, investigate, search through, make inquiries” and gives the adjectives *cikitvan/cikitvas/cikitvit*, “observing, noticing, attentive, etc. deliberately”. They are in turn cognate with later Latin *scio*, “know”, from which our “science” derives. By the time of the Mādhyamikas, however, these words had fallen out of common use in Sanskrit. (The derivatives *vicikitsā* “doubt” and *cikitsā* “curing” are used by them though.)

nature, being in itself < φύσις, svabhāva

The words φύσις in Greek, usually translated as “nature” and the origin of our word “physics” and “physical”, whose existence Sextus is keen to problematize in explanation, reality and especially ethics, and *svabhāva* in Sanskrit, translated as “nature” or “essence” or “self-

¹⁵⁹⁴ i.e. the ancient Sanskrit of the pre-classical period exemplified principally by the Vedas

existence”, the target of Nāgārjuna’s deconstructions in the same three fields, share a common etymological origin. φύσις comes from the verb φυ- meaning (in the passive) “become” or (in the active) “bring forth” and *svabhāva* comes from the cognate verb *bhū-* meaning, similarly, “become” or “bring into being”.¹⁵⁹⁵ English *be* and Latin *fu-* are also cognate. All have been referred to a putative PIE base *bheu* or *bhu* meaning “become” or “come into being”.

scepticism>inspection

sceptic(al)>inspective

trouble < ὄχλησις, kleśa, ὄχλος, cala, ταραχη, kṛcchra

Words similar to the Greek ἀταραξία exists in Vedic Sanskrit by the t>k slide¹⁵⁹⁶: *akṛcchra* means “freedom from trouble” from the noun *kṛcchra* meaning “difficulty, trouble, labour, hardship, calamity, pain, danger”; this word is perhaps related¹⁵⁹⁷ (by the frequent r-l slide) to *kleśa*, “pain, affliction, distress, anguish, worldly occupation, care, trouble,” the technical term we have seen in Buddhism for the negativities whose elimination is the rationale of the spiritual path, as suggested by the term *saṃkleśa*¹⁵⁹⁸ *nirvāṇa*, “the extinction of all affliction”, *akleśa*, “freedom from affliction”¹⁵⁹⁹ and *akliṣṭa*, “untroubled”. There might also be a relation between *kleśa* and the verb *calati*¹⁶⁰⁰ meaning to be moved or disturbed or disordered, *acala* or “the Undisturbed” being the name of the eighth of the ten territories (*bhūmi*) of the path of awakening beings, the one attained at the moment of total pacification of those obscurations of reality that are related to *kleśa* (leaving only those related to *cognition*)¹⁶⁰¹. However, Wharton (1882) connects ὄχλος with Sanskrit *vāhinī*, “army” and τᾶράσσω with *ṭṛh-*, “crush”.

¹⁵⁹⁵ (Wharton, 1882)

¹⁵⁹⁶ This correspondence is common between the so-called Centum and Satem languages: see “investigation” above.

¹⁵⁹⁷ *Kleśa* and *kṛcchra* both have the subsidiary meaning “obscurity”, and the connection is further evidenced by *kṛcchra* and *kliṣṭavartman* both being diseases of the eyelids (and possibly the same one?). The first occurs in the medical treatise (*Samhita*) by Śārīngadhara (fl. 1300 CE) and *the Treatise on the Heart of the Eight Sections (of Ayurveda), Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā* (at I: 24: 2 and VI: 8: 4 and VI: 15: 16) of the Buddhist Vāgbhaṭa (c. 6th century CE), and the second in *the Treatise, Samhitā* (at VI: 3: 16 – catarrh?) of the illustrious Suśruta (c. 6th century BCE).

¹⁵⁹⁸ cf. συντάραξις συνταράσσω

¹⁵⁹⁹ The privative is used flexibly and quantifiedly: see “training in solitude” below for a less complete privation.

¹⁶⁰⁰ By analogy with the way that *kāya* is related by the grammarians to *ci* (Pāṇini 3: 3: 41) cf. Butön (1931, pp. 128-9).

¹⁶⁰¹ *Acala* is also incidentally the name of one of the so-called Five Wisdom Sovereigns (personifications of Awakening) in the Tantric mandala of the Mahāvairocana Sūtra.

two kinds of “is” < satya dvāya

The usual translation “two truths” tends to confuse people, suggesting the separability of the two, which is exactly the opposite of its deployment in Madhyamaka; also I feel “truth” is better reserved for *tattva* and the cognate *ṛta*. Using verbal forms rather than nouns also circumvents the difficulty of cumbersome English nouns which connote either an objective or subjective emphasis. I translate *saṃvṛti satya* as “what circumscribedly is” or “circumscribed reality” and *paramārtha satya* as “what ultimately is”.

Appendix III: Crucial source statements

Diñnāga (Dignāga)

Pramāṇasamuccaya (PS): Compendium on Valid Cognition¹⁶⁰²

I: 3cd

pratyakṣam kalpanāpodham nāmajātyādiyojanā

Direct perception is removed from concepts, association with names and genera and so on.

Nāgārjuna

Mulamadhyamakakārikā (MMK): Root Middle Way Verses

XIII: 8

*śūnyatā sarva dṛṣṭīnām proktā niḥsataṇam jinaiḥ |
yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatā dṛṣṭis tān asādhyān babhāṣire ||8||*

Emptiness is taught by the conquerors to be the expedient to get rid of all beliefs.

But those for whom emptiness is a belief have been declared incurable.

XXIV: 14

*sarvaṃ ca yujyate tasya śūnyatā yasya yujyate |
sarvaṃ na yujyate tasya śūnyatā yasya na yujyate ||14||*

Everything is fitting for the one for whom emptiness is fitting;

Nothing is fitting for the one for whom emptiness is not fitting.

Vigrahavyāvartanī (VV): Dispeller of Obstacles

70

*prabhavati ca śūnyateyaṃ yasya prabhavanti tasya sarvārthāḥ |
prabhavati na tasya kiṃcin na prabhavati śūnyatā yasya ||70||*

Everything works for the one for whom emptiness works.

Nothing works for the one for whom emptiness does not work.

¹⁶⁰² Sanskrit reconstructed from Tibetan (Steinkellner, 2005).

Bibliography

Abbreviations for canonical texts

Abbreviations are made from the English title if one particular translated title is canonical and well-known, or from the original language if it is not.

- AE* Sextus Empiricus. *Against Ethicists*. (=M 11)
AG Sextus Empiricus. *Against Grammarians*. (=M1)
AL Sextus Empiricus. *Against Logicians*. (=M 7-8)
AP Sextus Empiricus. *Against Physicists*. (=M 9-10)
APr Sextus Empiricus. *Against Professors*. (=M 1-6)
BCA Śāntideva. *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.
BCV Nāgārjuna. *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*.
CS Āryadeva. *Catuḥśataka*.
HV(V) Āryadeva. *Hastavālanāmaprakaranavṛtti*.
ĪKN Nāgārjuna. *Īsvarakartṛtvanirākṛti, Viṣṇorekakartṛtvanirākaraṇa*.
LAS Nāgārjuna. *Lokāṭītaṣṭava*.
MĀI Kamalaśīla. *Madhyamakāloka*.
MAS Bhāvaviveka. *Madhyamakārthasaṃgraha*.
MAv Candrakīrti. *Madhyamakāvatāra*.
MMK Nāgārjuna. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.
MPPŚ Nāgārjuna. *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*.
OP Sextus Empiricus. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. (=PH)
PP Candrakīrti. *Prasannapadā*.
PSH(V) Nāgārjuna. *Pratītyasamutpādahṛdayakārikā* (and *Vyākhyāna*).
PTS Pāli Texts Society.
RĀ Nāgārjuna. *Ratnāvalī*.
SDV(V) Jñānagarbha. *Satyadvayavibhāga* (and *Vṛtti*).
ŚS Nāgārjuna. *Śūnyatāsaptati*.
ŚŚ(V) Āryadeva. *Śatakaśāstra* (and *Vṛtti*).
T *Taishō shinshu daizokyo* (Chinese tripiṭaka).
TS Śāntaraksita. *Tattvasaṃgraha*.
TSP Kamalaśīla. *Tattvasaṃgraha Pañjika*.
VP Nāgārjuna. *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*.
VV Nāgārjuna. *Vigrahavyāvartanī*.
YŚ Nāgārjuna. *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*.
YŚV Candrakīrti. *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*.

References

I have cited books consisting of translated texts by the text's author or by translator, following the emphasis of the published edition; if this is not clear then by the text's author if the book is principally a translation of a text, and by their translator if the latter has in addition produced extensive research on, notes about and explanations of the text. Authors are ordered according to the Roman alphabet ignoring diacritical marks. With variant transliterations I follow the published text.

Primary sources

Aristocles of Messene

Chiesara, M. L. (2001). *Aristocles of Messene: Testimonia and Fragments*. Oxford University Press.

Eusebius of Caesaria (1903). *Praeparatio Evangelica (Preparation for the Gospel)*. (5 Vols.) (E.H.Gifford, Trans.) Oxford.

Arrian of Nicomedia

Arrian. (1983). *Anabasis of Alexander, Books V-VII. Indica*. (Loeb Classical Library ed.). (P. A. Brunt, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

— (1989). *Anabasis of Alexander, Books I-IV*. (Loeb Classical Library ed.). (P. A. Brunt, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

Āryadeva

Aryadeva (1930). *Aksara-çatakam: The Hundred Letters, a Madhyamaka Text. After Chinese and Tibetan Materials*. (V. Gokhale, Trans.) In Kommission bei O. Harrassowitz.

Aryadeva, & Rinchen, G. S. (2008). *Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas On The Middle Way: With Commentary By Gyel-Tsap*. (R. Sonam, Trans.) Snow Lion.

Jones, R. H. (2011). *Indian Madhyamaka Buddhist Philosophy After Nagarjuna, Volume 1: Plain English Translations and Summaries of the Essential Works of Aryadeva, Rahulabhadra, Buddhapalita, and Bhavaviveka* (Vol. 1). New York: Jackson Square Books.

Lang, K. (Ed.). (1983). *Āryadeva's Catuḥśataka: on the Bodhisattva's cultivation of merit and knowledge*. Akademisk Forlag.

Thomas, F. W., & Ui, H. (1918, April). "The Hand Treatise', a work of Aryadeva", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 267-310.

Tola, F., & Dragonetti, C. (1980). "The Hastavālanāmaprakaranavṛtti", *Journal of Religious Studies (Punjabi University)* 8, 18-31.

Asaṅga

Lamotte, É. (1973). *La somme du grand véhicule d'Asaṅga : Mahāyānasamgraha*. Paris: Louvain.

Aulus Gellius

Aulus Gellius. (1982). *Attic Nights, Books VI-XIII*. (Loeb Classical Library ed., Vol. II). (J. C. Rolfe, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

Bhāvaviveka

Jones, R. H. (2011). *Indian Madhyamaka Buddhist Philosophy After Nagarjuna, Volume 1: Plain English Translations and Summaries of the Essential Works of Aryadeva, Rahulabhadra, Buddhapālita, and Bhāvaviveka* (Vol. 1). New York: Jackson Square Books.

— (2012). *Indian Madhyamaka Buddhist Philosophy After Nagarjuna, Volume 2: Plain English Translations and Summaries of the Essential Works of Chandrakīrti and Shantideva and Two Early Madhyamaka Critiques of God*. New York: Jackson Square Books.

Sastri, P. N. (1931). "Madhyamārthasamgraha of Bhāvaviveka (Restored from the Tibetan Version with an English Translation)", *Journal of Oriental Research* 5, 41-49.

Buddhapālita

Saito, A. (1983). *A study of the Buddhapālita-Mulamadhyamaka-vṛtti*. PhD thesis, Australian National University.

Butön

Butön Rinchen Drup (1931). *History of Buddhism in India and Tibet*. (E. Obermiller, Trans.) Paljor Publications.

— (2013). *Butön's History of Buddhism in India and Its Spread to Tibet: A Treasury of Priceless Scripture*. (L. Stein, & N. Zangpo, Trans.) Snow Lion.

Candrakīrti

Candrakīrti (1979). *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way - The Essential Chapters from the "Prasannapada" of Candrakīrti*. (Sprung, Trans.) Routledge & Kegan Paul.

— & Schayer, S. (1931). *Ausgewählte Kapitel aus der Prasannapadā; 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16. Einleitung, Übersetzung und Anmerkungen [von] Stanisław Schayer*. W Krakowie: Nakł. Polskiej Akadememji Umiejętności.

Chandrakīrti & Mipham (2005). *Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakīrti's Madhyamakavatara with Commentary by Ju Mipham*. (Padmakara, Trans.) Shambhala Publications.

De Jong, J. W. (1949). *Cinq chapitres de la Prasannapadā*. Paris: Paul Geuthner.

Jones, R. H. (2012). *Indian Madhyamaka Buddhist Philosophy After Nagarjuna, Volume 2: Plain English Translations and Summaries of the Essential Works of Chandrakīrti and Shantideva and Two Early Madhyamaka Critiques of God*. New York: Jackson Square Books.

La Vallée Poussin, L. de (1912). *Madhyamakāvātāra par Candrakīrti*. St Petersburg: Academie Impériale des Sciences.

— (1913). *Mulamadhyamakakārikās (Madhyamakāsūtras) de Nāgārjuna avec la Prasannapadā Commentaire de Candrakīrti*. (1st, Ed.) St Petersburg: Academie Impériale des Sciences. (Sanskrit)

Loizzo, J. (2007). *Nagarjuna's Reason Sixty (Yuktisastika) with Candrakīrti's Commentary (Yuktisastikavṛtti)*. American Institute of Buddhist Studies.

May, J. (1959). *Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti. Commentaire limpide au traité du milieu*. Adrien-Maisonneuve.

Dignāga

Steinkellner, E. (2005). “Dignāga's Pramāṇasamuccaya, Chapter 1”, http://www.ikga.oeaw.ac.at/Mat/dignaga_PS_1.pdf retrieved May 2014 (reconstructed Sanskrit and translation)

Diodorus Siculus

Diodorus Siculus (1935). *Library of History, Books 2.35-2.58*. (Loeb Classical Library ed., Vol. II). (C. H. Oldfather, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

Diogenes Laertius

Diogenes Laertius (1925). *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. (Loeb Classical Library ed., Vol. I & II). (R. D. Hicks, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

Gautama

Nyāya Sūtras of Gautama. (1999). (G. Jha, Trans.) Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Jñānagarbha

Eckel, M. D. (1987). *Jñānagarbha's Commentary on the Distinction Between the Two Truths*. (Eckel, Trans.) State University of New York.

Longchen Rabjam

Longchen Rabjam (2007). *The Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems*. (Richard Barron, Trans.) Padma Publishing.

Mabja Jangchub Tsondu

Mabja Jangchub Tsondu (2011). *Ornament of Reason: The Great Commentary to Nagarjuna's Root of the Middle Way*. (T. Doctor, Trans.) Snow Lion Publications.

Mkhas Grub

Cabezon, J. I., & Mkhas Grub. (1992). *Dose of Emptiness: An Annotated Translation of the Stong Thun Chen Mo of Mkhas Grub Dge Legs Dpal Bzang*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Nāgārjuna

Hahn, M. (1982). *Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī, vol 1. The Basis Texts (Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese)*. Bonn: Indica et Tibetica Verlag.

Hopkins, J. (1998, 2007). *Buddhist advice for living and liberation: Nāgārjuna's Precious Garland*. Snow Lion.

Jamieson, R. C. (2000). *Nāgārjuna's Verses on the Great Vehicle and the Heart of Dependent Origination*. New York: Peter Lang.

Jones, R. H. (2010). *Nagarjuna, Buddhism's Most Important Philosopher: Plain English Translations and Summaries of Nagarjuna's Essential Philosophical Works*. New York: Jackson Square Books.

— (2012). *Indian Madhyamaka Buddhist Philosophy After Nagarjuna, Volume 2: Plain English Translations and Summaries of the Essential Works of Chandrakirti and Shantideva and Two Early Madhyamaka Critiques of God*. New York: Jackson Square Books.

- Lindtner, C. (1987). *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nagarjuna*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Loizzo, J. (2007). *Nagarjuna's Reason Sixty (Yuktisastika) with Candrakirti's Commentary (Yuktisastikavrtti)*. American Institute of Buddhist Studies.
- Nagarjuna (2014). *Precious Garland: Buddhist Approach to Life, Polity and Liberation*. (S. T. Ngulphu, Trans.) Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
- Santina, P. D. (2002). *Causality and Emptiness: The Wisdom of Nagarjuna*. Singapore: Buddhist Research Society.
- Siderits, M., & Katsura, S. (2013). *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mulamadhyamakakārikā*. Wisdom. (Sanskrit, English translation)
- Stcherbatsky, T. (1969). *Papers of Th. Stcherbatsky. Indian Studies Past and Present*. Calcutta. (pp. 3-16)
- Tola, F., & Dragonetti, C. (1995). *Nāgārjuna's Refutation of Logic (Nyāya): Vaidalyaprakarana*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Westerhoff, J. (2010). *The Dispeller of Disputes: Nagarjuna's Vighavyavartani*. Oxford University Press.
- Ye Shaoyong. (2011). *Zhungleunsong: Fanzanghan Hejiao, Daodu, Yizhu [Mulamadhyamakakārikā: New Editions of the Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese Versions, with Commentary and a Modern Chinese Translation.]* Shanghai: Zhongxi Book Company.
- Yonezawa, Y. (2008). “Vighavyāvartanī: Sanskrit transliteration and Tibetan translation”, *Journal of Naritasa Institute of Buddhist Studies* 31, 208-333.

Pliny the Elder

Pliny the Elder. (1942). *Natural History, Books 3-7*. (Loeb Classical Library ed., Vol. II). (H. Rackham, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

Plutarch

Plutarch. (1919). *Lives, VII, Demosthenes and Cicero. Alexander and Caesar*. (Loeb Classical Library ed.). (Bernadotte Perrin, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

Quintus Curtius

Quintus Curtius (1946a). *History of Alexander, Books 1-5*. (Loeb Classical Library ed., Vol. I). (J. C. Rolfe, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

— (1946b). *History of Alexander, Books 6-10*. (Loeb Classical Library ed., Vol. II). (J. C. Rolfe, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

Śāntaraksita

Jha, G. (1939). *The Tattvasangraha of Shantaraksita with the Commentary of Kamalashila*. (Jha, Trans.) Baroda.

Śāntideva

Śāntideva (1922). *Śikṣāsamuccaya, A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine*. (W. H. Cecil Bendall, Trans.) Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

— (1990). *Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra: Original Sanskrit text with English translation and exposition based on Prajñākaramati's Pañjikā*. Delhi: Aditya Prakashan

Shantideva (2001). *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. (Batchelor, Trans.) Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

Sextus Empiricus

Texts with English translation:

Sextus Empiricus (1933). *Works* (Loeb Classical Library ed., Vol. I). (R. G. Bury, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

— (1935). *Works* (Vol. II). (R. G. Bury, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

— (1936). *Works* (Loeb Classical Library ed., Vol. III). (R. G. Bury, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

— (1949). *Works* (Loeb Classical Library ed., Vol. IV). (R. G. Bury, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

Other translations:

— (1997). *Against the Ethicists*. (R. Bett, Ed.) Clarendon Press.

— (2005). *Against the Logicians*. (R. Bett, Ed.) Cambridge University Press.

— (2000). *Outlines of Scepticism*. (J. Annas, & J. Barnes, Eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

— (2012). *Against the Physicists*. (R. Bett, Ed.) Cambridge University Press.

Strabo

Strabo (1930). *Geography, Books 15-16*. (Loeb Classical Library ed.). (Horace Leonard Jones, Trans.) Harvard University Press.

Tāranātha

- Taranatha, J. (1970). *History of Buddhism in India*. (D. Chattopadhyaya, Ed., L. Chimpa, & A. Chattopadhyaya, Trans.) Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. (English translation)
- (2001). *dam pa'i chos rin po che 'phags pa'i yul du ji ltar dar ba'i tshul gsal bar ston pa dgos 'dod kun 'byung*. Delhi: Sherig Parkhang (Tibetan Cultural and Religious Publication Centre). (Tibetan text)
- (2007). *The Seven Instruction Lineages*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

Tripitaka

- Brough, J. (2001). *The Gāndhārī Dharmapada*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Chang, G. C. (1983). *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras*. New York: Pennsylvania State University, reprint (1991) Motilal Banarsidass.
- Clery, T. (. (1995). *Buddhist Yoga*. Shambhala.
- Keenan, J. P. (2000). *The Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning*. Numata Center for Buddhist Translation & Research.
- Mahāvamsa*. (1908). London: Pali Texts Society.
- Nanjio, B. (Ed.). (1923). *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*. Kyoto: Otani University Press.
- Porter, B. (2012). *The Lankavatara Sutra: Translation and Commentary*. Counterpoint.
- Powers, J. (. (1995). *Wisdom of the Buddha: Samdhinirmocana Sutra*. Dharma Publishing.
- Takakusu, J., & Watanabe, K. (Eds.). (1924-1932). *Taishō shinshu daizokyo*. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyo kankokai, Taishō 13-Showa 7. (Chinese Tripitaka)
- Yuyama, A. (Ed.). (1976). *Prajñā-pāramitā-ratna-guṇa-saṃcaya-gāthā (Sanskrit Recension A)*. Cambridge University Press.

Secondary literature

- عبدالحميد, م. (2007). *ابراهيم بن ادهم: شيخ الزاهدين وامام المتصوفين*. دار الهدى للتألف والنشر والتوزيع
- [i.e. `Abd al Hamīd, M. (2007). *Ibrāhīm bin Adham: Shaykh al Zāhidīn wa Imām al Mutaṣawwafīn*. Dār al Hudā l-al Ta'alluf wa al Nashr wa al Tawzī. In Arabic.]
- Allen, C. (2012). *Ashoka: The Search for India's Lost Emperor* (2013, Abacus ed.). Little, Brown.
- Arnold, D. (2005). *Buddhists, Brahmins and Belief: Epistemology in South Asian Philosophy of Religion*. Columbia University Press.
- Bagchi, P. C. (1946). “Krimiśa and Demetrius”, *Indian Historical Quarterly* 22, 81-91.
- Bailey, A. (2002). *Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonian Scepticism*. Oxford University Press.
- Barnes, J. (2007). *The Toils of Scepticism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Barua, B. (1921). *A History of Pre-Buddhistic Indian Philosophy*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

- Beckwith, C. I. (2012). *Warriors of the Cloisters: The Central Asian Origins of Science in the Medieval World*. Princeton University Press.
- Bett, R. (2000). *Pyrrho: His Antecedents and His Legacy*. Oxford University Press.
- Bonazzi, M. (2011). "A Pyrrhonian Plato? : again on Sextus on Aenesidemus on Plato", in D. E. Machuca (Ed.), *New Essays on Ancient Pyrrhonism* (pp. 11-26). Brill.
- Bronkhorst, J. (2009). *Buddhist Teaching in India*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Burnyeat, M. F. (1980). "Can the Sceptic Live His Scepticism?" in M. Schofield, M. Burnyeat, & J. Barnes (Eds.), *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Reprinted (1983) in M. Burnyeat (Ed.), *The Skeptical Tradition* (pp. 117-148). Berkeley: University of California.
- Burton, D. (1999). *Emptiness Appraised: A Critical Study of Nagarjuna's Philosophy*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Cabezón, J. I. (1991). *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*. State University of New York Press.
- Castagnoli, L. (2010). *Ancient Self-Refutation: The Logic and History of the Self-Refutation Argument from Democritus to Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chakrabarti, K. K. (2010). *Classical Indian Philosophy of Induction: The Nyaya Viewpoint*. Lexington Books.
- Chatterjee, D. (1977). "Scepticism and Indian Philosophy", *Philosophy East and West* 27, 195-209.
- Clark, S. R. (2013). *Ancient Mediterranean Philosophy: An Introduction*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Colledge, M. A. (1967). *The Parthians*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Conze, E. (1963). "Buddhist Philosophy and its European Parallels", *Philosophy East and West* 13, 9-23.
- Cowherds. (2011). *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*. Oxford University Press.
- Cozort, D. (1998). *Unique Tenets Of The Middle Way Consequence School*. Snow Lion.
- Delhey, M. (2006). "Views on Suicide in Buddhism: Some Remarks", in M. Zimmermann (Ed.), *Buddhism and Violence* (pp. 25-64). Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute.
- Dhammajoti, K. L. (2009). *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong.
- Dorje, W. (2008). *The Karmapa's Middle Way: Feast for the Fortunate*. (T. Dewar, Trans.) Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion.
- Dreyfus, G., & Garfield, J. L. (2011). "Madhyamaka and Classical Greek Skepticism", in Cowherds, *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy* (pp. 115-130). Oxford University Press.
- Duerlinger, J. (2013). *The Refutation of the Self in Indian Buddhism: Candrakīrti on the selflessness of persons*. Routledge.

- Duerr, H. P. (2011). *Die Fahrt der Argonauten*. Insel Verlag GmbH.
- Dumont, J.-P. (1972). *Le Scepticisme et le Phénomène*. Paris.
- Dunne, J. (2004). *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Elliot, C. (1957). *Hinduism and Buddhism*. London: Routledge and K. Paul.
- Flintoff, E. (1980). "Pyrrho and India", *Phronesis* 25 (2), 88-108.
- Fox, R. L. (1973). *Alexander the Great*. London: Allen Lane.
- Frede, M. (1984). "The Sceptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge", in R. Rorty, J. Schneewind & Q. Skinner (Eds.) *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* (pp. 255–278). Cambridge.
- Frenkian, A. M. (1957a). *Scepticismul Grec si Filosofia Indiana*. Bucharest.
- (1957b). "Sextus Empiricus and Indian Logic", *Philosophical Quarterly (India)* 30, 115-26.
- Fussman, G. (1993). "Ménandre l'Indo-grec ou Paul Demiéville revisité", *Journal Asiatique* 1-2, 61-138.
- Garfield, J. L. (1996). "Emptiness and positionlessness: Do the Mādhyamika relinquish all views?" *Journal of Indian Philosophy and Religion* 1, 1-34.
- & Priest, G. (2002). "Nāgārjuna and the Limits of Thought", in J. L. Garfield (Ed.), *Empty Words* (pp. 86-105). Oxford University Press.
- Ghosh, B. (2006). *Linguistic Introduction to Sanskrit*. Delhi: Cosmo Publications.
- Gomez, L. O. (1976). "Protomādhyamaka in the Pali Canon", *Philosophy East and West* 26, 137-65.
- Graves, R. (1955). *The Greek Myths*. Penguin.
- Hadot, Pierre. (2004). *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* Belknap Press.
- Hankinson, R. J. (1995). *The Sceptics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hayes, R. P. (1988). *Dignaga on the Interpretation of Signs*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Huber, T. (2008). *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Re-invention of Buddhist India*. University of Chicago Press.
- Jacobi, H. (1911). *The Dates of the Philosophical Sutras of the Brahmans*. Gorgias Press.
- Karttunen, K. (1997). *India and the Hellenistic World*. (Studia Orientalia, edited by the Finnish Oriental Society, 83) Helsinki: Finnmarks.
- Köppl, H. I. (2008). *Establishing Appearances as Divine: Rongzom Chözang on Reasoning, Madhyamaka, and Purity*. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications.
- Kuzminski, A. (2008). *Pyrrhonism: How the Ancient Greeks Reinvented Buddhism*. Lexington Books.
- Lamotte, É. (1954). "Sur la formation de Mahāyāna", in U. Schneider (Ed.), *Asiatica* (pp. 377-96). Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz.
- (1958). *L'histoire du bouddhisme indien, des origines à l'ère Saka*. Louvain: Institut Orientaliste.

- Lévi, S. (1912). (note). *Journal Asiatique* 1, 622.
- Liu, X. (1997). *Ancient India and Ancient China*. Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks.
- Lopez, D. S. (2007). *The Madman's Middle Way: Reflections on Reality of the Tibetan monk Gendun Chopel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lyonnet, B. (2012). “Questions on the Date of the Hellenistic Pottery from Central Asia (Ai Khanoum, Marakanda and Koktepe)”, *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia* 18, 143-173.
- Machuca, D. E. (2011). “Moderate Ethical Realism in Sextus' 'Against the Ethicists'?” in *New Essays on Ancient Pyrrhonism* (pp. 143-78). Leiden: Brill.
- Marchand, S. (2011). “Sextus Empiricus' Style of Writing”, in D. E. Machuca (Ed.), *New Essays in Ancient Pyrrhonism* (pp. 113-142). Leiden: Brill.
- Marshall, J. (1918). *Guide to Taxila*. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing.
- Mathes, K. D. (2003). “Blending the Sūtras with the Tantras: The influence of Maitrīpa and his circle on the formation of Sūtra Mahāmudrā in the Kagyu Schools”, in *Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis: Studies in its Formative Period, 900–1400 (Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies)*. Oxford University Press.
- McClintock, S. (2010). *Omniscience and the Rhetoric of Reason: Santaraksita and Kamalasila on Rationality, Argumentation, and Religious Authority*. Wisdom Publications.
- McCrinkle, J. W. (1893). *The Invasion of India by Alexander the Great, as described by Arrian, Quintus Curtius, Diodorus, Plutarch and Justin*.
- McEvelley, T. (1981). “Early Greek philosophy and Madhyamaka”, *Philosophy East and West* 31 (2), 141-64.
- (1982). “Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka”, *Philosophy East and West* 32, 3-35.
- (2002). *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*. New York: Allworth Press.
- Monier-Williams. (1920). *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press.
- Murti, T. R. (1955). *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Madhyamaka System*. New York: Macmillan.
- Narain, A. K. (1957). *The Indo-Greeks*. Oxford University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (1994). *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Parker, G. (2008). *The Making of Roman India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pelden, K. (2010). *The Nectar of Manjushri's Speech: A Detailed Commentary on Shantideva's Way of the Bodhisattva*. (Padmakara, Trans.) Shambhala Publications.
- Pellegrin, P. (2010). “Sextus Empiricus”, in R. Bett (Ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism* (pp. 120-142). Cambridge University Press.
- Pesala, B. (Ed.). (2009). *The Debate of King Milinda: an Abridgement of the Milinda Pañha* (2nd revised ed.). Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

- Pettit, J. W. (2002). *Mipham's Beacon of Certainty: Illuminating the View of Dzogchen, the Great Perfection*. Wisdom Publications.
- Piantelli, A. B. (1978). "Possibili elementi indiana nella formazione nella pensiero di Pirrone di Elide", *Filosofia* 29, 135-164.
- Popkin, R. (1979). *The history of scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Priault, O. d. (1873). *The Indian Travels of Apollonius of Tyana and the Indian Embassies*. London.
- Ramanan, K. V. (1966). *Nagarjuna's Philosophy*. Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle.
- Rinpoche, P. (1998). *Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Altamira Press.
- Robert, L. (1968). "De Delphes à l'Oxus, inscriptions grecques nouvelles de la Bactriane", *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 112 (3), 416-57.
- Roerich, G. N. (2007). *The Blue Annals*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Ruegg, D. S. (1990). "On the Authorship of Some Works Ascribed to Bhavaviveka/Bhavya", in D. S. Ruegg & L. Schmithausen (Eds.), *Earliest Buddhist and Madhyamaka* (pp. 61-71). New York: E. J. Brill.
- (2010). *The Buddhist Philosophy of the Middle: Essays on Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka*. Wisdom.
- Sagar, K. C. (1992). *Foreign Influence on Ancient India*. New Delhi: Northern Book Centre.
- Santina, P. D. (1986). "The Madhyamaka and Modern Western Philosophy", *Philosophy East and West* 36, 41-54.
- Scerrato, U. (1958). "An inscription of Aśoka discovered in Afghanistan: The bilingual Greek-Aramaic of Kandahar", *East and West* 9, 4-6.
- Siderits, M., & O'Brien, J. D. (1976). "Zeno and Nagarjuna on motion", *Philosophy East and West* 26, 281-99.
- Sircar, D. C. (1967). *The Inscriptions of Asoka*. Faridabad: Government of India Press.
- (1971). *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Mediaeval India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Stough, C. L. (1969). *Greek Skepticism: a Study in Epistemology*. University of California Press.
- Strong, J. S. (1983). *The Legend of King Aśoka: a Translation and Study of the Aśokāvadāna*. Princeton University Press.
- Svavarsson, S. H. (2010). "Pyrrho and early Pyrrhonism", in R. Bett (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism* (pp. 36-57). Cambridge University Press.
- Tarn, W. W. (1948). *Alexander the Great*. Cambridge University Press.
- (1951). *The Greeks in Bactria and India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Thapar, R. (1997). *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (2nd ed.). Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- Thompson, G. (2005). "On Thomas McEvilley: A Postmodern Pyrrhonist", *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 9 (1-3), 45-58.
- Thorsrud, H. (2009). *Ancient Scepticism*. Acumen.
- (2011). "Sextus Empiricus on Skeptical Piety", in D. E. Machuca (Ed.), *New Essays on Ancient Pyrrhonism* (pp. 91-112). Leiden: Brill.
- Tillemans, T. (1984). "Two Tibetan texts on the 'neither one nor many' argument for śūnyatā", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 12, 357-388.
- Tuck, A. P. (1990). *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nagarjuna*. Oxford University Press.
- Viśākhadatta. (2005). *Rākṣasa's Ring*. (M. Coulson, Trans.) Clay Sanskrit Library, New York University Press.
- Walleser, M. (1923). *The Life of Nāgārjuna from Tibetan and Chinese Sources*. Nag Publishers.
- Walser, J. (2005). *Nāgārjuna in Context: Mahāyāna Buddhism and Early Indian Culture*. Columbia University Press. Reprinted 2008, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Watters, T. (1904). *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*. London: Royal Asiatic Society.
- West, M. L. (2009). *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*. Oxford University Press.
- Westerhoff, J. (2009). *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka*. Oxford University Press.
- Wharton, E. R. (1882). *Etyma Graeca: Etymological Lexicon of Classical Greek*. Chicago: Ares Publishers.
- Wood, T. E. (1994). *Nāgārjunian Disputations. A Philosophical Journey through an Indian Looking-glass*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Woodruff, P. (1988). Aporetic Pyrrhonism. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 6, 139-68.