

**BENEATH THE BODHI:
NĀGĀRJUNA AND HUME
IN CONVERSATION**

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NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

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IN CONVERSATION**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously



David Premsharan
14 August 2017

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Summary

This thesis is intended primarily as a comparative dialogue between Nāgārjuna and Hume. The Nāgārjunian programme has generally been cast as a sceptical enterprise, due in no small part to the surface-level similarities it shares with Hume's sceptical programme. The central aim of this thesis will be to distance Nāgārjuna from scepticism, and to contend that he should be considered an anti-realist instead. I begin with the ground-clearing task of identifying the markers by which Hume is considered a sceptic, and attempt to establish how Nāgārjuna does not fulfil these criteria. I then introduce an anti-realist reading of Nāgārjuna that evades many of the difficulties generated by the sceptical reading, and is consistent with the contextual and soteriological features of the Nāgārjunian programme. This interpretation will be concerned primarily with Nāgārjuna's employment of the *catuṣkoṭi* (tetralemma). In the final chapter, I close by placing Hume and Nāgārjuna (interpreted now as an anti-realist) back into dialogical space, with *conventions* serving as the fulcrum of the comparison. The task here is to establish that a philosophically productive dialogue between the two need not operate on sceptical axes, and that the anti-realist reading of Nāgārjuna has considerable comparative potential.

Introduction

General Aims and Structure

Nāgārjuna's commitments in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* ('Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way') and the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* ('Dispeller of Disputes') have been the subject of an inordinate number of interpretations and hermeneutic analyses in contemporary scholarship.¹ Taking stock of the sheer range of these interpretations, Ruegg notes that "over the past half century the doctrine of the Madhyamaka school, and in particular that of Nāgārjuna, has been variously described as nihilism, monism, irrationalism, misology, agnosticism, scepticism, criticism, dialectic, mysticism, acosmicism, absolutism, relativism, nominalism and linguistic analysis with therapeutic value."² This diversity may be considered a testament to the malleability of Madhyamaka thought or indeed, an appraisal of the fracas that is the current state of scholarship on all matters Madhyamaka. What I take the overarching moral of Ruegg's (deliberately prolix) catalogue to be however, is the fact that a developing contemporary commentarial tradition has emerged, and that Madhyamaka scholarship is seen as overlapping with multiple live topics in philosophy more generally. This thesis should be considered a modest contribution to this tradition, and is concerned with explicating particular features of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*

¹ The translations of the titles are taken from Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Translation and Commentary of Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), and Jan Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes: Nāgārjuna's Vigrahavyāvartanī*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). These are also the translations of the two texts that I will be using throughout this thesis unless otherwise stated.

² David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, Vol. 7, (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1981), 2.

in the contemporary idiom while maintaining textual fidelity, and guarding against interpretations that misrepresent these features.

One reading of Nāgārjuna in particular, has gained significant valence in Madhyamaka scholarship; namely that Nāgārjuna is a sceptic concerned with questions regarding truth and epistemic justification for beliefs. A considerable portion of evidence in favour of this reading is comparative in nature, with parallels between Hume and Nāgārjuna functioning as key drivers for the construction and continued defense of this particular interpretation. While there is a general tendency in contemporary Madhyamaka scholarship to ascribe a shared set of commitments and philosophical grammar to both Madhyamikas³ and a range of figures as diverse as “Kant, Hume, Wittgenstein, James, and Derrida”, I contend that it is primarily through comparisons with Hume, that the sceptical reading is buttressed.⁴ Garfield in particular draws on certain ostensible similarities between Hume and Nāgārjuna in order to place them both side by side in a cross-cultural ‘sceptical family’ that counts among its members: Hume, Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, Sextus, Pyrrho, Wittgenstein, Kripke and Tsong Khapa.⁵ It is my contention, that the sceptical interpretation is textually and methodologically deficient; and that the attempt to utilize parallels with Hume in order to motivate this reading of Nāgārjuna, involves an arbitrary dislocation of the Nāgārjunian corpus from its context and an illegitimate (or at least, misguided) imposition of a Humean conceptual scheme onto Nāgārjuna. I also argue that

³ The term ‘Madhyamika’ refers to a proponent or practitioner of Madhyamaka Buddhism

⁴ John Schroeder, “Nāgārjuna and the Doctrine of “Skillful Means””, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (October 2000), 559

⁵ Jay L. Garfield, “Epoche and Śūnyatā: Skepticism East and West”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (July 1990)

once Nāgārjuna is extricated from this perceived resemblance to Hume, he is more rightly considered an anti-realist.

Accordingly, this thesis has three major aims; 1) To distance the Nāgārjunian programme from scepticism, 2) To argue that Nāgārjuna is best interpreted as an anti-realist, and 3) To re-assemble Hume and Nāgārjuna in dialogical space, and use the anti-realist interpretation of Nāgārjuna to clarify certain aspects in Hume's epistemology. These three aims correspond to the three substantive chapters in this thesis. In Chapter 1, I broach the Hume-Nāgārjuna comparison in a ground-clearing capacity; that is, to show that Nāgārjuna is dissimilar to Hume in important ways and that Nāgārjuna cannot be considered a sceptic in the same way that Hume is. In Chapter 2, I attempt to construct a viable anti-realist interpretation of Nāgārjuna that can make use of a wider range of both textual support and contextual features, in which the internal difficulties associated with the sceptical reading do not emerge, and which does not resort to methodological gerrymandering of the sort discussed above. I then return to the Hume-Nāgārjuna comparison in a constructive capacity in Chapter 3, and attempt to show how certain features of the anti-realist interpretation may enable us to clarify certain aspects in Hume's epistemology; namely, the role of conventions in justification. The goal of this constructive comparison in Chapter 3 is to demonstrate the comparative potential of the anti-realist reading, and the possibility of dialogue between Hume and Nāgārjuna that is methodologically more robust, and considers both participants on their own terms. As such, the possibility of comparative dialogue between Hume and Nāgārjuna that does not pivot on sceptical axes

but rather on the role of conventions in both their programmes may be established.

On Comparison

Edward Conze, in “Spurious Parallels to Buddhist Philosophy”, contends that any seemingly apparent congruence between Humean and Buddhist thought is “merely deceptive”, given the fact that Hume “had a different purpose” and “a different set of adversaries in mind” from his Buddhist counterparts.⁶ Conze further states that “in different contexts two identical negative statements [referring here to Hume’s no-self doctrine and the Buddhist *anātman*] may, therefore, have nothing in common”, given their contextual and functional orientations.⁷ In light of these links to both context and purpose, Conze “holds out little hope for comprehensive interchange between East and West in philosophy” and asserts that “the time has now come to abandon it.”⁸

While I do *not* accept Conze’s ultimate assessment of both the possibility and value of comparative philosophy, the concerns that his diagnosis apprehends are, I think, certainly valuable and can serve as an appropriate starting point for the arrangement of the methodological framework that will inform the substantive enterprise of this thesis. What I take Conze’s central concern with the project of comparative philosophy to be, is the arbitrary or perhaps even purposeful dislocation of a particular segment

⁶ Edward Conze, “Spurious Parallels to Buddhist Philosophy”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 13, No.2 (January 1963), 106; L. Stafford Betty, “The Buddhist-Humean Parallels: Postmortem”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (July 1971), 251

⁷ Conze, “Spurious Parallels to Buddhist Philosophy”, 113

⁸ Betty, “The Buddhist-Humean Parallels: Postmortem”, 251; Conze, “Spurious Parallels to Buddhist Philosophy”, 113

of a larger system from the overall enterprise of that system and its underpinnings. Post-dislocation, these segments are re-employed in a common philosophical grammar that is supposedly “free from all tradition.”⁹ However, as both Mohanty and Gadamer are quick to remind us, if the proponent of this form of comparison alleges to be free from the respective traditions of her chosen *comparata*, she will still be operating “within a new tradition, for example, the tradition of (modern) rationalism.”¹⁰ This is to say that the procedure of dislocation and re-employment invariably involves the “(imposition) of an alien conceptual framework on another tradition”, which often leads to the distortion or mischaracterization of the particular segments that were dislocated to begin with.¹¹ It is from these anxieties that Conze concludes that the comparative enterprise is not a worthwhile endeavour.

I concede that Conze is legitimated in identifying the arbitrary imposition of one conceptual framework over another as an error. But in concluding the diagnosis there, it may be held that Conze commits the “complementary error (of) extreme contextualism, under which *any* attempt to note broad thematic similarities across cultures (is) condemned as an unacceptable distortion of meaning uprooted from the surrounding web of belief and practice.”¹² On Conze’s appraisal, any *comparata* of sufficiently distinct provenance and possessed of different objectives would have to be jettisoned as incommensurable. I contend that this extreme parochialism is untenable, simply given the fact that there are numerous examples of comparative

⁹ J.N. Mohanty, “A Fragment of the Indian Philosophical Tradition – Theory of Pramana”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 38, No.3 (July 1983), 251

¹⁰ Mohanty, “A Fragment of the Indian Philosophical Tradition”, 251

¹¹ David Wong, “Comparative Philosophy” in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Antonio S. Cua (Routledge, 2003), 54

¹² *Ibid.*, (emphasis mine)

endeavours that manage to articulate thematic similarities in a manner that acknowledges the underpinnings of the particular segments they utilize, and “seize (these segments) in an authentically creative manner”, generating original philosophical discourse that does *not* countermand their respective traditions or underpinnings.¹³ To deny this form of comparative philosophy legitimacy and to insist on incommensurability is to commit this second, complementary error. The possibility of comparative philosophy then is not foreclosed by Conze’s diagnosis. Rather it consists, as David Wong notes, in operating “somewhere between these two errors.”¹⁴

In operating *between* these errors, the task of the comparatist may reasonably include first correcting the comparative endeavours that are operating *in* error. As the second kind of error forecloses on the possibility of substantive comparison altogether, and the comparative project itself already depends on the rejection of cross-traditional incommensurability, the errors to be corrected are usually of the first kind; that is, the error of illegitimate dislocation and subsequent recontextualization.¹⁵ For Balslev, the current practice of seizing desired elements of Indian philosophy in a creative manner and applying them to contemporary or Western problem sets, often involves interpreting through “imaginative manipulation an effigy of the ‘otherness’ of the other” from a vantage that is already laden with and informed by its own

¹³ Anindita N. Balslev, “Philosophy and Cross Cultural Conversation”, *Metaphilosophy*, Vol.28, No.4 (October 1997), 364. Prime examples of comparative work conducted in this manner include Daya Krishna’s “Apoha and Samavāya in Kantian Perspective” in *Contrary Thinking: Selected Essays Of Daya Krishna*, eds. Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield and Daniel Raveh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68-74 and Bina Gupta’s, *The Disinterested Witness: A Fragment of Advaita Vedanta Phenomenology* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ Wong, *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, 54

¹⁵ This is to say that, to engage in comparative philosophy, one would already have to have rejected cross-cultural incommensurability, thus affirming the *possibility* of the comparative enterprise.

specificity.¹⁶ As such, the resultant construal of the ‘other’ is distorted and prone to mischaracterization. The attendant corrective then, would involve “(letting) the ‘other’ speak and *then* to attempt to comprehend what is spoken – a process that must *precede* whatever the comparativist has to say about the two or more sets of ideas.”¹⁷ The corrective task of the comparativist is centred on the rejection of the mischaracterized ‘other’ and consists in paving the way for the ‘other’ to emerge intact with its “already achieved self-understanding.”¹⁸ This includes acknowledging the context, overall enterprise and *problemata* of the traditions respective to the desired elements of comparison. This ground-clearing task is meant to affirm the differences between respective conceptual schemes that desired *comparata* are operant in, allowing for more dextrous forms of comparison that do not lend themselves to Conze’s indictment.

It is precisely this corrective or ground-clearing task that will be the primary focus of the first chapter of this thesis, in which I reject Nāgārjuna’s placement in Garfield’s ‘sceptical family’. I will attempt to show that it is only through imposing a Humean schema onto Nāgārjunian thought, that Nāgārjuna can be considered a sceptic. In the final substantive chapter, I present a comparison between Hume and Nāgārjuna that, it is hoped, will not involve the difficulties that Balslev outlines, and which operates on the basis of conventions playing similar roles in both the Humean and Nāgārjunian programmes. The aim here is to present a comparative dialogue that does not involve arbitrary dislocation and recontextualization, and operates between

¹⁶ Balslev, “Philosophy and Cross Cultural Conversation”, 364

¹⁷ *Ibid.* (emphasis mine)

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Wong's twin 'errors'. As such, alongside my arguments in favour of reading Nāgārjuna as an anti-realist, an important aim of this thesis is the endorsement and demonstration of a methodologically more robust comparative dialogue.

On Interpretation

Before we begin the substantive enterprise of this thesis, it is necessary that some interpretive concerns are briefly addressed. On the Nāgārjunian front, I have elected to focus my interpretation largely on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*. These two texts, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* in particular, are considered foundational to the Madhyamaka school of Buddhism (of which Nāgārjuna is typically considered the founder), and form part of a larger oeuvre of core texts attributed to Nāgārjuna, which Westerhoff terms the 'Yukti-corpus'.¹⁹ The *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is also the only text in this corpus of which Nāgārjuna's authorship is not generally disputed.²⁰ While we cannot be absolutely certain of his authorship of the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, it is considered a companion-work to the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and espouses a philosophical position that is consistent with, and clarifies many features discussed in the former text.²¹ These two texts also provide material that is particularly germane to my goals in this thesis. My focus on them should not be interpreted as a muting of conflicting elements presented in the other texts

¹⁹ Jan Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

²⁰ A.K. Warder, "Is Nāgārjuna a Mahāyānist?", *The Problem of Two Truths in Buddhism and Vedānta*, ed. Mervin Sprung, (Boston: Reidel, 1973), 78–88.

²¹ Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes*, 3

which form the ‘Yukti-corpus’, as they all “expound a single, coherent philosophical system.”²²

The circumscription of my reading of Nāgārjuna to these core texts is also due to the fact that there are several interpretive controversies arising from later doxographical distinctions that I wish to set aside in service of my purposes here. Chief among these is the distinction between the Svātantrika and Prasāṅgika sub-schools of Madhyamaka.²³ While considering my analysis of Nāgārjuna here in light of later commentarial and doxographical stances would indeed be a worthwhile task, I contend that it would detract from the comparative goals of this thesis, which are concerned with facilitating a dialogue between Hume and Nāgārjuna. Accordingly, my analysis of Nāgārjuna and my reference to Madhyamaka should be seen as emerging from the two foundational texts, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (henceforth MMK) and the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (henceforth VHV).²⁴

In the following chapters, I also emphasize the more soteriological features of Nāgārjuna’s programme, and how they intersect with the overtly philosophical elements of his thought. This emphasis includes my discussion of the Buddha’s Silence and skill-in-means (*upāya-kauśalya*). By the ‘soteriological’ here, I mean the concern for the attainment of the broader Buddhist salvific goals of the cessation of *duḥkha* (suffering) and the liberation from *saṃsāra* (cyclic rebirth). To this end, I have employed the reading of relevant texts outside the Nāgārjunian corpus, including the

²² Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka*, 6

²³ For a fuller discussion of this distinction, see Nathan Katz, “An appraisal of the Svatantrika-Prasangika debates”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 26, no.3 (July 1976), 253-267

²⁴ The abbreviations ‘MMK’ and ‘VHV’ will be used throughout this thesis

Majjima-Nikāya ('Middle Length Discourses') and the *Milinda Pañha* ('The Questions of King Milinda').²⁵ As this thesis assumes limited familiarity with Nāgārjuna and Madhyamaka, the incorporation of these texts would help to characterize Nāgārjuna as a specifically Buddhist thinker and clarify his aims within the context of the Madhyamaka and wider Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions. The core concepts in Madhyamaka Buddhism, namely: *śūnyatā* (emptiness), *svabhāva* (reified essence), the *catuṣkoṭi* (tetralemma), *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent co-origination), the Two-Truths Doctrine and the No-Thesis View are discussed where relevant.

On the Humean front, it should be noted here that my interpretation is largely centred on the comparative dialogue I facilitate between Hume and Nāgārjuna. Accordingly, it is not my intention or place in this thesis, to provide solutions to longstanding interpretive difficulties such as the 'integration problem' or the debate between the between the sceptical-realist Hume of recent scholarship (the 'new Hume') and the non-sceptical anti-realist Hume of traditional interpretations (the 'old Hume').²⁶ My decision to draw on material from both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries* to motivate my interpretation of Hume will be addressed in Chapter 3, where it is relevant.²⁷ It should also be noted that in Chapter 1, where I distance Nāgārjuna from

²⁵ V. Trenkner and R. Chalmers, eds., *Majjima-Nikāya*, (London: Pali Text Society, 1948-1951); T.W Rhys Davids, trans., *The Questions of King Milinda* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1890-1894). Reprint, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1965)

²⁶ See Philip D. Cummins, "Hume's Diffident Skepticism", *Hume Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 and 2, (April/November 1999), 43-65, for a discussion of the 'integration problem'; and Peter Kail, "Is Hume a Realist or an Anti-Realist", in *A Companion to Hume*, ed. Elizabeth S. Radcliffe, (Blackwell, 2008), 441-456, for a summary of the distinction between the 'old' and 'new' Hume.

²⁷ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds., David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998)

Humean scepticism and object to this placement in the sceptical family, I do not defend or critique Garfield's interpretation of Hume and my concern is only to explain Garfield's placement of Hume in the sceptical family. With the methodological and interpretive caveats now addressed, we may proceed with the substantive enterprise of this thesis.

Chapter One: Sceptical Siblings?: A Comparative Appraisal of Hume and Nāgārjuna

Introductory Remarks

In this, the first of three substantive chapters in this thesis, I attempt to distance Nāgārjuna from scepticism and establish that any interpretation that is concerned with fidelity to the Nāgārjunian textual corpus cannot treat Madhyamaka itself as a sceptical enterprise. As discussed previously, the sceptical interpretation is based in large part, on viewing the Nāgārjunian programme as having similar characteristics and objectives to other sceptics – Hume, in particular. Accordingly, the central problem I will be responding to in this chapter is Garfield’s grouping of various sceptical approaches into a neat family centred on the following organizing principle adapted from Kripke:

“A *skeptical* solution of a philosophical problem begins...by conceding that the skeptic’s negative assertions are unanswerable. Nevertheless our ordinary practice or belief is justified because—contrary appearances notwithstanding—it need not require the justification the skeptic has shown to be untenable.”²⁸

Garfield’s ‘sceptical family’ united around this Kripkean attitude, counts among its members; Hume, Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, Sextus, Pyrrho, Tsongkhapa, and Wittgenstein.²⁹ I will argue that Nāgārjuna does not belong in this particular grouping. I contend that the placement of Nāgārjuna in the

²⁸ Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 66-67, as quoted in Jay L. Garfield, *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6

²⁹ Jay L. Garfield, “Epoche and Śūnyatā: Skepticism East and West”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (July 1990)

sceptical family is due to the same sort of erroneous comparative praxis which we have seen Balslev and Conze apprehend in their critiques; that is, comparison that manipulates the desired elements of another tradition, that involves both an imposition of an alien conceptual scheme and a distortion of the elements themselves. I will attempt to highlight *how* Madhyamaka is a non-sceptical enterprise, through a comparison with relevant elements present in Hume. Note that it is not within the scope of this chapter to problematize the grouping as a whole or Hume's placement within it. Rather, my aim will be to establish that Nāgārjuna is not a member of Garfield's sceptical family by emphasizing how Nāgārjuna differs from *one* of its members, Hume, in important ways. Highlighting the differences between Nāgārjuna and Hume will involve close attention to the structural, contextual, and soteriological features of Nāgārjunian thought that will, it is hoped, allow the 'other' to "emerge intact with its already achieved self-understanding", and motivate the case for this comparison of Hume and Nāgārjuna to be jettisoned in favour of more nuanced comparisons.³⁰

This chapter is structured as follows: 1) in the following section, I lay out the issue I am responding to in full, providing a concise outline of Garfield's 'sceptical family', and through appraising Garfield's reading of Nāgārjuna and Hume, identify the reasons that underpin the placement of Hume and Nāgārjuna within the same grouping. It must be noted that some familiarity with Hume is assumed and as such, this section will proceed without extensive groundwork on the Humean front. I will argue that

³⁰ Anindita N. Balslev, "Philosophy and Cross Cultural Conversation", *Metaphilosophy*, Vol.28, No.4 (October 1997), 364. A constructive comparison of this kind will be taken up in earnest in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

membership in the group is informed by two criteria: first, that the members are concerned with developing a form of *therapy* against extreme or dogmatic views, and that these therapeutic ends are to be achieved through the application of sceptical arguments; and second, that this scepticism results in a *deference to the conventional*. 2) Having discussed the problem at hand, I offer my argument intended to establish that Humean and Nāgārjunian thought may *not* be considered complementary sceptical systems. The argument rests on the *structural incongruity* between the Humean vulgar-philosophical divide and Two-Truths of Madhyamaka, and is aimed at establishing that Madhyamaka as an enterprise is *non-sceptical* and that Nāgārjuna does not meet the two criteria for membership in the ‘sceptical family’. 3) I then conclude this chapter with some interpretive and methodological observations concerning the soteriological dimensions of Nāgārjuna’s programme.

1.1 The Sceptical Family³¹

The idea that Nāgārjuna may be placed in alignment with Hume along sceptical axes has gained considerable valence in comparative literature, with Matilal and Garfield among others, classifying Madhyamaka as a sceptical enterprise in the same vein as Hume and Sextus.³² Garfield in particular, in “Epoche and Śūnyata: Skepticism East and West” and *Empty Words*, stresses the sceptical character of Madhyamaka, assembling “a large cross-cultural

³¹ The term ‘sceptical family’ is used by Dreyfus, in Georges Dreyfus, “Can a Madhyamika be a Skeptic?” in *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*, eds., ‘The Cowherds’ (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), to characterize Garfield’s grouping of the aforementioned figures as ‘sceptics’.

³² See Bimal Krishna Matilal’s discussion of Nāgārjuna’s scepticism in relation to Hume and Sextus in Bimal Krishna Matilal, *Logical and Ethical Issues: An Essay on Indian Philosophy of Religion* (Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2004), and his discussion of Classical Indian Skepticism more generally in *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

sceptical family” which includes Hume and Nāgārjuna, among other prominent sceptics.³³ This section will be concerned with delineating Garfield’s conception of scepticism and reconstructing his employment of elements present in Humean and Nāgārjunian thought that inform their placement in the sceptical family. As noted above, I will not be defending or critiquing Garfield’s interpretation of Hume in this chapter, but will be concerned only with reconstructing and explicating Garfield’s treatment of Hume as a member of the sceptical family *tout court*.

As introduced at the outset of this chapter, Garfield’s sceptical family is united around a Kripkean attitude, which posits that the ‘skeptics negative assertions are unanswerable’, and that the solution is “to grant the point that our notions are unfounded.”³⁴ This then allows us to abstain from the pursuit of justificatory grounding, freeing us to consider “ordinary practice or belief (as) justified” precisely because it “need not require the justification the skeptic has shown to be untenable.”³⁵ That is to say that through the application of sceptical arguments, the possibility that justified belief may be foreclosed to us is made clear. This negative phase of the sceptical programme allows for its “constructive agenda” to emerge, “in which we are justified in using notions such as self, substance, and goodness as forensic devices or as conventional truths, that is, as making sense within the framework of our socially embedded practices.”³⁶ This is simply to say that in allowing for the

³³ Garfield, “Epoche and Śūnyatā: Skepticism East and West”, 285-307; *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Dreyfus, “Can a Madhyamika be a Skeptic?”, 93

³⁴ Dreyfus, “Can a Madhyamika be a Skeptic?”, 93

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Dreyfus, “Can a Madhyamika be a Skeptic?”, 93

suspense of rational enquiry, sceptical assertions allow for deference to the conventional or ordinary.

For Garfield, this freedom *from* the pursuit of justificatory criteria or grounding, and the freedom *to* proceed conventionally have *therapeutic* ends insofar as it is a remedy for extreme or dogmatic views.³⁷ The extreme views referred to here are namely, *reificationism*; that is, the view that there exists some mind-independent reality composed of substantive entities that exists over and above conventionality, and to which our beliefs refer to; and *nihilism* which involves the “philosophical denial of the existence of that which -at least in some sense- clearly exists, or more accurately of the warrant of what are in fact clearly warranted claims.”³⁸ While the reificationist asserts that beliefs are referential, denoting expressions that pick out something that is “ultimately real”, the nihilist “(denies) that any of our statements about external objects...are true or warranted, or that one can make sense of any of the practices associated with such beliefs.”³⁹ The sceptical remedy then, consists in adopting a *moderate* position that enables us to reject the commitments of the reificationist, but prevents our descent into nihilism through deference to the conventional.

³⁷ Garfield, “Epoche and Śūnyatā: Skepticism East and West”, 287

³⁸ Ibid., 288

³⁹ Ibid., 295

Hume's Membership in the Sceptical Family

On the Humean front, I contend that Garfield utilizes the discussion of two sceptical strategies present in Book I of the *Treatise* and Section 12 of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* to present the Humean sceptical programme as 'moderate'. The sceptical strategies in question here are, in Fogelin's parlance, *argumentative* scepticism and genealogical or *genetic* scepticism.⁴⁰ The argumentative strategy basically consists in presenting arguments intended to establish that some class of beliefs is not amenable to rational justification. This is to say that the application of sceptical arguments to particular entities of phenomena, the self or causality for example, would yield the conclusion that no sound arguments underpin our beliefs in them, due to the fact "that no such sound argument exists."⁴¹ This strategy encompasses the more notable aspects of Hume's overall enterprise, including scepticism as regards induction, the external world and the self.⁴² Following Fogelin, I have assembled two central arguments: The Regression Argument and The Diminution Argument, which are meant to diminish confidence in our beliefs.⁴³ They are as follows:

⁴⁰ Robert J. Fogelin, "Hume's Scepticism", in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, 2nd edition, eds., David Fate Norton, and Jacqueline Taylor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 212

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 213

⁴² *Ibid.*, 212

⁴³ Fogelin, "Hume's Scepticism", 222-223

The Regression Argument

1. “In every judgment, which we can form concerning probability, as well as concerning knowledge, we ought always to correct the first judgment, deriv’d from the nature of the object, by another judgment, deriv’d from the nature of the understanding.”
2. “As demonstration is subject to the controul of probability, so is probability liable to a new correction by a reflex act of the mind, wherein the nature of our understanding, and our reasoning from the first probability become our objects” (*Treatise* 1.4.1.5).⁴⁴

The Diminution Argument

1. Having thus found in every probability, beside the original uncertainty inherent in the subject, a new uncertainty deriv’d from the weakness of that faculty, which judges, and having adjusted these two together, we are oblig’d by our reason to add a new doubt deriv’d from the possibility of error in the estimation we make of the truth and fidelity of our faculties.”
2. “No finite object can subsist under a decrease repeated in infinitum; and even the vastest quantity, which can enter into human imagination, must in this manner be reduc’d to nothing.”
3. Thus, “all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence” (*Treatise* 1.4.1.6).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 122

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 122

This strategy ultimately results in an attempt to ground doxastic life not in the reflective space of the philosophical modality, but in the customary or habitually driven vulgar.⁴⁶ Hume notes that the principle by which we arbitrate between beliefs is given by the propensity of custom or habit. As we see in the first *Enquiry*, Hume states that “without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding; we always say, that this propensity is the effect of Custom.”⁴⁷

The genealogical strategy, by contrast, consists in an empirical investigation that is “consequent to science and enquiry”, of the mechanisms that give rise to these beliefs in the first place.⁴⁸ The investigation reveals the inadequacy of these mechanisms, and we are forced to conclude that the beliefs themselves arise from ‘disreputable provenance’.⁴⁹ Hume states the following with regards to this second strategy:

“There is another species of scepticism, consequent to science and enquiry, when men are supposed to have discovered, either the absolute fallaciousness of their mental faculties, or their unfitness to reach any fixed determination in all those curious subjects of speculation, about which they are commonly employed. Even our very senses are brought into dispute, by a certain species of philosophers; and the maxims of common life are subjected to the same doubt as the

⁴⁶ Fogelin, “Hume’s Scepticism”, 220

⁴⁷ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 32

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 110; sustained treatment of the inadequacy and unreliability of our faculties is also present in ‘Of Scepticism with regard to Reason’ (*Treatise*, 1.4.1).

⁴⁹ Fogelin, “Hume’s Scepticism”, 212

most profound principles or conclusions of metaphysics and theology.”⁵⁰

Where the argumentative strategy is aimed at establishing that our beliefs do not in fact rest on sound arguments, the genealogical strategy attempts to call our methods of belief-formation into doubt. As such, there is what Fogelin terms a ‘double movement’ in Hume’s sceptical programme.⁵¹ If one were to employ only the argumentative strategy one would have succeeded only insofar as establishing that our beliefs cannot be arrived at through argumentation or ratiocination.⁵² For the sceptical force of Hume’s programme to emerge, and for the possibility of rational justification to be foreclosed, one would have to apprehend the faculties that are involved in production of belief. As such, both the arguments against our beliefs (the argumentative strategy) and the arguments against the validity of the means by which these beliefs are produced (the genealogical strategy) are aggregative, and should be taken together for the full force of his sceptical programme to be exhibited.

On Garfield’s interpretation, what emerges from this negative phase of Hume’s skeptical programme is an approach that requires us to abandon the pursuit of rational justification, but still allows for some conventional justification for our practices. It is this particular species of scepticism comprising both the argumentative and genetic strategies in the negative phase, and the deference to the conventional in the positive phase, which Garfield characterizes as ‘moderate’ and thus in the same vein as the other

⁵⁰ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 110

⁵¹ Fogelin, *Hume’s Scepticism*, 213

⁵² *Ibid.*

members of the skeptical family.⁵³ The constructive agenda that emerges from this moderate remedy or therapy consists in acknowledging the radical doubt that is generated by the skeptical strategies (recall the Kripkean contention that the “skeptics negative assertions are unanswerable”), and proceeding to defer instead to ‘daily practice and experience’ and surrender to ‘natural’ or vulgar instinct. The interface between the negative and constructive phases of Hume’s skeptical programme is articulated in the first *Enquiry* as follows:

“[A] species of mitigated scepticism, which may be of advantage to mankind, and which may be the natural result of the Pyrrhonian doubts and scruples, is the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding...A correct Judgment observes a contrary method, and avoiding all distant and high enquiries, confines itself to common life, and to such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience. . . . To bring us to so salutary a determination, nothing can be more serviceable, than to be once thoroughly convinced of the force of the Pyrrhonian doubt, and of the impossibility, that anything, but the strong power of natural instinct, could free us from it.”⁵⁴

This species of skepticism allows for ‘therapeutic’ respite from the reificationist’s pursuit of rational justification for belief, by affirming that such justification is not forthcoming. It also prevents the descent into nihilism by emphasizing the deference to daily practice and experience. At this point, what should be observed from Garfield’s engagement with Hume, vis-à-vis, the

⁵³ Garfield, “Epoche and Śūnyatā: Skepticism East and West”, 298

⁵⁴ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 118

sceptical family, are 1) that the therapeutic ends of the sceptical programme, are to be achieved by deploying sceptical arguments, in order to inhabit a moderate position between extreme or dogmatic views; and 2) this moderate position involves deference to the conventional. Given that these are the criteria alleged to place Hume within dialogical reach of the Kripkean sceptical attitude through which the grouping itself is organized, it may be reasonably held that they are in fact the criteria for membership in Garfield's sceptical family.

Incorporating Nāgārjuna

Given these criteria, Garfield contends that there is a similar skeptical anatomy present in Nāgārjuna's programme that can in fact fulfill them, and grant Nāgārjuna membership in the skeptical family. On this analysis, the *catuskoṭi* (tetralemma) would perform the same functional role as the argumentative and genealogical skeptical strategies. The *catuskoṭi* is the particular discourse mode required to establish that the nature of all things is *śūnya* (empty) and thus lacking in *svabhāva* (reified essence), which is a core component of the Madhyamaka programme. This discourse typically takes the form of a tetralemma, which posits four possible categories; two of which are primary, and two, secondary.⁵⁵ The third and fourth operands of the tetralemma may be reduced to the conjunction and the negation of the conjunction of the first two operands respectively.⁵⁶ The four operands as regards some proposition *p* are as follows: 1) it is the case that *p*, 2) it is the case that not-*p*, 3) it is the case that both *p* and not-*p*, and lastly 4) it is the case

⁵⁵ Chandradhar Sharma, *The Advaita Tradition in Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 50

⁵⁶ Ibid.

that neither p nor not- p . Nāgārjuna then proceeds to *reject all four operands* to show p is an empty concept that cannot possess *svabhāva* or reified essence. Reified essence or *svabhāva* as apprehended by the Madhyamikas refers to a substantive ‘self-existence and permanence’, and is employed by Garfield as a parallel to the reificationist’s articulation of “substance”.⁵⁷

Note that establishing that some concept p cannot consist in any of the four operands *does not* entail the falsity or negation of p . It is simply to assert that p is empty of *svabhāva* (reified essence). For instance, if applied to the self, the matter of the MMK (18:1) is as follows:

If the self were the aggregates,

It would have arising and ceasing (as properties).

If it were different from the aggregates,

It would not have the characteristics of the aggregates (18:1)⁵⁸

We conclude that it is 1) not the case that the self is identical to its components (the aggregates), 2) it is not the case that the self is non-identical to its components, 3) it is not the case that the self is both identical and non-identical to its components and 4) it is not the case that the self is neither identical nor non-identical to its components.⁵⁹ Note that this fourfold

⁵⁷ Garfield, “Epoche and Śūnyatā: Skepticism East and West”, 289

⁵⁸ Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Translation and Commentary of Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 48

⁵⁹ For simplicity, I have used ‘components’ here in place of ‘aggregates’. The aggregates that Nāgārjuna refers to here are the Buddha’s Five Aggregates; these are namely: physical processes, processes of sensation, perceptual processes, volitional processes and processes relating to consciousness. These five aggregates or Skandhas are an established concept in the wider Buddhist oeuvre, and it must be noted that this particular characterization of the

negation does not lead to the complete disintegration of the concept of the self, but rather, simply one that does not possess reified essence.⁶⁰ It is this divestiture that Garfield considers therapeutic, as it enables the Madhyamika to desist from ‘grasping’ (*upādāna*).⁶¹ Grasping, in the context of the Madhyamika analysis of the self, is the process by which the aggregates are mistakenly appropriated and configured into a substantial entity, or ego with *svabhāva* (reified essence), and is the root cause of *duḥkha* (suffering). On Garfield’s reading, this grasping toward essence, or substance, is taken to be representative of an extreme view, namely that of the reificationist. As such, the role of the *catuṣkoṭi* in service of desisting from grasping is for Garfield, similar to the role that the genetic and argumentative strategies play in freeing one from the reificationist’s pursuit of rational inquiry.

The prevention of the descent into nihilism through Madhyamaka ‘scepticism’ however, is given through a complex account of the interdependence between *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent co-origination) and the Two-Truths, and between the Two Truths themselves, which I shall go some way towards outlining in the next section where I deal explicitly with the structural features of Madhyamaka. It is sufficient to note for now, that due to the fact that the *catuṣkoṭi* does not admit of the complete disintegration of some concept or entity, but rather simply reveals that does it not possess reified essence, it allows for conventional operations and thus arrests any

aggregates possesses no deep philosophical implications, and is simply an empirically grounded taxonomy of the constituent parts of selves.

⁶⁰ The *catuṣkoṭi* will be explored in fuller detail in the next chapter. At this point, this preliminary understanding of the *catuṣkoṭi* and its role in Garfield’s interpretation, is sufficient.

⁶¹ ‘Grasping’ or *upādāna* here refers to the attachment to substantive entities, and is a central feature in Buddhist discourse. Grasping is the root cause of ‘suffering’, the cessation of which is a core goal of Buddhist practice.

potential descent into nihilism. What we have at this point, is an interpretation of Madhyamaka that is 1) therapeutic due to the fact it enables a Madhyamika to desist from grasping, and keeps her from nihilism, through the deployment of the *catuṣkoṭi* and 2) that the *catuṣkoṭi*, in leading to the moderate space between extreme views, affords the Madhyamika the opportunity to proceed conventionally or defer to the conventional. For Garfield then, the membership of the Madhyamikas in the sceptical grouping is thus affirmed by the fulfilment of the two Kripkean criteria.

1.2 The Madhyamaka Enterprise as Non-Sceptical

In the previous section, we noted that Madhyamaka fulfilled the two criteria for group membership according to Garfield's comparative treatment. This section will be concerned chiefly with problematizing Garfield's treatment of Madhyamaka vis-à-vis the sceptical family, and positing that it is not a sceptical enterprise. My argument for this: the *structural incongruity thesis*, is aimed at establishing that Nāgārjuna does not fulfil the two criteria for group membership.

Structural Incongruity

I argue here that the sceptical remedy for Hume is a model which delineates *exit from* and *entry into* two different doxastic modes; the philosophical and the vulgar. It is in the exit from the philosophical, that the therapeutic ends with regards to extreme views are achieved, and in the entry into the vulgar that a deference to conventionality is achieved. In contrast, the Madhyamaka programme admits of no exit and entry with respect to doxastic modes but rather, consists in the apprehension of both conventional and

absolute (The Two Truths) as *interdependent*. As such the two programmes are structurally incongruous, and given this incongruity, I proceed to establish that Madhyamaka is not a sceptical enterprise. Nāgārjuna’s treatment of conventionality, as mentioned briefly in the previous section, involves engaging with a complex account of interdependence between *pratītyasamutpāda* and the Two-Truths Doctrine, and between the Two Truths themselves, and as such, will require some thorough explicatory work. It is here that I will begin the task of this section.⁶²

Pratītyasamutpāda is the doctrine of dependent co-origination that holds that “everything is connected to everything else and is constantly changing.”⁶³ It posits that an entity or phenomenon which emerges in the world has its emergence conditioned by and tethered to all other entities and phenomena. On the Madhyamaka interpretation no entity or phenomenon possesses a reified, individuated essence or *svabhāva*, as its essence is conditioned by and co-dependently arises with everything else. Garfield considers *pratītyasamutpāda* to be “the nexus between phenomena in virtue of which events depend on other events, composites depend upon their parts, and so forth.”⁶⁴ Garfield notes that Nāgārjuna discusses two different understandings of what exactly is meant by this nexus in terms of causality. The first involves a view in which the co-dependent network involves “*causes* (that) bring about their effects in virtue of causal powers”, and the second “according to which *causal relations* simply amount to explanatorily useful

⁶² This section incorporates elements from my discussion of similar issues in ‘Hume and Nāgārjuna on the Non-Self: Dispensing with the Problem of Necessary Ownership of Perceptions’ (Honours Thesis presented to the Department of Philosophy, National University of Singapore, Session 2014/15)

⁶³ Jay L. Garfield, “Dependent Arising and the Emptiness of Emptiness: Why Did Nāgārjuna Start with Causation?”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Apr., 1994), 221

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

regularities.”⁶⁵ Garfield also notes that Nāgārjuna defends the latter view. This second position has been described as a *regularity* view, an *anti-essentialist* view and perhaps prematurely, a “Humean theory of causation.”⁶⁶ The difference between ‘cause’ in the first view and ‘causal relations’ in the second, is crucial. On the first view, causes bring about effects in terms of real causal powers, that leads to the reification of both cause of effect. On the second view, causes are jettisoned in favour of relations which Nāgārjuna refers to as conditions (*pratyaya*). An effect simply arises due to the interrelated functioning of relevant set of conditions. Causes, like the self, are subjected to the *catuṣkoṭi* and lose their *svabhāva* or reified essence. What remains after the application of the *catuṣkoṭi* to causality, are simply the conditions that are divested of reified essence. And since they are themselves attendant upon further sets of conditions and so on *ad infinitum*, the effect of a particular cause must situate its origin with the entirety of the world, and as such, is dependently co-originated. We see here using the *catuṣkoṭi* to establish concepts to be empty, involves situating them with *pratītyasamutpāda*. Thus to be *śūnya* (empty) is just to be dependently co-originated.

Given this understanding, we begin to see the identity between *śūnyata*, the lack of *svabhāva* and *pratītyasamutpāda* through the fact that *pratītyasamutpāda* entails *both* the notion that ‘existence itself is empty of self-existence and permanence’ and that ‘everything is connected to everything else and is constantly changing’. It may be observed that this very

⁶⁵ Garfield, “Dependent Arising and the Emptiness of Emptiness”, 222

⁶⁶ Ewing Chinn, “Nāgārjuna's Fundamental Doctrine of Pratītyasamutpāda”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Jan., 2001), 55

identity is implicit in Nāgārjuna's analysis here. This identity is one that is achieved and expressed through interdependence. As conditions do not possess reified essence, the entities and phenomena that are attendant upon them cannot possess reified essence. As such, they are both empty. And since *pratītyasamutpāda* is simply the network of interdependent interactions between conditions and the conditioned; conditions and their effects, it follows that the entire network itself is empty, or similarly lacking in reified essence. This point is emphasized in the matter of the MMK (24:18):

*Whatever is dependently co-arisen,
that is explained to be emptiness.
That being a dependent designation
Is itself the middle way. (24:18)⁶⁷*

The identity relation between *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyata* is now explicit. What is problematic with this is that it leaves Nāgārjuna open to the criticism that he has simply replaced emptiness with essence. And therefore *śūnyata* itself would be the *essence* of all things. This is an appropriate point to segue into a discussion of the Two-Truths Doctrine which will enable us to make sense of this metaphysical picture that, taken in isolation, seems to assert that the entirety of the world is empty.

The Two Truths Doctrine involves the distinction between *saṃvṛitsatya* (conventional truth), which is the way we understand entities and phenomena conventionally or praxially and *paramārthikasatya* (absolute truth), which is 'how things really are'. For Nāgārjuna and Madhyamaka in

⁶⁷ Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, 69

general the phrase ‘the ultimate nature of reality’ is non-denoting. Instead it gains meaning by situating itself within conventional truth. On the Madhyamaka interpretation of this idea, the two truths are not “radically distinct from one another” but mutually supportive.⁶⁸ Importantly, they also assert that *emptiness itself is empty*, guarding against the charge that Nāgārjuna has simply replaced essence with emptiness. This emptiness of emptiness has given rise to what has been termed the No-Thesis View.⁶⁹ Because everything is empty, Nāgārjuna’s claim that everything is empty is itself empty. However, since we have established that emptiness is identical to dependent co-origination, the claim of universal emptiness can be made conventionally. In other words, to see emptiness as empty is just to see it as dissociated into the network of *pratītyasamutpāda*. Emptiness itself is dependent on all other entities through *pratītyasamutpāda*, and is thus empty in the same way that the conditions are considered empty.

This is to say that *śūnyata* and hence *pratītyasamutpāda* (through the identity between the two) are themselves in fact only conventions or praxial understandings, or terms used to explain entities and phenomena. The difference between the two truths and their mutual interdependence may be observed clearly in the following example put forward by Garfield. If a conventional entity, such as a table were analysed to demonstrate its emptiness, we would observe that there is in fact no table apart from its constituent parts, and “that it cannot be distinguished in a principled way from

⁶⁸ Garfield, “Dependent Arising and the Emptiness of Emptiness”, 231

⁶⁹ The No-Thesis View will be explicated in the following chapter.

its antecedent and subsequent histories.”⁷⁰ So we conclude that it is empty. This constitutes an understanding of absolute truth. But if were to analyze the emptiness of the table itself, we would not find a sort of substantive backing, but only the *lack of existence* of that table.⁷¹ As such this emptiness or lack of existence is itself *dependent* upon the table. If there were in fact no table in the conventional sense, there would *not be a lack of its existence*. To see the table as empty, for Nāgārjuna, “is not to somehow see ‘beyond’ the illusion of the table to some other, more real entity.”⁷² It consists in being mindful of the table as conventional, and dependent. This point is of course, not lost on Garfield, who asserts that “Emptiness is hence not different from conventional reality-it is the fact that conventional reality is conventional.”⁷³ It is not at all clear how the understanding of the relationship between the Two Truths as interdependent is compatible with the Kripkean model of sceptic proceeding *from* pursuit of rational justification *to* conventional justification. The shift between modes of inquiry seems to preclude that notion that both modes can be inhabited simultaneously. Upon assembling Nāgārjuna within the sceptical grouping in a comparative dialogue, interdependence seems to give way to deference, in favour of some cross-cultural aims that can only be achieved if Madhyamaka were made amenable to this particular sceptical form. I take this to be symptomatic of the ‘errors’ characteristic of the sort of comparative dialogue that we have seen Balslev and Conze caution against previously.

⁷⁰ Garfield, “Dependent Arising and the Emptiness of Emptiness”, 232

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

Returning to the matter at hand, it is in MMK (24:10) where the interconnectedness of the Two Truths is established:

Without a foundation in the conventional truth

The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.

Without understanding the significance of the ultimate

*Liberation is not achieved (24:10)*⁷⁴

There is then, no exit and entry on the Madhyamaka account, but rather a mindfulness of both the absolute and conventional, as interdependent. For Nāgārjuna, to consider the conventional, we must *simultaneously consider* the philosophical, and vice versa. As such, the vulgar-philosophical divide cannot be mapped onto the Two-Truths, as there is no structure of interdependence in the Humean account. Given the fact that conventional and absolute are interdependent, there is no *deference* or exit towards the conventional that we observe in Garfield's reading of Hume. As such, we may reasonably conclude that Nāgārjuna does not fulfil the second criterion of group membership (deference to the conventional).

I contend that the more accurate commonality should be between the vulgar belief in substantive entities and the 'grasper's' failure to relinquish the reified self that possesses its own *svabhāva*. It is only here that we see that confinement of the self to the conventional, as grasping considers *only the conventional self* and not the self from the absolute standpoint of dependent origination and thus emptiness. As such, the *catuṣkoṭi* is aimed at allowing for the apprehension of *both* the conventional and absolute (more accurately, the

⁷⁴ Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, 69

conventional and absolute as interdependent), and not the rejection of some unsatisfactory reflective modality *for* the conventional, as we observe in Hume. This is precisely where the therapy consists in; to desist from grasping onto reified essences, and not in the exit from an unsatisfactory reflective modality. Without effecting this exit from a reflective doxastic mode, the *catuṣkoṭi* cannot be rightly considered an analogue to sceptical arguments. As such, given the fact that the *catuṣkoṭi* does not lead to the sort of suspension we observe in Hume, we may conclude that the Madhyamaka programme while therapeutic, does not involve employing *sceptical* arguments. In light of this, it can be asserted that Madhyamaka also fails to fulfil the first criterion of group membership (therapeutic ends achieved through the deployment of sceptical arguments). Having shown that Madhyamaka does not fulfil these two criteria, we are warranted in concluding that the Nāgārjunian enterprise itself is non-sceptical.

In sum, the structural incongruity thesis contends that 1) on the sceptical model that Garfield has presented, scepticism (including that of Hume's) involves a shift from the reflective to the unreflective, and it is only in the unreflective mode that justification for our practices can be sought and attained and 2) there is no such shift involving exit and entry into different modes for Nāgārjuna. The discussion of the Two-Truths in the MMK does not present us with a sceptical conclusion, as the conventional and absolute are interdependent. There is then, no deference to the conventional, in the Humean sense of deferring to the vulgar and unreflective mode and as such Nāgārjuna cannot be aligned with Hume along sceptical axes, thereby dislodging him from the sceptical family.

Concluding Remarks

In closing, I will discuss some interpretive and methodological difficulties that arise from the placement of Nāgārjuna in the sceptical family which arise, I contend, from the dislocation of Nāgārjunian programme from its soteriological underpinnings. Garfield and Dreyfus note that, due to the reflexive nature of scepticism, it is problematic for the “skeptic (to) justify his own use of arguments, including the skeptical tropes.”⁷⁵ They posit that there are two solutions as regards the sceptic’s use of her own arguments. The first solution is to posit that they are used “purely *ad hominem*”, to divest the dogmatist of her extreme view.⁷⁶ They are justified “because the dogmatist will give up her...commitment because of them, even if the skeptic, despite using them, has no confidence in their warrant.”⁷⁷ The second solution is that they are justified because “they simply appear to the skeptic to work, and skeptics follow appearances. So, despite not having any confidence in the arguments, the skeptic goes on using them, as they, for reasons none can articulate, loosen dogmatic commitment and lead to *ataraxia*, just as throwing the sponge at the canvas just happened to represent the foam of the horse.”⁷⁸ The example here is drawn from Sextus’ *Outlines*, and is as follows:

“(Apelles) was painting a horse and wanted to represent in his picture the lather on the horse’s mouth; but he was so unsuccessful that he gave up, took the sponge on which he had been wiping off the colours

⁷⁵ Georges Dreyfus and Jay L. Garfield, “Madhyamaka and Classical Greek Skepticism”, in *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*, eds., ‘The Cowherds’ (New York: Oxford 2010), 121

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 122

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

from his brush, and flung it at the picture. And when it hit the picture, it produced a representation of the horse's lather.” (*Outlines*, 28)⁷⁹

It is patently obvious that neither of the abovementioned solutions is characteristic of Nāgārjuna. On the reading of a sceptical programme into Madhyamaka, the justification for the employment of *catuṣkoṭi* for example, will be amenable to use ‘without confidence in its warrant’, or purely on the basis that it ‘appears to work’. However, the use of the *catuṣkoṭi*, while still within the ambit of the conventional, cannot be due to the sort of accidental success it manages to achieve. Due to role that the *catuṣkoṭi* plays in what is essentially a functioning religious system that has specific goals and a structured programme for achieving said goals, subjecting the Madhyamaka programme to this sort of analysis, where justification arises simply from a process of trial and error, amounts to mischaracterization.

I contend instead that the discourse present in Madhyamaka possesses not only discursive or probative functions, but may fulfill soteriological ones as well. To this particular end, I draw on Huntington’s hermeneutical analysis of Nāgārjuna, the aims of which are evident from the following:

“Is there perhaps some way of taking seriously their non-advancement of a position while at the same time indicating how their mode of going about these matters has definite significance?”⁸⁰

“Instead of taking the arguments for emptiness as leading, ultimately, to a resting place — a view, position, or “true conclusion” — is there some

⁷⁹ J. Annas and J. Barnes, eds., *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), I:28

⁸⁰ C. W. Huntington, Jr., “The nature of the Madhyamika trick”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 37 (2007), 123

way that we might focus our attention on the process of argumentation itself, on the nature and role of religious language as it functions in the experience of the reader?”⁸¹

On this reading, the exercise of *catuṣkoṭi* should therefore be considered an action that is geared to salvific ends. The justification for employing the arguments present in the Nāgārjunian corpus must “be given by a strict function of its soteriological efficacy.”⁸² If this is accepted, understanding the interdependence of conventional and absolute that is achieved through the *catuṣkoṭi*, consists in applying ‘skillful means’ (*upāya-kauśalya*) which function as “a kind of clue about the appropriate way to put into operation the *religion* which one has.”⁸³ The centrality of soteriology to the Madhyamaka enterprise may thus be emphasized. In the next chapter, I argue for an anti-realist reading of the Nāgārjunian programme. The anti-realist position is centred on circumscribing the kinds of speech that can be meaningful, in accordance with what has come to be known as the Buddha’s Silence. It is hoped that the soteriological dimension of Madhyamaka can be given greater emphasis, on the alternative I propose in place of scepticism.

⁸¹ Ibid., 123; originally in Michael Pye, *Skillful Means: A Concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2005), 117

⁸² Huntington, Jr., “The nature of the Madhyamika trick”, 112

⁸³ Ibid., 123

Chapter Two: Speech Acts and Anti-Realism: An Exegesis of Nāgārjuna's *Catuṣkoṭi*⁸⁴

Introductory Remarks

In the previous chapter, I have attempted to establish that Nāgārjunian thought, placed in a comparative dialogue with Hume, should not be interpreted as possessing a sceptical programme. The primary reason for this is that a sceptical reading of Madhyamaka cannot properly render the *interdependence* of the Two Truths. Instead, sceptical interpretations advance a view on which Nāgārjuna, like Hume, must adopt an exit-entry model involving two distinct doxastic phases: the reflective and the non-reflective, and argue for an egression from one to the other.⁸⁵ Moreover, on the sceptical reading, Nāgārjuna's application of the *catuṣkoṭi* is seen as something arising from a process of trial and error. I have shown that these consequences are unacceptable on Nāgārjuna's terms. As a result of these considerations, we may proceed with the understanding that Nāgārjuna is not a sceptic in the Kripkean or Humean sense that is required for membership in Garfield's sceptical family, and Nāgārjuna and Hume are now no longer sceptical siblings.

⁸⁴ I owe a debt of gratitude to Ryosuke Igarashi for the philosophically stimulating conversations we have had regarding the *catuṣkoṭi* both at the National University of Singapore and at Kyoto University. I would also like to thank Mark Siderits and other attendees of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy Panel, at the American Philosophical Association's Pacific Division Meeting in 2017, for their helpful comments on the interpretation I propose in this chapter.

⁸⁵ It should again be emphasized here, that the interpretation of Hume that we encountered in the previous section: that is, Hume as a proponent of rejecting rational inquiry and deferring instead to the conventional is not one that I defend or attempt to problematize. This interpretation of Hume is a consequence of his membership in the 'sceptical family', which I have used as a point of departure, to establish that Nāgārjuna does not qualify as a member of the sceptical family.

In this chapter, I offer an alternative reading of Nāgārjuna's programme. My primary contention here is that Nāgārjunian thought should be read as an anti-realist enterprise. I use the term 'anti-realism' here not in any special technical sense exclusive to Buddhism or Madhyamaka, but in its standard Dummettian formulation (later expanded and applied to the VHV by Siderits).⁸⁶ This formulation will be made clear in the ensuing sections.

Central to the anti-realist reading I propose, is an interpretation of the *catuṣkoṭi* as an *illocutionary device*. I will attempt to establish that the *koṭis* themselves are concerned with *speech-acts* rather than *truth-tracking propositions*.⁸⁷ The distinction between speech-acts and truth-tracking propositions may be observed in the matter of VHV 24, where Nāgārjuna states that the "speech" employed in the *catuṣkoṭi* "does not exist substantially", but that the emptiness of all things is nonetheless established through the speech employed in the *catuṣkoṭi*.⁸⁸ To 'exist substantially' in this context, is to refer to some discrete entity or state of affairs which possesses *svabhāva* (reified essence). Speech that exists substantially is truth-tracking insofar as it refers to some state of affairs, and possesses truth-conditions as it may refer either correctly or incorrectly. But, as we have observed from our discussion of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) in the previous chapter, there are no entities or states of affairs which are non-empty and possess *svabhāva*. As such,

⁸⁶ Mark Siderits, "Nāgārjuna as Anti-realist", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 16 (1988), 311-325

⁸⁷ For our purposes in this chapter, 'speech acts' and 'illocutions' are used interchangeably.

⁸⁸ "This speech does not exist substantially, therefore there is no destruction of my position. There is no inequality, and no particular reason to be mentioned (VHV 24)", in Jan Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes: Nāgārjuna's Vīgrahavyāvartanī*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28

Nāgārjuna's own statements, which include his employment of the *catuṣkoṭi*, do not map onto or refer to any non-empty states of affairs and cannot be truth-tracking.

On the anti-realist interpretation, the *catuṣkoṭi* is concerned instead with the *rejection* of the particular kind of activity ascribed to Nāgārjuna's opponents, typically Ābhidharmika reificationists in the MMK and Naiyāyikas in the VHV; that is, curbing the *assertion* or *denial* of some proposition that describes some state of affairs in the world. As the *catuṣkoṭi* is concerned solely with speech acts (assertion, denial and rejection) and not propositions themselves, no ontological commitment is presupposed or required by Nāgārjuna at any stage on the anti-realist reading. The effect of the speech acts employed in the *catuṣkoṭi*, is to modify one's use of language or behaviour and to jettison certain kinds of inquiry. This feature is intimately linked to the Noble or Buddha's Silence; a particular attitude one ought to adopt with regards to metaphysical assertions or speculation. The significance of the Buddha's Silence to my interpretation will be explained in the second section of this chapter.

Although briefly introduced in the previous chapter, it would be prudent at this point, to restate the mechanics of the *catuṣkoṭi*. Standard readings of the *catuṣkoṭi* as employed in the MMK typically involve a positive and a negative phase.⁸⁹ As encountered in the previous chapter, the operands

⁸⁹ Note here that I use the terms 'positive *catuṣkoṭi*' and 'negative *catuṣkoṭi*' to refer to two phases of the application or employment of the *catuṣkoṭi*. As such, one should not conclude that there are in fact, two tetralemmas, in a positive formulation and negative formulation. The 'positive' and 'negative' refer here to two phases in the same continuous argumentative

or *koṭis* in the positive phase take the form of a tetralemma, which posits four possible categories. The four operands as regards some statement *p* are as follows:

- 1) it is the case that *p*,
- 2) it is the case that not- *p*,
- 3) it is the case that both *p* and not- *p*,
- 4) it is the case that neither *p* nor not- *p*.

These four categories are to be taken as mutually exclusive and exhaustive with respect to some *p*. Nāgārjuna then proceeds to reject all four operands in the *negative* phase of the *catuṣkoṭi* to establish that *p* is an empty concept that cannot possess *svabhāva* or reified essence. Nāgārjuna's rejection of these operands constitutes the negative phase of the *catuṣkoṭi*.

Engagement with the *catuṣkoṭi* has been something of a mainstay in comparative work dealing with Buddhism and Madhyamaka. Priest and Garfield in particular, have developed a four-valued semantics under which conditions for the mutual exclusivity and joint exhaustivity of the *koṭis* are fulfilled.⁹⁰ Westerhoff has posited that there are two distinct negations operant in the MMK and the VV, and that disambiguating between the two enables us to make sense of the overt contradictions in Nāgārjuna's employment of the

process. As we shall see presently, the positive *catuṣkoṭi* is simply the statement of Nāgārjuna's opponents' views and the negative *catuṣkoṭi* comprises his responses.

⁹⁰ Jay L. Garfield and Graham Priest, "Mountains are Just Mountains", *Pointing at the Moon: Buddhism, Logic and Analytic Philosophy*, eds., J. Garfield and M. D'Amato (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 71-82

catuṣkoṭi.⁹¹ However, much of recent scholarship regarding the *catuṣkoṭi* has been circumscribed within sceptical parameters, with Westerhoff offering perhaps the only interpretation that allows for a non-sceptical stance to be formulated. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis and in the previous chapter, this is due in no small part to the comparative purposes for which Nāgārjuna and Madhyamaka have been used. Now, having argued for Nāgārjuna’s removal from the ‘sceptical family’, the task in this chapter is to formulate an alternative anti-realist interpretation of the *catuṣkoṭi* and Nāgārjuna’s programme in both the MMK and VHV. It should be noted here that my interpretation is germane to Mark Siderits’ reading, presented in “Nāgārjuna as Anti-Realist”; although where Siderits motivates his anti-realist position via a discussion of the status of *pramāṇas* (means of knowledge), I do so through a discussion of speech acts and the limits Nāgārjuna places on language.⁹²

Given that these are my aims, here is schematic of the ensuing sections in this chapter: 1) In the next section I outline the formulation of anti-realism which I will be operating with, and distinguish it from scepticism 2) I will then attempt to motivate the move to an illocutionary understanding of the *catuṣkoṭi* through an analysis of the context in which Nāgārjuna’s exchanges with his interlocutors took place and by examining Nāgārjuna’s broader goals. Significant attention will be accorded to two key features in Nāgārjunian thought: the ‘No Thesis View’ and the ‘Buddha’s Silence’. 3) Following this, I

⁹¹ Jan Westerhoff, “The No-Thesis View: Making Sense of Verse 29 of Nāgārjuna’s *Vigrahavyāvartanī*”, in *Pointing at the Moon: Buddhism, Logic, Analytic Philosophy*, eds., J. Garfield and M. D’Amato (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 26-40

⁹² Siderits, “Nāgārjuna as Antirealist”, 311-325

will introduce some standard formulations of speech acts and attempt to model the positive phase of the *catuṣkoṭi* in terms of the speech acts: *assertion* and *denial* and 4) I will then formulate the negative phase of the *catuṣkoṭi* in terms of the speech act: *rejection*, and emphasize how Nāgārjuna himself never makes reference to some states of affairs in the world and is concerned only with *assertability conditions*, re-emphasizing the anti-realist reading. I conclude this section by examining how the soteriological emphasis of the Nāgārjunian programme is preserved on the interpretation I propose.

2.1 Scepticism, Anti-Realism and Nāgārjuna

In this section, I aim to disambiguate the commitments of the anti-realist from those of the sceptic. As discussed in the previous chapter, a general feature of Madhyamaka is its opposition to reificationism. The reificationists that Nāgārjuna engages with, in the context of the MMK, are the Ābhidharmikas.⁹³ As Nāgārjuna's principal opponents in the MMK, the Ābhidharmikas are concerned with establishing the *svabhāva* (reified essence) of the *dharmas*, translated here for our purposes as the components of experience.⁹⁴ In order to explain the workings of the *dharmas*, how they relate to each other, and how they relate to agents, the Ābhidharmikas posit a complex system of causal conditions. Note here that while causal conditions are also employed by Madhyamikas, Ābhidharmikas commit to the *svabhāva*

⁹³ The term 'Ābhidharmika' refers to a proponent or practitioner of the Ābhidharma school of Buddhism

⁹⁴ For a more systematic exposition of the Ābhidharma treatment of the term '*dharmas*', see Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics: The Making of a Philosophical Tradition*, (New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2005), 34-42. For our purposes here, which are limited to casting the Ābhidharmikas as metaphysical realists and investigating their role as Nāgārjuna's opponents, this understanding of the Ābhidharma programme is sufficient.

of these causal conditions. It is through the existence of *real* causes, and not causal conditions in the empty or conventional sense used by the Madhyamika, that an Ābhīdharmika can proclaim the causal efficacy of the *dharmas*. As such, if the *dharmas* are to be considered causally efficacious, the causal relations they generate and the existence of agents and their actions as the locus of the ‘*caused*’, must also be reified. Given this system of real relations and entities between which these relations obtain, Nāgārjuna considers the Ābhīdharmikas to be metaphysical realists in contravention of the Buddha’s *anātman* (non-self) and *anitya* (impermanence) doctrines.⁹⁵

In the VHV, Nāgārjuna’s reificationist opponents are typically Naiyāyikas.⁹⁶ The Nyāya project differs from the Ābhīdharmika’s concerns and is geared towards establishing the *svabhāva* of the *pramāṇas* (or means of knowledge). For Naiyāyikas, the *pramāṇas* are relations between the cognizer and the cognized (*prameya*), and render the cognized as knowledge. For some claim to be considered knowledge, the cognized and its relation to the cognizer must both be reified. As such both *pramāṇa* and *prameya* are reified and possess ontological import. *Pramāṇas* accurately describe states of affairs in the world and *prameya* are the real referents on which the *pramāṇas* operate. Nāgārjuna’s response to the Ābhīdharmikas in the MMK is preserved in the VHV, as Naiyāyikas are also considered metaphysical realists.⁹⁷ While the ambit of realist commitments differs significantly between Ābhīdharmikas and Naiyāyikas, the fact that both Nāgārjuna’s opponents advance theses that

⁹⁵ These posit that ‘selves’ (as we encountered in the previous chapter) and change are empty concepts

⁹⁶ The term ‘Naiyāyika’ refers to a proponent or practitioner of the Nyāya school of Orthodox Hinduism.

⁹⁷ Mark Siderits, “Nāgārjuna as Antirealist”, 311

to map on to a stipulated ontology, or more accurately, use truth-tracking propositions which involve some reference to states of affairs in the world, should enable us to say without much controversy that his two principal opponents in the corpus are both metaphysical realists.

As such, differences in scope and motivations notwithstanding, metaphysical realists of all stripes should at least subscribe to the following three Dummettian theses:

1. Truth is correspondence between proposition and reality
2. Reality is mind-independent
3. There is one true theory that correctly describes reality⁹⁸

It is in their respective responses to these three commitments, that the sceptic and the anti-realist part company.⁹⁹ The sceptic takes the conjunction of the theses above to be her starting point, proceeding subsequently to establish the failure of one or more of the above to reject metaphysical realism. As such, metaphysical realism should be considered “the first premiss in a natural representation of the sceptic's reasoning.”¹⁰⁰ As we encountered in the previous chapter when considering Garfield's interpretation, this is the strategy that Hume employs in his sceptical programme. The sceptical arguments are meant to establish the failure of rational justification for

⁹⁸ Mark Siderits, “Nāgārjuna as Antirealist”, 311

⁹⁹ It may be objected that some formulations of scepticism are compatible with and may in fact complement anti-realism. In the current context however, I am operating with Garfield's conception of the sceptical family. My contention here is that the sceptical approaches of the members of this particular sceptical family cannot be reconciled with anti-realism

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth P. Winkler, “Scepticism and Anti-Realism”, *Mind*, Vol. 94, No. 373 (1985), 37

correspondence between some proposition and some state of affairs. Accompanying this failure to justify correspondence is the failure to justify the ontology which is to be accessed through referential relations. Without an adequate account of how our statements acquire their truth-conditions, no theory that describes reality is admissible. As such, the conjunction of theses above is rejected. This constitutes the sceptical challenge to metaphysical realism.

The anti-realist, by stark contrast, *sidesteps* the commitments of the metaphysical realist. Referential failure is not a concern for the anti-realist for whom correspondence between some proposition and some state of affairs is a relation that need not be addressed. The concern for the anti-realist then is what can or cannot be *asserted* rather than what is or is not *true*. The shift here is from the *truth-conditions* of propositions (from which the sceptical challenge is generated) to the *assertability conditions* of statements (which the anti-realist is concerned with). If the conditions for some statement to be asserted obtain, then we are permitted to use said statement to communicate, convey meaning, influence behaviour and interact with others.¹⁰¹ If such conditions do not obtain, the statement cannot be used in any meaningful sense. Simply put, the target of scepticism is some thesis that describes reality (either *p* or not-*p*, both or neither) whereas the target of anti-realism is some act with regards to *p* (assertion of *p*, denial of *p*, both or neither).

Anti-realism sidesteps the sceptical preoccupation with truth-conditions as it posits that in many cases “the satisfaction of these conditions

¹⁰¹ My formulation of what constitutes these conditions is made explicit in the following sections.

lies beyond our capacity to recognize it, which means that in certain cases a grasp of truth-conditions is irrelevant to our behaviour-unavailable for manifestation in use”.¹⁰² Without this concern for establishing if the truth-conditions for some proposition can be correctly apprehended and specified, the anti-realist project makes no ontological commitment at any stage, and focuses instead on the conditions under which some statement can be asserted. Defined in this way, the anti-realist programme is an alternative to metaphysical realism, but does not offer an argument against metaphysical realism on realist terms (which is the preoccupation of the sceptic).

With regards to the *catuṣkoṭi*, an anti-realist interpretation is concerned solely with the acts of uttering or conveying the *koṭis* themselves. As introduced above, the positive *catuṣkoṭi* can then be considered a taxonomy of speech-acts attributed to Nāgārjuna’s opponents. The negative *catuṣkoṭi* is then a rejection of the assertability conditions for each of the *koṭis*. At no point in this schema, does Nāgārjuna make recourse to any ontological or referential claim in either the positive or negative phase of the *catuṣkoṭi*. The sceptical reading by contrast, interprets the positive *catuṣkoṭi* to be a taxonomy of truth-tracking propositions, and the negative phase as demonstrating the referential failure of each of the *koṭis*. Having provided a rough outline of what an anti-realist reading of the *catuṣkoṭi* would involve (namely, that the *koṭis* are illocutions or speech-acts), I proceed in the next section, to analyse the context in which Nāgārjuna’s *catuṣkoṭi* was employed in order to motivate my interpretation.

¹⁰² Winkler, “Scepticism and Anti-Realism”, 41

2.2 Nāgārjuna and His Interlocutors in Context

In this section, I will provide the context in which Nāgārjuna's exchanges with his interlocutors took place, and attempt to motivate the move towards an illocutionary understanding of the *catuṣkoṭi*. To accomplish these tasks, this section will involve a thorough analysis of two key elements in the Nāgārjunian corpus: namely, the 'No Thesis View' and the 'Buddha's Silence'.

It is important to note that the exchanges between proponents of competing *darśanas* (schools) - such as Madhyamaka and Ābhidharma- often operated within the context of a *katha* (debate) and thus involved a formalized set of rules specifying how participants may advance their respective positions, and positing a set of shared assumptions, on which acceptable positions, gambits and ripostes may be formulated. One of the core assumptions in this context is the notion that "the meaning of a term was the substantial entity to which it referred."¹⁰³ For Nāgārjuna's opponents, the metaphysical realists of the Ābhidharma and Nyāya schools, this was in fact a crucial presupposition that was required to facilitate any sustained inquiry or substantive disagreement regarding the specific *topoi* with which they were concerned. Nāgārjuna's own role as a participant in these exchanges however, is more complex. Scholarship concerned with Nāgārjuna's purported exchanges with his interlocutors in the MMK and especially the VHV supports the view that Nāgārjuna generally comported within the idiom used by his rivals and predecessors, but made some major qualifications regarding

¹⁰³Malcolm D. Eckel, "Bhāvaviveka and the Early Mādhyamika Theories of Language", *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1978), 325

how his statements should be understood by his opponents.¹⁰⁴ Eckel for example, notes that Nāgārjuna “was committed, as a Sanskrit dialectician, to the process of discussion and debate facilitated by the developments in Hindu logic, but he could not, as a Buddhist, accept the ontology on which the theories were based.”¹⁰⁵ As such, Nāgārjuna’s exchanges with the Ābhidharmikas and Naiyāyikas were “often, at bottom, cast as disagreements over the use of language” due to his refusal to accede to the set of shared assumptions required for substantive debate, and the critical method (that is, the *catuṣkoṭi*) that resulted from this refusal.¹⁰⁶ This emerges clearly in what has come to be known as Nāgārjuna’s ‘No-Thesis View’. In Verse 29 of the VHV, Nāgārjuna states:

“If I had any thesis, that fault would apply to me. But I do not have any thesis, so there is indeed no fault for me.”(VHV 29)¹⁰⁷

Here Nāgārjuna is responding his opponents’ (the Naiyāyika reificationist’s) charge that the Madhyamikas’ claim of universal emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is deficient. The Naiyāyikas claims that Nāgārjuna’s rejection of the Nyāya position is either impotent (as it is insubstantial as it does not possess *svabhāva*), or inconsistent (if it were meant as a substantive position). The Naiyāyika’s charges of impotence and inconsistency respectively, are stated as follows:

¹⁰⁴ See Eckel “Bhāvaviveka and the Early Mādhyamika Theories of Language” and Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes*.

¹⁰⁵ Eckel, “Bhāvaviveka and the Early Mādhyamika Theories of Language”, 325

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 324

¹⁰⁷ Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes*, 29

“If the substance of all things is not to be found anywhere, your assertion which is devoid of substance is not able to refute substance.”(VHV 1)¹⁰⁸

“Moreover, if that statement exists substantially, your earlier thesis is refuted. There is an inequality to be explained, and the specific reason for this should be given.”(VHV 2)¹⁰⁹

For the Naiyāyika, if Nāgārjuna’s refutation of his opponent’s substantive or realist views is not itself substantial, then it cannot function as a substantive refutation, and is thus impotent. If on the other hand, it does refute his opponents’ views substantively, then the refutation is itself substantive, and contravenes the Madhyamikas’ claim of universal emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Nāgārjuna’s response to this in Verse 29 is to claim that he has no thesis, and the opponent’s charges do not apply to him. Following Westerhoff, we should not of course interpret this as Nāgārjuna making “the obviously false claim that he asserts no theses whatsoever” but rather “that he does not have any thesis of *a particular kind*, that is, that among the theses one should assert there is none which exists substantially, none which is to be interpreted according to the familiar realist semantics” to which his opponents subscribe.¹¹⁰ Nāgārjuna’s own statements are to be interpreted in terms of “a convention-based” or conventionalist semantics.¹¹¹ In this way, Nāgārjuna’s statements are empty and are not vulnerable to the charge of inconsistency. Moreover, as Nāgārjuna rejects the realists’ presuppositions to begin with,

¹⁰⁸ Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes*, 19

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 20

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64-65

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

there are no theses or positions that do not gain their meaning through a conventionalist semantics. Westerhoff notes that “the mark of Nāgārjuna’s thesis, namely its emptiness, which requires it to be spelled out in terms of a convention-based semantics, does not render it impotent because of the claim that some theses have to be supplied with another kind of semantics, since the very existence of such a realist semantics is ruled out by the Madhyamaka theory of emptiness.”¹¹² As such, Nāgārjuna’s statements are not vulnerable to the charge of impotence. This interpretation of Nāgārjuna’s role as a participant in these exchanges supports the anti-realist reading as it does away with ontological commitment altogether by sidestepping realists’ starting assumptions, and as we shall see presently, focuses instead on what can or cannot be said.

Let us now consider Nāgārjuna’s commitments, which underpin his refusal to accept the realists’ presuppositions. Nāgārjuna’s enterprise in the MMK was primarily to re-establish what is known as the Buddha’s Silence. The Buddha’s Silence is an attitude one is to adopt when confronted with certain kinds of questions or speculations. The paradigmatic case of this attitude in effect is given in the matter of the *Majjima-Nikāya*, when the Buddha is posed a series of questions by a wanderer, Vacca, regarding the status of the Buddha after his earthly body perishes:

“How is it, Gotama? Does Gotama believe that the saint *exists* after death, and that this view alone is true, and every other false?”

¹¹² Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes*, 65

Nay, Vacca. I do not hold that the saint exists after death, and that this view alone is true, and every other false.

How is it, Gotama? Does Gotama believe that the saint *does not* exist after death, and that this view alone is true, and every other false?

Nay, Vacca. I do not hold that the saint does not exist after death, and that this view alone is true, and every other false.

How is it, Gotama? Does Gotama believe that the saint both *exists* and *does not exist* after death, and that this view alone is true, and every other false?

Nay, Vacca. I do not hold that the saint both exists and does not exist after death, and that this view alone is true, and every other false.

How is it, Gotama? Does Gotama believe that the saint *neither exists nor does not exist after death*, and that this view alone is true, and every other false?

Nay, Vacca. I do not hold that the saint neither exists nor does

not exist after death, and that this view alone is true, and every other false.”¹¹³

The resting place or terminus of the dialogue regarding the question is not to be found in any of the four options articulated by Vacca, but in a refusal to answer the question itself, hence the Buddha’s silence on the matter. The question itself is jettisoned as inappropriate. The *Majjima-Nikāya* then proceeds to provide a list of questions to which the Buddha remained silent. They include questions regarding the finitude of the universe, the identity between soul and body and life after death, among several others. This list would eventually become regarded as *pañhaṭhapanīya*, or questions “meant to be set aside.”¹¹⁴ Their exclusion is due to two reasons: firstly, answering these questions serves no pragmatic purpose in terms of soteriology. Here, the stock Buddhist parable of the poisoned arrow from the *Majjima-Nikāya* is of some salience to the discussion.¹¹⁵ The parable concerns a man who has been wounded by a poisoned arrow, and refuses to accept medical attention until a series of seemingly irrelevant questions, including the identity of his assailant and the type of arrow and bow used, have been answered. Bharadwaja notes that “the parable is designed to bring home the idea that what is important is giving urgent medical attention to the one who is shot with the arrow. Questions such as “Who shot the arrow?” are left to be answered later...in the

¹¹³ Charles A. Moore & Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, “Buddhism” in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, eds., Charles A. Moore & Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (Princeton, 1957), 290, as quoted in Graham Priest, “None of the Above: The Catuskoṭi in Indian Buddhist Logic” in *New Directions in Paraconsistent Logic*, eds., Jean-Yves Beziau, Mihir Chakraborty, Soma Dutta (Springer, 2016), 518

¹¹⁴ V. K. Bharadwaja, “Rationality, Argumentation and Embarrassment: A Study of Four Logical Alternatives (catuskoṭi) in Buddhist Logic”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1984), 304

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 305

context of giving urgent medical aid to the victim, they are irrelevant.”¹¹⁶ Similarly, entertaining and engaging with metaphysical speculations like the *ṭhapanīya* questions are irrelevant for the soteriological purposes of the cessation of *duḥkha* (suffering) and the liberation from *saṃsāra* (cyclic rebirth).

While the first reason to reject *ṭhapanīya* questions was broadly pragmatic, the second is concerned with meaning and the logical structure of what may be said. It is “conceptually impossible for us within a given conceptual framework to assign truth values, true or false, to any answer given to (them).”¹¹⁷ Any answer to *ṭhapanīya* questions would produce *avyākata* theses, or assertions that are “unanalyzed, unexplained, (are) not clear, and (are) *incomprehensible*” as there are no conditions under which we would be warranted to assert them.¹¹⁸ *Ṭhapanīya* questions are discussed in the *Majjima-Nikāya* alongside other seemingly unanswerable questions such as “*This fire in front of you, which has gone out, in which direction has it gone?*”¹¹⁹ There is simply no admissible evidence available within the conceptual framework within which the questions are asked, to answer them. For these two reasons, metaphysically speculative questions such as those catalogued in the *Majjima-Nikāya*, are to be ‘set aside’.

Nāgārjuna viewed his rivals, the Ābhīdharmikas and the Naiyāyikas, as engaged in metaphysical speculation of the sort rejected in the *Majjima-Nikāya*, and took it upon himself in the MMK to clarify and reinstate the

¹¹⁶ V. K. Bharadwaja, “Rationality, Argumentation and Embarrassment”, 305

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. (emphasis mine)

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 306

interpretation of the Buddha's teachings. Overt similarities between the form of the Buddha's 'question-and-answer' exchange with Vacca from the *Majjima-Nikāya* and the four corners of the *catuṣkoṭi* are easily observable. For Nāgārjuna then, the *catuṣkoṭi* was employed to circumscribe what can and cannot be said meaningfully, and was used with the goal of effecting a modification of one's linguistic and behavioural practices according to his interpretation of the Buddha's Silence. Both the Ābhidharmikas and the Naiyāyikas engaged with questions that were not useful soteriologically and more importantly, required some presuppositions in order to be answered that Nāgārjuna's conceptual framework did not allow for.

As such, we see that the positive *catuṣkoṭi* is simply a taxonomy of Nāgārjuna's opponents' views, to be treated in the same sense as Vacca's assertions in the *Majjima-Nikāya*. The negative phase of the *catuṣkoṭi* is meant to reject these views precisely because Nāgārjuna has denied them the ontological backing required for them to be rendered meaningfully. Given that the aim of Nāgārjuna's engagement with his interlocutors is to effect a change in linguistic and behavioural practices by showing that his opponent's use of language is either not useful or results in unclarity or incomprehensibility, our present discussion will be centred on what kinds of speech are permissible and what kinds are not. To this end, we turn to speech-acts and an illocutionary understanding of the *catuṣkoṭi*.

2.3 Assertion and Denial: The Positive *Catuskoṭi*

In this section I will attempt to frame the positive phase of the *catuskoṭi*; that is the taxonomy of Nāgārjuna's opponents' views, in terms of speech acts. The term 'speech act' is not used in any technical sense exclusive to our subject matter here, but in the typical Austinian sense that is has been used elsewhere in philosophy of language and linguistics. The terms 'speech act' and 'illocution' will be used synonymously for our purposes. For Austin, a speech act is to be distinguished from *locutions*.¹²⁰ Locutions are statements or utterances that are to be regarded solely in terms of their intrinsic meaning or what they refer to in the world. Locutions do not serve a specific function, and do not have any purpose except to refer to some states of affairs in the world. 'It is raining', 'It is not raining', 'The *tathāgata* exists after death' and 'The *tathāgata* does not exist after death' are all examples of locutions.¹²¹ Illocutions or speech acts by contrast, are statements or utterances that serve some intended purpose. Promising, commanding, asserting and denying are examples of speech acts intended to fulfil some specific purpose. 'I assert that the *tathāgata* exists after death' and 'I deny that the *tathāgata* exists after death' are examples of illocutions. The antecedent declaration 'I assert...' is not necessary for some utterance to be considered a speech act. One can assert that 'The *tathāgata* exists after death' by intending to express belief in the statement. In fulfilling this purpose (to express belief), the statement 'The

¹²⁰ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975)

¹²¹ '*Tathāgata*' is an epithet used to refer to the Buddha

tathāgata exists after death’ qualifies as a speech act. Without such a purpose the statement can only be considered a locution.¹²²

From the above, we can ascertain that a speech act is one that involves some *propositional content* and an element of *illocutionary force*.¹²³ Propositional content simply refers to some state of affairs in the world that both locutions and illocutions pick out. Illocutionary force on the other hand, is a communicative dimension, intended to bring about some effect in the listener or interlocutor, and is not present in locutions. The intended purpose or aim of a speech act is referred to as a ‘perlocution’. For example if there exists a state of affairs in the world such that the *tathāgata* exists after death, the *locution* would be ‘The *tathāgata* exists after death’, the *illocution* would be an assertion or denial of the statement ‘The *tathāgata* exists after death’ and the *perlocution* would be that the utterer has communicated his belief in the statement to his audience or interlocutor. The force of the speech act ‘The *tathāgata* exists after death’ is the expression of the fact that the utterer believes that statement to be true. The antecedent declaration ‘I assert...’ is an indicator of this element of force, although it is often omitted in natural usage of speech acts.

Following Searle and Vanderveken, we have seven aspects of illocutionary force. They include 1) the illocutionary point, 2) degree of strength of the illocutionary point, 3) mode of achievement, 4) content

¹²² Mitchell Green, "Speech Acts", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/speech-acts/>. (Accessed 21st July 2017)

¹²³ See Austin’s use of ‘force’ in J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 72-75; 100-109

conditions, 5) preparatory conditions, 6) sincerity conditions and 7) degree of strength of sincerity conditions.¹²⁴ For our purposes, in the context of Nāgārjuna's exchanges with the Ābhidharmikas and the Naiyāyikas, the *illocutionary point* and *content conditions* are relevant. The illocutionary point of a speech act is its particular aim.¹²⁵ For assertoric speech acts, the illocutionary point is generally to describe some state of affairs to be the case (or to be true) and to express belief in that statement. For denial, it is to reject that some state of affairs is the case (or to be false) and to express belief in that statement.

Content conditions are relevant insofar as some appropriate propositional content is required in order for a speech act to be executed successfully.¹²⁶ For example, promising or commanding that 'The *tathāgata* exists after death' are violations of content conditions as the propositional contents are not appropriate for the execution of these speech acts. As we shall see, for Nāgārjuna, there are in fact *no appropriate propositional contents* for the speech acts of assertion or denial. The other five components of illocutionary force do not seem relevant to the exchange between Nāgārjuna and his interlocutors. For example, the degree of strength of the illocutionary point should be identical across two speakers in a debate setting, where each opponent is attempting to express belief in some set of statements. Preparatory conditions are similarly irrelevant as Nāgārjuna and his interlocutor have already assumed their roles as participants in the debate.

¹²⁴ John R. Searle and Daniel Vanderveken, *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*, (Cambridge University Press, 1985), as seen in Mitchell Green, "Speech Acts".

¹²⁵ Searle and Vanderveken, *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*, 13

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16

In the context the MMK and the VHV, the *illocutionary point* of the speech acts employed by Nāgārjuna’s interlocutors would be to express agreement (or disagreement) with proposition and to bring about some belief in the opponent. The content conditions for assertion and denial are the states of affairs which the speech acts operate on. Given this understanding, we have the following:

assertion: any utterance expressing agreement with some propositional content.

denial: any utterance expressing disagreement with some propositional content.

Textual support for an illocutionary understanding of the debate between Nāgārjuna and his interlocutors, and the employment of the *catuṣkoṭi* is readily available, with the very first verse of the VHV, which we encountered above, explicitly affirming that the debate is concerned with speech (assertion) intended to serve some function or purpose:

“If the substance of all things is not to be found anywhere, your assertion which is devoid of substance is not able to refute substance”
(VHV 1)¹²⁷

Here the Naiyāyika points out that Nāgārjuna’s speech is unable to fulfil its intended function, as it is empty and makes no reference to

¹²⁷ Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes*, 19

propositional content. Importantly, in VHV 1 we note that Nāgārjuna’s interlocutors are concerned with the *referent* of Nāgārjuna’s purported ‘assertion’. As discussed earlier, the interlocutor, having observed that the referent cannot be outside the assertion itself, for ‘the substance of all things is not to be found anywhere’, claims that Nāgārjuna’s statements are impotent. This marks a preliminary distinction in the *type of speech acts* employed by Nāgārjuna, and those employed by his interlocutors. This distinction will be developed in detail in the following section. For now it would suffice for us to note that the debate between Nāgārjuna and his interlocutors is one that concerns speech acts, and that the speech acts that are employed in the positive *catuṣkoṭi* are ones that have propositional content which refer to states of affairs in the world. As such, the positive *catuṣkoṭi* is the articulation of the four possible realist positions (recall Vacca and his exchange with the Buddha from the previous section) and involve asserting or denying some propositions that have ontological referents. Given this understanding, the positive *catuṣkoṭi* may be formulated as:

1. Assert p
2. Assert not-p
3. Assert p and Deny p
4. Deny (Assert p or Deny p)¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Note here, that asserting not-p and denying p are equivalent. In fact, it is entirely possible to formulate the positive *catuskoti* in terms of assertion (for example, *koti* (3) would be rendered as ‘Assert p and Assert not-p’). There is no deep philosophical distinction here, as we have noted above that denial is simply to assert that some state of affairs is not the case and to express belief that it is in fact not the case. In natural language however, assertion and denial are generally considered to be two different kinds of behaviour, and modelling the *catuskoti* in a debate setting, where natural language is the operative mode of communication,

We now have a catalogue of speech acts that make reference to some states of affairs in the world, or are truth-tracking. In the context of the MMK, the proponents and executors of these acts are the Ābhidharmikas, while the Naiyāyikas fulfill this role in the VHV. The task now for Nāgārjuna is to reject this entire catalogue, without making reference to some alternative states of affairs. We will observe presently that Nāgārjuna takes the speech-acts of his opponents in the positive *catuṣkoṭi* to be the contents of his own speech-acts in the negative *catuṣkoṭi*. It is here that we transition to *rejection* as a different kind of speech act, and to an analysis of the negative *catuṣkoṭi*.

2.4 Rejection: The Negative *Catuṣkoṭi*

In the negative phase of the *catuṣkoṭi*, Nāgārjuna seeks to reject the assertions of his interlocutors. The rejection used in this negative phase is importantly also a speech act. However, where assertion and denial in the positive *catuṣkoṭi* were speech acts in virtue of the fact that they expressed agreement (or disagreement) with some proposition about the way the world is, rejection is a different *type* of speech act that expresses disagreement with *other speech acts*. Given this understanding, we have the following:

rejection: any utterance expressing disagreement with some speech act (assertion or denial).

motivates this understanding that assertion and denial are separate speech acts, although they are formally identical.

Note that the subject matter of rejection is not propositional content itself, but some assertion or denial. This shift in content should be considered a key marker of the anti-realist reading of Nāgārjuna, as on this interpretation, Nāgārjuna's own position does not involve any reference to states of affairs in the world. In doing so, Nāgārjuna's programme excludes truth-conditions generated by truth-tracking propositions from consideration, and emphasizes conditions of assertability (that is, the conditions under which something may be asserted and those under which it may not). We should also note at this point, the distinction between the disagreement expressed in *denial* and the disagreement expressed in *rejection*. These do not involve the same type of disagreement as they have different types of contents. This distinction has its precedent in Westerhoff's analysis of two distinct negations operant in the VHV, where he notes the following:

“It therefore seems plausible to take the distinction between views and propositions and between theses with standard and nonstandard semantics as coinciding. The views the Mādhyamika rejects are theses which are interpreted as referring to a ready-made world and a structural link between this world and our language. The propositions he takes to be unproblematic, some of which he holds himself, are theses which are given a semantics which makes neither of these two assumptions.”¹²⁹

Borrowing from this analysis, a view or *dr̥ṣṭi* is some speech act that assumes some reference relation between language and some ontological states of affairs. The speech acts employed in the negative *catuṣkoṭi* are what

¹²⁹ Westerhoff, *The No-Thesis View*, 35

Westerhoff terms ‘propositions’ or theses that make no ontological commitment. Westerhoff’s use of the term ‘proposition’ in this particular context is slightly misleading, as propositions are generally taken to mean some statement that refers to a state of affairs in the world. I propose that we use the term ‘position’ in place of ‘proposition’ to unencumber matters and to use the term ‘proposition’ in a manner that is consistent with its general use and how it has been articulated in this chapter. As such, we have two distinct types of speech acts: views (*dr̥ṣṭi*) which have as their contents some state of affairs in the world, and are therefore ontologically committed; and positions, which have as their contents some speech acts and are not ontologically committed. Rejection is a position that admits of no ontological commitment. Given the above, we may now formulate the negative *catuṣkoṭi* as follows:

1. Reject (Assertion of p)
2. Reject (Assertion of not-p)
3. Reject (Assertion of p and Denial of p)
4. Reject (Denial of (Assertion of p or Denial of p))

Textual support for this reading of the negative *catuṣkoṭi* can be found in the matter of VHV 24:

“This speech does not exist substantially, therefore there is no destruction of my position. There is no inequality, and no particular reason to be mentioned.”(VHV 24)¹³⁰

Here, Nāgārjuna is responding to his opponents charge that his use of dialectic is in contravention of the standards by which he rejects his

¹³⁰ Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes*, 28

opponents' views. But as is apparent from our discussion above, Nāgārjuna is not engaged in the same kind of activity as his opponent. Nāgārjuna's speech does not 'exist substantially' because to do so would be tantamount to advancing a *dṛṣṭi* with a realist semantic backing.

On this reading, Nāgārjuna's dialectical method in the negative *catuṣkoṭi* consists simply in rejecting his opponents' assertions. The negative *catuṣkoṭi* typically involves reducing the opponents assertion to an *avyākata* or incomprehensible thesis (recall our discussion in Section 2.2). Note here that all of Nāgārjuna's rejections do not refer in any way to the way the world is, and are concerned simply with the assertability conditions of the speech acts in positive *catuṣkoṭi*. Given Nāgārjuna's arguments in the MMK, of which the arguments against causation are an example, all four operands are rejected because they cannot be asserted as they lead to some *avyākata* or incomprehensible position.¹³¹ The failure of assertoric speech acts in the positive *catuṣkoṭi* is due to the fact that states of affairs in the world are not appropriate content conditions for assertion. Given that the four options provided by the *catuṣkoṭi* are exhaustive, there are no states of affairs that can function as appropriate content conditions for assertions. Nāgārjuna's purpose in the context of the debate with his interlocutors, as we have seen previously, is to curb his opponents' linguistic and behavioural practices and effect a modification in these practices in line with the Buddha's Silence. With the failure of assertion and denial, Nāgārjuna's goal is now complete, with the

¹³¹ Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Translation and Commentary of Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3-5

fulfilment of the perlocutionary effect of rejection: that is, curbing assertion or denial.

It is important to note here that Nāgārjuna's programme completely bypasses engaging with the metaphysical realist on *realist* terms. At no point in the exercise of the *catuskoṭi* is Nāgārjuna himself concerned with a mind-independent world or reference between some view and some ontological state of affairs. Nāgārjuna engages solely with his opponents' views (assertion and denial) and establishes that there are no conditions under which they can be asserted that does not lead to *avyākata* or incomprehensibility. This is a key distinguishing feature of the anti-realist reading that sets it apart from the sceptical interpretation.

Moreover, in contrast to the consequences of the sceptical reading we encountered in the previous chapter, the anti-realist reading does not require an *epoche* or adopting a suspensive modality, and is consistent with the understanding of the Two-Truths as interdependent. On Garfield's Humean interpretation of Nāgārjuna, the rational pursuit of justification for reference or correspondence is discarded (recall our discussion of *exit* and *entry*) in favour of a different sort of doxastic mode; one in which we must always defer to conventions. As such there is a doxastic shift between conventional and absolute. On the anti-realist reading, no such shift is required as all investigations are carried out at the conventional level. The understanding of the absolute consists in limiting our behaviour and practices to conventions, and by mindfully limited the source of meaning to a conventionalist semantics, without making unwarranted assertions that require a realist semantic backing. To reiterate, if there are appropriate conditions for some statement to be

asserted, then we are permitted to use said statement to communicate, convey meaning, influence behaviour and interact with others. If such conditions do not obtain, the statement cannot be used in any meaningful sense. If one were to use statements outside of their assertability conditions, one would be committing the error of reificationism. On the anti-realist reading, the sustained use of language within a conventionalist semantics may rightly be considered comporment with an understanding of the absolute truth that there is nothing over and above conventions.

The advance over the sceptical reading also consists in emphasizing the soteriological dimensions of the Madhyamaka programme. Recall the following analysis by Huntington, which we encountered at the close of the previous chapter:

“Instead of taking the arguments for emptiness as leading, ultimately, to a resting place — a view, position, or “true conclusion” — is there some way that we might focus our attention on the process of argumentation itself, on the nature and role of religious language as it functions in the experience of the reader?”¹³²

The soteriological emphasis placed on correct speech and behaviour, and modifying our linguistic practices in accordance with the Buddha’s Silence, explicated in section 2.2 should be seen as an advance over the sceptical reading, which de-emphasizes this aspect of Nāgārjuna’s enterprise. The *catuṣkoṭi* itself is interpreted here as a soteriological tool that enables us to

¹³² C. W. Huntington, Jr., “The nature of the Madhyamika trick”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 37 (2007), 123

curb speech and behaviour (assertion and denial) that is not useful in the salvific enterprise. The next chapter in this thesis will argue that this modification should be conducted in accordance with *upāya-kauśalya* (or skill-in-means), which is geared specifically toward the attainment of the broader Buddhist goals of the cessation of *duḥkha* and the liberation from *samsāra*.

At this point, I hope to have accomplished the following: 1) to articulate the difference between the anti-realist approach and the sceptical approach, 2) to have motivated a move to an illocutionary understanding of the *catuṣkoṭi* through an analysis of the context in which Nāgārjuna's exchanges with his interlocutors took place and his broader goals, 3) to have formulated the positive *catuṣkoṭi* in terms of the speech acts: assertion and denial and 4) to have formulated the negative *catuṣkoṭi* in terms of the speech act: rejection, and emphasized the 'anti-realist turn' consisting in the fact that Nāgārjuna himself never makes reference to some states of affairs in the world.

Concluding Remarks

I will close by returning to the No Thesis View, with an eye towards setting the stage for the discussion in the next chapter. Nāgārjuna's claim in VHV 29: "If I had any thesis, that fault would apply to me. But I do not have any thesis, so there is indeed no fault for me", can now be rendered in terms of rejection.¹³³ The rejection of the fourth *koṭi* in the negative phase is meant to establish the lack of substance in all things (*śūnyatā*). On this reading, the

¹³³ Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes*, 29

rejection of the fourth *koṭi* does not lead to some *alternative* ontological state of affairs, in which emptiness (*śūnyatā*) would be substantive and have some referent in the world, but consists simply in the rejection of a speech act. What is left after the rejection of the four *koṭis* is then not some substantive thesis about how the world is, but the understanding that all assertions or denials that possess ontological commitments are *avyākata* or incomprehensible and involve reified essence (*svabhāva*). As such, inquiries that require assertion and denial should be jettisoned in the same way that Vacca's inquiry into the Buddha's status after death was 'left aside'.

On this reading then, the understanding of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is to be considered a shift in the *way* we use language, rather than *how* the truth conditions of our statements map onto the world. Through using language within the ambit of a conventionalist semantics, with co-ordination of behaviour, inter-subjective communication and the pursuit of soteriological ends as pragmatic considerations, we use them in an empty sense, since they do not presuppose or require a realist semantic backing. This consequence of the anti-realist view, namely how all our linguistic activity is to be conducted according to a conventionalist semantics, will be taken up in earnest in the next chapter, which will be concerned with a comparative understanding of how conventions function in both the Humean and Nāgārjunian programmes.

Chapter Three: Practical Epistemology: A Comparative Analysis of the Conventional in Hume and Nāgārjuna

Introductory Remarks

In this chapter, we return to the comparative project attempting to place the Humean and Nāgārjunian programmes in a philosophically productive conversation. In the first chapter, we rejected the comparative axes on which the conversation was grounded by establishing that the Nāgārjunian programme could not be compared to its Humean counterpart on sceptical terms, due to various sceptical commitments being incompatible with Nāgārjuna's general enterprise. In the second, we reformulated the Nāgārjunian position as anti-realist instead of sceptical. We also noted that the *catuskoṭi* is employed as a device through which Nāgārjuna effects a shift from a realist semantics to a conventionalist semantics. In this chapter, I will attempt to utilize some implications of the anti-realist reading of Nāgārjuna; namely that meaning ultimately bottoms out conventions, to interpret Hume's positive epistemological project (after the negative phase of his scepticism is complete) as praxially or conventionally grounded. The aim then is to specify how conventions operate in the Nāgārjunian programme and to use this understanding to re-interpret Humean epistemology comparatively. It is important to note at the outset, that my intention here is not to claim that the Humean programme is systematically anti-realist, or that anti-realist concerns pervade the entirety of Hume's enterprise. The debate between the sceptical-realist Hume of recent scholarship (the 'new Hume') and the non-sceptical anti-realist Hume of traditional interpretations (the 'old Hume') straddles a

host of contentious and recalcitrant issues, and it is neither my aim nor place to provide a conclusive answer to this particular set of interpretive difficulties.¹³⁴ My aim here is only to show that anti-realist features in Nāgārjuna may enable us to provide a clearer account of how conventions feature in Hume’s thought; and how they may be utilized to deliberate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of reasoning, given Hume’s sceptical conclusions in 1.4.7 of the *Treatise*.¹³⁵ An important secondary aim of this chapter is to dislodge Hume-Nāgārjuna and Hume-Madhyamaka comparisons from their traditional skeptical axis, and posit a new grounding on which comparative dialogue may take place (that is, the conventional). The comparative potential of an anti-realist interpretation of Nāgārjuna may also be demonstrated as a result.

Here is an outline of the structure of this chapter: 1) I begin by introducing what I take the term ‘conventional’ to mean for both Hume and Nāgārjuna, and delineating the space for conventional justification of our practices in both programmes. 2) Following this, I raise a pressing difficulty that is common to both Nāgārjuna and Hume if we grant that conventions play a justificatory role in both their programmes; namely a *doxastic egalitarianism* that is generated by the inability to arbitrate between ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ conventions. 3) I then specify how conventions operate in the Nāgārjunian system. This section will be concerned with the doctrine of *upāya-kausalya* (skill-in-means), and how it may be considered a key resource through which Madhyamikas are able to distinguish between ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’

¹³⁴ See Peter Kail, “Is Hume a Realist or an Anti-Realist”, in *A Companion to Hume*, ed. Elizabeth S. Radcliffe (Blackwell, 2008), 441-456, for a summary of this issue.

¹³⁵ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds., David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 171-178

conventions, and to affix and regulate a conventionalist semantics. 4) I then turn to the Humean front of this comparison. In this section, I apply the Nāgārjunian understanding of conventions to a pragmatic interpretation of Hume's programme, to show how one might arbitrate between 'good' and 'bad' forms of reasoning. To this end, I use Schafer's virtue-epistemic account and Ardal's discussion of 'reasonableness' to establish that epistemic justification may also bottom out in conventional justification for Hume.¹³⁶ This will involve drawing an analogy between Hume's account of moral evaluation and his account of epistemic evaluation. I contend that Hume's 'steady and general points of view' play a role similar to *upāya* in justifying our doxastic practices.

3.1 Conventions and the Limits of Rational Justification

By the 'conventional' here, I mean in short, the everyday social, linguistic and behavioral practices that we engage and participate in which allow for communication, co-ordinated action and the attainment of some desired end. While this gloss may seem to make intuitive sense at first pass, what constitutes the conventional is by no means a settled issue, and some clarification is required in order to determine the extension and implications of the term as required for our purposes. For Goodman, "(the) terms "convention" and "conventional" are flagrantly and intricately ambiguous. On the one hand, the conventional is the ordinary, the usual, the traditional, the orthodox...(on) the other hand, the conventional is the artificial, the invented,

¹³⁶ Karl Schafer, "Curious Virtues in Hume's Epistemology", *Philosopher's Imprint*, Vol 1. No.1, (April 2013), 1-20; Pall S. Ardal, "Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume's Treatise", in *Hume: A Re-Evaluation*, eds. Donald W. Livingston and James T.King, (Fordham University Press, 1976), 91-106

the optional, as against the natural, the fundamental, the mandatory.”¹³⁷ Standard Lewisian analyses of conventions typically reduce them to arbitrary methods employed by agents ensuring some payoff given some ‘co-ordination problem’.¹³⁸ The convention is formed over multiple iterations of the same problem. In response to Lewis, Millikan has proposed an account of ‘natural conventions’ in which the conventional is simply “reproduced and standardized patterns of activity, which are proliferated in large part on the basis of the weight of precedent.”¹³⁹ Millikan’s account of conventions does not require that the “participants have any particular beliefs about their activity, or even that most people act in accordance with it.”¹⁴⁰

Given this array, it would be prudent for our purposes, to limit the use of the terms ‘convention’ and ‘conventional’ to some circumscribed conception that is amenable to both Hume and Nāgārjuna and that can be ascertained from the texts we have considered previously. For Hume, conventions are regularities in behaviour that are born of “a sense of common interest; which sense each man feels in his own breast, which he remarks in his fellows, and which carries him, in concurrence with others into a general plan or system of actions, which tends to public utility.”¹⁴¹ This ‘sense’ in which these *particular* regularities are adhered to and not deviated from, sets

¹³⁷ Nelson Goodman, “Just the Facts, Ma’am!”, in *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*, ed. Michael Krausz, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 80, as quoted in Michael Rescorla, “Convention”, *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), eds. Edward N. Zalta.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/convention/>. (Accessed, July 24th, 2017)

¹³⁸ David Lewis, *Convention*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); Rescorla, “Convention”

¹³⁹ Brian Epstein, rev., *Ruth Millikan, Language: A Biological Model*, (Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, 2006), 2; Original text: Ruth Millikan, *Language: A Biological Model*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

¹⁴⁰ Epstein, *Ruth Millikan: Language: A Biological Model*, 2

¹⁴¹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 98

them apart from *mere* regularities in behaviour. We see that conventions are attended by a concern for utility for both oneself and others.¹⁴² As such, we have a sufficiently broad criterion by which some activity or behaviour may be considered a convention. To act with ‘a sense of common interest’ is to act conventionally. The conventions themselves then are simply activities – social, linguistic, religious and political among others- that are carried out and adhered to in the sense described above. The task of delineating what conventions are for Hume is relatively unproblematic due to his explicit treatment and definition of the term itself. Unfortunately, such exegetical fortune does not attend the Nāgārjunian account, and some reconstruction will be required on his behalf.

In Nāgārjuna’s context, conventions or ‘conventional truth’ are contrasted with ‘absolute truth’. Recall here the distinction between conventional truth and absolute truth we have discussed in the previous two chapters. The absolute truth against which conventions are typically set against is one that is immutable and possesses reified essence (*svabhāva*). It is not dependently originated and exists ‘from its own side’.¹⁴³ Conventions on the other hand are dependently originated and stand in some relation on all other conventions, and change with them. The idea that ‘absolute truth’ is immutable and reified is typically ascribed to Nāgārjuna’s opponents; the Ābhidharmikas and the Naiyāyikas. As we have encountered previously, this conception of ‘absolute truth’ is completely sidestepped by Nāgārjuna. For

¹⁴² An exception to this general rule is Hume’s account of “monkish virtues” in the second *Enquiry* (9.3). However, the fact that Hume himself denounces these virtues and asserts that they should be considered vices instead, should allow us to preserve our account of conventions as grounded in utility.

¹⁴³ Jay L. Garfield, “Dependent Arising and the Emptiness of Emptiness: Why Did Nāgārjuna Start with Causation?”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Apr., 1994), pp. 220

Nāgārjuna, all that is accessible to us, or that we are privy to, are conventions. If this is the case, then even absolute truth is conventionally bound. This is the basis for the understanding that the absolute and conventional are *interdependent*, as set out in the first chapter of this thesis. Conventions span a range of human activities and include social, linguistic and soteriological behaviour.

A tract dealing explicitly with how conventions are to be defined and how they operate (the *Vyavaharasiddhi* or ‘Proof of Custom’) has been attributed to Nāgārjuna by later commentators.¹⁴⁴ However, only a six-verse fragment of the *Vyavaharasiddhi* remains, and does not contain enough information to formulate a coherent account of how Nāgārjuna explicitly defined conventions.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Nāgārjuna’s use of conventions (presumably in the sense defined in the *Vyavaharasiddhi*) in both the MMK and the VHV, is consistent with the general Mahāyāna understanding of conventions. A standard example of what constitutes conventions and how they function can be obtained from the Chariot Simile in the *Milinda Pañha* (‘Questions of Milinda’).¹⁴⁶ The *Milinda Pañha* is a record of a purported dialogue that took place between King Milinda (the eponymous *Milinda*) and the *arhat* (saint) Nāgasena. Milinda poses a series of questions to Nāgasena seeking clarification regarding the Buddhist doctrine of the non-self (*anātman*). In response, Nāgasena asks Milinda how he had journeyed to his hermitage. When Milinda replies that he had made his way on a chariot,

¹⁴⁴ Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Indian Philosophies*, Vol. 3 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), pp.179

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ T.W Rhys Davids, trans., *The Questions of King Milinda* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1890-1894). Reprint, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1965)

Nāgasena famously asks the king what exactly a chariot is: “Is it the wheels, or the framework, or the ropes, the yoke, the spokes of the wheels, or the goad that are the chariot?”, “(is) it all these parts of it that are the chariot” or is “there anything outside them that is the chariot?”¹⁴⁷ Milinda answers that none of the available options is in fact the chariot.

Nāgasena then accuses the king of speaking falsely. For if the chariot is not to be found in any of the above, Nāgasena responds, “(what) then is the chariot you say you came in? It is a falsehood that your Majesty has spoken, an untruth! There is no such thing as a chariot!”¹⁴⁸ To this, Milinda replies:

“I have spoken no untruth, reverend Sir. It is on account of its having all these things—the pole, and the axle, the wheels, and the framework, the ropes, the yoke, the spokes, and the goad—that it comes under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of “chariot”.”¹⁴⁹

Nāgasena then applauds Milinda for having “rightly grasped the meaning” of the term, and explains that the designation ‘Nāgasena’ is no different from the designation ‘chariot’, and that the “thirty-two kinds of organic matter in a human body, and the five constituent elements of being” are analogous to the parts of the chariot.¹⁵⁰ This is meant to explain the non-self (*anātman*) doctrine. What underpins the process of designation, and the reason that the designation itself is perpetuated in ‘common use’ is an attendant concern for praxial utility. In the case of the chariot, Siderits notes that “it is only because we happen to have a use for parts assembled in this

¹⁴⁷ Rhys Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda*, 44

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

way and because we find it inconvenient to list all the parts and their relations, that we employ the convenient designator ‘chariot’, and thus end up taking there to be such things as chariots.”¹⁵¹ The praxis here is linguistic, and utility consists in successful communication and the co-ordination of behaviour to some desired end (for instance, transportation).¹⁵² Analogously, in the case of the *anātman* (non-self) doctrine, the praxis in question is soteriological in nature, and utility consists in successful soteriological activity – that is, putting one in good stead to desist from ‘grasping’ and on the path to the cessation of *duḥkha* (suffering) and liberation from *samsāra*.

The statement ‘Milinda travelled to Nāgasena’s hermitage by chariot’ is thus only conventionally true. This is because it “employ(s) concepts (such as the concept of the chariot) that reflect our interests (e.g. in transportation) and our limitations (e.g. our inability to keep track of all the parts in a transport system).”¹⁵³ Conventional designations and their perpetuation come about precisely because they tend to utility in a specific domain. As we have noted in our previous discussion, for Nāgārjuna, absolute truth is just the realization that conventional truth exhausts the colours available to us on the palette. There are no concepts that are independent of our concerns for utility. Siderits observes that “once we concede that the notion of how things are, independently of our interests and limitations, is incoherent, this derogation of conventional truth to the status of mere second-best will fall away.”¹⁵⁴ The

¹⁵¹ Mark Siderits, “On the Soteriological Significance of Emptiness”, in *Studies in Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. Jan Westerhoff, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 39. In his reference to the case of the chariot, as a ‘stock example’, we may reasonably conclude that he is referring to the Chariot Simile we have encountered in the *Milinda Pañha*.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 43

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Mark Siderits, “On the Soteriological Significance of Emptiness”, 39

analysis of the relation between utility and conventions will be revisited later in this chapter.

We see that conventions for Nāgārjuna are not very different from their Humean counterparts insofar as they are activities or practices that we engage in, in order to fulfil some desired end in some specific domain. Conventions are formed and perpetuated because they promote utility. The only salient difference between the two accounts of conventions is their scope. The conventions that Hume discusses are primarily social in nature and emphasize co-ordinated activity, while Nāgārjunian conventions are generally geared towards some soteriological or salvific end and need not pivot on co-ordination. This disparity in scope will be addressed in the final section of this chapter. What we have at this point, is an understanding of conventions that is germane to both accounts. Conventions are a set of shared practices in any domain of human activity that promote utility and the attainment of some end specific to that domain.

Delineating the Space for Non-Rational Justification

With our definition of conventions now in place, we turn to the locus of their operation within both the Nāgārjunian and Humean programmes. Where, in fact, do conventions come into the picture? For Hume, I contend that it is after the negative phase of his scepticism that conventions begin to feature as justificatory instruments. Hume assembles a range of sceptical arguments spanning several *topoi* in *Treatise* 1.4.1.¹⁵⁵ Key among these, are the Regression and Diminution arguments that we have already rehearsed in

¹⁵⁵ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 121-124

Chapter 1. They are central to the negative phase of the sceptical programme in 1.4, and in establishing the state of sceptical “despair” pronounced at the end of 1.4.7.¹⁵⁶ The upshot of the two arguments taken together is Hume’s pronouncement that “all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence.”¹⁵⁷ This claim is characteristic of the negative phase in 1.4, and unequivocally rejects rational inquiry as the appropriate mechanisms at which we arrive at justification for our epistemic practices.

Yet, it is patently obvious that no such “total extinction” takes place. To explain the continued existence of belief and evidence, I take Hume to be motivating an alternative account of justification: since rational mechanisms cannot sustain our beliefs, and, indeed, lead to their ‘extinction’, there must be nonrational mechanisms that do this for us. I follow Schafer in contending that “Hume at the close of Book I is best read as having reached a relatively stable perspective on the normative standing of ordinary empirical reasoning, one which involves only a limited degree of scepticism.”¹⁵⁸

Hume’s ‘Title Principle’ is considered to be a broad justification for this stable perspective as it proposes a distinction between ways in “we ought to reason” and ways in “we ought not to reason.”¹⁵⁹ This distinction enables us to escape the impasse that is generated by Hume’s discussion of the “dangerous dilemma” (*Treatise* 1.4.7.6), between excessive scepticism and

¹⁵⁶ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 172

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 122

¹⁵⁸ Schafer, “Curious Virtues in Hume’s Epistemology”, 3

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* The term ‘Title Principle’ is used by Garrett in Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume’s Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), and has gained widespread valence in discussions of Hume’s epistemology.

excessive ‘credulity’.¹⁶⁰ Sole reliance on reason or the understanding leads to the first ‘sceptical horn’ of the dilemma, which leads to sceptical melancholy and despair. Sole reliance on the ‘trivial suggestion of the fancy’ leads to the second ‘credulity horn’ of the dilemma, which leads to “errors, absurdities and obscurities.”¹⁶¹

The Title Principle, Hume’s proposed way out of the impasse in 1.4.7 of the *Treatise*, is as follows:

“Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us” (Treatise 1.4.7.11)¹⁶²

On our reading of Hume’s sceptical programme, the Title Principle is invoked to provide us with a broadly *non-rational criterion* that must be met in order for the belief-forming method to be accorded merit. This criterion is posited in the absence of, and as an alternative to, the rationally-grounded methods already undermined by the negative phase of Hume’s sceptical programme. It also prevents our lapsing into the ‘errors, absurdities and obscurities’ that result from sole reliance on the ‘fancy’. Kripke’s description

¹⁶⁰ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 174; I thank Hsueh Qu for his extremely helpful discussion on this matter, and for his work on Hume’s ‘Deontological Threshold’.

¹⁶¹ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 174

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 176. I follow Schafer and Garrett in claiming that Hume’s response to the sceptical conclusions turns on the Title Principle. For some objections to this position, see Janet Broughton, “The Inquiry in Hume’s *Treatise*”, *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 113, No. 4 (October 2004). A fuller defense of the centrality of the Title Principle in 1.4.7, is outside the scope of this chapter.

of this class of solutions which informed our discussion in Chapter 1 is particularly salient and warrants restatement here:

“A *skeptical* solution of a philosophical problem begins ... by conceding that the skeptic’s negative assertions are unanswerable. Nevertheless our *ordinary practice* or belief is justified because—contrary appearances notwithstanding—it need not require the justification the skeptic has shown to be untenable.”¹⁶³

We see that we can in fact adjudicate between beliefs and between ways we ought to reason and ways we ought not to in the absence of rational justificatory criteria. For Hume it is here, after the *epoche*, or suspension is accomplished, that conventions as candidates for non-rational justification may be introduced.

How the space for non-rational justification is created in the Madhyamaka programme diverges significantly from the Humean account. As we noted in Chapter 2, referential failure is not a concern for the anti-realist for whom correspondence between some proposition and some state of affairs is a relation that need not be addressed. Reference to a mind-independent reality is taken to be a futile exercise, and rational pursuit of justification for truth-conditions is omitted. For Nāgārjuna, this omission does not occur through the sceptical route of first engaging with rational argumentation to elicit its shortcomings. Instead, the very notion that the way the world is independently of our practices and limitations, is considered devoid of meaning. This marks the divergence of the anti-realist from the sceptic. On the

¹⁶³ Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, (Harvard University Press, 1982), 66-67

anti-realist understanding then, the arguments of the MMK and the VHV are intended to show that “the project of philosophical rationality is misguided not because reality is beyond conceptualization but because that project presupposes a conception of truth as correspondence to a mind-independent reality.”¹⁶⁴ To this effect, Nāgārjuna claims that “(without) a foundation in the conventional truth, the significance of the ultimate cannot be taught” in the matter of MMK (24:10).¹⁶⁵ As we observed above, any conception of truth or meaning that transcends the ambit of human praxis is unavailable to the Madhyamika.

As such, the point at which conventions may be introduced as justificatory instruments is from the outset itself. The Madhyamaka programme does not require that a sceptical suspension of rational argumentation obtain *first, before* conventions play a justificatory role. Conventions feature from the very beginning. Nevertheless, we observe that there is space on both the Humean and Nāgārjunian accounts for non-rational justification. In the following sections, I will attempt to establish that conventions defined in the manner above, function similarly as non-rational justification for both Hume and Nāgārjuna.

3.2 Doxastic Egalitarianism

In this section, I will attempt to outline a pressing difficulty that emerges in both the Humean and Nāgārjunian programmes, once the space for non-rational justification has been delineated, and conventions are considered

¹⁶⁴ Siderits, “On the Soteriological Significance of Emptiness”, 43

¹⁶⁵ Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Translation and Commentary of Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 68

suitable candidates to play this justificatory role. The problem, simply put, is this: how do we arbitrate between *correct* conventions and *incorrect* conventions? On the Madhyamaka front, this problem is intimately linked to the anti-realist reading of Nāgārjuna set out in the previous chapter. If the anti-realist interpretation is successful, it generates the challenge of *doxastic egalitarianism* or an ‘‘anything-goes’ type of relativism’ about beliefs.¹⁶⁶ How in fact can Madhyamikas *justify* sustained belief in the teachings of the Buddha and other core tenets of soteriological import, if all they have recourse to are conventions? This difficulty is a more general consequence that arises out of any sort of conventionalism. Harman’s conventionalist account of how we arrive at and justify moral truths is a prime example of this. As the anti-realist reading of Nāgārjuna essentially bottoms out in a conventionalist semantics, this consequence is of considerable significance, and the problem is one that concerns justification for our beliefs and practices.¹⁶⁷

As we noted in the previous chapter, the purpose of Nāgārjuna’s arguments in the MMK and VHV is not to establish that reality transcends conceptualization (the preoccupation of the sceptic), but that truth must conform to conventions and that ‘‘philosophical rationality is doomed precisely insofar as it seeks a truth free of all taint of human needs and interests’’.¹⁶⁸ However, if truth just consists in assertability conditions, and warranted assertability ‘‘is determined in accordance with human needs and practices’’ (that is, conventions), then changing needs and variegation across

¹⁶⁶ Mark Siderits, ‘‘Thinking on Empty’’, in *Studies in Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. By Jan Westerhoff, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 31

¹⁶⁷ Gilbert Harman, ‘‘Moral Relativism’’, in *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*, ed. Gilbert Harman and J.J. Thompson, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996)

¹⁶⁸ Siderits, ‘‘Thinking on Empty’’, 29

practices should lead to a radical plurality of conditions under which a statement can be asserted or a belief can be justified.¹⁶⁹ As such, an egalitarianism with regards to our practices and the justification for those practices should obtain. One approach would be to fully embrace this sort of relativism.¹⁷⁰ This strategy of “biting the bullet” and resigning oneself to a “Feyerabendian”, ‘anything goes’ conception of radical pluralism however, is particularly unsatisfactory for our purposes here when we consider the fact that Nāgārjuna’s prevailing concerns were soteriological and concerned religious praxis.¹⁷¹ He, like all others in the Mahāyāna tradition, and in Buddhist discourse more generally, was concerned with attaining the broader goals (that is, the cessation of grasping (*upādāna*) and (*duḥkha*) and the liberation from *samsāra*) of what is essentially a functioning religious system.¹⁷² Biting the bullet and resigning to radical pluralism does not seem like a viable option, given Nāgārjuna’s position within the Mahāyāna tradition.¹⁷³ As such, some sort of deliberative mechanism is required in order to distinguish between correct and incorrect conventions. In the next section of this chapter, I will argue that *upāya* is a resource available to Madhyamikas that can fulfil just this role.

For Hume, the Title Principle provides a rough guide to arbitrating between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of reasoning. But what of the ‘inclination’ and ‘propensity’ involved in this arbitration? When, and under what conditions, is the ‘inclination’ to undertake further reasoning warranted?

¹⁶⁹ Siderits, “Thinking on Empty”, 29

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 31

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Michael Pye, *Skillful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism*, 2nd edition (Routledge, 2005), 1

¹⁷³ John Schroeder, Nāgārjuna and the Doctrine of "Skillful Means", *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Oct 2000), 559

Moreover, the ‘propensity’ which is a key condition for reason ‘to be assented to’ is the subject of considerable ambiguity in the context of *Treatise* 1.4.7.¹⁷⁴ In the passages leading up to the discussion of the Title Principle, Hume notes quite unequivocally, regarding the belief in continued and distinct body, that he “can give no reason why (he) shou’d assent to it (further reasoning); and feel nothing but a strong *propensity* to consider objects strongly in that view, under which they appear to me.”¹⁷⁵ The use of ‘propensity’ in this manner indicates that is to be understood as distinct from the operation of reason. If so what is the appropriate propensity, which reason must ‘(mix) itself with’ in order for some reasoning or belief to be considered acceptable by the Title Principle? I follow Schafer in claiming that the Title Principle “alone tells us very little about the nature of his epistemology. For it at most sorts cases of reasoning into two piles: one “good”, the other “bad”, while telling us very little about why these cases are sorted in this way.”¹⁷⁶ As my interpretation of Hume’s justificatory strategy involves a bottoming out in conventions, the appropriate propensity must be bound to some convention or set of conventions. As such, a similar problem involving doxastic egalitarianism arises for Hume. What are the conventions that fix the appropriate ‘propensity’ and ‘inclination’ and allow the Title Principle to operate, and how do we tell them apart from other conventions? Some method of arbitrating between correct and incorrect conventions is also required on the Humean account for this interpretation to succeed. I will attempt to establish that Hume’s ‘steady

¹⁷⁴ See Frederick F. Schmitt, *Hume’s Epistemology: A Verisitic Interpretation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 369-373

¹⁷⁵ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 172

¹⁷⁶ Schafer, “Curious Virtues in Hume’s Epistemology”, 4

and general points of view’ present a solution to this difficulty, as it plays a similar functional role to *upāya*.

3.3 Conventions and *Upāya*

In this section, I will attempt to specify how conventions function as justificatory instruments for Nāgārjuna. This account rests primarily on the concept of *upāya-kausalya* (skill-in-means) as a resource that enables Madhyamikas to discern the *correct* conventions in some given context, and bring one’s practices in line with these conventions.¹⁷⁷ *Upāya* refers to skilfully and expediently apprehending, employing and understanding the various tenets and practices of Buddhism. Central to the notion of *upāya* is the understanding that all Buddhist teachings are provisional means to the broader salvific goals of Buddhism, and that one ought not to form attachments to the means themselves.¹⁷⁸ A practitioner “who makes progress himself comes to recognise this provisional quality in the forms of his religion, and though using the means provided for him he has to learn not to be *wrongly attached* to them.”¹⁷⁹ *Upāya* consists first and foremost, in being able to apprehend the *utility* of some teaching to one’s salvific progress, and recognizing it as just that: a useful device or soteriological aid. In the *Majjima-Nikhāya*, the Buddha states the following: “If you cling to it, if you fondle it, if you treasure it, if you are *attached* to it,” says the Buddha, “then you do not understand that the

¹⁷⁷ Schroeder, “Nāgārjuna and the Doctrine of ‘Skillful Means’”, 559-583; Schroeder notes that scholarship concerning *upāya* and its role in Nāgārjuna’s programme is remarkably impoverished, and given the tendency of contemporary Madhyamaka scholarship to hastily attribute to Nāgārjuna the characteristics of prominent figures in the Western canon, this is somewhat understandable.

¹⁷⁸ Pye, *Skillful Means*, 1

¹⁷⁹ Pye, *Skillful Means*, 1

teaching is similar to a raft, which is for crossing over, and not for getting hold of.”¹⁸⁰ When one advances in skill, one is able to properly adjudicate between conventions and select those of most utility to the salvific enterprise.

Properly adjudicating between conventions requires that one gradually relinquish his attachments. ‘Grasping’ (*upādāna*) onto the concept of self, or to a reified notion of causality in order to navigate the world, is not conducive to the aims of Buddhist praxis and leads to soteriological *disutility*. To make accurate deliberations, one must divest himself of ‘self-interest’ and refrain from engaging in *upādāna*. With *upāya* as a resource, we are now better placed to make sense of Nāgasena’s exchange with Milinda. While *upāya* is discussed primarily in the context of soteriological advancement, the Buddhist concern with living one’s life and comporting in a manner that is not injurious to this advancement might enable us to reasonably extend *upāya* outside its soteriological ambit.¹⁸¹ The conventions governing the designation of the term ‘Nāgasena’ are linguistic, but they are undergirded by an *upāyic* process that does not involve grasping or clinging to ‘Nāgasena’ as a reified entity possessed of *svabhāva*. The conventional use of the term ‘Nāgasena’ enables us to converse with, learn from and co-ordinate action with the conventional personage that the term ‘Nāgasena’ designates. We are, importantly, able to do this without impinging on soteriological efficacy. In the soteriological domain, the conventions governing the designation of the term ‘Nāgasena’ lead to utility insofar as users of the term do not cling to a substantive conception of Nāgasena. In the linguistic domain, these conventions lead to utility insofar as

¹⁸⁰ Schroeder, “Nāgārjuna and the Doctrine of ‘Skillful Means’”, 562

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 572

mutual intelligibility and successful communication is achieved by users of the term.

Upāya then is the mechanism through which conventions are deemed appropriate or inappropriate, and brought in line with a concern for soteriological utility. On the interpretation I have advanced here, a conventionalist semantics is dependent on the *upāya* of its adherents. In the context of the MMK and the VHV, all designations are employed in a manner that is not at odds with soteriological efficacy, and are used in an ‘empty’ or ‘conventional’ sense. The practice of designating the term ‘Nāgasena’ to some ‘unfixed collection of aggregates’ is thus justified, as it fulfils conventional criteria as stipulated by *upāya*. Designating the term ‘Nāgasena’ to an actual existent with *svabhāva* is not justified, as the conventions involved contravene the criteria stipulated by *upāya*. As such, we have the following formulation:

(F1) *Some P is justified iff it fulfils conventional criteria stipulated by upāya, where P is any practice*¹⁸²

Conventions function as justificatory instruments only insofar they are deemed to be soteriologically efficacious through the exercise of *upāya*. One’s beliefs and practices are only justified if they promote this specific sort of utility that *upāya* is concerned with.¹⁸³ It is also crucial to note, that *upāya* is not itself extra-conventional, but a skill involved in arbitrating between conventions. We should contrast this understanding with the characterization

¹⁸² The term ‘practice’ here includes practices of belief-formation

¹⁸³ It may still be objected that *upāya* itself is unable to arbitrate between conventions. For instance one might claim that their exercise of *upāya* has justified their pursuing conventions that are self-interested. In response, I can only reassert that *upāya* and justification in the context of Madhyamaka, are concerned with soteriological efficacy and utility. Any convention that is not soteriologically efficacious is an ‘incorrect’ convention as it were, and the associated practice is therefore unjustified.

put forward by the skeptical interpretation encountered at the close of the first chapter, which contends that Nāgārjuna's use of his own arguments in a conventional sense is justified simply because they 'happen to work'.¹⁸⁴ We see here that it is only through the exercise of *upāya*, and not by an accidental process, that conventions can feature in justification.

This section has dealt with the role of *upāya* and conventions in the Nāgārjunian account and outlined how they may figure in justification. In what follows, I will attempt to bring this understanding to bear on Hume's positive epistemological project, by establishing that Hume's 'general and steady point of view' plays a role that is similar to *upāya*. Seen in this light, my interpretation of Hume may be reasonably read as pushing the 'usefulness and agreeableness' interpretation. This interpretation is centred on treating "Hume as arguing in (Treatise) 1.4.7 that our beliefs and/or epistemic policies are justified via their usefulness and agreeableness to the self and others."¹⁸⁵ Ardal, Schafer and McCormick are some notable proponents of this line of interpretation.¹⁸⁶ While there are elements that my reading has in common with 'usefulness and agreeableness' interpretations, I contend that, with the exception of Ardal (whose reading I discuss in this chapter), the 'usefulness and agreeableness' reading as it is generally handled, does not adequately or explicitly address the role and importance of *conventions* in epistemic evaluation. My discussion in this chapter may be considered an attempt to

¹⁸⁴ Recall our discussion of the case of the painter Apelles in Sextus' *Outlines*, who achieved his goal of rendering the foam of a horse's mouth, by throwing his sponge at the canvas.

¹⁸⁵ Hsueh Qu, "Hume's Practically Epistemic Conclusions?", *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 170, No.3 (September, 2014), 501

¹⁸⁶ Ardal, "Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume's Treatise"; Schafer "Curious Virtues in Hume's Epistemology"; Miriam McCormick, "Why Should We Be Wise?", *Hume Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2005). See Hsueh Qu (2014) for a fuller list of 'usefulness and agreeableness' interpretations of Hume's epistemology.

further develop the ‘usefulness and agreeableness’ reading by emphasizing the role of conventions that emerge comparatively through the dialogue with Nāgārjuna.

3.4 A Kindred Spirit

In the remainder of this chapter, I attempt to establish some similarities between the Nāgārjunian account of conventions and *upāya* and the Humean account of conventions and ‘steady and general points of view’ (GPV); and motivate a conventional or pragmatic account of Hume’s positive epistemological project. In light of the skeptical implications present in 1.4.7, and the emphasis on the inadequacy of *rational* justification for our doxastic practices, I will be concerned primarily with the broadly *non-rational* means by which we arbitrate between beliefs and belief-forming mechanisms. I argue that very much like Nāgārjuna in the absence of rational justification, for Hume, the judgements we make regarding whether a belief is justified or not, bottom out in whether *conventional* criteria concerning utility are met. If a belief is in accordance with a social or linguistic convention and that convention promotes utility in some relevant domain, then that belief is justified. This is not to say that in deferring to the conventional, a belief lacks all *epistemic* merit. Rather, the aim of this section is to contend that for Hume, epistemic criteria *emerge from* or supervene on the conventional. To say that a belief is ‘epistemically justified’ is just to describe a particular way in which that belief relates to social and linguistic conventions.

It must be noted that the GPV is not used by Hume in the context of epistemic justification, but rather in his account of moral virtue. Accordingly,

this interpretation will require that an analogy be drawn between the moral and epistemic cases. To this end, I will utilize Schafer's 'epistemic virtues' account.¹⁸⁷

Before we begin with the discussion of Hume, I would like to address a key interpretive caveat: that is the decision to draw on material from both the *Treatise* and the two *Enquiries* to emphasize the role of conventions. While Hume's own discussion of his skeptical implications, and the relevant commentary on 'non-rational' justification, are often *Treatise*-centric, I believe a good case can be made for relying on resources from other texts in the oeuvre. I am cognizant of the fact that key elements in Hume's skeptical programme in the *Treatise* – most notably the Title Principle- are applied differently or are absent from similar discussions in the first *Enquiry*.¹⁸⁸ I contend, however, that the *space for non-rational justification* is maintained across both texts. Further, it is not clear that Hume's discussion of moral evaluation in the *Treatise* differs significantly from the accounts in the two *Enquiries*. As my interpretation in the remainder of this chapter turns on the structural similarities between the accounts of moral and epistemic evaluation, similar treatments of moral evaluation across the texts legitimate the use of material from both the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*. We now turn to Schafer's 'epistemic virtues' account.

¹⁸⁷ Schafer, "Curious Virtues in Hume's Epistemology"

¹⁸⁸ Hsueh Qu, "The Title Principle (or Lack Thereof) in the Enquiry", *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 33 No.3, (July 2016), pp.257-274

The 'Epistemic Virtues' Account

Schafer proposes “a virtue-theoretical account of how one ought to reason - one that is simply a particular application of his general account of moral virtue.”¹⁸⁹ Through the analysis of Schafer’s account, we will be better placed to understand the role conventions play in both Hume’s account of moral evaluation and his treatment of epistemic evaluation.

Schafer treats the type of reasoning and associated justification endorsed in the Title Principle analogously to the account of ‘moral reasoning’ in Book III of the *Treatise*. In Hume’s account of moral evaluation, if a character trait is to be considered virtuous, the justification for that belief must bottom out in at least one of the following:

A1. *The trait is immediately agreeable to its possessor.*

A2. *It is immediately agreeable to others in the narrow circle of its possessor.*

A3. *It is useful to its possessor.*

A4. *It is useful to others in the same narrow circle.*¹⁹⁰

It is important to note that this evaluation must be made in accordance with a proper ‘moral sense’, which is made from the “common” or “general and steady point of view.”¹⁹¹ This condition is crucial “because it provides Hume with an account of how we come to “correct” our moral sentiments so as to arrive at a set of shared views about matters of virtue and vice that is

¹⁸⁹ Schafer, “Curious Virtues in Hume’s Epistemology”, 7

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 6

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

sufficiently stable to support the meaningful use of moral language.”¹⁹² For Schafer then, the distinction between “good” and “bad” forms of reasoning is just a particular instance of the general moral distinction between virtuous and vicious character traits.¹⁹³ We see here that Schafer is concerned with precisely the sort of non-rational justification discussed previously. In fulfilling virtue-theoretic criteria, a good form of reasoning and the attendant belief are justified.

Schafer then moves to an identification of structural similarities between moral evaluation and the sort of evaluation endorsed in the Title Principle. The criteria here are whether or not the intellectual passions; curiosity and ambition, are satisfied. The ‘propensity’ and ‘inclination’ in the Title Principle are rendered here as the propensity or inclination to satisfy one’s curiosity or ambition. As such, if a belief or belief-forming mechanism is to be justified, it must bottom out in at least one of the following:

B1. *It immediately satisfies the curiosity of the reasoner.*

B2. *It immediately satisfies the curiosity of others in the reasoner’s “epistemic community”.*

B3. *It indirectly satisfies the curiosity of the reasoner.*

B4. *It indirectly satisfies the curiosity of others in the reasoner’s “epistemic community”.*¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Schafer, “Curious Virtues in Hume’s Epistemology”, 6

¹⁹³ Ibid.,15

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.,12

If we grant that this analogy is a sound one, I contend that evaluation of beliefs and belief-forming mechanisms must also be made in accordance with ‘a general and steady point of view.’¹⁹⁵

The Centrality of the GPV to Moral Evaluation

Here, I intend to show that the ‘general and steady point of view’ (henceforth GPV)¹⁹⁶ is central to the Hume’s account of moral evaluation, and that it should play a role in epistemic evaluation. For Hume, moral evaluations are made primarily through “certain sentiments of pleasure or disgust, which arise upon the contemplation and view of particular qualities or characters.”¹⁹⁷ Moral sentiments are originally weak and uncoordinated as they arise primarily “from principles (mainly Sympathy), which may appear, at first sight, somewhat small and delicate (in their upshots).”¹⁹⁸ In order to properly ‘affix the epithets of praise and blame’, Hume notes that we should ‘override particular interests’¹⁹⁹ and render our sentiments more ‘public and social’, thereby co-ordinating, and enhancing our moral sentiments.²⁰⁰ Note here, that the proper ‘moral sense’ referred to earlier, can reasonably be said to mean,

¹⁹⁵ It is here that the affinity my interpretation shares with Schafer’s comes to an end. Schafer argues that there are criteria that are not tethered to pragmatic aims and ends, but which are purely *epistemic*. The reasons he provides for this are 1) that they seem to sit poorly with *manner* in which the criteria Hume endorses in the Title Principle and his discussion of mitigated scepticism due to the fact that “he never indicates that this endorsement is *not* meant to be an endorsement of them on broadly epistemic grounds”; and 2) the Practical Reading does not adequately account for the discontinuities in Hume’s evaluation of forms of reasoning in Book I of the Treatise, and his evaluation of moral reasoning in Book III, due to the fact that both discussions emphasize different passions. I find these reasons unsatisfactory and contend that it is only due to Schafer’s reliance on the unspecified and indeterminate nature of the relationship between pragmatic concerns and epistemic ones that he is able to posit that there are criteria which are purely epistemic.

¹⁹⁶ This is Davie’s abbreviation as seen in William Davie, “Hume’s General Point of View”, *Hume Studies*, Volume 24, Number 2, (November 1998), pp. 275-294

¹⁹⁷ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 371

¹⁹⁸ Jordan Howard Sobel, *Walls and Vaults: A Natural Science of Morals, Virtue Ethics According to David Hume* (Wiley, 2009), 96

¹⁹⁹ Sobel, *Walls and Vaults*, 96

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

the ability to properly use moral language to correct sentiments according to the GPV. Without the GPV, our moral evaluations will be much more sensitive to individual “personal preferences” and how each individual’s Sympathy is kindled in particular scenarios.²⁰¹ Hume notes that “Every particular man has a peculiar position with regard to others; and ’tis impossible we could ever converse together on any reasonable terms, were each of us to consider characters and persons, only as they appear from his peculiar point of view.”²⁰² In light of this, proper moral evaluation is *only possible* through adopting the GPV. Evaluative judgements that do not involve adopting this point of view are susceptible to error, and are thus unjustified. As such, if a character trait is to be considered virtuous or vicious it must be made from the GPV.

If we consider the assertion that the distinction between “good” and “bad” forms of reasoning is just a particular instance of the general moral distinction between virtuous and vicious character traits, then there should in fact be an analogue to the GPV that one needs to adopt in order to correctly determine between virtue and vice for the case of adjudicating between forms of reasoning. If certain character traits that win the approval of a properly functioning moral sense are considered virtuous, then certain epistemic traits such as “propensities to reason in certain ways, propensities to trust (or rely on) certain faculties, and propensities that amount to the acceptance of certain ways, forms, or methods of reasoning”²⁰³ should also be considered in light of a similarly general and steady point of view, before being considered

²⁰¹ Davie “Hume’s General Point of View”, 277

²⁰² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), pp. 371

²⁰³ Schafer, “Curious Virtues in Hume’s Epistemology”, 6

epistemically virtuous. I contend that a similar GPV that has as its aims, utility and mutual intelligibility between members of an epistemic community is present in the epistemic evaluation case. In order for the intellectual passions to be activated and satisfied, a conventionally-mediated general language has to exist prior to the evaluation of whether a particular form of reasoning is deemed good or bad. Having shown that moral evaluation requires the GPV, and that it should also play a role in epistemic evaluation, I will proceed to show how the GPV, in the case of moral evaluation, bottoms out in conventions that have utility and agreeableness as their aims. Once this is complete, we may apply our understanding to epistemic evaluation.

Virtue, *Upāya* and ‘Reasonableness’

Here I argue that entry into the GPV and our continued adoption of the GPV are governed by conventions. I also establish that these conventions have as their ends, pragmatic criteria such as utility and agreeableness. To this end, I draw from Ardal’s discussion of the ‘Virtue of Reasonableness’ to show how moral evaluations and epistemic evaluations ultimately bottom out in the conventional, which have pragmatic ends.²⁰⁴ A preliminary distinction that should be noted at this point is that while *upāya* is concerned first with soteriological utility and arbitrates between conventions on this basis, the GPV is looser in its stipulations and admits of conventions that promote utility to oneself and others.

²⁰⁴ Ardal, *Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume’s Treatise*, 91-106

Ardal notes that moral approbation and disapprobation are to be distinguished from other passions such as love and hatred.²⁰⁵ Approbation and disapprobation are rightly considered calm passions which are “fainter and more imperceptible” than love and hatred.²⁰⁶ Consider the following from the *Treatise* 3.1.2:

“’Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil. ’Tis true, those sentiments, from interest and morals, are apt to be confounded, and naturally run into one another. It seldom happens, that we do not think an enemy vicious, and can distinguish betwixt his opposition to our interest and real villainy or baseness. But this hinders not, but that the sentiments are, in themselves, distinct; and a man of temper and judgment may preserve himself from these illusions.”²⁰⁷

Interpreting the above passage in light of our discussion of the GPV, we may reasonably say that our immediate response to an enemy may correspond to the passion of hatred, and Hume thinks that this is often the case. However he qualifies that such a response is not made from the standpoint of ‘morals’ but from ‘interest’. The ‘trick’ to making correct moral evaluations Ardal notes, is to become a man of temper and judgement.²⁰⁸ This temperance and capacity for correct judgement is only available to those who

²⁰⁵ Ardal, *Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume’s Treatise*, in *Hume*, 98

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 97

²⁰⁷ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 304

²⁰⁸ Ardal, *Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume’s Treatise*, 98

adopt ‘some distant view or reflexion’ or the GPV.²⁰⁹ The calm passions of approbation and disapprobation are distinguished from love and hatred precisely because they are made from the GPV. Ardal goes further to contend that it is through the exercise of *reason* that we are able to oppose the biased passions, and offers this passage from Book III of the Treatise as support for this claim:

“This language will be easily understood, if we consider what we formerly said concerning that reason, which is able to oppose our passion, and which we have found to be nothing but a general calm determination of the passions, founded on some distant view or reflexion.”²¹⁰

Ardal is quick to note that reason as it applies to opposing biased passions is to be differentiated from other conceptions of reason such as Hume’s use of reason “as equivalent to ‘truth’”.²¹¹ Instead he contends that ‘reason’ as it is used at the close of Book III is better understood as ‘reasonableness’.²¹² Ardal contends that it is ‘reason as truth’ that is at stake when Hume famously says that ‘Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them’.²¹³ The ‘reasonableness’ reading, he notes, is not at odds with this claim.²¹⁴ Reasonableness as it is articulated by Ardal is to be considered a *virtue* and I will now attempt to explain why this is the case.

²⁰⁹ Ardal, *Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume’s Treatise*, 98

²¹⁰ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 373

²¹¹ Ardal, *Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume’s Treatise*, 95

²¹² *Ibid.*, 100

²¹³ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 266

²¹⁴ Ardal, *Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume’s Treatise*, 91-92

Ardal notes that we enter into the GPV, due to the fact that reliance on biased passions such as love and hatred “lead to all kinds of conflict”.²¹⁵ It is because “men discover the disadvantages for social life on this basis, (that) a tacit understanding to abide by certain rules and to adopt common viewpoints in looking at objects we are concerned with develops”.²¹⁶ Ardal refers to this understanding to enter into the GPV as a ‘tacit convention’.²¹⁷ Reasonableness is the means by which we enter into the GPV. The GPV “(further) communication, helps to reduce friction and (makes) life more commodious for all” and is thus considered to be both useful and agreeable.²¹⁸ Reasonableness is considered a virtue precisely because it leads to useful and agreeable consequences. Penulhum notes the Ardal’s ‘virtue of reasonableness’ is just the habit of making dispassionate rather than interested judgements and is judged to be virtuous in light of its utility.²¹⁹

It should not be difficult to observe that Ardal’s ‘man of temper and judgement’, dislocated from individual biased passions, resonates with the Madhyamika practitioner employing *upāya* and desisting from grasping. Both the GPV and *upāya* stipulate the sorts of conventions that are appropriate for justification in a given context. They are mechanisms through which conventions are regulated and selected to function as justificatory instruments. Both also bottom out in conventions that have as their aims some relevant conception of utility. However, while they perform the same roles in both these programmes, the *type of utility* through which they regulate conventions

²¹⁵ Ardal, *Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume’s Treatise*, 98

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 99

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 98

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 99

²¹⁹ Terence Penelhum, rev. “Pall S. Ardal: Passions, Promises and Punishment”, *Hume Studies* Vol. 26, No. 1 (April, 2000), 196

are markedly dissimilar. Where pragmatic considerations for Hume as discussed above, usually mean utility and agreeableness to oneself and society, the ‘pragmatic’ for the Madhyamika consists in soteriological utility. Nevertheless, the regulatory role of both the GPV and *upāya* is common across both systems. The type of utility required by the GPV will be explicated presently.

It is crucial to note at this point, that entry into the GPV is itself a ‘tacit convention’, much in the same way that *upāya* is itself conventional, or a provisional means. The basis of entry into both the GPV and *upāya* is not extra-conventional. They are both skills that are cultivated in order to arbitrate between all other conventions, given our goals in some specified context. As such, we now have a model in which proper moral evaluation for Hume depends on entry into the GPV. This GPV is entered into to prevent effects that are not useful or are disagreeable to us, and we prevent these effects by abiding in accordance with certain tacit rules and conventions. Entry into the GPV is considered virtuous because the conventions that we tacitly agree to abide by lead to utility and agreeableness. Textual support for this interpretation can be found in the *Second Enquiry*. In his discussion in “On Why Utility Pleases”, Hume notes that:

“general language, therefore, being formed for general use, must be moulded on some more general views, and must affix the epithets of praise or blame, in conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community”²²⁰. These sentiments spring "from

²²⁰ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 44

principles ... social and universal (that) form, in a manner, the party of human-kind against vice or disorder, its common enemy.”²²¹

Here the conventions we enter into are linguistic, and have as their ends mutual intelligibility and utility, which consists in safeguarding the party of humankind against ‘vice and disorder’. The entry into ‘some more general views’, through acceding to general linguistic rules in order to properly systematize moral language is considered virtuous as it prevents our descent into consequences that are not useful, or disagreeable to us. What should be noted here is the resemblance to Nāgasena’s assertions, which we encountered previously. The conventions governing the designation ‘Nāgasena’ are linguistic and have as their aims, communication, mutual intelligibility and co-ordination of action. However they are also conventions that promote soteriological utility as stipulated by *upāya*. In this case, the linguistic conventions are those which promote utility and ‘the general interest of the community’.

In very much the same way as exercising *upāya* and desisting from ‘self-interest’ and *upādāna* (grasping) is considered virtuous as it leads to the attainment of soteriological goals for the Madhyamika, entering into a GPV that is removed from private interests and participating in these conventions is virtuous as it leads to general utility and agreeableness for oneself and others.

So far in this section, I have attempted to show that proper moral evaluation requires that we adopt the GPV, in the same way the Madhyamikas are required to employ *upāya* to deliberate between conventions. I have shown

²²¹ Sobel, *Walls and Vaults*, 96

that by entering into the GPV, we participate in conventions, and that participating in these conventions is considered virtuous as it leads to utility and agreeableness in contrast to the Madhyamikas' concern with soteriological efficacy. It is *through* the entry into the GPV and the conventional that our moral evaluations are considered justified. As such, we have the following formulation:

(F2) *Some M is justified iff it fulfils conventional criteria stipulated by the GPV, where M is some moral evaluation*

Compare this to (F1) discussed in the previous section:

(F1) *Some P is justified iff it fulfils conventional criteria stipulated by upāya, where P is some practice*

We note that the *role* played by the GPV and *upāya* is functionally similar. The difference lies in the stipulations entailed by the GPV and *upāya* respectively. I will now attempt to apply this understanding to the case of epistemic evaluation.

Reassessing the 'Epistemic Virtues' Account

I have argued above that in light of the analogy between moral and epistemic evaluation, entry into the GPV to conduct proper epistemic evaluation should also be present. We have noted in the previous section that our entry into the GPV, like the exercise of *upāya*, involves our participation in conventions that have as their ends, utility and agreeableness. I contend that epistemic evaluation should also be conducted from the GPV in accordance with the conventional.

Let us now return to the difficulty with the Title Principle, and the ‘epistemic virtues’ account. Recall that the criterion by which our beliefs and belief-forming mechanisms are justified is whether or not the intellectual passions; curiosity and ambition, are satisfied. The ‘propensity’ and ‘inclination’ in the Title Principle are rendered here as the propensity or inclination to satisfy one’s curiosity or ambition. As such, if a belief or belief-forming mechanism is to be justified, it must bottom out in at least one of the following:

B1. *It immediately satisfies the curiosity of the reasoner.*

B2. *It immediately satisfies the curiosity of others in the reasoner’s “epistemic community”.*

B3. *It indirectly satisfies the curiosity of the reasoner.*

B4. *It indirectly satisfies the curiosity of others in the reasoner’s “epistemic community”.*

I contend, in light of our discussion in the previous two sections, that the activation and satisfaction of the intellectual passions must first make recourse to a GPV. The reasoner must first enter into the GPV and participate in the relevant conventions, in order to properly satisfy his or her intellectual passions, and for the intellectual passions of others in the reasoner’s ‘epistemic community’ to be similarly satisfied. Importantly, these conventions have as their aims, utility and agreeableness.

Consider Hume’s discussion in ‘Of Curiosity, or the Love of Truth’ (*Treatise* 2.3.10). Hume states that “The first and most considerable

circumstances requisite to render truth agreeable, is the genius and capacity, which is employed in its invention and discovery” but that it alone may not be sufficient to “give us any considerable enjoyment”.²²² Hume notes that the “truth we discover must also be of some importance”.²²³ This is further supported by Hume’s discussion of the similarities between hunting and philosophy in the same section. Hume notes that “it is evident likewise that these actions must be attended with an idea of utility, in order to their having any effect upon us.”²²⁴ The means by which the curious come to understand agreeableness and more importantly utility are I contend, through conventions that exist between members of an epistemic community. In order for the intellectual passions to be activated and satisfied, a conventionally-mediated general language has to exist prior to the evaluation of whether a particular form of reasoning is deemed good or bad. These conventions consist in the GPV which allows for the satisfaction of curiosity to be understood in public terms. Note also that the conventions have pragmatic ends (that is utility and agreeableness). Thus, given our discussion of conventions and their practical ends, when we say that a belief is justified due to its satisfying one of the four criteria outlined above (B1-B4), we must note that it through the conventional, and their pragmatic ends, that this satisfaction is made possible. Thus the satisfaction of the epistemic virtue of curiosity must ultimately bottom out in the conventional, and the relevant beliefs are more rightly considered ‘conventionally justified’.

²²² Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 287

²²³ *Ibid.*, 288

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

While the case of curiosity bottoming out in the conventional may have seemed rather convoluted, the case of ambition is relatively more amenable and natural. Hume's states of 'ambition' in Treatise 1.4.7 that "(he) feels an ambition to arise in (him) of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of acquiring a name by (his) inventions and discoveries".²²⁵ Given our earlier discussion, 'contributing to the instruction of mankind' and 'acquiring a name by (his) inventions and discoveries', must be made in accordance with the GPV. Ardal's virtue of 'reasonableness' is again relevant here. It is through 'reasonableness' that we enter into a GPV that removes us from our particular self-interested ambitions. We enter instead into conventions, both social and linguistic, that allow considerations of the interests general interests of mankind to influence our ambition, and to make our ambition intelligible to, and capable of interfacing with the curiosity of those in our epistemic community. Thus, in both the cases of curiosity and ambition, note that it is conventions, that have as their ends utility and agreeableness, that are primitive to the satisfaction of the epistemic virtues. We first have to enter into the convention-governed GPV in order for epistemic virtues to be satisfied and for the belief or belief-forming mechanism in question to be justified. As such, we have the following formulation:

(F3) *Some B is justified iff it fulfils conventional criteria stipulated by the GPV, where B is some belief or belief-forming process*

²²⁵ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 176

Beliefs are justified if they are in accordance with conventions that establish and promote utility and agreeableness. The conditions of fulfilment specific to epistemic activity are set out in B1-B4 above.

The positive Humean epistemological enterprise, on this interpretation, bottoms out in conventions that promote utility and agreeableness in very much the same way that Nāgārjunian practice bottoms out in conventions that promote soteriological efficacy. As such the centrality of *upāya* to and its specific function in the justificatory programme in Madhyamaka, mirrors the role of the GPV in Hume's enterprise. And given that *upāya* allows for a purely conventionalist semantics and justification for our practices in Madhyamaka, the GPV can be reinterpreted as allowing for a conventional or pragmatic account of justification in Hume epistemic programme.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have provided a comparative account of how conventions function in both the Nāgārjunian and Humean programmes. I have argued for the following: 1) that conventions play a justificatory role in both the Humean and Nāgārjunian programmes, 2) that conventions for both Hume and Nāgārjuna are attended with considerations of utility, although the *types* of utility are dissimilar across both accounts, 3) that for Nāgārjuna, justification is possible only with *upāya*, which stipulates appropriate conventions, 4) that for Hume, moral evaluation is possible only with the GPV, which functions similarly to *upāya*, and stipulates appropriate conventions and lastly, 5) that epistemic evaluation for Hume is possible only with the GPV, which stipulates appropriate conventions. I hope at this point,

to have successfully buttressed the anti-realist reading of the Nāgārjunian programme, by proving a solution to a major challenge that emerges from my interpretation; namely doxastic egalitarianism. I have also demonstrated that the anti-realist reading possesses significant comparative potential and the resources to enable us to provide solutions to similar challenges in Hume's epistemology thus interpreted, through my analysis of conventions and the similarities between the functional roles played by both *upāya* and Hume's GPV. As such, it is hoped that this comparative dialogue has facilitated a better understanding of both the Nāgārjunian and Humean accounts of conventions.

Conclusion

Here at the close, it would be of some service to take stock of what exactly this thesis has accomplished. In what follows, I retrieve the central arguments of each chapter, and present a concise summary of how they satisfy the goals stated at the outset. The general aims of this thesis were the following: 1) To distance Nāgārjuna from the sceptical tradition as understood by Garfield, 2) To argue that Nāgārjuna is best interpreted as an anti-realist, and 3) To use the anti-realist interpretation of Nāgārjuna to clarify certain aspects of Hume's epistemology, and demonstrate the possibility of comparative dialogue between the two.

Accordingly, the first substantive chapter has attempted to establish that Nāgārjuna cannot be placed alongside Hume in Garfield's 'sceptical family'. I have argued that membership in the sceptical family requires that two criteria be met: first, that the therapeutic ends of the sceptical programme, are to be achieved by deploying sceptical arguments, in order to inhabit a moderate position between extreme or dogmatic views; and secondly, that this moderate position involves deference to the conventional. In this way, to qualify as a sceptic in the sense defined by membership in the sceptical family is to advocate a shift from the reflective to the unreflective. Garfield's interpretation attributes such an exit-entry model to both Hume and Nāgārjuna. I have shown that no such exit-entry model can be accommodated within the Nagarjunian programme, given the interdependence of the Two-

Truths. As such, Nāgārjuna does not meet the criteria for membership in the sceptical family, and Nāgārjuna and Hume are not ‘sceptical siblings’.

In the second chapter, I have advanced an anti-realist interpretation of the Nagarjunian programme as an alternative to the sceptical interpretation, that turns on reading the *catuṣkoṭi* as an illocutionary device. I have distinguished speech-acts from truth-tracking propositions, and through an analysis of Nāgārjuna’s broader goals and the particular context in which Nāgārjuna’s exchanges with his interlocutors took place, argued that the *catuṣkoṭi* is concerned with speech acts rather than truth-tracking propositions. I have formulated the positive phase of the *catuṣkoṭi* in terms of the speech acts *assertion* and *denial*, and the negative phase of the *catuṣkoṭi* in terms of *rejection*. As such, we are able to conclude that Nāgārjuna does not make reference to some states of affairs in the world, and is concerned instead with assertability conditions. In switching the emphasis from truth-tracking propositions to speech-acts, Nāgārjuna effects a shift from a realist semantics to a conventionalist (anti-realist) semantics. It is only through a convention-governed semantics that our statements may be rendered meaningful and our beliefs and practices may be justified.

The final substantive chapter in this thesis has attempted to utilize some implications of the anti-realist reading of Nāgārjuna; namely that meaning ultimately bottoms out conventions, to interpret Hume’s post-sceptical epistemology as praxially or conventionally grounded. I have identified the inability to arbitrate between correct and incorrect conventions

as a potential challenge that emerges on anti-realist interpretation. I have established that a similar challenge emerges for Hume, in light of his sceptical conclusions at the close of *Treatise* 1.4.7. To solve the issue for Nāgārjuna, I have introduced the concept of *upāya* (skill-in-means) as a resource that enables Madhyamikas to identify the *correct* conventions in some given context, and bring one's practices in line with these conventions. We concluded that for Nāgārjuna, some practice is justified if and only if it fulfils conventional criteria stipulated by *upāya*. I have applied this understanding to Hume's positive epistemological project, by establishing that Hume's 'general and steady point of view' (GPV) plays a role that is functionally similar to *upāya*. For Hume then, some belief or belief-forming process is justified if and only if it fulfills conventional criteria stipulated by the GPV. As a result, I have demonstrated that the anti-realist reading possesses significant comparative potential as well as the resources to enable us to provide solutions to similar challenges in interpreting Hume's epistemology. As such, it is hoped that the dialogue I have facilitated here has allowed the Nagarjunian programme to emerge in its own voice, rather than as an echo of Humean scepticism.

At the outset, I stated that an important aim of this thesis was the demonstration of a methodologically more robust comparative dialogue. Such a dialogue would be one that operates "somewhere between (the) two errors" of either rejecting the *comparata* as incommensurable and foreclosing on the possibility of comparative philosophy altogether, or which involves the "(imposition) of an alien conceptual framework on another tradition", leading

to a mischaracterization of the elements being compared.²²⁶ This thesis has been an attempt at facilitating philosophical dialogue between Hume and Nagarjuna that does not commit either of these errors. My emphasis on the soteriological and contextual features of Nagarjunian thought and how they interface with his philosophical programme have informed both the anti-realist reading I have proposed and the account of conventions I have drawn from this reading. This has allowed us to develop an underrepresented feature in the Humean programme: namely his own account of conventions, and how it may be put to use in clarifying certain aspects in his epistemology. As such, I hope to have demonstrated that this conception of comparative philosophy is both possible and philosophically productive.

²²⁶ David Wong, “Comparative Philosophy” in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Antonio S. Cua (Routledge, 2003), 54

Glossary of Sanskrit Terms

<i>anātman</i>	non-self
<i>anitya</i>	impermanence
<i>arhat</i>	saint
<i>avyākata</i>	incomprehensibility
<i>catuṣkoṭi</i>	four corners (tetralemma)
<i>darśana</i>	school, view
<i>dharmas</i>	components of experience
<i>drṣṭi</i>	view, thesis
<i>duḥkha</i>	suffering
<i>kathā</i>	debate
<i>pañhaṭhapanīya</i>	questions to be set aside
<i>paramarthika</i>	absolute, ultimate
<i>paramāṛthikasatya</i>	absolute truth
<i>pramāṇa</i>	means of knowledge
<i>prameya</i>	object of knowledge
<i>pratītyasamutpāda</i>	dependent co-origination
<i>pratyaya</i>	conditions
<i>saṃsāra</i>	cyclic rebirth
<i>saṃvṛit</i>	conventional
<i>saṃvṛitsatya</i>	conventional truth
<i>śūnya</i>	empty
<i>śūnyatā</i>	emptiness
<i>svabhāva</i>	reified essence
<i>tathāgata</i>	the Buddha
<i>ṭhapanīya</i>	to be set aside

upādāna

grasping

upāya

means, technique, method

upāya-kauśalya

skill-in-means

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