

CHAIR: MARK SIDERITS
RAPPORTEUR: CHRISTOPHER KELLEY
SPEAKER: JAN WESTERHOFF
TITLE: “NĀGĀRJUNA’S MADHYAMAKA: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS”
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<<EDITED TRANSCRIPT>>

CHRISTOPHER KELLEY

Welcome. Tonight is the first in a series of lectures hosted by the newly established Columbia Society for Comparative. The CSCP is comprised of the University Seminar on Comparative Philosophy and the Graduate Student Group on Comparative Philosophy. If you’re interested in becoming a member of either of these groups, please see me and/or go to the following website: <http://www.cbs.columbia.edu/cscp/>. There you will also find free audio podcasts of all our lectures and instructions on how to join our mailing list.

Unfortunately our chair, Mark Siderits, is unable to join us tonight. Mark is presently a member of the Philosophy Department at the University of Illinois and is occasionally unable to make the long trip out here. Fortunately, we are very privileged to have Jan Westerhoff as our guest speaker.

Jan is presently a research fellow at the CUNY Graduate Center and a lecturer at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Durham. Jan completed a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Cambridge and his research interests include: practical philosophy, the history of ideas, metaphysics, philosophy of language, as

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well as Indian philosophy. He's currently doing work under the tutelage of David Ruegg, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, at the University of London. Tonight Jan will share some of his more recent work on the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna. So won't you please join me in welcoming Jan Westerhoff.

[APPLAUSE]

JAN WESTERHOFF

Well, thank you Christopher and thank you all for coming. Just to give you an idea of what's happening tonight, I think I'll speak for about 30 or 40 minutes and then we can have questions for as long as you like. But not more than an hour I suppose.

So, this is the title of today's talk, "Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka: Some philosophical Problems." We're talking about two specific philosophical problems in particular. Now, as some of you might be aware, there was a much bigger lecture on Nāgārjuna here in New York last week, given by the Dalai Lama. And there, the Dalai Lama said that he enjoyed giving lectures a lot more than giving initiations. Because for initiation if you got the text wrong or something, then the ritual didn't work, but a lecture — that was just talk. And so you could (particularly when talking about Nāgārjuna), partly explain the points you understand and pass over the rest in silence. And so I thought that was very good advice. So I'm going to explain what I understand of a particular problem in Nāgārjuna's thought (or at least what I think I understand), and sweep everything else under the carpet.

To start, I'll give you a very, very brief idea of who Nāgārjuna was and what he did. Historical information on Nāgārjuna is notoriously sparse. We have virtually no biographical information. The most recent research suggests that he wrote most of his philosophical works roughly between 180 and 200 AD. So that makes him a

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rough contemporary of Sextus Empiricus. He probably lived at, or close to, a place called Amaravati in Southern India. He is attributed with having composed six main philosophical works in Sanskrit, four of which are extant in Sanskrit, and the rest are preserved in Tibetan (the so-called Yukti-corpus). There is, of course, an enormous amount of later commentary works. His six philosophical treatises form a foundation of the philosophy of Nāgārjuna that I'll be talking about tonight. Because as some of you might know, there are a variety of works attributed to Nāgārjuna — more than 120, I think, in the Tibetan canon — of very diverse quality and contents. I'm focusing on these six works, which definitely provide the philosophical core of his thinking.

Right, so, on the slide here I've provided an artistic rendering of Nāgārjuna. But this is not what he looked like. This is a 17th century painting done 1,500 years after his death. So why am I showing this to you apart from giving some pretty visuals? Well, I think it illustrates two interesting points about Nāgārjuna.

First of all, as you can see from the robe, he was a Buddhist monk. And secondly, he is depicted here with this crown protrusion. I think the only other figure in the Tibetan pantheon, or the Buddhist pantheon, which is depicted in this style, is the Buddha (and sometimes Padmasambhava). So you should realize that the importance of Nāgārjuna within Buddhist thought and Buddhist religion -- it's hard to overestimate that. He's certainly one of the most seminal thinkers within Buddhist philosophy. And I think it's probably true to say that he's the most famous and one of the most influential of two Indian thinkers. (The other being the Hindu philosopher Shankara.)

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Ok, so that is our very sparse biographical introduction. Now I'm going to talk about the philosophical problem I'm going to address today. First of all, as probably everybody knows who's ever heard anything about Nāgārjuna's thought, it's all about emptiness. According to Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka philosophy, all things are empty. One might ask, 'empty of what?' Well, they're empty of *svabhāva* -- this particularly intricate Indian concept that is sometimes translated as "inherent existence," "existence," or "intrinsic existence," or "real existence" and so on. To understand what the theory of emptiness is all about, it is of prime importance to understand what the notion of *svabhāva* is all about. Or as Tibetan commentarial literature would say, we have to identify the *dgag-bya* ("the object of negation"), and then we understand what things are empty of.

In order to understand what *svabhāva* is all about, it's very important to take into account that there are two very different -- but closely related -- notions of *svabhāva*. One is a primarily an epistemological notion (having to do with knowledge), and the second is primarily an ontological notion (having to do with existence). I sometimes refer to them as essence-*svabhāva* and substance-*svabhāva*.

So let us first have a look at essence-*svabhāva*. I define essence as 'whatever property an object cannot lose while remaining that very object.' So, for example, Candrakīrti's commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* argues that heat is called the *svabhāva* of fire because it's invariable in it. The heat of water, however, is not *svabhāva* because water can cool down whilst remaining water. But there can be no cold fire. So water cannot lose the property of being hot without ceasing to be what it is, while hot water could. And for that reason, heat is the *svabhāva* of fire (or essence-*svabhāva* in this context). And the heat of water is not its *svabhāva*.

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This understanding of svabhāva is very close to the Sanskrit notion of *svalakṣaṇa* (“an object’s particular characteristic”), which we use in order to determine what that very object is. And for Candrakīrti at least (very conveniently), everything that is hot is fire. And everything that is fire is hot. So once we’ve got a grip on the svabhāva of heat, you can identify fire. So this notion is primarily epistemological because it’s all about how we find out what something is.

Now there’s a very important different understanding of svabhāva that is in terms of substance. Now, as you know, in Western philosophy “substance” is a major topic. And there are so many different definitions of substance that I couldn’t possibly summarize them all here. I am defining substance – in the present context -- as ‘something which is not dependent for its existence on anything else.’ Candrakīrti uses a particular phrase in the fifteenth chapter of the *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (which is primarily an investigation of what svabhāva), in which he says that svabhāva is defined as whatever is not artificially created and not dependent on anything else. So whereas the epistemological notion of svabhāva is very close to the notion of *svalakṣaṇa*, this substance-svabhāva is basically an understanding of svabhāva in terms of the notion of *dravya* or *dravya sat* (“substantial existence”). This notion of *dravya* is important in early Buddhist philosophy -- particularly in Abhidharma thinking.

In brief, some of you might know the famous example of the chariot in the “Questions to King Milinda” where the question is raised, ‘Ok, so does a chariot really exist?’ And then the discussion goes about breaking down the chariot and saying, ‘Well no, the chariot doesn’t really exist because it’s just a conglomeration of its parts. What, however, does really exist – the ultimate parts of the chariot, or the fundamental atoms or whatever we might identify this way.’ And to this extent, this is some sort of merological reductionism where we say, ‘well,

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the composite thing is not real, however, what is real, what is dravya sat -- the fundamental atoms.' So there is an ontological bottom level and those things are the things which exist with substance – svabhāva.

It's important to take into account that when Madhyamaka thinkers -- particularly Nāgārjuna -- talk about the refutation of svabhāva, what they mean is the refutation of substance-svabhāva. They are not refuting essence-svabhāva. This is very clear in Candrakīrti's commentary where he basically says that essence-svabhāva is unproblematic. There is, however, a fundamental problem in thinking that there is an Abhidharma style of ontological foundation upon which everything depends. Ok, so this gives you a rough idea of what the theory of emptiness is all about. It's about the rejection of inherent existence or substance-svabhāva, or in this case, just substance.

I have to add here one caveat, while I think it a useful heuristic crutch, it's important to realize that you can't just equate the Madhyamaka concept of svabhāva with the Western philosophical understanding of substance. The Madhyamaka concept of svabhāva has a variety of other dimensions that our Western concept of substance does not. In particular, there is a cognitive dimension to the nature of svabhāva, which I won't talk about at all today. But this is basically the idea that svabhāva is something that is unwittingly, or automatically, projected out onto the things -- which in fact it lacks. Whenever we perceive the world, we automatically perceive it in terms of substance, or svabhāva. And so this is a characteristic of a deluded mind. The whole idea of Madhyamaka reasoning and meditation is to get rid of the automatic superimposition of svabhāva. This cognitive idea of something you project out into the world is, of course, completely absent in Western analyses of substance. So, it's important to realize that when we equate svabhāva with substance -- as I'm doing here --

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this is a simplification. And while it may not get at the whole complexity of the picture, I think it is close enough for the particular problem I want to discuss today.

The problem I want to discuss today is really two problems which are very closely related. As you may all know, Madhyamaka literature presents a variety of both general and specific arguments for the thesis of universal emptiness. They're based on the examination of causation, the examination of parts and whole. And then there are specific arguments about particular topics such as knowledge, language, and the self and so on. All of these are used demonstrate that everything is empty and that all of these particular things are empty. How exactly these arguments work, and whether they work, is a huge topic that I'm not going to talk about today. What I am going to talk about are two reflexive problems for the thesis of universal emptiness.

Reflexive problems refer to those instances where something is applied to itself. In this particular case, I want to discuss the problem of what happens when we apply the thesis of universal emptiness to itself. If one does this, you immediately get into two very thorny problems. The first is this notion of the 'emptiness of emptiness.' If everything is empty, then emptiness should be empty too. Secondly, the notion of the 'emptiness of the theories of emptiness.' Nāgārjuna asserts that they should be empty too. It's interesting that this second problem also turns up in the contemporary discussion of global anti-realism. And this is what I have called here the anti-realist's dilemma. And we'll talk about this a bit more in the second part of the lecture.

Ok, so this is the set-up. I'll begin by talking about the first problem -- the emptiness of emptiness. The obvious problem here is whether emptiness is itself empty? You might think that the obvious answer is that it had better be -- because if emptiness wasn't empty, then there would be at least one thing which isn't empty in the

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emptiness itself. Therefore the thesis of universal emptiness would be contradictory. So, the official party line seems to be that everything is empty and emptiness is empty too. But if we just accept that, then we run into problems with some of the major commentarial literature. Look, for example, at one famous passage from Candrakīrti's autocommentary on the *Entrance to the Middle Way*. In the footnote, where he says, "Ultimate reality for the Buddhas is svabhāva itself. That, moreover, because it is non-deceptive is the truth of ultimate reality. It must be known by each one for himself." On this understanding, we find that Candrakīrti seems to say that svabhāva is something which is both a mistaken superimposition onto objects (that's the cognitive damage of svabhāva), and also something which appears to the Buddhas who have purified their perceptions and are completely free of any misknowledge. This, rather puzzling passage, is then followed by a long list of synonyms Candrakīrti gives for emptiness where he characterizes emptiness as "changeless," as "not originated," and "independent of everything else." So, strangely enough, both svabhāva (the object of negation) and emptiness (the theory of the nonexistence of svabhāva) seem to be ascribed the same properties. That is really strange. Because it makes it seem like emptiness is a contradictory concept.

Why would it be contradictory? Because, the absence of svabhāva – namely, emptiness – should both exist (because svabhāva does not exist, that's what the Madhyamaka argue are) and it also should not exist, because it has the same properties as the nonexistent svabhāva. Because the theory of emptiness is exactly the theory argued – that there is 'nothing which is changed,' has 'not originated' and 'independent.' So, when examining the notion of the 'emptiness of emptiness' we come up with the most thorny, contradictory problem. And we'll have to do something about it.

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So what are we going to do about it? Well, here's the first weird response by way of Graham Priest. Basically, the idea here is that we might rebut it and say, 'yeah, the theory of emptiness is contradictory. Emptiness is a contradictory concept, but that's fine. Because there can be true contradictions. And the contradictory notion of emptiness shows that reality itself is contradictory.' Here's what Graham Priest writes in his very fine paper on Nāgārjuna and the limits of thought. He calls it "Nāgārjuna's paradox." He says:

"Reality has no nature. Ultimately, it is not any way at all. On the other side of the street emptiness [the lack of an ultimate nature] is an ultimate characteristic of things. The paradox is grounded in the contradictory nature of reality itself" (See "Nāgārjuna and The Limits of Thought," in *Beyond the Limits of Thought*. OUP, 2002: 267).

For Priest, far from being a difficulty of Nāgārjuna's statements, this contradictory statement formulates a fundamental truth about the nature of reality -- one that can only be formulated through a paradox. In this book, Graham Priest tries to show that this is a particular kind of "limit contradiction" which turns up in all sorts of philosophical contexts -- in Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger.

So, that would be one way of replying to this charge of the 'emptiness of emptiness' and the resulting problem. But I'm not completely happy with that. Maybe it's because I'm not completely convinced by dialecticism; namely, the theory that there can be true contradictions. If it were possible, I would prefer to have a way of tackling the problem that uses fewer philosophical resources and is a bit more conservative. And like all conservative things, this response is also a bit dull, I think. But at least it has the advantage that it doesn't commit us to saying that well, there must be true contradictions.

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Ok, so here is the alternative response and you can expect how this response goes – being ‘changeless,’ ‘not originated’ and ‘independent’ means something different when applied to svabhāva and when it’s applied to emptiness. That’s the standard way of defusing a contradiction. Its like saying, “when I say ‘A’ and ‘not A’ then I mean different things by ‘A.’” And that’s exactly what we are going to do here. (Mind you, this Interpretation is very much an orthodox Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka viewpoint. Yogācāra has a very different interpretation, but I’m not going to go into this.) So what are we going to say about the attributes of emptiness? Well, first of all when we say that emptiness is ‘independent,’ then we mean that its existence does not depend on some specific object. We don’t say it’s independent of any object -- whatsoever. So, for example, if I say about a certain mathematical theorem, this is independent, then it could mean that while it exists, it could mean in a strong sense -- it exists whatever else might exist. In other words, it doesn’t depend on some physical things, minds, or anything else. Being in the universe, this theorem will always exist. So that would be the strong sense.

In the weaker sense, I could also say that this mathematical theory doesn’t depend on, say, it being proved by some particular person or being inscribed on a particular blackboard, or in a particular book. It’s just somebody has to have proved it at some point in time. It has to be written somewhere, right? So that’s the weak understanding of dependence -- it doesn’t depend on any specific object. So, this is also the weak understanding of independence, which we could employ here in our discussion of emptiness. Here we would want to say that emptiness is not some sort of primordial reality until then – before the things. But it is rather the case that as long as objects exist and are conceived of by beings with deluded minds – pretty much like ourselves – then these objects will be empty of the mistaken thing which is superimposed onto them. So, it’s not independent of everything, but it doesn’t depend on any particular object.

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Secondly, emptiness is 'changeless' and 'not originated' because it is the property of every object and not produced together with the empty object. What does that mean? Well, emptiness is not regarded as some permanent, unchanging absolute reality that somehow when, say, the object is destroyed, you have some empty object and that ceases to exist, with the emptiness somehow remaining behind because that's its true nature of things. It's rather the case that if, say, an empty pot is destroyed then there's no point in referring to its emptiness because there would be nobody superimposing substantial existence onto the thing in any case because it doesn't exist. So, whatever phenomenon is conceptualized by ordinary beings will have substance-svabhāva mistakenly ascribed to it. Emptiness is unchanging because it is a property ascribed to everything ever conceived (once they have been correctly analyzed).

Ok, so, to follow up on this point, we can sum this up by saying that emptiness does not exist by substance-svabhāva. Emptiness is not a property or phenomena existing independently of anything else. Candrakīrti, in his discussion of this, uses the example of vitreous floaters (this is a technical term from ophthalmology). The Sanskrit term is *timira* and the Tibetan term is the *rab rib*. And what it means is a familiar phenomenon that you sometimes see sort of floating things in your vision – almost everybody has them – which are basically little pockets of liquefied gel inside your eye which cast a shadow on your retina and then you see little blobs in your vision. It's completely harmless and nearly everybody has them. So he uses this as an example to illustrate the notion of emptiness being expressed here. He says, 'consider the example of one person suffering from this condition. Let's say he's got this white bowl and he thinks that he has a small hair in the bowl because he sees these floaters in his eye. Well, then the eye doctor, or some well-meaning friend, will tell him that there are no hairs there in the bowl. In fact, he'll say that you're just superimposing that -- it's all in your head (or rather

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your eyes). So, then the question is, does the bowl objectively have the property of being free of hairs?’

Candrakīrti says no because it only has this property in order to remove the mistaken superimposition of there being hairs in the property, which is held by the guy who has got a problem with his eyes.

So, it’s not innately that this is somehow something which is objectively ultimately on its own side true of the bowl, but it’s only something which we need in order to remove a mistaken superimposition. And for this reason, emptiness is dependent. Since its purpose is to dispel an erroneous conception of objects. And if there is nobody who projected hairs into bowls, then we wouldn’t have to talk about that the bowl being free of hairs. And so if nobody projected svabhāva into things, we wouldn’t have to talk about sva-things being free of svabhāva.

Ok, so the upshot of all of this is that emptiness is the essence-svabhāva of all objects. The idea here is that as heat is the essence of fire, emptiness is the essence of all things. The notion of emptiness is not contradictory because emptiness here is not regarded here as some sort of underlying substance. It is no noumenal reality, but simply a property that objects can not lose without ceasing to be those very objects.

So when Candrakīrti is giving all these weird synonyms for emptiness – ‘how things really are,’ and ‘suchness,’ and so on, what he means is not that it’s some sort of substance beyond things. What he means is that emptiness is the essence-svabhāva of all objects. So in the same way particular objects have a particular svalakṣaṇa -- particular specific marks that we can use to identify them -- the universal mark of everything which exists is that it is empty. And this is the reason why emptiness is the nature of all things, and so on. So this is the pretty much what I wanted to say on the first point – the ‘emptiness of emptiness.’ Let me now come to the second

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example, the second reflexive problem. Ok, so there are two problems I want to raise here. The first is what I call the antirealist's dilemma and the second is the emptiness of the theory of emptiness.

First is the antirealist's dilemma. This is the problem that arises in contemporary discussions of antirealism -- what is the status of the theory of global antirealism itself? So, perhaps a word about realism and antirealism is necessary here. Various kinds of local antirealisms are fairly common in philosophy and, I think, very sensibly unproblematic. For example, when we say that, for example, ethical values are not a particular class of objects on their own, but they rather have to be reduced to something, or say, value judgments by people or motive responses or what have you. If you have this kind of view, say, of ethical values, then you are an antirealist about ethical values. Now, the funny thing about the global antirealist is that he wants to be an antirealist about everything. It's basically antirealism gone wild!

Now, the most popular view of a global antirealism is some sort of antirealism, I think, of the variety defended by Richard Rorty. The basic idea here is that there is no truth impicator, only truth relative to some way of speaking. We might also want to say, truth in some sort of fiction. So, when, for example, we say that the Himalayas are much older than the human race, this is not a truth that is made true by the objectively existent Himalayas out there in the world independent of human concerns. It is rather something, an implication of the mountain talk that is part of our common conceptual framework. And according to this variety of global antirealism, all truth is of this brand.

Ok, so if you want global antirealism, then of course the question is, 'what's the status of the theory of global antirealism itself?' Because that's supposedly true. It has to be couched in the very same terms. So, now, this

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can't be an absolute truth because if it's an absolute truth, then there would at least be one truth which is not just truth in the theory, but something really true. True with a capital T. So, that's not the way to go.

Secondly, if you want to say global antirealism is also just true in a theory, then we might just want to think, 'well, then it's just truth about the story. It has no impact, it's not even about the word, right? It's just something implied by some sort of conceptual scheme and if I don't want to buy it, I don't want to buy it.' And this is, I think, brought out very well by this quotation by Thomas Nagel, which you see on the next page, which is in fact here. I'll just read this to you and you might want to change the word when he says subjective and objective, you might just want to read relative and absolute. So what he says:

The claim 'everything is subjective' must be nonsense, for it would itself have to be either subjective or objective. But it can't be objective, since in that case it would be false if true. And it can't be subjective, because then it would not rule out any objective claim, including the claim that it is objectively false. [...] It is a report of what the subjectivist finds agreeable to say. If he also invites us to join him, we need not offer any reason for declining since he has offered us not reason to accept (*The Last Word*, OUP 1997, page 15.)

So this is basically the antirealist's dilemma. Well, the obvious problem that we encountered in the Madhyamaka context is that when everything is empty, then obviously the theory of emptiness is empty too. So what's going to happen to that? So if the theory of emptiness is itself empty, then the theory is inconsistent, obviously, because then there is that theory itself is **[unintell]** which is not empty. And therefore, the claim of **[unintell]** is false. If, however, it is empty, then we might have the familiar charge that it really has no impact. Because if it is an empty theory, what good is it supposed to do? And this is exactly what Nāgārjuna's opponent at the beginning of the *Dispeller of Objections*, the short work called the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*. So what he says is

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the following, “If there is no substance of things,” so no *svabhāva*, “your statement that everything is empty must be devoid of substance, too. Therefore it cannot deny the substance of things.” Now comes the example, “A non-existent fire cannot burn, a non-existent knife cannot cut. But if your statement has a substance your original position is destroyed. There is a contradiction and you have to give the special reason why your statement is not to be counted amongst all things.” Ok, now let us consider some possible replies to both of these problems –to the antirealist dilemma and to the charge of Nāgārjuna’s opponent that I’ve just outlined.

So, first of all, I think that you probably all agree that embracing the first horn of the dilemma is not attractive. Saying, well, ok, so they said here’s one counterexample – one thing which is we don’t have to be antirealist about is one thing which is not empty. That is not a very attractive and in fact, I don’t know of anybody who actually embraces that theory. So what we really want to do is find a reply to the no impact or impotence charge. There is an alternative interpretation of what the second horn of the dilemma is about, which was described in the recent book by Boghossian on fear of knowledge. Because we’re actually running quite late, I’m not going to go into the subject. I’ll go straight to this.

I think it’s very easy to underestimate the force of Nāgārjuna’s opponent’s argument. Because what you read in the sort of standard text is they’re saying the opponent of Nāgārjuna just gets the meaning of emptiness completely wrong when he says a non-existent knife cannot cut. Because he just thinks that when Nāgārjuna says something is empty, it’s non-existent. And that’s obviously not what he means. What he means is empty of *svabhāva*. So therefore there is no problem. But I think that’s a very sort of simple-minded reply because you can interpret this argument in a much more sophisticated manner. I think that the deeper worry is that for the opponent, his statements connect directly with the world, with the ontological foundations. But for

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Madhyamaka of course, there is no substance, there is no ontological foundation. So the Madhyamaka assumption can no more refute the opponent's assertion, which supposedly connects up with the real world, then, say, rain in a meteorological simulation can moisten real soil. Or, in the way, say, in which a key in a film could open a real door. So they're just two different levels of reality. One is just within the story, so to speak. And one has some sort of referential oomph and connects up with the world.

Ok, so we might want to have a look at what Nāgārjuna says. And that is, as usual, very enigmatic. And it is probably the most famous statement in the entire text. It's the famous, or infamous verse 29 of the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*. So what Nāgārjuna says here, "If I had a thesis the difficulty you mention would apply to me." So that's the charge of being either contradictory or having no impact. "However, I do not hold any thesis. Therefore there is no defect in my position." Right, ok, so what does he mean by that? Well, what I think he means (and this is very much my interpretation), is that this interpretation has the redeeming feature that it actually works. So, what Nāgārjuna denies here is that he asserts any thesis that is to be interpreted according to the opponent's semantics. So, the opponent's semantics, particularly in this book, is basically a semantics of traditional Nyāya theory of knowledge. So the idea is that reference is reference to ready-made world -- to a world that is cut up at the joints, independent of our wishes and concerns. And secondly, there is something like an objective reference relation. So that the way we refer to these cut-up things is not something which is just true by convention, but something which is somehow mind-independent.

For example, we could say in a modern way that there is some sort of structural similarity between the sentence or the thought we have in our head and the state of affairs. And it's this structural body that is independent of what we think of things, which makes the theory of truth possible. So, I think in order to reply to this second

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charge – to the problem of the emptiness of the theory of emptiness -- and similarly to the antirealist dilemma, we have to think about semantics. And the question it boils down to is that in order to reply to the second horn of the dilemma, it is necessary to develop a theory of meaning and truth that dispenses with the notion of a non-linguistic world.

Now, this is quite a radical position, obviously. What we want to do here is give an account of what a sentence means and give an account of when a sentence could be true without actually talking about the world at all. Now, if you could actually get that to work, then if such a semantics worked equally well as the traditional semantics we usually know and love, then it would obviously make few ontological assumptions because it doesn't make one key ontological assumption, namely the world. And therefore, on the grounds of parsimony (or as the Indian commentators would have it, on the ground of lightness), the antirealist assertion couldn't be seen as having no impact on the realist assertion because both of these assertions would have to be interpreted in terms of this semantics which dispenses with the world. Basically it is an antirealist denial of the theory of emptiness and the Madhyamaka assertion of it.

So, how would such a semantics work? And is it possible that it would? Well, at this stage of course, I have to be extremely hand-wavy. So, the idea of course of what one might want to do is here treat language not in any representational way, not as a means of mirroring in some structural way features of the world, but purely as a set of conventions for coordination between agents. If you regard it as a sense of conventions which don't have to refer at any point to the world, but which arise purely for the evolutionary need to coordinate behavior in groups. That would be the big challenge, I think, which both the Madhyamaka and the global antirealist would have to answer to. So, if it is possible to develop such a semantics, then I think we could very well reply to this

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thorny issue of the [**unintell**] in this dilemma. But of course, how such a theory would work is a big question I have very little to say on just at the moment. And that's all I want to say. Thank you.

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