

M. Siderits and S. Katsura (eds.). *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way. Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Wisdom Publications. Classics of Indian Buddhism. Boston 2013, 351 pp.

I

The book under review with the title *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way* (NMW) offers a new translation into English of the fundamental treatise of the philosophical school of Madhyamaka, viz. the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā-s* (MMK) regarded as the creation of an author called 'Nāgārjuna'. It includes a running commentary on the verses that constitute the work, which purportedly distills 'information from the four extant classical Indian commentaries in order to make clear the background context and reasoning of each argument'. The publication contains four major sections: 1. An introduction, which, apart from specifying some characteristics and underlying principles of the subsequent part, in which the translation is presented, provides some general information about the text as well as its author and attempts to convey to the readers 'some general introductory' information 'concerning Nāgārjuna's goals and strategies' (pp. 1-10). 2. The main part, where translations of all the verses constituting the entire work are offered subsequent to their citation in the original language, often followed by explanatory remarks on the part of the authors of NMW. At the beginning of each of the 27 chapters of the text outlines of the train of thought of the respective chapters are presented (pp. 13-335). 3. A 'Bibliography' which specifies relevant primary sources and under the heading 'Further Readings' offers a selection of pertinent secondary literature (pp. 337-341). 4. An 'Index' containing apart from some proper names, English and Sanskrit technical terms (pp. 343-351).

In view of the character of NMW it could be reasonably surmised that a major objective of the publication should lie in providing a reliable basis enabling readers who are not (yet) specialists in the area of studies on early Madhyamaka, in particular persons who are interested in the history of philosophy without possessing particular philological competence in Sanskrit Studies, to attain both a correct understanding of the propositions expressed in the individual verses and chapters and an adequate view of the text as a whole. Although, as far as one can see, the authors of the book do not explicitly declare that they pursue this aim, we regard it as

justified to examine whether the publication could comply with this objective. Accordingly the fact that NMW can not satisfy this desideratum ought be considered as a relevant result. The subsequent discussions will mainly focus on three topics: 1) The adequacy of the translations, 2) the reliability of the comments accompanying the translations in the individual chapters of the second major section of NMW, 3) the correctness of the exposition presented in the ‘Introduction’.

II

As far as the translations offered in NMW are concerned, it deserves to be noticed that more than three decades ago a translation into Danish of the entire text of the MMK has been published by C. Lindtner, under the title *Middelværens fundamentele memorialvers* (MFM)¹. Even if Lindtner’s renderings might not be always correct or optimal in detail, it appears hardly deniable that in the whole the translation presented in MFM is decisively superior to the one offered in NMW. Accordingly renderings of verses to be found in MFM will be mentioned from time to time in the subsequent discussions.

The translations of NMW do not always faithfully reflect the syntactic constructions of the original text. To be sure, the maxim to allow for syntactic deviations between original and translation can be justified in principle, and deviances could be even regarded as desirable if they entail increase of clarity and facilitate understanding. There are, however, numerous cases where lack of literality is apt to hamper exact understanding even if one can surmise that the writers of NMW did not grammatically misunderstand the original.

The way in which the introductory stanzas of the MMK has been rendered in NMW is apt to vindicate in an exemplary manner the fact that apparently minor deviations regarding grammatical features between original and translation can entail major consequences. The so-called ‘dedicatory verse’ of the work reads in the original as follows:

*anirodham anutpādam anucchedam aśāśvatam /
anekārtham anānārtham anāgaman anirgamam //*

¹ Lindtner 1982. *Nāgārjunas Filosofiske Værker* (*Nāgārjunīyam Madhyamakaśāstram*). København.

*yah pratītyasamutpādam prapañcopaśamām śivam /
deśayām āsa saṃbuddhas tam vande vadatām varam //*

It has been rendered in NMW p. 13 as:

I salute the Fully Enlightened One, the best of orators, who taught the doctrine of dependent origination, according to which there is neither cessation nor origination, neither annihilation nor the eternal, neither singularity nor plurality, neither the coming nor the going [of any dharma, for the purpose of nirvāṇa characterized by] the auspicious cessation of hypostatization.

In the present connection it is apposite to only focus on the employment of the words ‘according to which’ because by their use the impression is conveyed to a reader that the theorem that cessation, origination etc. do not exist constitutes the content of a doctrine called ‘dependent origination’. The comments accompanying the translation in NMW clearly corroborate this understanding. For it is said (p. 14):

These negations are said to describe the content of the Buddha’s central teaching of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). The verse thus claims that when we say everything is subject to dependent origination, what this actually means is that nothing really ceases or arises, nothing is ever annihilated nor is there anything eternal, that things are really neither one nor are they many distinct things, and that nothing really ever comes here from elsewhere or goes away from here.

This interpretation is not corroborated by the grammatical structure of the pertinent textual segment. From a syntactical point of view the series of expressions beginning with *anirodham* and ending with *anirgamam* permit only an analysis according to which they function as attributes, if it is taken for granted that those words are not used as independent nouns. In this context it might not be improper to pay attention to the fact that those expressions could, taken as attributes, be alternatively construed with *pratītyasamutpādaṁ* or with *tam*. To be sure, the probability that they ought to be exclusively combined with the pronoun *tam* is quite low, but since deliberate equivocations are quite frequent in Sanskrit literature, it is not entirely unrealistic to assume that the writer of the text intended to convey a ‘double reading’, such that the expressions beginning with *anirodham* and ending with *anirgamam* should be taken as qualifying

pratītyasamutpāda and the annunciator of *pratītyasamutpāda* likewise.² The above cited rendering excludes a recognition of this possibility from the very outset. However, even if this point is left out of consideration, it remains valid that the expressions *anirodham* etc. are presumably used as qualifiers and that the rendering of NMW conceals this fact. In this respect the translations of both Frauwallner 1994, p. 178³, and of Lindtner, MFM p. 67, are preferable.⁴

It might be objected that the inadequateness concerns merely a purely grammatical point and is insignificant from the perspective of content. This criticism is inappropriate. Even if it were supposed that the translation offered in NMW presents a correct explication of the content of the verse, it must be regarded as questionable to impute a translator's own interpretation without making this manifest. In fact, however, it is far from certain that the above quoted rendering embodies an appropriate explication. According to the commentator Candrakīrti one ought to suppose that *pratītyasamutpāda* is both the content of a teaching and qualified by eight qualifiers beginning with *anirodha*.⁵ Against the background of Candrakīrti's outlook — which presumably correctly reflects the Madhyamaka position in this respect — one can presume that the employment of the expression 'qualifier' (*viśeṣaṇa*) relates to a purely grammatical feature, the fact that *anirodham* etc. should be syntactically construed with *pratītyasamutpādaṁ* as its attributes, without implying that being without cessation etc. constitute objective qualifications of some object, called *pratītyasamutpāda*. It is conceivable that the idea that the series of adjectives must not be taken as representing objective qualities of an object has induced the peculiar feature of the translation offered in NMW. However, this consideration cannot

² In this connection it deserves to be kept in mind that the words beginning with *anirodham* and ending with *anirgamam* constitute an independent verse.

³ E. Frauwallner 1994. *Die Philosophie des Buddhismus* (4. Aufl.). Berlin.

⁴ According to Frauwallner the verse should convey that the Buddha taught the *pratītyasamutpāda* as being without cessation etc., which preserves the idea that *pratītyasamutpāda*, according to Buddhist teaching, is without cessation etc. Lindtner's rendering, on the other hand intimates that being without cessation etc. constitute objective qualifications of *pratītyasamutpāda* — 'Den har intet opphør, ingen opstæn' (MFM, p. 67).

⁵ LVP 3,11 *tad atrānirodhādyastaviviśeṣaṇavivisṭah pratītyasamutpādah śāstrābhīdheyārthah / sarvaprapāñcopaśamaśivalakṣaṇanirvāṇam śāstrasya prayojanam nirdiṣṭam /*

justify the supposition that (the writer of the MMK intended to convey that) the non-existence of cessation, origination etc. is the content of a teaching with the title *pratītyasamutpāda*. In this context of discussion it is indispensable to remain aware of the phenomenon that if one would encounter an utterance or inscription of the form:

Watson is not the boss of Sherlock Holmes.

one needs to differentiate between (at least) three different types of communicative intentions assignable to the pertinent utterance or inscription: The first variety, which could be characterized as the naïve stance, is distinguished by the circumstance that the producer of the linguistic tokens, possibly believing that Sherlock-Holmes-stories relate real events, intends to convey that, as a matter of fact, Watson was not the boss of Sherlock Holmes — but rather vice versa. The second type is instantiated by the utterance of somebody who intends to communicate a fact about literature, specifically the fact that in some genre of stories a character called ‘Watson’ is not depicted as the boss of a character depicted as a bearer of the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’. It could be portrayed as the sophisticated stance. The third variety of intention, which is rather extraordinary and could be characterized as such, would occur if somebody used the above sentence with the intention to impart merely the fact that ‘Watson’ is nothing but the designation of a fictitious item; since there is no real person who is referred to by (certain employments of the expression) ‘Watson’ it must be a *fortiori* acknowledged that no such person is the boss of Sherlock Holmes.⁶ The decisive point is that in all the envisaged cases the expression ‘is not the boss of Sherlock Holmes’ occurs as a predicate on the grammatical level.

We can presume that a similar situation exists with respect to the introductory verses of the MMK. Although the surface structure of the formulation cannot make this manifest, the remarks have to be associated with an import corresponding to the third variety of intention or the extraordinary stance. It is precisely because of the under-determination of content by linguistic expressions that many

⁶ It might be true that in such cases one would seldom use the pertinent sentence alone, without the addition of some clarification of the relevant point, such as ‘because he is only a fictional character’. It will be contended later, however, that the subsequent text of the MMK, taken as a whole, could be regarded as providing exactly the same sort of explanatory comment on the introductory section.

textual passages occur which exhibit a deep concern on the part of proponents of Madhyamaka to forestall mistaken ways of understanding their words and their doctrine. Although one ought not suppose that the writer of the MMK expected that first readers of his text will recognize the final import of the initial segment of the work, it can be nevertheless assumed that he counted on the fact that by reading the treatise an ultimately adequate understanding of his remarks can be induced. Hence the initial section embodies a view which definitely surpasses any tenet concerning the content of any doctrine: The goal is envisaged to impart that that which is current under the designation of *pratityasamutpāda* possesses itself the status of a mere fiction.⁷ The most decisive drawback of the ‘free rendering’ given in NMW lies in the circumstance that it obstructs from the very outset the way of obtaining the above portrayed perspective of the matter. Therefore one must maintain that even those who would reject the thesis that the position of early Madhyamaka is basically equivalent to the illusionism of Advaita Vedānta minus Brahman, would need to admit the deficiency of the rendering of NMW due to the mere circumstance that it blocks possibilities of understanding and recognition of problems.

Some additional examples corroborate the contention that even minor deficiencies of formulation deserve attention.

The second half of MMK 1.5 which reads:

yāvan notpadyata ime tāvan nāpratyayāḥ katham

is rendered in NMW (p.22) by:

When something has not arisen, why then are they not nonconditions?

In contrast both Frauwallner and Lindtner clearly explicate the pertinent meaning of *yāvat* as ‘as long as’ (Frauwallner ‘solange’, Lindtner ‘sålænge’). A closer analysis is apt to reveal that the particular temporal component involved in the notion of ‘as long as’ possesses potential relevance for the understanding not only of the

⁷ Presumably this implies both that the principle of dependent origination is illusory and that the same holds true for the teaching of this principle. The latter thought in particular is indicated by textual passages like MMK 25.24, where it is said that no *dharma* has ever been taught by the/a Buddha.

pertinent remark but of the character of the arguments presented in the MMK in general.

Presumably the writers of NMW thought that the rendering of the construction *na ... yujyate* by ‘it is not correct to say’, as e.g. in MMK 14.8; 15.1 etc. amounts merely to a stylistic transformation. It is, however, far from certain that this modification cannot impede a proper understanding. The construction ‘It is not correct to say that p’ need not imply that the state of affairs depicted by the embedded sentence is not true or cannot be true. It is probable, however, that the writer of the MMK intended to convey by a formulation, such as:

na tena tasya samsargo nānyenānyasya yujyate

that it is (objectively) impossible that a conjunction between an item with itself or a conjunction of an item with something different ever occurs.

In MMK 22.16, which reads:

tathāgato yatsvabhāvas tatsvabhāvam idam jagat /

tathāgato niḥsvabhāvo niḥsvabhāvam idam jagat //

the expressions *yatsvabhāvas*, *niḥsvabhāvo*, *tatsvabhāvam* and *niḥsvabhāvam* are grammatically attributes to be construed with *tathāgato* and *jagat* respectively. This fact is reflected in Lindtner’s translation (MFM, p. 116) which reads:

Den Fuldkomne har samme selvværen

Som den empiriske verden:

Den Fuldkomne har slet ingen selvværen,

Men det har den empiriske verden heller ikke!

In contrast, NMW offers a translation which does not reflect the pertinent grammatical fact as far as the first half of the verse is concerned. It reads:

What is the intrinsic nature of the Tathāgata, that is the intrinsic nature of this world.

The Tathāgata is devoid of intrinsic nature; this world is devoid of intrinsic nature.

Although it can be safely ruled out that the authors of the translation failed to understand the syntactic structure of the first half of the verse correctly, it is legitimate to raise the question of why they abstained from offering a more faithful rendering. As far as one can see, the lack of literality does not entail any advantages but rather disadvantages. We are entitled to presume that the formulation of the original exhibits a rhetorical point resulting from the fact that the second half, which suggest a justification for the statement made in the first half, is obtained by merely substituting the expressions *yat* and *tat* by *nih*, which signals that — surprisingly — the pronoun *tat* does not possess any reference in the present context. It might be admittedly not easy to preserve all the relevant stylistic peculiarities of the original in an English translation. However, the parallelism ought to be preserved as much as possible. A way to achieve this goal to some extent could be a translation which reads as follows:

That which the Tathāgata possesses as *svabhāva* this world possesses as *svabhāva*,

The Tathāgata possesses no *svabhāva* [and] this world possesses no *svabhāva*.⁸

— A discussion of this verse was also presented earlier in my book ‘Materialien zur Übersetzung und Interpretation der Mūlamadhyamakārikās’ (MIM)⁹, pp. 160-161.

It would be a mistake to presume that the inadequacies inasmuch as they are not based on incorrect grammatical analyses or interpretations affect merely clarity of expression or faithfulness in stylistic respects.

MMK 10.25

yo 'pekṣya sidhyate bhāvas tam evāpekṣya sidhyati /
yadi yo 'pekṣitavyah sa sidhyatām kam apekṣya kah //

is translated in NMW (p. 115) by:

⁸ The following German translation would be even closer to the original:
 Der Tathāgata ist von demjenigen Eigenwesen, vom dem diese Welt ist;
 Der Tathāgata ist von keinem Eigenwesen [und] die Welt ist von keinem Eigenwesen.
⁹ Reinbek 2001. Philosophica Indica: Einsichten – Ansichten, Band 5.

If an entity x is established in dependence [on something else y], and in dependence on that very entity x there is established that y on which x's establishment depends, then what is dependent on what?

It could seem that, notwithstanding the fact that the (complex) relative construction of the original has not been mirrored in this rendering, the quoted translation presents the intended thought with optimal clarity. On the other hand it could be argued, however, that a legitimate aim of a translation must not exclusively lie in an intelligible presentation of some (propositional) content of the original; it might equally pursue the aim to assist readers with some knowledge of the language of the original to understand the grammatical construction. It is in fact possible to fulfill this desideratum without sacrificing too much of clarity by presenting a rendering which reads as follows:

If that entity which is established depending (on something) is established depending on precisely that [entity] on which it has to depend, [then one must ask:] which [entity] should depend on which?

It deserves to be noticed, however, that it is pretty questionable that the syntactic analysis on which the above envisaged translations rest are correct in the final analysis. After all, in view of the order of words, it is more natural to connect the expression *sa* in the second half of the verse with *yo 'peksitavyah*, and not with *yo 'pekṣya sidhyate*. Accordingly a rendering would be more adequate which runs:

If that on which [something] must depend comes into existence (*sidhyati*) depending on precisely that entity which comes into existence depending on [it], [then one must ask:] which [entity] should depend on which?

The second analysis had been regarded as the preferable alternative in MIM 129-132. If this interpretation were accepted it could not even be maintained that the translation suggested in NMW rests on an impeccable grammatical understanding of the verse. To be sure, since the two envisaged interpretations amount to contents which can be considered as equivalent in the present context, the rendering offered in NMW would not entail the consequence of obfuscating the relevant point of the pertinent remark of the text. It is difficult to ascertain whether the authors of NMW have made the effort to reach a correct

grammatical analysis of MMK 10.10. At any rate, if one takes the trouble to identify a tenable syntactic analysis one is in a position to recognize the possibility that the writer of the text might have intentionally chosen a formulation which could be analyzed in different ways.

MMK 17. 31-32, which reads

yathā nirmitakam śāstā nirmimītarddhisampadā (in NMW
nirmimītarddhisampadā) /
nirmito nirmimītānyam sa ca nirmitakah punah //
tathā nirmitakākāraḥ kartā yat karma itatkṛtam¹⁰ /
tadyathā nirmitenānyo nirmito nirmitas tathā //

has been rendered in NMW, p. 191, by:

Just as the Teacher by his supernatural power fabricates a magical being

that in turn fabricates yet another magical being,

so with regard to the agent, which has the form of a magical being,
 and the action that is done by it,

it is like the case where a second magical being is fabricated by a
 magical being.

Evidently the phrase *sa ca nirmitakah punah* has not been taken into consideration here and it remains unclear how the translators understand the sequence of *tadyathā ... tathā* in the second half of MMK 17.32. Although the syntactic construction of this passage is not obvious it should be worthwhile to make an effort to understand it. The following suggestion is based on the assumptions that *nirmitakah* in MMK 17.31 d and *nirmitas* in MMK 17.32 d occur in predicate positions and that the textual passage exploits a subtle equivocation between ‘created’ on the one hand and ‘artificially created’ = ‘unreal’, ‘fictive’ on the other for derivations of *nirmā-*. The second supposition appears to be supported by Candrakīrti’s comments concerning these verses — compare pp. 330,4-331,3 in the edition of

¹⁰ Lindtner (and De Jong) *tat kṛtam*.

L. de la Vallée Poussin 1970 (LVP). Thus the following proposal can be made:

As a teacher (in the arts of magic) might fabricate by his magical craftsmanship a magical (and fictive) being, [and] the created (and fictive) being might fabricate another being, and this is in its turn (created and) fictive,

so the agent is of a (created and) fictive nature [as well as] the action done by him,

in such manner as [generally] another being created by a (created and) fictive being is likewise (*tathā*) (created and) fictive.

It might be conceded — and it had been explicitly admitted in MIM 149-150 — that alternative ways of construing the sentence are equally conceivable. However, an attempt to identify a syntactically viable analysis and its presentation in the context of a translation should not be regarded as futile.

The significance of not neglecting details of formulation pertains also to particles, such as *hi*, *atha*, *tu* and others because not seldom do they shed light on the argumentative structure. In NMW (p.17) the first half of MMK 1.12

athāsad api tat tebhyaḥ pratyayebhyaḥ pravartate

is rendered by:

If that which does not exist [in them] is produced from those conditions

This does not account for the occurrence of *atha* and *api*. It can be presumed, however, that these words signal in this context a relevant argumentative function of the remark, namely the fact that the supposition that an effect results from the causal conditions even if it does not previously occur in those conditions is envisaged leaving, for the sake of argument, out of consideration the circumstance mentioned in the preceding verse, namely that it ought be in fact assumed that something which does not exist in the conditions cannot result from them. Both in Lindtner's and in Frauwallner's translations this nuance is indicated, in the latter case by 'aber' (Frauwallner 1994, p. 180) and in the former case with even more clarity by the expression 'allgevèl' (MFM, p. 69).

In NMW p. 19 the formulation

The intrinsic nature of existents does not exist in the conditions, etc.

The intrinsic nature not occurring, neither is extrinsic nature found

should render MMK 1.2

*na hi svabhāvo bhāvānām pratyayādiṣu vidyate /
avidyamāne svabhāve parabhāvo na vidyate // 3*

a comparison with Frauwallner's translation (Frauwallner 1994, pp. 178-179)

Denn das eigene Wesen der Dinge ist in den Ursachen usw. nicht vorhanden. Wenn aber kein eigenes Wesen vorhanden ist, dann ist auch kein fremdes Wesen vorhanden.

reveals two facts: 1. Frauwallner does not use any technical term for rendering the occurrences of *svabhāva-* and *parabhāva-* in this verse in contrast to NMW, where one finds 'intrinsic nature' and 'extrinsic nature'. 2. Frauwallner interprets the occurrence of *hi* in the sense of 'for' in contrast to NMW, where no equivalent occurs. The non-technical way of rendering *svabhāva-* and *parabhāva-* could be suitable because it is quite probable that the writer of the original text did not intend to attribute any technical import to those words in the present context. By conceiving those expressions in the sense of 'own-being' and 'other-being' one could easily make intelligible that *svabhāva* and *parabhāva* can be taken to constitute an exhaustive alternative and that from the non-existence of a *svabhāva* the impossibility of a *parabhāva* follows: The underlying thought is that the possibility of exhibiting some character or nature which is not a thing's own nature requires that the concerned item possesses itself *some* nature either in the form of a character which distinguishes the unit from the character of other entities or even in the form of the *parabhāva* which the item exhibits itself. It is noteworthy that considerations of this sort are indicated in the MMK itself, e.g. in MMK 15.3. Accordingly the option of mirroring internal compositional properties of original expressions in their translation-equivalents can be commendable. Lindtner's rendering by 'selvværen' and 'andenværen' does not only comply with this recommendation, but permits even the possibility of recognizing why the impossibility

of a *parabhāva* could follow from the impossibility of a *svabhāva*. As far as the rendering of *hi* is concerned, Frauwallner's view can be considered as appropriate. It is not improbable that the author of the MMK intended to signal that verse 2 and the remainder of the section as a whole should furnish the justification of the thesis pronounced in MMK 1.1. In MIM p. 39 ff it was argued that a similar interpretation of *hi* as signaling a reason or justification can be equally maintained if the order of MMK 1.2 and MMK 1.3 were reversed as attested in certain editions (see also NMW p. 18). Even admitting that the particle *hi* need not always possess such a function it can be asserted that in philosophical texts and in the MMK in particular this usage is extremely frequent. In this connection the fact possesses importance that one can attribute the function of signaling justifications in many instances where this is not immediately obvious. Accordingly it ought be acknowledged as a maxim that one should first carefully examine the possibility of this import before discarding this hypothesis and taking the particle as (semantically) redundant. — We will revert to this point later.

The previously suggested claim, however, that NMW is not appropriate to be employed as a reliable basis for non-specialists does not rely on phenomena as the ones which have been discussed above. Decisive is rather the circumstance that in numerous instances the presented translations depend on questionable interpretations in combination with the fact that the doubtfulness of the underlying assumptions is not or not easily discernible for a non-specialized reader. In MIM one can discern many instances where interpretations differ in various respects and various degrees from those intimated in NMW. There the complete first, second and sixth chapter of the MMK have been investigated and some larger sections of other chapters were examined. Also from section VII of my article 'Pragmatic Implicatures and Text-Interpretation', which deals with MMK 13¹¹, various divergent views, specifically regarding the dialogic and argumentative structure, could be detected. Despite these facts it appears appropriate to mention at least some of the instances where the understanding of NMW deserves to be questioned.

MMK 1.7

¹¹ *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*, (Band 16/17) 1992. Reinbek.

*na san nāsan na sadasan dharma nirvartate yadā /
katham nirvartako hetur evaṁ sati hi yujyate //*

has been rendered by Frauwallner 1994, p. 179 as:

Wenn weder eine seiende, noch eine nichtseiende, noch eine seiende und nichtseiende Gegebenheit entsteht, wieso ist dann ein hervorbringender Grund möglich?

This suggests the argument that a productive or ‘operative’ cause is impossible because no item which is an effect, irrespective of whether it is existing or not existing or both existing and not existing (at some particular time), can occur. A similar interpretation is also advocated by Lindtner MFM, p. 68).¹² In contrast the translation to be found in NMW p. 24

Since a dharma does not operate whether existent, nonexistent, or both existent and nonexistent,

How in that case can something be called an operative cause?

intimates that an ‘operative cause’ is impossible because no item, which is a cause, can be operative under any circumstances. This means that the justification that nothing can be an operative cause is that nothing can be operative, which appears pretty circular as an argument. The accompanying remarks in the commentary attempt to explicate the thought by saying that ‘for an entity to perform the operation of producing an effect, it must undergo change ... [b]ut an ultimately real entity, a dharma, cannot undergo change’ when it exists or does not exist or both exists and does not exist. It remains completely unclear on what basis the explanation offered here rests. At any rate, neither the Tibetan translation, where (*na*) *nirvartate* is rendered by (*mi*) *grub pa*, nor Candrakīrti’s comments¹³ corroborate

¹² Da der hverken kan frembringes et begrep der existerer,
Ikke existerer eller både existerer og ikke existerer
Hvordan kan der så, når der altså (ingen »effekt«) er,
Logisk set tales om en »frembringende årsag«?

¹³ See LVP 83,9: *tatra nivartaka utpādakah, yadi nivartyo dharma nirvarteta tam utpādako hetur utpādayet, na tu nirvartate, sadasadubhayarūpasya nirvartyasyābhāvāt // tatra san na nirvartate vidyamānatvāt / asann apy avidyamānatvāt / sadasann api parasparaviruddhasyaikārthasyābhāvāt, ubhayapakṣābhīhitadosatvāc ca // yata evaṁ kāryasyotpatir nāsti hetupratyayo 'py ato nāsti / tataś ca yad uktam, lakṣaṇasambhavād vidyate hetupratyaya iti, tad evam sati na yujyate //*

this interpretation, but support Frauwallner and Lindtner, whose views appear definitely more plausible. It may be annotated in passing that the occurrence of *hi* need not be taken as semantically redundant: It *might* have been used to signal that MMK 1.7 gives a reason as to why the statement of the preceding verse is relevant for the topic of the impossibility of the four varieties of conditions specified before in the text.¹⁴ — Compare also MIM pp.45-46.

For MMK 2.5

*gamyamānasya gamane prasaktam gamanadvayam /
yena tad gamyamānam ca yac cātra gamanam punah //*

NMW p. 34 presents the following rendering:

If the act of going is in the path presently being traversed, then two acts of going would follow:

that by which the path presently being traversed [is said to be such], and moreover that which supposedly exists in the act of going.

This translation is puzzling because of the phrase ‘that which supposedly exists in the act of going’, which must obviously correspond to *yac cātra gamanam punah*. It is not merely mysterious how this English phrase could be a grammatically correct translation of the original, but also the thought suggested thereby is odd: Why should it be supposed that there is an act of going in some act of going, or that the writer of the MMK intended to convey this view? There is not the slightest reason to extract from the original formulation any peculiar theorem. Obviously the verse should say that if one assumed an activity of going or traversing pertaining to the place which is being traversed, one should be obliged to acknowledge two activities of going or traversing: first the activity on account of which some place is a place that is being traversed and second that which is in that case the activity of going or traversing itself, which is

¹⁴ Also in other languages the use of causal clauses for expressing justifications for acts of saying or asserting etc. — instead of justifications of what is said or asserted — is not uncommon. An example would be, in German: Da Du mich gefragt hast, was ich denke — ich denke, Du bist ein Gauner. (Since you have asked me what I think — I think you are a crook); or: Ich denke Du bist ein Gauner. Denn Du hast mich ja gefragt, was ich über Dich denke. (I think you are a crook, for after all you asked me what I think about you).

supposed to pertain to the place that is being traversed. This is mainly the same thought as the one intimated by the translation of the verse presented by Lindtner (MFM, p. 70). It deserves to be annotated only that Lindtner interprets the word *atra* as referring to the place or region which is being traversed — ‘Og dernæst passeringen her i (banen der nu passerer)’. We suppose that this interpretation is not compelling and that *atra* might be taken to relate to the situation which is envisaged by the pertinent hypothesis. But this is a detail of relatively minor importance.

MMK 2.22, which reads

*gatyā yayājyate gantā gatīm tām sa na gacchati /
yasmān na gatipūrvo ‘sti kaś cit (in NMW *cid*) kim cid dhi gacchati //*

possesses arguably a central importance for the interpretation of the entire chapter in which the verse occurs. In NMW p. 40 this is rendered as follows:

A goer does not obtain that going through which it is called a goer,
since the goer does not exist before the going; indeed someone goes
somewhere.

A remarkable feature of the translation lies in the employment of the words ‘does not obtain that going’ which must correlate with *tām (sa)* *na gacchati*. This evokes the impression that the authors interpreted the combination of the verb *gam* with a noun in the accusative case in analogy to phrases, such as *vināśam gacchati*, equivalent to ‘perish’ and literally interpretable as ‘going into perdition’. Thus the statement of the first half of the verse might be understood as a claim to the effect that the act of going by which a subject of going is qualified as somebody who goes (or something which moves) cannot be something which the pertinent subject incurs or which accrues to it at some (later) time during its existence. This contention could be based on the supposition that a subject of going or movement cannot exist prior to the existence of the activity by which it is qualified as a goer, and precisely this thought might be distilled from the phrase *yasmān na gatipūrvo ‘sti*. The writers of NMW add a comment to the pertinent verse according to which the argument of MMK should be similar to that of verse 10. They say that it ‘spells out in more detail the

reasoning behind the denial in verse 20 that a goer and going are distinct' and that the 'idea is that in order to obtain going as an attribute, and thereby become a goer, the goer must exist distinct from the going', whereas, on the other hand, 'something that existed distinct from going would not be a goer' and 'to be a goer is to go somewhere, which requires the act of going'.

The manner in which MMK 2.22 has been treated in NMW is beset with various problems. First the matter is presented in a way which permits only specialists to recognize the fact that the supposed reading of the phrase *tām (sa) na gacchati* is by no means imperative and not even natural.¹⁵ Second the supposition that the argument of MMK 2.22 is similar to one which has been presented previously in the same chapter entails the difficulty of averting the consequence of redundancy. Third, the supposed 'argument' which should have been presented in the present verse according to NMW is pretty odd. At first glance one should be inclined to think that on the supposition that no subject of going or movement can exist without and prior to any movement it immediately follows that the first activity of going or moving on account of which it is qualified as something that goes or moves cannot 'accrue' to it at some later time. This implies the threat of redundancy concerning the last quarter of the verse, viz. *kaś cit kiṁ cid dhi gacchati*. Obviously the authors of NMW presume nevertheless that those words are not redundant. The supposition of argumentative relevance has however a high price: The formulation which allegedly means 'indeed someone goes somewhere' is not only not apt to support a contention to the effect that 'something that existed distinct from going would not be a goer', but, if it is argumentatively significant at all, corroborates rather the contrary view that any activity of going or moving is performed by someone or

¹⁵ In this context it deserves to be noted that the following verse, which reads: *gatyā yayājyate gantā tato 'nyām sa na gacchati / gatī dve nopapadyete yasmād ekatra* (according to a variant reading: *eke tu) gantari //* are translated in NMW, p. 41 as: A goer does not obtain going by means of something other than that going through which it is called a goer, since it cannot be held that there are two goings when just one goes. It should be evident that the first half of this verse has been rendered in a way which would not reflect its grammatical structure even if the hypothesis concerning the import of the construction of *gam* plus (pro)noun in the accusative case would be granted. — Only a replacement of 'going by means of something other than' by 'a going which differs from' could bring the translation in closer agreement with the original.

something and that accordingly the performer of the action ought to be taken as existing independently of the performed action — something which accords well with common sense. The crux is that if the pertinent sequence of words should convey the thought that ‘something that existed distinct from going would not be a goer’ and that ‘to be a goer is to go somewhere, which requires the act of going’ it would not merely exhibit lack of explicitness; the formulation would be utterly inadequate and misleading. In view of the remark embodied in *kaś cit kim cid dhi gacchati* it would be most natural to retort that precisely because of the fact insinuated by this expression one ought suppose that it is false that a goer cannot exist distinct from his going and that it is rather true than false that a goer ‘obtains going’, if this is taken to mean that acts of going or movement can occur as something which some item performs or undergoes during its existence. As long as no completely different literal sense is attributed to the relevant words, which seems hardly possible, the expounded difficulty cannot be dismissed as irrelevant.

As soon as the assumption is dropped that the combination of the words *gatīm ... gacchati* occurring in MMK 2.22 — and *mutatis mutandis* the similar construction in MMK 2.23 — possesses the import of ‘obtain going’, it is natural to suppose that the words represent a construction which is comparable to phrases like ‘sing a song’, ‘play a game’, corresponding to German ‘ein Spiel spielen’ etc., that, in other words, the noun *gatīm* refers to an item which is traditionally called ‘inner object’. Accordingly the sequence *gatīm gacchati* could be less literally rendered by ‘performs (an act of) going’. This means that the proposition represented by the first half of MMK 2.22 amounts to the claim that the act of going or movement by which someone or something is qualified and characterizable as a goer or as something which moves, cannot be the same as the activity of going or movement which the subject concerned performs. In this manner a connection is established in the first place to MMK 2.11 — and not to MMK 2.10. MMK 2.11 reads:

*gamane dve prasajyete gantā yady uta gacchati /
ganteti cājyate yena gantā san yac ca gacchati //*

This has been rendered in NMW, p. 37, as follows:

If a goer does indeed go, then it would follow that there are two acts of going:

that by which the goer is said to be a goer and that by which the goer really goes.

It is noteworthy that the phrase *yac ca gacchati* has been rendered here by ‘that by which (the goer really) goes’. Although this cannot be considered as a most literal rendering of the original phrase, because ‘that by which ... goes’ would rather correspond to *yena ... gacchati*, it is plain that the import attributed to *gacchati* here differs from the one hypothesized in the translation of *gatim gacchati* in MMK 2.22. It is, on the other hand, not improbable that the authors of NMW regard *yac* as a neutral relative pronoun in the accusative case, which is linked to the lexeme *gamana-* instantiated in the first word of the verse. We can endorse this view, but take the combination of *gacchati* with the relative pronoun in the accusative in the same sense as the combination between *gacchati* and *gatim* in MMK 2.22. Accordingly MMK 2.11 could be rendered as follows:

Two acts of going follow (as an undesirable consequence) if [it were maintained that] the goer in fact goes¹⁶, [namely] that on account of which [somebody or something] is described [by] ‘goer’ and that which he (or it), being a goer, goes.

The point is evidently that somebody who endorses the proposition that a goer goes, is committed on the one hand to hypothesize an activity of going (or movement) which follows from characterizing some item as a goer and on the other hand an activity of going (or movement) which follows from the possibility of correctly saying of some entity that it goes (or moves). As far as MMK 2.11 is concerned it seems possible to reconcile the translation offered in NMW with the idea that two acts of movement follow, such that one is implied by the expression ‘goer’ (*gantā*) and the other by the expression ‘goes’ (*gacchati*). It remains unclear, however, why the authors are reluctant to connect MMK 2.22 with the same problem and to interpret *gatim gacchati* in MMK 2.22 parallel to *yac gacchati* in MMK 2.11.

¹⁶ Regarding the import of *uta* it had been suggested in MIM p. 73 that it might signal an alternative to the supposition advocated in the preceding verse that advocating the thesis that a goer goes must be rejected on account of the implication of the existence of a goer without any act of going.

One might wonder why the question concerning the identity or difference of the activities indicated by the terms ‘goer’ and ‘goes’ possesses any relevance for the issue of the possibility or impossibility of going and moving. After all, in ordinary discourse we hardly employ expressions, such as ‘the goer goes’, but rather sentences like:

Fred goes to the market.

or

The ball moves to the center of the billiard table.

This doubt can be settled, however, by pointing out that the content of any sentence resulting from replacing the blanks in ‘... goes ____’ or ‘... moves ____’ by (grammatically and semantically) appropriate expressions entails propositions expressible by formulations, such as

Somebody who goes goes.

Something which moves moves.

Any ascriptions of activities of going or moving can only be true if also sentences of the above sort express truths, and the expressions ‘a goer goes’ or ‘a subject of moving moves’ can be regarded as variant formulations of the former ones. On the other hand the entailment holds good only in one direction and the ordinary sentences and the corresponding artificial expressions representing their entailment do not say the same. Thus the fact that sentences of the latter type signify necessary requirements for the truth of ordinary movement statements cannot vindicate that the subject terms of ordinary sentences must refer to items which cannot exist independently of movement activities.

Nonetheless, the weakness of the contention expressed in MMK 2.11 is patent: The argument takes for granted that the activities of going implied by the subject term ‘goer’ and by the predicate term ‘goes’ are numerically different. If in the second chapter of MMK no remark could be found which addresses the problem we would be forced to assume that this questionable supposition was taken for granted without any argument. But MMK 2.22 — and as far as one can see only MMK 2.22 — offers a possibility to recognize a reason for the adoption of the dubious hypothesis. It is merely required to interpret the first half of MMK 2.22 as expressing the denial that the

activity implied by the subject term and the activity implied by the predicate term can be identical. In order to distil an argument for this contention from the pertinent verse it appears appropriate to attribute a relevant semantic function to the particle *hi* in the last quarter of the verse, by taking it as signaling a (meta-)reason of why the (first-order) reason represented by *yasmān na gatipūrvo 'sti* possesses sufficient probative force for the thesis in question. From an argumentative viewpoint the situation is equivalent to an argument where the thesis depends on two premises, one corresponding to *yasmān na gatipūrvo 'sti* and the other to *kaś cit kim cid ... gacchati*.¹⁷ The reasoning in a nutshell is that (the existence of) the activity of going implied in the verb requires (the existence of) some item which is qualified as a goer; but (the existence of) the qualification of being a goer requires (the existence of) an activity of going. Thus, on account of transitivity of requirement the activity implied in the verb requires an activity implied by a subject term by which an item is qualified as goer. Given, however, that the (pertinent) relation of requirement is irreflexive it follows that apart from the activity of going implied by the verb at least one activity of going is required on account of which some item is qualified as a goer and which (numerically) differs from the one implied in the verb. Accordingly, the proposition that a goer (and only a goer) goes cannot be regarded as involving merely one activity which is implied by the subject and by the predicate term simultaneously. Hence the possibility that the pertinent supposition might even imply the occurrence of more than two acts of going need not be ruled out for safeguarding the relevant thesis.

Against the background of the depicted analysis it must not be claimed that the writer of the MMK presented a valid argument for his contention. This is definitely not the case, because the assumption that all varieties of requirement are asymmetric deserves to be called into question. However, the decisive point is that we are not any more forced to suppose that the author of the text advocated the contention of MMK 2.11 without even recognizing its fatal weakness.

If it were not assumed that MMK 2.22 — or, if not this, then at least some other verse(s) occurring in the same work — did not

¹⁷ It is supposed that the construction *kim cid ... gacchati* should be interpreted in a sense which is analogous to the import of *gatim gacchati* in the first half of the verse.

address the dubiousness of the dismissal that items implied by subject and by predicate terms might be identical one would need to suppose that the writer took the difference simply as axiomatic. Under such circumstances it would be tempting to attribute to the founder of *Madhyamaka* a fairly naïve view on linguistic matters, specifically the opinion that surface structure needs to mirror content in a most direct manner, such that everything which differs on the level of linguistic expression must correspond to a difference with respect to content or reality. The attribution of this position is improbable not merely on account of the fact that remarks to be found in the MMK and other works attributed to the same author, in particular the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, suggest a dismissal of the naïve stance. Previous text-related considerations which have been brought forward by myself need not be mentioned here, because something else is more important in the present context: If the writer of the MMK had based his contention pronounced in MMK 2.11 — and similar contentions like the one formulated in MMK 2.5 — on the depicted presupposition he could be accused of being uncritical to an inexcusable degree. Not only is the naïve ‘mirror view’ counterintuitive but its dubiousness is pretty obvious. Sentences such as

Fred looked at himself.

Paul visited his friend.

appear to clearly vindicate that different linguistic tokens can even possess identical direct reference. A rejection of this assumption without any argument could never be approved. Intuitively sentences like

Everybody who moves moves.¹⁸

Everything which is red is red.

etc. express truisms. Should anybody trust a theory which says that such sentences can express falsehoods because the different

¹⁸ It would be certainly faulty to derive from the proposition that it is necessarily true that everything which moves moves (i.e. that it is necessarily true that if anything moves then it moves) the consequence that everything which moves necessarily moves. But as far as one can see, there is no evidence that the writer of the MMK committed this fallacy.

occurrences of ‘moves’ or ‘is red’ are bound to involve some (direct or indirect) reference to different entities? In the final analysis the worst would be to accept a mirror view of the pertinent sort without any argumentation. Our analysis can at least avert the need to attribute to the writer of the MMK an uncritical adoption of a most questionable outlook. Hence the issue concerning MMK 2.22 possesses undeniable significance.

Sometimes problems of translation affect questions of logical relations. MMK 6.1

*rāgād yadi bhaved pūrvam rakto rāgatiraskṛtaḥ /
tam pratītya bhaved rāgo rakte rāgo bhavet sati //*

has been rendered in NMW, p. 66, by:

If the one who desires existed prior to and without desire,
then desire would be dependent on that; there being the one who
desires, desire would then exist.

The translation intimates that the existence of someone existing prior to desire without being affected by desire (at that time), constitutes a sufficient condition for dependence of desire on some desiring subject. But this appears quite implausible. The remark of the first half of the subsequent verse, where it is said that desire can impossibly originate if somebody who desires does not exist, supports the supposition that the previous existence of a subject of desire is rather taken as a necessary condition of dependence of desire on a subject of desire; in view of the circumstance that a necessary requirement of dependence is not satisfied, it can be derived that the pertinent assumption cannot hold true. By merely replacing the occurrences of ‘would’ by ‘could’ the idea that the state of affairs depicted in the first line constitutes a necessary requirement for the state of affairs depicted in the second half of the verse can be conveyed. If this is correct, then Lindtner’s translation (MFM, p. 78)

Hvis der forud for begær eksisterede
Et begærende subjekt adskilt fra begæret,
Kunne begæret opstå afhængigt af vedkommende —
Begær må jo opstå hos en begærende der existerer.

is definitely preferable. One could nevertheless doubt that the last quarter of the stanza *rakte rāgo bhavet sati* represents — as suggested by Lindtner — a justification of the connection advocated in the previous part of MMK 6.1. Possibly it ought to be rather taken as an elaboration of the immediately preceding remark represented by *rakte rāgo bhavet sati*. Thus the entire verse would say that provided that a subject of desire existed without desire prior to it desire might depend on a subject of desire; under those circumstances it could hold good that desire exists, if a desiring subject exists.

To MMK 10.7

*anya evendhanād agnir indhanam kāmam āpnuyāt /
agnīndhane yadi syātām anyonena tiraskṛte //*

corresponds in NMW, p. 113:

[Reply:] Fire, being distinct from fuel, would surely be able to touch
fuel
if fire and fuel were mutually independent.

In view of the occurrence of *kāmam* it appears probable that a correct rendering could read:

Fire which is distinct from fuel might very well reach fuel,
if fire and fuel existed separately of each other.

Again the conditional clause formulates a necessary condition of the state-of-affairs expressed in the main clause. This import is quite clearly expressed in Lindtner's translation.¹⁹

A similar case is to be found in MMK 16,7. Again Lindtner's rendering appears more adequate than the one offered in NMW for similar reasons. — Compare NMW, p. 168, and Lindtner (MFM, p. 99).²⁰

The first half of MMK 6.4

¹⁹ Lindtner MFM, p. 90: Ja, så kunne en ild absolut forskellig fra brændstoffet, Da sagtens komme i kontakt med brændstoffet — Hvis bare ild og brændstof først vat til, Adskilt fra hverandre!

²⁰ There are other examples of the same sort which are not discussed here although they might deserve attention, such as the interpretation of MMK 27.28.

naikatve sahabhāvo 'sti na tenaiva hi tat saha /

correlates with NMW, p. 68

If there is unity [of state and subject] there is no co-occurrence; there is not that with which the thing comes together.

The import of this formulation is obviously:

If there is sameness [of desire and subject of desire] there is no co-occurrence. For (*hi*) that is not together with that very (*eva*) [same item] (i.e. something cannot co-occur with itself).

This import can be easily discerned in Lindtner's translation (MFM, p. 79):

De kan ikke optræde sammen hvis de er identiske
Idet en af dem ikke kann være sammen med sig selv.

It is not easy to find any justification for not presenting that idea in a clear manner in the framework of a translation.

MMK 10.5 reads:

*anyo na prāpsyate 'prāpto na dhakṣyaty adahan punah /
na nirvāsyaty anirvāṇah sthāsyate vā svaliṅgavān //*

and is translated in NMW, p. 112, by:

If fire is other than fuel, it will not touch [fuel]; not having touched, it will not burn it up; and if it does not burn it up,

it will not go out. If it will not go out, then it will endure precisely as something with its own mark.

Evidently the import of the disjunctive particle *vā* has not been taken seriously in NMW. Possibly the authors found it difficult to account for a disjunctive import. But this cannot yield a justification for this neglect. As a matter of fact, one can attribute to the particle *vā* the function of signaling two different alternatives. On the supposition that fire differs from fuel, one alternative is that fire will not attain the state of burning at all, thus not touch fuel, burn it up and after burning it up extinguish. Another alternative would be that it attains the state of burning, but being something separate from fuel endures forever in its original state, which contradicts common experience. In this

connection the remarks on pp. 124 – 126 in MIM can be considered too.

Examples exist where it is even difficult to find any plausible explanation for the manner verses of the MMK are rendered in NMW.

MMK 5.6 reads:

*avidyamāne bhāve ca kasyābhāvo bhaviṣyati /
bhāvābhāvavidharmā ca bhāvābhāvāv avaiti kaḥ //*

and has been translated in NMW, p. 62, by:

When the existent is not real, with respect to what will there come to be nonexistence?

And existent and nonexistent are contradictory properties; who cognizes something, whether existent and nonexistent?

It remains mysterious on which linguistic analysis the rendering of the second half of the verse has been or could be based. Both the Tibetan translation of the verse:

*dños po yod pa ma yin na / dños med gaṇ gi yin par ḥgyur /
dños daṇ dños med mi mthun chos / gaṇ gis dños daṇ dños med śhes //*

and the remarks of Candrakīrti's commentary — compare LVP 132,12–133,7 intimate that the writer of the MMK intends to convey in the second half that there is no subject possessing a nature deviating from (a) being or (a) non-being, in particular no subject that is neither a *bhāva* nor an *abhāva* who might investigate (or perceive or understand) (the dichotomy of) being and not being.²¹ Since the occurrence of this thought is philosophically interesting there should be no ground for concealing its existence, except there were philological reasons for rejecting the supposition that it has been expressed. But no such considerations are presented in NMW.

MMK 17.26

²¹ This is also the view manifested by the translation of Lindtner (MFM p. 78): [Men
når en positive værensform ikke findes, Hvad kan da være blottet for positiv
værensform?], Hvilket (subjekt) heterogent fra væren og ikke-væren, Skulle
endvidere erkende væren og ikke-væren?

*karma kleśātmakam cedam te ca kleśā na tattvataḥ /
na cet te tattvataḥ kleśāḥ karma syāt tattvataḥ katham //*

is rendered by

You hold that action is by nature defiled and the defilements are not ultimately real.

If for you the defilements are not real, how would action be ultimately real?

in NMW, p. 188. The existence of ‘you hold that’ as well as ‘for you’ intimate that the two occurrences of *te* are taken as representing enclitic forms of the second personal pronoun. From a grammatical point of view one cannot discern a basis for discarding the supposition that the two tokens represent masculine plural forms of the pronoun *tat*; the syntactic position of the first occurrence before *ca* is even suited to support this assessment. From the point of view of content it is equally difficult to see why the pertinent verse ought to be taken as referring to the opinion of some other person(s). At any rate, from the exposition given in NMW itself one cannot discern any plausible justification for this view. Lindtner, p. 103, takes the occurrences of *te* in the same way as we prefer, viz. as demonstrative pronouns to be construed with *kleśā(h)*.²² In view of the fact that MMK 17 as a whole exhibits a rather complicated dialogical structure the question of whether or not individual verses relate to views of others is not irrelevant.

Regarding the translation given in NMW, p. 205, for MMK 18.11

*anekārtham anānārtham anucchedam aśāsvatam /
etat tal lokanāthānām buddhānām śāsanāmṛtam //*

represented by the formulation

Not having a single goal, not having many goals, not destroyed, not eternal:

This is the nectar of the teachings of the buddhas, lords of the world.

²² It should be noted that even in NMW the occurrence of *te* in the subsequent verse is obviously interpreted as a demonstrative pronoun in the nominative plural.

the interpretation of *anekārtham* and *anānārtham* in the sense of ‘not having a single goal’ and ‘not having many goals’ is noteworthy. This contrasts with the understanding of Frauwallner 1994, p. 186, as well as Lindtner, MFM p. 106, according to which the pertinent expressions represent the ideas of absence of unity and absence of plurality (of things).²³ Hence the words *anekārtham* and *anānārtham* are taken in NMW as direct qualifications of the component *śāstra-* in *śāsanāmr̥tam*, whereas both Frauwallner and Lindtner intimate that those expressions together with the two subsequent ones should characterize the content of the teaching. Admittedly the reading of NMW is grammatically acceptable and could be even considered as more ‘straightforward’ than the other one. On the other hand, in the accompanying comments the authors of NMW themselves point out that Candrakīrti did not advocate an interpretation of the component – *artha* in the sense of ‘goal’. Instead of saying that Candrakīrti interpreted the word in the sense of ‘meaning’ one should however rather say that he understood it in the sense of ‘object’, attributing to *anekārtham* as well as *anānārtham* the same import as Lindtner and Frauwallner (See LVP 377, 12 *ekatvānyatvaraḥitam*). In view of these facts the possibility ought to be considered that the writer of MMK 18.11 deliberately envisaged a double reading regarding the pertinent expressions, and the question arises as to why the writers of NMW did not propagate this view. One can speculate that the authors of the book might have considered the reading in the sense of ‘not having a single goal’, ‘not having many goals’ as decisively superior. This view could be induced by the subsequent verse where it is said that when the completely enlightened Buddhas do not arise and the Śrāvakas disappear, the knowledge of Pratyekabuddhas arises. On p. 206 of NMW the consideration is suggested that MMK 18.12 occurs immediately after MMK 18.11 because it is suited to explain why the contention that the teaching is neither (completely) destroyed nor eternal is justified: On the one hand it is not exempt from change in time and on the other hand it is not completely disrupted at later times. Analogously one could regard the remark of MMK 18.12 as providing a justification for the contention that the Buddhist teaching(s) has neither one nor many goals: It does not have just one single goal

²³ The pertinent expressions in those translations are ‘keine Einheit’, ‘keine Vielheit’, ‘uden enhed’, ‘uden forskel’.

because it can be employed for the realization of different aspirations on the part of Buddhas proclaiming the way for attaining Nirvāṇa and other Buddhist believers who propagate that which they have previously heard for enabling others to attain Nirvāṇa or for attaining it for themselves or to attain salvation independently of any teaching by others; on the other hand, the contention that the teaching possesses different goals deserves to be rejected on the basis of the fact that the different aspirations are not completely different, aiming at a same common goal. It needs to be added, however, that the preceding reasoning does not furnish a compelling argument for adopting the preferred reading of *anekārtham* and *anānārtham*. For there is equally another way to explain the occurrence of MMK 18.12 exactly in the context in which it occurs: The remark of the verse should explain why even at times, such as the time when the MMK was written, the possibility exists to ascertain the ultimate import of the instruction of the Buddha and juxtapose it with other interpretations. The context is not misplaced because the 18. Chapter contains repeated references to the pluralism inhering in Buddhist teaching.

MMK 20.9

*niruddhe cet phalam hetau hetoḥ samkramanam bhavet /
pūvajātasya hetoś ca pūrvajanma prasajyate //*

has been rendered in NMW, p.220, by:

If it were held that, the cause having ceased, there were transference of the cause to the effect,

It would follow that there is another birth of a cause that had already been produced.

It is difficult to reconcile this translation with the original formulation not only because it presupposes the reading of *phalam* ... *saṃkramanam bhavet* in the sense of ‘transference to the effect’ but also because it does not account for the occurrence of *ca* in the second half of the verse. Maybe the option of restricting the scope of the conditional represented by *cet* to the first quarter — which accords with the Tibetan version²⁴ — was dismissed in NMW because of the

²⁴ *gal te rgyu hgags hbras bu na*

consideration that the consequence of some transference given that an effect exists after the cause has ceased appears implausible. Lindtner's rendering reveals, however, that the pertinent assumption regarding the scope of *cet* does not necessitate this result. It is not imperative to view the words *samkramanām bhavet* as referring to a *consequence* resulting from the assumption that an effect exists after the cessation of a cause. Possibly according to Lindtner the conditional clause represents a necessary and not a sufficient condition and the stanza would say that if the effect would come into existence after the cause has perished it could happen that there were a progression of the cause, and this would entail that a previously existing cause would be reborn.²⁵ If it were assumed that specifically the second half of the verse represents the consequence, MMK 20.9 might be rendered in the following way:

If the effect [occurred] when the cause has ceased [before] there could [still] be a progression of the cause; but (*ca*) [then] the repeated birth of a cause that was born before follows.

On the other hand, the supposition that the phrase *hetoh samkramanām bhavet* equally represents a consequence is not as eccentric as it could appear. On the premise that an effect cannot exist without the simultaneous existence of a cause, the supposition that an effect exists at some time before which the cause has perished [for the first time] in fact necessitates that the cause 'progresses' in the sense of perpetuating itself so that a previously originated cause would originate again. For vindicating the claim that the argument of MMK 20.9 could in fact rely on the premise that cause and effect must exist simultaneously it would be needed to embark on a more detailed study of the MMK as a whole. In the present context it must suffice to point out that an equivocation between temporal and atemporal readings of (constituents of phrases) of the form 'If A exists, B exists' appears to be virulent in various places in the text. Moreover the idea of the necessity of temporal coincidence can be formed on the basis of the supposition that for the quality of being an effect the existence of a cause is essential — in combination with other presuppositions such as the non-difference between qualities and their substrata and an

²⁵ Lindtner, p. 109: Hvis effekten kom når årsagen var gået til grunde, Måtte årsagen (alligevel) være vandret videre: Det ville nødvendigvis indebære genfødsel, Af en førhen eksisterende årsag.

'anti-realistic' conception of qualities which precludes e.g. an identification of the quality of being the cause of the breaking of a glass with the quality of possessing such and such mass moving against a piece of glass with such and such speed etc.

Apart from the above cited and various other examples where the correct understanding of individual verses or of argumentative connections are at stake cases can be found where even minor inaccuracies possess potential relevance for the interpretation of essential features of Nāgārjuna's teaching. For example,

MMK 25.16, which runs

naivābhāvo naiva bhāvo nirvāṇam yadi vidyate /
naivābhāvo naiva bhāva iti kena tad ajyate //

has been rendered in NMW, p. 300, by:

If nirvāṇa were found to be neither an existent nor an absence,
then by what is it revealed that it is neither existent nor an absence?

This translation does not take into consideration the fact that the pronoun *tad* does not occur within the scope of the *iti*-clause. This fact could — and presumably does — possess considerable importance. By interpreting the second half of the stanza in the sense of

by whom is this (namely Nirvāṇa) characterized/manifested [by saying:] [It is] neither *bhāva* nor *abhāva*?

it is made plain that the writer of the text intends to dispute the possibility to attribute anything to Nirvāṇa in the way of attributing a quality to some object. The same would hold true if *kena* would be taken as a pronoun in the neuter gender understanding the phrase in the sense of

whereby is it recognized as a *bhāva* or an *abhāva*?

This would imply that it would be incorrect to characterize the pertinent denial as pertaining to a proposition of the form 'Neither P nor not P'. Rather one ought assume that it discards the acceptability of a proposition of the form 'm is neither F nor not F', which is reasonable if it is supposed that 'm' cannot refer to any object which exists under the perspective of ultimate analysis.

The same point possesses significance with respect to the immediately subsequent verses, which run:

param nirodhād bhagavān bhavatīty eva nājyate /
na bhavaty ubhayam ceti nobhayam ceti nājyate //
tiṣṭhamāno ‘pi bhagavān bhavatīty eva nājyate /
na bhavaty ubhayam ceti nobhayam ceti nājyate //

and which were rendered in NMW, p. 301 by:

It is not to be asserted that the Buddha exists beyond cessation,
 nor “does not exist” nor “both exists and does not exist,” nor “neither exists nor does not exist” — none of these is to be asserted.

Indeed it is not to be asserted that “The Buddha exists while remaining [in this world],”
 nor “does not exist” nor “both exists and does not exist,” nor “neither exists nor does not exist” — none of these is to be asserted.

Again it is quite reasonable — although syntactically not absolutely compelling here — to suppose that the constituents *param nirodhād bhagavān* as well as *tiṣṭhamāno ‘pi bhagavān* lie outside the scope of *iti*. Accordingly the thought conveyed by the two verses is that neither with respect to a Buddha after cessation nor with respect to a Buddha during lifetime would it be appropriate to characterize him either by ‘he exists’, or ‘he does not exist’, or ‘he exists and does not exist’ or ‘he neither exists nor does not exist’. The reason is exactly the same as the one which justifies analogous dismissals with respect to Nirvāṇa. The circumstance that — against the background of the distinctions previously introduced in this chapter — negative predication could be permissible if they were associated with the ‘extraordinary’ intention is an altogether different issue. Presumably the writer of the text did not consider this possibility as relevant *in the present context* — or at least not as sufficiently relevant to make its mention imperative. The lack of care with which those verses are treated in NMW would not be excusable even if one preferred divergent analyses of the constructions or adopted deviant views concerning the philosophy of early Madhyamaka. It is not desirable if the possibility of recognizing alternative interpretations remains

reserved to specialists. It could be retorted that even previous translators were not very particular with respect to questions of scope. But even so it must be admitted that NMW failed to achieve any progress in this regard.

It is widely believed that MMK 24.18 possesses high importance for the interpretation of the teaching proclaimed in the MMK, and in NMW, p. 177, it is declared to be ‘the most celebrated verse of the work’. The translation of the stanza, which reads

*yah pratityasamutpādah śūnyatāṁ tāṁ pracakṣmahe /
sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā //*

is rendered in NMW, p. 277, by:

Dependent origination we declare to be emptiness.

It [emptiness] is a dependent concept; just that is the middle path.

As the offered translation is quite faithful to the original wording it can be for the most part accepted. A *prima facie* minor, but on closer consideration a significant problem lies in the rendering of *sā prajñaptir upādāya* by ‘it is a dependent concept’. The accompanying explanations in NMW specify what that should mean. It is asserted, NMW, p. 277-278, that ‘[t]o say of emptiness that it is a dependent concept is to say that it is like a chariot, a mere conceptual fiction’, and that ‘[s]ince the chariot is a mere conceptual fiction because it lacks intrinsic nature (it is only conceived of in dependence on its parts, so its nature is wholly borrowed from its parts), it would then follow that emptiness is likewise without intrinsic nature’. This should, according to NMW imply that ‘emptiness is itself empty’.

In this connection it deserves to be pointed out, first, that the alleged quintessence of Madhyamaka-teaching, viz. that emptiness is empty, is nowhere formulated in the MMK. As a matter of fact, the term *śūnya* is never in the text attributed as a grammatical predicate to some term synonymous with ‘emptiness’ although it is attributed to various other items, such as *kleśa*-s and *karman* in MMK 17.27, cause (*hetu*) in MMK 20.16, (object of) appropriation (*upādāna*), appropriator (*upādātr*) and the Tathāgata (MMK 22.10) or MMK 22.14. One finds, on the other hand, various instances where it is said

with respect to (all) things (*bhāva*), all *dharma*-s or this entire (world) (*idam sarvam*) that they are empty, e.g. MMK 13.3; 24.1; 25.1-2; 25.22; 27.29. It might be certainly assumed that according to the teaching expounded in the MMK everything which belongs to the domain of so-called ‘conceptual fictions’, in particular items — not concepts! — which can only exist dependent on parts or other sorts of components, would fall under the verdict of being empty (of *svabhāva*). However, there is not the slightest evidence for assuming that in the eyes of the writer of the text, emptiness or whatever might be meant by *śūnyatā*, represents another item belonging to the same sphere. There is rather reason to suppose that this is not the case. If it is affirmed e.g. in MMK 13.8 that the Jinas have promulgated emptiness as a liberation from all views (*drṣṭi*) and that those who possess a view of emptiness have been declared incurable by them, this should presumably indicate that emptiness ought *not* be viewed as any object of the ordinary kind, in particular not as a property characterizing finally existing property-bearers and thereby equally existing on a level of ultimate analysis.²⁶ It ought to be noticed in addition that the MMK do not contain any demonstration to the effect that emptiness depends for its being on something (different), analogous to the treatment of cause and effect, movement, characteristics and their substrata etc.

Let us abstain from going into further details and confine ourselves to pointing out that an interpretation of MMK 24.18 which entails the above outlined consequences is by no means mandatory. The wording of the phrase *sā prajñaptir upādāya* does not necessitate the reading adopted in NMW according to which the expression *prajñaptir upādāya* represents an indefinite noun-phrase to be construed as a predicate correlating with *sā* as grammatical subject. Since alternative ways of reading MMK 24.18 and the third quarter of

²⁶ In this connection it must also be considered that MMK 13.7 intimates that the possibility of correctly classifying anything as empty would require the existence of something which is not-empty. This should strictly forbid to classify emptiness as empty, given that the existence of non-empty items is denied. The same sort of dependence is possibly alluded to in the second half of MMK 13.3 *nāsvabhāvaś ca bhāvo 'sti bhāvānām śūnyatā yataḥ*, although the rendering presented in NMW, p. 140 ‘There is no [ultimately real] existent that is without intrinsic nature, due to the emptiness of existents’ conceals this fact. But different readings of the verse have been proposed on p. 206 in the above mentioned article ‘Pragmatic Implicatures and Text-Interpretation’ and in MIM, p. 135.

the verse in particular have been discussed before in my article ‘On MMK 24.18’²⁷ the issue need not be reconsidered here. The decisive point is that the manner in which NMW deals with the verse is such that it can hardly be possible for non-specialists to recognize the mere existence of exegetical problems and their potential significance.

In the present connection it is not suitable to embark on detailed considerations concerning the adequate rendering of individual words. But some brief remarks pertaining to this issue appear appropriate.

In MMK 7. 16 (*pratītya yad yad bhavati tat tac chāntam svabhāvataḥ*) the expression *sānta-* has been rendered in NMW, p. 81, by ‘free [of intrinsic nature]’, which is certainly not licensed by the lexical meaning of the word. Essentially the same expression — ‘free [from intrinsic nature]’ — appears as an equivalent of *sānta-* in NMW, p. 202, within the translation of MMK 18.9. It might be argued that in the framework of Madhyamaka a special relation exists between the notions of being calm and being free of intrinsic nature, given that the non-existence of *svabhāva* is taken as the ground for the allegation of the tranquility of the world on the level of ‘ultimate truth’ (*paramārtha*). But this cannot justify the chosen rendering of *sānta-* because the concepts are clearly different and a replacement of a statement to the effect that everything that exists in dependence is calm by everything which exists in dependence is free of intrinsic nature involves a crucial loss of informational content. The same holds good for analogous replacements in other contexts. Thus one ought to approve the principle adopted by Frauwallner as well as by Lindtner, who by rendering *sānta-* as ‘friedvoll’ (p. 186) and ‘i ro’ (p. 83) or ‘rolig’ (p. 106) do not disrespect the lexical import in the same manner.

The terms *bhāva* and *abhāva* are rendered by ‘existent’ and ‘nonexistent’ in contexts where this appears inappropriate or doubtful. If it is said, for example in the translation of MMK 15.5 ‘For people proclaim the nonexistent to be the alteration of the existent’ (NMW, p. 158), this sounds odd and presumably does not correctly represent the content of the remark, which should say that people call non-being the alteration of an (existent) entity. The rendering in Lindtner p. 97 ‘Ved ikke-væren forstår folk jo En værenseforms anderledesværen’ appears

²⁷ *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, (35) 2007, pp. 1-32.

far more appropriate. It could be even contended that in the context of the present chapter the renderings of ‘væren’ in Lindtner of ‘Sein’ in Frauwallner (= ‘being’) are more adequate than ‘existent’ for various occurrences of *bhāva*, because this enhances the plausibility of certain pieces of reasoning.

The expression *svabhāvasadbhūta-* in MMK 20.21 is translated in NMW, p. 225, by ‘intrinsically real’. But the import of the term appears to correspond to ‘being existent [on account of] *svabhāva*’. The thought that it is impossible that a cause produces an effect which is existent on account of its own nature or essence, suggesting that it must always exist, is more intelligible than the idea that a cause cannot produce an ‘intrinsically real’ effect.

The rendering ‘you are ... frustrated’ as a correlate of *vihanyase* in MMK 24.7 (NMW, p. 271) appears far less felicitous than Frauwallner’s rendering, p. 189, by ‘nimmst du Anstob’. Presumably the verse intends to refer to the reluctance on the part of the opponent to accept the teaching of emptiness, because it allegedly entails unacceptable consequences.

In MMK 24, 38 *vicitrābir avastābhiḥ rahitaṁ* seems to be better rendered by ‘von allen wechselnden Zuständen frei’ as in Frauwallner, p. 193, or by ‘blottet for forskellige tilstande’ as in Lindtner, p. 126, than by ‘devoid of its manifold appearances’ as in NMW, p. 287, because both the lexical meaning of the expression *avasthā* and the context provided by the verse intimate an allusion to changes in time.

The expressions *pūrvāntam samupāśritāḥ* and *aparāntam samāśritāḥ* in MMK 27,1 and 27,2 respectively have been rendered in NMW, p. 318-319 by ‘dependent on the past life’ and ‘dependent on the future life’. It appears, however, quite plausible that the two verses should convey that considerations about one’s own existence in the past are based on the previous limit of one’s present life, whereas considerations about one’s own existence in the future are based on the ultimate limit of one’s present life. The idea is that the facts of being once born and of being bound to die at some time trigger the curiosity and the apprehension concerning one’s own existence before birth or after death.

Occurrences of *śāśvatam* and *aśāśvatam* in MMK 27, 15-16 have been rendered in NMW, pp. 326-327 by ‘eternalism’ and ‘noneternalism’ respectively. It appears, however natural to suppose

that in (*evam*) *bhavati śāśvatam* and *aśāśvatam* (*ato*) *bhavet* the pertinent expressions are used adverbially. — On the other hand the view exhibited in the translation of Lindtner, p. 134, according to which those phrases mean ‘something (non)eternal exists’ can be accepted too.

The expression *atha vā* in MMK 27.29 has been rendered in NMW, p. 334, by ‘so’, which intimates that the pertinent verse formulates a consequence of the preceding deliberations presented in the chapter and thereby does not account for any disjunctive import of the expression. One can, however, justly doubt that this assessment regarding the contextual role of MMK 27.29 is correct. The connection between the remark of MMK 27.29 and those of the preceding verses of the chapter could be understood as the presentation of an alternative justification for the dismissal of the mistaken views which constitute the topic of this textual segment. Whereas the initial section up to MMK 27.29 presents detailed considerations against the tenability of the views without relying on the theorem of universal emptiness, the statement of verse 29 claims that the dismissal of the mistaken views can be alternatively obtained on the basis of the principle of emptiness. In fact the rejection of views by emptiness can pertain to different levels: First, emptiness deprives the mistaken views of their rational basis entailing the unreasonableness of their adoption. Second, the tenet of emptiness implies that mistaken views do in fact never occur seen from the perspective of final analysis. Third, a realization of emptiness on the level of practice leads to a result where mistaken views and the illusions which they involve cannot (appear to) arise any more. If this account is mainly correct, then Lindtner’s rendering of *atha vā* by ‘med andre ord’ = ‘in other words’, MFM p. 135, is closer to the point. It emerges again that hasty dismissals of lexical import are not commendable.

NMW does not go into questions of textual criticism regarding the MMK.²⁸ This appears acceptable against the background of the fact that, for example, with respect to MMK 24.9 a preference of the alternative reading *gambhīram*, appearing in the edition of de la Vallée Poussing (LVP, p. 494,5) and supported by the Tibetan version, instead of *gambhīre* adopted in NMW, p. 273, would not

²⁸ Compare also the remarks at the end of the ‘Introduction’, p. 9.

entail major consequences for the interpretation of the work, at least as far as one can see.²⁹ But not all cases are like this. If e.g. *utpadyamānas* in the first quarter of MMK 7.7, appearing in LVP, p. 150,15 would be replaced by *utpādyamānas*, a completely different argument would have to be associated with the verse, and the translation presented in NMW, p. 76, would not be adequate.³⁰

If in MMK 23.13, which is quoted in NMW, p. 160, as

*anitye nityam ity evam yadi grāho viparyayah /
nānityam vidyate śūnye kuto grāho viparyayah //*

one would, following Lindtner, p. 205, replace *nānityam* by *na nityam* and the second occurrence of *viparyayah* by ‘*viparyayah*’ one could obtain a more plausible interpretation than the one appearing in NMW.³¹ Similarly in the subsequent verse, which is quoted in NMW as:

*anitye nityam ity evam yadi grāho viparyayah /
anityam ity api grāhah śunye kim na viparyayah //*

and has been translated, p. 261, as

If it would be a false conception to think that impermanent things are permanent,

²⁹ It might be mentioned in passing that it occurs that textual quotations in NMW do not harmonize with the given translation, such as on p. 323, where the last quarter of MMK 27.10 is quoted as *tatra jāyeta cāmrtah*, whereas the text is translated in accordance with *tatra jāyeta vāmtrah*, conforming with LVP 579,3, but not with the Tibetan version, which fits better with the first reading.

³⁰ Although the verse has been translated in NMW in accordance with the former reading (*utpadyamānas*), the form *utpādyamānas* appears in the quotation of the verse. It is not clear what might explain the internal deviance. — Concerning the interpretation of MMK 7.7. and its context compare also MIM, p. 100ff.

³¹ In NMW, p. 260, the following translation is given: If it would be a false conception to think that impermanent things are permanent, then, there being nothing that is impermanent with regard to what is empty, how can there be a false conception? On the basis of the alternative reading the verse could say that, since a) the concept ‘eternal’ with respect to something which is (in fact) not eternal — and could not be eternal if it were no object at all — must be erroneous and b) something eternal cannot be found in something empty (i.e. cannot be found if it is empty), a corresponding conception of being eternal is bound to be an erroneous view.

then, things being empty, isn't conceiving that things are impermanent also false?

A substitution of *nityam* by ‘*nityam*, (the first occurrence of) *viparyayah* by ‘*viparyayah*, and *anityam* by *nānityam*, again following Lindtner, would open the possibility to regard the verse as embodying the thought that, if (only) with respect to something which is (in fact) non-empty the conception of being not eternal is not erroneous then such conception (of being non-eternal) regarding something which is empty is bound to be erroneous because (*iti*) it is (in fact) not even non-eternal. It appears, however, preferable to retain (following other editions) the reading *anityam* in the second half of the verse, accepting only the proposed changes regarding the first half, because this permits a far more natural reading of the *iti*-clause. Thus MMK 23.14 could convey the thought that since the concept ‘non-eternal’ with respect to something that is in fact non-eternal and nothing else can be a non-erroneous conception, even the concept ‘non-eternal’ with respect to something empty is bound to be an erroneous view, because such an item cannot exist on a level of final analysis.³²

III

It is appropriate to terminate the discussion of the translations in NMW without implying that no further possibilities of improvement exist. If the book had contained merely a translation of the MMK one could have claimed that a more satisfactory publication could have been attained by a literal translation of Lindtner’s Danish translation into English. However, NMW combines a complete translation of the MMK with a fairly elaborate commentary which provides valuable information to readers. Without disclaiming its merits it is apposite to point out that the explanations conveyed in the sections accompanying the translations are not always reliable or beyond doubt. Only some illustrations are presented below.

On p. 18 it is asserted that ‘the overall conclusion for which Nāgārjuna will argue’ in the first chapter is ‘that existents do not come into existence as the result of causes and conditions’. The four possible alternatives which are taken into account according to NMW

³² Lindtners translations of MMK 23.13 and 23.14 occur on pages 118-119. A short discussion of the verses is also given in MIM, pp. 163-164.

are 1) that an effect arises ‘because it was already in some sense present in its cause’ and that ‘its appearance is really just the manifestation of something that already existed’, 2) that ‘cause and effect are distinct entities’, 3) that ‘cause and effect may be said to be both identical and distinct’, 4) ‘that things originate without any cause’. First it deserves to be noted that according to NMW’s own account the overall conclusion cannot be that existents do not come into existence as the result of causes and conditions. This can at most constitute a part of the envisaged goal, which must lie in the tenet that entities cannot originate at all, given that the four alternatives exhaust all possible alternatives in which things might originate. As far as the specification of the four alternatives is concerned, it is far from certain that it envisages, among others, the odd idea that cause and effect are both identical and distinct, although this *could* be in fact the case if the historical context in which the MMK had been composed is taken into consideration. At any rate, according to an alternative account the first alternative ought to be seen in the supposition that an effect originates exclusively from itself, the second that it originates exclusively from things which are (numerically) different from it, the third that it originates both from itself and from other things, and the fourth that it does not arise from anything at all, i.e. without any cause.³³ This would have the consequence that the third possibility is less eccentric.³⁴ Anyhow, no formulation in the MMK alludes to the idea that the appearance of the effect is just the manifestation of something that already existed. Obviously the writers of NMW have imputed this notion on the basis of later commentaries which connect the first position with the historical teaching of *satkāryavāda*, advocated in the Sāṃkhya-school. But there is not the slightest independent evidence indicating that the writer of the MMK intended to refute the views of this school in particular. The remark of MMK 1.1 can be made perfectly intelligible on the basis of the supposition that the second alternative has been envisaged because it is needed for an exclusive exhaustion of all conceivable possibilities. This entails that the writer of the text was not, or at least not primarily, concerned with the —

³³ Compare also MIM, pp. 35-39.

³⁴ One could assume that it is implicitly accounted for by the general argument pronounced in MMK 1.2.

perhaps rather childish — goal of refuting the opinions of other people, in particular those of his own ‘colleagues’.

On p. 45 it is contended that MMK 3.3 represents an objection against an alleged principle of irreflexivity according to which an entity can never operate on itself by claiming the existence of counterexamples. The pertinent counterexample should be that a fire, while burning its fuel, also burns itself. There is not the slightest indication to the effect that the writer of the MMK endorses here, or elsewhere, the odd proposition that fire burns itself. The point of MMK 3.3. is rather that the conditional suggested in the preceding verse that if something does not operate on itself it cannot operate on other things either is unfounded: Fire, although it does not burn itself, can nevertheless burn other things. Only this interpretation is corroborated by Candrakīrti (see LVP 114, 3-5). It is nevertheless highly doubtful that the writer of the MMK based any argument on the dubious premise that generally an item cannot operate on itself. One can at most ascertain an acknowledgment of particular instances of such an impossibility which appear fairly plausible in themselves, such as the theorem that sense-faculties cannot perceive themselves.

On p. 57 NMW states a point which is allegedly ‘important to Madhyamaka methodology’. It is said: ‘Nowhere does Nāgārjuna give an argument that can be taken as a *conclusive* proof of emptiness. Instead he refutes specific views of specific opponents who hold that there are non-empty things, things with intrinsic nature’. It can be granted, at least for the sake of argument, that the author of the MMK has not provided any conclusive proof for a thesis which might be considered as the theorem of emptiness — whatever this is. But one wonders why this should corroborate the claim that he merely refutes ‘specific views of specific opponents’. There is not the slightest indication in the entire MMK that all the different possibilities against which arguments are directed in this work correspond to positions which had been actually advocated by persons who adhered to the doctrine that there are non-empty things. A careful scrutiny of the text reveals rather that the different alternatives envisaged in pieces of reasoning cover or are presumably intended to cover all *conceivable* possibilities which can be implied by a tenet to be refuted. After all the MMK evoke *prima facie* the impression that the aim of the work lay in providing a conclusive, or at least a maximally conclusive, demonstration of the tenet of the emptiness of all items (encountered

in the phenomenal world). The circumstance that the arguments are not conclusive in the eyes of the authors of NMW or might even fail to be objectively conclusive is a different matter. It is irrelevant for settling the pertinent question about ‘methodology’.

On p. 96 a passage of Candrakīrti’s commentary is quoted in translation which allegedly rejects the charge of ‘nihilism’ against the teaching of Madhyamaka. It remains unclear, in which precise sense of the term the accusation of nihilism should be denied. It is moreover questionable whether the pertinent textual passage has been properly understood. A crux lies in the interpretation of the phrase *bhavatas tu sasvabhāvavādinaḥ svabhāvasya bhāvānām vaidhuryāt sarva-bhāvāpavādah sambhāvyate* as ‘But for you who believes that existents have intrinsic nature, the refutation of all existents is possible, due to the absence of intrinsic nature with respect to existents’. Presumably the correct interpretation of the pertinent occurrence of *vaidhurya-* is not ‘absence’, but ‘deprivation’. Thus the import of the whole passage of LVP 188,10–189,3 is, in a nutshell, the following: On the premises of someone who supposes that some entities exist which possess a nature of their own it could be made possible to negate all objects in the form of depriving them of their nature, i.e. by disclaiming something regarding them. This is not possible for somebody who denies the existence of such objects. Under these circumstances it is only feasible to provisionally adopt the way of speaking practiced by people who have not discerned their illusory nature and to employ it for revealing precisely this truth about them. The vital point is that the terms ‘nature’ and ‘about’ cannot be any more taken in the same strict sense as under the premises of those who admit the ultimate reality of (at least some) objects.

On p. 121 of NMW a disconcertment is articulated regarding the idea that transmigration is without an end, which is expressed in the following way:

This declaration of the Buddha’s is here taken to mean that saṃsāra is also without end. This is somewhat puzzling, since nirvāṇa is said to be an end to rebirth for those individuals who attain it

Under the premise of pervasive illusionism and against the background of the various intentional stances specified before, the different statements to which the above quoted passage alludes to can be easily reconciled. Declarations to the effect that there is no first or

last point and no intermediate section or no beginning or end of *samsāra*, which are to be found at the beginning of MMK 11, attain the justification from the supposition of its illusionary status and thus correspond in the previously expounded framework to the extraordinary stance, where negative assertions are made with the goal of signaling something's fictitious nature. On the other hand, if statements which say that Nirvāṇa is the end of *samsāra* or similar things, implying that it is not the case that the circle of rebirth is eternal by its own nature, are (supposedly) pronounced by subjects which have attained the highest degree of insight, then they would correlate with the sophisticated stance, where assertions of positive or negative form are used for communicating so to speak 'intra-fictional' information. They convey what would be true if a world of fiction would be a real world on the part of somebody who is completely aware of this fact.

In connection with MMK 23.22 it is said in NMW, p. 264, that since the erroneous nature of the belief that there is a self (*ātman*) is a consequence of the fact that all things are empty, 'it does not follow that its being erroneous stems from its being ultimately true that there is no self'. According to NMW "There is no self" cannot be ultimately true, and it should hold good that '[i]f all things are empty, then no statement about reality can be ultimately true'. Nowhere in the MMK, and as far as one can see nowhere in the literature of early Madhyamaka, does a pronouncement occur to the effect that no statement about reality can be ultimately true or that the tenet of universal emptiness entails such a consequence. In fact general questions regarding the concept of truth with respect to sentences or their contents are never envisaged in those sources and presumably were not a topic of concern. Hence it could be at most surmised that the MMK propagates a teaching which objectively implies this result. A crux lies in the fatal vagueness of the contention that no statements about reality can be ultimately true due to the elusiveness of the phrase 'about reality'. To be sure, if 'about reality' were taken as equivalent to 'about objects which exist (even) on a level of final analysis' or 'about objects which are non-empty' then the pertinent proposition plainly follows from the theorems that there are no objects which exist (even) on a level of final analysis or that there are no non-empty objects. It appears, however, doubtful that the assertion in

NMW has been intended by their authors in this modest sense. Momentous problems arise if the contention should be implied that no statement can be true from a viewpoint of ultimate reality. As NMW does not offer any additional support for this proposition it would be needed to suppose that MMK 23.22 vindicates this claim. However, the pertinent verse says that if (or: since) self, [something] pure, permanent and happy is not found, non-self, impure, impermanent and painful is not found either.³⁵ Theoretically the allegation that negative(ly qualified) items cannot exist if or since their positive correlates do not exist could rely on at least three principles: 1. It is assumed that some (negative) quality can be instantiated only on condition that its positive counterpart is in fact instantiated somewhere, 2. A (negative) quality can only be instantiated if it is at least theoretically possible that its counterpart is instantiated, 3. Certain items as well as their counterparts cannot be instantiated because a common requirement for their instantiation is not satisfied. Among those the second alternative is objectively difficult to maintain considering the fact that the impossibility of something's being a round square ought not entail the impossibility of something's not being a round square. The first option is equally not in correspondence with common intuition, but could be adopted on a particular interpretation of the terms representing negative qualifications according to which they embody the notion of something's being different from instances of correlates, such that e.g. 'non-self' has to be read in the sense of 'different from something which (in fact) is a self', 'impure' as 'different from something which is (in fact) pure' etc. The third alternative could be satisfied if it were held that being an object which exists on a level of final analysis or ultimate truth represents an indispensable requirement for the instantiation, and thus for the occurrence of positive and negative correlates. However, none of those considerations could ever vindicate the proposition that no statement can be true from a viewpoint of ultimate reality. This could be at best maintained on an equation between being true with saying something true of some (ultimately existing) object. However, nothing which is to be found in the textual sources indicates an acceptance of this dubious equalization. The same must be said with respect to the

³⁵ *nātmā ca śuci nityam ca sukham ca yadi vidyate / anātmā ‘sucy anityam ca naiva duḥkham ca vidyate //*

thesis that ‘there is no self’ cannot be ultimately true for someone who maintains the tenet of universal emptiness. The view that the writer of the MMK has adopted tenets of this sort might however occur in the phantasy of interpreters of Nāgārjuna’s thought.

On p. 289 it is asserted in the context of an outline of the contents of MMK 25 that MMK 25.3 embodies the assertion that nothing can be asserted concerning Nirvāṇa. Against the background of the fact that according to NMW’s own translation, p.291, the verse means:

Not abandoned, not acquired, not annihilated, not eternal,
not ceased, not arisen, thus is nirvāṇa said to be.

this statement is suited to provoke puzzlement. After all, the authors of NMW in no manner indicate the opinion that saying something about something has to be strictly differentiated from asserting something concerning something. Against the background of the preceding contemplations it might be in fact maintained that one cannot assert anything concerning Nirvāṇa in the sense that one could not make any correct attributions of qualities to Nirvāṇa as an ultimately existing object. It is however far from certain — and not even probable — that this idea should be conveyed in NMW.

In the light of the previous remarks concerning the scope of *iti* in verses like MMK 25.16 and others it can be easily discerned that the considerations made in NMW, p. 293-300, about tensions between statements made by Nāgārjuna and ‘classical logic’ are misplaced. The crux lies in the very employment of propositional calculus for describing the character of affirmations encountered in the text. This is particularly relevant for the — presumably misguided — equation of the last member within a group of four ways of making assertions about Nirvāṇa with ‘neither p nor not p’. On the other hand the circumstance is remarkable that on p. 300 one encounters the sentence:

The statement *p* must really be about something in order to be true or false.

It should go without saying that this sentence does not represent anything which is expressed in the MMK and that we ought to abstain

from fanciful hypotheses about what the writer of the text could have said.

On p. 335 the claim is reiterated that emptiness is itself empty and it is asserted that ‘emptiness is not to be thought of as the correct account of ultimate truth’. In addition NMW intimates, among other things, that one should ‘avoid turning emptiness into yet another metaphysical theory’. Concerning the opinion that the teaching of the MMK should not be classified as a metaphysical theory, the question of its acceptability presumably depends on the precise explication of the expressions ‘metaphysical theory’ and ‘metaphysics’. In view of the previous exposition a legitimacy of refraining from classifying the doctrine of the MMK as metaphysics could be based on the consideration that it disclaims the existence of objects on some ultimate level of reality which could help to explain features of the phenomenal world. The problem is that one would need to accept a rather narrow sense of ‘metaphysics’ or ‘metaphysical theory’, which is far from mandatory. A denial of categorizing the teaching of the MMK as metaphysics in the pertinent narrow sense would not license the contention that emptiness cannot be thought of as the correct account of ultimate truth — except on a highly artificial interpretation of ‘ultimate truth’. The problems implied by the tenet that emptiness is itself empty need not be reconsidered.

IV

The ‘Introduction’ of NMW presents an outline of the historical context of the MMK, in particular an account of views held by persons or (Buddhist) schools flourishing around the time the MMK had been written, and is surely worth reading on that account. But a few points deserve to be annotated:

1. The assertion on p. 4 that ‘[t]here are two ways in which a statement may be true, conventionally and ultimately’ contrasts with remarks encountered in other parts of NMW insinuating that no statements can be ultimately true or that emptiness is not to be thought of as the correct account of the ultimate truth — compare above. It is not made plain in the book, how this apparent tension should be resolved. Possibly the writers of NMW are inclined to embrace the view that in the framework of the teaching of Madhyamaka there is room for a *conceptual* differentiation between something’s being

conventionally and something's being ultimately true, but that the latter concept is in fact not instantiated. Unfortunately it is difficult to ascertain whether this explanation faithfully represents the position of NMW.

2. On p. 7 it is asserted that 'there can be no single argument that could establish' the thesis of universal emptiness. The reason should be that '[s]uch a "master argument" would have to be based on claims about the ultimate natures of things' and that 'this would involve commitment to intrinsic natures of some sort or other'. The reason why the presentation of a single argument for the contention that all things are empty must involve a commitment to intrinsic natures of some sort or the other is difficult to see. One should think that in theory at least it should be viable to provide a compelling proof of the tenet in question by deriving a contradiction or by deducing evidently unacceptable consequences from the supposition of its antithesis that there is anything which is not empty. Nevertheless, the fact that the MMK does not employ an argument of this kind is significant and therefore the statement made in NMW to the effect that 'Nāgārjuna's strategy is instead to examine a variety of claims made by those who take there to be ultimately real entities and seek to show of each such claim that it cannot be true' embodies an important point. This holds good even if the contention is dismissed that the author of the MMK generally examined claims which were actually advocated by other persons or in other schools. An explanation or a part of such an explanation might be provided by the observation that the arguments of the MMK rest on the exploitations of relations of dependence together with the supposition that the theorem that everything which exists must be dependent on something should not be taken as simply axiomatic. Rather relations of dependence ought to be demonstrable for different types of possible objects individually.

3. On pp. 7-9 a number of 'patterns that occur particularly often in MMK' are presented. It is particularly in this context that the 'Introduction' calls for critical comments.

3.1. The first pattern which is described under the label 'Infinite Regress' should according to NMW relate to the fact that some phenomenon requires some hypothesis H for its explanation, which in its turn calls for another hypothesis H' and so on (*ad infinitum*). But, it

is said, ‘a good explanation must end somewhere’. The implicit contention that series of explanations must possess a definite end is neither objectively undisputable nor clearly acknowledged by the writer of the MMK. If one examines the individual examples, which NMW adduces, it turns out that several of them lack any obvious reference to an infinite regress and do not exhibit any compelling connection with the idea of explanation. For example the piece of reasoning in MMK 2.6 that acts of going cannot occur without somebody who goes and that two acts of going would entail two subjects of going refers to the fact that activities of motion require items which move. But the concept of requirement cannot be equated with the concept of (explanatory) hypothesis. According to most ordinary intuitions it is pretty bizarre to suppose that the existence of an object that moves explains the occurrence of motion. It is absolutely inexplicable why the conflation of distinct notions should be of any advantage here or elsewhere.

3.2. A second pattern which is described under the label ‘Neither Identical Nor Distinct’ allegedly consists in a situation which can be characterized as follows: The hypothesis that some item x and some item y are related in some way R is refuted by the consideration that x and y need to be either identical or distinct. In the latter case the pertinent items cannot be connected by R given that in this case the one must exist apart from the other. In the former case the consequence results that an item (say x) would bear the relation R to itself, which is absurd. The point is presented in a manner as if the writer of the MMK boldly rejected the supposition that relations can be reflexive. There is in fact not the slightest evidence for the adoption of a dogmatic tenet of this kind in the MMK. It can be at most supposed that with respect to particular relations, such as being a cause of something, reflexivity is strictly dismissed. On the other hand, numerous examples where according to NMW this type of argument should be instantiated, do not contain any obvious reference to some relation which connects pertinent items. For example, in MMK 2.18 it is merely asserted that it is both impossible that somebody who goes is the same as an act of going and impossible that those are distinct items. This is a mere declaration without any argument. To be sure, in the two subsequent verses it is contended that if a subject of going and going were the same, then agent and action would have to be the same and that if they were different both would

have to occur independent of the other, i.e. without the existence of the counterpart. It remains unclear which common relation between an act and its subject should be referred to in the two alternative cases. Even if it were supposed that the relevant relation consists in the relationship between an act and its substratum or, specifically, an agent and its action, it remains doubtful that the argument against the supposition of difference is taken to depend on the assumption that on this condition the agent cannot be connected with the act in the way of agent and action because the remark of the verse merely entails that they must also exist independent of each other.³⁶ The crux is that one could at best speculate about the acceptance of further implicit presuppositions on the part of the writer of the text.³⁷

3.3. A pattern which is depicted under the label ‘The Three Times’ should be exemplified in cases where a hypothesis to the effect that some item has the property P is refuted on the basis of the consideration that the concerned entity must possess the property either in the past, the present or the future and where those alternatives are shown to be untenable. It is contended that the argument rests on the view that the present is ‘a mere point without duration’. This last allegation is not supported by any argument in NMW, and it is highly questionable that any of the pieces of reasoning in the MMK relies on this supposition. Various textual passages which are declared in NMW to exhibit this type of argument do not contain any reference to the notions of past, present and future or to some of them. For example in MMK 1.5-6 it is contended that as long as an effect does not arise nothing can qualify as its (causal) condition and that nothing can be a condition either of something which exists or something which does not exist. To be sure, the reasoning presumably refers to

³⁶ It would be possible to come close to the envisaged result at best if it were supposed that the pertinent relationship connects subjects with sorts of actions for which it is impossible that different subjects perform the same action.

³⁷ In other cases it is even more difficult to distill a reference to a relation from the text. For example in MMK 18.1 it is said that sameness of self and skandhas would imply that the self is subject to origination and annihilation and difference would entail that the self is not endowed with the characteristics of skandhas. Do the authors of NMW suppose that (absence of) origination and (absence of) destruction consist in a *relation* between something originating or perishing and events or states of (non-) origination or (non-)annihilation or that such a view has been hypothesized as relevant in the pertinent context by the writer of the MMK? Where is the evidence that the same relation must equally be relevant for the second alternative?

temporal aspects. But these are not past, present or future but at best relative connections, in particular the existence or non-existence of something simultaneous with the existence of something else.³⁸

Under the title ‘Irreflexivity’ it is claimed that certain arguments depend on a principle of irreflexivity which says ‘that an entity cannot operate on itself’. It has been remarked earlier that it is doubtful that the writer of the MMK appealed to any such principle in the general form.

According to NMW there are instances falling under a category labeled ‘Nonreciprocity’. This pattern should serve to refute a hypothesis to the effect that certain items x and y ‘are in a relation of mutual reciprocal dependence’. Several passages which are mentioned in this connection turn out to be doubtful. For example, in MMK 11.5³⁹ it is merely implied that *if* birth, old age and death occurred simultaneously, *then* mutual dependence would not be possible. This is perfectly compatible with the contention that birth (as a type of event) depends on some previous death and death (as a type of event) depends on a previous birth. — The bizarre idea that individual events of being born and dying are mutually dependent is obviously irrelevant in the present connection, and the refutation of this possibility would in any case not rely on any consideration formulated in this verse. — Evidently the objective of MMK 11.5 is not a refutation of mutual dependence but of the simultaneous occurrence of birth, old age and death. Similarly in MMK 20.7 it is only said that if an effect would emerge simultaneously with an assemblage (of causes or conditions), then the (unacceptable) result would follow that producer and that which is produced occur at the same time. This is in itself unsuited to refute any supposition of mutual dependence.

V

³⁸ Moreover, there is no obligation to interpret the term *asat-* in MMK 1.6 as implying a prior or later existence relative to some reference time. It seems that the validity of the reasoning is not affected in the least if the occurrences of *asat-* should relate to effects which do not occur at some particular time, where it is completely immaterial whether they might have arisen before or arise later or do not arise at any time at all.

³⁹ MMK 11.5 reads: *na jarā marañam caiva jātiś ca saha yujyate / mriyeta jāyamānaś ca syāc cāhetukatobhayoḥ //* In NMW, p. 125, the verse is rendered by: And it is indeed not right that birth be simultaneous with old age and death. That which is undergoing birth would at the same time die, and both would be without cause.

The circumstance that NMW offers translations of all the verses of the MMK together with accompanying commentaries and quotations of the pertinent stanzas in the original language constitutes a relevant merit. The most significant virtue lies in the transparency entailed by this arrangement: Readers who are to some extent familiar with the language of the original text are enabled to critically examine the tenability of the translations and even those who do not possess this competence attain assistance for their understanding by the supplementary explications provided by the commentaries to the individual verses. As NMW presents the complete text of the MMK, it is moreover made possible to control interpretations of single verses or particular textual segments in the light of their immediate context or other parts of the work. One must approve in addition that the authors of NMW have considered various Indian commentaries on the MMK and provide information about their views, even if it appears that more attention has been paid to Candrakīrti's commentary than other older ones, such as the commentary attributed to an author called Qing-mu (*Pingalākṣa), which is preserved in a Chinese translation (Taishō 1564). As far as the translations are concerned one must acknowledge that they are generally free from misinterpretations due to *blatant* grammatical misunderstandings or philological deficiencies. In this regard it needs to be considered, nevertheless, that the MMK are to a large extent quite easy to understand from a linguistic aspect, that the syntactic structure is mostly fairly transparent, if not obvious, and that terminological issues are less tantalizing than in many other textual sources of the Indian philosophical tradition.

On the other hand, the translations as well as the explanatory comments in NMW suffer from lack of reliability in a number of cases. Not only are various interpretations doubtful, but not seldom the very existence of exegetical problems cannot be easily discerned or are not detectable at all on the basis of the exposition offered in NMW. Apart from aspects of questionableness with respect to the portrayal of the philosophical teaching in the MMK even the omission of consideration of textual variants in some particular cases are not unimportant inadequacies. Possibly what matters even more is the circumstance that NMW drops behind older translations and interpretations of the MMW, some of them published in other languages than English. It is striking that the list of secondary

literature presented in NMW contains only titles in English. This induces an impression of parochialism. It might be pointed out that the bibliography appearing on pp. 339-341 appears under the title 'Further Readings' and could hence be considered as an introduction into some pertinent publications in the subject matter for English speaking readers. But the circumstance that the exegeses presented in NMW *de facto* amount to a neglect of non-English translations and studies cannot be explained by this. Thus one cannot assert that NMW suffers merely from imperfections which are insignificant and negligible.

At this point it is apposite to bring up a more general matter concerning translations: Although the renderings in NMW tend to be more in agreement with the literal sense of the original verses *compared* to certain other published translations, the difference is only gradual. The translations abstain from strictly separating translation from interpretation. This means that aspects of explanation or interpretation of the root text are permitted to have an impact on the translations even when this is not dictated by the linguistic properties of the respective source and target languages. The thesis that this is a recommendable principle deserves to be questioned. Its corollaries in the form of obliterating the imputation of a translator's personal views concerning the interpretation of the text as a whole and of impeding the identification of the exegetical potential of the source clearly emerge in the light of the translation of the MMK presented in NMW. Against this background one feels compelled to advocate a reconsideration of the dismissal of the Tibetan translations as exceedingly 'slavish' and a reappraisal of the manner in which Indian textual sources had been rendered in the Tibetan tradition. We can suppose that writers of philosophical texts were equipped not only with theoretical but also with linguistic, stylistic and rhetorical competence. Presumably they were concerned both with what to say and with how to formulate what they wanted to say. If this is true a translator ought not confine himself to re-formulating some content which he himself thinks to be in accordance with an author's intentions but should equally attempt to do justice to a writer as a subject of linguistic competence and hypothesize, at least by default, that his way of putting a content in words is most adequate.

In view of all this it appears remarkable that on the cover of the book one finds a number of excerpts from reviews containing passages as follows:

This translation is sensitive to text-critical issues, felicitous, academically rigorous, and it incorporates a useful introduction with an admirable and philosophically sensitive summary of Nāgārjuna's intellectual background and method. This translation has the authentic flavor of Nāgārjuna

Siderits and Katsura have produced a masterful translation that is both philologically precise and philosophically sophisticated and sets extremely high standards for further work on the *Mūlamadhyamakārikā*

Katsura and Siderits's translation and commentary renders the work accessible in an outstanding fashion. The scholarship is of the very highest quality. The translation is authoritative, and the commentary, drawing on the texts of the most notable Indian commentators, provides a picture of Nāgārjuna's thought that is vivid and illuminating.

One may rightly attribute considerable merits to NMW. On the other hand, it can hardly be doubted that the above quoted remarks imply a considerable discrepancy between statements and actual state-of-affairs. They inevitably raise the question as to what extent publications reviewed have also been read and examined.

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