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Facets of the Intellectual History in India and Tibet Concerning Meditating on a Mere Absence

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Abstract

Beginning at least in the early sixth century in India, a fascinating controversy arose over what is established by Nāgārjuna's refutation of production in the first chapter of his *Fundamental Treatise on the Middle Called "Wisdom"*. It is likely that Buddhapālita (c. 470-540?) stimulated this controversy by indicating that this stanza demonstrates "how this called 'production' is only a convention," suggesting that something positive is also established by this series of negations. Bhāvaviveka (c. 500-570?) responded by emphasizing that in Nāgārjuna's system these reasonings establish a mere absence. In defense of Buddhapālita, Chandrakīrti (seventh century) responded that indeed Buddhapālita "wished to express a nonaffirming negation," thereby agreeing with Bhāvaviveka that Nāgārjuna intended only a nonaffirming negation. Much later in Tibet the tradition stemming from Tsong-kha-pa (tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa, 1357-1419) put particular emphasis on this controversy in order to detail how, according to it, proper meditation on emptiness requires that the object of meditation be a mere negation, a mere absence of inherent existence. This position stands in marked contrast to many other Tibetan traditions, including that of Tsong-kha-pa's predecessor Döl-po-pa Shay-rap-gyel-tsen (1292-1361) for whom ultimate reality is an affirming negation (*ma yin dgag, paryudāsapratishedha*).

Keywords:

Nāgārjuna, Chandrakīrti, Tsong-kha-pa, Nonaffirming Negation, Affirming Negation

印度與西藏對於禪修「唯遮」的思想歷史面向

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摘要

至少在六世紀初開始，有關龍樹在《中論》第一章「生之否定」的看法於印度產生了爭論。這似乎是因佛護而起，他認為此偈誦表示所謂的「生」只用於世俗，並主張任何成立事物也是由此一連串之遮除而建立的；清辨則強調在龍樹的系統中這些推理要說明的是唯遮，月稱在為佛護辯護時認為佛護要表達的是無遮，因此同意清辨所說龍樹所指的只是無遮。許久之後，在西藏由宗喀巴而下的傳承特別強調此爭論，以便詳細說明在正確禪修空性時，應如何要求禪修的對境為「唯遮」，也就是僅僅是對於自性存在的遮除；此立場明顯地與其他西藏傳承形成對比，也包含在宗喀巴以前主張究竟實相為非遮的多布巴。

關鍵字：龍樹、月稱、宗喀巴、無遮、非遮

Introduction

Nāgārjuna at the beginning of his renowned *Fundamental Stanzas on the Middle Called “Wisdom”*¹ makes an expression of worship to the Buddha who taught dependent-arising as qualified by eight negations:²

Homage to the perfect Buddha,
The best of propounders,
Who taught that what dependently arises
Has no cessation, no production,
No annihilation, no permanence,
No coming, no going,
No difference, no sameness,³
Is free from proliferations, and at peace.

After the expression of worship, Nāgārjuna presents the first of twenty-seven chapters titled “Analysis of Conditions.”⁴ Although this chapter appears right after the expression of worship, which mentioned no cessation first, rather than immediately speaking about no cessation, Nāgārjuna chooses to show that there is no production, likely due to the fact that cessation does not exist without prior production. As Avalokitavrata explains:⁵

Indeed, earlier on the occasion of indicating the body of the treatise [Nāgārjuna] placed the category of “no cessation” first, but if here on the occasion of teaching those [eight], he taught no production first, it would be easier to teach no cessation, no annihilation, no permanence, no coming, no going, no difference, and no sameness; therefore, he took up the task of initially teaching no production.

About this others object: Earlier⁶ when [you, Bhāvaviveka,] answered a statement [challenging the order of the eight no’s in the expression of worship in which cessation is first and production is second]: “It would have been reasonable [for Nāgārjuna] to refute cessation *after* production because [production] is earlier [than cessation], just

1 *mūlamadhyamakakārikāḥ*.

2 Introductory stanzas; Toh 3824, *sde dge, dbu ma*, vol. *tsa*, 1b.2-1b.3; Sanskrit in La Vallée Poussin, *Prasannapadā*, 11.13: *anirodhamanutpādamanucchedamaśāśvataṃ /anekārthamanān ārthamanāgamamanirgamam//yaḥpratītyasamutpādam prapañcopaśamaṃ śivaṃ /deśayāmāsa saṃbuddhastam vande vadatām varam //*.

3 In Chinese Buddhism these eight negations are called *ba bu* — the Eight No’s.

4 *rkyen btag pa, pratyayaparikṣā*.

5 Avalokitavrata’s *Commentary on (Bhāvaviveka’s) “Lamp for (Nāgārjuna’s) ‘Wisdom’*,” (Golden Reprint, vol. 109, 186.1).

6 This is quoted from Bhāvaviveka’s *Lamp for (Nāgārjuna’s) “Wisdom”* (Golden Reprint, vol. 107, 128.2).

as [he refutes] annihilation [*after* production],” you [Bhāvaviveka] said,⁷ “Because cyclic existence has no beginning, production and cessation do not have a definite order; hence, there is no fallacy in [Nāgārjuna’s] teaching these [with the order of] ‘no cessation, no production.’” If in that case it was reasonable according to that order [for Nāgārjuna] to teach no cessation first, why does he want [here] to teach no production first?

Answer: Earlier [when discussing the order of the eight terms in Nāgārjuna’s expression of worship, Bhāvaviveka] explained that there is no fault in [Nāgārjuna’s] teaching “no cessation, no production” because cyclic existence has no beginning and because cessation does not depend on the stage of production and because the topics are being listed,⁸ but here in teaching *the meaning* of those the cause of all of them — that is to say, the cause of cessation and so forth — is production since:

if [something] has been produced, it will cease, but if it is not produced, it will not cease;

the definition of the cutting of the continuum of something that has been produced is annihilation, but if it is not produced, it will not be annihilated;

due to the nondestruction of something that has been produced, it is permanent, but if it is not produced, it will not become permanent;

due to the coming of something produced from another place, it comes,⁹ but if it is not produced, it does not come;

due to the going of something produced to another place, it goes, but if it is not produced, it does not go;

something produced is a different character, but if it is not produced, it does not become a different object;

because something produced has the same character, it is the same object, but if it is not produced, it will not become the same object;

and hence:

because when the cause is stopped, its effects also do not arise, and because it being the case that the world is intensely attached mostly to production and manifestly adheres to production, this treatise is aimed at abandoning intense attachment and manifest adherence, and

7 This paraphrases Bhāvaviveka’s response (Golden Reprint, vol. 107, 128.3).

8 *don brtag pa yin pa’i phyir*, which literally is “because meanings are being examined” but likely means “the topics are being listed” or “the topics are being examined” in contrast to “teaching *the meaning* of those” just below. These latter two reasons quote Bhāvaviveka (Golden Reprint, vol. 107, 128.4).

9 In the Golden Reprint (vol. 109, 187.2) read *yin* for *ma yin* in accordance with the Karmapa *sde dge bstan ’gyur* (60b.2).

because when intense attachment and manifest adherence have been abandoned, nirvāṇa is attained, here the master [Nāgārjuna] took up the task of initially teaching no production.

From this it can be seen that the aim in refuting production and so forth is the attainment of nirvāṇa, which requires the eradication of attachment and adherence.

Nāgārjuna starts the first chapter with a refutation of four types of production:

Not from self, not from others,
Not from both, not causelessly.
Do any things
Ever arise anywhere.

*na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṃ nāpyahetutah/
utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kvacana kecana//*

*bdag las ma yin gzhan las min/
gnyis las ma yin rgyu med min/
dngos po gang dag gang na yang/
skye ba nam yang yod ma yin//*

Uncharacteristically, Nāgārjuna says nothing more about the first leg of this reasoning, “not from self;” he merely declares that things are not produced from self. Instead of explaining why things are not produced from self, he immediately proceeds to a proof that things are not produced from other by examining four types of conditions. However, his commentators explain what is behind his refutation of production from self, and the ways they frame and explain this point result in a controversy that engenders a split between what in Tibet came to be known as two subdivisions within the Middle Way School, the Autonomy School and the Consequence School, the first founded by Bhāvaviveka and the second founded by Buddhapālita and Chandrakīrti.

According to the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century Tibetan scholar Jamyang-shay-pa, Buddhapālita (c. 470-540?) stimulates this controversy by how he frames the background to this stanza:¹⁰

Here [someone] says: At this point show how this called production is only a convention!

10 Two editions were used: Golden Reprint, vol. 106, 493.3-494.4; P5242, vol. 95, 75.1.3-75.2.2. See also the annotated translation and edited Tibetan text in the Ph.D. thesis by A Saito (1984).

According to Buddhapālita, Nāgārjuna is responding to a request from an interested party who wants to know how it can be claimed that production only conventionally exists. In a similar way, Buddhapālita concludes his commentary on the first chapter with the statement:

Since the production of things is thus in all ways inadmissible, there is no production; therefore, this called production is only a convention. He thereby twice suggests that something positive is also established by this series of four negations, namely, the conventional existence of production.

I find Jam-yang-shay-pa's opinion about the initial stimulus of the controversy to be cogent even though Bhāvaviveka explicitly responds not to this framing but to how Buddhapālita constructs a logical argument against production from self. For, Bhāvaviveka's objection is that Buddhapālita is not merely negating production from self but in addition is implying production from other. Buddhapālita's argument is:

“From self” (*bdag las*, *svataḥ*) is the equivalent of saying “from [its own] entity” (*bdag nyid las*). About that, respectively, things are not produced from self because their production would be just senseless and because production would be endless.¹¹

11 This and the next two sentences are cited in Chandrakīrti's *Clear Words* (La Vallée Poussin, *Prasannapadā*, 14.1):

na svata utpadyante bhāvāḥ/ tadutpādavaiyarthiyāt/ atiprasaṅgadoṣācca/ na hi svātmanā vidyamānānām padārthānām punarutpāde prayojanamasti/ atha sannapi jāyeta/ na kadā cinna jāyeta//

The Tibetan translation of Chandrakīrti's text (Golden Reprint, vol. 112, 13.2) is:

dnegos po rnams bdag las skye ba med de de dag gi skye ba don med pa nyid du 'gyur ba'i phyir dang/ shin tu thal bar 'gyur ba'i phyir ro // dnegos po bdag gi bdag nyid yod pa rnams la ni yang skye ba la dgos pa med do// ci ste yod kyang skye na nam yang mi skye bar mi 'gyur ro/

The Tibetan translation of Buddhapālita's text (Golden Reprint, vol. 106, 493.5) reads:

dnegos po rnams bdag gi bdag nyid las skye ba med de/ de dag gi skye ba don med pa nyid du 'gyur ba'i phyir dang skye ba thug pa med par 'gyur ba'i phyir ro/ 'di ltar dnegos po bdag gi bdag nyid yod pa rnams la yang skye ba la dgos pa med do// gal te yod kyang skye na nam yang mi skye bar mi 'gyur bas//*

In the latter edition, *svataḥ* is translated into Tibetan as *bdag gi bdag nyid las* instead of *bdag las* (as would be expected) most likely because Buddhapālita in the previous sentence glosses *bdag las* (*svataḥ*) as *bdag nyid las* and in the next sentence uses *bdag gi bdag nyid* (*svātmanā*).

The Sanskrit of the second fallacy, *atiprasaṅgadoṣācca* (“and because of the fault of great absurdity”) is rendered in the Tibetan of Chandrakīrti's *Clear Words* (P5260, vol. 98, 4.4.3; Golden Reprint, vol. 112, 13.2) as *dang shin tu thal bar 'gyur ba'i phyir* (“and because it would be very absurd”). The Tibetan of Buddhapālita's text (P5242, vol. 95, 75.1.6; Golden Reprint, vol. 106, 493.6), however, differs due, most likely, to providing a meaning translation

It is thus: the production-again (*yang skye ba, punarutpāda*) of things already existing in their own entities is purposeless. If, though existent, they are produced, they would never not be produced. Hence, that also is not accepted. Therefore, respectively, things are not produced from self.

Bhāvaviveka's rebuttal is:

Another [namely, Buddhapālita] makes the explanation, "Things are not produced from self because their production would be just senseless and because production would be endless."

That is not reasonable¹² (1) because [Buddhapālita] does not express a reason [capable of proving that there is no production from self] as well as an example,

spelling out the actual absurdity, *dang skye ba thug pa med par 'gyur ba 'i phyir* ("and because production would be endless"). Since the latter is more to the point and is also the reading in the Tibetan of Bhāvaviveka's text (P5253, vol. 95, 155.4.7; Golden Reprint, vol. 107, 132.4; Karmapa *sde dge bstan 'gyur*, vol. 96, 97.6) and Avalokitavrata's commentary on Bhāvaviveka (P5259, vol. 96, 190.3.1; Golden Reprint, vol. 109, 229.2, which for *thug* reads *thugs*; Karmapa *sde dge bstan 'gyur*, vol. 98, 145.3) have translated it this way throughout.

It is unsuitable to translate this fallacy as "infinite regress" since the reference is not to the past but to the future, that is to say, an object would be produced over and over again. Also, each cause has a cause, thereby requiring an infinite regress, which is not a fallacy since there is infinite time for a string of infinite causes.

- 12 The Sanskrit of this paragraph, as Chandrakīrti cites it (La Vallée Poussin, *Prasannapadā*, 14.4), is: *tadayuktaṃ/ hetuḥśāntānabhīdhanāt/ paroktadoṣāparihārācca/ prasaṅgavākyatvācca prakṛtārthaviparyayeṇa viparītarthasādhyataddharmavyaktau parasmādutpannā bhāvā janmasāphalyāt/ janmanirodhāceti kṛtāntavirodhaḥ syāt//*

The Tibetan as it appears in Bhāvaviveka's text (Golden Reprint, vol. 107, 132.4) is: *de ni rigs pa ma yin te/gtan tshigs dang dpe ma brjod pa 'i phyir dang / gzhan gyis smras pa 'i nyes pa ma bsal ba 'i phyir ro// glags yod pa 'i tshig yin pa 'i phyir te/ skabs kyi don las bzlog pas sgrub par bya ba dang /de 'i chos bzlog pa 'i don mngon pas dngos po rnamz gzhān las skye bar 'gyur ba dang / skye ba 'bras bu dang bcas pa nyid du 'gyur ba dang / skye ba thug pa yod par 'gyur ba 'i phyir mdzad pa 'i mtha' dang 'gal bar 'gyur ro//*

A slightly different Tibetan translation is found in Avalokitavrata's commentary on Bhāvaviveka (P5259, vol. 96, 190.3.8):

de ni rigs pa ma yin te/gtan tshigs dang dpe ma brjod pa 'i phyir dang / gzhan gyis smras pa 'i nyes pa ma bsal ba dang // glags yod pa 'i tshig yang yin pa 'i phyir te/ skabs kyi don las bzlog pas sgrub par bya ba dang /de 'i chos bzlog pa 'i don mngon pas dngos po rnamz gzhān las skye bar 'gyur ba dang / skye ba 'bras bu dang bcas pa nyid du 'gyur ba dang / skye ba thug pa yod par 'gyur ba 'i phyir mdzad pa 'i mtha' dang 'gal bar 'gyur ro//

See also the next two footnotes.

and (2) because [the reasoning as Buddhapālita states it] does not avoid the fallacies adduced by another [that is, the fallacies that a Sāṃkhya would be expected to adduce], and (3) because [Buddhapālita's] words also afford an opportunity [to an opponent to expose contradiction within his own system] since [the thesis and the reason must] be reversed from the meaning put forward, and hence what becomes evident is the meaning of the opposite of the thesis and the property of that [that is, the opposite of the reason] — things are produced from other and production has effects and production has an end¹³— due to which [Buddhapālita] would contradict tenets [of the Middle Way School].

The background of this repudiation of Buddhapālita's attempt at a logical refutation of production from self is found in Bhāvaviveka's presentation of types of negations earlier in his commentary on chapter one, in which he emphasizes that these are mere negations, not implying anything in their place:

This negation, “is not from self” (*bdag las ma yin, na svataḥ*), is to be viewed as meaning a nonaffirming negation¹⁴ because of principally being a negation and because of intending¹⁵ to establish “nonconceptual pristine wisdom” endowed with the entirety of objects¹⁶ through refuting the entirety of the net of conceptions. When

13 The Sanskrit, as Chandrakīrti cites it (La Vallée Poussin, *Prasannapadā*, 15.1), rather than presenting this as three points as the Tibetan in Bhāvaviveka's text does (*dnegos po rnams gzhan las skye ba 'gyur ba dang / skye ba 'bras bu dang bcas pa nyid du 'gyur ba dang /skye ba thug pa yod par 'gyur ba 'i phyir*: P5253, vol. 95, 155.5.1; Golden Reprint, vol. 107, 132.5; Karmapa *sde dge bstan 'gyur*, vol. 96, 97.7, as well as in Avalokitavrata's commentary, Golden Reprint, vol. 109, 234.2; Peking P5259, 191.1.5; Karmapa *sde dge bstan 'gyur*, vol. 98, 148, 3), reframes Buddhapālita's syllogism in its opposite form:

paramādutpannā bhāvā janmasāphalyāt janmanirodhācceti (Things are produced from other because production has effects and because production has an end.)

The Tibetan of Chandrakīrti's text, nevertheless, is as above: *dnegos po rnams gzhan las skye ba 'gyur ba dang / skye ba 'bras bu dang bcas pa nyid du 'gyur ba dang /skye ba thug pa yod par 'gyur ba 'i phyir* (Golden Reprint, vol. 112, 13.4; Tibetan Publishing House 1968 edition, 10.19). I would render the Sanskrit into Tibetan, however, as:

dnegos po rnams gzhan las skye ba yin te/ skye ba don yod pa nyid yin pa 'i phyir dang skye ba thug pa yod pa yin pa 'i phyir ro/

Because of the unanimity of the Tibetan versions on this point (except for mine) and because Tsong-kha-pa and Jam-yang-shay-pa speak to these versions, I use their casting of the meaning as three points but cite the Sanskrit version throughout.

14 *med par dgag pa, prasajyapratishedha*.

15 *dgongs pa*.

16 As Bhāvaviveka's commentator Avalokitavrata (Golden Reprint, vol. 109, 201.1) says:

That nonconceptual pristine wisdom — endowed with the entirety of objects, that is to say, what

an affirming negation¹⁷ is employed, due to its principally being an affirmation, it is being affirmed that “phenomena are not produced,” whereby nonproduction is indicated, and hence one would separate from a tenet because scripture says, “If one courses in the nonproduction of form, one is not coursing in the perfection of wisdom.” Here it is to be delimited that “Things are only not produced from self.” If it is delimited otherwise, then it would be determined as, “[Things] are not produced from only self. Well, what then? They are produced from other,” and likewise it would be determined as, “[Things] are not produced from only self. Well, what then? They are produced from self and other.” Hence, those also are not asserted because of separating from a tenet.

Avalokitavrata summarizes the core of the argument against using an affirming negation:¹⁸

When an affirming negation is solely employed and a nonaffirming negation is not employed, then because an affirming negation is principally an affirmation, just a mere negation would not be established, since an affirming negation, “Phenomena are not produced,” would be affirmed, whereby that nonproduction exists would be indicated. However, that also is not asserted since one would separate from a tenet.

Not even the *existence* of nonproduction is conveyed by these refutations of the four types of production.

The meditative intent of the refutations is apparent when Bhāvaviveka says that it is aimed at producing nonconceptual pristine wisdom by way refuting the full scope of the “net of conceptions.” Nāgārjuna’s method is viewed as being in the service of developing wisdom, and thus mere negation is connected with meditative cultivation and is not just refutation of opposing systems.

Perhaps stemming from two types of injunctions used by the non-Buddhist Mīmāṃsakas — when something is just forbidden and when something positive is implied in place of what is forbidden — Bhāvaviveka speaks of two types of negations, affirming and nonaffirming, or implicative and nonimplicative. His commentator, Avalokitavrata, cites Navidharma’s *Stanzas Demonstrating a Condensation of Exclusions* for concise descriptions of them:¹⁹

is known, what is realized, and what is thoroughly distinguished (“objects” being the entirety of objects of activity, objects apprehended, and objects observed) — is called [by Bhāvaviveka] “nonconceptual pristine wisdom’ endowed with the entirety of objects.”

17 *ma yin dgag, paryudāsapratiṣedha.*

18 Golden Reprint, vol. 109, 202.2.

19 Golden reprint, vol. 109, 198.1: *dgag pa don gyis bstan pa dang / tshig gcig sgrub par byed pa dang // de ldan rang tshig mi ston pa // ma yin gzhan pa gzhan yin no //*. Jam-yang-shay-pa’s *Great Exposition of Tenets* (Taipei, 216.3) identifies the passage as from *Ldog pa bsdu pa*, which is *Ldog pa bsdu pa bstan pa’i tshig le’ur byas pa, Piṇḍanivartananirdeśakārikā*; P5782. The *sde dge* edition (Toh. 4293; TBRC W23703, 504.7-505.1) reads: *don gyis go bar byed pa dang // tshig gcig sgrub par byed pa dang // de dang ldan pa’i dgag pa dang // rang gi tshig gis mi ston pa’o //*. There is a commentary by Navidharma, *Ldog pa bsdu pa bstan pa’i rnam grel*,

Negations that indicate through import,
That establish through a phrase,
That possess those, and that do not indicate through their own words
Are affirming [negations]; others are other [that is, non-affirming negations].

Avalokitavrata briefly explains that affirming negations are those that:²⁰

1. indicate understanding through import
2. establish an actuality through a phrase
3. possess those — understanding through import and establishing an actuality
4. and do not indicate through their own words, as for example, concerning a person of the royal lineage²¹ not indicating this through the phrase “royal lineage” but indicating it through the phrase “not a brahmin.”

Tsong-kha-pa provides clear identifications:²²

In this:

- That which indicates through its import is, for instance, “The corpulent Devadatta does not eat during day-time.”
- That which establishes an actuality through a phrase is a case of one phrase’s containing both the elimination of an object of negation and an explicit suggestion of another phenomenon — for instance, “Nonproduction from self exists.”
- That which possesses those is a phrase that has both explicit and implicit suggestion of other phenomena — for instance, “The non-emaciated fat Devadatta who does not eat during the day exists.”
- That which does not indicate through its own words is, for instance, “This one is not a Brahmin,” at a time when (1) it has been ascertained that a person is either of the royal lineage or a Brahmin and (2) the specific one has not ascertained.

Whenever any of those four modes of suggestion occur, [the phenomenon] is an affirming negation, whereas those negatives that are other than those — that do not suggest [in] any of those four [ways] — are non-affirming negations, which are other than affirming negations.

Pinḍanivartananirdeśavārttika; P5783; Toh. 4294.

20 Golden Reprint, vol. 109, 198.2.

21 In the Golden Reprint (vol. 109, 198.3) for *rgyal rigs zhes la* read *rgyal rigs la* in accordance with the Peking (P5259, vol. 96, 185.4.3).

22 In the section of Consequence School in the *The Essence of Eloquence* (Drakpa and Damdul Namgyal, 220.4).

When Avalokitavrata fleshes out the meaning of the scripture that Bhāvaviveka cites, it becomes even clearer that the aim is get beyond conceptuality:²³ The Supramundane Victorious Mother, the *Perfection of Wisdom* says:

Others asked the Supramundane Victor, “How is it that when Bodhisattvas course in the perfection of wisdom, they are not coursing in the perfection of wisdom?” and the Supramundane Victor pronounced, “If one courses in the nonproduction of form, one is not coursing in the perfection of wisdom. If one courses in the production of form, one is not coursing in the perfection of wisdom.

and so forth. What does this indicate? It indicates that since the perfection of wisdom is devoid of the entirety of conceptions of production, nonproduction, and so forth, then when bodhisattvas do not course even in conceptions of nonproduction, they are coursing in the perfection of wisdom. Consequently, if an affirming negation is thoroughly employed, such contradicts scripture, and hence here one is to rely only on a nonaffirming negation.

Since the emphasis is on the refutation of production and so forth in order to reach a state beyond conceptuality, it would be a mistake to make use of affirming negations in the context of the refutation of the four types of production.

Indeed, when Chandrakīrti defends Buddhapālita against Bhāvaviveka’s allegations of such a fallacy, he agrees with Bhāvaviveka that Nāgārjuna’s refutation is intended as a nonaffirming negation:²⁴

Question: When it is delimited that “[things] are just not produced from self,” is it not that it would just be asserted that “[things] are produced from other”?

Answer: It is not, because of wishing to express a nonaffirming negation²⁵ and because production from other is also refuted.

When Chandrakīrti indicates that Buddhapālita’s intention is to make a nonaffirming negation, not one that implies something positive in its place, he accepts Bhāvaviveka’s framing of the four negations as non-affirming but from within that framework proceeds to undo Bhāvaviveka’s repudiation of Buddhapālita’s logic. (Since my aim here is to reveal how a mere negation — a mere absence — could serve as an object of meditation, I will not detail his repudiation here.)

²³ Golden Reprint, vol. 109, 203.2.

²⁴ Golden Reprint, vol. 112, 12.5; the Sanskrit is La Vallée Poussin, *Prasannapadā*, 13.4.

²⁵ *med par dgag pa, prasajyapratishedha*. In the Varanasi 1978 edition, 10.6, read *med par dgag par* for *med par yang dag par* in accordance with the Sanskrit (La Vallée Poussin, *Prasannapadā*, 13.5) and Golden Reprint, vol. 112, 12.6.

Tibet

Six centuries later in fourteenth-century Tibet²⁶ the agreement between these central figures of the Middle Way School, Bhāvaviveka and Chandrakīrti, on the status of emptiness as a nonaffirming negation manifests in a controversy over whether meditation on the ultimate truth means (1) meditation on an emptiness that is an affirming negation or (2) meditation on an emptiness that is a nonaffirming negation, a mere absence, that is the nonfinding of objects by an analysis such as whether the production of things is from self, other, both, or neither.

The terms *prasajyapratishedha* (*med dgag*) and *paryudāsapratishedha* (*ma yin dgag*), usually translated respectively as “nonaffirming negation” or “nonimplicative negation” and as “affirming negation” or “implicative negation” might seem to refer merely to statements or to acts of negation, but, at least in Tibet, they are also taken as phenomena that are absences. In conversation in the early 1970s the Dalai Lama broke into English and used the term “negative,” which I have found to be most appropriate. These are nonaffirming negatives and affirming negatives, that is to say, phenomena that are mere absences or absences that imply something in place of what is negated. This is clear from the way Tsong-kha-pa defines the two types of negations/negatives in his *The Essence of Eloquence*:²⁷

A negative is (1) an object of realization that is such that when it is expressed by a term, the words literally eliminate an object of negation or (2) an object of realization that explicitly appears as having the aspect of negating an object of negation when its aspect appears to an awareness. The first is, for instance, selflessness (*bdag med, anātman*). The second is, for instance, noumenon (*chos nyid, dharmatā*), which, although [this term] does not literally eliminate an object of negation, when its meaning appears, it appears as having the aspect of an elimination of the proliferations [of inherent existence].

Objects that are realized through an explicit elimination of an object of negation in that way are twofold, [affirming negatives and non-affirming negatives]. Between those two, an affirming negative, upon explicitly eliminating an object of negation, suggests another phenomenon. Bhāvaviveka’s *Blaze of Reasoning* says:²⁸

An affirming negative negates the entity of a thing, through which the entity of a thing like that but other than that is affirmed. For example, through the negation, “This is not a Brahmin,” it is affirmed that [the person] is a non-brahmin, like a brahmin [but] other than that, a menial (*dmangs rigs, śūdra*) who is lower by way of asceticism, hearing [that is, learning], and so forth.

26 The intervening history in India and in Tibet of the interface between these two types of negations and their relevance to meditation is beyond the scope of this essay.

27 Tsultrim Kelsang Khangkar and Takada Yorihiro (1996, 226.16).

28 Commenting on stanza III.26; Toh 3856, *sde dge, dbu ma*, vol. *dza*, 59b.4-59b.5; Iida (1980, 84).

A non-affirming negative, upon explicitly eliminating an object of negation, does not suggest another phenomenon. Bhāvaviveka's *Blaze of Reasoning* says:²⁹

A non-affirming negative simply refutes the mere entity of a thing and does not affirm another thing which is not it [but which is like it]. For example, that “Brahmins should not drink beer” simply refutes only that and does not express that [Brahmins] drink or do not drink a drink other than that.

In those [statements] “affirming” (*sgrub*) and “not affirming” (*mi sgrub*) have the same meaning as “suggesting” (*'phen*) and not “suggesting” (*mi 'phen*); “other than that” [refers to] what are not just negatives of objects of negations. Negations through the words “is not” (*ma yin*) and “does not exist” (*med*) do not constitute the difference between those two because both Bhāvaviveka and Chandrakīrti explain that the negation “is not from itself” (*bdag las ma yin, na svataḥ*)³⁰ is a non-affirming negation and because Amitāyus (*tshe dpag med*; “Measureless Life”) must be taken as an affirming negative.

Therefore, with respect to negative phenomena, since all phenomena negate what is not themselves [in the sense that they are not what is not themselves] it is not sufficient that an object of negation be eliminated with respect to the thing; rather, either the term expressing it must eliminate [an object of negation] or it must appear — to an awareness realizing it — as having the aspect of explicitly eliminating an object of negation.

Applying these points to Nāgārjuna's stanza:

Not from self, not from others,
Not from both, not causelessly.
Are any things
Ever produced anywhere.

The four negations/negatives serve as four reasons proving a negative. The reasoning is composed of a thesis:

The subjects, things, are not inherently produced and a four-cornered proof:
Because of not being produced from themselves, from [inherently existent] others,
from both, or causelessly.

The reasoning proves a nonaffirming negative (the absence of inherently existent production), and the four reasons are nonaffirming negatives. The four do not imply anything positive in their place, such as the *existence* of no production from self. Still, they do imply another non-affirming negative — that things are not inherently produced — because although non-affirming negatives lack positive implications, they can imply other non-affirming negatives of the same type. The reasoning proving that things are not inherently produced does not establish that things are nominally or conventionally produced. Just the *absence* of inherently

29 Commenting on stanza III.26; Toh 3856, *sde dge, dbu ma*, vol. *dza*, 59b.5-59b.6; Iida (1980, 84).

30 The reference is to the first stanza of Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle* cited above.

existent production, not the *presence* of nominal production, is realized when inferring the emptiness of production.

Through this route, the expression of worship at the beginning of Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle* is taken as meaning that cessation, production, annihilation, permanence, coming, going, difference, and sameness do not exist in the face of meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness. Using Middle Way reasonings to search for objects as in whether they are produced from self, other, both or neither, they are not found; thus in meditative equipoise all dependent-arising are seen as without production and so forth, and this means that in general they lack inherently existent production and so forth.

Tsong-kha-pa's presentation is in opposition to a nuanced position by his predecessor, the prodigious fourteenth-century scholar-yogi Dol-po-pa Shay-rap-gyel-tsen.³¹ In his *Mountain Doctrine, Ocean of Definitive Meaning: Final Unique Quintessential Instructions*.³² Dol-po-pa puts forward a prolonged and detailed argument that there are two types of emptiness, self-emptiness and other-emptiness. Self-emptiness is a nonaffirming negative, which, for him, means that conventional phenomena are empty of their own entities; it is not ultimate reality. However, other-emptiness is an affirming negative and is ultimate reality. He calls the first empty-emptiness, whereas he calls the second non-empty-emptiness,³³ because it is not self-empty, since it is not empty of its own entity. Other-emptiness is empty of compounded or conventional phenomena, which are "other" than itself. Dol-po-pa explains the purpose behind Buddha's teaching self-emptiness as a provisional object of meditation to induce a state of nonconceptuality.³⁴

When yogically performing the perfection of wisdom, it is necessary to be devoid of all conceptuality, and hence all objects are refuted for the sake of stopping all apprehending subjects. Therefore [in the second wheel of doctrine, Buddha] was intent on teaching everything as emptiness through many aspects such as everything's non-existence, non-establishment, voidness, and so forth but was not intent on differentiating existence, non-existence, and so forth, due to which the second wheel of doctrine is said to be "through the aspect of speaking on emptiness."

However, he holds that this teaching does not take account of the fact that ultimate reality is not self-empty:

In this fashion, the second wheel out of purposeful intent teaches that even what are not self-empty are self-empty, and so on, and is not possessed of good differentiation, that is to say, is not without internal contradictions, and for such reasons [the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*] says that [the second wheel] "is surpassable, affords an occasion [for refutation], requires interpretation, and serves as a basis for controversy."

31 dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan, 1292-1361.

32 *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho zhes bya ba mthar thug thun mong ma yin pa'i man ngag*; for a translation see Hopkins (2003).

33 Hopkins (2003, 213, 252 and 301).

34 Hopkins (2003, 205).

About the third wheel, by reason that, opposite from those, it differentiates meanings well just as they are, and so forth, [the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*] says that it “is unsurpassable, does not afford an occasion [for refutation], is of definitive meaning, and does not serve as a basis for controversy.”

Since the ultimate, although without the phenomena of cyclic existence, is replete with beneficial qualities, it is not a mere absence. In the *Ocean of Definitive Meaning*, Dol-po-pa identifies the ultimate nine times as an affirming negative, something that indicates a positive in place of the negation; for instance:³⁵

Similarly, those who assert that in the mode of subsistence, except for exclusions and non-affirming negatives, there are not at all any inclusions, positives, and affirming negatives are extremely mistaken because I have repeatedly explained and will explain that:

Natural exclusion, negation, and abandonment are complete in the mode of subsistence, since all flaws are naturally non-existent and non-established in the mode of subsistence.

Natural realizations of the inclusionary, the positive, and affirming negatives are primordially complete [in the mode of subsistence], since all noumenal qualities are naturally complete in their basis.

and because the master, the great scholar Jinaputra’s commentary on the *Praise of the Three Jewels* by the master Mātrcheṭa also says:

Therefore, the negative term “does not possess” is an affirming negative because those types of conceptual consciousnesses do not exist [in the mode of subsistence], and it possesses naturally luminous pristine wisdom, devoid of them.

The ultimate is a negative in that it excludes conventionalities, but it is not a mere negative, or non-affirming negative, in that it is self-arisen pristine wisdom endowed with buddha-qualities of body, speech, and mind. In this way self-arisen pristine wisdom itself is the ultimate, the noumenon, and hence itself permanent. From this perspective, those who hold that ultimate reality is a nonaffirming negative are simply mistaken. Instead of meditating on the ultimate truth, they are meditating on a conventional, or obscurational truth.

Reacting to this stance, the equally prodigious founder of the Ge-luk-pa tradition, Tsongkha-pa, puts particular emphasis on detailing how, according to him, proper meditation on emptiness requires that the object of meditation on ultimate truth be a mere negative, a mere absence of inherent existence. For him, this nonaffirming negative is even an object of yogic direct perception, not merely an object understood through reasoning. The radical nature of this stance is highlighted through contrasting it with the assertion by the Sūtra School that whatever is an object of direct perception must be impermanent, and thus the Sūtra School’s assertion that yogic direct perception explicitly realizes the mental and physical aggregates

35 Hopkins (2003, 470).

and only implicitly realizes selflessness. As the eighteenth-century follower of Tsong-kha-pa, Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, says:³⁶

Because the appearing object of direct perception must be a specifically characterized object, the Proponents of Sūtra do not assert that the subtle selflessness of persons is the object of the mode of apprehension by an uninterrupted path of a Hearer's [or anyone's] path of seeing. This is because they assert that the subtle selflessness of persons is realized *implicitly* by Hearers [and so forth] through *explicit* comprehension of compositional phenomena [the mental and physical aggregates] that are devoid of a self of persons.

In the epistemology of the Sūtra School a mere negative cannot be explicitly realized by direct perception, and thus not even by yogic direct perception; hence, the mental and physical aggregates are what yogic direct perception explicitly realizes, the selflessness of persons being realized only implicitly. However, the Great Vehicle schools of tenets, the Mind-Only School and Middle Way School, assert, according to the Ge-luk-pa rendition, that even a nonaffirming negative can be directly and explicitly realized by yogic direct perception. Consequently, from the viewpoint of Tsong-kha-pa and his followers Dol-po-pa's system has not advanced beyond the epistemology of the Sūtra School.

Because the Ge-luk-pa order came to be widespread in Tibet, these stances came to be accepted by many, but they were also rejected by many non-Ge-luk-pa orders. The controversy remains to the present, such as when Mi-pam-gya-tso (mi pham 'jam dbyangs nam rgyal rgya mtsho, 1846-1912) of the Nying-ma order emphasizes a combination of luminosity and emptiness as the final reality, even saying "A non-conceptual pristine wisdom observing an emptiness that is a nonaffirming negative utterly does not exist." He explains:

If it is necessary to observe the absence of true existence, then although indeed one would not be conceptualizing true existence, why would one not be conceptualizing the absence of true existence? If one is conceptualizing, then no matter whether one conceptualizes a thing or a non-thing, it does not pass beyond conceptuality. This is like the fact that when one conceptualizes that the horn of a rabbit does not exist, even though one does not have conceptuality apprehending the horn of a rabbit, one has conceptuality apprehending the horn of a rabbit as nonexistent — there is no way to avoid conceptuality that has an absence of true existence as its object. If there is no [way to avoid conceptuality that has an absence of true existence as its object], then even if one is not apprehending [phenomena] as truly established, how could one avoid the conceptuality of all phenomena such as pots and so forth? That is to say, there is no way to avoid such conceptuality.

Therefore, whether it is a conceptual consciousness of a negative phenomenon or a conceptual consciousness of a positive phenomenon, it does not pass beyond conceptual consciousness. Non-conceptual pristine wisdom, however, is not either a

36 See Geshe Sopa and Hopkins (1989, 245).

conceptualization of a negative or a conceptualization of an affirmative phenomenon; it does not conceptualize anything.

From Mi-pam-gya-tso's viewpoint, what a mere emptiness lacks is the factor of luminosity; his *Analysis of the Meaning of Fundamental Mind, Clear Light, Distinguishing the Basis, Path, and Fruit of the Great Completeness: Illumination of Intelligence* says:³⁷

Therefore, the Matrix-of-One-Gone-to-Bliss, the noumenal pristine wisdom of clear light abides in natural flow as the mode of subsistence of all things; it is just empty and luminous, not preventing anything. Due to not having any aspect of a compounded phenomenon with limited luminosity, it in brief is a union of luminosity and emptiness, devoid of verbalization.

Not understanding its essentials, [others] assert that the noumenon is a mere eliminative emptiness. Thinking that all appearances are impermanent things and that all factors of luminosity are factors of compounded minds,³⁸ they make a mess of all presentations of the path.

Luminosity allows that basic reality be a pristine wisdom that pervades all phenomena.

In conclusion, although the view that the ultimate truth is a nonaffirming negative is by no means universally accepted in Tibet, there is a strong tradition throughout the region that holds that through meditating on this mere absence of inherent existence the Buddha qualities Buddha qualities of body, speech, and mind are generated. The opposing traditions tend to hold that these Buddha qualities are not so much generated as manifested or uncovered through meditating on a Buddha-matrix endowed with ultimate Buddha attributes.

³⁷ *Gnyug sems 'od gsal gyi don la dpyad pa rdzogs pa chen po gzhi lam 'bras bu'i shan 'byed blo gros snang ba* (1965, 32b.3).

³⁸ Their idea is that all whatsoever appearances are effective things made from material particles and that all whatsoever instances of luminosity are contained within minds compounded from causes and conditions.

List of Abbreviations

Dharma

refers to the *sde dge* edition of the Tibetan canon published by Dharma Press: *The Nyingma Edition of the sDe-dge bKa'-gyur and bsTan-gyur*. 1980. Oakland: Dharma Press.

Golden Reprint

refers to the *gser bris bstan 'gyur*. 1989. Sichuan, China: krung go'i mtho rim nang bstan slob gling gi bod brgyud nang bstan zhib 'jug khang.

Karmapa *sde dge*

refers to the *sde dge mtshal par bka' 'gyur: A Facsimile Edition of the 18th Century Redaction of Si tu chos kyi 'byung gnas Prepared under the Direction of H.H. the 16th rGyal dbang Karma pa*. 1977. Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Chodhey Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang.

P

refers to “Peking edition,” refers to the Tibetan Tripiṭaka. 1955-1962. Tokyo-Kyoto: Tibetan Tripiṭaka Research Foundation.

TBRC

refers to Tibetan Buddhist Research Center.

Toh.

refers to the *Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons*, edited by Prof. Hukuji Ui (1934. Sendai, Japan: Tohoku University), and *A Catalogue of the Tohoku University Collection of Tibetan Works on Buddhism*, edited by Prof. Yensho Kanakura (1953. Japan: Tohoku University).

Tokyo *sde dge*

refers to the *sDe dge* Tibetan Tripiṭaka — *bsTan hgyur* preserved at the Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo, edited by Z. Yamaguchi, et al. 1977-1984. Tokyo: Tokyo University Press.

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- Bhāvaviveka (legs ldan 'byed, c. 500-570?), *Blaze of Reasoning / Commentary on the "Heart of the Middle Way": Blaze of Reasoning* [*Madhyamakahrdayavṛttitarkajvālā, Dbu ma'i snying po'i 'grel pa rtog ge 'bar ba*]. P5256, vol. 96; Toh. 3856, vol. dza;
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- Buddhapālita (sangs rgyas bskyangs, c. 470-540?), *Buddhapālita Commentary on (Nāgārjuna's) "Treatise on the Middle"* [*Buddhapālitamūlamadhyamakavṛtti, Dbu ma rtsa ba'i 'grel pa buddha pā li ta*]. P5254, vol. 95; Toh. 3842, vol. tsha; Tokyo *sde dge* vol. 1; Golden Reprint, vol. 106.
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