Putting the Madhyamaka Trick in Context:
A Contextualist Reading of Huntington's
Interpretation of Madhyamaka

MICHAEL DORFMAN[1]

ABSTRACT

In a series of works published over a period of twenty-five years, C.W. Huntington, Jr. has developed a provocative and radical reading of Madhyamaka (particularly Early Indian Madhyamaka) inspired by 'the insights of post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism and deconstruction' (1993, 9). This article examines the body of Huntington's work through the filter of his seminal 2007 publication, 'The Nature of the Mādhyamika Trick', a polemic aimed at a quartet of other recent commentators on Madhyamaka (Robinson, Hayes, Tillemans and Garfield) who attempt 'to read Nāgārjuna through the lens of modern symbolic logic' (2007, 103), a project which is the 'end result of a long and complex scholastic enterprise ... [which] can be traced backwards from contemporary academic discourse to fifteenth century Tibet, and from there into India' (2007, 111) and which Huntington sees as distorting the Madhyamaka project which was not aimed at 'command[ing] assent to a set of rationally grounded doctrines, tenets, or true conclusions' (2007, 129).

This article begins by explicating some disparate strands found in Huntington's work, which I connect under a radicalized notion of 'context'. These strands consist of a contextualist/pragmatic theory of truth (as opposed to a correspondence theory of truth), a contextualist epistemology (as opposed to one relying on foundationalist epistemic warrants), and a contextualist ontology where entities are viewed as necessarily relational (as opposed to possessing a context-independent essence.) I then use these linked theories to find

1. Michael Dorfman (1964–2013) was a student on the University of Sunderland online programme 2009–2011, for which he gained an MA with Distinction. This article was his excellent MA dissertation. American by birth, he gained a BA Critical Theory at Hampshire College, MA in 1989, where Jay Garfield was among his professors. Moving to Norway in 1998, he owned a software development company and was its chief technical officer until 2008. He read on Zen, then Chogyam Trungpa and did the Shambhala Training, also learning *śamatha* (which he continued to practise) and *vipaśyanā*. He had absorbed the 140 Bhikkhu Bodhi tapes on the *Majjhima Nikāya*, and his interests and reading included the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, Huayan, and books on meditation by authors such as Goldstein and Buddhadasa. His 600+ collection of books on Buddhism and Philosophy have been donated to the Buddhist Federation of Norway and will later be housed in a temple that is being built by the Karma Tashi Ling Buddhist Association in Oslo, as a library in his name.

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fault with Huntington's own readings of Candrakīrti and Nāgārjuna, arguing that Huntington misreads the semantic context of certain key terms (*tarka*, *dṛṣṭi, pakṣa* and *pratijñā*) and fails to follow the implications of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's reliance on the role of the *pramāṇa*s in constituting conventional reality. Thus, I find that Huntington's imputation of a rejection of logic and rational argumentation to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti is unwarranted. Finally, I offer alternate readings of the four contemporary commentators selected by Huntington, using the conceptual apparatus developed earlier to dismiss Robinson's and Hayes's view of Nāgārjuna as a charlatan relying on logical fallacies, and to find common ground between Huntington's project and the view of Nāgārjuna developed by Tillemans and Garfield as a thinker committed using reason to reach, through rational analysis, 'the limits of thought.'

Keywords
C.W.Huntington, Madhyamaka, Nāgārjuna, Wittgenstein, contextualist-pragmatism, symbolic logic

We therefore must constantly ask ourselves: On what essential understanding does the work as a whole rest? What is assumed to be beyond question? Where does this author begin his argument? (Huntington 2007, 108–109)

As described above, C.W. Huntington has developed, in works such as his 2007 'The Nature of the Mādhyamika Trick', a contextualist reading of Early Indian Madhyamaka[2] that is critical of readings of it as having an important role for logic and reasoning. Huntington's 2007 paper drew a forceful response from Garfield the following year in 'Turning a Madhyamaka Trick: Reply to Huntington', and this pair of articles formed the premise for a 2010 symposium at Smith College on 'Madhyamaka and Methodology.'

This article will first attempt to explicate Huntington's arguments, both methodological and substantive, through a radicalized notion of 'context' (comprising a contextualist theory of truth, a contextualist epistemology, and a contextualist ontology) arguing that Huntington's critique at times goes too far, and at times not far enough in following the implications of this notion. In doing so, it offers an alternative reading of Robinson, Hayes, Tillemans and Garfield born of the same conceptual matrix as Huntington's, but reaching a significantly different conclusion.

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2.   On the usage of the terms Madhyamaka/Mādhyamika, this article employs the convention, now near-ubiquitous in the literature, of using the term 'Madhyamaka' to refer to the school (*darśana*) or body of thought instituted by Nāgārjuna, and 'Mādhyamika' to refer to an adherent. It appears that this practice is, in fact, a back-translation from the Tibetan *dbu ma* and *dbu ma pa*, and that the term Mādhyamika is attested to for both contexts in the Sanskrit (Tillemans 2004a, 507). However, The Cowherds (2011, 4n2) point to an unpublished paper by Saitō with evidence supporting the common convention. Regardless, it should be remembered that there is no evidence that Nāgārjuna viewed himself as the founder of a school, and that this imputations dates only to the time of Bhāvaviveka.

Madhyamaka and Methodology: The role of context

Huntington begins his argument by raising methodological issues concerning the hermeneutical approach the contemporary reader takes towards Nāgārjuna[3] and Candrakīrti. Being a point on which Huntington and Garfield are in agreement, this portion of Huntington's thesis has not drawn much attention in the subsequent discussions of Huntington's argument, but as the underlying problematic is one which has preoccupied Huntington since his earliest publications, a closer analysis is warranted.

Huntington draws a distinction between two approaches to what he calls 'the well-established "linguistic" interpretation of the Mādhyamika'[4] (1983a, 325). The first approach, which he elsewhere associates with scholars working in the 'shadow of T.R.V. Murti, Richard Robinson and Edward Conze' (1995, 280), is described by two linked theories:

> (a) the correspondence theory of truth, and (b) the so-called 'referential' theory of meaning. The first of these two theories may be stated as follows: 'A sentence is true if it corresponds to a fact'; and the second, which is taken as a corollary of the first, reads: 'If a simple expression has meaning then there is a corresponding simple object.' (1983b, 325–326)

In the Western philosophical tradition, this approach can be loosely compared to that of Frege (Priest 2009a, 468), and in a Buddhist context, to the 'naïve correspondence theory' identified by Jayatilleke (1963, 351–360) in Early Buddhism.[5]

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3. For the purposes of this article, Nāgārjuna is taken to be the author of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, and the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*. Although the attribution of some works to Nāgārjuna is contested, these three are attested to by Lindtner 1987, and there seems to be little doubt of their authenticity. Certainly all three were attested to at the time of Candrakīrti (Ruegg 1981, 8). For biographical details on Nāgārjuna, see Yün-hua 1970, Mabbett 1998, and Walser 2005. For the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*, I have used Loizzo 2007. For the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, I have used Westerhoff 2010, and compared Bhattarchaya 1998. For the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, my primary reference has been Garfield 1995, although I have consulted Inada 1993, Kalupahana 1991 and Streng 1967 for comparison purposes. However, I have taken Garfield at his word when he 'advise[s] that this translation [i.e., Samten and Garfield 2006] supersedes Garfield's earlier one' (Samten and Garfield 2006, xxi) and used that translation in its place.

4. It is worth pointing out that this 'linguistic' interpretation takes its name from the use of (generally post-Wittgensteinian) linguistics to explicate Madhyamaka, and does not entail the proposition that Nāgārjuna or other early Mādhyamikas were concerned with the philosophical problems of language. Thus, the objections of Oetke 2011 do not apply, nor does Bhattarchaya's suggestion that a Grammarian would object that 'the Mādhyamika is unduly mixing up facts of language with ontological considerations which are foreign to them' (1980–1981, 42). As will be seen below, this article will argue that the metaphor of 'context' can be extended to help understand precisely those ontological considerations that Bhattarchaya's Grammarian would object to.

5. This identification by Jayatilleke is not without considerable controversy; see Siderits 1979 for a representative defence of Jayatilleke's position, and Holder 1996 for a critique from a contextual/pragmatic standpoint. Which view is closer to the operant theory of truth in Early Buddhism is outside of the scope of this article. Siderits ascribes a doctrine of 'metaphysical realism' to the Nyāya, classical Sāṃkhya and Buddhist Abhidharma schools which consists of three theses, similar to Huntington's two: '(1) truth is correspondence between proposition and reality: (2) reality is mind-independent; (3) there is one true theory that correctly describes reality' (1998, 311) and suggests that Nāgārjuna, on the other hand, argued 'against a strict correspondence theory of truth and is in favor of a theory of meaning, which takes

The second approach, which Huntington refers to as 'nonreferential', is in turn distinguished by the following criteria:

> (a) The *truth value* of a collocation of words or concepts derives from its being used in a manner that may be seen as somehow consistent with the conceptual matrix of the sociolinguistic community in which it occurs. (b) The *meaning* of a word or concept derives from its usage in some particular socio-linguistic community, and not from its reference to any real object. (Huntington 1983a, 326)[6]

In the Western philosophical tradition, this view can be associated with Saussure (Priest 2009a, 468), although Huntington prefers the examples of Wittgenstein, Fish, and Rorty; in a Buddhist context, this position is recognizable as Holder's 'contextualist pragmatic' interpretation of Early Buddhism (Holder 1996).

Although Huntington refers to this latter view of language as 'nonreferential', this label is misleading, as meaning (in this view) is still constructed through a process of reference, although no longer a simple one; rather, references are multiplied, as each term gains its meaning through a process of contextual differentiation from other terms which in turn gain their meaning in the same manner. Therefore, I will hereafter use the term 'contextual' to refer to this theory of meaning in place of Huntington's term. (This will also better allow us to draw epistemological and ontological parallels as we proceed.)

According to this contextualist view of meaning, every act of understanding is an act of interpretation, and the recovery of a definitive, original, or objective meaning from a text is impossible, and a certain amount of isogesis (an unconscious 'reading into' a text based upon presuppositions) is inevitable.[7] What varies is the degree of awareness of these presuppositions; as Tuck points out in his study of the Western reception of Nāgārjuna, 'for an interpreter to believe that he *can* accurately reconstruct the intentions and beliefs of the original author without betraying his presence is nothing less than belief in his own scholarly omnipotence' (1990, 15).

Hayes appears to miss this point in his reading of Tuck; instead of framing the question of isogesis and the ideal of scientific objectivity as a question concerning the awareness of presuppositions, he reads Tuck as maintaining a strict distinction based on the intentions of the interpreter — in other words, that one can clearly distinguish between exegetical readings which attempt 'to discover what a text meant in the time it was written', and hermeneutic/isogetic readings which

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into account such things as coherence and pragmatic and contextual considerations' (Siderits and O'Brien 1976, 288). Similarly, Westerhoff opposes Nāgārjuna's thought to 'a particular semantic theory. This theory, which I call the "standard picture", assumes that the world of referents is endowed with a mind-independent structure and that our language manages to latch onto the world not just by force of convention, but by the existence of some objectively existent structural similarity between language and world' (Westerhoff 2009, 17). Bronkhorst argues that at the time of Nāgārjuna there was a pan-Indian belief in what he calls 'the correspondence principle', to wit: 'the words of a statement correspond, one by one, to the things that constitute the situation described by that statement' (1996, 1), and further elaborated the argument in Bronkhorst 1997.

6. Near-identical language can be found in Huntington 1993, 31.

7. Tuck 1990, 8–30, contains an extended discussion on the tension between isogesis and the ideal of objectivity.

attempt 'to find the meaning of a text for the time in which the interpreter lives'[8] (Hayes 1994, 362). Hayes then aligns himself with those interpreters, Robinson among them, 'who appear to come very close to the ideal of detached and scientific objectivity in scholarship' (1994, 361–362), thus drawing Huntington's criticism.

Garfield rightfully exempts himself from this particular charge of Huntington's, arguing that he, in fact, shares a contextualist theory of meaning. He is not, he says, committing the historicist/objectivist fallacy of attempting to recover authorial intent beyond textual meaning as Hayes is, but is instead

> trying to construct a reading of those texts that makes sense of them in the dual contexts provided by the textual milieu in which they figure historically — the context of their composition — and our own interpretative horizon, which is the only context in which we can read and understand. As Huntington would agree, although we will necessarily bring our own prejudices to bear in reading, we must be open to challenges to those prejudices presented by the text, and so must be prepared, in the course of understanding, to attribute views at odds with our own to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, as well as to have our views modified by textual encounter. (Garfield 2008, 14)

In other words, an interpretation of a text (and reading necessarily entails interpretation) comes from the merging of two contexts, the context of composition and the context of reception, and increasingly better interpretations are formed by increased awareness of the presupposition encoded in each (where 'better' is defined in pragmatic terms.) Garfield goes on to add that 'this is just familiar Gadamerian hermeneutical theory.[9] But it is good to have all of our cards on the table, even when they are from a familiar deck'[10] (Garfield 2008, 14). Furthermore, as Huntington adds,

> [w]e can never read any text — even in the original language — except through the lens of our conscious and unconscious presuppositions. More, were it not for these very presuppositions and prejudices no text or teacher could have any meaning at all for us, since the very possibility of meaning is rooted in just this conceptual soil. (Huntington 1990, 127–128)

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8. As Huntington points out, 'In practice, both exegesis and hermeneutics are, inevitably, ways of constructing meaning in an inescapably historical context that includes both the object of investigation and the historian himself' (2007, 108n9).

9. Gadamer is one of Huntington's explicit reference points in this regard; for example, in writing 'As Gadamer and others have argued, meaning is always meaning in the context of history, and history includes both the text and its various interpreters' (1993, 10)

10. Familiar as the deck may be to Garfield, it is worth noting that this hermeneutical theory is still far from dominant in the contemporary literature surrounding Madhyamaka texts. Bronkhorst, for example, admits to being perplexed that Tuck does not consider himself a relativist, arguing that 'at least in some cases it is possible to get closer to the "real" meaning of a text' (1993, 505). Similarly, Cabezón mistakenly believes that Derrida's work implies 'hermeneutical relativism', and that if Derrida is right, the text is meaningless (1990, 140). Hayes claims that deconstructive textual interpretation is 'an act of playing with the written symbols in deliberate disregard of what the author's intention may have been in first inscribing them' (1994, 346). Needless to say, a contextualist view does not mean that interpretation is conducted in disregard of the author's intentions, but in the recognition that those intentions are not available for reference *outside of the text itself.*

This issue is not purely methodological for Huntington: he argues that 'when Hayes associates himself with Robinson …. in his efforts to achieve "the ideal of detached and scientific objectivity" he is advocating not only a style of scholarship but a particular epistemology as well — and a questionable one, at that' (2007, 105–106) — namely, the correspondence theory of truth discussed above, which he considers 'a view of truth or reality that would undermine the Buddhist soteriological project through purporting to be value-free or objective' (1990, 122). For one holding this perverse view, Huntington argues, 'Nāgārjuna's words are to be read as a proposed universal lexicon for non-mythical, objective truth, knowledge of which would reflect the presence of an equally non-mythical, objective reality' and a modern interpreter would attempt to 'evaluate the validity of the Mādhyamika's arguments in terms of whether or not they succeed in providing convincing theoretical proof ("grounds")' for such an objective reality by 'peel[ing] back from Nāgārjuna's writings the layers of cultural baggage (everything that has to do with the period and place in which these texts were composed) and uncover a core of timeless philosophical truth' (1995, 280). Such a reading would *ipso facto* be in conflict with Nāgārjuna's primary thesis in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* — the emptiness of all phenomena. For Hayes to be right, texts (and the words comprising them) would refer, simply, to actually existing external objects which would each have a unitary essence identifiable without an act of interpretation: a *svabhāva.* The contextualist view, however,

> allows us to make sense out of the notion of *saṃvṛtisatya* or 'conventional truth'. If meaning derives exclusively from usage in a conventional, pragmatic, or 'social' context, then words and concepts that seem to refer *simply* to private objects like a *dharma* or an *ātman* must be viewed as inherently meaningless. Private objects like these are by definition divorced from any sociolinguistic context, and they are therefore deemed irrelevant for either pragmatic or philosophical purposes. Once they have been disposed of, all that remains are 'empty' names, that is, names that have no real object insofar as they do not correspond to any actual objective referent but only to other names. (Huntington 1983a, 326)

At this point, however, we must tread carefully. Huntington's 'empty names' no longer refer to private objects, but to conventionally existing objects, which may not be an 'actual objective referent' in the strict sense, if by that we mean an object with inherent existence (and we accept the Madhyamaka position of the emptiness of all phenomena) but certainly have conventional effects, and conventional referents, even if these referents are ultimately empty. It is here that the use of the term 'nonreferential' by Huntington is most troublesome. Paul Williams, in a review (lost reference) of Huntington's *The Emptiness of Emptiness,* argues:

> The fact that Madhyamaka accepts that words require referents does not in itself carry with it any commitment as to the exact ontological status of those referents. The universal denial of inherent existence in Madhyamaka entails that both language and its referents lack inherent existence. There is no necessity for the Mādhyamika to go further and suggest that language does not require referents at all. In fact, Nāgārjuna was probably aware of his Abhidharma inheritance — language has referents which enjoy the status of *prajñaptisat*, conceptually created existence.

Cabezón, in his review of the same book, makes a similar point:

> Words, as long as they are used in accordance with common usage, do have referents. The fact that under an ultimate analysis those referents cannot be found does not mean that, within the realm of conventions, the referents are non-existent. There is only one arena in which philosophy can be undertaken and that is the realm of worldly usage, but philosophers are part of the world and technical philosophical terminology does not fall outside of 'worldly usage'.
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> <div align="right">(Cabezón 1990, 161n6)</div>

Thus we must read Huntington quite carefully when he claims:

> The linguistic interpretation allows us to appreciate this seminal insight captured in all of the Mādhyamika's central concepts: Metaphysical language is incapable of justifying its claim to capture truth in a complex of ontological and epistemological propositions, for the objects to which it refers are entirely without practical consequences and are thus devoid of all reality. Equally important, it should be noted that this analysis has the effect of drawing our attention away from names and named objects and fixing it squarely upon the context in which they occur and the relations that obtain between them. (Huntington 1993, 31–32)

This 'central concept' is true if, and only if, by 'metaphysical language' we follow Huntington as defining it as 'any sort of linguistic behavior that purports to derive its meaning from a source outside the sociolinguistic community in which it occurs' (1993, 31). Private objects (such as *dharma*s partaking of inherent existence by virtue of a *svabhāva*) capable of grounding such metaphysical language would indeed (as Nāgārjuna argues in the first chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*) be incapable of participating in causal events and would therefore be 'entirely without practical consequences'. Conventionally existing dependently originated objects, on the other hand, still have practical effects and truth statements can still be used (at the conventional level) to create philosophical propositions. The fact that Huntington refers to this insight as a 'central concept' is itself an admission that it is only at the conceptual level that these matters can be discussed at all; any critique of metaphysics will necessarily have to partake of the language of metaphysics.[11] What's more, any critique of metaphysics will rely upon the same epistemic instruments (*pramāṇa*s)[12] as the theory it opposes. We will explicate some of the implications of this contextualist

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11. That Huntington is aware of this is evidenced by his quotation (1995, 294) of Derrida's averral 'There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language — no syntax and no lexicon — which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest' (Derrida 1978, 280–281)

12. The translation of *pramāṇa* varies greatly in the contemporary literature; possible translations include 'means of knowledge' (Westerhoff 2009), 'epistemic instruments' (Westerhoff 2010a), 'valid means of knowledge' (Siderits 1980), 'means of valid cognition' (Tillemans 1999), and 'instrument of true cognition' (Bhattarchaya 1998). Ruegg notes it has been 'variously translated a right/correct knowledge/cognition, veridical awareness, valid knowledge, validating knowledge, epistemic norm, standard, and authority' (2010, 119). Nāgārjuna, in *Vigrahavyāvartanī* verses 5 and 6 recognizes four specific *pramāṇa*s, borrowed from Nyāya epistemology: perception, inference, testimony and likeness (i.e., analogy) (Westerhoff 2010a, 21–22).

epistemology in more detail below, but for now let us follow Huntington from a contextualist epistemology to a contextualist view of conventional reality itself:

> [J]ust as our ideas and perceptions are conditioned by other ideas and perceptions, so every aspect of the contents of perception — every object — necessarily exists in dependence on the others, as well as on its association with a specific, conditioned state of consciousness. Every element of conceptualization and perception owes its individual identity to an interrelated web of causes and conditions, so that it does not bear its meaning or existence in itself, and on this account concepts of a self-sufficient generative matrix or a transcendental ground are inherently problematic. By virtue of its most fundamental nature, as illuminated through the Mādhyamika's deconstructive analysis, all experience is radically contextual. All things are necessarily conditioned and quite empty of independent existence. All words are contingent and devoid of fixed, referential meaning.
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> (Huntington 1993, 109)

The connection between this 'radically contextual' view of reality and dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is explicated by Huntington by a dual analysis related to Nāgārjuna's arguments concerning causation (in the first chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*):

1. That which exists within a nexus of cause and effect cannot be real in and of itself (that is, its individual existence cannot be grounded outside the context of everyday experience).

2. The sole criterion for empirical reality is existence within the nexus of cause and effect which defines our shared sociolinguistic experience, constituted by all the states of affairs that have already come to pass or may at any time in the future come to pass. (Huntington 1993, 48–49)

This is, in my reading, a stronger claim than simply viewing all dependently originated objects as conceptually constructed (*prajñāptir upādāya*);[13] rather, since entities are empty of any *svabhāva* that could be viewed as a context-independent essence, they are inescapably relational in nature. This is in fact a transcendental argument:

> [T]o argue that 'all existents are empty' just is to argue that all existents necessarily exist only in relation to other existents — a fact whose transcendental character is

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13. There is a great deal of debate in the literature about how to interpret the phrase *prajñāptir upādāya* in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXIV.18. The dominant reading is to view this verse as drawing a three-way relationship between emptiness (*śūnyatā*), dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and dependent designation (*prajñāptir upādāya*). This is the reading taken (in some form or another) by Garfield (1995, 304–308), Samten and Garfield (2006, 503), Inada (1993, 148), and Kalupahana (1991, 338). Wayman (1996, 90) translates it as 'it is the instruction that was received'. Streng translates the phrase as 'This apprehension, i.e., taking into account [all other things]' [*brackets in original*] (1967, 213). Berger 2010, 47 controversially translates the phrase as 'once acquired.' Garfield and Westerhoff 2011 point out that this reading is not found in the commentarial literature or early translations in Chinese or Tibetan, a point which Berger 2011 concedes. Finally, Oetke argues that the verse is fundamentally ambiguous and that 'MMK 24.18 is apt to furnish a classical example for the phenomenon of underdetermination of exegetical import by provided data' (2007, 27). As will be seen below, my reading does not rely on a direct adequation between dependent origination and conceptual construction.

evident in the inevitability that any attempt even to say anything about this (even to deny it) necessarily involves relations among terms — relations between our analysis and the world. This is why Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti find it in principle important to defer, in the end, to what is 'conventionally' true .... To understand emptiness is thus to see a finally logical point: 'Emptiness,' if it means simply the possibility and necessity of relationship, can be understood as a logical category as basic as the principle of noncontradiction. Thus, any attempt even to imagine alternatives to it inevitably presupposes it. (Arnold 2008, 175, 189)

Conversely, to possess a context-independent essence, would mean to exist on a mind-independent, ultimate level[14] (Siderits 2004, 397–398).

We thus have three linked theories: a contextualist theory of meaning, where words gain their meaning from a sociolinguistic context (and not by direct reference to private objects); a contextualist epistemology, where perceptions and conceptualizations gain their meanings through a context of relations to other perceptions and conceptualization (and not via privileged epistemic warrants) and a contextualist view of conventional reality, where entities arise in a context of dependent origination (and not via a context-independent *svabhāva*). Although Huntington does not explicitly link the theories in this way, they are all to be found in his reading of early Madhyamaka texts. And it is from this theoretical matrix that Huntington makes his next move: a rejection of logic and rationality in Madhyamaka, based upon a particular reading of Indian Buddhist history.

Huntington's schematization of Indian Buddhist history

Huntington argues that the readings of Nāgārjuna proposed by Robinson, Hayes, Tillemans and Garfield all suffer from a similar fault: they are preoccupied with logical analysis, and attempt to read Nāgārjuna as a rationalist philosopher making arguments (2007, 104, 110). They are no means unique in doing so, according to Huntington; rather, they represent the 'end result of a long and complex scholastic enterprise ... [which] can be traced backwards from contemporary academic discourse to 15th century Tibet, and from there into India', backwards to the earliest Pāli texts (2007, 111–112). Huntington identifies 'two distinct, but seemingly incompatible' views of truth in the Pāli canon, namely the two theories of meaning described earlier. But his explication of these theories in their historical context makes a move that will prove to be critical for the cogency of his project, identifying additional properties attached to each view.

The contextualist/pragmatic view, Huntington argues, can be 'understood as a version of Jamesian pragmatism: The cash value of truth is a strict function of its soteriological efficacy; therefore, the single truth is the truth that brings spiritual liberation, which is found when one ceases to need, or desire, certainty of the sort provided by fixed views' (2007, 112). In other words, truth is identified with non-clinging — more specifically, not clinging to fixed views. In other words, 'what is called for is not belief, but rather, a kind of practical skill; specifically, the capacity for non-clinging' (2007, 112).

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14. Oetke makes a similar point, suggesting that 'the phrase "*x* has a *svabhāva*" probably has to be taken as an idiomatic variant for the concept of something's being constituted by or founded in entities of the *paramārtha*-level' (1991, 323n4).

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Contrasting with this pragmatic pluralism is what came to become the 'ortho-dox belief in a continuous, unbroken transmission of the Buddha's own teaching, the single, unchanging Truth' (Huntington 2007, 112). Faced with 'the problem of reconciling various apparently conflicting truth claims within the Buddha's teaching' (2007, 113) a scheme based upon a distinction between 'direct mean-ing' (*nītārtha*) and 'indirect meaning' (*neyārtha*), the primary appeal of which 'was the power to act as the critical judgment necessary in order to measure specific doctrinal statements against the ideal of a single truth. This was accomplished by the systematic reconciliation of all apparent discrepancies and incoherencies among doctrinal statements' (2007, 114). Huntington, following Harris (1991), mistakenly calls this 'a coherence theory of truth'[15] and adds that '[t]he onto-logical commitment embodied in this theory was first made explicit in the early commentaries with the specification of a distinction apparently not recognized in the Pāli *suttas* between "the truth of the highest meaning" (*pāramārthasatya*) and "the truth of conventional affairs" (*saṁvṛtisatya*)' (2007, 115).

Huntington then draws a direct line from this hermeneutic to 'ābhidharmic exe-gesis, where the two truths are now linked to a correspondence theory of truth' (2007, 115). Huntington again follows Harris: '[O]ne ontological truth (i.e. reality ([*tattva*]) gives rise to two epistemic truths, i.e., the conventional (*saṁvṛti*) and the ultimate (*pāramārtha*) ... The dharma then, while it may appear contradictory to a superficial examination, in fact has a coherent unity which points toward the true nature of reality'[16] *[bracket insertion Huntington's, ellipsis mine]*. From here, Huntington moves ahead to the first five centuries of the common era, which in Huntington's estimation was 'arguably the single most fertile period in the long history of Indian Buddhist thought' yet also 'a time of grave danger — a danger which cannot be overestimated — for the Buddhist community was finding it more and more dif-ficult to define any fixed parameters for acceptable doctrine and practice' (2007, 117). This was due to the twin threats of the new *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* texts, and the 'ominous' appearance of influential philosophers like Vasubandhu and Dignāga and Nāgārjuna (2007, 117–118). Finally, '[t]he threat of anarchy was decisively contained in the sixth century CE with the work of a single brilliant individual', Bhāvaviveka[17]

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15. Huntington quotes Harris as paraphrasing the coherence theory of truth as follows: 'If someone makes a series of statements on a particular matter it is important that they should all point in the same general direction, or rather that they should cohere. Someone whose statements do not meet this condition may be dismissed as someone who does not expound a unitary truth' (Harris 1991, 84, quoted in Huntington 2007, 115). Unfortunately, this paraphrase bears little relation to the notion of a coherence theory of truth found in contemporary philosophical discourse, and the misattribution is vexing for two reasons. First, as Garfield points out, Nāgārjuna is 'the first philosopher in any tradition to defend coherentism systematically' (2008, 524). Second, because the advantage of the coherence theory of truth (for Nāgārjuna) is precisely because it does *not* require ontological commitments. Under a coherence theory of truth, 'the truth conditions of propositions consist in other propositions. The correspondence theory, in contrast, states that the truth conditions of propositions are not (in general) propositions, but rather objective features of the world' (Young 2009). Huntington's reliance on Harris is particularly troublesome, as much of Harris's interpretation of Madhyamaka is based upon an unquestioned acceptance of the (very problematic) axioms Robinson extracted from the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. We will discuss the problems of Robinson's reading below.

16. Harris 1991, 91, quoted in Huntington (2007, 115–116).

17. This article uses the name 'Bhāvaviveka' to refer to the author referenced by Candrakīrti,

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who 'erect[ed] a hermeneutical canopy large enough to shelter every potential renegade' (2007, 118–119) by initiating a doxographical project that classified teachings according to various tenets (*siddhānta*) leading to a view (*dṛṣṭi*) of emptiness 'said to be of "direct meaning" (*neyārtha*) and is therefore identified with the Buddha's ultimate purport[18] ... which had as well long since been recognized within the exegetical tradition as the one ultimate truth taught by the Buddha' (2007, 121).

For Huntington, then, there are two distinct traditions in conflict in Indian Buddhist history. One has a contextualist/pragmatic theory of truth, is pluralistic, is focused on activity that is soteriologically beneficial and opposed to the creation of views, runs from the *Kālāma-sutta* to the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* texts to Nāgārjuna, and is characterized by Huntington as 'philosophical propaganda':

> The characterization of philosophy as propaganda is valuable because it stands in dramatic defiance of all attempts to hypostatize this or that definition of 'philosophical cogency.' It acts as a barometer to gauge one's attachment to the concept of philosophy as a search for eternally sanctified, ahistorical, inalterable truth(s) to be attained through the proper application of an approved methodology.
>
> (Huntington 1993, 128)

The other has a correspondence theory of truth, is concerned with a hermeneutic that reduces variations to a series of tenets that lead to a unitary truth and takes its ultimate expression in Bhāvaviveka. It is from this tradition, Huntington argues, that:

> contemporary logicians like Robinson, Hayes, Tillimans [*sic*], and Garfield find tacit historical justification for their operating premise, namely, that 'Nāgārjuna had a set of definitely stated doctrines for which he was trying to produce a systematically arranged set of rational arguments' (Hayes 1994, 363). (Huntington 2007, 121)

He argues that, despite their differences, 'Hayes, Tillemans, and Garfield share a common desire to characterize Nāgārjuna as an analytic, rationalist[19] philosopher' (2007, 104) and that '[b]oth the modern commentators and Bhāvaviveka are preoccupied with logical analysis' (2007, 110) and suffer from a compulsion to 'force a logical grid over the work of a writer who is so obviously and profoundly distrustful of logic' (2007, 111).

But, like all good Mādhyamikas, we must ask: is there not room here for a middle way? Huntington argues that:

> [u]nlike either a strictly rational philosophy or a metaphysical system, the Mādhyamika does not seem to be preoccupied with sophisticated epistemological or ontological explanations of reality. On the contrary, the dialectic is appar-

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although the forms Bhāviveka, Bhāvin, and Bhavya are all found in other sources. Ruegg (2010, 145n1, 159n1) suggests that Bhāviveka or Bhavya are probably the preferred forms, but the form Bhāvaviveka is standard in contemporary literature, so I have followed convention.

18. Here Huntington references Cabezón 1990, 'The canonization of philosophy and the rhetoric of Siddhānta in Tibetan Buddhism' in *Buddha Nature: A festschrift in honor of Minoru Kiyota*, Tokyo: Buddhist Books International, 15.

19. As Garfield correctly points out, 'Huntington uses the pejorative term 'rationalist' not in the doxographic sense most familiar to Western philosophers to refer to philosophers loosely allied to Descartes and Leibniz, but to mean *committed to the probity and utility of reason*' [*emphasis in original*] (Garfield 2008, 508n3).

ently designed to expose the meaninglessness of any such attempts at explanation, and in doing so, to "make propaganda" for a style of thinking that should lead to a conception of ultimate truth as *duḥkha-nirodha,* or the cessation of all suffering, by altering one's attitude towards everyday experience in this world.

(Huntington 1983a, 103)

But can we not conceive of a Madhyamaka philosophy that uses *reason* and *rational argumentation* to show the limits of foundationalist epistemologies and ontologies, and "make propaganda" for a more soteriological effective position? Is it not possible to remain committed to the probity of reason and rational argumentation while still holding a contextualist/pragmatic theory of truth? Let us therefore examine in more detail Huntington's arguments concerning Bhāvaviveka, Candrakīrti, Nāgārjuna and the role of reason.

Epistemology and the role of reason

Huntington's view of Bhāvaviveka's project is based, in part, upon his reading of Candrakīrti, specifically the first chapter of the *Prasannapadā*. As far as Candrakīrti is concerned, Huntington argues, 'Bhāvaviveka is not a Mādhyamika at all, here is merely a Logician (*tārkika*) taking the side of the Madhyamaka school (*aṅgīkṛtramadhyamakadarśana*) out of a desire to show off his mastery of the canons of logic (*tarkaśāstrātikauśalamātram āviścikīrṣayā*)' (2003, 82). But here a word of caution is in order: in taking *tarka* to mean 'logic' *simpliciter*, Huntington runs the danger of re-enacting the kind of out-of-context reading we will find below in Robinson. In a study of the definition and connotations of the word *tarka*, Kang cautions that,

> [i]n cases where the basic research into the history of Indian philosophy has still to be done (and such is the case with *tarka* in my estimation), there is a tendency to fill this lack with pseudo-logical methods, seemingly using the terminology of modern logical and established philosophical concepts properly, but in incongruous contexts — owing to ignorance of the complexity of the given topics in both Indian and Western philosophy. (Kang 2010, 2)

If *tarka* cannot be taken simply to mean 'logic', what does it mean? Kang argues against Matilal's equation of *tarka* and *prasaṅga* (Kang 2010, 14) and claims that '*Tarka* is a means of sizing up a certain state of affairs: all the given factual or logical possibilities are differentiated, and the logical and theoretical implications of them are drawn', and that '[a]s a maieutic process, *tarka* does not resort to any additional perceptual information. ... Its argumentational appeal consists in the fact that the subject matter and possible states of affairs are differentiated in a seemingly exhaustive way, in the light of the available sum of information'[20] (Kang 2010, 21). In other words, if Huntington is correct in claiming that Candrakīrti views Bhāvaviveka as *reducing* Nāgārjuna's work to a set of logical propositions presumed to be exhaustive, this does not mean that Candrakīrti rejects (or views Nāgārjuna as having rejected) logic or the canons of rationality wholesale.

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20. Siderits poses the provocative question as to 'whether the proofs of Euclidean geometry represent a kind of *tarka*' (2003b, 317).

Nor does Candrakīrti reject the syllogistic form in general, when arguing against the use of *svatantra* reasoning; not all syllogisms are *svatantra*s. Cabezón shows that Khedrup Je (mKhas grub dGe legs dpal bzang) argues specifically against the misapprehension that Prāsaṅgikas reject all syllogistic reasoning and logic (Cabezón 1988, 218).[21] Khedrup Je states that,

> when positing a *svatantra* position or logical reason it is not enough that both the proponent and the opponent establish, by means of a *pramāṇa* [valid cognition], the subject of the inquiry (*shes 'dod chos can*) which is the basis upon which a predicate is posited. Instead, it is absolutely necessary that (the subject) be established compatibly (*mthun snang du*) [in both the system of the proponent and opponent].[22]

In other words, for Candrakīrti, the problem with a *svatantra* position is not the syllogistic form *per se*, but rather the fact that the subject of the syllogism must be defined in a manner acceptable to both parties taking part in the debate, which, in practical terms, means accepting a realist account when debating with non-Buddhists. To use Garfield's example, when debating whether or not a pot is impermanent, both parties to the debate must agree on the ontological status of the pot, which Candrakīrti refuses to do (2008, 525).

Huntington, on the other hand, reads the Prāsaṅgika/Svātantrika[23] distinction as being based upon 'reason itself', not the specific modes of logic employed by Bhāvaviveka:

> The Prāsaṅgika-Svātantrika debate was thus only tangentially concerned with the emptiness doctrine per se. Both sides agreed that all philosophical views (*dṛṣtis*) must be rejected; the disagreement arose with respect to determination of the proper means for accomplishing such a nonpresuppositional or nonimplicative (*prasajya*) negation. The essential issue which informed all the heated controversy, however, was actually a question as to the efficacy of reason itself: To what extent can logic be employed to serve the Mādhyamika's soteriological purpose? Bhāvaviveka argued that if the truth of the highest meaning (*paramārtha-satya*) could not be grounded in a rationalist methodology, then there would be no possibility of developing any cogent system of philosophy. The truth of the highest meaning must be susceptible to rational interpretation, for otherwise there would be an unbridgeable rift between conventional truth and an eternally transcendent absolute (a consequence that would stand in direct conflict with the Mādhyamika's own concept of dependent origination.) Candrakīrti responded by steadfastly rejecting Bahāviveka's [*sic*] rationalist convictions on the pragmatic grounds that any such appeal to abstract reason would inevitably undermine the soteriological purpose of the Mādhyamika critique. If used for anything other than strictly deconstructive aims — aims that are accomplished by accepting *an opponent's rea-*

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21. Cabezón 1992 attempts to engage this specific point with Huntington, who defers to methodological issues and refuses to respond to the substance of the charge.

22. mKhas grub dGe legs dpal bzang 1972, *sTong thun chen mo* in *Mādhyamika Text Series*, Vol. 1, New Delhi: Lha mkhar yongs 'dzin, quoted in Cabezón 1988, 220. Bracketed insertions are from Cabezón's later translation (1993, 273).

23. The term Svātantrika is a back-translation into Sanskrit of the Tibetan *rang rgyud pa*; similarly, Prāsaṅgika of the Tibetan *thal 'gyur ba.* Strictly speaking, these should thus be written as *Svātantrika and *Prāsaṅgika, but this article follows the common convention of omitting the asterisk. Cf. Ruegg (2010, 159n1, 160) for details.

soning only in order to turn it back on itself in a spiral of paradox and contradiction — logic can become a dangerous snare. It is in itself quite incapable of resolving the confusion which is generated by the attempt to apply conventional, dichotomized thinking to a task for which it is totally unsuited. (Huntington 1993, 35)

In Huntington's reading, Candrakīrti is opposed to any use of logic and he 'has nothing to do with "commanding rational assent", with demonstrating, proving or disproving anything' (2007, 122). However, as Garfield argues forcefully, a plain reading of Candrakīrti's verses show them to be 'explicitly reasoned, replete with logical vocabulary, and clear development of arguments from premises that Candrakīrti clearly endorses' (Garfield 2008, 521). Furthermore, Garfield argues, Candrakīrti

> endorses the utility of conventional epistemic authority, indeed of the quartet of epistemic warrants endorsed by the Nyāyika [i.e., the four *pramāṇas*], including inference, and that he thinks that there are genuine objects of mundane knowledge ... [The *Prasannapadā,*] far from constituting a rejection of reasoning, relegates reasoning, along with everything else, to the conventional world. But that is precisely the world in which philosophical activity occurs. (Garfield 2008, 518–519)

In other words, for Candrakīrti, although the *pramāṇa*s (including inference, and by extension, the canons of rationality) are ultimately empty, when applied to the world of conventional reality, they are adequate to the phenomena,[24] and necessary to rely upon in order to make any kind of argument at all. Significantly, this reliance is not merely accidental.[25] Arnold stresses that Candrakīrti's

> deference to ordinary intuitions is not ... a convenient step for him to take in defense of some other point that he chiefly wishes to argue; rather, there is a sense in which Candrakīrti's deference to the convention *is itself the argument.* That is, Candrakīrti's is a principled deference that can be understood as meant to

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24. This notion — that an explanation be 'adequate to the phenomena' is a common one in various anti-realist epistemologies. Cf., for example, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (http://plato.stanford.edu) entries on a range of topics as diverse as Constructive Empiricism, Moral Anti-Realism, Reductionism in Biology, Innateness and Language, and Neutral Monism, all of which make use of this standard.

25. Nor is it unique to Candrakīrti. As mentioned earlier, Nāgārjuna (in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*) explicitly accepts the *pramāṇa*s, including (critical to our purposes) inference. In a discussion of Huntington's theories of the Madhyamaka rejection of reason, Westerhoff attempts to define a minimal definition of 'rationalism' which is useful for our purposes: 'the belief that there are certain intersubjectively determinable features (IDFs) and statements such that if a statement we hold to be true has these features then another different statement is also true. For example, if A is true, and if "if A then B" is true, then B is true' (Smith College Symposium 2010: Panel 2, Westerhoff, 3, 00–3, 30). Thus, to accept the *pramāṇa* of inference is to *ipso facto* accept rationalism in this sense. Siderits (1998) suggests that if reason is itself empty, there may be multiple 'canons of rationality', and investigates whether or not Mādhyamikas would be compelled to be relativist with regard to these, or merely pluralist. (Interestingly, he suggests that Svāntantrikas might have better grounds to reject relativism than Prāsaṅgikas.) It is difficult, however, to imagine a canon of rationality that did not meet Westerhoff's minimal definition. Wood 1995, 154–155, argues that any definition of rationality must include the law of non-contradiction, and that Madhyamaka should be characterized as 'irrational'. This claim, like many of Wood's, is based upon a strict opposition between 'nihilism' and 'non-nihilism' which refuses to countenance the possibility a 'middle way' at all. We shall return to the problematic of the law of non-contradiction in the final section, in reference to paraconsistent logic.

exemplify an ultimately metaphysical claim: that there is nothing 'more real' than the world as conventionally described — or, more precisely, that there can be no explanation that does not itself exemplify the same conditions that characterize our conventions. [*Emphasis in original*] (Arnold 2008, 117)

Contrariwise, as Mabja Jangchub Tsöndrü (rMa bya Byang chub brtson 'grus) argues, a failure to accept the *pramāṇa*s would render even Candrakīrti's preferred *prasaṅga* method of *reductio* impossible, and lead to a dismal quietism:

If even reliable means of cognitions [i.e., *pramāṇa*s] that are acknowledged by the world or agreed upon by others cannot be accepted, our own position cannot be set forth. We cannot, then, maintain that although things lack any nature, they appear merely relatively as illusion-like dependent origination. Nor will there be any way to induce the understanding that the positions of others, the extreme beliefs in conventional nonexistence or actual existence, are false. Hence, the wish to refute the positions of others would not arise. Likewise, there would be no way to ascertain whether or not the property of the position, entailment, and exclusion have been claimed. Hence, the object of attack through consequential argumentation [*prasaṅga*] would remain unestablished. Finally, since there would be no way to see the contradictions between the various elements of an opponent's statement, the consequential argument would itself remain unestablished. Thus, using consequences to refute another's position would be unreasonable.[26] (Tsöndrü 2011, 131)

Furthermore, as Siderits points out, accepting the conventional utility of the *pramāṇa*s gives:

a credible response to the self-stultification objection. If all things are indeed empty, then nothing has the intrinsic nature of a means of knowledge, so there are ultimately no means of knowledge and objects of knowledge. Still, emptiness can be known, namely by using instruments that function as valid means of knowledge within the context of inquiry in which they are employed. (Siderits 2003a, 147)

In fact, this framing of an epistemic context is precisely that which defines conventional reality:

Under a contextualist epistemology, those propositions that define an epistemic context remain fixed and beyond question as long as the project of inquiry that they frame persists. This has the result of making truth appear transparent within any context of inquiry: because such propositions are beyond questioning in the epistemic context they frame, they come to constitute a 'world' that is independent of our epistemic behavior within that context; the aim of inquiry is then seen as that of arriving at beliefs that accord with how that world is. (Siderits 2003a, 186)

In other words, the epistemological contextualism we find in Huntington is precisely what enables Candrakīrti to use logic effectively to interrogate conventional reality without making ontological commitments.

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26. Ruegg 1983, 230n68, points to a passage where Jamyang Shayba ('Jam dbyangs bzhad pa) attributes the opposite point of view to Mabja Jangchub Tsöndrü. Williams 1985 hypothesizes that this attribution by Jamyang Shayba may have been intentionally erroneous for polemical purposes. There is no reason to doubt that the position stated by Mabja Jangchub Tsöndrü in his commentary on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* represents his actual position on the matter.

Huntington does not limit his imputation of a rejection of the probity of reason to Candrakīrti, but also extends his claim to cover Nāgārjuna:[27] Nāgārjuna was not, he argues, 'interested in systematically commanding Buddhists and non-Buddhists of his day to assent to a set of rationally grounded doctrines, tenets, or true conclusions' (2007, 129) but rather to help readers achieve a 'groundless world of non-abiding' beyond 'the validity of rational argumentation' (2007, 129). Huntington argues that 'the unqualified rejection of any sort of 'definitely stated doctrine' — whether in the form of a philosophical view (*dṛṣṭi*), thesis (*pakṣa*), or proposition (*pratijñā*) — is not only a leitmotif of Nāgārjuna's writing, it is arguably the defining feature of his work, its single most troubling aspect, one with which any serious attempt at interpretation must come to grips' (2007, 109).

This argument, like the argument with regard to *tarka*, is based upon a semantic widening on Huntington's part: in this case, the notion that the three specific forms rejected by Nāgārjuna (*dṛṣṭi, pakṣa* and *pratijñā*) exhaust the domain of 'definitely stated doctrines'. In fact, each of Nāgārjuna's rejections — of *dṛṣṭi* in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXVII, 30,[28] of *pakṣa* in *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* 50,[29] of *pratijñā* in *Vigrahavyāvartanī* 29[30] — come in the context of logical, reasoned arguments comprised of 'definitely stated doctrines'.[31] As Garfield points out 'When Huntington asks us to take Nāgārjuna at his word, I agree that we should. But words are words in context, and Huntington rips the verses on which he relies out of their context' (Garfield 2008: 525).

The importance of context for determining meaning is not accidental; as we saw in the first section of this article, it underpins Huntington's project — and Nāgārjuna's. And, as we further saw, this is a point on which Huntington and Garfield agree. Yet the implications drawn by Garfield from the 'cards from a familiar deck' are strikingly different than those drawn by Huntington. Whereas Huntington argues that 'Mādhyamika philosophers can best be understood by entirely disposing of the idea that they are presenting a series of arguments against one set of claims and in favor of another' (1993, 10), Garfield claims that:

> Nāgārjuna affirms the deep and original philosophical position (not to be discovered in the West until Heidegger and Wittgenstein defended it) that linguistic meaning can only be conventional. This permits Nāgārjuna to prosecute a philosophical project that indeed undermines any attempt to take it as fundamental ontology, but does not undermine *itself*. It allows him *cogently* not only to refute his opponents, but to *defend* his own account of emptiness, to do so without taking emptiness to be a view about the nature of reality, and to do so without committing himself to a philosophy of language or epistemology antithetical to the account he

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27. Shulman 2010 takes issue with the manner in which Huntington 2007 and Garfield 2008 lump Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti together, arguing that there are discontinuities in their implementations of Madhyamaka logic — but these differences are beyond the scope of this article, as Shulman adds no evidence that either party rejected logic or rational argumentation.

28. Garfield (1995, 83).

29. Loizzo (2007, 125).

30. Westerhoff (2010a, 29).

31. Even the titles of the latter two works clearly demonstrate their commitment to reason and argumentation.

defends so adroitly, so rationally. *[Emphasis in original]* (Garfield 2008, 525)

As Huntington puts it, 'Here is where the road forks: One way leads toward the promise of a true, rationally binding conclusion, the other to a state of non-abiding, a metaphorical place neither *on* nor *off* the map' *[emphasis in original]* (2007, 123). We will now attempt to explore each of the paths before us, beginning with Huntington's, before turning to that of Garfield and the other 'contemporary logicians'. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that Huntington is correct, and that Nāgārjuna is *not* making arguments against one set of claims and in favor of another. What, then, is he doing? What kind of a reading does Huntington propose?

Fictionalism and metaphor: Nāgārjuna as conjurer

Huntington begins with the fact that the ontological status of an argument is based upon its context (e.g., in a courthouse, in a work of fiction, in a dream) and proposes that Nāgārjuna's arguments (or rather, 'arguments') can be viewed through the lens of fictionalism: 'I do not find any *real* arguments in the Mādhyamika. However I do not deny that the Mādhyamika offers the *appearance* of arguments similar to arguments in fiction or in a dream'.[32]

The appeal to fictionalism as a means of understanding Madhyamaka is by no means a novel one, neither for Huntington, nor for Madhyamaka studies in general.[33] Huntington's application of fictionalism takes an unusual form, however, and is therefore worth examining in some detail. In its most general form, fictionalism is a means to reduce one's ontological commitments in a nominalistic manner. Among the earliest use of fictionalism in Buddhist studies is Robinson (1957, 307–308) where he writes 'The Śūnyavāda is in fact a kind of theory of fictions. The concept of designation (*prajñapti*) provides a way of handling abstracts without concretizing them, or assigning ontological value to them.' As Tillemans points out, fictionalists 'reinterpreted quantification in such a manner that the variables do not refer to objects in a domain but rather to terms that form a *substitution* class' (1999, 197). In other words, one can continue to effectively perform mathematical operations while remaining completely agnostic with regard to the Platonic existence of numbers by treating the number 7 not as a pointer to a real, ontological object, but rather as a name that can be substituted for a variable in an equation. A Mādhyamika would take this principle further, and 'simply reject

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32. Smith College Symposium (2010: Panel 1 Introduction, 8, 15–18, 30). A similar argument is made in Huntington 1995, 283.

33. The use of fictionalism in Western philosophy is outside of the scope of this article; an overview can be found in Eklund 2007. In a Buddhist context, Matilal 1971, 144–145, takes up Robinson's thread, but in the context of the Nyāya criticism of Sautrāntika, not Madhyamaka. Crittenden 1981 applied Matilal's notions to Madhyamaka, and Huntington 1983, 79–81, referred to Crittenden approvingly. More extended treatments of the topic are found in Siderits 2003a, which suggests fictionalism as a way of understanding personal identity in a Buddhist context: that the 'self' is merely a useful fiction with no substantial ontological status. More recently, Priest, Siderits and Tillemans 2011, 144–150, discuss fictionalism with regard to Madhyamaka, but opt for deflationism as a preferable strategy. Tillemans 2011, 157–164, argues that Madhyamaka fictionalism should be viewed as a form of 'revolutionary fictionalism' (as opposed to 'hermeneutical fictionalism'). Finally, Finnigan and Tanaka 2011, 181–188, do not use the word 'fictionalism', but treat Carnap's work on mathematics as a fictionalism *avant la lettre* as a means to understanding Candrakīrti.

all reference to real entities ... accept[ing] only a logic interpreted in the onto-
logically neutral substitutional fashion'[34] (Tillemans 1999, 198–199). As Crittenden
(1981, 324–325) notes, for a fictionalist,

> the existence of the entities denoted by references to fictions is not assumed.
> Reference, predication, quantification, are simply integral parts of the language we
> adopt in writing and discussing fiction and this language is taught and mastered
> without any assumption of existential commitment. The supposition that corre-
> sponding to referring uses of expressions concerning fictions there must be existing
> things, whether fully existing or having some weaker form ('subsistence', 'being') is
> gratuitous and not warranted by an examination of the uses of language involved.

In other words, we can discuss and refer to fictional entities (such as charac-
ters in novels) without assuming or implying that they actually exist. Further, we
can still make valid truth claims about fictional entities: Garfield (2006, 2) uses the
example of Dean Moriarty, a character in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*:

> There are real distinctions to be drawn between truth and falsity within the fiction,
> despite the fact that the fiction is a fiction. It is *true* (in the fiction) that Dean flew
> from Mexico City to San Francisco. It is *false* (in the fiction) that Dean flew from
> New York to Kathmandu. It is even *true* (in the fiction) that Dean is a real human
> being, and *false* (in the fiction) that he is a fictional entity, despite the fact that the
> former claim is false *outside of the fiction*, and the latter is true *outside of the fiction*.
> [*Emphasis in original*] (Garfield 2006, 2)

A Mādhyamika fictionalist could thus view the world and its contents as noth-
ing more than convenient fictions, which have no ontological status outside of
the fiction in which they reside, and continue to make truth claims (at the level
of conventional truth) concerning them without any implied appeal to ultimately
real entities (*bhāva*). As D'Amato (2009, 50) states, 'According to such a fictionalist
view, one might engage in conventional discourse without positing that the entities
referred to in such discourse ultimately exist, for example, through adding an oper-
ator "in fiction *f*" (or "according to the conventional domain") to any truth claim.'

Such is fictionalism as currently constituted in the literature.

Huntington's use of fictionalism, however, is different, as he is not attempting
to reduce his ontological commitment to entities, but rather reduce his commit-
ment to logic itself. He argues that Nāgārjuna's arguments in the MMK should
be viewed as similar to Atticus Finch's arguments in Harper Lee's novel *To Kill
A Mockingbird*, or arguments made in a dream, as opposed to an argument made
in an actual courthouse. This distinction, however, begins to break down upon
closer examination, as arguments made within a dream or in a work of fiction are
exportable across domain contexts. Westerhoff raises the example of the Indian
mathematician Srīnivāsa Rāmānujan who dreamt that his family goddess showed
him a scroll upon which were written mathematical theorems, which Rāmānujan

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34. It should not escape the reader's notice that this paper is one of Huntington's direct targets in
   'The Mādhyamika Trick' (Huntington 2007). In an ironic twist, the paper's only use of symbolic
   logic (which is the putative cause of Huntington's ire) offers a fictionalist interpretation of the
   catuṣkoṭi, an interpretation to which Huntington would presumably subscribe. In fact, three
   of Huntington's four targets (Robinson, Tillemans and Garfield) have endorsed a fictionalist
   reading of Madhyamaka at various points in time. We will return to Tillemans' paper in the
   final section below.

then remembered, checked, and published. Unless one wishes to maintain that the dream-theorem and the published-theorem are different (which is difficult, as they say the same thing, which is surely the identity criteria for mathematical theorems), one must accept that the theorem has been successfully exported across domains.[35] And, to the degree to which the argument is exportable, the distinction between a 'fictional argument' and a 'real argument' cannot be supported.

Further, the question must be raised as to what, exactly, would be gained if such a distinction could be supported. Huntington's proposal seems designed to eliminate any commitment to the probity of reason on Nāgārjuna's part — arguing, in effect, that Nāgārjuna only *pretends* to argue in a logical manner, but holds no ultimate commitment to reason or logic, which are purely conventional.[36] If this is the case, there is no need for Huntington's move, as a Mādhyamika (early Indian or contemporary) who is committed to a fictionalist approach already views the 'real' courthouse argument (and hence, Nāgārjuna's 'real' arguments) as fictional. Nor does this view render these fictional notions (or others, such as the Four Noble Truths) any less efficacious at the conventional level; as Westerhoff put it, 'only a cinematic key could open a cinematic door, a real key could not' (2009, 185n5). Thus, any arguments (for fictionalism, or otherwise) would already be *inside the fiction, a*nd would thus be bound by the rules *of the fiction*, including the commitment to the probity of reason.

This principle would apply to Huntington himself: as Garfield puts it, 'It strikes me that reason and the kind of commitment to some kind of truth and cogency is a transcendental condition of being able to argue at all, *including being able to argue for fictionalism.*'[37] Huntington's attempt to extend fictionalism to apply to reason itself proves in the end to be self-stultifying — in order to argue for Nāgārjuna's putative rejection of logic and reason, Huntington would be obliged to simultaneously commit to logic and reason, thus refuting the premise he is arguing against.

This charge is similar to, but subtly different from, the charge posited against Nāgārjuna in *Vigrahavyāvartanī* verses 1 and 2. There, the opponent charges:

1. If the substance of all things is not to be found anywhere, your assertion which is devoid of substance is not able to refute substance.

2. Moreover, if that statement exists substantially, your earlier thesis is refuted. There is an inequality to be explained, and the specific reason for that should be given. (Westerhoff 2010a, 19–20)

In other words, the opponent claims that Nāgārjuna is trapped by the horns of a dilemma: if his statement that 'all phenomena are empty' is itself empty, it

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35. Smith College Symposium (2010, Panel 1a, 10, 10–11, 05). Westerhoff does not name the mathematician, but the identification of Rāmānujan seems uncontroversial.

36. The same criticism would thus apply to Taber, when he writes: 'Thus I suggest that Nāgārjuna might only pretend in the MMK to demonstrate in rigorous philosophical fashion the illusory nature of the world. In reality his arguments serve only to describe the interconnectedness, hence illusoriness, of all phenomena, not establish it as true. They function to convey knowledge simply by displaying the perspective of highest truth in the fullest possible terms. The reader is not compelled to adopt that perspective by rigorous logic, but is invited to do so by making a paradigm shift, if you will — a leap beyond ordinary experience' (Taber 1998, 237). The fact that the arguments partake of conventional truth (and not ultimate truth) does not make them *false*. We will return to this below.

37. Smith College Symposium (2010, Panel 3, 11, 00–11, 15).

lacks probative force; if, on the other hand, it has substance, than it is self-refuting. Nāgārjuna's reply, in verses 21–24, chooses the first horn of the dilemma, but argues that his argument has probative force precisely because it is empty:

1. If my speech is not in the combination of causes and conditions and also not distinct from them, is it not the case that emptiness is established because of the absence of the substance of things?
2. The dependent existence of things is said to be emptiness, for what is dependently existent is lacking substance.
3. Suppose one artificial being were to hinder another artificial being, or an illusory man would hinder one brought about by his own illusionistic power. This negation would be just like that.
4. This speech does not exist substantially, therefore there is no destruction of my position. There is no inequality, and no particular reason to be mentioned. (Westerhoff 2010a, 26–28)

For Nāgārjuna, the realm of conventional reality consists solely of dependently originated phenomena, that are empty, and thus any argument at the level of conventional truth would necessarily be empty, and necessarily need to be empty in order to obtain.[38] One artificial being can hinder another artificial being, Nāgārjuna argues; one fictional character can argue against another fictional character. Arguments concerning conventional reality can only take place using the tools of conventional reality. Further, as Nāgārjuna argues in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (XXIV, 10ab), it is only through conventional truth that ultimate truth can be understood:

> Without depending on the conventional truth,
> The meaning of the ultimate cannot be taught.[39]

Thus, Huntington can indeed hold that the Mādhyamika 'only pretends' when he argues and relies on the canons of rationality — but only to precisely the same extent that the Mādhyamika 'only pretends' when he does *anything.* While engaged with conventional reality, the Mādhyamika must use the tools of conventional reality — and it is only through conventional reality that ultimate reality can be understood.

But if this appeal to fictionalism with regard to the canons of rationality ultimately fails, the metaphor from the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* of the artificial being who hinders another artificial being brings us to another portion of Huntington's charge against Robinson, Hayes, Tillemans and Garfield: that being 'preoccupied with logical analysis ... both assume that it is possible to reduce Nāgārjuna's rich and subtly nuanced writing to "a set of definitely stated doctrines for which he was trying to produce a systematically arranged set of rational arguments" without sacrificing anything of literary or metaphorical value' (2007, 110), and that

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38. Mabbett 1996, 316, makes the first half of this point concisely: 'Nāgārjuna does not deny that an assertion can capture a truth. On the contrary, some propositions are true, and can be conveyed by utterances. These utterances, however, are not real because, like all supposedly concrete things and events, they lack intrinsic reality. Whatever is meant by this lack of intrinsic reality, it does not mean that they are incapable of carrying out the function of asserting the content of propositions.'

39. Samten and Garfield (2006, 498).

'such a reading lacks any sensitivity for the very features of textuality — symbol, metaphor, polysemy, multivalence — that might lead us (à la Candrakīrti) out of the compulsive desire to deal in certainties'[40] (2007, 126).

To the best of my knowledge, no published work has focused on the topic of metaphor in Nāgārjuna (in the manner of, for example, Sarah Kofman's *Nietzsche and Metaphor*); at the same time, the literature on Nāgārjuna's use of logic is extensive. And this is a gap that should indeed be filled. But, having said that: the vast majority of metaphors in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* are stock metaphors, taken from pan-Indian debates. We find, for example, the example of fuel and fire (III.3ab, X.15), the flame of a butterlamp (VII.8, XXVII.22), milk and curd (XIII.6), sprout and seed (XVII.7), the pot, and cloth (X.15), all of which appear to have been stock examples in Nāgārjuna's time. Further, we find a series of metaphors for illusion,[41] which became stock metaphors: a dream, a mirage, a city of Gandharvas (VII.34, XVII.33, XXIII.8), a magical illusion (XVII.31), impaired vision (XXI.11). Finally, there are a small number of vivid metaphors which clearly deserve additional attention:

> Karma is indestructible, like a promissory note
> And like a debt. (XVII.14ab)[42]

> Just as when the teacher,
> Through his miraculous powers,
> Emanates a body, and that emanation
> Emanates another emanated body (XVII.31)[43]

> When you foist on us
> All of your errors,
> You are like a man who has mounted his horse
> And has forgotten that very horse. (XXIV.15)[44]

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40. There is no question that literary effects such as these can be persuasive. But here we must return to the discussion of theories of truth, and epistemic warrants. If we accept a pragmatic theory whereby truth is defined in terms of soteriological efficacy, we must be careful not to place too much emphasis on the poetical nature of a text. It is perhaps wise at this point to remember the words from the *Ani-sutta* (SN.II.267):

    > So too, bhikkhus, the same thing will happen with the bhikkhus in the future. When those discourses spoken by the Tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supramundane, dealing with emptiness are being recited, they will not be eager to listen to them, nor lend an ear to them, nor apply their minds to understand them; and they will not think those teachings should be studied and mastered. But when those discourses that are mere poetry composed by poets, beautiful in words and phrases, created by outsiders, spoken by [their] disciples, are being recited, they will be eager to listen to them, will lend an ear to them, will apply their minds to understand them; and they will think those teachings should be studied and mastered. In this way, bhikkhus, those discourses spoken by the Tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supramundane, dealing with emptiness, will disappear. [*Bracketed insertion Bodhi's*] (Bodhi 2000, 708–709).

    The danger exists that we may believe that certain teachings are true because they are beautiful, without the test of reason.

41. Westerhoff 2010b takes up these five metaphors, alongside seven others that also became canonical: the moon in water, an echo, an optical illusion, rainbows, lightning, water bubbles, and a reflection in a mirror. A similar study of other Madhyamaka metaphors would be most welcome.

42. Samten and Garfield (2006, 355).

43. Samten and Garfield (2006, 366).

44. Samten and Garfield (2006, 502).

These are powerful images, and should not be overlooked. And, naturally, there are notable metaphors to be found in Nāgārjuna's other works, and in Candrakīrti's. And, for that matter, we should not be blind to the metaphors at play in the contemporary texts, as well. Robinson began his 1972 paper with a vivid metaphor that gave Huntington his title:

> In American country fairs there used to be a well-known game played with three walnut half-shells and one pea. The operator first held up all three shells for the audience to see. Then he turned all three upside down, placed the pea under one shell, and proceeded to shuffle the shells. When he stopped, a member of the audience would try to guess which shell the pea was under. Nagarjuna's system resembles the shell game in several ways. Its elements are few and its operations are simple, though performed at lightning speed and with great dexterity. And the very fact that he cannot quite follow each move reinforces the observer's conviction that there is a trick somewhere. The objective of this article is to identify the trick and to determine on some points whether or not it is legitimate.
>
> (Robinson 1972, 325)

Hayes (1994, 325) quotes this approvingly, and adds the metaphor of a *trompe-l'œil*, which Huntington reappropriates as a trick 'from which one might learn something exceedingly valuable about the medium in which [it is] performed' (2007, 127), calling Nāgārjuna's work 'a masterwork of the creative imagination that disturbs and provokes in that it appears to be something it is not, something *graspable* .... It is the nature of the Mādhyamika trick not to argue, explain, command or demonstrate — all of which would be self-defeating — but rather to *conjure*' (2007, 128).

Let us leave Huntington, for the moment, with this image of Nāgārjuna the conjurer, and explore the other path: the path of Nāgārjuna the logician. But first, we must dispose of Nāgārjuna the charlatan.

Robinson, Hayes: Nāgārjuna as charlatan

For Huntington, if one accepts that Nāgārjuna has 'a set of definitely stated doctrines for which he was trying to produce a systematically arranged set of rational arguments', then 'it is relatively unimportant whether — like Garfield and Bhāvaviveka — one is convinced that he has succeeded in vindicating Nāgārjuna the logician, or — like Hayes and Robinson — one is persuaded that Nāgārjuna's logical 'trick' is little more than a curious historical artifact' (2007, 110–111). But for those committed to the probity of reason, it is very important indeed.

Huntington's characterization notwithstanding, rather than viewing Nāgārjuna's work as 'a systematically arranged set of rational arguments', Robinson was known for extracting arguments from their context and arranging them into his own systematization. Tuck (1990, 56) calls Robinson 'one of the most influential and insistent of the analytic scholars' who ushered in an atmosphere where,

> specific sections of text were selected for detailed analysis and criticism in a way that was foreign to the idealists who had been searching for a unified system of philosophy. The *Mādhyamikakārikā* was no longer considered a monolithic entity to be read and understood in its entirety. It was now a collection of propositions,

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syllogisms, and logical devices that could be isolated, translated into artificial languages, and judged for their logical validity. This change in style and subject matter indicated far more than a shift in interpretative emphasis, it indicated an entirely new way of reading the text. The modern European interpreter and the author of the ancient Sanskrit work were united by the rules of a universal language: the imperatives of systematic reason, as defined by the modern reader.

<div align="right">(Tuck 1990, 55–56)</div>

This re-systematization of independent textual fragments read outside of their context within the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is exemplified by Robinson (1957), where 61 independent verses (or verse-fragments) are categorized by logical form in order to contribute toward 'more precisely formulated questions, and a rigorous methodology, with consistent definitions of terms and delimitation of fields of inquiry' (Robinson 1957, 294), and also by Robinson (1972), which purports to identify six 'axioms upon which [Nāgārjuna's] arguments depend' (1972, 327). The clear methodological continuities between these two papers, however, do not fail to mask a significant shift in Robinson's assessment of Nāgārjuna's use of logic. The earlier paper takes a generally positive view, stating 'Nāgārjuna's knowledge of logic is about on the same level as Plato's. It is pre-formal, and consists of a number of axioms and rules of inference which he manipulates intuitively, with great dexterity but also with occasional error' (Robinson 1957, 295). The latter paper, on the other hand, views Nāgārjuna as a charlatan, writing 'The nature of the Madhyamika trick is now quite clear. It consists of (a) reading into the opponent's views a few terms which one defines for him in a self-contradictory way, and (b) insisting on a small set of axioms which are at variance with common sense and not accepted in their entirety by any known philosophy' (Robinson 1972, 331).

The axioms that Robinson speaks of are ones he has derived from the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, which he argues that Nāgārjuna depends upon, and which are not held by Nāgārjuna's opponents. On closer examination, however, the axioms prove to be inappropriate generalizations, based upon reading certain verses out of context. To take but one example, let us examine Robinson's 'Axiom 5':

> (5) Only transitive actions and relations are admissible; reflexive actions are disallowed (the eye cannot see itself)*[sic]* (MK 3.2), the fingertip cannot touch itself, etc.), and seemingly intransitive expressions such as 'the goer goes' must be recast in transitive form as 'the goer goes a distance'. (Robinson 1972, 327)

Robinson then goes on to add 'When he denies that the lamp illuminates itself (MK 7.8), he is simply arbitrarily choosing to consider the reflexive object as if it were a nonreflexive object' (1972, 329). But is this really what Nāgārjuna is doing? *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* VIII.8 reads:

> Just as a butterlamp
> Illuminates itself as well as others,
> So arising gives rise both to itself
> And to other things. (Sangten and Garfield 2006, 186)

Robinson appears to assume that because this is a *pūrvapakṣa* verse,[45] Nāgārjuna holds the opposite opinion, that a butterlamp does not illuminate itself. But a

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45. That is, one stating a preliminary position in a philosophical argument, usually taking the

study of the following verses show that Nāgārjuna's objection takes a different form altogether (regarding the manner in which a lamp illuminates darkness) and makes no direct reference to whether or not the lamp illuminates itself. Thus it would appear that we have already found evidence that Nāgārjuna is not intending a general rule against reflexive relations.

Turning to the other passage Robinson cites in support of Axiom 5, a more thorough reading of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* III.2 and the passages surrounding it indicates that Nāgārjuna actually argues that vision is by its very nature relational — that vision cannot see *by itself*, but rather, requires an object of vision, and that this object of vision cannot be vision itself.[46] This would then be a *prima facie* argument against the *dharma* of vision having a *svabhāva* that would be (by definition) non-relational. And this takes us to the other half of Robinson's charge, that 'The validity of Nāgārjuna's refutations hinges upon whether his opponents really upheld the existence of a *svabhāva* or *svabhāva* as he defines the term' (1972, 326). Robinson answers in the negative, on the grounds that *svabhāva* as defined by Nāgārjuna is self-contradictory, so it is absurd to maintain that a *svabhāva* exists.

This charge is taken up by Hayes, who claims 'Nāgārjuna's arguments, when examined closely, turn out to be fallacious and therefore not very convincing to a logically astute reader. By using faulty argumentation, Nāgārjuna was able to arrive at some spectacularly counterintuitive conclusions' (1994, 299–300). To Robinson's list of alleged fallacies he adds a new charge of equivocation. Hayes argues that 'not only did Nāgārjuna use the term "*svabhāva*" in ways that none of his opponents did, but he himself used it in several different senses at key point in his argument' (1994, 327), claiming that Nāgārjuna alternates between two distinct meanings of *svabhāva*: identity (which he labels as *svabhāva₁*) and causal independence (which he labels as *svabhāva₂*) depending on his rhetorical needs (1994, 312).

Hayes elaborates this argument with reference to *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* I: 3,[47] which he initially translates using calques:

> Surely beings have no *svabhāva* when they have causal conditions. And if there is no *svabhāva*, there is no *parabhāva*. (1994, 312)

Hayes then proposes the following translation for the first portion, with the italicized phrase substituted for the calque,

> Surely beings have no *causal independence* when they have causal conditions.
> (1994, 312)

Because of the reference to causal conditions, Hayes decides that Nāgārjuna must intend *svabhāva₂* here. He then goes on to examine the second half of the verse, which he translates as follows, substituting for *svabhāva* and *parabhāva*:

> And if there is no *identity*, then there is no *difference*. (1994, 313)

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form of an objection put into the mouth of an opponent (real or imagined).

46. That vision is not reflexive is thus not based upon some general axiom against reflexivity, but is specific argument regarding the relational nature of sense-perception.

47. Hayes defies the standard convention of leaving the dedicatory verses unnumbered, so his references to verses in Chapter I are off by two when compared to other references. I have corrected his numbering to conform to standard convention.

Here Hayes determines that *svabhāva*$_1$ is called for, because the statement translated in this manner 'makes sense at face value, because a thing's identity is understood as a feature that distinguishes the thing from things other than itself' (1994, 313). Finally, he notes that if we substitute *svabhāva*$_2$ instead, we obtain the following translation:

And if [beings have] no *independence*, then they have no *dependence*. (1994, 313)

Which Hayes argues 'seems to be quite false at face value. So, if one gives Nāgārjuna the benefit of the doubt by assuming that he was trying to write sentences that were true (or at least appeared to be true at face value), one is likely to reject' this translation[48] (1994, 313). Of course, there is another, simpler means of giving Nāgārjuna the benefit of the doubt: by assuming that he is making a cogent argument that does *not* rely on equivocation, and that the two senses of *svabhāva* proposed by Hayes are in fact an artifact of the translation into English of a polysemic Sanskrit term.[49]

It is a reading of precisely this type is proposed by several critics of Hayes. Taber argues that *svabhāva* can best be understood in a Western context as parallel to Spinoza's definition of 'substance' as 'that which is in itself and is conceived through itself'[50] and which in turn is based upon Aristotle's notion that substance is '*per se*; it is definable in terms that are unique to itself and is not able to be produced by something else' (1998, 224). In this manner, *svabhāva* would refer simultaneously to the unique identity of an entity and its independent existence.

Tillemans takes a similar tack, without recourse to the Western philosophical tradition. He begins by pointing out that where Hayes defines *svabhāva*$_1$ as identity *simpliciter*, it is always used in the sense of 'analytically findable identity', which is to say, an identity that withstands analysis (unlike, for example, the identity of a chariot, which is conventional and dependent upon parts) (2007, 509–510) and then proposes three sources we can turn to in order to find a linkage between findability and independence:

1. A selective use of pan-Indian philosophical debates
2. Etymological and purely semantic arguments
3. Non-obvious facts about our mental-makeup and way of seeing the world.

In the first category, Tillemans points to the pan-Indian debate on causality, between proponents of *satkāryavāda* (the theory that the effect exists at the same time as the cause) and *asatkāryavāda* (the theory that the effect does not exist at the time of the cause). In chapter I of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*,

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48. It is a testament to Hayes's distaste for Nāgārjuna that he considers it to be 'giving him the benefit of the doubt' to assume that he is writing sentences that merely *appear to be true on face value*. This is a very odd construal of Gadamer's 'principle of charity', to say the least.

49. It is worth noting that Hayes makes no reference to Candrakīrti's reading of this passage, which states that there can be no borrower without a lender. As Tillemans points out, 'instead of hastening towards a reading discerning equivocations, we might well want to adopt what Paul Grice once termed the "Modified Occam's Razor": senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity' (Tillemans 2007, 520) (reference to H.P. Grice 1991, *Studies in the Way of Words*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press , 47).

50. Spinoza, B., 1982, *Ethics and Selected Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis: Hackett, Part I, Def. 3, quoted in Taber 1998, 224.

Nāgārjuna accepts each side's refutations against the other, to demonstrate that neither position is tenable, 'and thus show that findability entails independence. If things were dependent *and* findable under analysis, then the cause and effect relationship would be along either the lines of *satkāryavāda* or *asatkāryavāda*, but it is neither of the two; therefore things cannot be both dependent and findable' (2004a, 516). In the second category, Tillemans points to chapter XV of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, and Candrakīrti's exegesis upon it in the *Prasannapadā*, where the word *svabhāva* 'is to be analyzed as meaning that the thing has its own being, i.e., *svo bhavāḥ*'[51] (2004a, 516). Finally, in the third category, Tillemans points to the Madhyamaka idea of 'superimpositions' (*samāropa*) to argue that for the Mādhaymika, and explicitly for later Mādhyamikas such as Jñānagarbha and Kamalaśīla, what is superimposed upon entities is a reification of a putative intrinsic nature and intrinsic being[52] (2004a, 518).

There is, however, an easier way to link the notions of intrinsic nature and intrinsic being without recourse to the Western philosophical tradition or later Madhyamaka interpreters, and simultaneously clear Nāgārjuna of Robinson and Hayes's charge of attributing to his opponents views they did not actually hold: we can turn to the texts of the Sarvāstivādin school, and examine the notion of *svabhāva* found there.[53] According to Ronkin, for the Sarvāstivāda version of *dharma* theory,

> *svabhāva* is an ontological determinant of primary existence, although it does not have an ontological status and is not an ontological category in its own right. To have a *svabhāva* is to be a primary existent. Hence the *svabhāva* is the determinant of a *dharma* which is *dravya*, a substantially real entity, and is what defines a *dharma* as having primary existential status regardless of its temporal status. Now both *svabhāva* and *dravya* are used to describe the existence of a *dharma* recognized as a primary existent. The difference is that they characterize the reality of a *dharma* from two different perspectives: *svabhāva* refers to the *dharma*'s individual essence that distinguishes it from all other *dharmas*. *Dravya* refers to any primary existing *dharma* that so exists by virtue of its own individual essence, as distinct from those *dharmas* that exist merely as provisional designations (*prajñapti*). (Ronkin 2005, 110)

In other words, a *dharma* possessing *svabhāva* is, by definition, actually existent (*dravya*) as opposed to conceptually designated (*prajñapti*), and the *svabhāva* represented the specific identity of that particular *dharma.* Walser makes a similar point, but adds an important reference to the Sarvāstivādin notion of time; he states that for the Sarvāstivādins,

> *Dharmas* are real (as opposed to merely nominal) to the extent that they have essence (*svabhāva*). The implications of this statement seem to have been ignored

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51. Tachikawa omits the etymology, but argues that '"uncreated and non-contingent upon another" is the most basic meaning of the word "*svabhāva*" in the *Middle Stanzas*' (1997, 108). He also points out that 'This word appears in the *Middle Stanzas* 37 times in 30 verses. In addition, the word "*niḥsvabhāva*" (without own-being) appears three times in three verses' (1997, 107).

52. Tillemans 2004a, 232–234, argues that although this theory is typically identified with Svātantrika thought, there are reasons to believe that Candrakīrti also subscribed to this notion.

53. Cox 2004 offers a detailed look at the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma which concurs with the characterizations by Ronkin and Walser quoted below.

> in the *Jñānaprasthāna* but are taken up in the *Mahāvibhāsā*. If, according to the *Vijñānakāya*, real objects are said to exist by virtue of their *svabhāva*, then it is by virtue of this same *svabhāva* that objects exist in the past, present, and future. The essence of an entity is not a product of causes and conditions, but is unchanging.
>
> (Walser 2005, 210)

It would appear to be precisely this Sarvāstivādin notion of *svabhāva* that Nāgārjuna is arguing against in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, and thus there are no grounds to support Robinson's claim that he is saddling his opponents with a position they did not actually hold, nor Hayes's contention that he is equivocating. Thus, the evidence for viewing Nāgārjuna as a charlatan is slim. So let us turn then to Tillemans and Garfield, and investigate their views on Nāgārjuna's logic.

Tillemans and Garfield: Nāgārjuna as logician at the limits of thought

Tillemans begins his paper by drawing a distinction between two types of logic that go beyond classical logic in some manner: non-classical logics, which supplement the theorems and formula of classical logic with additional vocabulary, and deviant logics which reject some of the theorems of classical logic (1999, 192). Thus, a theorem that is proven to be true in classical logic will still be true in a non-classical logic, but may or may not be true in a deviant logic. The question then becomes: considering Nāgārjuna's reliance on the negative form of the tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*), is his logic classical, non-classical, or deviant? Tillemans argues that Madhyamaka logic, and Buddhist logic in general, can be best viewed as non-classical (and not deviant): '[N]othing in formal logic stops us from saying that, in the vast majority of cases, the Buddhist uses a consistent logic but that, in certain contexts, he clearly accepts paradoxes' (1999, 195). In the case of Nāgārjuna's use of the *catuṣkoṭi*, this is best explained by viewing the negation applied as having a fictionalist import (i.e., 'There is no X such that X has property A' and 'There is no X such that X has property non-A' can both be asserted simultaneously if *there is no X*) (1999, 200).

And here a puzzle arises: Huntington would presumably be amenable to Tillemans's fictionalist reading; further, Tillemans shows no sign of attempting to 'force a logical grid' over Nāgārjuna, as much as attempt to understand the logic apparent in the *catuṣkoṭi*. There is nothing here to suggest that Tillemans is a latter-day Bhāvaviveka, clinging to a correspondence theory of truth and an associated ontology. On the contrary, Tillemans comes to the conclusion that the Mādhyamika philosopher 'uses logic to arrive at an understanding beyond all argumentation and discursive thought' (1999, 189).

Nor does a careful reading of Garfield and Priest's paper[54] divulge a similar tendency. Rather, they argue that Nāgārjuna uses reason to find the contradictions that lie 'at the limit of thought' (2003, 2). To do this, they first make a distinction between Nāgārjuna's arguments concerning conventional reality and those concerning ultimate reality. Where conventional reality is concerned, the apparent contradictions found in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* are only contradictions if one lifts verses out of context (2003, 8) and that 'where it might appear that Nāgārjuna does assert contradictions, it is invariably the case that a careful reading of the

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54. Despite Huntington's aiming his attack on Garfield, the paper that Huntington cites is actually co-authored by Graham Priest.

text undermines the straightforwardly contradictory reading' (2003, 9). In fact, they argue, Nāgārjuna is 'not of the view that the conventional world, however nominal it may be, is riddled with contradictions' (2003, 10). When analyzing the conventional world, classical logic is adequate to the phenomena.

Ultimate reality, on the other hand, necessarily involves contradictions; Garfield and Priest think Tillemans is correct (in the paper discussed above) to take 'Nāgārjuna's sincere endorsement of contradictions to be possible evidence that he endorses paraconsistent logic[55] with regard to the ultimate while remaining classical with regard to the conventional' (2003, 19n2).

The contradictions that Nāgārjuna endorses, they argue, are not just any contradictions, either: rather, they take the specific form of 'limit paradoxes': 'The contradictions at the limits of thought have a general and bipartite structure. The first part is an argument to the effect that a certain view, usually about the nature of the limit in question, transcends that limit ... The other is an argument to the effect that the view *is* within the limit' (2003, 4).

In particular, they identify in Nāgārjuna's thought two particular paradoxes, which they label 'the expressibility paradox' and 'the ontological paradox'. The expressibility paradox is demonstrated by Siderits's memorable phrase 'The ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth' (Siderits 1989, 231). If we express the claim that there is no ultimate truth, we are expressing an ultimate truth — the truth of there being no ultimate truth.

The ontological paradox is based on Nāgārjuna's statement in the auto-commentary to the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (quoting the *Aṣṭasahasrika-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*) 'All things have one nature, that is, no nature' (quoted in Garfield and Priest 2003: 15). If we accept the emptiness of all phenomena, we say that phenomena have no essence. But lacking an essence is itself an essence of sorts — phenomena have the essential property of having no essence.

In each of these cases, we are faced with an irreconcilable inconsistency — there being no ultimate truth is itself an ultimate truth, things having no nature is itself a nature. And rather than attempt to resolve the contradiction in some manner, Nāgārjuna, Garfield and Priest argue, embraces the contradiction, and proves he is 'prepared to go exactly where reason takes him: to the transconsistent' (2003, 18). Ultimate reality is, for Nāgārjuna, 'at the limit of thought' (Garfield and Priest 2003, 2).

And it is here, at the limits of thought, that we rejoin Huntington, who himself argues:

> Carefully taking into account 'the limits of reason' as well as its necessary and legitimate claims, the meaning of this or any other philosophy has for us can perhaps be measured by no higher standard than as a function of its practical consequences for the individual, for society, and for all forms of life. The most important question would then be: Through incorporating a vocabulary that seeks neither to deny nor otherwise to contradict or denigrate all the evidence that can and must be accepted by the canons of reason, does this philosophy serve to reduce or augment the fear and suffering caused by clinging, antipathy, and the delusion

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55. Classical logic is a considered 'explosive', in that from a set of contradictory premises anything can be proven true. Paraconsistent logic, on the other hand, is non-explosive and permits dialetheias, that is, 'true contradictions'. Cf. http: //plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-paraconsistent/

of reified thought? (Huntington 1993, 139)

It seems to me that Tillemans, Garfield and Priest, attempt to do precisely that in their respective readings of Nāgārjuna; they are attentive to the soteriological implications, yet believe that reason can (and must) be used precisely in the aim of reducing the delusion of reified thought.

We saw earlier that Huntington disparaged Bhāvaviveka's doxographic project for organizing thoughts into 'tenets' — units of reified thought:

> We have seen that a tenet (*siddhānta, grub mtha'*) is literally an 'established conclu-sion', a hypothesis marking some point 'that one will not pass beyond'. Tenets are not fluid lines of thought that change and develop, nor are they merely a style of conversation, like Socratic dialogue. They are, in effect, timeless atomic units of meaning ('resolved, established, fixed'), and the schools that take shape around them stand outside of history in a timeless realm created by the doxographers' imagination and presented as explanation or exegesis. (Huntington 2003, 70)

But this notion of a point 'that one will not pass beyond' has another cor-responding notion in the Western philosophical tradition: the *aporia* (ἀπορία). The *aporia* is a logical impasse, a perplexity one cannot traverse; quite literally (and etymologically) 'that one cannot pass beyond' — in other words, the lim-its of thought. No less a metaphysician than Aristotle wrote of the relationship between the *aporia* and fetters:

> Now for those who wish to get rid of perplexities (*aporia*-s) it is a good plan to go into them thoroughly; for the subsequent certainty is a release from the previous perplexities, and release is impossible when we do not know the knot. The per-plexity of the mind shows that there is a 'knot' in the subject; for in its perplexity it is in much the same condition as men who are fettered: in both cases it is impos-sible to make any progress.[56]

For Nāgārjuna, the 'knot in the subject' is an irresolvable contradiction at the heart of ultimate reality. And, as it is only through conventional reality that the meaning of the ultimate can be taught, we are required to use the tools of con-ventional reality — including the *pramāṇa* of inference, and the canons of reason — to attempt to break through the reified thoughts that keep us in fetters, and follow the critique right up to the limits of thought.

Earlier, we stood with Huntington where the road forks: 'One way leads toward the promise of a true, rationally binding conclusion, the other to a state of non-abiding, a metaphorical place neither *on* nor *off* the map' *[emphasis in original]* (2007, 123). But now we find that the fork is illusory: that place that is neither *on* nor *off* the map has a recognizable structure — a limit paradox, which occurs at the limits of thought. And we can find a path with the promise of a true, rationally binding conclusion that can take us there. And perhaps now, the Madhyamaka trick can be put in its proper context: not as a trick of deception, as in a shell game, nor as the magic trick of a conjurer, or the optical trick of a *trompe-l'œil*; rather, it is the trick of following reason as far as it will lead, all the way to the edge, and then peering beyond the limit.

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56. Aristotle, Metaphysics 995a, trans. Hugh Tredennick, online at http: //www.perseus.tufts. edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0052%3Abook%3D3%3Asection%3D995a

And I believe that Huntington, at some level, has already seen this, and deserves the final word:

> When properly disciplined through study of the Mādhyamika deconstructive philosophy the intellect is a powerful and efficient guide that can point the bodhisattva in the right direction and even conduct him along the way for some distance. Inherited patterns of conceptualization, perception, and linguistic usage dictate that we either devalue rationalism as mere discursive thought or place a premium on logical precision, or else do both simultaneously, fragmenting ourselves into intellectual and spiritual components that can be welded together only through the power of faith. Here, as elsewhere, the Mādhyamika cuts a middle way between these two extremes. Rational thought should be used, as it is a particularly effective tool, but it is nothing more than a tool, and critical thinking alone is not enough to bring about the actualization of emptiness. The fruit of deconstructive analysis must be allowed to ripen in personal experience ... by waiting patiently and watching with all [one's] attention focused intensely, through meditation, on the network of interpenetrating relations that is gradually revealed through study of the texts and critical reflections on what has been learned.
>
> (Huntington 1993, 112)

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