

The Deceptive Simplicity of Nāgārjuna's Arguments Against Motion: Another Look at *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* Chapter 2

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Abstract This article—which includes a complete translation of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* chapter 2 together with Candrakīrti's commentary thereon—argues that notwithstanding the many different and often arcane interpretations that have been offered of Nāgārjuna's arguments against motion, there is really just one straightforward kind of argument on offer in this vexed chapter. It is further argued that this basic argument can be understood as a philosophically interesting one if it is kept in mind that the argument essentially has to do with whether a *personal* level of description will admit of an exhaustively impersonal explanation.

Keywords Nāgārjuna · Madhyamaka · Metaphysics

The Enduring Appeal of Nāgārjuna's Arguments on Motion, and One Take on the Basic Project of Madhyamaka

Nāgārjuna's case against the intelligibility of motion, as elaborated in the second chapter of his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*MMK*), surely represents one of the most widely studied and variously interpreted parts of this foundational text of the Madhyamaka school of thought.¹ Not surprisingly, some modern interpreters have considered whether or to what extent the arguments of this chapter exhibit affinities

¹ I would like to express my thanks to the advanced Sanskrit students with whom I read this text: Rita Biagioli, Sam Hopkins, Jamal Jones, Nabanjan Maitra, David Tomlinson, and Stephen Walker. Thanks, too, to Sonam Kachru for illuminating conversations on this chapter (and on Madhyamaka more generally); to Anne MacDonald for some helpful suggestions (and for spirited disagreement on the interpretation of Madhyamaka); and to Amber Carpenter for correspondence on the affinities between *pudgalavāda* and (my interpretation of) Madhyamaka.

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with the famous arguments canonically known as “Zeno’s Paradoxes.”² Appropriately finding in this kind of mathematical characterization of Nāgārjuna’s arguments an occasion to advance a point widely attributed to Daniel Ingalls—namely, that just as mathematical argument is paradigmatic for the traditions of philosophy that stem from ancient Greece, so linguistic and grammatical analysis represent the governing paradigm of knowledge for classical Indian philosophers³—Kamaleswar Bhattacharya has argued, in a number of oft-cited articles, that Nāgārjuna’s arguments exploit not geometrical presuppositions, but rather the presuppositions of the Sanskrit grammarians. Against, then, the mathematical register that has prevailed in some modern reconstructions of their arguments, Bhattacharya has generally urged that “the failure to recognize the grammatical basis of the arguments of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti has been responsible for many inaccuracies and obscurities....”⁴

More recently, Jan Westerhoff has distinguished three distinct groups of arguments in the chapter. Elaborating these, he effectively identifies some of the same points that emerge on Bhattacharya’s analysis as functions, instead, of what Westerhoff characterizes as “property-absence arguments” and “property-reduplication arguments.”⁵ On this kind of interpretation, Nāgārjuna’s arguments are to be understood generally in terms of conditions for the instantiation of *properties* (such as “being an agent of motion”). While there is something to recommend Westerhoff’s reconstructions, Claus Oetke, for his part, has challenged the extent to which Westerhoff’s interpretations—which are significantly informed by such modern conceptual tools as “the Humean principle that for things to be distinct we must be able to conceive of them independently of one another”⁶—abstract Nāgārjuna’s various moves from their proper dialectical context; though agreeing, then, with Westerhoff’s contention that the arguments of *MMK* 2 should be interpreted in such a way as to “give an example of a form of arguments which can be applied to a variety of subject-matters,”⁷ Oetke urges that “if one considers W[esterhoff]’s interpretations against the background of the chapter in its entirety[,] most significant problems besetting his exegesis come to light.”⁸ Oetke sees these problems as particularly reflecting a contemporary line of interpretation according to which Nāgārjuna is chiefly preoccupied with essentially *semantic* problems; against this, Oetke’s contention is that, like all of Nāgārjuna’s arguments, the arguments of *MMK* 2 should be understood to have the “overriding goal” of establishing “a metaphysical tenet”—one to the effect that “there are no particulars at all which might explain the phenomena of common experience in a manner

² See, e.g., Siderits and O’Brien (1976), Mabbett (1984), and Galloway (1987).

³ Ingalls (1954); see also, in this vein, see Staal (1965).

⁴ Bhattacharya (1980, p. 85, here citing in particular the translation of May 1959). See also Bhattacharya (1980–1981, 1985, 1994–1995).

⁵ See Westerhoff (2009), Chapter 6: “Motion” (pp. 129–152).

⁶ See Westerhoff 2009, p. 132; cf. Oetke (2011, p. 254) for comment on Westerhoff’s appeal to this.

⁷ Oetke (2011, p. 252); cf. p. 284, where Oetke ventures that his own interpretation “does not militate against W[esterhoff]’s contention that the second chapter of the *MMK* ‘uses the discussion of motion as an example to illustrate an argumentative template which can be used in a variety of contexts’... On the contrary, it is suited to support these claims.” (Oetke here quotes Westerhoff 2009, p. 135.)

⁸ Oetke (2011, p. 249).

analogous to the way in which we tend to conceive the world of everyday experience as being due to entities hypothesized in theories of the natural sciences.”⁹ In light of this, Oetke argues, “matters pertaining to questions of semantics attain relevance at best in the form of objective consequences which the metaphysical doctrine might entail.”¹⁰

While I wholeheartedly endorse the idea that Nāgārjuna is best understood as advancing essentially metaphysical claims (and even that these claims are pretty much as Oetke here characterizes them), I find Oetke's own reconstruction of Nāgārjuna's arguments in Chap. 2 very far from straightforward.¹¹ Indeed, on my reading of Nāgārjuna's arguments concerning motion (which I understand particularly in light of Candrakīrti's interpretation), this is a problem with pretty much all of the available interpretations. While I think, then, that such interpretations as those advanced by Bhattacharya, Westerhoff, and Oetke succeed in capturing some of what I take to be Nāgārjuna's salient insights, all of these interpretations—variously enlisting, as they do, such elusive ideas as Pāṇinian rules regarding what is instrumental in bringing about the actions expressed by verbs; the analytic-philosophical notion of “thin individuals”; and the logical-mathematical principles of irreflexivity and transitivity¹²—obscure the deceptively straightforward point of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's arguments. I want to suggest that there is really just *one* kind of argument deployed in these Mādhyamika arguments against the intelligibility of motion—and that it is a straightforward variation on one of the most significantly recurrent kinds of argument in the *MMK*. In particular, Nāgārjuna¹³ is consistently arguing simply that any attempt to *explain* the phenomenon of motion—any attempt to give us an “ultimately real” (*paramārthasat*) explanatory grip on this eminently familiar and basic action—turns out itself to be intelligible only insofar as we already understand motion. More specifically, with respect to such questions (which must be answered if we are to understand what motion “really is”) as *where* motion takes place, Nāgārjuna invariably

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 245; cf. p. 324: “Aspects connected with semantics come into play only in the context of evaluating the consistency of the attitude of proclaiming the metaphysical doctrine that is characteristic for Madhyamaka.” As I hope will become clear, this is a point on which I agree.

¹¹ Consider, especially, Oetke's preliminary formalization (subsequently much qualified)—at 2011, p. 284, and requiring no fewer than 16 premises—of what he takes to be the basic line of argument. See, as well (and inter alia), Oetke (1988). For my own earlier attempt to characterize Mādhyamika arguments as essentially metaphysical, see Arnold (2005, pp. 115–204). While many of Oetke's formulations of Nāgārjuna's metaphysical commitments seem to me on target, his interpretation significantly differs from mine insofar as he finally sees Nāgārjuna as upholding a version of “Metaphysical Illusionism”; see especially Oetke 2007, elaborating his differences from my interpretation.

¹² As noted, it is Bhattacharya's interpretations (footnote 4, above) that enlist the first of these; the idea of “thin individuals” figures in Westerhoff's reconstruction of the arguments of *MMK* 2.5, 2.11 as commonly exemplifying a “property-duplication argument” (Westerhoff, 2009, pp. 136–140); Oetke invokes (and lengthily elaborates), as the only principles that need to be presupposed in order to understand the arguments of *MMK* 2, the principles of irreflexivity and transitivity (2011, pp. 272–284).

¹³ And I hereby stipulate that henceforth, by “Nāgārjuna” I will mean the author of *MMK* 2 as read in light of the interpretation of Candrakīrti. I am not making any claim to the effect that this interpretation represents “the real view of Nāgārjuna”—only that this is a philosophically interesting and philologically defensible interpretation that makes good sense of the complete text that consists in Nāgārjuna's verses together with Candrakīrti's commentary thereon.

argues simply that any attempt to individuate such a space will turn out to make reference to (what we're supposedly trying to explain) motion.

By way of substantiating this characterization of the famous Mādhyamika arguments concerning motion, I want to offer a complete and (I hope) readable translation of *MMK* 2 with Candrakīrti's commentary, along with my own interpretive comments. Just as most modern interpretations of Nāgārjuna's case against motion obscure the deceptively straightforward point of his arguments, so, too, many of the available translations of the text can make it hard to see what's going on. In some cases this is owing to problematic inaccuracies;¹⁴ even in the case, however, of generally reliable translations, conventions that remain regrettably common in the translation of Sanskrit philosophical texts can make matters opaque.¹⁵ By way of supporting, then, my contention that *MMK* 2 really exemplifies just one deceptively straightforward kind of argument, I want to provide a complete translation of the chapter, including Candrakīrti's commentary;¹⁶ my aim is to make clear both how my interpretation of that argument makes sense of the complete unfolding of the chapter, and that (notwithstanding Candrakīrti's occasional opacity) my interpretation can be gotten out of the eminently grammatical terms in which Candrakīrti recurrently reconstructs Nāgārjuna's points. (It should be acknowledged, though, that it is sometimes questionable whether Candrakīrti's interpretation makes sense of Nāgārjuna's verses; insofar, however, as these are sometimes unintelligible without a commentary, I see no way of recovering the sense of all of Nāgārjuna's verses without recourse to some commentary.)

Taking it as axiomatic, moreover, that a translation is also an interpretation, I offer this as an unabashedly *interpretive* translation—one, to be sure, that I take to be faithful to the Sanskrit (and particularly to the explicitly grammatical register that

¹⁴ See, e.g., Sprung (1979), as well as the review thereof by Steinkellner (1982).

¹⁵ Chief among these regrettably common conventions is the proliferative use of brackets to supply pronominal antecedents and other implicit things the translator takes to be necessary for understanding; to take an example largely at random, consider Claus Oetke's translation of *MMK* 2.3–4: "How should perhaps a[n action of] traversing of (i.e. pertaining to) something which is [presently] being traversed be possible given that something [presently] being traversed is definitely impossible without [an action of] traversing? For someone for whom the/a[n action of] traversing pertains to something which is [presently] being traversed the (undesired) consequence of [the existence of] something [which is presently] being traversed without a[n action of] traversing ensues (*prasajyate*). For something [which is presently] being traversed is traversed" (2011, p. 250). Regardless of its accuracy, this is profoundly difficult to read. (Compare my translation, ca. footnote 56, ff., below.) Also common are translations that awkwardly render relative clauses, and/or that misconstrue the indeclinable particles that are so often integral to discerning the dialectical flow; consider, for example, Westerhoff's translation of the first verse (discussed at footnote 42, below), as well as his translation of the same verses (2.3–4) we've just seen in Oetke's translation: "[H]ow suitable is it to attribute motion to the space presently traversed, as far as attributing non-motion to it is not suitable? For whom motion is attributed to the space presently traversed, there should be a space without motion—but 'presently traversed space' means 'movement takes place there'" (2009, p. 131). The more user-friendly translation of Garfield (1995), though commendable in many respects, is done exclusively from the Tibetan, and therefore transmits (inter alia) problematic artifacts of the Tibetan translation; cf., especially, Garfield's translation of 2.1, discussed below (footnote 44).

¹⁶ Verses 1–6 will be translated with my own interpretive commentary, while verses 7–25 are given as an Appendix with more minimal comment confined to footnotes.

characterizes Candrakīrti's commentary), but also one that, rather than simply transposing Sanskrit words into English, renders what I take to be the *meaning* of the text. Among other things, this means that I shall completely eschew brackets, supplying, without shame or apology, what I take to be integral to understanding the meaning of the text as I understand it.¹⁷

Before presenting my translation and interpretive comments, though, let me say a little more about how I understand Madhyamaka—and in particular, about why I take it to be philosophically interesting for Nāgārjuna to show only that proposed *explanations* of certain ordinary phenomena turn out invariably to be intelligible *only relative to the very phenomena purportedly explained*. While it might be thought underwhelming or sophistical for Nāgārjuna thus to refute the reality of motion by effectively showing only that there are important limitations on the *intelligibility* thereof—why, after all, should such a conclusion, which might seem to reflect only epistemic limitations, be thought metaphysically significant?¹⁸—I think the significance of such arguments is evident if they are understood in light of the question (always overriding for Mādhyamikas) of how (and how not) to understand the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness. Thus, on my reading the guiding question for Nāgārjuna is always whether it could make sense to think the *conventionally real*—which, I take it, most significantly picks out what we can characterize as a *personal* level of description—might be *explained* by any of the essentially impersonal categories proposed by other Buddhist Ābhidharmikas as “ultimately real.” And to show that constitutively *personal* phenomena cannot finally be explained in exhaustively *impersonal* terms is to show, I take it, something of great philosophical interest.¹⁹

¹⁷ For other recent translations that admirably exemplify the same spirit, see Patil (2009), and McCrea and Patil (2010).

¹⁸ The aptness of asking this kind of question is often a good indication that one is in the vicinity of essentially *metaphysical* arguments; for illuminating reflections (with which I am sympathetic) on the possibility that questions about forms of *thought* are coextensive with questions about *what there is*, see Rödl (2012, pp. 39–43), et passim. Though I have not pursued this angle here, Rödl's reflections on the essentially *temporal* forms of thought might also usefully be invoked in thinking through some of the issues in *MMK* 2 as I understand them; insofar, in particular, as I will here be emphasizing the extent to which *kriyā*, “action,” is an essentially *person-level* term, one might get at many of the same issues by emphasizing that *kriyā* is also an essentially *temporal* term. Consider, too, Rödl's theorization (pp. 149–157) of *movement* as a “pure concept of the temporal,” which theorization affords a way to think about *MMK* 2s analysis (contra the *MMK*'s more typical deployment of the *caṭuṣkoṭi*) of just *three* options with regard to the locus of motion; on Rödl's analysis, thoughts that predicate movement “are temporal in virtue of the *tripolar* contrast of past-perfective, present-progressive, and past-progressive. This three-way contrast is irreducible to a two-way contrast” (p. 157). That temporality is essentially at issue in *MMK* 2 is suggested, too, by Cardona (1991), who considers the arguments of *MMK* 2 particularly as exemplifying (per his subtitle) “Some Early Indian Arguments concerning Time”; it is further suggested by the other points in the *MMK* (3.3, 7.14, 10.13, 16.7) where Nāgārjuna refers back to the arguments of Chap. 2, these invariably being points at which intrinsically *temporal* phenomena are at issue. (Thanks to Sonam Kachru for having brought Cardona's article to my attention, and for conversations about temporality vis-à-vis Mādhyamika arguments.)

¹⁹ What I here mean by a “personal” level of description is much the same kind of thing I have elsewhere (Arnold 2012) characterized as an *intentional* level of description, though I here eschew that term in hopes of avoiding confusion. See, too, Arnold (2010) for an earlier elaboration of the following interpretation of Madhyamaka.

The insight I take proponents of Madhyamaka to have elaborated can usefully be expressed in the idiom of some contemporary debates in philosophy of mind. Some contemporary philosophical projects informed by work in the cognitive sciences centrally involve the question of how (or even finally whether) we can relate two levels of description: the broadly “personal” level of description (that available from a first-person perspective) that represents what might be called the common-sense view of the mental; and the “scientific” level of description in terms of which that level is (according to the cognitive-scientifically inclined) finally to be explained. The problem is how or whether we can say that our first-personal experience of our actions—as reflected, e.g., in what we might *say* that we *meant* to do in acting some way or another—finally has any explanatory significance; or whether, instead, this level of description is ultimately epiphenomenal in light of the fact that everything about us can be exhaustively explained in terms of a scientific level of description—a level of description that finally makes no reference to the kinds of things that figure in what Wilfrid Sellars called the “logical space of reasons.”²⁰

Rather similarly, the characteristically Buddhist reference to “two truths” can be taken to consist, in its basically Ābhidharmika iterations, in the idea that two fundamentally different kinds of existents can be enumerated: the set of “conventionally existent” (*saṃvṛtīsat*) things is the set of temporally enduring macro-objects (paradigmatically, *persons*) that figure in ordinary experience and in the common-sense view of the mental (in what the cognitive-scientifically inclined often call “folk psychology”); the set of “ultimately existent” (*paramārthīsat*) things is the set of *dharmas*—the impersonal ontological primitives that alone “really exist.” The characteristically Ābhidharmika claim (at least on Nāgārjuna’s understanding thereof) is that causal interactions among these exhaustively *explain* all conventionally real phenomena; a complete account of persons can therefore be given with reference only to impersonal *dharmas*.²¹

With regard to this, Nāgārjuna can be said to have recognized that the ontological primitives posited by Abhidharma could have explanatory purchase only if they represent an exception to the rule that everything is dependently originated; dependently originated existents would be ultimately *explained* only by something that does not itself require the same kind of explanation in turn. But it is precisely the Mādhyamika point to emphasize that there is no exception to this rule; phenomena are dependently originated all the way down. Chief among the senses in which this is so, I want to emphasize, is that proposed explanatory categories invariably turn out to be dependent, for their intelligibility, *on the phenomena they are invoked to explain*; the explananda, that is, can never be thought finally to drop out of any explanation. For all explanations to be (as Nāgārjuna is most concerned to emphasize) themselves dependently originated is, then, for them to depend

²⁰ This way of characterizing what I am here calling a *personal* level of description is developed especially in Arnold (2012).

²¹ It is, of course, a fair question whether all Ābhidharmikas really understand the two truths this way; I take it that Vasubandhu, for one, might have had a much more nuanced view of the matter. Insofar, though, as I am characterizing “the Ābhidharmika” understanding of the two truths *as Mādhyamikas are apt to do*, it should be understood that the hermeneutic charity with which I approach Nāgārjuna may result in a lack thereof with respect to some Ābhidharmikas.

particularly upon *the perspective from which any explanation must be offered*—and the perspective from which even putatively “ultimately true” explanations are offered is, necessarily, itself that of “conventionally” described experience.²²

It makes a significant difference, then, that the conventionally described phenomena paradigmatically in view are *persons* or *selves*; indeed, the difference this makes is just what I want to bring out by suggesting that we understand “conventionally real” here to refer, above all, to a *personal* level of description. Thus, while it's clear that there are cases where, in fact, we *can* say what some conventionally described thing “really is”—surely there's no problem in saying, for example, that sunrise and sunset really consist in facts about the earth's rotation—the situation is essentially different when the explanandum is persons. In the case, for example, where we want to understand something precisely like *what it is to understand something*, it cannot coherently be held that the explanation might make no reference to the very perspective from which that idea makes sense.

I take it, then, that this is the context for understanding the significance of the basic *modus operandi* of the *MMK*: considering the various categories central to the characteristically Ābhidharmika tradition of Buddhist scholasticism (and central, more generally, to any proposed *explanations* of familiar phenomena), Nāgārjuna invariably shows that these categories turn out to be constitutively dependent upon the very phenomena they purportedly explain. And this point, I am emphasizing, is significant especially insofar as we keep in view the idea that “conventionally” described phenomena here means above all *personally* described phenomena; purported explanations of persons are intelligible, then, only with reference to persons. Insofar as impersonal explanations of persons thus turn out to be intelligible only with reference to *the perspective from which such explanations are understood*—insofar, indeed, as it is only *to persons* that any such explanation could make sense—exhaustively impersonal explanations are finally untenable.

In terms of the kind of grammatical interpretation of Nāgārjuna advanced by Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, we can at this point note that *action*—here rendering *kriyā*, which for the Sanskrit grammarians denotes what is expressed by verbs, where that is subserved by all the other things (agents, patients, instruments...) that are “instrumental in bringing about the action expressed by a verb” (i.e., it is *kriyā* that is subserved by *kāraṅkas*)²³—is a *person-level* term par excellence. That is, the individuation of actions is coextensive with the individuation of a *personal* level of description, since it is only *for persons* that “actions” so much as come into view, such that they can then be thought to require explanation. (Actions are not, that is, individuated as the events they are except relative to the explanatory interests of persons.) This is especially noteworthy in light of Stanislaw Schayer's contention (apropos of *MMK* 2) that “it has to be stressed that the critique of [motion] bears no direct relationship to the problem of motion. ‘Going’ is only used as an example to

²² An especially good characterization of this problem can be found in Siderits (2009) (though Siderits is more optimistic than I about the prospects of resolving the problem from a reductionist's point of view).

²³ On the philosophical significance of the Sanskrit grammarians' *kāraṅka* analysis of sentences, see, inter alia, Matilal (1990, pp. 40–48). On my translation of *kāraṅka* as “what is instrumental in bringing about the action expressed by a verb,” see footnotes 64, 65, below.

demonstrate the general impossibility of action (*kriyā*).²⁴ This can be taken to recommend the conclusion that in arguing that a non-question-begging explanation *of motion* cannot be given, Nāgārjuna is above all advancing the case for thinking more generally that non-question-begging explanations *of personal phenomena* cannot be given.

The fact that “action” is most importantly a person-level term comes nicely into view in a passage from Candrakīrti that can usefully be adduced here to introduce some arguments that we will see again in *MMK* 2.²⁵ So, in *MMK* Chap. 3, where he considers the explanatory value of the sense faculties (*indriyāni*), Nāgārjuna argues that it makes sense neither that a sense faculty called *sight* (*darśana*, from the verbal root $\sqrt{dṛś}$) is the agent of seeing, nor that something that is *not* sight (*adarśana*) is such. Much of the discussion parallels arguments we will see in chapter two; with respect, for example, to verse 3.5’s claim that neither sight nor non-sight could be what sees, Candrakīrti thus explains the reasons for this: “Nāgārjuna’s point is that it doesn’t make sense, first of all, that there be—on the part of an eye whose essence is *sight*, and which is connected with an act expressible by the verbal root $\sqrt{dṛś}$ —an additional connection with an expression like ‘it sees’; this is because there’s the entailment of two acts expressible by the verbal root $\sqrt{dṛś}$, and hence the entailment of two *seeings*. Nor does *non-sight* see, because of its being, like a finger-tip, devoid of any act of seeing.”²⁶

As we will see, this passage enlists the same line of argument marshalled against the intelligibility of any attempt to individuate the locus of motion. Here, though, it’s relevant for us to note especially that Candrakīrti goes on to anticipate an objection just such as an Ābhidharmika might press: “Others think that this is merely dharmas, originating as inactive, that have originated; hence, no one at all sees any object at all, since there’s simply no action. Therefore, what you’ve established—that ‘sight doesn’t see’—is already established.”²⁷ That is, Nāgārjuna’s claim isn’t novel or interesting for an Ābhidharmika, who will simply yawn and say that *of course* there’s not really any agent who “sees”; after all, the whole point of Ābhidharmika analysis is to show that what we experience as *persons who act* really consist simply in impersonal ontological primitives (*dharmas*), the causally describable occurrence of which effectively explains away all of the things (such as *action*) that are thought to obtain at a personal level of description.

²⁴ Schayer (1929–1930, p. 44n26), here as quoted (and translated) by Westerhoff (2009, pp. 135–136n.21); the original passage reads: “Es mus aber hervorgehoben werden, daß die Kritik der *gati* in keiner direkten Beziehung zum Problem der Bewegung steht. Das »Gehen« ist nur ein Beispiel, an dem die prinzipielle Unmöglichkeit der »Aktion« (*kriyā*) demonstriert werden soll.”

²⁵ In fact, the passage here in question is the very one that Schayer adduces to warrant his contention that Chap. 2’s critique of motion is really in the service of demonstrating “the general impossibility of action”; thus, the passage given in footnote 24 (above) concludes by referring us to the discussion I am here considering: “Vgl. die Widerlegung des »Sehens« *Pr.* 114³–116³.”

²⁶ Translated from La Vallée Poussin (1970, p. 115). On my translation here of Candrakīrti’s *dṛśikriyā* as “an act expressible by the verbal root $\sqrt{dṛś}$,” see especially my discussion of Chap. 2’s recurrent term *gamikriyā* apropos of *MMK* 2.1 (ca. footnote 43, below). The problematic entailment, in the present discussion from Chap. 3, of two acts of seeing is explained, we will see, by the development of Candrakīrti’s commentary on *MMK* 2.1–5.

²⁷ Translated from La Vallée Poussin (1970, p. 116) (as emended by de Jong (1978, p. 39).

To this objection, Candrakīrti responds in a way that's consistent with the characterization of Madhyamaka that I have ventured here: "If there were no action (which is integral to the common-sense view), then there could not be 'mere dharmas,' either, since, like flowers in the sky, they would be devoid of any action; how could mere dharmas be devoid of action? So, if we're talking about common-sense reality (*vyavahārasatyam*), action would have to be accepted just as much as 'mere dharmas'; if, on the other hand, there is consideration of the real (*tattva*), then you have to accept that mere dharmas don't exist any more than action does."²⁸ Action (*kriyā*), then, is "integral to the common-sense view" (*vyavahārāṅgabhūtā*); it must therefore remain in view if we are so much as to think it's the common-sense view that we are explaining or understanding. Moreover, insofar as it's only *from* the common-sense point of view (from, that is, a first-person perspective) that even such actions as *understanding or explaining the common-sense view* make sense, there can be no making sense of the idea that such actions might "really" consist only in impersonal dharmas. If, then, there is a point of view somehow beyond the person-level of description (if there is "consideration of the real"), it cannot coherently be specified as really consisting in something altogether different (or autonomously intelligible apart) therefrom.²⁹ (Of course, just how "consideration of the real" *is* in this case to be understood is a huge and difficult question.)

Insofar as a personal level of explanation is thus the level at which such conceptual activities as understanding and explaining make sense, I think we can helpfully express something like the same point with reference to a Hegelian thought developed by John McDowell.³⁰ McDowell has argued that we cannot make any sense of the idea of *explaining* our conceptual capacities in terms of anything that is not itself already the content of those very capacities; just insofar as we *think* any such explanation, thought already sublates the very distinction between thought and reality that we would thus claim to have invoked. Wary, perhaps, of Hegel's excesses, McDowell suggests that "Tarskian semantics points to a sober interpretation" of this clearly Hegelian conclusion.³¹ McDowell thus invokes Alfred

²⁸ Translated from *ibid.*

²⁹ Candrakīrti elaborates the same point with particular clarity in his commentary on *MMK* 9.5, which caps a discussion that harkens back to Chap. 3's discussion of sight. Arguing, then, for the impossibility of an impersonal level of description's ever having explanatory priority over the personal level supposedly explained thereby, Candrakīrti says: "Here, something (called a *sprout*) is brought into view (*abhivyajyate*) by a cause known as a *seed*; and, some cause (called a *seed*) is brought into view by that effect—such that we say 'this is the one's cause, this is the other's effect.' In the same way, something (having the nature of a *self*) is brought into view by any impersonal basis (*upādāna*) such as sight; this is the latter's *appropriator* (*upādātṛ*). And, some impersonal basis (such as sight) is brought into view by any self; this is the latter's *impersonal basis*. In that case, there can be establishment of impersonal basis and appropriator only as mutually entailing. But if it's accepted that an impersonal basis like sight is separately constituted, without any appropriator, then that, being without a basis, is *unreal*. Therefore, there's no establishment of either one of these; neither does it make sense that an appropriator is established separately from such impersonal bases as sight" (Translated from La Vallée Poussin 1970, p.194). See also footnote 76, below, which refers to another discussion—one that also deploys the pair *upādāna* / *upādātṛ*—that is to precisely similar effect.

³⁰ I here invoke a discussion that figures as the conclusion of a longer discussion in Arnold (2012, pp. 100–108).

³¹ McDowell (1998, p. 489).

Tarski's "Convention *T*," which specifies that in order for any theory of truth to be adequate, it must entail that for every sentence *P* of any language, "*P*" is true if and only if *p*—as, on a canonical example, "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white." Now, it's important to appreciate that the seemingly vacuous repetition on the right-hand side of such statements represents something essentially abstract—the *proposition*, for example, that is expressed by the natural-language phrase on the left-hand side. It's significant, however, that this distinction is obscured by the fact that we can only *express* propositions in natural-language sentences; indeed, McDowell's Hegelian turn can be characterized in terms of his emphasizing just that point—thus, he comments that in order to appeal to such statements, "we have to *use* the words on the right-hand side of semantical statements."³²

McDowell's point, I take it, is that we cannot coherently suppose that the proposition on the right-hand side of any such statement amounts to an *explanation*, from essentially outside of semantic space, of how the sentence on the left-hand side means what it does; Tarski's point in deploying this apparatus,³³ rather, is itself intelligible only given the essentially semantic character of *both sides of the statement*. As McDowell puts it, "we have to *use* the words that figure in specifications of what nonovert conceptual episodes are intentionally directed toward. In statements of meaning and aboutness, we relate the conceptual order to the real order, mentioning elements of the real order by making ordinary uses of the words on the right-hand sides of these statements."³⁴ Our conceptual capacities are thus ineliminable—which is, I'm suggesting, effectively the same as saying that a *personal* level of description is ineliminable—in the sense that anything we could *know* about what explains these capacities would ipso facto be included therein. There is, then, nothing it could look like to know that, say, personally describable states like *knowing* or *believing* might "really" be something else, or that our conceptual capacities are explicable in terms of things that are not themselves conceptual; just insofar as this could be *known*, it would be known "without moving outside the conceptual order—without doing more than employing our conceptual capacities."³⁵ It is only *as persons* that we can understand whatever figures on the right-hand, predicate side of explanatory claims about persons; we therefore cannot make sense of any such predicate if it advances the claim that *persons are ultimately unreal*.

McDowell's expression of this point in terms of Tarskian semantics is helpful, we can now see in turning to my translation of *MMK 2*, insofar as the significance of Nāgārjuna's arguments against motion (as those are to be understood according to Candrakīrti) similarly comes down to the question of how we are to understand the relation between two sides of any supposedly explanatory statement regarding

³² Ibid.; cf. McDowell (2009, p. 63).

³³ Which, n.b., is not to *give* a theory of truth, but rather to express a fundamental constraint on any such theory; Tarski's Convention *T* is misunderstood, then, if read as *explaining* the truth of whatever figures on the left-hand side of the expression—the point, rather, is just that for any proposed account of truth to be viable, it must come out that on the theory in question, the kind of sentence expressed by Tarski counts as true.

³⁴ McDowell (1998, p. 489); cf. McDowell (2009, p. 63).

³⁵ Ibid.

motion. The governing question of *MMK* 2, then, is simply this: *where does motion take place?*³⁶ What the arguments of this chapter show, with respect to all of the candidate answers—such as (chiefly) that “motion takes place in a space presently being traversed”—is just that whatever figures, as explanation, on one side of such a statement cannot, in fact, give us an ultimate explanatory grip on the other side. Candrakīrti will develop this point by showing that any such statement will be intelligible only insofar as *both* sides thereof involve some reference to an “act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} ” (*gamikriyā*)³⁷—which is simply to show that a non-question-begging explanation of motion cannot be given. Insofar as arguments to this effect are understood more generally to advance Nāgārjuna's case against eliminative versions of the doctrine of selflessness—insofar, in other words, as reference to “acts expressible by verbs” is above all reference to a *personal* level of description—this is an interesting (indeed, profound) thing to show.

“An Investigation of Motion”: An Annotated Translation of *MMK* 2.1–6

The following translation has been made from the standard edition of Nāgārjuna's *MMK* as that is embedded in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*—namely, that of La Vallée Poussin (1970), as corrected by the text-critical notes of de Jong (1978); the bracketed page numbers in bold type refer to this edition, which may therefore be consulted by those who wish to evaluate the translation. I have also consulted the edition of Nāgārjuna's *kārikās* that de Jong based on his text-critical notes (2004), as well as the recent edition of Ye (2011). For the Tibetan translation of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's Sanskrit, I have consulted the edition of May (1959). In the interest of readability, I have invariably translated what I take to be the *meaning* of the text, where that includes (inter alia) providing the antecedents of pronouns (even if this is sometimes a whole phrase or topic); rendering explicit the often implied content of demonstrative pronouns (e.g., where “here” clearly refers to “in this phrase”); and translating Nāgārjuna's sometimes elliptical verses in ways informed by Candrakīrti's reading thereof.

Except in cases where such elaboration is speculative or uncertain on my part, I have not bothered to note such additions, which I hope will in any case be clear to those who can access the original text; uncertain cases are discussed in footnotes, rather than in the strictly interpretive comments I have interspersed throughout the text. Passages that I have rendered parenthetically never represent the insertion of something not in the text; rather, they reflect my interpretive judgment that the Sanskrit clause is best rendered as parenthetical, and are thus *part of the translation*. Similarly, italics (except where they indicate, say, *mention* rather than *use* of a word) generally represent my own sense of a passage's emphasis. Finally, while I

³⁶ As we'll see, there are variations on this question, which also makes the same sense (e.g.) if expressed temporally (*when* does motion take place?; cf. footnote 95, below); the overriding point of these variations, though, is just that whatever is on the right side of any statement purporting to answer that question (whatever figures, that is, as *explaining* what's on the left-hand side) will turn out to be intelligible only relative to the explanandum.

³⁷ See my discussion of *MMK* 2.1, below.

have tried to remain consistent in translation terms where appropriate, I have not felt constrained always to render, e.g., stock transitional phrases (such as *atrâha*, “he says”) the same way; rather, I have expressed my sense of the chapter’s dialectical flow by varying these locutions with circumstance. Without, then, any further ado:

[p. 92] At this point, one might say: Even if there has been (based on the first chapter’s refutation of origination) a demonstration of dependent origination’s being characterized as “without cessation,” etc., nevertheless, if you’re going to demonstrate that dependent origination is “without coming and going,”³⁸ some other argument must be stated – one dedicated to refuting the actions (familiar to everyone) of going and coming.

Well, here’s such an argument: If there were anything worth the name ‘motion,’³⁹ it would have to be attributed to a space⁴⁰ *already traversed*, one *not yet traversed*, or one *now being traversed* – and as Nāgārjuna says, none of these makes any sense:

(*MMK 2.1*:) First of all, the *already-traversed* is not traversed; nor indeed is the *not-yet-traversed* traversed; nor is the *being-traversed* (as distinct from the first two options) traversed.

In this verse, a space where an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} has been completed is referred to as “already-traversed”; of a space which is being affected by a *present* act of motion, it’s said that it “is traversed.”⁴¹ Since it’s incoherent that what is *already traversed* (where an act of motion has been completed) be expressed by another phrase – “is traversed” – that signifies connection with a *present* act of motion, it doesn’t make sense, first of all, that

³⁸ Candrakīrti thus refers back to the *MMK*’s dedicatory verse, which he interprets as a programmatic statement of the text’s aims: “I praise that perfect Buddha, the best of teachers, who explained that dependent origination (which is the absolute, the calming of conceptual profusion) is without cessation or origination; without discontinuity or permanence; without a single or a manifold sense; without coming or going” (Translated from La Vallée Poussin 1970, p. 11). Taking *MMK* Chapter 1, on causal conditions, to make good on the promise of showing that dependent origination is “without cessation or origination,” Candrakīrti now introduces Chap. 2 as showing the aptness of the dedicatory verse’s concluding characterization.

³⁹ “Motion” here translates *gamana*, the same word translated in the preceding sentence as “going” (with “coming” there rendering *āgamana*); insofar as the present chapter is best characterized as treating *motion*, as such, I have judged it worthwhile to take the chapter’s talk of “going” throughout as more generally concerning motion, notwithstanding my different translation of the same word as that occurs in the *MMK*’s dedicatory verse (footnote 38, above).

⁴⁰ The word here rendered as “space” (*adhvajātam*; also, elsewhere, just *adhvan*) is more typically rendered as “road,” or “part of a road”; to better reflect, however, what I take to be the abstract generality of this chapter’s arguments, I have instead opted for “space” (Cf. Apte 1957/1992, p. 71 [s.v. *adhvan*]: “Distance, space (traversed or to be traversed).”). I follow Candrakīrti in taking it that this is to be supplied throughout as implicitly modified by the various neuter verbal nouns based on the root \sqrt{gam} used by Nāgārjuna; it’s important to note, however, that Nāgārjuna himself never uses these words, leaving it indeterminate throughout just what (if anything) is to be understood as modified by these forms.

⁴¹ On the form *gamyate* as picking out a *present* act of motion, see Cardona (1991, p. 456), who notes that the grammarian Pāṇini indeed specifies as one condition for the application of this verb-form that “the action denoted by the verb is referred to current time.”

the *already-traversed* is traversed. (With the expression “first of all,” Nāgārjuna just shows the order of refutation.⁴²)

The expression “act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} ” renders Candrakīrti's compound *gamikriyā*, which might also (reasonably and less clumsily) be rendered simply as “act of motion.”⁴³ Insofar, however, as *gami* is the Pāṇinian meta-linguistic term for referring to “the root \sqrt{gam} ,” I have rendered this expression (recurrent throughout Candrakīrti's commentary on the chapter) in such a way as to disclose the explicitly semantic key in which Candrakīrti reconstructs much of this chapter's argument. On Candrakīrti's interpretation, then, Nāgārjuna's basic argument—viz., that a non-question-begging explanation of motion cannot be given—is expressed in terms of conditions of the intelligibility of the words that must be used in any proposed explanation; the main point, then, will be that an *act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam}* must show up in *any supposed explanation thereof*. That an act of the same kind we're supposed to be explaining thus shows up on *both* sides of any explanatory sentence just means that any such sentence must finally presuppose (and hence cannot explain) precisely what is at issue.

It's also important to note that in my translation of Nāgārjuna's first verse, the last occurrence of the word “traversed” translates the same word (*gamyate*) so translated in the first two clauses; this is not reflected, however, in the Tibetan translation of the verse, which differently renders the final occurrence of this word according to the epistemic sense (“is understood,” “is conceived”) that the same root not infrequently has. Translating from the Tibetan translation of Nāgārjuna's text, Jay Garfield thus renders the last quarter-verse consistently with this equivocation: “What has been moved is not *moving*. What has not been moved is not *moving*. Apart from what has been moved and what has not been moved, Movement cannot be *conceived*.”⁴⁴ Insofar as the thrust of Nāgārjuna's arguments in this chapter will be to show particularly that a space *presently-being-traversed* cannot be the locus of motion, the Tibetan reading is not inconsistent with the sense of the verse or the chapter; the claim that this third alternative cannot be made coherent can indeed be expressed as the claim that this alternative “cannot be conceived.” While the meaning of the third denial is, though, effectively the same either way (i.e., whether it's denied that a space *now-being-traversed* “is traversed,” or that such “is conceived”), the epistemic rendering of the last word obscures the fact (integral to the entire chapter) that we are dealing throughout with variations on the same verbal

⁴² Despite Candrakīrti's thus making clear that *tāvat* here has the frequently attested sense of “first,” Westerhoff renders this (as he typically does) in the sense of “insofar as”; this results in a translation of 2.1 that obscures the relation between the first two quarter-verses: “*As far as the place moved over does not move, the place not moved over does not move either*” (Westerhoff 2009, p. 129n; emphasis added). This makes it seem as if Nāgārjuna's point is that the space not-yet-traversed is not “traversed” *because* the space already-traversed is not; as Candrakīrti makes clear, though, there is no such syntactic connection between the first two quarter-verses, which separately indicate two of the three possible spaces in which motion could be thought to occur.

⁴³ Here, recall my brief discussion—ca. footnote 26, above—of Candrakīrti's appeal in chapter three to an “act expressible by the verbal root $\sqrt{dṛś}$.”

⁴⁴ Garfield (1995, p. 125); the added italics all represent the same word, *gamyate*, in the Sanskrit. Cf., too, May (1959, p. 52) and Saito (1995, p. 87), who also both translate as the Tibetan suggests.

root (\sqrt{gam}).⁴⁵ Moreover, there is only one point in Candrakīrti's commentary where the difference in the possible senses of *gamyate* is explicitly entertained—and it is in the course of explicating a possible *objection* that this possibility is raised (see Candrakīrti's comment on 2.2, below), which suggests that the Tibetan translation of the last quarter of the first verse is finally unwarranted. In any case, for now we continue with Candrakīrti's pass through the first verse:

[p. 93] Nor can the *not-yet-traversed* be said to be what is traversed; for the not-yet-traversed (where an act of motion hasn't yet been produced) is called "future" – and "is traversed" is *present*. Hence, since future and present are mutually exclusive, it doesn't make sense to say the not-yet-traversed is traversed, either. If it's *not-yet-traversed*, how is it traversed? If it *is* traversed, it isn't not-yet-traversed!⁴⁶

Motion isn't present in a space *being traversed*, either, since (as Nāgārjuna says) "nor is the *being-traversed* (as distinct from the first two options) traversed." For in this case, that space which an agent of motion has crossed is *traversed* by him, and that which he hasn't crossed is *not-yet-traversed* by him. But we don't see any third space (as distinct from the already-traversed and the not-yet-traversed) which could be characterized as "*being traversed*." And since, that being so, a space *being traversed* is not traversed – i.e., it isn't known of this that "it is traversed" – therefore it is not *being-traversed*. Hence, not being affected by an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} , it is not traversed; there is, then, no motion in a space *being-traversed*, either.

It doesn't much matter that Candrakīrti's commentary on Nāgārjuna's dismissal of the third alternative (i.e., that the locus of motion might be individuated with reference to a space *presently being traversed*) is here rather labored and underwhelming; for most of the remainder of the chapter is dedicated to considering this, the most intuitively plausible alternative. There is still forthcoming, then, a good deal of argument on the sense it makes for Nāgārjuna to reject this alternative; it is in explaining the untenability of this alternative that most of the chapter's real philosophical work is done. The main discussion begins, then, by canvassing attempts to make the third alternative coherent—first, by Candrakīrti's anticipation of the thought that we can individuate the locus of motion simply by indicating the presence there of the foot of someone who is presently walking:

One might think it could work to say this: that space which is covered by the foot of a presently-moving agent of motion could be what is *being-traversed*. But this isn't so, since the foot, in turn, is reducible to atoms. That space which is in front of an atom situated at the tip of the toe is included in what is *not-yet-traversed* by the foot; that space which is behind the atom situated at the back

⁴⁵ This seems to have occasioned some confusion on the part of the Tibetan translators; when, for example, the same quarter-verse is quoted (shortly before the introduction of verse two) by Candrakīrti, the same translators in that case render the final *gamyate* in the sense of motion (see footnote 49, below; cf., too, May 1959, p. 55, n. 17).

⁴⁶ Precisely the same point is made, with respect to the question of who the *agent* of motion could be, in Candrakīrti's commentary on 2.8, below; cf. note 79.

of the heel is included in what is *already-traversed* by it.⁴⁷ And there *is* no foot as distinct from its atoms; therefore, there is no space *being-traversed* as distinct from the already-traversed and the not-yet-traversed. And the same kind of analysis that thus applies to the foot can be carried out for atoms, too, insofar as they have relations of spatial parts like front and back. Alternatively, if the *being-traversed* is thought of as *partly-traversed*, it can be analyzed according to the analysis of being born that was expressed earlier.⁴⁸ Therefore, it's established: "nor is the *being-traversed* traversed."⁴⁹

Candrakīrti here enlists Vasubandhu's famous argument against the intelligibility of atoms—an argument recurrently exploited by the later Mādhyamikas Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, but not much deployed by Candrakīrti. The "foot" argument (which is not suggested by anything in Nāgārjuna's verses) represents the only part of this chapter that advances an argument with any real similarities to those of Zeno.⁵⁰ Against, then, the thought that the locus of motion might be individuated with reference to the presence there of a walker's foot, Candrakīrti's argument suggests that that space is infinitely divisible—in which case, there can be no specifying just where the foot "really" is. Furthermore, if one concedes that point but argues that one need only indicate the presence of foot-*parts* in order to individuate the locus of motion, Candrakīrti argues that this move fares no better; for even supposedly "atomic" parts thereof turn out to be divisible. Whatever the interest of this argument, it is clearly anomalous, and it is not one that is picked up again; the discussion continues, rather, with a verse suggesting another way to salvage the possibility of individuating the locus of motion:

At this point, it will be objected: A space that's being traversed *is*, in fact, traversed. For in this case,

⁴⁷ The difficulties with Candrakīrti's argument here include not only the fact that it doesn't track anything in Nāgārjuna's text, but also the fact that as the Sanskrit text reads, it seems the foot in question belongs to someone who is walking backwards. Thus, according to the Sanskrit in La Vallée Poussin's edition (which is not emended by de Jong), the space in front of an atom at the tip of the toe is actually said to be included *in the already-traversed* space; correspondingly, the space behind the back of the heel is said to be included *in the space not-yet-traversed*. It seems clear this is reversed, and I am here inclined (following Siderits and O'Brien 1976, pp. 289–290) to read the text as having an errant privative prefix; cf., too, May (1959, p. 54n14) on the Tibetan translators' difficulties with the passage.

⁴⁸ According to La Vallée Poussin, Candrakīrti here refers to a discussion to be found at p. 80 of his edition (where Candrakīrti is commenting on the fourth verse of Chap. 1); there, he argues that "activity in an existent which is being produced isn't possible, either, since there's nothing being produced as distinct from the already-produced and the not-yet-produced." While the point is clearly similar, it is not any further elaborated in the earlier discussion, either, and Candrakīrti's present reference therefore adds little.

⁴⁹ Here, when the last quarter of Nāgārjuna's first verse is quoted to summarize the discussion to this point, the Tibetan translation renders *gamyate* as "is traversed"—rather than (as in the translation of the verse itself) in the epistemic sense reflected in Garfield's translation; cf. footnotes 44–45, above.

⁵⁰ On Candrakīrti's "foot" argument, see the comments of Westerhoff (2009, pp. 130–131, n.7), who provides references to some of the scholarship that especially concerns this passage.

(*MMK 2.2.*) There is motion⁵¹ where there is activity;⁵² and since activity is present in a space *being traversed* (but not in one *already-traversed* or in one *not-yet-traversed*), there is therefore motion in a space being traversed.

[p. 94] In this verse, *activity* is characterized by lifting and placing the foot. *Motion* is present in just the same place where there is activity on the part of an agent of motion (one who is walking); and this activity is not possible in a space *already-traversed*, nor in that *not-yet-traversed*—rather, it’s possible only in one *being-traversed*. And since⁵³ that’s the case, there is therefore *motion* in a space being traversed; for a space where motion is observed is *being-traversed*—and that is affected by an act of motion. Therefore, a space *being-traversed* is, in fact, understood; here, *one occurrence of the verbal root $\sqrt{\text{gam}}$ has the sense of awareness, and the other has the sense of acquisition of a different place.*

Recall, here, the foregoing discussion of the Tibetan translation’s equivocation in verse 1—then note especially that in translating Candrakīrti’s concluding restatement of the third alternative (“the space *being-traversed* is, in fact, understood”), I have this time rendered *gamyate* in the epistemic sense that’s suggested by the Tibetan translation of 2.1d.⁵⁴ I translate thus because we have here (in the concluding phrase that I’ve italicized) the only point in his commentary on *MMK 2* where Candrakīrti explicitly suggests that *gamyate*, as it occurs in the last quarter of Nāgārjuna’s first verse, might be understood not as “is traversed,” but instead in the epistemic sense that the same root not uncommonly has. While Candrakīrti may, however, thus seem to provide warrant for the Tibetan translation of 2.1d, it would be a mistake to conclude that Candrakīrti himself therefore endorses this—as suggested by Bhattacharya, who says, apropos of the first verse: “Perhaps because of Nāgārjuna’s qualification of *gamyamānam* as *gatāgatavinirmuktam*, the early commentators interpreted *na gamyate* at the end of the fourth *pāda*, as ‘it is not perceived,’ ‘is not known.’ Candrakīrti follows this interpretation.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Here, the word translated as “motion” is *gati* rather than *gamana*. While May will suggest that there could be some basis for thinking there is semantic significance to the text’s alternation between these (see footnote 61, below), it’s clear that the two forms are interchangeable; see especially footnotes 103–105, 112, below.

⁵² “Activity” here renders *ceṣṭā*.

⁵³ I thus render Candrakīrti’s repetition of the verse’s *yataḥ* as “since”—and this despite the fact that Candrakīrti arguably reads this word (surely against Nāgārjuna’s verse) as a genitive present-participial form of the verbal root $\sqrt{\text{ī}}$, “go” (given which, the passage I have rendered parenthetically would instead read “of one who is walking, i.e., one who is going”); see, on this point, Saito 1995. Nevertheless, I have rendered *yataḥ* as “since” owing to the facts that, (a), Candrakīrti’s passage will admit of this reading, too; (b), it seems clear that it’s the sense the word has in Nāgārjuna’s verse; and, (c), nothing much hangs on the difference.

⁵⁴ That there is ample scope for confusion here is clear, however, from the fact that despite Candrakīrti’s explicitly saying here that the two different senses of the verbal root $\sqrt{\text{gam}}$ are in play on the view now being considered, the Tibetan translation of *Candrakīrti’s repetition of Nāgārjuna’s clause from 2.1d* this time renders the final occurrence in the sense of “motion”; see, on this, May (1959, p. 55n17). While May is correct that in the present case the epistemic rendering is more natural, he is, I think, unwarranted in applying that as well to the translation of 2.1d itself.

⁵⁵ Bhattacharya (1985, p. 9).

As against Bhattacharya's conclusion, it matters that Candrakīrti here invokes the different senses of this verbal root *in stating the view of an objector*; that is, the voice here represented as exploiting the distinction is that of someone who is trying, *contra Nāgārjuna*, to salvage the idea that the locus of motion *can*, in fact, be individuated. The imagined objector's point in equivocating on *gamyate*, moreover, would seem to be to circumvent precisely the problems that will be raised by the immediately ensuing verses—to avoid the problem, that is, of vacuously making reference to “motion” on both sides of the proposed explanatory statement. Candrakīrti and Nāgārjuna will rejoin, though, by arguing precisely that uses of the verbal root \sqrt{gam} , as those must figure in any proposed explanation of motion, have whatever purchase they do only insofar as they refer to acts of motion; the present interlocutor's evasion is therefore unsuccessful. The present appeal to the verbal root's different senses is not, then, to be taken as something Candrakīrti himself endorses; indeed, the immediately ensuing argument makes sense as refuting precisely the equivocation his imagined objector has just introduced:

Even if it's conceived this way, a space *being-traversed* isn't traversed; saying as much, Nāgārjuna says:

(*MMK 2.3*.) How in the world could it make sense that motion belongs to a space *being-traversed*, when it makes no sense at all that there be a space *being-traversed* that is yet without motion?⁵⁶

In this case, it's precisely in virtue of a connection with the verbal root \sqrt{gam} that you want to refer to a space *being-traversed*; and you further say that that space “is traversed.” In the resulting expression, there is just one act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} ; let this act refer, if you like, to a space's *being-traversed*. But the additional connection of a space *being-traversed* with this action—“is traversed”—doesn't make sense; saying as much, Nāgārjuna says, “How in the world could it make sense that motion belongs to a space *being-traversed*?”

Nāgārjuna gives the reason for thinking this problematic when he says, in the second half of the verse, “when it makes no sense at all that there be a space *being-traversed* that is yet without motion.” Now, the point you want to make is that a space “*being-traversed*” is traversed; but one of your uses of the verbal root \sqrt{gam} is “without motion,” i.e., motion has disappeared from it.⁵⁷ The sense of Nāgārjuna's verse is that since your predication (“is traversed”)

⁵⁶ According to La Vallée Poussin's edition of the Sanskrit, the third quarter-verse has *dvigamanam* rather than *vigamanam*, which recommends translating thus: “when it makes no sense at all that there be *two motions* in the space being-traversed.” This reading is emended by de Jong (1978, p. 36) and Ye (2011, p. 34; see, too, May 1959, p. 55n19); La Vallée Poussin's reading shows up, though, in such translations as that of Sprung (1979, p. 78), and is tentatively endorsed by Siderits and O'Brien (see footnote 57, below).

⁵⁷ Note that the text translated by this sentence (*gamyamānam iti gamyata ity arthaḥ; vīgatagamanam vīgamanam*) is especially elliptical; I take it that it restates the imagined interlocutor's position, with Candrakīrti glossing the verse's “without motion” in the phrase that follows the semi-colon. Note that La Vallée Poussin emends Candrakīrti's gloss so it conforms to his reading of the verse (cf. footnote 56, above, and also de Jong 1978, pp. 36–37, apropos of La Vallée Poussin's p. 94.14). Siderits and O'Brien

doesn't make sense without an act of motion—and there is no such act available because the single act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} is already used up in the other clause (i.e., where you refer to “the space *being-traversed*”), and because there is no second—[p. 95] the meaning of the sentence (“a space *being-traversed* is traversed”) is therefore incomplete. Only this much (“*being-traversed*”) is possible, since there is no second action; you can't say, in addition, that it “is traversed.”

This is the chapter's principal expression of what Westerhoff characterizes as a “property-absence argument”; on this characterization, Nāgārjuna's point here is that “some individual can be said to have a property only if it is at least conceivable that it lacks that property.” Thus, “in order to ascribe the property of motion to the individual that is the presently traversed space, or to the mover, we have to be able to conceive of this individual while the property is absent... But in the case under consideration the individual depends on the property it instantiates.”⁵⁸ While Westerhoff's reconstruction may make sense of the argument, it obscures the more straightforward point here at issue. Note especially, in this regard, that the concessive phrase with which Candrakīrti introduces verse 3—“Even if it's conceived that way” (*evam api parikalpyamāne*)—immediately follows the equivocation on the verbal root \sqrt{gam} that's introduced at the end of Candrakīrti's commentary on the preceding verse; it's clear, then, that it's particularly *the appeal to the equivocal sense of \sqrt{gam}* that Candrakīrti now takes to be targeted by verse 3. Thus, Candrakīrti now adds that *even if* it makes some sense to say, in virtue of the presence of motion in the same place where there is the *activity* of moving, that “it is understood” that a space being-traversed is the locus of motion, there is nevertheless a problem with taking that proposal to give us an ultimate explanatory grip on the phenomenon of motion.

The problem, Candrakīrti now suggests, is that the subject on the left-hand side of the clause (“the space *being-traversed*”) is only *explained* by the predicate on the right-hand side if the latter tells us something about what “motion” *is*. Insofar, however, as the imagined objection of verse two depends on the right-hand side's using the verbal root \sqrt{gam} in a different sense, the predicate clause (“is understood,” on that reading) turns out to tell us nothing about the locus of motion; only a usage of the root in its primary sense of “motion” could do so—but the opponent's proposal in verse two deprives us of just this possibility. It doesn't help, then, to think there might be only one reference to an act of motion in the sentence. If there is a real reference to motion *only in individuating the subject-side of the clause* (only in individuating, that is, the space *being traversed*), then nothing can be

Footnote 57 continued

(1976, p. 290), it seems to me, are therefore wrong to suppose that Candrakīrti's commentary supports La Vallée Poussin's preferred reading.

⁵⁸ Westerhoff 2009, pp. 131–132; it's here that Westerhoff suggests (*pace* footnote 6, above) that Nāgārjuna must presuppose “the Humean principle that for things to be distinct we must be able to conceive of them independently of one another.” For a critique of Westerhoff's characterization of the argument here as a “property-absence argument,” see Oetke (2011, pp. 252–254). (Garfield's interpretation of this verse seems to me to come to the same thing as Westerhoff's; see Garfield 1995, p. 126.)

added to our understanding of *motion* by the right-hand, predicate side of the expression; the predicate *gamyate* (“is traversed”/“is understood”) says nothing at all, in other words, if it doesn't also make reference to motion—if this usage, Candrakīrti says, is one from which reference to motion has “disappeared.” It can't be the case, then, that the candidate answer to the question of where motion takes place—“the space *being-traversed* is traversed/understood”—makes reference to motion only on the subject-side of the expression.

This characterization of the argument has the advantage that it makes good sense of the immediately ensuing verses (as Candrakīrti understands them); thus, verse four will now entertain the possibility that the single connection with “an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} ” is on the *other* side of the subject-predicate clause; when that proves no more successful, verse five will consider whether it helps to acknowledge that *both* sides of the predication involve reference to an act of motion—at which point, the real problem finally comes fully into view. First, then, we consider the possibility that the meaningful reference to motion is instead on the *other* side of the proposed explanatory statement:

Well then, perhaps you accept that it's just with respect to this—i.e., the predicate clause, “is traversed”—that there is a connection with an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} . In that case, in the subject clause's reference to a space “*being-traversed*,” there is no connection with that act; hence, the meaning of the sentence is still incomplete. Arguing as much, Nāgārjuna says:

(*MMK* 2.4:) For one for whom motion belongs to a space *being-traversed*, it follows that *being-traversed* is without motion; for a space *being-traversed* is traversed.

On the view of the proponent whose view is that “motion belongs to a space *being-traversed*”—who accepts, in other words, that the action expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} is the predicate⁵⁹ applied to a space *being-traversed*, where the latter is a technical term⁶⁰ that is itself devoid of an action expressible by the root \sqrt{gam} —it follows that there is an instance of “*being-traversed*” without motion;⁶¹ there would be, for him, something that is *being-traversed* which is yet devoid of motion, since for him (as Nāgārjuna concludes) “a space *being-traversed* is traversed.” (The word ‘for’ at the end of the verse is, then, in the sense of *since*.) Since, for this proponent, a space *being-traversed* can be said to “be traversed” only insofar as it's devoid of motion—and this because the expressible act of motion is already used up in the predicate clause, “is traversed”—it therefore follows that the space *being-traversed* is devoid of motion.

⁵⁹ Translating *ādheyabhūta*.

⁶⁰ Translating *saṃjñābhūta*.

⁶¹ Here translating *gati* instead of *gamana*; on the possible significance of the alternation, see May (1959, p. 57n26).

Despite, perhaps, the difficulty of getting it out of Nāgārjuna's verse,⁶² Candrakīrti's point is again deceptively straightforward: Wanting to salvage the possibility of individuating the locus of motion by referring simply to *the space being traversed*, but without simply repeating the same thing on both sides of the predication, the opponent now suggests that perhaps it is just on the *predicate* side of the expression ("is traversed") that there is any real connection with an act of motion. In that case, Candrakīrti here takes Nāgārjuna to rejoin, there can be no individuating the place *being-traversed* as the subject of that predicate; for that way of individuating a place makes sense only insofar as it refers to (what we're supposedly trying to explain) motion. If, in other words, the only reference to an act of motion is on the predicate side ("is traversed"), one is committed to individuating a *subject* thereof ("the space *being-traversed*") without benefit of referring to any such act (only in that case could the predicate "is traversed" be thought to add anything); but if "a space being-traversed" does not already refer to or presuppose an act of motion, then it just fails to pick anything out.

The discussion to this point then leads quite naturally to verse five, which heads off an opponent's concession that reference to motion might therefore be in play on *both* sides of the expression. In the immediately following verse, then, we finally see fully the point that, I submit, Nāgārjuna has all along been after—viz., that there can be no individuation of the locus of motion that doesn't presuppose (what was supposed to be explained thereby) the idea of motion:

Well then, perhaps one can accept that there's a connection of the act of motion to *both* sides of the predication—to the subject clause *being-traversed*, and to the predicate 'is traversed.' In this case, too,

(*MMK* 2.5) If motion belongs to a space *being-traversed*, two acts of motion are entailed—one owing to which the space is *being-traversed*, as well as the one which is the *motion* that happens here.

[p. 96] A space gains the status of *being-traversed* because of a connection with motion—that's one act of motion; there, in the space being-traversed (which is taken as the locus), there is a second act—the one owing to which the space *is traversed*. This pair of motions is entailed if motion belongs to a space *being-traversed*.

While this verse seems to return to the alternative considered in 2.3 (viz., that reference to motion is made only on the left-hand, subject side of the expression), Candrakīrti takes Nāgārjuna rather to introduce the possibility that the relevant act shows up on *both* sides of the predication; accepting, that is, the preceding verse's conclusion that reference to motion must show up on the right-hand, predicate side,

⁶² Among other things, I find it unclear, both in the verse and on Candrakīrti's interpretation thereof, just how the final quarter-verse ("for the space *being-traversed* is traversed") counts as a *reason* for the problematic entailment; perhaps the point is to emphasize that "being-traversed" could in fact only mean *is traversed*, so that the last quarter-verse makes explicit the contradiction that's involved in thinking there might be reference to motion only on the predicate-side. (That is clearly how Westerhoff takes the verse, whose conclusion he thus renders "but 'presently traversed space' means 'movement takes place there'; see footnote 15, above.) The thrust of Candrakīrti's overall comment, in any case, is clear.

Candrakīrti here reads Nāgārjuna as now anticipating the claim that it *also* shows up on the left-hand side. The resultant problem in that case is that the attempt to individuate the space where motion occurs—which is proposed, recall, as *explaining* motion—now amounts to a vacuous tautology. Thus, if it's accepted both that a space *being-traversed* can be individuated only with reference to motion, *and* that there is reference to motion in saying of this that it “is traversed”—if, in other words, there is reference to motion *on both sides of the supposedly explanatory statement*—the proposed explanation now quite clearly presupposes precisely the point at issue, and therefore explains nothing. Indeed, the proposed explanation now amounts simply to this: *motion takes place where motion is happening*—which is, I submit, all that it means for Nāgārjuna to say that we now have two acts of motion.⁶³

The text then proceeds to elaborate on why that is problematic:

All right, so there are two motions; what's the problem? This is a problem because:

(*MMK 2.6ab*:) Given the entailed pair of motions, two *agents of motion* are entailed...

But what's the reason for the entailment of two agents of motion? Nāgārjuna explains:

(*MMK 2.6cd*:) ...since motion doesn't make sense without an *agent of motion*.

The reason is that an action necessarily requires something to bring it about⁶⁴—requires, that is, a patient or agent; so this act expressible by the verbal root $\sqrt{\textit{gam}}$, insofar as it must be instantiated in an agent, requires an *agent of motion*. But when just Devadatta alone is moving, there is no second agent; so, because there are not in such cases two *agents*, there cannot be two *acts* of motion. And because of that, it doesn't make sense to say that “a space *being-traversed* is traversed.”

It's particularly with respect to this stretch of the chapter's argument that Bhattacharya (1980, 1980–1981, 1985, 1994–1995) has emphasized the grammatical key in which Nāgārjuna's argument is reconstructed by Candrakīrti. While

⁶³ This is, I think, more straightforward than, e.g., on the interpretation of Garfield, for whom the point is that “if the motion is a property of the mover at all, both the mover and the motion must be moving. And this amounts to two separate motions” (1995, p. 127). On Garfield's interpretation, that is, if an agent of motion essentially has the property of *moving*, and if that agent *moves*, then *both the agent and that property* must be moving. While this may also work as a way to capture the problematic entailment Nāgārjuna has shown in 2.5, we do not, I think, have to make any reference to such ideas as what it is “essentially” to “have the property of moving” in order to make sense of the entailment of two motions; the point is just that reference to motion, which was supposed to be explained by the statement in question, shows up in this case *on both sides of the statement*.

⁶⁴ I here follow Bhattacharya's felicitous suggestion (1980, p. 87) for translating *svasāadhanam*, which he renders as “a means to bring it about.” As Bhattacharya further notes, *sādhana*, on this usage, is basically synonymous with the grammarians' term *kāraka*—on which, cf. footnote 65, below (as well as Abhyankar 1961, p. 393, s.v. *sādhana*).

Bhattacharya's emphasis is surely appropriate, it is perhaps misleading to suggest (as Bhattacharya seems to do) that there are peculiarly Sanskritic reasons for the problematic entailments here; it makes as much sense in English as in Sanskrit to suppose that the *agents* of actions are individuated by the actions themselves (one must first have individuated an event of the type "action" before one can so much as inquire into the agent thereof), and that reference to two different acts of motion therefore creates the expectation that there are two agents thereof. While Bhattacharya is, then, quite right to emphasize that it's eminently characteristic of Sanskritic philosophical discourse for problems to be elaborated in terms of the Sanskrit grammarians' *kāraka* analysis of the aspects of expressible actions, I take it that verse 2.6 represents a way to specify—as straightforwardly in English as in Sanskrit—what is problematic in saying, in effect, that "*motion takes place where motion is happening.*" What's problematic is that such an expression makes reference to two *acts* (two acts, though, *of the same kind*)—and if we really have two *different* acts (as we must if one side of the expression is to count as explaining the other), then there must be two different *actors*; insofar, however, as that makes no sense in this case, to show as much is precisely to show that this sentence purportedly explaining motion is incoherent, insofar as it both *must* and *cannot* make reference to two different things.

Candrakīrti continues, elaborating on the Sanskrit grammarians' account of *kāratva* (of "being instrumental in bringing about the action expressed by a verb"):

One might rejoin: When this Devadatta is standing, he speaks and sees; in that case, a single person is seen to exhibit multiple actions. In the same way, there could be a pair of actions in a single agent of motion. But this isn't so; for what's instrumental in bringing about the action expressed by a verb⁶⁵ is a *capacity*, not a *substance*. And it's because of the difference in *actions* that it's clear that there are differences in the capacities for bringing them about; it's not owing to an act of *standing* that one could be individuated as a speaker. If it's objected that there's just one substance in this case,⁶⁶ we can allow that; but the substance [p. 97] isn't what's instrumental in bringing about the action expressed by a verb—rather, the *capacity* is, and that's totally different.⁶⁷ Moreover, we don't ever see a capacity situated in a single locus as the means of bringing about two actions of the same kind; hence, there are not two acts of motion for a single agent of motion.

⁶⁵ With the phrase "what's instrumental in bringing about the action expressed by a verb," I am effectively glossing the word *kāraka*, rather than trying to translate it with a single word; the wording is suggested by Monier-Williams (1970), s.v. *kāraka*.

⁶⁶ I.e., that the single person (a certain Devadatta) performing these various acts is, bodily, just one "thing."

⁶⁷ May (1959, p. 59n33) unpacks the present passage in terms of supposed differences between Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas; Bhattacharya (1980, p. 88) is surely correct to note, though, that May misses the explicitly grammatical discussion that's here presupposed. (Sprung 1979, p. 80, is particularly unhelpful here.)

Doesn't the example of someone who speaks and sees (while also standing) suggest that in fact there's no problem in thinking one might be the agent of two actions? No, for the same reason that a single person isn't counted *twice* (isn't counted *as two agents*) in virtue of performing two different acts of the same kind. The point is that persons are individuated as the agents of actions not in terms of (say) their physical bodies, but in terms of their *exercising the relevant capacities*; and while a bodily single person can simultaneously exercise multiple capacities (such as those of *standing* and *speaking*), it doesn't make sense that he or she can be counted more than once-over as exercising just one such capacity. Thus, it only makes sense to say that someone is individuated *as* exercising the capacity of "agent of motion" in virtue of one act of moving; otherwise, her executing two of the same such acts (sequentially, for example) would, absurdly, make her count as *two* agents of motion. And the point in emphasizing this is again just to show that the foregoing entailment (two different *motions* would have to mean two different *agents* thereof) is problematic.

Again, then, the claim that "motion takes place where motion is happening" could count as *explaining* motion only if there were reference here to two different things (such that what's on the right-hand, predicate side of the expression could give us an explanatory grip on what's on the left-hand side)—which means the conditions for the realization of each of these two actions (e.g., the agents thereof) would have to be different. But insofar as there is, in fact, clearly reference on both sides of the predication to just one *kind* of act, it's absurd to think the two expressions could have different conditions; the claim that "motion takes place where motion is happening" doesn't explain anything, then, just insofar as there can really be no meaningful reference here to two different things—in which case, the usage on the right-hand side just presupposes (and therefore cannot explain) what's on the left-hand side. This, on my reading, is all that Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti have argued to this point.

Moreover, we have now seen all there is to the main line of argument in *MMK* 2, as that is understood by Candrakīrti. (That this is so is clear from the remainder of the chapter, which I have included as an Appendix; the rest of the chapter mostly rehearses precisely the same arguments with respect to slightly different forms of the framing question.) That argument has been to the effect that if we are really to *explain* the familiar action of motion—where "action" (*kriyā*), recall, represents a *person-level* category par excellence—we must, inter alia, be able to specify just where or when⁶⁸ this could ever occur. The question then becomes simply this: can we individuate the locus of motion without presupposing the very idea (*viz.*, motion!) that that is invoked to explain? Nāgārjuna suggests that there are only three possible spaces that are candidates here, and that they can be expressed, temporally,

⁶⁸ As noted above (36), the arguments all work just the same way if the question is (not *where* does it occur but) *when* does motion occur; in the temporal case, too, we will still have the problem that any attempt to individuate a present moment *when motion occurs* can work only insofar as we already have the category of motion available to us as a way to individuate it—we will still have, that is, the problematic entailment of two motions ("motion occurs *when* motion is happening"). Cf., too, footnote 95, below.

in terms of past, present, and future forms of the verbal root $\sqrt{\text{gam}}$;⁶⁹ since it's clearly absurd that motion *be occurring* in a space where motion has *already* or has *not yet* occurred, only one of these is really a live option. Can we make sense, then, of the claim that it is in a space *presently being traversed* that motion occurs (that such a space “is traversed”)? The difficulty is that it would seem that one side of this expression (“a space presently being traversed is traversed”) could really *explain* the other side only if it involves meaningful reference to two different things—or (to express much the same point *pace* McDowell) only if such a sentence did not have to “*use* the words on the right-hand side.”⁷⁰

If, however, there is to be real reference to “motion” only on the left-hand side (individuating the space *being traversed*), then it can add nothing to say of this subject that it “is traversed”; for this predicate is meaningless if it doesn't refer to an act of motion just such as figures on the left-hand side. One might, as suggested both by Candrakīrti's elaboration of the objection expressed at 2.2 and by the Tibetan translation of 2.1d, therefore try to get around this by reading the explanatory sentence as saying instead that “a space presently being traversed *is understood*.” This tells us, though, nothing about what motion *is*, which can be accomplished only by making reference to motion on the predicate-side of the expression. If, accordingly, the real reference to motion is only on the predicate side (only in connection with the phrase “is traversed”), it follows that the subject-expression (“a space *being-traversed*”) fails to pick anything out; for that expression individuates something only insofar as it refers to motion. If it's therefore allowed that there is really some reference to motion on *both* sides of the expression, then there is the problematic entailment that we have *two motions*—which is just to say that our explanatory attempt at individuating the locus of motion now consists in saying only that “motion takes place where motion is happening.” And, that this explains nothing is clear if we consider what it would take for it actually to *say* something; we would, then, really have two different references here (such that one of them could explain the other) only if the statement refers to two essentially different *acts*—but that would require two different *actors*, and it's absurd to think that (say) *Devadatta's moving* could be explained by *Yajñadatta's* doing so (or even by Devadatta's own, different act of moving).

What all this shows is just that our explanatory interest in individuating the locus of motion must presuppose the very idea we'd set out to explain. Recalling, then, such interpretive efforts as Westerhoff's (variously attributing to Nāgārjuna “property-absence” and “property-duplication” arguments) and Oetke's (reconstructing the chapter's basic argument in 16 premises⁷¹), I hope we can see the sense it makes to say that there is really the development of just *one* kind of argument here—a deceptively straightforward argument (again *pace* McDowell) to the effect that in fact, “we have to *use* the words on the right-hand side of semantical statements.”

⁶⁹ This is an important difference from many other phenomena considered in the *MMK*, the options for which more typically admit of expression in terms of a *cauṣkoṭi*; for further thoughts on the significance of this point (which I have not pursued here), cf. footnote 18, above.

⁷⁰ See ca. footnote 32, above.

⁷¹ See footnote 11, above.

We therefore cannot finally *explain* the person-level categories that figure in our common-sense view of the world (cannot finally *explain* such things as our conceptual capacities, where these show up as the subject-side of a supposedly explanatory claim) just insofar as we can only ever do so “without moving outside the conceptual order—without doing more than employing our conceptual capacities.”⁷²

If, then, we keep in view Schayer's contention that motion really figures as the target of Nāgārjuna's arguments in *MMK* 2 only “as an example to demonstrate the general impossibility of action (*kriyā*),” and also (with Candrakīrti) that *kriyā* is “integral to the common-sense view” (*vyavahārāṅgabhūṭā*)⁷³—that action represents, indeed, a *person*-level category par excellence—we can see that the only kind of argument really made in *MMK* 2 is, in fact, of real philosophical significance. The argument is just another instance of the Mādhyamika's larger case to the effect that the Buddhist doctrine of the two truths cannot be understood in such a way that “ultimately real existents” (*paramārthasat*) *explain* the common-sense view that I have characterized as involving a *personal* level of description. To show as much is to show that the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness is misunderstood if it is taken to call for a specification of what “really” exists *instead of* the “selves” we typically take ourselves to be. And the reason for this, as arguments such as the foregoing show, is that any attempt to explain a personal level of description will inevitably turn out itself to be intelligible only relative to that very level of description; indeed, the very act (*kriyā*) of *understanding what a person-level really consists in* is itself something that makes sense only as occurring *at that level of description*. “Understanding” is essentially something that *persons* do; just, then, as we cannot explain *where motion occurs* without already having the idea of motion, so, too, we cannot explain or understand *what persons really are* without already having persons in view. Anything, then, that could figure on the right-hand, predicate side of a statement purportedly explaining *what persons really are* can be so much as intelligible only insofar as we are *using* the words on that side of the expression—but it is only *as persons* that we can do so.⁷⁴

⁷² See footnotes 31, ff., above.

⁷³ Cf. footnotes 24, 28, above.

⁷⁴ It will be noted that on this interpretation, Madhyamaka turns out to have significant affinities with the heretical *pudgalavāda* position rejected by almost all Indian Buddhists (including, according to himself, Candrakīrti, in the *Madhyamakāvātāra*). In fact, the philosophical motivations for that position can be understood as very much like those I have developed here; this is particularly well brought out by Carpenter (forthcoming), who considers the philosophical case for *pudgalavāda* to be motivated especially by circularity considerations that resemble the ones we have seen in play here. With respect, for example, to the question of whether Buddhist Ābhidharmikas are entitled to think they can individuate *santānas* (“continua”) without reference to the “persons” explained thereby, *pudgalavādins* recognize the following circularity: “It is only convenient to grasp a group of aggregates together as a person given some ends; and these ends are conceivable in the first place only by thinking in terms of persons. Having ends presupposes the individuation that ‘useful for some end’ is supposed to engender” (Carpenter, forthcoming). Just, then, as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti (as I read them) have argued that the impersonal *dharmas* posited by Ābhidharmikas cannot *explain* a “personal” level of description just insofar as the *dharmas* themselves are intelligible only relative to (only *at*) that very level, so, too, *pudgalavādins*, on Carpenter's account, are “alert to the fact that the ultra-minimalist Buddhist view inevitably *presumes* the individuation of person-constituting-aggregates and person-constituting streams”; the philosophical

I want to conclude by emphasizing, however, that this is not a finally semantic point; it's a *metaphysical* one. If we keep in view what I take to be the overriding question for Mādhyamikas—viz., how to understand (and how not to) the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness—we can see that the foregoing arguments, though reconstructed in an eminently semantic key by Candrakīrti, are significant not chiefly as analyzing *statements*, but as analyzing *explanations*. What we want to understand, then, is whether we can *explain* “what there really is” and “what persons really are”; that we cannot do so just insofar as any proposed explanation will be intelligible, in effect, only relative to *persons* is a metaphysically significant conclusion—a conclusion, that is, that tells us something about what there is and what we are like.

Appendix: MMK 2.7–25

Having concluded his discussion of how we are to individuate *actions* (namely, with respect to the agents thereof, who are understood as such in terms of their exercising the relevant capacities), Candrakīrti now introduces a thread of the chapter that centers not on individuating the locus of motion, but on individuating the *agents* thereof. The arguments, though, effectively rehearse the same ones we have already seen:

At this point, one might say: Even if all that is as you say, nevertheless, motion is apprehended with respect to Devadatta (the agent of motion), since there's the predication ‘Devadatta moves’; and so, there *is* motion, since there really is an agent of motion who exists as the locus thereof. We reply: that would be so if there were an agent of motion who was the locus of motion; but there isn't. How so? Nāgārjuna explains:

(**MMK 2.7:**) *If motion doesn't make sense without an agent of motion, then how, when there is no motion, could there be an agent of motion?*

The verse says that an act of motion without a locus—i.e., without an agent of motion—is unreal; and so, without (i.e., leaving out of account)⁷⁵ an agent of

Footnote 74 continued

project of the *pudgalavādins* is to avoid this circularity “by acknowledging that in one central case”—namely, that of *persons*—“our convenience does not determine but rather tracks the different ways in which aggregates are related.” Carpenter (personal communication) reports having entertained the hunch that “Candrakīrti effectively took over what was the *pudgalavāda*, then foisted a rather crude view back on the Pudgalavādins under that name” (making it easy for him then to refute *that* version of the doctrine in the *Madhyamakāvātāra*). See, too, Vetter (1992, pp. 495–496); citing an earlier article (1982) to similar effect, Vetter here ventures that “[a]ccepting a person on a preliminary level of truth as having the same reality as the constituents (skandha) of a person seems to be the most individual characteristic we know of Nāgārjuna,” whose works often echo “some kind of *pudgalavāda* milieu in which Nāgārjuna probably grew up.” (Thanks to Anne MacDonald for alerting me to Vetter's articles.) I hereby confess, in any case, to interpreting Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti as having, in fact, real affinities with (a hermeneutically charitable reading of) the “*pudgalavāda*” position.

⁷⁵ Candrakīrti here glosses the word from the verse (*tiraskṛtya*, lit., “setting aside”) that has the sense of “without.”

motion, there is no motion; if there is no motion, how could there be an *agent* of motion (an agent in that case being baseless)? Hence, there is no motion.⁷⁶

Here, perhaps it will be said: There *is* motion, since it's owing to that that there is predication of one possessing it; and the agent of motion, connected with that act of motion, moves *because of his connection with that*. If there were no motion, "he moves" could not be predicated of Devadatta (who possesses motion), just as there can be no predication of being a "staff-bearer" when there's no staff. We reply: There would be motion if there were *this* predication (i.e., "he moves"); but there isn't,⁷⁷ since,

(**MMK 2.8:**) An agent of motion, first of all, does not move; nor indeed does a *non-agent* of motion move. What third person, then, other than agent and non-agent of motion, could move?

[p. 98] In the verse, there's a position according to which "an agent of motion moves"; Nāgārjuna tells us that that one, first of all, does *not* move—and with the next three verses, he will explain just how it is that he doesn't move.⁷⁸ Nor does a *non-agent* of motion move, since a non-agent of motion is by definition one who is lacking any action expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} ; and the expression 'he moves' is rightly applied only in connection with an action expressible by the root \sqrt{gam} . So, if he is a non-agent of motion, how does he move? If he moves, he's not a non-agent of motion!⁷⁹ Perhaps it will be said that one who is without either of these statuses moves. But that can't be right;

⁷⁶ This way of expressing the chapter's recurrent point is particularly reminiscent of Chap. 10's discussion of the relation between fire and fuel, where the point is similarly that neither of these relata is intelligible apart from the other; rather, it is only *as related* that "fire" and "fuel" can come into view as the kinds of things they are taken to be—hence, any account that purports to explain how they come into relation is, ipso facto, already off on the wrong foot. On this line of argument, see Arnold (2012, p. 224, ff.). Cf., too, Westerhoff (2009, pp. 26–27), on the difference between *notional* and *existential* dependence. While it may seem that Nāgārjuna often conflates these (or otherwise obscures the difference between them), there is another possibility—namely, that it is chief among Nāgārjuna's points to question the characteristically Ābhidharmika view that *causal* dependence is the only kind there really is, and to urge that there is an ineliminably *semantic* dimension even to the supposedly privileged level of description that Ābhidharmikas would individuate vis-à-vis causal efficacy. (A "semantic" dimension is evident, e.g., in the fact that causal relations obtain only among events that have first been individuated under some description—which is again to say that the individuation even of the reductionist's supposedly privileged terms must involve the person-level perspective the reductionist had set out to explain.)

⁷⁷ As May (1959, p. 60n42) notes, this phrase isn't in La Vallée Poussin's Sanskrit (nor is it added by de Jong); the Tibetan, though, is surely correct in supplying it. From this point on, there are several instances where this addition is necessary (and where in some cases the Tibetan translation also lacks it).

⁷⁸ As with the chapter's first verse, two of the three alternatives (viz., that a *non-agent* of motion moves, and that someone who is neither agent nor non-agent of motion does so) are easily dispatched; there is really just one possibility to be considered. Here, though, as opposed to the first verse, it is the position stated in the first quarter-verse that represents the intuitively plausible option; insofar, then, as Candrakīrti's comment on the present verse takes up the options in order, he must begin by offering a promissory note, before actually commenting on the two alternatives that can be considered dispatched at this point.

⁷⁹ This is precisely the same rhetorical point made at the end of the second paragraph of Candrakīrti's commentary on verse 1; see footnote 46, above.

for who's the third person, apart from agent and non-agent of motion, who could be imagined as moving? Therefore, there is no motion!⁸⁰

At this point, one could say: it's not a *non-agent* of motion who moves, nor one devoid of both agency and non-agency; rather, only an *agent of motion* moves. But this doesn't make sense, either. Why not? Because:

(**MMK 2.9:**) How, first of all, could it make sense that an agent of motion moves, when an agent of motion without motion doesn't make sense?⁸¹

In this sentence—"an agent of motion moves"—there is only one act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} ; and owing to that act, "he moves" is predicated. But in the specification of an "agent of motion," there is no second act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} ; so, given that an agent of motion without motion (a non-moving mover!) is impossible, it doesn't then make sense that "an agent of motion moves." Let it be said, if you like, that "he moves"; but since it's not possible that he is an "agent of motion," the full expression doesn't make sense.⁸²

Maybe you'll say an agent of motion *is* endowed with motion,⁸³ because of his connection with motion.⁸⁴ Even so, there could be no predication "he moves," since there's no second act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} ; so Nāgārjuna:

(**MMK 2.10:**) For one whose position is that "an agent of motion moves," it follows—just insofar as he accepts that motion obtains for an agent of motion—that there is a motionless agent of motion.

[p. 99] For the proponent whose position is that "there is an agent of motion owing to his connection to an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} ," it would be the case—insofar as he accepts that motion obtains for an agent of motion (i.e., because of his specification of an agent of motion who has an act of motion)—that "*a motionless agent of motion moves*"; this is because there

⁸⁰ The discussion here is syntactically and conceptually parallel to 2.1, simply transposing talk of the relation between motion and the supposed *locus* thereof to talk between motion and the supposed *agent* thereof. Particularly in Candrakīrti's commentary on this, we can see that the transposition does not make the point appreciably different.

⁸¹ This verse clearly parallels verse 3.

⁸² Here again, Candrakīrti's interpretation is precisely parallel to the one he offers of verse 3; there can be no individuating someone *as* an "agent of motion" without reference to motion—in which case, it can't be right that there is reference to motion only on the predicate side of the expression.

⁸³ Here, rendering *gati* rather than *gamana*; cf. footnote 61, above.

⁸⁴ As Candrakīrti's interpretation of this verse will make clear, the point of the present proposal is effectively that the relevant "act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} " is on the *predicate*-side of the subject-predicate expression "an agent of motion moves"—and the problem with this will again be that one can only locate the act of motion on that side at the expense of individuating a *subject* ("agent of motion") without benefit of referring to any such act. Only in that case could the predicate "moves" be thought to add anything—but in that case, the subject-clause "agent of motion" can't be thought to pick anything out.

is no second act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} .⁸⁵ Hence, it doesn't make sense that "an agent of motion moves." In the subject-clause that the proponent of this position is committed to ("a motionless agent of motion"), the term "agent of motion" just means "*he moves*."⁸⁶

Perhaps you'll allow that in the phrase "an agent of motion moves," there is a connection with motion in the case of *both* sides of the expression. Even so,

(*MMK* 2.11:) If "an agent of motion moves," two motions would be entailed: That owing to which he's called an agent of motion; and that which, being an agent of motion, he moves.⁸⁷

"Agent of motion" is said (i.e., predicated) owing to a connection with motion—that's one act of motion; and there's also that which, *being* an agent of motion, he moves (i.e., the act of moving which he does)⁸⁸—these two motions are entailed. Because of this, the same refutation as before (i.e., to the effect that there's the entailment of two *agents of motion*) can be stated. Therefore, there is no predication to the effect that "he moves."⁸⁹

At this point, one might say: Even if all that is as you say, nevertheless there *is* motion, since there really is the predication "Devadatta moves." But it's not so; for the only consideration involving Devadatta is this: Does he move insofar as he's an agent of motion? Or as a *non*-agent of motion? Or as something apart from these? None of these makes sense, so there's no point!⁹⁰

Here, one might say: Motion *does* exist, since there really is the commencement thereof. In this case, by giving up on staying, Devadatta commences motion [p. 100]; and one does not commence things that, like a tortoise-hair coat, do not exist! But we reply: There would be motion if there really were the commencement thereof; but there isn't.⁹¹ This is because:

⁸⁵ The point of the present proposal is again that the relevant "act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} " is on the *predicate*-side of the expression—and the unwanted entailment of holding that position is, again, that there is then no left-over "act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} " that could be invoked to individuate the subject *as* an "agent of motion."

⁸⁶ Candrakīrti here simply makes explicit the contradiction that's entailed on the foregoing interpretation. (I have found the Tibetan translation especially helpful in discerning the sense of this sentence.)

⁸⁷ This verse is hard to render into English insofar as Nāgārjuna's Sanskrit involves a peculiarly transitive sense of "move"—as though, that is, an act of motion is *what* a mover "moves."

⁸⁸ Glossing Nāgārjuna's expression with one that more naturally admits of a transitive use, Candrakīrti here seems to reflect an awareness of the difficulty (*pace* footnote 87, above) with the verse's peculiarly transitive talk of "the act of motion that a mover moves."

⁸⁹ The point here is precisely parallel to the point made at verse 5.

⁹⁰ Again, then, insofar as we are interested in *explaining* motion, an appeal to ordinary linguistic usage does not circumvent the need to specify what it is in virtue of which any person could be individuated *as* an "agent of motion"; the fact that we regularly say (and understand) things such as that "Devadatta moves" does not, that is, give us any explanatory grip on *what motion is* unless the supposed agent here can be specified *as an agent* without presupposing the very category we are trying to understand. (Precisely similar considerations come into play *vis-à-vis* verse 2.22; see especially footnote 119, below.)

⁹¹ Again, the latter phrase is not in La Vallée Poussin's edition of the Sanskrit (or in de Jong's emendation thereof); cf. May, p. 63n54, and footnote 77, above.

(*MMK 2.12:*) Motion⁹² is not commenced in a space *already-traversed*; motion is not commenced in a space *not-yet-traversed*, nor is it commenced in a space *being-traversed*—where *is* motion commenced?

If there were any commencement of motion, that would be commenced in a space *already-traversed*, or in one *not-yet-traversed*, or in one *being-traversed*. Among these options, motion isn't commenced in a space *already-traversed*; for the “already-traversed” is by definition where an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} has been completed—if motion were commenced there, it would not be “*already-traversed*,” since there's a contradiction between past and present. Nor, though, is motion commenced in a space *not-yet-traversed*, since there's a contradiction between future and present. Nor is it commenced in a space *being-traversed*, since that doesn't exist—this is because there would be the entailment of two acts, and hence the entailment of two agents.⁹³ So, thus not seeing the commencement of motion anywhere, Nāgārjuna says: “Where *is* motion commenced?”

And explaining how it is that motion is not possible, Nāgārjuna says:

(*MMK 2.13:*) Prior to the commencement of motion, there is no space *being-traversed*, nor any space *already-traversed*, where motion could be commenced; and how could there be motion in a space *not-yet-traversed*?⁹⁴

In this case, if Devadatta continues staying, then he does not commence motion. Prior to his commencement of motion, there *is* no space *being-traversed*, nor one *already-traversed*, where he could commence motion; therefore, since there is neither a space that's already-traversed nor one being-traversed, [p. 101] there is no commencement of motion in either of these.

Of course, it could be that even if there is, prior to the commencement of motion, neither a space *already-traversed* nor one *being-traversed*, there is nevertheless a space *not-yet-traversed*; the commencement of motion could occur there! To this, we reply: How could there be motion in a space that's not-yet-traversed? A space *not-yet-traversed* is one where an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} hasn't yet been produced—i.e., where an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} hasn't yet *commenced*! It's incoherent that the commencement of motion be there; this is as Nāgārjuna says in concluding the verse by asking, “how could there be motion in the *not-yet-traversed*?”

⁹² Here, “motion” translates the infinitive form *gantum*; literally, then, the Sanskrit (*ārabhyate gantum*) means “it is commenced to move.” Owing, however, to typical Sanskritic usage of the infinitive in passive constructions, the translation is not inappropriate (even though it obscures the fact that we here have yet another form of the verbal root \sqrt{gam}).

⁹³ The Tibetan translation suggests there are three reasons here, but it seems to me to make more sense to say that “because it doesn't exist” is the primary reason, with the other two reasons (already familiar from above) subordinate to that. Clearly, Candrakīrti sees here again the same basic line of argument developed at 2.1–6.

⁹⁴ For 2.13a, I have accepted the reading of Ye (2011, p. 40: *prāg asti gamanārambhād*, with an added negation in *pāda* b; so, too, Lindtner, in de Jong 2004); the same sense can be gotten, though, out of the alternative reading given by La Vallée Poussin (*na pūrvaṃ gamanārambhād*; p. 100).

Even if there is no commencement of motion in any of these (in a space already-traversed, one not-yet-traversed, or one being-traversed), all of these still *exist*—and they don't make sense if there's no motion. To this, we reply: There would be motion if *these* were real; for given the commencement of an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} , a space where the act expressed by this has ceased could be conceived as *already-traversed*; where it's presently happening would be a space *being-traversed*; where it's not yet produced would be a space *not-yet-traversed*. When, however, there is no *commencement* of any act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} , then:

(**MMK 2.14:**) If the commencement of *motion* isn't observed anywhere at all, what is imagined as the already-traversed? What's the being-traversed? What's the not-yet-traversed?

If the commencement of motion is never being apprehended, what is this falsely imagined triad of spaces?⁹⁵ How, pray tell, could motion be a basis for the predication of these?⁹⁶ So, this doesn't make sense.

At this point, someone might say: motion *does* exist, since its opposite really exists—and that which has an opposite exists (think of light and darkness, the near and far banks of a river, doubt and certainty). And there does exist the opposite of motion, i.e. *stasis*. To this, we reply: There would be motion if there were any stasis which is the opposite thereof; how, though, could this stasis be imagined as obtaining for an agent of motion, for a non-agent of motion, or for someone other than these? None of these makes sense, says Nāgārjuna:

(**MMK 2.15:**) An agent of motion, first of all, does not stay, nor does a non-agent of motion stay—and what third, other than agent and non-agent of motion, stays?

[p. 102] Nāgārjuna will explain with the next verse how it is that an agent of motion doesn't stay.⁹⁷ A non-agent of motion doesn't stay either, since he's already *staying*! What's the point of another act of staying?⁹⁸ The problem is the same as before: he's a non-agent of motion in virtue of one act of staying,

⁹⁵ As noted by May (1959, p. 65n.65), the Tibetan here translates *adhvan* (which I have translated throughout as “space”; cf. footnote 40, above) instead as “time,” which is indeed a possible sense of *adhvan*.

⁹⁶ Here again, we have a perfect expression of the recurrent argument: An imagined interlocutor has here proposed salvaging the intelligibility of motion by appealing to the fact that we regularly refer, in ordinary discourse, to spaces that are “already traversed,” etc.; surely it's a condition of the intelligibility of such usage that motion be real. The rejoinder, though, is familiar: these regularly invoked categories cannot be thought of as *explained by* the reality of motion just insofar as motion itself is only intelligible relative to them.

⁹⁷ Cf. footnote 78, above.

⁹⁸ That is, a “non-agent of motion” is ipso facto an agent of *staying*; what could be the point, then, of additionally saying of such a person that “he stays”?

and in virtue of another *he stays*;⁹⁹ there's the entailment of two acts of staying, and because of this the further entailment of two agents of staying. And apart from agent of motion and non-agent of motion, there's no one else it could be!

At this point, someone will say: A non-agent of motion doesn't stay, nor someone who's neither an agent nor a non-agent of motion; rather, it's just an *agent of motion* who stays. But this isn't so, since:

(**MMK 2.16:**) Given that it doesn't make sense that there be a motionless agent of motion, how could it make sense that an agent of motion stays?

Insofar as it's said that "he stays," there can't be any motion on his part (since motion contradicts stasis); but without motion, there can be no predication "agent of motion." Hence, it doesn't make sense to say that an agent of motion stays.¹⁰⁰

At this point, one might say: Motion *does* exist, because of the reality of desisting therefrom. In this case, by desisting from motion, one commences staying; but if there's no moving, one can't desist from it! Again, though, we can respond: There would be motion if there were any *desisting* therefrom; but there isn't, since:

(**MMK 2.17ab:**) One does not stop in a space *being-traversed*, nor in one *already-traversed*, nor in one *not-yet-traversed*.¹⁰¹

Regarding this verse, an agent of motion does not desist in a space *already-traversed*,¹⁰² since there's no motion there; nor in one *not-yet-traversed*, for just the same reason; nor does he desist in a space *being-traversed*, since

⁹⁹ The case is a little less transparent here than in the *two motions* case, since we don't here have two occurrences of the same verbal root; rather, the fact that "he stays" (*tiṣṭhati*) is equivalent to the fact that he is a "non-agent of motion" (*agantā*) just insofar as *gamana* is the opposite of *sthāna*—but there isn't, in this case, the repetition of the same root to exploit as a way to make the contradiction obvious. (Thanks to David Tomlinson for noting this point.)

¹⁰⁰ This is a rather indirect way to point out the contradiction in this case. It would seem more straightforward to argue that an agent of motion can't stay just insofar as *he's an agent of motion*; instead, Candrakīrti argues that if such a person *stays*, then there can be no individuating him as a subject of the kind "agent of motion" in the first place.

¹⁰¹ In fact, this half-verse contains *ablative* declensions of the various forms of $\sqrt{\text{gam}}$, not (as my translation suggests) locative. This syntax suggests translating as I have translated in the immediately preceding passage from Candrakīrti ("desisting *from* motion"); but while it makes sense to desist *from* motion, it doesn't make much sense to desist *from* a space "being-traversed," etc. See, on the verse's syntax (and the Tibetan translation's handling thereof) La Vallée Poussin's note (1970, p. 102n3). In translating as I have, I follow Siderits and Katsura, who render: "[The goer] is not [said to] stop when [on the path] presently being gone over," etc. (2006, p. 144) Alternatively, May (1959, p. 67: "La station ne succède ni au mouvement actuel...") suggests that we have reference to stopping *after* having been moving, etc. Oetke (2011, p. 251) renders: "The [action of] traversing does not desist from [something] that is [presently] being traversed nor [something] that is traversed or [something] that is not [yet] traversed."

¹⁰² Again, it's difficult to construe Candrakīrti's ablatives; it makes sense to speak (as Candrakīrti does in introducing the verse) of desisting *from actions*, but insofar as the participles in Nāgārjuna's verse are all taken to modify *spaces*, it's hard to see what sense it makes to cease *from these*. May (like Siderits and

there's no apprehension of that, and since there's no act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} . Therefore, there is no desisting from motion.

[p. 103] Here, one might say: If motion is non-existent because there is no *stasis* which is the opposite thereof, we can in that case first establish *stasis* in order to establish motion; given the establishment of *stasis*, there can then be the establishment of motion. So: *Stasis does* exist, because of the real existence of its opposite (for motion is the opposite of *stasis*); motion exists, and so *stasis* does, too, because of the real existence of its opposite. But this doesn't make sense either, because:

(*MMK 2.17cd*.) The motion you would here appeal to, as well as its commencement and cessation, are the same as the motion we've already considered.¹⁰³

For the motion¹⁰⁴ which is here explained in order to establish *stasis* is the same as the motion we've already considered¹⁰⁵—which is to say that the same refutation applies. Verse 15 (“An agent of motion, first of all, does not stay”) stated a refutation of *stasis*, the latter having there been taken as being a basis for demonstrating motion; just as in that case, here, too—i.e., with regard to *motion*, now taken as being a basis for the demonstration of *stasis*—a refutation can be stated by changing the reading of these two verses (15 and 16), so that we have instead: “an agent of *staying*, first of all, does not stay,” etc. Hence, there's no motion—nor,¹⁰⁶ because of the absence of that, any

Footnote 102 continued

Katsura, footnote 101, above) here translates as though these are locatives: “L'agent de mouvement ne s'arrête pas dans le trajet [déjà] parcouru...” (1959, p. 67).

¹⁰³ I here read the second half of Nāgārjuna's verse as understood by Candrakīrti, though in this case it's particularly hard to get that out of Nāgārjuna's words alone. Literally, the second half-verse says only “motion (*gamana*), and commencement and desisting, are the same as motion (*gati*)”; but as explained below (notes 104 and 105), Candrakīrti clearly takes the alternation in forms not as adverting to any intrinsic semantic difference, but just as a way to distinguish between motion as *here* adduced, and motion as that's already been considered. Siderits and Katsura apparently construe the ablative-genitive form of *gati* with “commencement and desisting,” rather than (as I have done) with *samā*, and thus take the sense of the verse to be that of emphasizing the applicability of the argument to “commencement and desisting”: “The same [analysis] that applies to the case of the act of going also [applies] to the commencing and ceasing of the act of going” (2006, p. 144). Oetke translates to similar effect: “Beginning and termination [of traversing] is like the [action of] traversing” (2011, p. 251). My translation is suggested, though, not only by Candrakīrti's interpretation, but also by the fact that on the most natural reading of the verse, *samā* clearly construes with *gateḥ*; the subject clause, then, has to be *gamanaṃ sampravṛttiś ca nivṛttiś ca*, and the predicate *gateḥ samā*.

¹⁰⁴ Here translating *gamana*...

¹⁰⁵ ...and here translating *gati*. While the alternation in forms is conceivably significant by itself, I take Candrakīrti in this way to distinguish between motion as *here appealed to*, and motion as that's already been refuted—hence, my translation of *gati* as “the motion we've already considered.” May (1959, p. 68) translates both terms the same way: “Le mouvement (*gamana*) appelé à fonder l'existence de la station, est ‘comme le mouvement’, c'est-à-dire se réfute de la même manière que le mouvement (*gati*)...”; see, though, his translation of an ensuing passage, footnote 107, below.

¹⁰⁶ I read the text's *nāsti* as clearly carried over from the previous clause, which is made explicit in the Tibetan; so, too, May: “Donc le mouvement n'existe pas; ni par suite la station son contraire” (1959, p. 68).

stasis (its opposite), either. In this way, then, the motion here appealed to¹⁰⁷ is to be rejected just the same as the motion we've already considered.

Well, perhaps this could be said: Stasis *does* exist, because of the real existence of the commencement thereof. In this case, by giving up *motion*, one commences staying; and how could that which is commenced not exist? We respond: *Commencement*¹⁰⁸ is explicable the same way as going. In that regard, just as the commencement of motion was previously refuted by the verse (2.12) that begins “motion is not commenced in a space *already-traversed*,” so, too, in this case: by substitution in three verses (i.e., 2.12–14)—so that we have “Stasis is not commenced in a space *already-traversed*; stasis is not commenced in a space *not-yet-traversed*, nor is it commenced in a space *being-traversed*—where *is* stasis commenced?”, etc.—[p. 104] the commencement of stasis, too, is to be rejected in the same way as that of motion.

Well then, how about this: Stasis *does* exist, because there really is the cessation thereof. In this case, insofar as Devadatta (who's staying) desists from staying, he begins *motion*; and if there were no staying, he could not desist therefrom! We respond: There would be stasis if there really were the cessation thereof—but there isn't,¹⁰⁹ since cessation, too, is the same as motion; that is, the cessation of staying, too, is to be rejected in the same way as the cessation of motion. Just as in the negation of motion—a refutation of motion was expressed, recall, in the passage (2.17ab) that says “One does not stop in a space *being-traversed*, nor in one *already-traversed*, nor in one *not-yet-traversed*”—so, too, in the negation of stasis, the refutation is the same as that of motion: “He does not *move* in a space where he's staying,¹¹⁰ nor in one where he's not staying...” Hence, there's no stasis; since that doesn't exist, how could there be any proof of motion for those who propose the real existence of stasis as the opposite thereof?

Moreover, if motion were existent, it would exist either as *distinct* from an agent of motion, or as *indistinct* therefrom—and insofar as it's being critically analyzed,¹¹¹ it's not possible either way. So Nāgārjuna:

¹⁰⁷ Again, “the motion here appealed to” just translates *gamana*; cf. footnote 105, above. At this point, May makes the insertions necessary to understand the passage in the way that I've been suggesting: “Bref, le mouvement [en tant que contraire de la station] (*gamana*) est à écarter comme le mouvement (*gati*) [que l'on voulait à l'heure prouver par son contraire]” (1959, p. 68).

¹⁰⁸ Here rendering *saṃpravṛtti* rather than *ārambha*.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. footnote 77, above.

¹¹⁰ As before (notes 101, 102, above), I here render Candrakīrti's ablatives as though they were locatives.

¹¹¹ Candrakīrti here adds a crucial (and characteristic) qualification: it's only insofar as motion is *being critically analyzed* (*vicāryamāṇaṃ*) that it's appropriate to say it doesn't exist; Candrakīrti's characteristic view is that conventionally real phenomena are defined as such partly by their not being subjected to such analysis, the pressing of which amounts, ipso facto, to a search for something *ultimately* real. See, on this point, Arnold (2005, pp. 160, 271–272n80); see, too, footnote 122, below.

(**MMK 2.18:**) That *motion* is just the same as the *agent* thereof doesn't make sense—but neither does it make sense that the agent of motion is *other* than motion.¹¹²

But how does this not make sense? Nāgārjuna explains:

(**MMK 2.19:**) For if the *agent* of motion were same as *the motion*, it would follow that agent and action are just one thing.

If an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} were indistinct from (i.e., not other than) the agent of motion, then agent and action would be identical—and because of that, there could be no distinguishing between them (as when we say “this is the action, this is the agent”). But *the act of cutting* and *the agent of cutting* are not identical—so it doesn't make sense that the motion is the same as the agent thereof.

[p. 105] But the agent of motion and the motion aren't *different* from one another, either; showing how this is so, Nāgārjuna says:

(**MMK 2.20:**) But if it's imagined that the agent of motion is *different* from the motion, there could be motion without an agent thereof; there could be a motionless agent of motion!

For if the agent of motion and the motion were different, then there could be an agent of motion independent of motion; in that case, a separately constituted motion could be apprehended independent of any agent of motion, in the same way that one might distinguish a blanket from a jar. But a motion that's separately constituted from any agent thereof is not, in fact, apprehended. Nāgārjuna has demonstrated, then, that it doesn't make sense that “the agent of motion is *different* from the motion.”

So then:

(**MMK 2.21:**) How in the world could there be any establishment of these two things, which can be established neither as identical nor as distinct?

According to the foregoing argument, motion and the agent thereof are established neither as *identical* nor as *distinct*; what other way of establishing them could there be?¹¹³ This is why Nāgārjuna asks: “How in the world could there be the establishment of these two things...?” His point is that there *is* no establishment of motion or the agent thereof.

At this point, one could say: Now, it's well-known to everyone that an agent of motion (say, Devadatta) moves; in that respect, in just the same way that (as everybody knows) an actor performs an action, or a speaker utters speech,

¹¹² Note that “motion” renders *gamanam* in the first half-verse, and *gati* in the second; that there is no intrinsic semantic difference between these is clear from Nāgārjuna's here using them indifferently. (Cf., *inter alia*, footnote 103, above.) With this verse, Nāgārjuna finally introduces a distinct line of argument—one that's reminiscent of what Tibetan interpreters will come to characterize as the “neither one nor many” argument.

¹¹³ Here, I translate after May (1959, p. 71).

Devadatta moves that motion owing to which he shows up as an agent of motion—hence, there isn't the kind of problem you've expressed. But this isn't right, either, since,

(*MMK 2.22ab*:) He does not move that motion owing to which he is called an agent of motion....¹¹⁴

[p. 106] Insofar as he's an agent of motion, Devadatta does not, in the first place, move that motion owing to which he shows up as an agent of motion—that is, he doesn't achieve this motion, he doesn't do it,

(*MMK 2.22c*:) ...since he isn't an agent of motion¹¹⁵ before moving.

If¹¹⁶ an agent of motion could be constituted as such before moving, he could move that motion owing to which he shows up as an agent of motion.¹¹⁷ How so? Because:

(*MMK 2.22d*:) ... for someone moves something.¹¹⁸

We see that someone (say, Devadatta) moves somewhere that's apart from him (say, to a village or a city). But there is not, owing to this, an "agent of motion"—one independent of any motion, his status already constituted before that motion in virtue of which he's called an "agent of motion"—who could move there.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Here again, we have a peculiarly transitive use of these verbs of motion (cf. footnotes 87, 88, above); as May here notes, "L'acc. d'objet direct et l'acc. de direction sont ici confondus: GAM-est à la fois verbe intransitif de mouvement et verbe transitif. Le tib. hésite: il rend l'acc. après GAM-en général par le cas absolu... mais il emploie le particule *ru...*" (1959, p. 72n93). May translates: "Le mouvement par lequel l'agent de mouvement reçoit son nom, n'est pas l'objet de son act moteur." This suggests alternatively rendering: "The motion owing to which he is called an agent of motion is not the object of his moving." Cf. Oetke's translation of the whole verse: "The [action of] traversing on account of which a traverser is characterized [as such] this traversing he does not traverse because prior to the [action of] traversing he is not [specified as such]. For somebody traverses something" (2011, p. 251). We will see that as Candrakīrti's comment on the verse unfolds, he is drawn to more intuitive usage, and he comes to emphasize a rather different sort of point than may at first be suggested.

¹¹⁵ "Agent of motion" does not appear in Nāgārjuna's verse, but is clearly suggested by Candrakīrti's commentary.

¹¹⁶ I here omit the pedestrian gloss with which Candrakīrti begins: "'Before moving' [*gatipūrvo*] means before moving [*gateḥ pūrvo*]."

¹¹⁷ Here it's worth noting that I've supplied a lot ("that motion owing to which he is manifested as an agent of motion") for Candrakīrti's pronoun *tām*—which, however, clearly has (as feminine) just this "*gati*" (i.e., *yayā gatyā devadatto gantēty abhivyajyate*) as its antecedent.

¹¹⁸ The last quarter-verse thus gives a reason for why "that motion owing to which he shows up as an agent of motion" could be the "object" of *gacchati* ("moves")—could be so, that is, if it made sense that he could in the first place be constituted as an "agent of motion" prior to any motion; Candrakīrti's main point will then be to deny the antecedent of this conditional.

¹¹⁹ Candrakīrti's examples of accusatives here (*grāmaṃ nagaraṃ vā*) are such as make more intuitive sense with verbs of motion; indeed, he finally takes the point of the verse (if I rightly understand him) again to be precisely that ordinary usage doesn't warrant any conclusions of metaphysically explanatory significance. I thus take the point to be that by saying "Devadatta moves," we shouldn't be understood as individuating anything like an autonomously intelligible "agent of motion." If, then, one is going to appeal to ordinary linguistic usage, one is constrained to say things like "Devadatta moves to the village"; but person-level usage such as this doesn't entitle us to the conclusion that we've thus individuated

Maybe you think he doesn't move the very same motion owing to which he shows up as an agent of motion; rather, he moves something other than that. But this isn't right, either, since:

(*MMK 2.23*:) He doesn't move something other than that motion owing to which he's called an agent of motion, since it doesn't stand to reason that there be two motions in the case of a single agent of motion.

[p. 107] He also doesn't (insofar as he's as an agent of motion) move something other than that motion owing to which he shows up as an agent of motion, since there's the entailment of two motions. That motion owing to which he shows up as an agent of motion, and another which, *as* an agent of motion, he moves—this is the entailed pair of motions. And it doesn't make sense that there be two motions in a single agent of motion; accordingly, your appeal to ordinary usage (“an actor performs an action, or a speaker utters speech”) is refuted.¹²⁰

So, in this way,

(*MMK 2.24–25ab*:) A really existent agent of motion doesn't move any of three kinds of motion, nor does an *unreal* agent of motion do so, nor even one who is both really and not really existent.

With regard to these alternatives, *motion* here is said in the sense “is traversed.” With regard to motion, there might be a really existent agent of motion (who is associated with an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam}); an unreal agent of motion (who is devoid of an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam}); or one who, having the nature of both positions, is both really and not really existent. Motion, too, could in the same way be understood as of three kinds, according to its connection with an act expressible by the verbal root \sqrt{gam} . With regard to all these, a really existent agent of motion does not move any of three kinds of motion—not really existent motion, nor *unreal* motion, nor motion that is both really and not really existent; Nāgārjuna will teach this in Chap. 8, “Investigation of Act and Actor.” In the same chapter, he will similarly explain that an unreal agent of motion doesn't move any of three kinds of motion, either, nor one who is both really and not really existent. And

Footnote 119 continued

anything like an autonomously intelligible *agent of motion*. What's at issue, then, is whether the ordinary, person-level use of verbs of motion (“Devadatta moves”) could ever represent an *explanation* of motion; Candrakīrti's claim here is that it can't—and the reason (again) is that we can only take things like personal names to individuate *agents of motion* (and hence, can only suppose reference to Devadatta might *explain* motion) insofar as we already have the idea of him as moving. (The considerations here recall those in play in Candrakīrti's comment on 2.11; see footnote 90, above.)

¹²⁰ The foregoing appeal to ordinary usage doesn't, that is, entitle us to think we have in hand an ultimately true *explanation* of the phenomenon; the argument is again precisely like the one that unfolds over the course of 2.1–6.

since, in this way, agent of motion, locus of motion,¹²¹ and motion itself—
insofar as these are being critically analyzed¹²²—do not exist,

(**MMK 25cd**.) Therefore, there is no motion, no agent of motion, and no
locus of motion.¹²³

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¹²¹ “Locus of motion” renders *gantavyam* (“to be traversed”), which form of the verbal root \sqrt{gam} makes its only appearance in the chapter here at the very end.

¹²² Significantly, Candrakīrti thus concludes by introducing the same crucial qualification first noted above (footnote 111).

¹²³ After this, Nāgārjuna's last *kārikā* of Chap. 2, Candrakīrti adduces several pages' worth of *sūtra* quotations, which I have not here bothered to translate.

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