

Some more notes on Siderits and Katsura's translations of Ngrjuna's Mlamdhyamakakrik

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Some More Notes on Siderits and Katsura's Translation of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*

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Abstract: In my recent translation (Ferraro 2016) from Sanskrit to Portuguese of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* I have frequently consulted, among many others, Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura's English version (Siderits / Katsura 2013) of the same work. In this review article I present some places where my understanding of Nāgārjuna's words more markedly diverges from their translation. Regarding the ideal of "an English-speaking Nāgārjuna" as a work-in-progress which could be constantly improved, my observations aim to continue the list of remarks presented by Anne MacDonald in her review article (MacDonald 2015) of Siderits and Katsura's work.

Keywords: Nāgārjuna, Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, Madhyamaka School, Buddhist Philosophy, Translation

In her review of Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura's *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way. Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Siderits / Katsura 2013), before offering "a few brief remarks on S&K's translation and interpretation of some randomly selected *kārikās*" (MacDonald 2015: 360), Anne MacDonald presents some criticisms of the methodology used by the two authors. In particular, according to her, a questionable aspect of the work of Siderits and Katsura (hereafter S&K) is their choice to not explicitly confront any of the several translations (in English and several other modern languages) of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) or engage with any modern critical study devoted to this or that individual chapter or *kārikā* of the same work.

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In my recent translation (the first from Sanskrit to Portuguese) of the MMK (Ferraro 2016), I had the lucky chance to consult with Professor MacDonald on countless occasions, over the course of which she gave me many valuable suggestions for how to deal, in general, with such a work, and also offered dozens of punctual “solutions” for the more cryptic passages of Nāgārjuna’s magnum opus. Therefore, I can say that my commented translation, among the many defects which it – due to my personal scholarly limitations and *inasmuch* as it is a *translation* – cannot but have, is devoid at least of some of those that MacDonald identifies in S&K’s work.

In particular, in my version of the *kārikās*, I have frequently tried – within the space limits allowed by the editor – to justify my lexical choices against others, suggested by other authors. And obviously, since the publication of S&K’s book, my comparison with it was punctual and systematic – actually, for everyone who undertakes the enterprise of a new version of the MMK, S&K’s translation is now an indispensable reference, because, despite the shortcomings highlighted by MacDonald, it seems unquestionable that today it is, by far, the best complete commented translation available in English. In this comparison, several divergences have emerged (some of them also due to the different final “linguistic containers”), some of them more macroscopic.

So, the primary aim of this paper is to point out some other passages, besides those indicated by MacDonald in her review, in which S&K’s reading seems more questionable; or, to put it in another way, I will try to justify my way of *understanding* – sometimes, independently of my actual lexical choices – this or that *kārikā* in comparison with S&K’s reading.

More generally, however, this article suggests that “the quest for an English speaking Nāgārjuna” (MacDonald 2015: 357) ought to take the shape of a work-in-progress in which different scholars, starting from the best results achieved until now in translating every verse of the MMK, identify the best solutions – those that, on the basis of rigorous philological and hermeneutical criteria, prove to be, if not *true*, at least *less falsifiable* than others – for rendering Nāgārjuna’s Sanskrit into English.

We observe, indeed, that nowadays, much more than ever was the case in the past, it is possible to conceive of the work of translation – at least, translation into English of the works of ancient authors as much studied as Nāgārjuna – as a collective enterprise, developed on virtual platforms in which the possibilities of comparison, exchange and access to bibliographical sources are almost unlimited.

MMK 2.22

gatyā yayājyate gantā gatiṃ tām sa na gacchati |
yasmān na gatipūrvo ’sti kaścit kiṃcid dhi gacchati ||

A goer does not obtain that going through which it is called a goers,

since the goer does not exist before the going; indeed someone goes somewhere –
(S&K 2013: 40)

Of this S&K’s translation, MacDonald (2015: 364–365) criticizes (1) the version of *ajyate* as “is called” rather than “is manifested”; (2) “obtain” for *gacchati*, instead of “go”; (3) “indeed” for *hi*, instead of “for”; (4) “somewhere” for *kiṃcid* instead of “[on] something”.

I agree with the first three corrections, but I think that S&K have good reasons to support their “somewhere” to render the *kiṃcid* of *pāda* d. Indeed, they have the support of the commentators. For example, Buddhapālita glosses: “Someone goes to something, e. g., a village and a city, since it is separated [from him]” (BPV, tr. Saito 1984: 47); Bhāviveka: “Someone goes somewhere [MMK 2.22.d]. [That is, he does] not [go] to his own self, because it is not possible to act on one’s own self” (PP, tr. Ames 1995: 330); Candrakīrti: “We see that someone, like Devadatta, goes [toward] something like a city or a village being different [from him/from the place where he is now]” (PsP 106.7).

The problem here is that we have an – unlike – transitive use of *√gam*, with *kiṃcid* as its object. MacDonald surmises that this object is the *place* in which the action of going happens, like, for example, one path. But here it seems safer to follow the way in which Sanskrit speakers such as Buddhapālita, Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti understand this object; that is, as the *destination* of the action of going.

Thus “for someone goes somewhere” seems to me the best translation of *pāda* d.

MMK 6.4ab

naikatve sahabhāvo ’sti na tenaiva hi tat saha

If there is unity [of state and subject] there is no co-occurrence; there is not that with which the thing comes together – (S&K 2013: 68)

This is one of the cases pointed out by MacDonald (2015: 326) in which S&K consider the particle *hi* to be pleonastic. Here (as in many other circumstances), instead, its version as “for” seems recommendable. Furthermore, it seems clear – with the backing of the commentators¹ – that here *tena* should be understood in a reflexive sense with respect to *tat*, and not as a *distinct* entity with which *tat* would “come together”. The particle *eva*, which S&K do not translate, has its common “emphatic” meaning, which in English is embedded in the reflexive pronoun *itself* (but in Portuguese could be expressed by a demonstrative adjective such as *mesmo*). Finally, following Candrakīrti (PsP

¹ More clearly, ChL: “It is like a fingertip which cannot touch itself” (tr. Bocking 1993: 157).

139.8), who considers this verse as a reply to the objection that *rāga* and *rakta* could not occur “successively” (*paurvāparyeṇa*), the translation of *sahabhāva* with “simultaneity” seems preferable to “co-occurrence”. This does not preclude the possibility – as Bugault (2002: 96–97) remarks – that in the rest of the chapter (beginning with the *pādas* cd of this same *kārikā*) *sahabhāva* has the less temporal meaning of “co-existence”, “togetherness” or “co-occurrence”.

Thus, a most appropriate version of the half-verse would be: “There is no simultaneity in identity, for something (*tat*) could not be simultaneous with itself (*tena*)”.

MMK 6.9 cd

ṛthagbhāvāprasiddheś ca sahabhāvo na sidhyati |
katamasmin ṛthagbhāve sahabhāvaṃ satīcchasi ||

And if distinctness is not established, co-occurrence is not established.

If there is distinctness of the two, in which do you posit co-occurrence?

– (S&K 2013: 70)

S&K consider *ṛthagbhāve ... sati* as a locative absolute (of hypothetical value) and *katamasmin* as a simple locative, understood as a locative complement.

Alternatively, if we look at *katamasmin* as part of the locative absolute, we get something like: “on the basis of which kind of alterity do you want/surmise simultaneity?”.

In other words, Nāgārjuna, after observing in the first half-verse that otherness/distinctness is lacking then simultaneity is inadmissible, ironically asks his opponent, in the second half-verse, whether perhaps some other kind of otherness (different from that ruled out in the previous verses) exists, from which simultaneity could be established.²

MMK 7.5ab

utpādotpāda utpādo mūlotpādasya te yadi |

[Reply:] If, according to you, origination is what originates the primary origination [...] – (S&K 2013: 75)

S&K recognize, in the translation of the previous *kārikā*, the distinction – according to Candrakīrti, of *sāṃmitīya* origin (*Prasannapadā*, PsP, 148.1) – between “origination of origination” (*utpādotpāda*) and “primary origination” (*mūlotpāda*). However, here, for some reason, they do not translate *utpādotpāda* as “origination of origination”.

² A similar reading of this half-verse is what we find, again, in ChL: “In terms of what kind of difference do you want to speak of a unity of characteristics?” (tr. Bocking 1993: 160).

A more consistent version of the verse would be: “If, according to you, origination of origination is the inception (*utpāda*) of primary origination [...]”

MMK 8.2

sadbhūtasya kriyā nāsti karma ca syād akartṛkam |
sadbhūtasya kriyā nāsti kartā ca syād akarmakaḥ ||

There is no activity (*kriyā*) with respect to an agent that is real, [so] the object would be without agent.

There is no activity with respect to an object that is real, so too the agent would be without an object – (S&K 2013: 91)

The general sense of this verse is to argue in favor of what has been said in the first half of the previous *kārikā* (8.1): “a real agent does not bring about a real action” (*sadbhūtaḥ kārikaḥ karma sadbhūtaṃ na karoty ayam*).³

S&K closely follow the commentators’ readings – the one by Candrakīrti is particularly clear – of this verse. For this, they take two “heavy” decisions: (1) they render the same sentence – *sadbhūtasya kriyā nāsti*, in *pādas* a and c – in two different ways; (2) they give the *cas* in *pādas* b and d a consecutive meaning (which is not immediately present in the semantic range of *ca*).

Whilst I personally consider the interpretation of this *kārikā* made by S&K to be consistent, however, the fact is that it is an *interpretation* and not an actual translation (which should be open to more than one interpretation).

In this case, it would be better to leave to their commentary the task of presenting their own interpretation of the *kārikā* and to translate it in a way that could somehow be supported by the Sanskrit, as, for example, resorting to the possible

³ In their translation of this *parikṣā*, S&K opt for reading *karman* as “object” rather than “action”. The reason for this choice is that here Nāgārjuna would be following the terminology of the school of Grammarians (S&K 2013: 89). Now, it is true that Candrakīrti glosses the first occurrence of *karman* in the *parikṣā* in a *vaiyākaraṇa* fashion: *kriyata iti karma kartarīpsitataṃ* (PsP 180.14), that is, “*karman* is what is done, i. e., the main objective of the agent” (or, literally, “what is most desired by the agent”); this seems to justify the version of *karman* as “object” (even though it does not exclude the possibility of rendering *karman* as “action”). However, the next two occurrences of *karman* are glossed by the same commentator in a way that turns “action” into a more suitable translation of it: in PsP 181.8–9, as an example of a *karman* with no agent, Candrakīrti gives the “the fabrication/making (*karāṇa*) of a pot by the daughter of a barren woman” (*karāṇa*, in the Grammarians’ terminology, would be the *instrument* of the action); in PsP 181.18, the example for an agent with no *karman*, is “the [attribution of the] agency of an unforgivable sin for a not committed (*akṛta*) unforgivable sin” (*akṛtānantaryakarmaṇaḥ ānantaryakarmakāratva*).

So, given that the rendering “action” for *karman* is at least as (or more) likely as “object”, I prefer the first option, because it seems to me that the dichotomy “agent/action” shows more immediately than “agent/object” Nāgārjuna’s aim, in the eighth chapter of MMK, of proving that the idea of *katṛ/karaka* and that of *karman* are reciprocally originated and dependent.

version of “*ca ... ca*” as “both ... and”: “There is no activity with respect to a real [entity], both [if] the agent were without action and if the action were without agent”.

MMK 9.12

*prāk ca yo darśanādibhyaḥ sāmpratam cōrdhvam eva ca |
na vidyate 'sti nāstīti nivṛttās tatra kalpanāḥ ||*

What entity is prior to seeing and the rest, what entity is simultaneous, and what entity comes after – these do not exist; the concepts of existence and nonexistence no longer apply there – (S&K 2013: 106)

It seems to me that this translation does not clearly display the syntactical relation between *yo* of *pāda* a and *tatra* of *pāda* d. We can also think that here *na vidyate* – differently from the several occurrences within the MMK in which this formula could be rendered as “does not exist” – has the more literal meaning of “is not found”, “is not seen”. Lastly, it could be questioned whether the version of *nivṛttās* as “no longer apply” is better than, for example, “cease”, or “vanish”.

A more intelligible translation of the stanza could be something like: “Regarding that (*tatra*) which (*yo*) is not found prior, simultaneously and even (*eva*) after to seeing, etc., the categories of existence and nonexistence cease”.

MMK 10.3cd

punarārambhavaiyarthyaṃ nityadīptaḥ prasajyate ||

It being permanently alight, it would follow that restarting is pointless – (S&K 2013: 111)

Apparently, in this case, the translation does not follow the Sanskrit (of La Vallée Poussin’s 1913 and de Jong’s 1977 editions) quoted by S&K but that of Ye’s edition, which homologates the emendation proposed by MacDonald (2007: 46) of *nityadīptaḥ* with *nityadīpte*. Indeed, while the locative absolute (with the implied participle *being*) *nityadīpte* justifies the translation “it being permanently alight”, the same translation does not seem appropriate for the nominative *nityadīptaḥ*.

MMK 12.8⁴

*syād ubhābhyāṃ kṛtam duḥkham syād ekaikakṛtam yadi |
parākārāsvayaṃkāraṃ duḥkham āhetukaṃ⁵ kutaḥ ||*

Suffering might be made by both self and other if it were made by one or the other.

⁴ In S&K’s translation, this *kārikā* is the ninth, because based on past editions of the MMK, they consider as the sixth stanza of Chapter 12 a *kārikā* not included in Ye’s edition.

⁵ S&K do not accept MacDonald’s correction (2007: 34), homologated in Ye’s edition, of *ahetukaṃ* (of La Vallée Poussin and de Jong’s editions) with *āhetukaṃ*, whose meaning, in Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit, is the same as *ahetukaṃ*, but which is used here by Nāgārjuna for metrical reasons.

And how can there be a suffering not caused by self or other, or that is causeless? – (S&K 2013: 134)

After ruling out, in previous *kārikās*, the possibility of auto- and hetero-causation of suffering, in this verse Nāgārjuna rejects the two remaining possibilities of the tetralemma: (3) that suffering is *both* self- *and* other-made; (4) that suffering is without cause.

In S&K’s translation, the presence of the disjunctive conjunction “or” (which has no correspondence in the original Sanskrit) before the causeless hypothesis makes us think that according to these authors the compound *para-a-kāra-a-svayaṃkāraṃ* of the *pāda* c does not belong to the possibility (4) but is still included in the hypothesis (3). However, this would be problematic, because it would mean that Nāgārjuna, instead of ruling it out, is actually *admitting* the hypothesis (3). Indeed, the answer to the – rhetorical – question “how can there be a suffering not caused by self or other?” could only be that suffering is definitely *caused* by self or other; and indeed in the half-verse ab it had been said that the hypothesis (3) vindicates precisely *under the condition* that suffering “might be made by both self and other”.

Now, against this problematic conclusion, it seems clear that only the *pādas* ab are actually committed to the hypothesis (3), whilst the *whole* part cd is devoted to the exclusion of the possibility (4), that of a *non-caused* arising of suffering. So, the translation of the *pādas* cd should be: “[And] how could there be a causeless suffering, [that is, a suffering] whose author is neither itself nor other?”

We can observe here that Nāgārjuna makes explicit what in MMK 1.1 was implicit, i. e., that the hypothesis “causeless” is nothing more than the fourth possibility of the tetralemma, namely that of the “neither ... nor”. After all, that *para-a-kāra-a-svayaṃkāraṃ* is part of the fourth horn of a tetralemma is confirmed by the fact that the source of this tetralemma is the word of the Buddha, who, more than once, asserts the wrongness of the four hypotheses of arising – of suffering, for example, in Saṃyutta Nikāya II.1.17; or of the self, in Udāna VI.5.55 – according to the modalities: (1) *sayamkata* (“self-made”); (2) *paramkata* (“other-made”); (3) *sayamkata-paramkata* (“self- *and* other-made”) and, indeed, (4) *asayaṃkāra aparāṃkāra adhicca* (“causeless, [that is,] neither self- nor other-made”).

MMK 13.2

*tan mṛṣā moṣadharmam yad yadi kiṃ tatra muṣyate |
etat tūktam bhagavatā śūnyatāparidīpakam ||*

If the Buddha’s statement ‘Whatever is deceptive in nature is vain’ is true, then what is there about which one is deceived? This was said by the Blessed One for the illumination of emptiness – (S&K 2013: 139)

The translation of the question – *kiṃ tatra muṣyate* – in *pāda* b looks unlikely in all the contemporary versions of this *kārikā* that I consulted. Most frequently, translators disregard the passive form of *muṣyate*, and propose solutions such as: “What is there which deludes?” (Inada 1993: 92); “[W]hat, in that case, is deceptive?” (Nietupski 1996: 126); “[W]hat deceives” (Garfield 1995: 208). More literal translations – such as, for example, “che cosa mai, allora, è ingannato?” (Gnoli 1979: 81) or “what is deceived?” (Jones 2010: 15) – present questions in such a way that it is not clear in which sense they could stem from the statement of the first part of the half-verse: “if whatever is deceptive in nature is vain”.

Other scholars choose to disregard the Sanskrit of the *kārikā*, reaching solutions which, to my view, are hardly intelligible. For example: “[S]ur *quoi* porte alors la déception?” (Bugault 2002: 170); “¿[Q]ué hay trás el engaño?” (Vélez de Cea 2003: 99).

S&K’s solution – based on *Akutobhayā* – has the virtue of providing an intelligible reading of the entire verse. However, it could also be charged with being textually unjustified, because it introduces into Nāgārjuna’s question a subject (“one”) and an indirect complement (“about which”) which have no correspondence in the Sanskrit of the verse.

My proposal for dealing with this *kārikā* is to start from a simile that we find in Buddhapālita’s commentary, which says that, “if [something] were deceived, robbers (*caura*) would also attack the wealth of a *Pāśupata* (a worshipper of Śiva Paśupati) and a *Nirgrantha* (a naked Jaina)” (BPV. tr. Saito 1984: 180). Now, the *Pāśupatas* and the *Nirgranthas* are naked ascetics, who have no goods at all, so it is impossible *to rob* something from them. This simile consents to surmise that Nāgārjuna, in *pāda* b of his verse, is using the verb $\sqrt{muṣ}$ in its primary meaning – different from the one from which the noun *moṣa* derives – of “to steal, rob, subtract” and that, therefore, the half-verse ab could be read as “if whatever is deceptive in nature is false, what is here *subtracted*?”⁶

This reading makes perfect sense if we consider that the stanza, according to all the ancient commentators, is Nāgārjuna’s reply to a charge of nihilism (by opponents of the *Mādhyamikas*) occasioned by the previous verse, which asserts

⁶ The idea of “subtraction” or “theft” is present in the translation of this *kārikā* suggested by Oetke (1992: 206), who, however, does not consider the half-verse ab as Nāgārjuna’s reply to the objection that the commentators identify at the end of their gloss of the previous stanza, but rather as the objection of one of Nāgārjuna’s opponents, to which the part cd of the verse would reply. Oetke’s version is: “*Objection*: If that which has the *dharmā* of theft/fraud is false/feigned, what [is it then which] becomes ‘robbed’/feigned (i. e. feigned as being otherwise than it actually is) (= What is the bearer of the *dharmā* of ‘theft’/fraud)? *Answer*: The Venerable has said this as a means of kindling/stimulating/indicating emptiness”.

that, according to the Buddha, all *dharmas* are illusory. Therefore, to an opponent who insinuates that saying that “all *dharmas* exist deceptively” is the same as saying that “nothing exists”, Nāgārjuna replies that, given that all *dharmas* are illusory, there is no existence that is *subtracted* to them by the contentions of *Mādhyamikas*: in the same way as it is impossible to steal goods that do not exist (or, according to the image of MMK 7.31, in the same way as it is impossible to cut a head that does not exist, because it was already cut),⁷ it is also impossible to subtract an *inexistent existence*.

MMK 13.3

bhāvānām niḥsvabhāvatvam anyathābhāvarśanāt |
nāsvabhāvaś ca bhāvo 'sti bhāvānām śūnyatā yataḥ ||

[Objection:] For existents there is lack of intrinsic nature, because they are seen to alter.

There is no [ultimately real] existent that is without intrinsic nature, due to the emptiness of existents – (S&K 2013: 140)

S&K's translation rests on a gloss of the *Akutobhayā* that suggests that the word *bhāva*, in *pādas* a and d, means “existents” in the sense of “person and other things that are composite in the first sense”, whilst the “existents” in *pāda* c “are *dharmas*, things that are only composite in the second sense” (S&K 2013: 140).⁸

The supposition that Nāgārjuna uses the same word, within the same *kārikā*, in two different meanings (that is, in Fregean vocabulary, the same name with two different *references*) gives rise to perplexities which would be drastically reduced only if it were proved that the *Akutobhayā* is actually a *svayṛtti*. On the other hand, if the meaning of *bhāva* were the same within *pādas* c and d, the translation of the verse proposed by S&K would be asserting something totally inconsistent, like “no existent is empty, due to the emptiness of existents”.

⁷ The fact that Saito, in his translation of the BPV, introduces the paradox of the two naked ascetics being robbed with “if something were *deceived*” and not “if something were *robbed*” could arise from the circumstance that the Tibetan translator of Buddhapālita's *ṛtti* – not grasping the semantic nuance that allows the Indians to play with the double meaning (“to steal” and “to deceive”) of *ṛmuṣ* and consents that *moṣa* and *muṣyate*, in Nāgārjuna's *kārikā*, means respectively “deceptive” and “is subtracted” – uses the same word *slu* to render both the words.

⁸ As MacDonald (2015: 360) does not fail to underline, S&K's translation – here and elsewhere – of *saṃskāra* as “composite thing” instead of “conditioned thing” is inappropriate. As Stcherbatsky (1923: 40, note 1) puts it: “The translation of *saṃskṛta-dharma* as ‘compound’ is a *contraditio in adjecto*. A *dharma* is never compound, it is always simple. Wherever there is composition there are several *dharmas*.”

S&K consider this *kārikā* as the *objection* of a “substantialist” opponent of *Mādhyamikas*, who, in the half-verse ab, recognizes that phenomenal entities (things and persons) actually lack intrinsic nature; in *pāda* c he asserts that, instead, *dharmas* have intrinsic nature and, in *pāda* d, that this intrinsic nature is nothing more than the very emptiness.⁹

This reading is endorsed by other contemporary authors who, however, in order to justify it, have to somehow *strain* – like S&K do inasmuch as they give different meanings to the occurrences of *bhāva* within the verse – the Sanskrit text.¹⁰ They, nonetheless, find support in the commentaries of Candrakīrti and Bhāviveka, who actually present the verse as the point of view of an opponent of Nāgārjuna.

Yet, this reading is neither the only possible nor the most convincing reading of MMK 13.8. Indeed, the BPV offers a different explication of this *kārikā*, according to which it expresses a genuine point of view of Nāgārjuna (and not that of an opponent):

As a thing without own-nature does not exist and the emptiness of things has also been taught, therefore, we should understand that he stated «things are without own-nature» because the nature of things is inconstant and they are seen to alter.¹¹

9 In other words, the opponent would be pointing out a *prasaṅga* consequence in Nāgārjuna’s position: his exclusion of the own nature of everything implies that all entities have emptiness as their own nature.

10 Oetke, for example, besides his main translation (Oetke 1992: 206), which presents the content of this *kārikā* as an authentic Nāgārjunian point of view, offers an alternative reading (Oetke 1992: 207, n. 19), which would express the objection of one of Nāgārjuna’s opponent. However, according to the same scholar, in order to support this alternative version, it is necessary to differentiate the meanings of *niḥsvabhāvatva* of *pāda* a (to be understood as “essenceless/lack of own nature”) and *asvabhāva* (“essenceless/without own nature”) – a straining that, even though it “should not be ruled out”, is qualified by Oetke as “slightly artificial”.

Also, Nietupski (1996: 117 e 127–128) presents this verse as an anti-*Madhyamaka* position. Yet, in order to do this, he inserts a negation in part ab of the *kārikā* which allows him to read *pāda* a as “There is *no* lack of self-nature”: a sentence that, with no need of specifications, could well be pronounced by one of Nāgārjuna’s opponents. However, obviously, the problem is that within the Sanskrit of the half-verse ab there is nothing at all that allows for the presence of a “no” in the English translation.

Another reading of MMK 13.3 as the point of view of an opponent is that of Inada (1993: 92): “(The opponent contends) [...] From the perception of varying natures all entities are without self-nature. An entity without self-nature does not exist because all entities have the nature of *śūnyatā*”.

The translation of part cd is very clear, but definitely not faithful, as long as the original text does not justify a sentence like “all entities *have the nature of*”.

11 BPV, tr. Saito 1984: 181.

That the position expressed by *pādas* ab – “the fact that things change is a proof that they have not intrinsic nature” – could be authentically *madhyamaka* is unquestionable. In order to consider *madhyamaka* also the half-*kārikā* cd, it is only necessary to read *pāda* c (*nāsvabhāvaś ca bhāvo ’sti*), rather than “there is no existent that is without intrinsic nature” (which in fact does not seem to express a Nāgārjunian position) as “an entity with no intrinsic nature does not [ultimately] exist”: also, a very typical *madhyamaka* statement.

Finally, if we give to the *yataḥ* of *pāda* d – as suggested by Bugault (2002: 171) – a consecutive (“en suite de quoi”) and not a causal (“puisque” or “due to”) meaning, we get a translation like:

“For entities there is lack of intrinsic nature, because they are seen to alter.

An entity with no intrinsic nature does not [ultimately] exist – therefore [we teach] the emptiness of entities.”

It can be observed that this solution, inasmuch as it does not require any forcing of Nāgārjuna’s text (such as the one that ascribes different meanings to the three occurrences of the word *bhāva* within the *kārikā*), is more “economical” than the one presented by S&K.¹²

MMK 20.10

janayet phalam utpannaṃ niruddho ’staṃgataḥ katham |
hetus tiṣṭhann api katham phalena janayed vṛtaḥ ||

How could what is ceased and ended produce an arisen effect?
How, on the other hand, could a cause that is connected with the effect, though enduring, produce that effect? – (S&K 2013: 220)

The word that S&K translate as “connected” is *vṛtaḥ*, probably because the gloss of *vṛta* offered by Candrakīrti is *saṃbaddha*, which actually could be firstly rendered as “connected” or “bounded”.

The problem is, however, that the idea of “connection” is not present within the semantic range of *vṛta*, which rather means “concealed” or “covered”. So, in this case, instead of extending the sense of “connection” to *vṛtaḥ*, it seems more appropriate to give to the *saṃbaddha* used by Candrakīrti a sense that is more close to “concealing”, such as, for example, “enveloped” or “wrapped”.

It seems, in conclusion, that Nāgārjuna, after excluding, within part ab of this *kārikā*, that a *ceased* cause could produce any effect, in cd denies that a

¹² The reading of *kārikā* 13.3 as expressing the point of view of Nāgārjuna and not that of an opponent is shared by many contemporary translators, such as Garfield 1995, Kalupahana 2006, Bugault 2002 or Gnoli 1979.

cause (like a seed) could produce anything while “continuing to exist” (*tiṣṭhan*) *concealed* by the effect (the sprout): “How, on the other hand, could an enduring cause, wrapped by the effect, produce?”

MMK 23.7

rūpaśabdarasasparśā gandhā dharmāś ca ṣaḍvidham |
vastu rāgasya doṣasya mohasya ca vikalpyate ||

[Opponent:] Concerning desire, aversion, and delusion, there is constructed six kind of object taken as real – color, sound, taste, touch, smell, and the object of inner sense (dharmas) – (S&K 2013: 257)

The choice of translating *vikalpyate* as “there is constructed” and *vastu* as “object taken as real” leads to quite a confused version of this *kārikā*. Candrakīrti (PsP 456.6) glosses *vastu* with *ā lambana*, “objective support”. Bhāviveka explains *asmin vasatīti vastu* as “[b]ecause (something) dwells in this, it is an object” (translation by Ames 1986: 327). So, according to these commentators *vastu* should be understood as “base” or “substrate”. On the other side, there is no apparent reason to translate *vivikṣp* as “to construct” rather than “to conceive”, “to imagine” or “to surmise”.

Thus, a clearer translation of the verse would be: “Color, sound, taste, touch, smell and the object of inner sense – [this] is conceived as the sixfold substrate of desire, aversion and delusion”.

MMK 23.9

aśubhaṃ vā śubhaṃ vāpi kutas teṣu bhaviṣyati |
māyāpuruṣakalpeṣu pratibimbameṣu ca ||

How will their [determination] as either bad or good come to be, when they [colors, etc.] are like the image of an illusory person and the same as a [mere] reflection? – (S&K 2013: 258)

A minor remark, extended to the translation of the whole chapter, is that the choice – upheld by S&K since the first verse – to render *aśubha* and *śubha* as “bad” and “good” does not seem the most felicitous; as a base of “aversion” (*dveṣa*) and “desire” (*rāga*), the pair “pleasant/unpleasant” (which, however, the two authors – p. 255 – consider) seems more appropriate.

Regarding the rest of this *kārikā*, the interpretation of *teṣu māyāpuruṣakalpeṣu pratibimbameṣu ca* as a locative absolute is questionable. The reading of it as a simple place complement would allow for a translation that seems more sound: “How will either the unpleasant or the pleasant come to be *in regard to* those [perceptions that are] like the image of an illusory person and the same as a [mere] reflection?”.

MMK 24.13

*śūnyatāyām adhilayaṃ yaṃ punaḥ kurute bhavān |
doṣaprasaṅgo nāsmākaṃ sa śūnye nōpapadyate ||*

Moreover, the objection that you make concerning emptiness
cannot be a faulty consequence for us or for emptiness – (S&K 2013: 275)

The insertion of “or” between *asmākaṃ* (a genitive) and *śūnye* (a locative) seems a bit arbitrary. A more precise translation would be: “Moreover, the objection that you make concerning emptiness is not a faulty consequence of ours, [for] it does not apply to the empty”.¹³

MMK 24.23

svabhāvaparyavasthānān nirodhaṃ pratibādhase ||

You deny cessation through your maintaining intrinsic nature – (S&K 2013: 280)

The meaning of *paryavav/sthā*, which in “classical” Sanskrit is something like “to be firm” (and then, by extension, also “to maintain”), in “Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit” is rather that of “to be possessed, ensnared”, which justifies a translation such as: “Being obsessed by [the notion of] intrinsic nature, you deny cessation”.

MMK 24.25

*yadā duḥkhaṃ samudayo nirodhaś ca na vidyate |
mārgo duḥkhanirodhaṃ tvāṃ katamaḥ/katamaṃ prāpayiṣyati ||*

When there is neither suffering nor the arising and cessation of
suffering,
then, what kind of path will lead you to the cessation of suffering? –
(S&K 2013: 281)

Of the two corrections to the editions La Vallée Poussin (1913) and de Jong (1977) proposed by MacDonald (2007: 38–40) and homologated in Ye’s edition (2011) – (1) *duḥkhanirodhaṃ tvāṃ* instead of *duḥkhanirodhatvāt* and (2) *katamaṃ* instead *katamaḥ*¹⁴ – S&K only accept the first. In fact, the translation of Ye’s

¹³ In a personal communication of May 2014, MacDonald told me that there are textual indications (such as the manuscript of Avalokitavrate’s *Prajñāpradīpa-ṭīkā* used by Jñānagarbha and Klu’I rgyal mtshan for its translation in Tibetan) that support the reading *doṣa-prasaṅgena-asmākaṃ* instead of *doṣa-prasaṅga nāsmākaṃ*. This would lead to a translation like: “Moreover, the objection that you – by ascribing to us a faulty consequence – make to emptiness does not apply to the empty”.

¹⁴ The Sanskrit of La Vallée Poussin and de Jong’s editions compels us to translations that are actually quite unlike, such as, for example: “When suffering as well as its arising and ceasing are not evident, through the cessation of suffering where will the path lead to?” (Kalupahana

version would be: “When there is neither suffering nor the arising and cessation of suffering, what kind of cessation of suffering will the path bestow to you?”. So, according to Ye’s edition, what would be in question, here, would be (again) the “kind of cessation” and not (in tune with La Vallée Poussin and de Jong’s editions) the “kind of path”.

S&K’s version – which seems to be confirmed by Candrakīrti – is equally (if not more) logical than the one based on the emended Sanskrit. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to know if S&K have some consistent argument for accepting just a part of MacDonald correction.

MMK 27.4

*sa evātmēti tu bhaved upādānaṃ viśiṣyate |
upādānavinirmukta ātmā te katamaḥ punaḥ ||*

If it were that ‘That is just myself’ [then appropriation would not be distinct from the appropriator ‘I’]; however, appropriation is distinct.

How, on the other hand, can your self be utterly distinct from appropriation? – (S&K 2013: 320)

S&K’s translation here seems too free and not very clear. The insertion, in the first half-verse, of the reflexive first person pronoun (“myself”) – even though Nāgārjuna quotes, in the previous verses, the point of view of one who says “I existed in the past” or “I did not exist” – does not seem justified. Moreover, for the intelligibility of the verse, the rendering of *sa eva* as “identical” or “the same” would be better than as “that is just” chosen by S&K. As regards the option of translating *upādāna* in a literal fashion, as “appropriation”, with no remittal (for example, in brackets) to the notion of *skandha* – which here and elsewhere within the MMK is implied¹⁵ – does not facilitate the comprehension of Nāgārjuna’s words. Finally the rendering of the *te* of *pāda* d as a possessive adjective (“your”) is questionable; rather, it seems better to translate this pronoun, as in many other cases in the previous verses, as “according to you”.

In conclusion, also taking into account Candrakīrti’s commentary, the translation of this *kārikā* could be as follows: “but, [if you think that] the self [of the previous and the present existences] was the same, [you should consider that] the [*skandhas* of] appropriation are different. [For] how [would be], according to you, a self utterly distinct from the [*skandhas* of] appropriation?”.

2006: 345); or: “Puisque [...] il n’existe ni douleur, ni origine, ni arrêt, comment déduire [l’existence du] chemin, puisqu’il [se définit par] l’arrêt de la douleur”? (May 1959: 242).

¹⁵ Also in the case of this verse, Candrakīrti does not fail to explain that *upādāna* is “designated by the five *skandhas*” (PsP 574.13).

In other words, the hypothesis that the past and the present selves are the same thing would imply also that the psycho-physical features (i. e., the *skandhas*) associated with the past self are identical to those of the present self – unless we consider the self, like part cd of the verse suggests, as something totally different from the aggregates. However, as *pāda* b remarks, the aggregates of the previous life are undoubtedly different from those of the present existence.

MMK 27.10

*yadi hy ayaṃ bhaved anyah pratyākhyāyāpi taṃ bhavet |
tathaiva ca sa saṃtiṣṭhet tatra jāyeta cāmṛtaḥ ||*

For if this present self were indeed distinct from the past, then it would exist even if the past were denied.

And the past person would abide just as it was, or it would be born here without having died – (S&K 2013: 323)

It seems to me that here too S&K’s translation is not very intelligible.

In the second half-verse the syntactical paper of *tatra* in *pāda* d is problematic, for it could be (1) a locative adverb of *saṃtiṣṭhet*, (2) of *jāyeta*, (3) of *amṛtaḥ*, or (4) a conjunctive adverb (or a clause, like “*that is to say*” with an *explicative* function) which introduces the sentence *jāyeta cāmṛtaḥ*.

S&K choose (2), which is the only option that could not rely on Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of Candrakīrti’s PsP (cf. May, 1959, p. 285, note 1040). Moreover, they consider the ca of *pāda* d as a disjunctive conjunction (“or”) introducing the final clause (that is, *jāyeta cāmṛtaḥ*), i. e., they conceive the two clauses of the second half-verse to be mutually exclusive. Finally, they deem the subject of all verbs (namely, *saṃtiṣṭhet*, *jāyeta* and *amṛtaḥ*) of cd to be the same, that is, “the past person”.

Differently from S&K “solutions”, my understanding of *pādas* cd, in the first place, considers *tatra* – relying on PsP 579.5–6 – according to option (1), that is, as a locative adverb of *saṃtiṣṭhet*; secondly, it reads ca as a copulative conjunction (“and”), which gives the final clause the function of explaining the first part of the half-verse; thirdly, given that the hypothesis criticized in this *kārikā* is that the past and the present selves are different, and relying on Candrakīrti’s example (cf. PsP 579.6–7) of the cloth that, being different from the pot, is not destroyed by the appearance of the pot, it seems appropriate to assume that the subject of *saṃtiṣṭhet* and *amṛtaḥ* is the past self, whilst the subject of *jāyeta* is the *present* one. In other words, here Nāgārjuna is saying that the consequence of thinking of the past and the present selves as being different from each other is that the former would still abide here, that is, it would not have died yet, whilst the latter would already be born.

In conclusion, my translation of this verse is: “For if this [present self] was *other* [than the past], it would exist even independently from that [past]. But [in this case], that [past self] would abide here just as it was, and [it] would not have died [yet], whilst [the present self] would [already] be born”.

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