

Ontology, Language, and Deconstruction

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I

My aim here is to deconstruct ontology. I take an archeological stance which I associate with the second noble truth of the Buddha. This stance is diagnostic [*nidāna kathā*]. It takes ontological texts as symptoms of how the ego incarnates its concerns in traditions of thought where language is believed to present things as they are in themselves. Deconstruction occurs only in a textual field and can do no more than rethink what has been thought before. It also is positional, calling for belonging to a tradition of theme and method. My belonging here is to Mādhyamika Buddhism, especially as espoused by Chandrakīrti in his *Prasannapadā*.

I shall use deconstruction as a tool to recontextualize two of the central questions of Indian thought: (1) How does the world of being and non-being come to be through language? and (2) How must a Buddhist deconstruct ontological language in order to restore the words of the Buddha?

"Ontology" and "methodic deconstruction" need to be clarified right away. I use "ontology" in the sense of a discipline that traces being in

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a cave at the bottom of the sea, derives the world out of the communion of Being and language and treats the world as a processive dispersal of Being through words. Ontology exalts the world as a text, as a materiality of signification sustained in the reciprocity of saying and being, words and referents. It enclose meaning in a logocentric circle of discourse, being and non-being in criteria of knowability, truth in syllogistic coherence. The circle regulates speech, determines criteria of truth and falsity and lays down rules of admission to the philosophical community. Two rules are central. One is ontological commitment, the other is adherence to a referential theory of language. Governed by subject-predicate logic, language is believed to display the order of things. Things either exist or they do not; they exist in relation of substance and attribute, and language presents them as such. Ontology uses epistemology as a tool of methodic description of the world. It shows what exists and what does not, and claims that certain kinds of assertions are true about things that exist and about those that do not. Ontology mediates the world with its cause, man with the source of his being. It redeems the cogito from the ego, existence from the vain circularity of rebirth and redeath. Ontology is meta-medicine[*mahaauṣḍhiḥ*].

A clarificatory note to "methodic deconstruction" also needs to be added. I use "methodic" in the sense of *sādhana*, meaning that truth consists in the method of arriving at a claim. Truth consists in syllogistic movement of thought, in a coherent departure and arrival of the cogito from a premise to the conclusion. "Deconstruction" signifies incoherence in syllogistic movement and logocentric discourse. It means dismissal of the cogito on the ground that it fails to deliver on its own terms. I use "methodic deconstruction" in the sense of *prasaṅga*, an immanent form of criticism that claims no methodological independence whatsoever. Unable to occur in an alien frame of reference, it concedes radical dependence on the categorial traditions in which it is conceived. It is steeped in sociality of thought, and it can operate from within and on terms of discourse from the circle, using them as tools to dismiss ontological claims. It obeys the circle without believing in the validity

or invalidity of the rules. Deconstruction is methodic in the sense that it operates on the level of rules only.

Methodic deconstruction has a skeptical texture. It uses skepticism as a medicinal tablet, as a tool to clear the way for confession of faith [*śraddhotpāda*]. Skepticism leads to dismissal of ontological claims, to the realization that neither being nor non-being can be said to exist. Religious experience of the Mahāyāna sort, too has little to do with ontological claims, including the criteria used to determine the truth or falsity of ontology. For this reason, it invites the risk of misunderstanding by the philosophical community. For it operates from within the circle, and the circle subjects language to either/or logic. An entity exists or it does not, and language presents it as such. The philosopher either stays in the circle, and makes ontological claims through referential language, or exists the circle to dissolve the world in silence. In keeping with the middle way, deconstruction does neither. It refuses to retreat in silence, but rather seeks to use referential language to demonstrate the emptiness of referential language. It accedes to samsaricity of discourse, to disclosing the non-entative sense of "Tathāgata" in a world that affirms or denies meaning in entative terms. There is no linguistic independence, no meta-language, and nowhere else to go. The risk of misunderstanding is real. Deconstruction might be taken for nihilism, for stealing the referents from language and destroying the world as a system of meaning. The logocentric circle is conservative. It insists that one either speak entative language or not speak at all. Using language, within the circle, is like riding a horse; one either rides it or one does not. Deconstructing referents through referential language violates common sense; it is like a horseman who claims he is not riding a horse while riding it.

The accusation come with the territory. The logocentric circle has the world on its side. The deconstructionist may end up losing on both sides of the court; he could be expelled from the philosophical community only to face estrangement from the claims. Mahāyāna has to do with the therapeutic sense of "Tathāgata," with the departure to

and return from the bottom of the sea. Methodic deconstruction returns ontology to embodied cogito, tracing the steps the ego takes to incarnate its concerns in formal language. It discerns how Being is conceived at the bottom of the samsaric sea, how categories like being and non-being are construed in defence of identity and difference, and how eros gets edited as logos in propositional assertions. Driven by this self-predicative project, and seeking to appropriate a "this" to its "I," the ego speaks referential language. It attribute truth value to "I know this" only as a means to claim the truth of "I am this." The ego makes cognitive assertions in order to recognize itself. It posits an object in space, attributes "knownness" to the object as a means of inferring its own existence. Like a spider, the ego encloses itself in a categorical network. It constitutes a world of identity and difference, agent and act, self and the body, cause and effect, being and non-being. The ego elevate the world to an ontological text, to a materiality of meaning sustained in reciprocity of words and referents.

Methodic deconstruction dissolves the text. It discerns the "I" as empty term, a signifier without any referent. No, "I," no "this"; no subject, no object. So too is the case with "Tathāgata" and "*dharmā*," if they are used as terms in propositional assertions. Deconstruction draws attention to the mutuality of ego and cogito, being in the world and doing the world. In a chapter in his *Prasannapada*, entitled "Examination of Noble Truths," Chandrakīrti faces the accusations squarely, raising fundamental issues. Must Buddhism be bound to things about which one can say either that they exist or that they do not? Should not Buddhism, in fidelity to Tathāgata, liberate itself from the status quo that either/or logic entails? What happened to the claim that existence is function, that to exist is to change, and that knowledge is born out of emancipatory praxis? Should the Mādhyamika be accused of stealing the Buddha from Buddhists merely because he shows how the metaphysical independence of Tathāgata is no more than a cover for the possessive anxiety of the Buddhists themselves? Why do Buddhists become nervous when faced with the possibility that "Tathāgata" may not refer to a being-in-itself? Chandrakīrti raises these

issues with comedic relish. he likens the ontologist to a horseman who insists his horse has been stolen even though he is mounted on that very horse. The analogy does not call for determining being and non-being, not even the truth or falsity of the horseman's claim. The point is the processes through which the horseman incarnates possessive anxiety as ontological categories, in this case the non-being of the horse.

The analogy is more than just that. It is symbolic of a great methodological divide in Indian thought, particularly in Buddhism. Is there a pre-logical concern in logocentric discourse? Does the "I" incarnate its alterity in ontological categories? And, how credible is the accusation that denying referents to signifiers like "Tathāgata" implies stealing the Buddha from Buddhists, the world from language? In the first section of this essay, I shall connect the "horse and horseman" analogy with the birth of ontology, tracing how it encloses the world in a concept of text, rules of writing and logocentric systems of discourse. In the second section, I shall discuss why Chandrakīrti accedes to the samsaricity of discourse, to logocentric rules of writing and understanding, and to deconstructing referents in terms of referential language. In the third section, I shall try to establish that denying a referent to "Tathāgata" implies returning the Buddha to people. the middle way to worldliness of language.

II

I begin with the *Ṛgveda*, the text inaugurated ontology with the analogy of horse and horseman. The analogy is used as a paradigm of self-definition, as a tool with which a community conceives its identity in transcendental terms. The dominant connotation as of *aśva*, which means horse, is metaphysical sacrifice. It signifies the event through which Being moves out of being-in-itself to becoming the world. There was a time when Being was in timeless immediacy with itself; lost in deep sleep, it lay still in a cave at the bottom of the sea. An endless darkness prevailed in the cave, an abyss without a sign or voice.¹ There

¹ ≈Salilaṃ aittamasā ... aprekataṃ salilaṃ sarvamā idaṃ," Ṛgveda, 10.129.3: "Ambhaḥ kimasid

was nobody to call and nobody to hear, nothing with which to call and nothing to call about. The silence was total [*nih̥svaramvābra*]. Then *Vāk*, the transcendental mother and originary Word, entered the cave. She traced Being, the father, and approached him with a libidinal gesture. "She wedded him in mind and spirit. Desirous of progeny, with her fluid potencies ready to conceive, she fecunded. Then the whole world responded to her in admiration."² The Vedic text inaugurates ontology in genealogical terms. It used *aśva*, the horse, in the sense of spermative logos (*retas*) and places it at the heart of the originary Word. Replete with noetic nameability, with a promise of finitization, the logos prehends the possibility of the world through words.³ *Āśva* demands that Being sacrifice its faceless eternity in order that it may resurrect itself in self-predicative infinity [*vyāṛtti yajña*]. Hence, the movement from tautological immediacy in the cave to mediated existence under the sun, from worldless presence to the saying of "I am one, let me be many." *Āśva* drives Being to genealogical dispersal, to affirmation of identity in begetting difference and to encountering itself through the reciprocity of words and objects.⁴ For this reason, *aśva* is called *harī*. The root *hr̥*, from which *harī* is derived, means "to usurp," "to rub," "to carry away" and "to bear." The embodiment of time, *aśva* robs Being of eternity only to reveal it in its own possibility.⁵ It brings Being to a fall, to the predicament of having to retrieve its essence in self-transcendence, to recovering its being through becoming. Being is thus thrown toward ontological excellence, into dispersing itself as an infinity of beings and to a life of unsurpassable possibility of

gahanam gambhiram," *ibid.*, 10.129.1; "Apo ... agre salilamavāsa, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa," XI.1.6.1.; "Ṣete trailokya grāsarvṛhitāḥ " Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 1.3.24; Harivaṃśa, 3.10.31.

- 2 "Mātāpitarṃṛta āvabhāja dhityagre manasā saṃ hi jagme, Śa ... garbharasā nibiddhā ...," Ṛgveda, 1.164.8.
- 3 "Vāgvai prajāpatih̥ prajāpatih̥ vai Vāk," Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 4.1.5.6; "Vāco agraṃ yatpreritāḥ nāmadheyam dadhānaḥ ... tadesaṃ nihitaṃ guhāvih̥," Ṛgveda, 10.71.1; "Yavat Brahma viṣṭhitaṃ tāvat Vāk," *ibid.*, 10.114.8.
- 4 "Kimāriṣaḥ kuha kasya śarman," Ṛgveda, 10.129.1; " Rūpaṃ rūpaṃ patirūpo babhūva tadasya rūpaṃ praticakṣanāya," *ibid.*, 6.47.18; "Sahasraḥ prabhavante sarūpaḥ," Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, 2.1.1.
- 5 "Sa dyā taṃ vṛṣaṇaṃ rathamadhiṣṭati ... hariyojanaṃ ... yojānvindra te har 6," Ṛgveda, 1.82.4; "Kālo aśvo bahati," Atharva Veda, 19.53.1-2; see also "Aśva Sukta" in Ṛgveda, 1.163.10; "Devaratho vā eṣa yadyajñāḥ," Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, 2.5.37.

self-surpassing.⁶ Being happens to be in the present only in virtue of what it shall be, and its future is enclosed in the trajectory of the event that took place at the bottom of the sea. Stuck with temporal noesis, forever chasing its own possibility, Being comes to be in such a way that it inescapably awaits its arrival at the boundary of all that can be.⁷ *Aśva* plants negation at the heart of Being. It drives Being to a recurring rupture between the present and the future, to a life of endless arrival through perpetual departure. Being is on the way to recovering itself in such a way that it always finds itself in the middle of its own before and after. It took an exit from the cave in search of a teleological fulfillment that is forever promised and forever postponed. Being thus gives itself a temporal anchorage, establishing its spermatic sovereignty in a network of its own finitude. Such disclosure of Being is the world.⁸

The disclosure takes place in language. It happens in the unity of signifier and signified, the saying of "I" by Being and its positing itself as a "this," as a referent. Goaded by *aśva*, the spermatic logos, Being wakes up to center the world in itself. Not only does it name itself as "I," it also becomes the referent in response to naming itself. Being becomes the world to hear its own echo. The "I" is not an ordinary word, not a case of designating identity to an already existing object. The "I" is the arche in which the world is conceived, through which it exists and to which it shall return. The saying of "I" is a self-centering act, one through which Being turns its alterity into a world where self has privilege over the body, subject over subject, substance over attribute, identity over difference. The "I" is also the ground word from which all other words are derived, and in which they all are subsumed. Being has come to bear the world in language, and it keeps on

6 "Brahmā va paribṛddham bhavati," Nirūkta, 1.7; "Bṛhatvad ... brahmeti abhidhiyate," Viṣṇu Purāna, 1.3.21; "Brahmā santam brahmaṇā vardhayanti," Atharva Veda, 13.1.33; "Bṛhatya brahmayati tasmāt ... Brahmā," Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa, 3.12.9.7.

7 "Tataḥ paraṁ Brahmā paraṁ bṛhaṅtam," Śvetāśvatara, 3.7; "Mahimaisa tato Brahman." Bhāgavat, 2.6.17; "Anavadhikāṭisaya bṛhat Brahman." Ramanuja, Śrībhāṣya 1.1.2.

8 "Bṛhat te jālam bṛhataḥ ... śata viryasya," Atharva Veda, 8.4.7; "Sadhyā eka jāladāṇdamudyatya yantyojāsa," *ibid.*, 8.4.12; "Ātmakṛte parimaṇāt," Brahmasūtra 1.4.26; "Sarvatra svechaya paricchedāvabhāṇam co'ktaṁ," Vallabha, Śaṣṭrārthdīpa Nibandha [Varanasi, 1971], Vol. I. p. 93; "Anantamūrti tad Brahmā hyavibhaktam vibhaktimat," *ibid.*, p. 94.

dispersing itself in the reciprocity of words and referents [*iheha nāmabhiḥ savaiḥ*].⁹ The reciprocity elevates the world to a text, to a bodiliness of signification sustained in language. There is no empty word, no floating signifier; nor is there a nameless entity, something that can be said to exist without being referred to by a word. The world is a text in motion; like a chariot, it is driven by a horse into the shifting horizons.¹⁰ Being is driven to saying "I" to an infinite degree, to becoming beings in such a way that something invariably is left for it to say and to be [*svigatirvorddhaya*]. Because Being lives through self-predicative possibilities, the world is a text that must inescapably remain incomplete. It can never be concluded in silence.

Vedic poets marvel at the text. Eager to participate in the ceaseless sacrifice of Being in words, the poets respond in kind. They celebrate the communion of Being and World, perform sacrifice in memory of the communion and declare that the sacrificial altar is the center of the world [*bhuvanasya nabhiḥ*]. They associate *asva* with *agni*, the preeminent priest who excels in evocation speech. Then the poets compose *mantra*, calling on Being to dwell in their words and testifying that Being has indeed answered their call.¹¹ Hence the birth of ontology in poetry, of thinking in prayer. The composer of *mantra* are not content with poeticization, however. They go on to make truth claims, thereby, in effect, hiding the meaning of the world in their own words.¹² Being came out of the cave to disclose itself as the world, but the poets persuade Being to hide the truth of its becoming in scriptural text. In tune with what it contains, the text is like a chariot; it too is driven by *asva*.¹³ And the horse is manned by horsemen, those who can do

9 "Ahamāsmi ityagre ... aham nāma bhāvat," Brhadāmyaka Upaniṣad, 1.4.1; "Sa dvtiyamiccat," *ibid.*, 1.4.3; "Sṛṣṭim vaktum ... bahusyam iti, Svasyaiva karmakarṭr bhāvat," Vallabha, Aṅubhāṣya, 1.4.26; Tadaikṣat Chandogya, 6.2.3; "Sarvasya jagato bharaṇāt," Nirukta, 1.7.

10 "Eva svarājo asvina vahantu ... ratho vanirna pravatvān," Ṛgveda, 1.82.2; see also Fatah Singh, Vaidika Darśana [Allahabad: Bharati Bhandara, samv. 2019], pp.128-129; "Yanajmi te ... hari ... utatva svāso rabhasā abhimdiṣu," Ṛgveda, 1.82.5-6.

11 "Asyātrapaśyam viṣpatim saptaputraṃ," *ibid.*, 1.164.1.

12 "Trinabhi cakramajaramanarvam yatri'ema viśva bhuvanādhi," *ibid.*, 1.164.2; "Guhā trini nihita," *ibid.*, 1.164.45; "Trihsata sakhyuḥ pade," *ibid.*, 8.69.7; "Tisro vāc udirate," *ibid.*, 9.97.34; "Vāmasya nihitam padaṃ ve," *ibid.*, 1.164.7.

13 "Vedo'siyenatvam deva ... mahyam Vedobhūya," Yajurveda, 2.21; "Imaṃ rathamadhi ye sapta taṣṭhuḥ saptacakram sapta vahanti aśvaḥ," Ṛgveda, 1.164.3; "Aśvo bahati sapta nāma," *ibid.*,

ontology.

The preeminent horseman is Dirghatamas. Urging the horse yoked to the chariot, and clinging to the halter in his hands, Dirghatamas does what he is supposed to do. He asks ontological questions. "Who witnessed the world coming into being? Who has seen the formless Being as the ground of beings that have form? Where is the blood and essence of the world? Who may approach the poets to ask these questions? Immature in understanding, with an understanding mind, I inquire about the place where the gods stay in hiding...Not knowing, I ask for the poets who know...Let those who know announce here and now."¹⁴ Dirghatamas is in the mood to clear up the issues once and for all. "I ask you," he continues, "about the limit of the world. I ask you about the center of the world. I ask you about the spermatocidal will of the horse. I ask you about the dwelling place of the originary Word."¹⁵ Dirghatamas thinks through signifiers, using "where," "wherefrom" and "here" to spatialize the objects of thought. He bounds the signifiers with referents, using them so as to entice about which one can say "there," "wherefrom" and "this place." His questions reiterate the truth of what he assumes. He assumes that the world can not be explained on its own terms, that it is a derived entity and that its cause is the spermatocidal logos that drives Being to embody itself as the world. Dirghatamas evinces his interest in the whereabouts of Being by first centering the world in Being(*hrdpratiṣṭha*). he directs all the questions to the center, and does so to trace his genesis in Being(*Ṛgveda*. 1. 164. 33).

The questions are important in themselves. But they assume additional luster in accordance with what is due the person who raises them. Dirghatamas is a senior *rṣi*, the eldest among those who insist that seeing is believing. Witnessing an event is the reason for believing in its truth(*akṣānavantahī*). Dirghatamas is a poet with foundational experience; the trajectory of his mind can land him back in the

1.164.2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.164.4-7;1.164.37.

¹⁵ "Prchāmi tvā paramāntaṃ pṛthivyāḥ pṛchāmi tvāṃ bhuvānsya nabhiḥ," *ibid.*, 1.64.34.

beginning of time. He has witnessed the communion of Being and Word at the bottom of the sea, and believes that the world is a factual dispersal of Being through words. He is also convinced that his own identity bears the communion of Being and language, that the truth of the cave dwells in his heart and that his vocation is to celebrate the dwelling in speech.¹⁶ Riding on the chariot of time, which signifies the processive recovery by Being of itself, Dirghatamas happens to be in a place by virtue of having to depart from it. He encloses his identity in ontological memory, affirms the present in light of the past and performs *yajña* to reiterate the metaphysical sacrifice. For him, being-in-the-world is a matter of ceaseless mimesis. Truth resides in the *arche* of tradition, identity in the bearing of what has been witnessed before and meaning in the re-hearing of what has already been heard.¹⁷

Burdened with memory, Dirghatamas can do no more than ask premeditated questions. He has raised questions about the beginning and of the world before, and he would do it again; he has affirmed the world in the communion of Being and language, and he would do it again. He knows that there are no answers without questions, that the historical identity of a community is sustained by the questions it reiterates and that people become strangers to themselves when they begin answering questions not their own. Dirghatamas enforces the alterity of tradition through ontological questions. He asks the questions with a recollective posture, in invocative speech and as an eminent priest. "This altar is the utmost limit of the world, and this sacrifice the center of the world. Soma is the spermatic logos, and this priest the dwelling place of the Word."¹⁸

Dighatamas stages the questions though dramatic doubt. He asks the questions not because he does not know the answers, but to dramatize his answers, constructing riddles only to make questionable what he himself holds to be true. He plays the drama of doubt in dialectical language, in debating halls and before a community of

16 "Antahrdā manasā pūyamāṇai," Yajurveda 17.95; "Vidmā te nāma paramaṃ guha," *ibid.*, 12.19; "Akṣaṇavāntaḥ karṇavāntai sakhāyo manojavesvasamā vabhūvuh," *Ṛgveda*, 10.71.10.

17 "Idaṃ nāma ṛṣibhyaḥ pūrvajebhyaḥ pūrvabhyāḥ pathikṛdbhyaḥ," *Ṛgveda*, 1.14.15.

18 "Iyaṃ vedi paro antaḥ pṛthivya ayaṃ bhuvanasya nabhiḥ," *ibid.*, 1.164.35.

scholars(*sakhāyo*). The community appreciates law and order in the life of the mind, enjoying the defense and refutation of claims according to rules. Playing the game and winning it means monetary gain and political influence: not playing by the rules or losing the game means loss of prestige in the community, even expulsion from scholarly circles.¹⁹ Dirghatamas plays to the tune of his community. He formulates ontological questions with two things in mind: to re-present the past in the present, and to enclose the future in the memory of what happened at the bottom of the sea. He asks about the horse that brought Being to time. But he does so while driving the chariot and clinging to the halter in his hands. He uses "where" in regard to the horse, thus implying that it may be in another place or in the possession of someone else. He posits space not to signify rupture or separation between himself and his horse, but only as a stage on which to dramatize identity through premeditated questions.

Vedic poets enclose the space in scriptural ambiguity. They insist that Being dwells in their words, but they also testify to hearing a voice on the horizon that says: "Thou shall not find what has begotten all these beings. Something other than Being has been dwelling in your heart. Wrapped in misty clouds, and with their lips stammering, the chanters of hymns wonder in discontent."²⁰ Hence the reiterability of ontological questions to an infinite degree. Yoked in the wheel of time, the horse keeps on pulling Being away from the cave. And the horseman will keep on questioning the whereabouts of his horse, even though the halter is in his own hands. The horseman defines his identity in terms of the horse, and he will keep on pondering his identity even though he is driving that very horse. Philosophical inquiry will take place in a situation where misty clouds prevail between Being and beings, between the originary Word and words of man. Reflection will begin with *avidyā*, not with absence of knowledge but with the signs that Being is somewhere there in the mist that knowledge must clear. Philosophy will be done for "atmalogical" reasons, to mediate an

19 "Yatra dhirāvācamakrāta. Atrā sakhāyaḥ sakhyāni jānate," *R̥gveda*, 10.71.10.

20 "Na tam vidatha ... nihārena pravṛtta," *ibid.*, 1.52.7.

immediate truth and to reiterate identity through ontological questions. I must ask "What is Being?" because I cannot stop asking "Who am I?" the Vedic poets elevate Being to the ultimate question, one better than which there is none.²¹ The important thing, however, is the "atmalogical" ultimacy of the question, its endless recurrence through which to enforce the "I." Because identity is affirmed through the question that is Being, the reiterability of the question is more important than the question itself. The poets immortalize identity by placing questionability at the heart of Being, wondering whether even Being knows what it is, where it is and how it is.²²

Dirghatamas textualizes the world. Being becomes the world though language, and the truth of becoming is embodied in scriptural word. Having emerged from the bottom of the sea, Being hides itself in the scriptural cave.²³ Dirghatamas's stance was fateful in three ways. He determined who may think, about what and how. Thinking is done by those who perform *yajña*. They think about the metaphysical sacrifice that Being performed with Word, and they do so by interpreting scriptural texts in which is embodied the truth of the world.²⁴ Dirghatamas reduces ontology to hermenutical reflection with an analogical touch. The scriptural text is like a cow, the interpreter like calves; the text begets calves who then milk meaning out of her body. "The cow bellows for her calf who [stands] near her with blinking eyes. She lows as she moves to lick his forehead. His mouth she fondly invites to her udder, and she suckles him with warm milk while gently lowing"²⁵

The relation between the text and the interpreter is genealogical, which explains why the will to understand moves reflexively toward the invitation to understand. There is a hearing distance between the text and the interpreter, the cow and the calf. The distance is posited as a

21 "Prajāpatiḥ vai kaḥ, Śatapatha," 6.4.3.4; "Eka eva taṃ saṃpraśnaṃ," *Ṛgveda*, 10.52.3; Ko nāmāsi, *Yajurveda*, 27.29.

22 "So veda yadi vā na veda," *Ṛgveda*, 10.129.7; "Na cakaraṃ na so asya veda," *ibid.*, 1.164.32.

23 "Catvāri Vāk pārimita padāni ... guhā triṇi nihita," *ibid.*, 1.164.45.

24 *Ṛgveda*, 1.164.41-42.

25 "Dhenumetaṃ suhasto godhuguta dohadenaṃ," *ibid.*, 1.164.26; see also *ibid.*, 1.164.27; 1.164.28

relational medium, as a space that accounts for response to a call. Like good calves, who are also jealous, interpreters provide systematic understanding of what they have heard. They announce hermeneutical finality, each claiming that he alone has milked the last ounce of meaning. They inaugurate schools of thought, enclose the world in conceptual borders and are succeeded by a line of gifted students who re-hear scriptural text with a view to defending the truth of what their mentors had heard. Thus are the mentors turned into a school of thought, into a tradition of group-think(*siddhānta*).

The mother text meanwhile has something else in mind. Burdened with a surplus of meaning, she finds herself incomplete in any or all interpretations. She is divinely enigmatic and systematically ambiguous[*gāḍham*]. Not only does she reveal truth to the interpreter to their satisfaction, she also conceals it from all of them to the same degree. she feeds the calves she has and then moves on to affirm her transcendence. Thus did scriptural text get the nickname *go*, i.e., a cow that forever keeps on moving. We have seen that Being lives through the future; it comes to the world in such a way that something invariably remains for it to be. Like the truth it embodies, the text too lives through hermeneutical possibilities; she accedes to the borders of a group-think only with a view to transcend those very borders. The scriptural text given to perpetual motherhood, to ceaseless mutation of her semantic body. Each group-think claims decisive understanding of the mother text, each reduces truth to its borders and all of them refute each other in the name of the mother text. The history of Hindu thought is a hermeneutical circle in motion. it is a history in which scriptural text begets plurality to affirm her transcendence, where dissent gets solidified in traditions of thought and where each group-think encounters all others to negotiate its own certainty. Hence the history of Indian thought as a conflict of interpretations.

The conflict elevates history to a dialogical stage. The philosopher appears on the stage to reiterate the truth of his tradition, to play the drama of in the face of difference. Born of memory, he perpetuates the memory; he takes a recollective stance(*smṛti*). Faced with the accusation

that a rupture has taken place between scriptural text and his group-think, the philosopher shows the syndromes of a calf. He re-hear the text to clear the accusations, equates validity of thought with scriptural verification and tracks down the presence of his group-think in the scriptural cave(*sāstra yoni*). In the process, he reduces time to textual time. He writes his own text to temporalize eternity, to force scriptural text to bear the truth of his present and to re-present the past for the future. Time does not separate, it unites; distance does not alienate, it reconciliates. Writing becomes a case of re-writing, thinking a reflective appropriation of the already thought. The philosopher reopens the hermeneutical question to face the other, the competing group-think, that threatens his identity in the present. He thinks through what has been thought before, reviews the claims of the contemporary other, and he does it all to insure the future of his group-think. Conceived in intertextual time, his own text must inescapably be a passage. It appropriates the preceding texts in the face of contemporary pressures, and it transmits itself to a future text that will then re-present the past in its own contexts. For this reason, Indian thought is historical through and through.

The historicity of thought calls for authorless texts. Born of positional belonging, the author is only a means through whom a tradition affirms its alterity in words. The author is so by virtue of writing a text, and the text inherits and method from a point of view. There is no private theme or method, no private language. The act has privilege over the agent, the text over the author. What is being written is far more important than the one who writes, and writing inherits a pre-thought theme. Historically speaking, there is no evidence that thinking begins out of nothing; hermeneutically speaking, thinking is re-thinking of the already thought. The theme lends itself to an endless interrogation, and it is through such interrogation that the theme is transformed into a tradition of thought. Raising questions is a matter of re-raising them, for no great question can ever be refuted. Hence the history of philosophy as a tradition of theme and method.

Performed from a perspective, philosophy fulfills itself in a

sylogistic circle(*hetu cakra*), in a coherent deduction of conclusion from premise(*nigamana*), in clearing instances that might prove the contrary(*dr̥ṣṭāntābhāsa*) and in defense or refutation of a group-think according to rules(*vāda vidhi*). Philosophy thus operates in a circle of logocentric discourse. The circle has the authority to censor. It regulates speech, determines the theme and method of discourse and lays down criteria of truth and falsity. It has the juridical authority to determine who shall be admitted to the scholarly community and who shall remain marginalized on the borders. It promotes dissent, but only within its borders, and always on its own terms. Reducing thought to methodological consensus, the circle refuses to recognize those who have no ontological commitment, or who deny any or all claims without expressed belief in the validity of its rules. The circle is conservative. It insists that method must control the theme, and form the content. Writing becomes a matter of law and order, an instance of the juridical authority of the circle and a tool to enclose meaning in a categorical tradition (*saṃvṛti*)

Dirghatamas burdened Hindu thought with two missions. One is the metaphysics of causation, the deduction of the world out of Being. The other is the syllogistic logic with which to establish concomitance between cause and effect, Being and the world. Being has become the world through "I," which therefore is the only word worth pondering. "Brahman, the lord of language, we call on you so that we may be called by you. Let us not be away from knowledge, let us be enclosed in knowledge."²⁶ Being has become the world in a self-centering act, and it is by remaining at a hearing distance from the center that human beings can realize the meaning of their being in the world. Philosophers hear Being to say that the world is a derived entity, that going away from Being is a case of egological deviation and that such deviation leads to a world without a center. Hence the metaphysics of causation whose mission is to restore the world to the center. Salvation consists in the knowledge that Being stays in causal relation with the world. Being discloses itself in knowable and speakable entities, and it

26 "Upahṛto vācaspatirupāsmaṇ vācaspatihavaryatām," Atharvaveda, 1.1.4.

is Being itself which is ultimately the ground as well the object of thought and language. Hence the realistic *episteme* of ontology, the claim that the cogito presents reality and words the objects. There are no empty words, no floating signifiers. The self becomes authentic in ontological reflection, in decoding the presence of Being through categories like substance and attribute, and by affirming itself as an *am-Being*(*Bṛh̥mā'smi*).

The logocentric circle finds meaning in coherence. Its world is thick with entities that either exist or do not exist, entities that are definite and indubitable and about which demonstratively true claims can be made. The cognitive conditions given through which *X* can be known to exist are far more important than the mere existence of *X*. Existence is a matter of law and order. The world is a place where people follow their station in life, where unity is more important than equality, where the particular makes sense by virtue of bearing the universal and where individuals are ritually ranked in relation to the social whole. There is a determinable relation between cause and effect, agent and act, knowing and doing, being and social existence.

The circle justifies inequality in the name of karmic coherence: to each according to the ethical quality of his karmic will; from each according to the social worth of that very will. The game of life is played according to rules. There is no rupture in human relations, no gap in what one does and what one happens to be, and therefore no room for revolution in the name of social justice. Ontologically speaking, *X* is *Y* because of *Z*; socially speaking, life is as smooth as syllogistic reasoning. "Logic," said the founder of Nyāya, "is the ground of all thinking, the tool of all successful actions, including moral actions."²⁷ A logocentric form of life leads to successful action, not disappointments; to a world of objective truths, not fantasy or whims²⁸; to an ethical collectivity governed by self-restraints, not hedonistic

27 "Pradīpaḥ sarvavidyānam upāya sarva ... karmānam." Sri narayana Mishra, ed., Nyāya Darśanam with Vatsayana's Bhāṣya [Varansi: Chowkhamba, 1970], p.15. "Tadidaṃ tattvajñānam niḥśreyadhigamaśca yathavidyam veditavyaṃ," *ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*, pp.16-23; Udyotkara, Nyāyavārtika, ed. Srinivas Shastri [Gaziabad: Indovision Private Ltd., 1986], pp. 7-18

indulgence or instinctive deviations; to a methodic sociality of discourse, not dialectical cunning or egocentric silence. Ontology celebrates the virtues of responsible criticism, encourages dissent in terms of rules and salvation in a rational forms of life. It envisions the world as the body of Being or God in motion, encloses the meaning of the world in scriptural texts and restricts access to the texts only to those who do *yaja* by virtue of their moral superiority. Hermeneutical reflection is not a natural or fundamental right. It is a matter of morally acquired rights, and it is confined to an ethical aristocracy for the good of society.

III

Such is the ontological culture in which Chandrakīrti was raised. He thematizes ontology, tracing its genesis in a dreamworld. He demands admission to the logocentric circle and promises to play by the rules. But he eschews ontological commitments, including belief in the validity or invalidity of the rules. He has no desire to defend identity in the face of difference, no interest in dialectical cunning and no obligation to perform dramatic doubt on the stage.³⁰

Chandrakīrti opens his *Prasannapadā* with poetic embellishments. He uses the ocean as a root metaphor for the world as well as the dwelling place of scriptural texts. The world is an ocean; its truth is contained in the words of Tathāgata, and it is in the ocean that the words dwell. Chandrakīrti embellishes the metaphor in a recollective mood. Nāgārjuna descended in the ocean, meditated at the bottom of sea, traced the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts and brought back to the world. He also wrote *Mādhyamika Kārikā* in order to disclose the sense of the texts, showing how man incarnates egocentric concerns in ontological claims. The *Kārikā*, in Chandrakīrti's view, is as deep as the ocean itself. Its author understands the words of Tathāgata in the way of Tathāgata as hitting, like arrows, the categories like being and non-being that the

30 "Tena hi ayuṣmantaḥ saṅgasyāmo na vivādisyāmaḥ. Avivāda paramā hi sramaṇasya dharmāḥ." Chandrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* along with Nagarjuna's *Madhyamakasastram* (Darbhanga: Mithila Vidyapitha, 1960), p.15.

either/or logic entails. The *Kārikā* consumes ontology like fire, unsettling the philosophical community in the process.

Chandrakīrti then goes on to embellish in another metaphor, this time an archeological one. He does so to introduce the nature and mission of his own work. In his case, writing is a form of re-writing, his text representing a commentarial reflection on what has already been thought and put into words. The aim of Chandrakīrti's text is to retrace Nāgārjuna's departure and arrival from the bottom of the sea. Chandrakīrti will do with the *Kārikā* what Nāgārjuna had done with the *Prajñāpāramitā*. He will dig into the text, perform meditation at its heart, conceive his own text while there and then return to the world to put it all in words. He will tell a story of how ontology formalizes a world that the ego conceives in its own image. His work represents the text in which it is conceived; its task is to recontextualize what has already been thought. There is earnestness in Chandrakīrti's tone. He has a suspicion that philosophers, especially Buddhist philosophers, have either distorted or forgotten the story that Nāgārjuna had once told. He intend to reiterate the Mādhyamika tradition, tracing once more the egological cave in which ontology is conceived.

Chandrakīrti proposes to do it all in the name of the Buddha, who dismissed questions about the beginning or end of the world, showed that metaphysical categories are a cover for egocentric anxiety and set the analytic wheel in motion.³¹ Shākyamuni rode his horse to the boundary of Kapilavastu, the horse died at the border and the Buddha never rode a horse again. He only walked. Chandrakīrti also remembers Nāgārjuna, who brought the scriptural texts of Mahāyana from the bottom of the sea. The texts witness no Being asleep at the bottom of the sea, no Word that brought Being to the light of the sun. What they do witness is the ego, which is absorbed in an aesthetic dream, lets loose its imagination like a swift horse and disperses the dread of its own finitude in a network of categories. The communion of Being and

³¹ "Yāvata phassāyatanāṃ gati tāvata papañcassa gati, yāvata papañcassa gati tāvata passāyatanāṃ gati," *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (London: P.T.S., 1885-1900), II.161; see also K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (Varanasi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1980), pp.292-293.

Word, including the questions that Dirghatamas raises, is conceived in a cave where the ego dwells.

The ego is appetitive to the core. It posits a "this" as a locus on which to affirm its "I." The relation of "I" and "this" is fundamental; it gets formalized in subject-predicate discourse. The ego incarnates its alterity in the epistemological field where the holding of "I am this" is the ground for beholding the truth of "This is a jar," and where the cogito is nevertheless believed to present things as they are in themselves (*svabhāva vastu*).³² The ego rationalizes its existence in ontic discourse, in a circle of meaning where signifiers bond themselves with objects and where saying "I" implies an independent referent (*vastu nibandhanam*). The circle gives regulative power to definitions and to the logic of predication. It construes identity in the correspondence of a thing with its concept, and it revises "the blue jar" to read "The jar has the property blue." Replete with recognitive will, the ego fills its world with signifiers like "this" and "here," "that" and "there," "what" and "wherefrom." It spatializes itself in the form of "I am this," just as it cognizes an object over "there," something whose space it can not share but whose identity it determines in self-centering terms (*ātmNyākara*). The "I" equals itself in a cognitive mediation with its own contrary. It uses the cogito as an instrumental reason, positing an object over "there" as a means to seize hold of its definite spatiality down "here."³³

Space is not an ontological category. It is not an independent locus where entities exist side by side and where each entity is so by virtue of excluding all others from the same point. Nor is space a locus where the cogito assumes a "truth-hitting" property by encountering an object as a sensory limit. Instead, space is a recognitive medium through which the ego confers knownness to an object in order to infer its own existence as the knowing subject.³⁴ It is a sphere where man

32 "Svakāya ātmadr̥ṣṭiḥ ātmīyakāra grahaṇa pravṛtta," Prasannapada, p.198.

33 "Tatra vastu ālamabanaṃ vasati iti vā asmin raḡādikam ... mohanaṃ moha sammoha padarthaśvarūpa pariñānaṃ," *ibid.*, p.199.

34 "Anātmāni ātmābhīnīveśaḥ," *ibid.*, p.201; "Dūrādālokitaṃ rūpamasannairdṛṣyate sphuṭaṃ," *ibid.*, p.148.

hears echoes of the words of which he himself is the speaker. The ego posits space to ascertain its existence through staged referents, to disperse its deceptions in propositional assertions and confessions of faith. The preeminent example of a staged referent is Being (or God), which is believed to be independent of everything else and has the power to bring all the referents to being by saying "I."

In making itself the ultimate question, the "I" assures its existence to the same degree; it reiterates its existence through endless interrogation of its own. Space is a stage for dramatic doubt. It is a platform on which philosophers make questionable what they themselves believe to be true, and where they dramatize the indubitability of the ego by showing that it is presupposed in the methodic dubitability of all things. In Chandrakīrti's view, space as an ontological category is conceived in a dreamworld. Thick with words like "here" and "where," it is an aesthetic horizon through which the ego has confused empty signifiers with actual referents. The horizon has a categorial texture. It is dense with substance and attribute, self and the body, being and non-being, eternity and time, the universal and the particular, Being and Buddha and God.

Chandrakīrti quotes the *Aryapariṣecchā sūtra*, which likens space to a golden spaceship. The spaceship is manufactured by those who are fearful of losing identity in death, who sublimate their fear in genealogical belonging to Being, even claiming that transitoriness has been overcome in a transcendental type of nirvāṇa.³⁵ The ego uses space to collectivize itself in a group-think. It carves a cognitive boundary, places its identity inside the boundary and then looks for a competing "other" across the border. Competing collectivities defend their identity in the face of difference, none recognizing the other for what it is, and each requiring all others to witness the superiority of its own claims. Space thus becomes a dialectical stage, a forum for identity play and inter-ontological discourse.

Chandrakīrti thematizes the discourse. He wants to look into the

35 "Chitramanorama sañjītapuṣpaḥ svarnavimāna jalanti manojñāḥ," *ibid.*, p.80; "Sa tatonidānaṃ kalaha vighraha vivādaṃ sañjanayati," *ibid.*, p.17.

psycho-social reasons that force philosophers to formalize the status quo. The need is to return philosophy to the everyday world; the cogito to the ego; logos to eros; Being to the desire for immortal identity; singularity of the first cause to sociality of causes and conditions. There is no innocence in transcendence, no rationality in ascribing metaphysical independence to the referent of "Tathāgata."³⁶ In the preface of his *Prasannapadā*, Chandrakīrti states his purpose succinctly: to prove that ontology is a case of egology. Chandrakīrti states his strategy just as succinctly: he is not about to write a meta-text that passes judgments on ontological texts from the outside. He has no transcendent frame of reference, no separate set of criteria or language. His strategy is to do immanent criticism, to deconstruct ontological discourse in terms of the rules of that very discourse. He wants to discern the psycho-social interests in support of which the Buddhists reduced "Tathāgata" to an ontic term.

Chandrakīrti concedes that his strategy puts him at risk. He will be accused of doing the impossible, which is to deconstruct ontology in its own language. He will be accused of ignoring literary conventions which, among other things, insist that a text at least be coherent. In order for it to be taken seriously, the text must mean what it says. It should not profess alienation of aim from method, of content from form. Thus, it makes no sense to write a text that seeks the end of ontology in ontological language. Chandrakīrti acknowledges the risk, knowing fully well that implementing his strategy is as risky as catching a poisonous snake.³⁷ He will use ontological discourse through which to decode the deceptions of man. He will do so while remaining in the logocentric circle which believes that ontology is a methodical description of things as they are in themselves. Chandrakīrti submits to the juridical authority of the circle, accepting its rules as a predicament of thought. However, he will use the rules as strategic tools only (*upāya*).

One of the rules of the circle is the *anubandha* model of writing.

36 "Tathāgatajñānotpatti hetumādiṃ kṛtvā," *ibid.*, p.1.

37 "Sarpa yathā durgṛhīto," Nāgarjuna, *Madhyamaka Śāstraṃ*, X X IV.XI.

This model created a literary culture in which an author, like anything else in life, does not begin with nothing. In a world conceived in a communion of Being and language, consciousness can not be wordless. Man does not begin to speak language; language comes to speak through man. The closure of the world in language determines the relation between the text and the author. Writing, which makes an author, does not begin on a clean slate; it inherits a system of signification and occurs in a world of pre-texts. The author receives, transforms and transmits knowledge in terms of a frame of reference. No matter how modern or critical, the author is steeped in some form of tradition. Chandrakīrti gives in to the *anubandha* model of writing. He prefaces his *Prasannapadā* with dedicatory words, announces its positional belonging to Mādhyamika tradition, evokes the authority of Mahāyāna sutras, introduces the theme and method and states the reason for writing his text. He also establishes the causal relation between his text and the emancipatory purpose it seeks to achieve, shows what went wrong with the texts that preceded his own, and intends to recover the sense of Buddha-words through his own text.³⁸ Chandrakīrti concedes to inter-textual movement of thought, to the temporal thickness in which no text, not even a sentence, makes any sense by itself. Thinking has no pre-textual genesis. There is no world without language, no thought that can transcend the world. There simply can be no *śūnyatā* apart from *saṃvṛti*, no meaning outside the traditions of signification and no nirvāṇa beyond saṃsāra. The hermeneutical significance of dependent origination is complete.³⁹

Chandrakīrti submits to historicity of thought. He is a stranger to the house of ontology, but he also knows that there is nothing outside of it. He can deconstruct ontology only on its own turf, there being no other turf and no home-court advantage. Because there is no such thing as meta-language, Chandrakīrti can do no more than use the language of ontology as *upāya*, as a strategy of deconstruction.⁴⁰ He has no

38 "Nagarjunāya pranipātya tasmai tat Karikāṇaṃ vivṛtṭiṃ kariṣye," *Prasannapadā*, p.1.

39 "Paraspara sambhavanāṃ vā saṃvṛtiranyonya samāśrayeṇetyarthaḥ... sa ca abhidhānabhidheya jñānañjeya lakṣaṇaḥ," *Prasannapadā*, p.215; "Laukika eva darśane sthitvā Buddhanāṃ dharma deśana," *ibid.*, p.15.

language of his own, no methodological independence, no epistemology or syllogistic logic and no center. Nor has he any ontological commitments. He gives no privilege to identity or difference, universal or particular, being or nothingness, self or not-self, eternity or time. He has no alternative set of assumptions, separate criteria of truth and falsity, or standard of criticism alien to the logocentric circle.⁴¹ Deconstruction makes sense only in the categorical tradition, in the inter-textual field, and only at the level of signs and signifiers. Chandrakīrti seeks admission to the logocentric circle. But he makes it clear that words are not policemen, and that he will think through the words without believing that what they say is true. The important thing is to play by the rules, not the espousal of faith in the authority of policemen.⁴² Chandrakīrti will play by the rules, but he will not commit himself to their validity or invalidity.

But the circle is conservative. It insists that there can be no such thing as playing by the rules without accepting their validity. One cannot inhabit the world on borrowed terms. The establishment reminds Chandrakīrti that philosophers practice their craft by honoring two conventions. One is the authority of lived experience, the everyday world. Even if God, let alone a philosopher, says that fire does not burn, the wisdom of common sense prevails. No matter how critical or profound, a philosopher cannot contradict common sense. The philosopher should not confuse an explanation of the world with explaining it away. The second convention is just as important. It stipulates that the philosopher must share at least one truth with commoners, namely, that there is a world of things out there to which language refers. There is no significant speech if there is nothing to speak about, and language does refer to things other than itself. When faced with doubt or indecision, a person in the street asks: "What is there, a man or a lamp post?" The question spatializes truth. It has a

40 "Vayamapi āropato vyavahārasatyē eva sthītvā vyavahārārtham vinayajana anurodhena śūnyamityapi brūmaḥ aśūnyamityapi brūmaḥ śūnyā-śūnyamityapi naiva śūnyam naśūnyamityapi brūmaḥ," *ibid.*, pp.192-193.

41 "Na vyaṃ svatanīranumānaṃ prayujjamahe," *ibid.*, p.11; "Sva pratijñāyā abhāvāt," *ibid.*, p.7.

42 "Na hi śabdāḥ daṇḍapāsikā iva vaktāramasvatantrayanti," *ibid.*, p.7.

referential flow, enjoining one to determine whether there is or there is not something that corresponds with the use of the word "there".

The question has an assumption as well as aim. It assumes that a thing makes sense by virtue of the fact that it is not anything else, and that two or more things cannot exist in the same space at the same time. If a thing is to be definite and indubitable, if it is not to be anything else, then the authority of either/or logic must prevail. Otherwise a thing would not be different from any other thing, in which case the everyday world would collapse. The question aims to discern the alterity of the world in words, to determine that either a lamp post or a man corresponds to "there", not both. There is an extraordinary degree of relationality in the everyday world. It insists that a rope is a rope and a snake is a snake, that nothing can be both a rope and a snake at the same time, and that their apparent similarity should not be mistaken for definite identity. Common sense insists that similarity often leads to disappointment rather than to successful action. In need of trying a cow with a rope, one does not after all like to pick up a snake in trust. Philosophy answers the call of common sense. It provides a definite description of entities, thereby presenting the world as a coherent body where referents correspond to signifiers like "I" and "there." Philosophy is authentic only if it serves human interests, and it can do so only as a logocentric system (*anvikṣikī*).

Guided by the assumption that knowledge is social, it operates in a field of shared categories and rules of discourse. The concern for meaning and order implies that philosophy must use epistemology as its methodology of making ontological claims. It is not enough for one to say that he or she knows; simple assertion will not do. One must also differentiate knowing from knowing *that* - cognition from object - and evolve methods of determining correspondence between knowledge and things that may or may not exist out there. There can be no ontology without epistemology, and human interests will not be served both, he is irresponsible with respect to common sense and the everyday world.

The establishment goes on to accuse Chandrakīrti of other

things. Deconstruction smells of ambiguity and double-talk, both having to do with the alienation of aim from method. Chandrakīrti's aim is to find meaning in the world, and he does this by stealing referents from words. He claims to think through ordinary language, insisting that nirvāṇa must be returned to saṃsāra. But he should know that it makes no sense to return anything to the people by first denying referential validity to their language.⁴³ He wants to serve the cause of the Buddhists, but he does so by denying that "Tathāgata" refers to a being who spoke the *dharma* in Shravasti. Chandrakīrti is free to deconstruct ontology, but he should realize that he cannot do so in the language of ontology itself. There is no such thing as immanent criticism, no deconstruction in terms of methodological dependence on the circle. One cannot eat the cake and keep it at the same time. The authority of either/or logic is total. One cannot stay in the logocentric circle and eschew its rules of discourse, just as one cannot affirm the world by destroying language through which the world is sustained. Deconstruction is unmethodic; if not, then it is nihilistic. One either lives in the circle and accepts the validity of its method, or one makes an exit and destroys it from outside.

The establishment does not stop there. It reminds the deconstructionist that he loses credibility on his own terms. Chandrakīrti expects people to believe that his language makes sense although, on his own admission, it has nothing to do with what exists and what does not. That is not how one uses language, especially ordinary language. The establishment philosopher likens Chandrakīrti to a man who expects to be taken seriously when he claims that he is riding a non-existent horse, or that he is riding a horse by virtue of not riding it.⁴⁴ Common sense says that one either rides a horse and admits one is doing so, or that one does not ride a horse and admits it. One cannot ride a horse and not ride at the same time. Not only would that be self-contradictory, it would also violate the everyday use

43 Nāgarjuna, Vighra Vyāvartani, ed. P.L. Vaidya (Darbhanga: Mithila Vidyapitha, 1960), pp.277-278.

44 "Yatha hi kascid yameva asvamarUdhah tameva vismrtah san tadapaharadoṣena paranupalabhate," *ibid.*, p.219.

of the word "riding." Riding a horse is as much of a fact as not riding it, but they are altogether different sorts of facts. One is positive, the other negative; and the two together exclude all other possibilities between themselves. "Not riding" refers to a meta-linguistic fact as much as "riding" does, and both signify states of affairs that are incompatible and transcendent to language. It is not necessary that a man be a horseman. But he cannot be a horseman without possessing a horse; neither can he both ride and not ride the horse at the same time. The authority of either/or logic is self-evident. There is nothing in the middle.⁴⁵

Referential language is a matter of reflex with the establishment. It elevates its reflex to logical necessity, to the claim that it is self-contradictory to use language without making an ontological claim. Conceived in a referential gesture, in the saying of "I am this" by Being, the world has come to dwell in the house of language. And this house determines the terms of discourse, including "borrowing." One borrows what one does not have, and that too from another house. Chandrakirti may either live in the house, in which case he must believe in its system of signification, or walk out of it and speak the language of a dreamworld. He should concede that deconstruction cannot operate on the level of concepts and signifiers only. To deconstruct concepts is more than a conceptual act, just as to deny language its referential validity is more than linguistic. Ontology is more than a linguistic deception, if it is a deception at all. Philosophers may do positive or negative ontology, giving privilege to being or non-being. But there is no such thing as deconstruction of ontology, no purging the cogito of all claims about being or non-being. The fact of the matter is that Chandrakirti is doing negative ontology, and that too from the back door. If not, he is engaged in dialectical cunning and double-talk.

The establishment suspects that deconstruction is symptomatic of a deeper malady. It involves disdain for categorical conventions, a disregard for the sociality of language and an unwillingness to play the

45 "Sataśca sadbhāvo'sataścasasabhāva iti sat saditi grhyamaṇam," Nyāya Vārtika, p.19.

game of life by the rules. Rooted in an ideology of unmediated difference, adhering to the particularity of a moment preceded and succeeded by non-being, the deconstructionist reduces an object to what a subject thinks of it. He dissolves the publicness of experience to privacy of dreams, the everyday world to brains in a vat. Chandrakirti should realize that abandoning epistemology, the means of acquiring and validating knowledge, would reduce the world to a fantasy.⁴⁶

The logic of the objective world goes something like this: "X is Y" is true because of Z, where the universal concomitance between Z and Y is established empirically, and where X signifies the locus in which such concomitance occurs. It is therefore reasonable to say that "There is fire on the hill" is true, because "Wherever there is smoke, there is fire" is true, and because "There is smoke on the hill" is true. In Chandrakirti's scheme, an individual may well say "X is Y" is true without any regard to the truth of "Z is Y," and another individual, with equal impunity, can say "X is B" is true -- even though both individuals are talking about the same X at the same time, and even though Y and B signify contradictory state of affairs.

Chandrakirti seeks to emancipate the cogito from the ego, but his dismissal of epistemology does the opposite. It surrenders the cogito to the whims of the ego, the world to a solipsistic cave. There is no objective arbiter in Chandrakirti's scheme of things, nothing that keeps knowledge from will-to-power. The order of things is broken and the cogito becomes an instrument of anarchy and violence. The world becomes a free-for-all, with the stronger ego institutionalizing its will into an omnipotent totality. Philosophy then becomes an ideology of tyranny and slavery.

The logocentric circle draws a line. At stake is liberty of reason, the right to fair play and freedom of responsible dissent. Deconstructionists have the right to negative dialectic, for negation implies liberty of reason. But they cannot absolve themselves from responsibility to civil society, bound as they are to sociality of meaning.

46 "Hetu dṛṣṭāntānubhidhānāt parokta doṣāparihārācca," *ibid.*, p.5. See Chandrakirti's defense, which continues through p.12.

Chandrakirti has to understand that thought need not regress to emptiness of content or commitment, that there are constraints on assertion and denial, that a negative claim is still a claim and that it must answer to criteria of truth and falsity of claims. Negation, if it is to be meaningful, must conform to the content as well as the form of an affirmative judgement. "The rabbit's horn is not sharp" is not a case of significant negation for the simple reason that "The rabbit's horn is sharp" is not an instance of a significant assertion. To deny that the rabbit has horns, let alone sharp horns, is not only logically odd, it also violates common sense. It is important that deconstruction be methodic, and the circle is not at all convinced there is a method that does not involve assertions about the state of affairs in the world. There is no way one can be methodic and not do epistemology or make ontological claims.

The logocentric circle leaves Chandrakirti with disconcerting options. Chandrakirti either concedes that deconstruction is not methodic, in which case he violates the rules of responsible dissent and loses the privilege of inhabiting the circle. And, if he does stay in the circle, he has to accept the authority of its method. There are rules of discourse to enforce which language acts like the policeman. One cannot use language to destroy the alterity of its world. No matter how innovative or critical, a philosopher cannot escape verbalizes temporality and sociality of discourse. The philosopher cannot take his tradition for granted, but neither can he or she be post-modernistic or meta-traditional. That is the only form of criticism the middle way can bear. There is no philosophy without history of philosophy, no dissent that transcends a categorial circle. Inside the circle philosophers use language to make claims that are true if they present a state of affairs, and false if they do not. Dissent cannot be elitist; it cannot be transcendent to or imported from outside society. Like negative judgement, dissent has efficacy only if it is not alien to the categorial borders in which it occurs. Because he does not believe in its juridical authority, Chandrakirti cannot inhabit the logocentric circle. He must remain on the borders of civil society, wandering aimlessly in the

forests.

There is an irony in all this. The circle insists that there is no philosophy without the history of philosophy, but it discourages question that pertain to the birth and validity of its sanctum. Does philosophy alienate itself if it comes to reflect on its own genesis? What is the relation between being in the world and doing ontology? Does obedience to the rules of logocentric discourse necessitate confession of faith in the rules? One either rides a horse or one does not, never mind how it is that one comes to have or learns to ride a horse in the first place. Happy with the status quo, the circle excludes the middle. It finds comfort in ontological commitments, shying away from the egocentric concerns that get refreshed in categories like being and non-being. The circle calls for a world where identity has privilege over difference, the one over the many, the whole over the part, the caste over the individual. Positive posture, which at bottom is a case of self-assertion, determines the form and content of negation; the conditions that make saying "yes" possible also determine the means and limit of saying "no." The circle likes unity and coherence; fearful of inner contradictions, it regulates deviation and dissent. It does not deny difference or plurality, but it relegates them to attributes of identity. No wonder the circle insists upon methodological consensus. It talks of inside and outside, the law-abiding "I" and the liminal "other." It recognizes the other in contrast to itself, in its own image and on its own terms. Inside the border there is syllogistic coherence, traditions of ontological commitment and the harmony of hierarchical society. Outside the border the circle recommends the use of dialectical cunning (*tarka*) only to show that the alien is illogical, esoteric and deviant.

After a rhetorical response to the circle, Chandrakīrti gathers himself to clear the accusations. He denies that deconstruction is double-talk or a negative ontology. He agrees with the circle that epistemology is the method of doing ontology, that the latter is the end to which former is the means. In good faith, he returns to Nāgārjuna who eschewed the end by dismissing the means. "If by means of valid knowledge I were to cognize an object, I would affirm or deny the

object. I do not do so and should not be accused on that count."⁴⁷ Nāgārjuna put it succinctly: if one absolves oneself from the method of doing ontology, then there is no reason for that person to make claims about being or non-being. No epistemology, no ontology; no *pramāṇa*, no *prameya*. Having no epistemology means eschewing all ontology, including negative ontology.⁴⁸ There is no room for double-talk, no need of doing ontology from the back door. Chandrakīrti cites scriptural authority time and again in good faith. The words of Tathāgata do not center the many in the one, the particular in the universal, the body in the self, the difference in identity. Nor do they espouse the contrary. They do not reduce the one to the many, the universal to the particular, the self to the body, identity to difference. They also eschew a both/and form of thinking. They do not affirm identity *and* difference, the self *and* the body, the one *and* the many. Having dismissed the polarities, they do not call for an ontology in the middle.⁴⁹

Mahāyāna scriptures disavow one more thing. They do not accord themselves the status of the *between*, as they are not interested in defining rules of discourse with a view to settling conflicts of claims and counter-claims. That would be prioritizing a subjectivity which then has the authority of determining what is worth talking about and including in the circle, and what is irrelevant and to be excluded. The scriptural texts of Mahāyāna have no margins. They dismiss the inside as well as the outside, the "I" as well as the "other." They have no center, no middle kingdom and no boundaries to defend. The text even deconstruct themselves. "Whoever says Tathāgata has spoken the *dharma* is telling a lie. Speaking of *dharma*, speaking of *dharma*, Subhūti, there is no word about *dharma* that could be said to the word of Tathāgata."⁵⁰ Not that Tathāgata did not speak at all. Indeed he spoke before

47 Nāgārjuna, *Vaidalya Sūtraṃ* (Varanasi: Tibetan Center, 1974), p.27.

48 "Ata eva tarkalakṣaṇābhidhānaṃ niṣprayojanaṃ," *Prasannapada*, p.11.

49 "Na ca Mādhyamikasya sataḥ svatantra anumānaṃ kartuṃ yuktaṃ pakṣāntara abhyūpagamābhavāt," *ibid.*, p.5; "Madhyepi sthānaṃ na karoti paṇḍitaḥ," *Samādhirājasūtra*, cited in *ibid.*, p.54.

50 "Dharma deśanā dharma deśanā, Subhūte, nāsti sa kaścīdharmo yo dharmadeśanā." L.M. Joshi, ed., *Vajracchedikā Prajñāparamitāsūtra* (Sarnath: Kendriya Tibeta Siksa Sansthana,

there was time, he shall speak at the end of time, and in the middle he speaks in such a way that he will have to speak time and time again. It is only that he uses words as *vajra*, as deconstructive tools, which cut through the categorial network in which the ego has dispersed fears of its finitude. Such cutting is methodic, and it itself is *śūnyatā*.⁵¹

Chandrakīrti takes shelter in scriptural texts for a purpose. The text do not house an ontic world, although they are in that very world. No truth that needs borders dwells in them, and that is why they belong to all the worlds; they recognize no falsity across the borders, and that is why they quarrel with none. There really are no walls between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*, between wandering in the forests and being in the world. The texts confer endless flexibility upon the deconstructionist. Linguistically and categorially speaking, the deconstructionist is homeless, and that is why he or she is at home everywhere. Because there is no word about *dharma* that could be said to the word of Tathāgata, there is no word that could be said to be "other" to Tathāgata. For this reason, a Mādhyamika need not be engaged in a dialectical refutation of the other.⁵² Rather than refuting the other, philosophers should return a critical gaze into the interior of their own group-think. They should discern the mutual dependence of the ego and the cogito, of eros and logos, of "I" and "other." There is no need to steal the referents from language.⁵³ Instead the point is to return the referents to where they belong, namely, the referentiality of language (*Vāk prapañca*). Whether it is a person or a lamppost is a legitimate concern, but the concern comes into focus with a linguistic act, in the asking "What is there?" Language is where the world dwells, and it is in such dwelling that the birth of the referents can be traced. How the referents come to be is what they are; they come to be

1978), p.40.

51 Atthasālini (London, 1987), p.148; "Najñānacchūnyatā nama kacidanya hi vidyate." Tucci, ed., Minor Buddhist Texts (Rome, 1956), Vol. I., p.201; Joshi, *Vajracchedika*, p.13.

52 "Astīti nāstīti vivāda eṣaḥ. Vivādapraptyā na dukkhaṃ praśamyate," *Samādhiraśasūtra*, cited in *Prasannapadā*, p.54.

53 "Tṛṣṇādṛṣṭi nibandhanam," *ibid.*, p.131; "Te strīnimittam kalpayitva tabhiḥ sardham ramamaṇamatmānam sarjananti ... kalahavigrahavivadam sarjanayati," *ibid.*, p.17.

through language; and the ego uses language to posit its alterity in a referential posture (*prakṣepa*). Chandrakīrti has no intention of wandering aimlessly in the forests. Instead his aim is to return the transcendent to the everyday world, the referents to the self-referential ego and the ontology of being and non-being to the anxiety of living and dying.⁵⁴

But ontologists are used to chasing their own shadows. They insist that language presents referents that are transcendent to itself, that it is unreasonable to use language and not claim independence of the referents. In desperation, Chandrakīrti forces the issue: Who is being unreasonable? Who deprives language of its world? Is it the ontologist who steals referentiality from language? Or is it the deconstructionist who does no more than show that the ontologist fails to establish independent referents on his or her own terms? Denying the mental cramps that plague oneself would do, much less projecting them unto others. The ontologist becomes defensive whenever faced with two questions: Are there referents apart from referentiality of language? How does language come to assume referentiality in the first place? When asked to look into the egological genesis of signifiers the ontologist reacts as nervously as the horseman who accuses others of stealing his horse.⁵⁵ The point is not the truth or falsity of the horseman's claim. That would separate the symptom from the cause. The point is the possessive anxiety that incarnates itself in the horseman's claim. It is not that the horseman possessed the horse and then lost it in theft. In that case the accusation would be reasonable. What is unreasonable is the horseman's claim that someone has stolen his horse, even though he is mounted on that very horse. The horseman is given to self-predicative contingency, to asserting his being in terms of having the horse and the fear of losing identity by the possible loss of what he has. Anticipatory fear incarnates itself in a stolen referent, in the belief that the horse is non-existent.

54 "Satkāyadr̥ṣṭimūlakāḥ satkāyadr̥ṣṭisamudayaḥ satkāyadr̥ṣṭihetukah," *ibid.*, p.149;

"Bhayaśan̄jñāmutpādayedasatsamāropeṇa ... rāgakoṭi bhayabhita virāgakoṭim̄ niḥsaraṇam̄," *ibid.*, p.203.

55 "Atyanta vikṣepāttanupalambhamāno asmān parivdadati," *ibid.*, p.219.

Belief in stolen referents involves displacement of two kinds: cognitive and spatial. In the first sense, not only is the possible loss of the horse not recognized as just that; it is also turned into an actual fact and is perceived as such. The anticipatory fear of loss turns itself into a state of affairs, into a knowable entity about which truth claims are then made (*prameya*). In the spatial sense, the horse does not exist where it did; it does not answer to signifiers like "mine" and "here." It is believed to exist in another locus, in the possession of someone else, and it functions as a referent of "his/hers" and "there." The point is not the independence of the referent, in this case the being or non-being of the horse. The point is that language carries the trajectory of its birthplace, namely, the saying of "I" and positing of entities corresponding to "this" or "there." Although demonstratively empty, the "I" seeks exteriorization through objects. Thus does language assume referentiality, forcing the belief that signifiers like "here" and "there" present things that are here and there in themselves. Language assumes an ontological texture for egological reasons; it bears a world by displacing its own referentiality as independent referents. Ontology involves a semantic of desire that Chandrakirti seeks to disclose.⁵⁶ He has no intention of stealing the referents. Instead his intention is to return the referents to the referentiality of language, the being and non-being of a horse to the possessive anxiety of the horseman, and the world to egological dispersal through words.⁵⁷

IV

Methodic deconstruction is restorative. Chandrakirti notes with dismay that fellow Buddhists forgot that Buddhism was born with the death of the horse and the horseman. Shākyamuni walked to the *bodhi*-tree to meditate on the egocentric genesis of the questions that Dirghatamas had raised. The Buddhists forgot the therapeutic sense of "Tathāgata," turning it into a term of propositional discourse. They joined the logocentric discourse, thought in terms of subject-predicate

56 "Prapañco hi Vak," *ibid.*, p.159; "Grahśca nāma saṅgrahaṇaṃ bhāvarūpaḥ," *ibid.*, p.203; "Mohaṇaṃ mohaḥ sammoha padārthasvarūpa vijñānaṃ," *ibid.*, p.199.

57 "Saṅklesa vyavadāna nibāṇḍhanaṃ," *ibid.*, p.15.

logic and made all sorts of claims and counter-claims. "Existence is momentary" became a matter of syllogistic cogito, "Tathāgata speaks the *dharma*" an instance of propositional truth. Chandrakīrti seeks to restore the authentic sense of "Tathāgata" not by running away from the logocentric circle but by deconstructing propositional discourse on its own terms.⁵⁸

Two terms constitute a proposition in Indian logic: reference and description. The former names a subject which by definition exists and is known or knowable as such. The latter ascribes predicates to a subject, adding something significant to what is already known of the subject. There are two criteria of determining the subject or predicate status of the terms: grammatical and logical. If the grammatical criterion is used, then the status of the terms depends on the order in which they are introduced in a sentence. "Tathāgata speaks the *dharma*" is a case in point. Here "Tathāgata" is used in the nominative case and stands for the subject term, while "speaks the *dharma*" signifies descriptive expression by virtue of the fact that it is introduced in the accusative case. The grammatical expression has the characteristic of display; it reveals the subject-predicate structure of reality (*vācya-vācaka*). And if it does not, it should be revised to meet the logical criterion, in which case it does exhibit the ontological structure. The shift from the grammatical to the logical is made in the interests of an ontological stance. The terms change positions in the revised edition, but the sentence still bears them in subject-predicate relation. Thus "Tathāgata speaks the *dharma*" may be revised to read as follows:

1. "Tathāgata" signifies the subject term. It refers to an agent that does something by virtue of the fact that it exists and is known to exist. If that were not the case, then expressions like "barren woman's son" could also be used to signify the agent of an act.

"Tathāgata" refers to an agent that does things intentionally and whose acts, along with the ensuring consequences, are

⁵⁸ "Na hi Tathāgata yuktiviruddham Vākyamudāharanti," *ibid.*, p.26; "Tirthyamatāni parityajya," *ibid.*, p.192.

predicatively descriptive of the agent's identity. "Tathāgata speaks the *dharma*" exhibits reality, but not nearly enough. As a matter of fact, it is an incomplete expression. The sentence should be revised to read "Tathāgata is qualified by the act of speaking the *dharma*." There is an *X* that has the property *Y*.⁵⁹

2. "Tathāgata" in itself means nothing. Existence is functional; that which does nothing and does not change is demonstratively nonexistent. A Tathāgata that does nothing or does not speak the *dharma* cannot be significantly used in a sentence. It is the speaking of *dharma* that makes Tathāgata so and should have privilege over everything else in the sentence. "Tathāgata speaks the *dharma*" is a misleading expression. It should be revised to read "The speaking of *dharma* has Tathāgata as its locus," where "speaking" is the reference term and "Tathāgata" the nominal base in which the act occurs. There is *Y* such it occurs in *X*.⁶⁰

3. An act is, by definition, intentional. It fulfills itself in a materialization of the intended state of affairs. Intentionality precedes an act, the end terminates it, and in the middle the act is not a thing in itself. The intended end ascribes a definite texture to an act; without it, no act would be distinguishable from any other. It is the "*dharma*" that signifies the sense of "speaks" and that should be the privilege term in "Tathāgata speaks the *dharma*." Not only is the sentence an incomplete expression as it stands, it is also misleading. Its grammatical flow is completely at odds with its logical sense. It should be revised to read, "dharma is the object of speech that has Tathāgata as its locus." There is a *Z* such that it constitutes *Y* which occurs in *X*.⁶¹

Chandrakīrti examines these revisions in two chapters of his *Prasannapadā*.⁶² Here I present his treatment of the first position only,

59 "Prathamāntartha amukhyaviśeṣyabodhakaḥ," V. Suba Rao, *The Philosophy of the Sentence and Its Parts* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1969), p.5.

60 "Dhātvartha mukhyaviśeṣyaka śābdabodhaḥ," *ibid.*, p.4.

61 "Ākhyātārthamukhyaviśeṣyaka śābdabodhaḥ," *ibid.*, p.5.

62 "Karma Kāraka Parikṣā," in *Prasannapadā*, pp.75-80; "Agni Īndhana Parikṣā," *ibid.*, pp.86-94

namely, "Tathāgata is qualified by the act of speaking the *dharma*." "Tathāgata," because it is used in the nominative case, refers to the agent, and "speaks" - together with the rest of the terms - signifies a predicative description. When we say "agent" we mean someone who does something, an *X* that exists and is the subject of the act signified by the root verb in the sentence. The relation between subject and agent is that of identity. "Devadatta," in "Devadatta is cooking," is the subject term in the sense that it signifies a person who is none other than the one who does the cooking. Such also is the case with "Tathāgata" in "Tathāgata speaks the *dharma*." To say that "Tathāgata" signifies the subject is to mean that its referent is a person who speaks, and that this person does so by virtue of the fact that he or she exists. It is not a non-existent person who is the agent of "speaks," not a person who does something else, say cooking, who is the agent of "speaks"; nor is it a person who has finished speaking and is now silent who is the agent of "speaks." It is only the speaking Tathāgata that can be the agent of "speaks." Thus "Tathāgata speaks the *dharma*" leads to "The speaking Tathāgata speaks the *dharma*." This is logically odd.⁶³ Such also is the case with "Tathāgata exists," if "exists" is used as a predicate term. The proposition would lead to the oddity of "The existing Tathāgata exists."

Chandrakīrti shows that there are no propositions, not even reformed propositions that Buddhists like Bhavyaviveka and Dharmakīrti espouse. There is an alienation of aim from method in propositional language; it claims to exhibit the subject-predicate alterity of things but it defeats its purpose on its own terms, ending up in either self-contradiction or tautology. The logic that deconstructs the substance model of reality can do the same to the modal model. If identity has no privilege, then neither does difference. Ontology loses face in its own mirror. The talk of Being (or God) melts into silence on its own terms, and the language of momentariness fares no better. Indeed, "God" does not signify an entity on the hill; but, just as importantly,

63 "Kriyā nibandhantvātkarakavyapadeśaśya," *ibid.*, p.75; "Doṣaprasaṅgāt sadbhūtaḥ kārakaḥ karma na karoti," loc. cit.

nor does "Tathāgata" refer to a being who speaks the *dharma* in Shravasti. The relation of words and object is like mirage and water. Lost in the desert, a thirsty person says, "Water is there." The movement of meaning in the sentence is from "water" to "there"; it claims to display a state of affairs, but in point of fact it does not. The desire that water be there gets spatialized in demonstrative symbols, in deceptive signifiers like "there." Like the man in desert, ontologists mistake referentiality of language for a referent. They are victims of a linguistic mirage.⁶⁴

What, then, does "Tathāgata" signify? If it does not refer to the agent of "speaks," then whose words did the people hear in Sharavasti? Who spoke the *dharma*, a ghost or a real person born of Shuddhodana and Maya? Does not Chadrakīrti steal Tathāgata from the Buddhists? The questions have an ontic slant, implying the belief that if Tathāgata was not there to speak then the people could not have heard a word on the *dharma* at all. Chadrakīrti responds to the questions in light of his stance on ontology. Conceived in a dreamworld, manufactured in egological imagination, ontology presents images as reality. It conveniently displaces the wish that there should be some truth in the claim that the thing in fact is there. The panic of identity seeks shelter in decisive transcendence, concern for self-certainty in methodic doubt, and uncertainty of belief in the claim that "Tathāgata speaks the *dharma*" is true. The irony is that the "I" reiterates itself in the independence of the referent of "Tathāgata." and it does so by first stealing the referent from itself. The desire for religious certainty gives itself a spatial anchorage, incarnating itself in the claim that "Tathāgata is over there and speaks the *dharma* for us."⁶⁵ This assertion implies that Tathāgata is over there, the listeners here, and that a distance prevails between the speaker and the listeners. Hence the duality of Buddha and the Buddhists for egological reasons. The ego affirms itself as the locus of religious discourse, uses space as a category of mediation and does so with a view toward elevating itself to the sacred.

64 "Sāvṛtanam padārthanam maricika jalakalpanam idampratyayamatrata," *ibid.*, p.79; "Dūribhūtariryatha loko'yaṃ dṛṣyate," *ibid.*, p.148.

65 "Ayaṃ Bhagavān asmabhyamimaṃ dharmam deśayati," *ibid.*, p.236.

It projects Tathāgata as an "other" in space, ascribes ontological independence to the other, clings to the words that it itself has ascribed to the other and gives the words the power to define the true and the false. The "I" confirms itself in the other-I, the egological bondage on an ontic Tathāgata who is believed to liberate the world.⁶⁶

There is no point in stealing the referent of "Tathāgata," of Buddha from the Buddhist. There indeed is no such referent, no Buddha apart from the Buddhists. The point is the logocentric enclosure of "Tathāgata," the processes through which the Buddhists come to give themselves an ontic Buddha. It is not that there are people who are Buddhists by virtue of hearing the words of Tathāgata. The opposite is the case. It is because there are people who wish to establish their identity by thinking in categories and speaking the language that they do, that there is an ontic Tathāgata who speaks about the things he does, in the language he does and the place he does. The underworld is older than the world, the listeners prior to the speaker. Then come ontologists who edit the dreamworld as the world, give a formal texture to the movement of desire and turn "Tathāgata" into a term of propositional discourse.⁶⁷

Chadrakīti deconstructs ontology in defense of the bodhisattva ideal. He does so as a monk, as one who is as much interested in knowing the world as in changing it. The bodhisattvas refuse to enter *nirvāṇa* until all human beings have reached the emancipatory stage. This refusal enjoins that no Buddhist shall ever concede the world to the epistemology of the static present, knowledge to a cogito that claims to present things as they are in themselves, or truth to a correspondence of things and concepts. Deconstruction demands a return from mountains to world, from metaphysical reason to psycho-social praxis. It gives privilege to *mārga*, the meditative way that leads to the egological cave where *nirvāṇa* and Tathāgata are conceived in ontic terms (*Tathāgata garbha*). There in the world, and in ordinary language, human beings should witness the genesis of their ontological

66 "Svotprekṣitā mitthya parikalpa ... ye Buddhaṃ Bhagvaṅtaṃ papañcayanti," *ibid.*, p.195; "Ghanatāro mahatābhīniveśeṇa asti Tathāgato iti grāho," *ibid.*, p.194.

67 "Vastu nibandhana hi prapañcaḥ avastukaśca Tathāgataḥ," *ibid.*, p.195.

imagination.⁶⁸ The Buddhists, in particular, should reflect on the reasons why they dissolve the transformative mission of "Tathāgata" into a metaphysical signifier, the socio-ethical commitment into an entity about which it can only be said that it either exists or it does not. There is no salvation in metaphysical dreams, only a deceptive reprieve from egological fears. The need is to take an analytic stance with a view toward emancipating man from illusions of the transcendent, to discern how man comes to commit to the doctrine of Tathāgatagarbha and to let him face the fact that the Buddha that people believe to be "other" from themselves is none other than their own other I.⁶⁹ Those who do not do this only flee the Buddha. They run from one end of the forest to the other, like frightened antelopes, never pausing in the middle to reflect on the psycho-social praxis that Tathāgata entails.⁷⁰

Deconstruction is an argument for staying in the middle. It takes a stance against the social implications of either/or logic, which is that one either stays in society and accepts its hierarchical structure of finds solace in a metasocial nirvāṇa. Consistent with the middle way, the bodhisattvas do neither. They do not move into the mountains to save their individual conscience, and in the world they demand social equality on religious grounds. There is no curtain between nirvāṇa and saṃsāra, between Tathāgata and the people. Dependent origination implies a radical relativity of all in one and of one in all. The "I" by itself is irrelevant, and so is the "other"; existence is relational to the core, and it is in this relationality alone that Tathāgata dwells. Such is the social meaning of the middle way.

The middle way is the way of language. *Nirvāṇa* is not a transcendental entity about which one must be silent, not a soteriological absolute inaccessible to ordinary language. That would dissolve the worldliness of Tathāgata on metaphysical silence, the

68 "Ātmavāda pratīṣṭhāyuktāni jīvaivāda pratīṣṭhāyuktāni kautukamaṅgala pratīṣṭhāyuktāni," *ibid.*, p.259.

69 "Mā bhāṣiḥ bho puruṣaḥ. Supto hi tvam, na tvamīto gṛhāt kutahścannirgataḥ," *ibid.*, p.17; "Tathāgato hi pratibimba bhūtaḥ," *ibid.*, p.236.

70 "Nairātmya singhnādamaśamaṇaḥ kuraṅgamā iva ...," *ibid.*, p.192.

sociality of truth in institutional secrecy, salvation in elite mysticism. It would be the Vedantization of Mahayana. Rather than silencing truth by dismissing ordinary language, the middle way moves through ordinary language (*janapada nirutti*). Tathāgata keeps on wandering in a multitude of linguistic fields, knowing well that people cannot transcend their language.⁷¹ No meta-language or linguistic hegemony, no silence in a worldless emptiness, only the dispersal of Tathāgata in a plurality of texts and tongues. There is a radical sociality between Tathāgata and the people, between the way and language. This sociality implies endless effort. Mahāyana is so only because it has perceived the depth of problematic existence, and not because it has simplified the solution in a once-and-for-all act. There is no divine guarantee behind the emancipatory mission of Tathāgata, no last prophet and on promise of a day after which there shall be no more days. The bodhisattvas find themselves in a world they have not created, and they see no eschatological signs on the horizon. they submit themselves to samsaric facticity, to a historical destiny that has no transcendental beginning and no promised end (*samsrtili*).⁷² The worldliness of bodhisattvas is total. It is through the inevitable between-ness of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and not in the metaphysical polarity of the two, that the psycho-social meaning of Tathāgata can be pursued.⁷³

Such is methodic deconstruction. It dissolves questions about beginnings and ends, and lets people face Tathāgata in the middle of their world. Being and nothingness give in to becoming, God to the emancipatory possibility of man. Deconstruction implies courage and hope. People cannot accept death and destruction as their destiny; neither can they harbor illusions about a pure land where the city of *nirvāṇa* is located and where there is a total absence of suffering. There

71 "Tadānurūpaṃ kṛta nāmadheyam śabdena sarvaṃ trisahasra vijñāyī," *ibid.*, p.121; "Saṃvṛti bhāṣitu dharmā jineya," *ibid.*, p.103.

72 "Yatra na saṅkarsaṇapadaṃ na niṣkarṣaṇapadaṃ tadāryāṇaṃ padaṃ. Apadayogena anāgatiragatisāryāṇaṃ gātiriti," *ibid.*, p.41; "Tathāgata ... na kvacid gato na kutaścīdagataḥ. Tena vocate Tathāgato," *Vajracchedikā*, p.42.

73 "Ata eva saṃsāranirvāṇayo parasparato nāsti kaścivīṣeṣaḥ vicāryamanayostulyatvat ... saṃsāranirvāṇayovīṣeṣayābhāvāt," *Prasannapada*, p.234; "Pūrvāparakoṭi kalpanā na sambhavati," *ibid.*, p.235.

is no such thing as a pure land in the land of human beings. There is neither messianic finality nor cynical pessimism; both are instances of extremity (*koṭi*). Purged of metaphysics and utopia, "Tathāgata" signifies no mire than the inevitability of effort and the risk of faith. The world keeps on dying in spite of bodhisattvas, just as bodhisattvas keep on returning to the world. The middle way works through tragic optimism, an important part of which is the samsaricity of disclosure. "Tathāgata" does not refer to an entity, although its meaning has to be presented to the world that thinks in entative terms. *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* (VP) embraces the samsaricity with these words about itself:⁷⁴ "He who speaks its [VP's] meaning to others achieves the greatest good. But how shall he speak it? He shall speak it the way it cannot be spoken. That is why it is said, 'He shall speak it.' "

74 "Katham ca samprakāṣayet? Yathā na prakāṣayet. Tenocyate samprakāṣayet iti," *Vajracchedikā*, p.43.