

## ***NĀGĀRJUNA AND SCHELLING: OUTLINES OF A DIALOGUE ON SELF, WORLD, AND VIEWPOINTS***

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**RESUMO** *O artigo pretende construir as linhas gerais do diálogo entre Nāgārjuna e Schelling sobre o eu, o mundo e os pontos de vista sobre eles, tomando como referência seus respectivos textos: Versos fundamentais sobre o caminho do meio e cartas filosóficas sobre dogmatismo e criticismo. Enquanto Nāgārjuna critica a substancialização dos entes em favor da explicação destes por meio do discurso calcado na cooriginação dependente tendo em vista a superação do sofrimento, Schelling, por seu turno, rejeita o delírio fanático ancorado nas teses do dogmatismo em favor de uma filosofia crítica, interpretada segundo seu espírito e não de acordo com sua letra, tendo em vista emancipar a humanidade. Iniciando com uma sucinta contextualização do discurso filosófico oriental e ocidental, passando, posteriormente, para a apresentação do pensamento dos dois autores, o artigo é encerrado com uma avaliação de suas teorias.*

**Palavras-chave** *Eu, mundo, pontos de vista, svabhāva, dogmatismo e criticismo.*

**ABSTRACT** *The paper intends to build a dialogue between Nāgārjuna and Schelling on Self, world, and standpoints, taking as main references Nāgārjuna's The Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way and Schelling's*

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Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism. *Whereas Nāgārjuna criticizes the substantialization of beings by resorting to the discourse of the dependent co-origination in order to overcome suffering, Schelling, on his turn, refutes the fanaticism based on dogmatism's tenets in favor of the criticism interpreted according to its spirit, and not according to its letter; in order to emancipate humanity. Starting with a succinct contextualization of the Eastern and Western philosophical discourse, proceeding further to discuss the philosophies of both thinkers, the paper is concluded by assessing their theories.*

**Keywords** *Self, world, viewpoints, svabhāva, dogmatism, and criticism.*

## Introduction

### *1 The general context of a dialogue between West and East*

The contemporary Indian thinker, Mall (1996, p. 23),<sup>1</sup> alludes to Mircea Eliade in order to point out three kinds of Renaissance, in which the dialogue between West and East can be understood and developed. The reference to them aims at the understanding of the general context of the subject matters that will be investigated in this paper, since it is impossible to detail all or some of them due to the limits allotted to the papers specially gathered to this issue of *Kriterion*.

The first Renaissance, which started at the end of what is conventionally called the Middle Ages, was that of Graeco-Roman culture and set up what is immediately and *par excellence* understood as Renaissance. Among its features, Mall, still drawing on Eliade, underlines the kind that is important to his objective, and to my own too, namely: the Renaissance of the Graeco-Roman culture was taken in by a vast range of cultural agents, such as philosophers, theologians, literates, artists, philologists, etc. Thus, reaching a large audience, it took deep roots in the European culture.

The second Renaissance, unfolding along the 19th century, was that in which the discovery of Sanskrit, Upaniṣad, and Buddhism took place. Differently from the first Renaissance, however, it did not obtain a dissemination

1 Mall's reconstruction of the three kinds of Renaissance is also the theme of the book co-authored by Ferraro and me on the first chapter of MMK that is to be published at the end of 2015 or at the beginning of 2016 by Editora UFMG.

as wide as that of the first one. Focusing mainly on works of philologists and historians, and gaining no or short visibility beyond the research field of those scholars, it was not able to build a dialogue with a wider horizon of cultural agents and, thus, it failed to be a cultural milestone. Consequently, the content of the investigated stuff was not so much worked as to provide a decisive influence on research field such as philosophy, theology, art, politics, etc.

The third Renaissance, the one developing nowadays, is the result of huge technological power implemented in the contemporary world, connecting vast cultural complexes, and that of the important role played by some Asian countries in the present-day configuration of international politics, as well. Having as background the the first and second Renaissance, the decisive question is to know if the Renaissance taking place today will reach a wide horizon as it was the case of the first Renaissance, or if it will be confined to some niches of experts, as it was the case of the second one.

Therefore, this paper cannot and does not want to neglect the historical context in which it is written. Accordingly, it should not be circumscribed to *historico-philosophical report* of the subject matter to be addressed here, as in the sense of a mere study of comparative philosophy, but it intends to look into “the thing itself”, the *theoretical tenets* held by Nāgārjuna and Schelling on the Self, world and viewpoints, so that their arguments can be object of careful scrutiny. I write this paper on the assumption that the theoretical confrontation of these tenets can contribute to deepen the dialogue between Western and Eastern philosophical discourses on the chosen topics here debated, focusing both on the accuracy of their arguments and the flaws linked to them.

## 2 *The specific context of the dialogue between Nāgārjuna and Schelling*

This paper intends to discuss Nāgārjuna’s (c. 150-250) and Schelling’s (1775-1854) theories on the Self, world and viewpoints based on the Self and on the world. Getting into details, the first part (I) investigates the examination of points of view (*dṛṣṭi-parīkṣā*), and it concludes that the discourses whose aim is to explain the duration and finitude of Self and world are deficient. Therefore, as stated by MMK, XXVII, 30, Gautama taught us to remove all points of view (*sarva-dṛṣṭi-prahāṇa*, MMK, XXVII, 30). In the sequence, the second part (II) deals with Schelling’s philosophy. Here the main themes looked into are the philosophical positions of criticism and dogmatism, the former based on the Self, the latter drawn upon the world. Finally, in part III I want to point out the convergences of Schelling’s and Nāgārjuna’s philosophies, as well as their divergences, and to conclude the paper with a critical assessment of Schelling’s and Nāgārjuna’s tenets.

The guideline that coordinates the inquiry into both philosophers lies in demonstrating that, as Nāgārjuna argues for overcoming suffering (*dukkha*, Pāli; *duḥkha*, Sanskrit), Schelling's correspondent theoretical and practical, i.e., moral effort, consists in surmounting fanatical enthusiasm, *Schwärmerei*, brought about by dogmatism.

Besides, I argue that Nāgārjuna criticizes the deficiency (*doṣa*) caused by the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) way of dealing with ourselves and objects outside us, whereas Schelling criticizes the conflict (*Streit*) produced by the conditioned (*bedingt*) way of handling them. As a result of that, the discourses conducted on the base of the conventional truth and the arguments construed by the synthetic and conditioned truth are not as flawless as they intended to be, although they can contribute to reach what is "beyond" both truths: *tattva* and *das Absolute*.

Therefore, what is at stake is an investigation of a similar problem shared by both thinkers. They face tenets that affirm the substantial reality of the Self and the world as well, so that the absolute position of the Self and irremovable inconditionality of the world would be validated. Consequently, both would promote either the absorption of the Self into the world or the swallowing of the world into the Self. Facing this theoretical framework, we see the efforts of both thinkers to demonstrate the inconsistencies of those positions that favor, on the one hand, an absolute Self – although, as we will see, Schelling was not able to overcome the substantialization of the Self in his text here under consideration – and, on the other hand, a world absolutely fixed in itself and existing due to its own nature. Overcoming suffering, Nāgārjuna's aim, and avoiding fanatical enthusiasm, Schelling's purpose, mean to deprive both Self and world from a supposedly substantial existence. As a result, there will not be any kind of confrontation between the Self and the world and its unfortunate consequences. To sum up, the problem to be confronted with can be thus formulated: how do we surpass the (moral and theoretical) deficiencies caused by the several kinds of points of view depended upon the substantialization of the Self and the world?

Attention must be paid to the fact that the goal of this paper is not to frame Nāgārjuna's tenets into Schelling's philosophy, transforming the Indian Philosopher into an expression of the German philosopher's ideas in the Indian-Buddhist culture. Nāgārjuna's thinking would be legitimated, just because it defended tenets similar to those assumed by Schelling himself some 1600 years later. In this case, Nāgārjuna would be a sort of Schelling *avant la lettre*. Resembling a possible interpretation of Nāgārjuna's thinking through Schelling's philosophy is the already done interpretation of Buddhist texts

through a Kantian bias by Stcherbatsky, or the interpretation of the position of the philosophy of Middle Way in the Indian philosophy by Murti, in the similar vein with Kant's position in the history of modern philosophy (Tuck, 1990, pp. 37 and 51).<sup>2</sup>

Such a tenet would also resemble that defended by William Jones (1746-1794), "undisputed founder of Orientalism", as affirmed by Said, to whom the interest for the study of Indian culture should be oriented by the understanding of Europe itself. The historical and structural link between the classical languages of India and Europe – source of legitimation for establishing both Indian philosophy and literature and compared philology as academic disciplines – would ultimately lead to the self-assertion of European culture (Tuck, 1990, pp. 3-5). Now, *mutatis mutandis*, it is precisely that what must be avoided: to use Nāgārjuna's tenets in order to legitimate Schelling's ones.

One of the consequences of legitimizing Nāgārjuna's thought through the presence of Western author's tenets may be seen in the translation of some terms of his work. Such is the case when Stcherbatsky (2003, p. 73, Part I) comes to seeing "similarity" between "Hegel's dialect method and that of Nāgārjuna", and, then, it is a natural consequence if he translates *śūnyatā* as "negativity", considered by Hegel (Hegel. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 115) as "the soul of the universe", "die Seele der Welt".

Another theoretical deficiency, although not so frequently regarded, consists of fitting Schelling's philosophy into that of Nāgārjuna, so that the former would be a Western representative of the latter. Therefore, the German philosopher would be a kind of outpost of Buddhist thought in the Western World, thus confirming what is accepted by some circles of scholars of Eastern thought: *ex orientis lux*.

It is also important to avoid another error, frontally opposite to those referred to above. If the first one intends to establish a false identity of Schelling's philosophy with Nāgārjuna's, the second one theoretically corroborates so radical a difference between them that a dialogue would have to be necessarily discarded. Therefore, there would be an unavoidable incommensurability that would prevent us from investigating their arguments on subjects such as Self, world, and the viewpoints, as proposed in this paper. If the first position pointed out either the reaffirmation of Western philosophical theses in the Eastern philosophy or the acceptance of truths already acquired in the Eastern thought by Western philosophy, the second one enhances an unsurmountable abyss

2 See Ferraro (2012a; 2014) on the issues related to the history of interpretation of Nāgārjuna's thought.

between those philosophers, beyond any kind of intermediation. Referring to such oversensitive feeling of unbridgeable differences, Tuck (1990, p. 96) calls attention to the “relativism” of a self-consciousness so extremely aware of its linguistic and cultural confinement that it makes the understanding among individuals and among cultures, as well, impracticable.

I think that both conflicting positions are untenable and it is necessary to avoid them. In this context, I use Mall’s thesis, according to whom philosophy, as a Western and Eastern experience, cannot be isolated from its cultural environment. Every philosophy is involved within a cultural context, even though it claims universality. Built in such a context does not mean, however, exhausted in it. If that would be the case, there would be a restless identification between a certain kind of philosophy and a certain kind of culture. The consequence would be the transformation of that culture in which a certain philosophical discourse unfolds its tenets into the center of philosophy as such. That culture would establish the orthophilosophy which, in turn, would mark out what is wrong and right in philosophy.

Therefore, the point is to avoid a standardized model of philosophy, as it is elaborated in a particular philosophical culture, so that it would require every philosophical discourse to fit its arbitrary standards in a style similar to that of Procrustes’ bed. Consequently, the philosophy is always topical, always involved in a cultural sphere, and it would be blind without transcending its own cultural limits. However, at the same time, it would be empty, floating in the vacuum, if it were not bound up with the cultural context in which it develops itself (Mall, 1996, p. 14). Thus, a dialogue among Eastern and Western philosophies carried out nowadays is not to be subjected to that discourse that lifts European philosophy out of its particular cultural context into the status of the absolute *topos* of the truth. Ironically, Mall (1996, p. 89) refers to a kind of preference of the Being for the West over the East as a sort of philosophical counterpart of the theological and religious God’s chosen people.

Having faced the absolute incommensurability (radical and abyssal difference) and the reductionist commensurability (simplistic identity), one of the possible alternatives and the one that I intend to discuss here is the “Überlappungen”, or overlappings (Mall, 1996, pp. 45-54; see also Wimmer, 2004; Mall; Hülsmann, 1989). By overlappings Mall understands the fact that there are philosophical discourses that bring up zones of convergence without bringing about a total and complete superposition of their tenets, as to the point that their differences are eliminated. Above all, these overlappings invite to a dialogue among philosophies that do not lose their particular

theoretical physiognomies. Recognising their similarities does not mean that one is submerged and disappeared into the other, as well as pointing out their differences does not signify the impossibility of a dialogue. That is precisely what I want to do by investigating the issues related to the Self, the world, and the point of views in a dialogue between Nāgārjuna and Schelling.

This dialogue is suggested by Schelling himself, as far as Schelling's text is concerned in this analysis, as he explicitly links dogmatism's tenets to Eastern thinkers, although he does not refer to Nāgārjuna himself in a very clear manner. But the dogmatic environment in which Schelling includes Eastern thinkers also involves Nāgārjuna, because the former recklessly expands the assumptions of the dogmatism into a teaching assumed by Eastern philosophies as such. However, he grants one exception that worsens even further the already misfortuned dogmatic feature of Eastern philosophies: "some Chinese sages" go beyond dogmatism by advocating nihilism. Like Schelling, Eastern thinkers seem to oscillate between dogmatism and nihilism. In my opinion, as explained below, Schelling's assessment is wrong, as far as Nāgārjuna is concerned.

These are the texts by Schelling and Nagarjuna I intend to look into:

Schelling, *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus*, 1795, (DK), *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*.

Nāgārjuna, *mūla-madhyamaka-kārikāḥ* (MMK), *Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way* and *vigraha-vyāvartanī* (VV), *The Rejection of Contention*.

Therefore, I am not going to build a dialogue between Nāgārjuna and Schelling that is beyond the limits of the texts drawn above, as it is done by Vater (2004)'s very interesting remarks on Nāgārjuna and Schelling that, nevertheless, take Schelling's philosophical development from 1801-1815, further away from his initial philosophy around 1795 e 1796 when DK was published, on which my paper is concentrated. My focus is on MMK, VV, and DK, and, for such reason, they will bear the consequences and limits of my interpretation.

## I Nāgārjuna: Overcoming The Suffering

### I.1 Introductory Remarks<sup>3</sup>

The MMK finish their last chapter (*dr̥ṣṭi-parīkṣā*, examination of viewpoints) with the criticism of those viewpoints (*dr̥ṣṭayaḥ*), whose intent

3 For an introduction to Nāgārjuna's and madhyamaka philosophy, s. Ruegg (2000); Williams (1990; 2002); Lindtner (1981; 1982).



is to demonstrate the (non-)existence of the Self (*ātma*) and the world (*loka*), meaning the inhabitants of the world, in the past (*pūrvānta*) and the future (*aparānta*). As a result, they all show some kind of deficiency that the tetralemma (*catuḥkoṭi*)<sup>4</sup> undertakes to display. I will deal with two of them only: the existence of the Self in the past and the existence of the world in the future due to my purpose and the limits of this paper.

In order to reconstruct Nāgārjuna's arguments I will follow this path: firstly, beginning with the analysis of chapter XIII, *saṃskāra-parīkṣā*, examination of composition, I want to argue for the thesis that unfolds a criticism of the composite beings and their constituting elements, as well as its refusal of any point of view on *svabhāva*, intrinsic and substantial nature or being: according to Candrakīrti, "the intrinsic and substantial being is the being that exists by itself" (*svo bhāvaḥ svabhāva*, Candrakīrti, *PP*, pp. 260, 4-5).<sup>5</sup> Secondly, I proceed to study the fact that the teaching based on conventional truth makes uses of *svabhāva*, whereas the teaching based on supreme truth engages the criticism of *svabhāva* (*chapter XXIV: ārya-satya-parīkṣā*, examination of the noble truths). In this context, our task is to identify the tools used by Nāgārjuna to build a bridge between two truths. Finally, I launch into the study of the last chapter of MMK, *dṛṣṭi-parīkṣā*, examination of point of views, where the results obtained in the previous two sections will be linked to the themes of chapter XXVII: points of view on Self and world.

Although these three chapters are the focus of my arguments, verses from other chapters will also be adduced in order to provide a basis for arguments developed along with the chapters XIII, XXIV e XXVII.

### *1.2 Points of View and Intrinsic Being*

All entities or beings (*bhāvāḥ*) that arise, develop and perish are the result of compositions (*saṃskārāḥ*) of *dharmāṇaḥ* as the ultimate and no more reducible components of reality, so that they ontologically support, as the final constituents and irreducible factors of our experience, the composite and aggregated entities that we perceive in our ordinary experience. In this sense, as it is held by the Abhidharma, the beings are made of parts, and – as such, because they are impermanent (*anitya*) and the attachment (*upādāna*) to them causes frustration and suffering –, they are deceptive in nature, unreal or vain

4 *Catuḥkoṭi* refers to the four possible alternatives related to a subject under investigation: 1) a; 2) not a; 3) a and not a; 4) neither a nor not a.

5 Ferraro (2011).



or false (*mṛṣā*): “that which is deceptive in nature (*moṣa-dharma*) is vain”.<sup>6</sup> In fact, this statement by Buddha,<sup>7</sup> according to Nāgārjuna, is an explanation of what he calls vacuity (*śūnyatā-paridīpaka*, MMK, XIII, 2d), so that vacuity does not say anything other than Buddha’s word (*buddha-vacana*): it means the lack of intrinsic being or nature (*svabhāva*) as it is assumed to be the case of composed entities.

An example of a composite entity that is made of parts is the person or personality (*pudgala*) who is devoid of any intrinsic nature or substantiality (*pudgala-nairātmya*), as it is the aggregation of five *skandhāḥ*: *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saṃjñā*, *saṃskāra* e *viññāna* (Conze, 2007, pp. 147-148). I do not intend to go into the divergences over the translations of these terms or the deepening of their meanings, because they would lead us away from our goal. I just want to stress the fact that some elements make up the personality, and they deny its allegedly substantial existence.

- a) *rūpa*, the material body and its sense organs;
- b) *vedanā*, sensation or feeling that can be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral;
- c) *saṃjñā*, perception that discriminates the several objects, giving rise to the six senses (including thought as the sixth one);
- d) *saṃskāra*, mental formation or volition that constitutes the environment of mental habits, ideas, worldviews, etc;
- e) *viññāna*, consciousness.

Just as the personality as a whole entity is built on by the aggregation of *dharmāṇaḥ*, the ultimate factors of our experience, it is also dissolved by their decomposition as well. Therefore, what we call personality is the emergence of a conjuncture of certain aggregates as the personality does not subsist by, in and for itself independently from their constituting parts that give it its coming into being. And a so constituted person is impermanent, precisely because there is no everlasting being claimed to be her/his essence which this person should cling to in order to achieve her/his highest goal.

However, not only the alleged substantiality of the person is questioned – as it is claimed by the Abhidharma school – but also that of the *dharmāṇaḥ* themselves as the ultimate factors of our experience – and this is vindicated by Nāgārjuna, but rejected by the Abhidharma school. Therefore, Nāgārjuna is going further than the Abhidharma school and stands for *dharma-nairātmya*,

6 tan mṛṣā moṣadharmā yad, MMK, XIII,1a. In this context, I interpret *moṣa-dharma* in the same way as Siderits and Katsura (2013), 13.1, do, whereas Brosamer and Back (2005), 13.1, on their turn, read it as *trügerische Eigenschaft*, deceptive property.

7 Siderits and Katsura (2013), p. 2355, refer to a set of possible *sūtrāṇi* related to this Buddha’s statement.

because even the *dharmāṇaḥ*, assumedly the ultimate factors of reality, are empty, devoid of any substantial, intrinsic nature (*nairātmya*) and, thus, dissolved *ad infinitum*. Taken erroneously for substantial beings, both *pudgala* and *dharmāṇaḥ* are false (*mṛṣā*), and, on that account, non-existent, because all of them allude to something unreal and not identifiable in our experience: a substantial being stripped off from the set of conditions enabling its emergence.

As a matter of fact, we also tend to assume that there is a subject as substantial and self-existent entity facing its counterpart: a substantial object. But this would be the case only if the subject, as made up of substantial elements, were also as misleading and unreal entity as are the objects. On the contrary, if the subject is as empty as the objects, then it cannot evade the same destiny attributed to entities as substantial beings. In other terms, the falsity of a *dharma* that is supposed to be absolutely existent is not dissociated from the flawed perception of a subject that is also allegedly firmly anchored in false criteria of substantial identity. That which is seen in the entities is not obviously detached from the manner the subject perceives them, as we will see next at MMK, XIII, 8.

As much as the emptying of entities is right, it sounds wrong to substantialize the resulting vacuity (*śūnyatā*) of emptying the beings. Let us take as example the emptying of a table. After decomposing its constituting factors, such as wood, nails, legs, etc, and verifying the lack of any resulting substantial object whatsoever (*anātman*), a point of view can attribute to this resulting vacuity the identity of *ātman*. In this case, we are confronted with two kinds of errors if, apart from qualifying entities as having intrinsic nature, this very resulting vacuity would be interpreted as an absolutely existing intrinsic being. Thus, the conclusion of the chapter XIII: “vacuity was declared by the winners as a means of disentangling from all points of view. However, those to whom vacuity is a point of view have been called incurable”.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the problem is not only restricted to the deceived ones who view *dharmāṇaḥ* as ultimate factors of our experience, or entities (*bhāvāḥ*) composed of them, *svabhāva*, but it is also extended to the incurable ones too, who transform *svabhāva* itself into a point of view. At the end of chapter XIII, emptying *dharmāṇaḥ*, *bhāvāḥ*, and *dr̥ṣṭayaḥ* from intrinsic nature superimposed on them ensures the deceived ones and the diseased ones who, nevertheless, want to be cured as a way of surmounting suffering.

8 śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭināṃ proktā niḥsaraṇaṃ jinaiḥ |  
yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatādr̥ṣṭis tān asādhyaṇ bābhāṣire|| MMK, XIII, 8.

### I.3 Overcoming both suffering and absolutely existing entities

Chapter XXIV deals with suffering, its cause and the necessary steps to succeed in defeating it, such as they are expressed in the four noble truths, *catvāri-ārya-satyāni* (Pāli, *cattāri-ariya-saccāni*). It is important to bear in mind that the Sanskrit and Pāli expression, respectively, *ārya-satyāni* and *ariya-saccāni*, can also be translated as “the nobles’ truths”, “the truths for nobles”, “the nobilising truths”, “the truths of, possessed by, the noble ones”, and “the truth[s] of the noble one (the Buddha)”, although the translation “noble truths” is the mostly known (Williams; Tribe, 2002, p. 41).

In short, and without looking into all the details of the four steps to overcome suffering, for our purpose they can be pictured as follows: the first step/truth is to recognise that suffering is unavoidably linked to the life of unenlightened human beings. But, suffering does not come out of nothing. The second truth is that it has a cause (*samudāya*) called *taṇhā*, literally “thirst”, thus, craving: craving for sensual pleasures, eternal life, theories, world views, death, etc. The seemingly everlasting perspective laid out by the first truth is contrasted with the possibility of a happy exit out of suffering brought about by the third truth: cessation of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha*) through giving up craving, which, broadly speaking, is *nibbana*. The final truth is the way that leads to the cessation of truth (*dukkha-nirodha-gāmini-paṭipadā*). It is the eightfold path (*ariyo-aṭṭhaṅgiko-maggo*): 1. right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*); 2. right intention (*sammā-saṅkappa*); 3. right speech (*sammā-vācā*); 4. right action (*sammā-kammanta*); 5. right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*); 6. right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*); 7. right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*); 8. right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*).<sup>9</sup>

However, it is impossible to win over suffering if we keep a wrong point of view on it, considering it as if it were *svabhāva*: “if non-comprehension [of suffering] takes place by drawing on intrinsic nature, how will there be afterwards its comprehension? Is it not said that intrinsic nature is immutable?”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the tenet held by an individual who regards suffering as *svabhāva* means to eternalize it by obstructing any kind of action that can be taken in order to overcome it. If suffering has no origination, then it too has no end.

There is also a cognitive and ontological entanglement, as mentioned earlier in the debate on chapter XIII. If the individual perceives *svabhāva* in the objects, it also means that s/he is a bearer of a cognitive deficiency.

9 All the terms referred to above in the context of the so-called noble truths are Pāli.

10 *svabhāvenāparijñānaṃ yadi tasya punaḥ katham | parijñānaṃ nanu kila svabhāvaḥ samavasthitaḥ || MMK, XXIV.26.*

Consequently, the attribution of *svabhāva* to the objects is not indifferent, but the result of deficient cognition of objects and, accordingly, Nāgārjuna qualifies this kind of deficiency as non-comprehension (*aparijñāna*) of what is suffering and how to defeat it.

In the first chapter (*pratyaya-parīkṣā*, examination of conditions) Nagarjuna had already discussed theories intended to explain the origination of beings by means of use of *svabhāva*. In conclusion: that which exists exclusively by itself cannot be caused and destroyed, since it does not depend upon others to be or to be conceived, i.e., rationally explained. According to the context of chapter XXIV, he comes back to a similar topic, calling our attention to the error of interpreting beings as without causes and conditions: “if you look on the existence of beings as based on intrinsic nature, then in that case you regard them as without causes and conditions”.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the defender of the suffering as *svabhāva* disconnects it from the causes and conditions that make it emerge, as well as from the causes and conditions that make it disappear. Such a person does not understand the dependent co-origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*) of suffering (and other beings): “the meaning of dependent co-origination: origination of beings in dependence on [their] causes and conditions”.<sup>12</sup> If we, then, only empty suffering by emptying our view on it at the same time, it is also possible to free us from it. Otherwise, suffering is our unavoidable destiny (MMK, XXIV, 21, a-b; MMK, XXIV, 23).

As a consequence of this non-comprehension of the origination and overcoming of suffering Nāgārjuna, right on chapter XXIV, 27, argues in favor of *prahāṇa*, abandonment of a substantial understanding of a substantialized suffering.

#### *1.4 The Discourse Supported By the Supreme Truth*

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) should not be mistaken for nihilism, as it might appear at first glance. I think Nāgārjuna could not be more explicit than his statement at MMK, XXIV, 18 a-b: “dependent co-origination is that which we declare to be emptiness”.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the denial of intrinsic nature superimposed upon beings is the necessary step to perceive objects as co-dependently emerging from causes and conditions. Otherwise, the intrinsic nature superimposed

11 svabhāvād yadi bhāvānām sadbhāvam anupaśyasi|  
ahetupratyayān bhāvāms tvam evaṃ sati paśyasi||MMK, XXIV.16.

12 hetupratyayāpekṣo bhāvānām utpādaḥ pratītyasamutpādārthaḥ, Candrakīrti, PP, 5.5-6.

13 yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatām tāṃ pracakṣmahe.

upon beings brought about by our “wordly conventional practices”<sup>14</sup> will take control over us, and it will lead us to all kinds of suffering.

After linking emptiness to dependent co-origination, Nāgārjuna goes on linking emptiness to middle path (*pratipat ... madhyamā*) through dependent conceptual representation (*prajñaptir upādāya*): “it [emptiness, LAV] is a dependent conceptual representation, just that [emptiness, LAV] is the middle path”.<sup>15</sup> This quotation requires an explanation of dependent conceptual representation, rather than going right now into details of the link between emptiness and middle path.

There is a conventionality in the statement about what the beings really are, i.e., about their identities. The absence of an intrinsic and substantial nature of beings impedes the identification of substantial properties and qualities that would give them a clear and sharp ontological profile, upon which we would formulate our discourses. Without the *svabhāva* of beings, our concepts of beings rest upon conventionally arranged causes and conditions, instead of upon intrinsically and immutably fixed natures. The famous example of a chariot illustrates not only its constituting elements, such as wheels, wood, nails, etc, but also the fact that the discourse on the identity of a chariot banks on a conventional mindset and conventional linguistic system, since that discourse cannot find any objective support (the presupposed *svabhāva* of a chariot) that would be the ontological basis of a subjective description of objective being: there is no *ousía*, no substance ontologically supporting the essence of a chariot, since it is just an aggregate of its constitutive parts. What, then, could be the fixed groundwork of a description of the word, so that this kind of description were immune to the whim of an individual who describes it?

The verse quoted above states that emptiness is dependent conceptual representation. Now, the issue under discussion refers to the dependency with which the use of the word “emptiness” is associated since the word “emptiness” has no *svabhāva* that legitimates its use. It is precisely here that the distinction drawn at MMK, XXIV, 8 comes in, that between conventional truth and supreme truth: “Buddhas’ teaching of dharma rests upon two truths: conventional truth and supreme truth”.<sup>16</sup> For the dependent conceptual representation is the concept that mediates between the two kinds of truth.

14 vyavahāra, MMK, XXIV.10 a-b.

15 sā [śūnyatā, LAV] prajñaptir upādāya pratipat sāiva madhyamā ||MMK, XXIV.18, c-d.

16 dve satye samupāśrītya buddhānām dharmadeśanā]

lokasamvṛtisatyaṃ ca satyaṃ ca paramārthataḥ|| MMK, XXIV.8; also check Ferraro (2012).

The first one is the worldview that conceives substantial beings identified by their essential properties, and it illustrates the teaching (*deśanā*) founded on conventional truth assumed by individuals (*loka-saṃvṛti-satya*). According to it, the reification of beings and the several kinds of constructions derived from it read subjective and objective realities as two ontologically autonomous and different entities, so that each of them is only anchored to its own being, also freed from anything else but itself.

But the conventional is not only what allows us to see substantial things, but it can also set us free from the limits of the conventional standpoints, if the conventional is oriented by a truth involving a “view” of thing “beyond” *loka-saṃvṛti-satya*. It seems that it is possible to criticize *loka-saṃvṛti-satya* by making use of its own instruments. In his commentary on MMK, besides distinguishing three meanings of conventional (*saṃvṛti*), Candrakīrti also explains the meaning of *loka*, so that the whole of the expression *loka-saṃvṛti-satya* can be understood.

In this context, the Sanskrit word *loka* means not only the objective world, but also the individual with his/her system of language and thinking: therefore, a conventionally constructed Self (*skandhātmā*). The subjective *loka* and the objective *loka* build up a system of mutual reinforcement of their truth, *satya*, so that the truth of the individual cannot be seen as separated from the truth of the world, and vice versa.<sup>17</sup>

The first meaning of *saṃvṛti* is that of complete concealing (*samantāt-varaṇam*).<sup>18</sup> According to this first meaning, the truth based on a conventional point of view engenders nescience (*ajñāna*) about what entities – we, human beings, and things in general – really are (*tattva*).<sup>19</sup> As we will see below, the idea of concealing, obscuring *tattva* conveyed by *saṃvṛti* is one of the reasons for not clinging to its subjective and objective *loka*. Candrakīrti, however, does not restrict the meaning of *saṃvṛti* only to that of concealing, obscuring, but also he expands it to that of mutual origination (*paraspara-saṃbhava*), reciprocal co-dependence (*anyonya-samāśraya*). It is such meaning of *saṃvṛti* that, in my opinion, expresses the fact that the denial of *svabhāva* conveyed by *pratītya-samutpāda* takes place inside *loka-saṃvṛti-satya* and, by making use of its tools of it, on the one hand, but without holding on to its beliefs, on the other. Finally, the third meaning communicates the idea of social convention

17 Candrakīrti, PP, 492.6-9.

18 Candrakīrti, PP, 492.10-12.

19 In a similar manner, Plotinus affirms that nescience (a[ignoia] is established where otherness (e[ter]o) takes place. Both of them implies flawed knowledge in which the one side (qavteron) does not know (ajnoh'/) the other (qavteron). Plotinus, VI 9, 6, 47-50.

(*saṃketa*) and usual transactions of individuals in their world (*loka-vyavahāra*) characterized by the difference between knowledge (*jñāna*) and known object (*jñeya*), naming (*abhidhāna*) and named thing (*abhidheya*), etc. The *loka-saṃvṛti-satya* cannot evade the dissensus among the points of view as, for instance, the conflicting points of view on the conditions of origination of beings discussed in the first chapter of MMK. The promise of transcending the distinction and conflicts plaguing *loka-saṃvṛti-satya* is what the ultimate truth has to offer.

Since all beings are devoid of intrinsic nature and are the result of causes and conditions, emptiness is a mere conceptual fabrication without any real, ontological support. Therefore, emptiness is just some conventional fiction out of elements derived from *loka-vyavahāra* but, at the same time, linked to and thus dependent upon the supreme truth. Thus, the conventionally built-up conceptual fiction depends upon arranging terms according to theoretical beliefs, moral habits, and linguistic standards. But, without a link to *loka-saṃvṛti*, it would be impossible even to criticize its deficiencies. The advantages of emptiness as conceptual construction lies in the fact that it is not enclosed or obscured by the prejudice of *loka-saṃvṛti* based on essential beings, although it makes use of its instruments. Nāgārjuna's verse is explicit: "the ultimate truth is not taught without the support of the usual transaction of talking and thinking; not having acquired the ultimate truth, nirvāṇa is not achieved".<sup>20</sup> If well managed, *loka-saṃvṛti* is a sort of springboard, a (without denying its deficiencies) discursive instrument that seeks to surmount the conventional ambience it makes uses of.

Having discussed in a general way dependent co-origination as emptiness and as dependent conceptual representation, we now move to the meaning of dependent co-origination as middle way. What are the extremes which the dependent co-origination is the middle way of?

There seems to be no doubt that one of them is the substantialism expressed by *svabhāva*. Such affirmation of *svabhāva* is that which is frequently refuted in the MMK's verses, as seen above, and the surmounting of nescience linked to *svabhāva* was repeatedly featured in the arguments adduced in this context.

Diametrically opposed to *svabhāva*, it cannot be anything but nihilism. Then, according to dependent co-origination as conventional truth, the

20 vyavahāram anāśrītya paramārtho na deśyate|

paramārtham anāgāmya nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate|| MMK, XXIV.10. I do not intend to investigate the question if ultimate truth and nirvāṇa are identical or different, but I just want to refer to the difference between conventional truth, on the one hand, and ultimate truth and/or nirvāṇa, on the other hand.



absolutely intrinsic being cannot be affirmed but opposed to nothingness, as well as the latter can be understood only as opposed to the former, as in Candrakīrti's quotation above and here once again reproduced: reciprocal co-dependence (*anyonya-samāśraya*). However, the dependent co-origination could induce the reader to nihilism, inasmuch as it refused any kind of substantial support of beings: the repeated denial of *svabhāva* would come out in favor of a thesis, according to which beings did not exist at all.

Absence of absolutely existent beings, one of the extremes denied by means of the criticism of *svabhāva*, should not lead us to the other extreme: absence of beings, i.e., nihilism, as if they were made of nothingness or, even worse, of substantialized nothingness. Within the horizon of conventional and ordinary truth, it seems to make sense to adopt a nihilistic position as it is the denial of any substantial entity, at least as a first step towards the criticism of *svabhāva*. However, for a conventional discourse oriented by and toward the ultimate truth, nihilism as absolute negation of being is as meaningless as the absolute affirmation of being, since the denial of one necessarily implies the denial of the other, as at MMK, XV, 7, a-c, where, alluding to the Kaccānagottasutta, it is said that "in the Instruction to Katyāyana, both 'it exists' and 'it does not exist' are denied by the Blessed One".<sup>21</sup>

### *1.5 Examining the viewpoints grounded on the intrinsic being*

MMK XXVII debates the viewpoints on Self and world based on *svabhāva*. The subject matter of these viewpoints had already been the theme of the *Brahma-jāla-sutta*, *Discourse On The Brahma's Net*, *Dīgha Nikāya*, 1. I do not intend to discuss the sixty-two points of view debated there, as well as I will not go through all the sixteen standpoints described in MMK XXVII. As it was said before, due to my purpose and the limits of this paper, I concentrate myself firstly on the theme of the (non-)existence of the Self in the past to, finally, proceed to study the finitude or infinitude of the world.

The first point of view to be examined is: I existed in the past.<sup>22</sup> This statement rests upon the identity (*svabhāva*) of the Self (*ātman*) in past and present lifes (MMK, XXVII, 4-8).

Nāgārjuna's argument questions immutable identity of the Self by relating *ātman* to *upādāna-skandha*, appropriations (*upādāna*) of objects by an aggregate built up by the elements (*skandha*) of the personality above

21 Katyāyanāvāde cāstīti nāstīti cōbhayam  
pratiśiddham bhagavatā.

22 MMK, XXVII. 3, a. abhūm atītam adhvānam.

described: *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saṃjñā*, *saṃskāra* and *viññāna*. In this context, the *upādāna* is to be seen as a part of the twelvefold chain that explains the cycle of birth, old age and death. Besides, it is assumed that the agent – the appropriator, the Self in present life as result of deeds in the past – and action – the appropriation – are different. Accordingly, if, on the one hand, the Self were identical with the appropriations performed by the personality then, on the other hand, the Self were as vulnerable and impermanent as the acts of appropriation themselves brought about by the personality, it would consequently be finite and destroyed. Thus, it would be meaningless to defend arguments in favor of a continuous and uninterrupted existence of the Self from the past to the present, since agent and acts would be identical.

However, he also takes the other side into consideration: the Self and the appropriations are different, as it is the assumption. In this case, the Self could be said to exist not only in the past, but also right now in the present, for it would be free from the impermanences of the appropriation. But, distinct from the impermanence of the aggregate built up by *skandhāḥ*, the Self could not reach the objects. The advantage of a permanent Ego would succumb to the incapacity to attain things through appropriations: the nonsense of an appropriator who does not appropriate anything. Such a kind of appropriator – apart from the *skandhāḥ* and, thus, from the acts of appropriation – cannot be perceived, grasped. From all of that, nevertheless, adds Nāgārjuna, it could not be concluded that the Self did not exist in the past, as well as that there would exist in the present a permanent and immutable Self. As confirmed by the kind of negation promoted by Nāgārjuna, *prasajya-pratiṣedha*, a non-implicative negation, the denial of a Self does not imply the affirmation of existent and permanent Self, just as the denial of the origination of being by itself (*svata utpannā*) does not endorse the origination of the same being by another (*parata utpannā*) (MMK, XVII, 3-8; Candrakīrti, PP, 13, 4-6). For the refusal to attach to the point of view, according to which there is no Self, because it is finite and impermanent avoids, based on Buddha's teaching, the nihilism that ends up destroying one's karmic responsibility for one's deeds (Siderits; Katsura, 2013, commentary on verse 24.8, pp. 4693-4722) Taking into consideration the conventional point of view, the conventionally real person composed of his/her *skandhāḥ* has some degree of validity, and is the result of past acts of appropriation, although its substantial reality is completely denied.

The chapter MMK XXVII proceeds to the second point of view under critical scrutiny: I did not exist in the past.<sup>23</sup>

If the rebuttal of the first point of view fights the presupposed immutable identity of the Self that allows its defender to argue in favor of eternal existence of the Self, the refusal of the second point of view holds on to the presupposedly permanent identity of the Self: the Self that exists now is not different from the Self that existed in the past.

If they were different, the present Self would be originated independently from the past Self. Therefore, the latter could remain in the existence, while the former could have already gone out of existence: without being born earlier and, thus, having existed in the past, the current Self could have already reached its end. Consequently, the independence of both Selves causes an interruption of their actions promoted by the *karma*. The action (*karma*) of the past Self would be performed, but the present Self would receive no effects (*phala*). As a matter of fact, the karmic connection would become meaningless, since a Self would perform deeds, but another completely different Self would be their patient. Or, given their difference and independence, it could also be the case that the current Self would even emerge without cause, out of nothing. For the ones assuming karmic retribution and twelfold chain of being born, old age and death conditioning our existence, both hypotheses are inconceivable and have to be abandoned.

The two other points of view – (3) I both existed and did not exist in the past; (4) I neither existed, nor did not exist in the past – suffer from deficiencies similar to those points of view (1) and (2), since they are rearrangements of the first two standpoints. The combination of two problematic views does not produce a correct one. Therefore, all tenets about the (non-)existence of the Self in the past are not without problems (MMK, XVII, 9-13).

Let us now move to the topic of the (in)finity of the world (MMK, XVII, 21-28).

First of all, it is important to point out the meaning of the word *loka*, as it is usually translated as world. However, unlike this usual translation, in the context under discussion here, it means people who inhabit the world, resembling of Candrakīrti's explanation of *saṃvṛti* given above, where *loka* meant a personality made up by the aggregates, *skandhāḥ*. Differently from what was discussed in the verses on the (non-)existence of the Self in the past, the verses on *loka* concentrate on the world as the set of its inhabitants

23 MMK, XVII, 9: nābhūm atītam adhvānam.

and their possible and future existence in another world (*paraloka*), as reborn individuals (Siderits; Katsura, 2013, commentary on verse 27.21, p. 5780).

In such case, we have some questions to answer: will the world/*loka* – the inhabitants of the world – have an end (*anta*)? (MMK, XXVII, 2; MMK, XXVII, 21). Will the world have no end? Will there be another world, a rebirth for individuals whose world or themselves ceased to exist? Starting from the first two parts of the tetralemma – (1) will the world have an end?; (2) will the world have no end? – it must be stated that they are to be refused because another world, a rebirth, takes place. Otherwise, there will be no *paraloka*.

The metaphor of the light of a lamp is used in order to explain the transition of one world to another. Like the light of a lamp that stays lit over night insomuch as the continuous process of originating and ceasing of an individual lamp flame is kept working, so that a momentary lamp flame causes the next one, the transition of a world to another is also made possible through the continuous process of originating and ceasing a continued succession of *skandhāḥ* (*skandhānām saṃtāna*) (MMK, XVII, 22).

According to this kind of succession, the current Self, made up by these psychophysical elements, is simply the result of an earlier set of *skandhāḥ* that originates the present Self by ceasing to exist. And so goes on the *samsāra* with its continued succession of conventionally composed Selves.

But if the world has an end, i.e., if a certain set of psychophysical elements ceases to exist without generating another one and reaches a real end that does not go beyond that limit, then another world would not emerge, the conventional Self would be stuck to its particular world and would eventually die leaving no other set of *skandhāḥ* of itself.

And if the world has no end, i. e., if a certain set of psychophysical elements does not cease to exist, so that it lives on continuously without interruption, then it would be also impossible for another world to emerge, because the necessary cessation of an earlier set of psychophysical elements did not occur in the first place. As in the first case, the conventional self would in fact be stuck to its particular world but, unlike it, it would live forever, would never die and would never be born again.

The third part of the tetralemma as a conjuncture of the first two ones – will the world both have an end and no end? – states that the inhabitants of the world have an eternal and unceasing part of themselves, while they also have a certain set of *skandhāḥ* that is impermanent and finite. This could be a tenet defended, for instance, by those who say that we have an eternal and immortal soul/Self and a physical body destined to cease to exist sooner or later. But what is the problem of this tenet?

As in the example of the soul and its finite body, its flaw lies in the overly criticized tenet of an eternal Self, as was the case of the second part of the tetralemma under debate here, stating that the world will have no end. As for the example of men who become gods, in whose case a set of *skandhāḥ* ends its existence and generates another set, while another set of *skandhāḥ* existing in themselves does not. The flaw of the example as an illustration of this tetralemma lies in the fact that it makes unnecessary the transition of the status of men to that of gods, because human beings would already have the divine and immortal status of gods in themselves. Why would they become gods, if they are gods in the first place?

The fourth and last part of the tetralemma – will the world neither have an end, nor no end? – as denial of the conjuncture of the first and second parts of the tetralemma, which had been put together in the third part of the tetralemma, cannot escape from the insufficiencies of the first and second parts of the tetralemma described above. The denial of their conjuncture (fourth part of tetralemma) is no less problematic than their affirmation (third part of tetralemma), because both its affirmation and its denial are based on the flaws of viewpoints asserting would there be a world that has an end and a world that has no end.

Some of the adduced arguments listed by Nāgārjuna and reproduced along with comments on them, in order to defend the tenet on Self and world, could not withstand the criticism. The refusal of any tenet about Self and world, at least from the ultimate way of seeing things – although, from a conventional point of view, some tenets can be agreed to, as was the case of the existence of the Self in the past and its link to karma and responsibility of one's own deeds – leaves no room to take in any of them, since all of them are not able to resist their inherent inadequacies.

In the VV, Nāgārjuna states his conviction that he defends no thesis, so that its deficiency and consequent denial cannot be attributed to him: “but, there is no thesis of mine, for this reason, no deficiency [can be attributed to] me”.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, emptiness, dependent co-origination and middle path are not really a thesis or points of view asserting the essential being of things. On the contrary, inspired by the ultimate truth, using at the same time tools of conventional world and truth and, thus, mediating and linking both truths to each other, their goal is to surmount suffering and to attain *tattva*.

## II Schelling: Overcoming Schwärmerei

### II.1 Introduction

In this part of the paper now dedicated to DK, I will begin with a study of the Absolute and the conflicting tenets that are brought about when the absolute identity is “abandoned”. Next, I deal with Nāgārjuna’s and Schelling’s defended positions on the Self, world, and how they converge upon as well as diverge from. In so doing, I hope I can build a fruitful dialogue that is able not only to understand Nāgārjuna’s and Schelling’s philosophy, but also to deepen the understanding of the subject matters here debated, such as the I, world, and viewpoints, by criticizing the flaws of Nāgārjuna’s and Schelling’s thought.<sup>25</sup>

### II.2 Originating and Surmounting Conflicting Theses

Schelling’s interpretation of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, KrV) is the first step to understand how Schelling philosophically values criticism and dogmatism. In summary, it may be explained as follows: the KrV plays a role as similar as the one that is played by the *prasajya-pratiṣedha*.<sup>26</sup>

As said before, *prasajya-pratiṣedha* means a non-implicative negation. According to this kind of negation, the tenets opposed to those expressed by a *prasajya-pratiṣedha*’s proposition are not accepted. Thus, if a *prasajya-pratiṣedha*’s proposition denies “A”, then it does not mean that an affirmation of “A” must be accepted. Therefore, a *prasajya-pratiṣedha*’s proposition does not take in the opposite of what it denies. That is precisely the case when it comes to Schelling’s interpretation of the KrV. In Schelling’s peculiar reading of it, the refutation of the dogmatism by the KrV does not imply that the KrV embraces the tenets of the criticism as the only existing sort of philosophy. And vice versa, too. On this Schelling leaves no doubt: “[...] the Critique of Pure Reason is not destined to ground exclusively any *system* [...]. Rather, it [the Critique of Pure Reason] is just destined, as much as I understand it, to derive, from the essence of reason, the possibility of two systems opposed to each other, and to found a system of criticism [...] as well as a system of dogmatism just opposed to that of criticism.”<sup>27</sup>

25 For an introduction to Schelling’s philosophy that is taken into consideration in this paper, see Bock-Sandkaulen (1990); Boenke (1990); Görland (1973); Henrich (2004); Kuhlmann (1993); Pawlowski, Smid and Specht (1989).

26 On this kind of negation, check Ruegg (2002, footnote 6, p. 19ff); Ruegg (1981, p. 79); Westerhoff (2009, p. 70).

27 “[...] die Kritik der reinen Vernunft nicht bestimmt ist, irgend ein *System* [...] ausschließend zu begründen. Vielmehr ist sie, so weit ich sie verstehe, gerade dazu bestimmt, die Möglichkeit zweier einander gerade

If Schelling's reading of KrV is once again reinterpreted by one of the logical tools used by Nāgārjuna, then there is another way to understand the kind of refutation carried out by the KrV: it is the tetralemma, now applied to the four alternatives related to questions involving criticism and dogmatism, although none of them is supported by KrV in Schelling's eyes. On the contrary, they are equally dismissed:

- 1) criticism as unquestionable and only existing philosophical viewpoint theoretically based on absolute subject (A).
- 2) dogmatism as unquestionable and only existing philosophical viewpoint theoretically founded on absolute object (not A).

The KrV does not favor any particular system of philosophy, be it criticism or dogmatism. It accepts the rationality of both systems, whatever the rationality of criticism and that of dogmatism may be, and although the rationality of the former is superior to that of latter, as will be seen below.

3) mixture of dogmatism and criticism (A and not A): "the thing in between dogmatism and criticism",<sup>28</sup> defended by dogmatism. Dogmatism's tenet affirms that the limits of theoretical reason – as determined by the KrV – explains the weakness of theoretical reason and, therefore, they make it illegitimate to prove God's existence, so that the rational plausibility of God's existence has to be demonstrated by the moral reason in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. And that is criticism's contribution to such a mixture. The part played by dogmatism, on its turn, comes into play when the moral law derives its legitimation from God, so that the moral God – God's existence morally justified – is an absolute being existing externally to the individuals, that human beings have to succumb to, giving up on their freedom, which is assumed to be the *ratio essendi* of the moral law (Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, A 5, footnote) It is up to dogmatism to implement the kind of rationality that is able to give credibility to this (in Schelling's view, failed) mixture of criticism and dogmatism.

4) neither criticism, nor dogmatism (neither A nor not A); as a system of philosophy is based on subject, criticism, or object, dogmatism, this alternative denies any foundation of philosophy and such a thesis is untenable, too.

entgegengesetzter Systeme aus dem Wesen der Vernunft abzuleiten, und ein System des Kriticismus [...] so gut, als ein diesem System geradezu entgegengesetztes System des Dogmatismus zu begründen". DK, 5<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 69.

28 "Das Mittelding von Dogmatismus und Kriticismus", DK, 5<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 69.



Schelling's interpretation of KrV is to be comprehended as a teaching built upon the spirit of Kant's KrV or as some "esoteric philosophy"<sup>29</sup> rather than upon the literal text and, thus, conventional reading of it. Schelling criticises those who have not still comprehended "the *spirit* of the Critique of Pure Reason"<sup>30</sup> and have otherwise clung to a literal reading of it and followed the KrV's text to the letter. Those interpreters – who feel irritated by the fact that Schelling offers no literal reading of the KrV and to whom, as Schelling again, the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* are not written<sup>31</sup> – still believe that the KrV benefits only criticism and refutes dogmatism. But such interpretation overlooks the spirit of the KrV, because KrV's conclusion allows neither a theoretical discourse on an absolute object (as claimed by dogmatism) nor that on an absolute subject (as demanded by criticism according to Schelling's leaning), as it appears at that time – on Fichte's reading of Kant's philosophy, although Schelling himself was not completely acquainted with Fichte's thought.

As stated in the editorial report (*Editorischer Bericht*) of the historical and critical edition of Schelling's DK,<sup>32</sup> Schelling received from Fichte himself the theoretical part of his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794) around late 1794 or early 1795, as its complete volume came to light only in the Easter of 1795. Asked by Niethammer to write down a review on Fichte's *Grundlage*, Schelling – assumed by Niethammer as the one who knew Fichte's philosophy – replied in a letter of January 1796 that he had not yet studied the whole *Grundlage*, certainly not that part concerning the practical issues. From this historical context, the editorial report concludes that Schelling seemed to be familiar only with the spirit of the *Grundlage*, rather than with its letter. It is important to remember that DK's first to fourth letters were published by the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* in November 1795, whereas fifth to tenth letters in April 1796.

I see Schelling's reading of the spirit of Kant's philosophy as corresponding with Nāgārjuna's supreme, ultimate truth, whereas I regard the literal interpretation of it as analogous to conventional truth. The analogy – and it is important to pay attention to the fact that I do not suggest any kind of identity – draws upon differences established by two levels of viewing the beings and by the superiority of one view over the other, so that the former not only

29 "eine Philosophie [...], die *durch sich selbst* zur *esotherischen* wird", DK, 10<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 112: "a philosophy [...] that becomes *esoteric through itself*".

30 "Geist der Kritik der reinen Vernunft", DK, 5<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 68.

31 DK, 4<sup>er</sup> Brief, footnote A, p. 64.

32 DH, *Editorischer Bericht*, p. 23-24.

highlights a critical review of conventionally viewed things, it also explains how things happen in our everyday experience.

What does Schelling mean by esoteric philosophy? The first step to answer this question is to say what is not. It is not a philosophy centered on subject as opposed to object, or that built upon object as opposed to subject. In both cases, an opposition between subject and object takes place. Besides, it is not, as the term is frequently understood, a philosophy that promotes a concealment of principles that should be known by humanity. It is not esoteric due to the possession of a secret knowledge, accessible to a very few blessed ones, as well as due to power stemming from it. Now affirmatively, it is esoteric on the grounds of being understandable only by an “alliance of free spirits”<sup>33</sup>, who themselves have reached a level of freedom not yet attained by others to whom the true freedom of spirit is incomprehensible. The “free spirits” are not “slave of system”<sup>34</sup> but, on the contrary, it is a matter of a “sceptic who declares war beforehand against every system universally accepted”<sup>35</sup> who also keeps himself within his limits, prevents himself from “intrusions into the domain of human liberty”<sup>36</sup>, and “believes an progressive, self-achieved, self-acquired truth.”<sup>37</sup> As a matter of fact, this so depicted sceptic possesses “the *authentic, critical spirit*”,<sup>38</sup> and is “the *authentic philosopher*”.<sup>39</sup> As the possessor of this “*authentic, critical spirit*”, “the *authentic philosopher*” vigorously promotes a kind of philosophy that will not succumb to the attempt that is directed “to coerce it [philosophy] into the limits of a theoretical, universally accepted system”.<sup>40</sup> On the contrary, for those deprived from the genuine spirit of philosophy, such as the ones criticized by Schelling, the esoteric philosophy will always be “an eternal enigma”,<sup>41</sup> because they are a sort of theoretical partisans of a philosophical system and, because of this, its prisoners.

Actually, the esoteric philosophy claimed by Schelling is a quite specific way of looking at things, and it corresponds to “the eye of right understanding (*prajñā*), Buddha’s eye”,<sup>42</sup> to the vision of things that belongs to those who have transcended the conventional view. In this precise sense,

33 “Bund freier Geister”, DK, 10<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 112.

34 “Sklaven des Systems”, DK, 5<sup>er</sup> Brief, footnote D, p. 75.

35 “Skeptiker, der jedem allgemeingültigen System zum Voraus den Krieg ankündigt”, DK, 5<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 74.

36 “Eingriffe ins Gebiet menschlicher Freiheit”, DK, 5<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 75.

37 “an progressive selbst errungene selbsterworbene Wahrheit glaubt”, DK, 5<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 75.

38 “der *ächte* kritische Geist”, DK, 5<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 74.

39 “den *ächten Philosophen*”, DK, 5<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 75.

40 “sie [die Philosophie] in die Schranken eines theoretisch-allgemeingültigen Systems zu zwingen”, DK, 5<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 74.

41 “ein ewiges Räthsel”, DK, 10<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 112.

42 “occhio della correta comprensione (*prajñā*), l’occhio del Buddha”, Williams (2002, p. 128).

Schelling's proposed interpretation of dogmatism and criticism necessarily implies a questioning of the ordinary and, thus, conventional way of facing them. Confining ourselves to the boundaries of conventional subjectivity and the world associated with it, as vindicated by *loka-saṃvṛti-satya* and by the literal reading of Kant's philosophy, both Buddha's teaching based on supreme truth, according to Nāgārjuna's, and Schelling's esoteric philosophy are unintelligible. But, having said that, I do not intend to equate *prajñā*, or supreme truth, to *intellectual intuition*. I hope to deepen their differences in a better way as we move on to other topics. Nevertheless, what I want to point out for now is the fact that both *prajñā*/supreme truth and *intellectual intuition* require questioning such consolidated vision of things in favor of a truth *in fact* accessible to all, but *de facto* seized by few. And this makes *paramārtha-satya* and esoteric philosophy suspicious to many.

It came as surprise to many interpreters of KrV, among them the above quoted literal readers of Kant's KrV, the fact that Schelling states that it provides a method for criticism and dogmatism, since it deduces the possibility of both of them by demonstrating the impossibility of theoretical knowledge of subjective Absolute and objective Absolute. Because of such impossibility, instead of a theoretical knowledge of the Absolute, criticism and dogmatism propose a practical, i.e., moral realization of the Absolute by means of deeds oriented towards an identity with it, be it interpreted as an object (as dogmatism intends to do), be it understood as a subject (as criticism sees it). Likewise, when we debated Nāgārjuna's argument, criticism and dogmatism pleaded for substantial realities. Expressed in Nāgārjuna's terms, associated with Schelling's, we have subjective *svabhāva* (criticism) and objective *svabhāva* (dogmatism). As to that specific issue, there is a huge difference between Nāgārjuna and Schelling, since the latter is still subjected to a conventional point of view, restrained by subjectively substantial, absolute realities, although he claims with his esoteric philosophy to be beyond the limits of the exoteric, i.e., conventional way of seeing things.

Although both criticism and dogmatism are rationally sustainable positions and, thus, legitimated by the KrV, it does not mean at all that they are equally acceptable by Schelling insofar as there would be no rational criteria for distinguishing them in terms of better or worse. That is not the case, as Schelling emphatically defends criticism over dogmatism. And he does so by ascribing to dogmatism, *Schwärmereien*,<sup>43</sup> some sort of excessive enthusiasm, fanaticism for the absolute object, so that it crushes the freedom

of humanity, because the subjective freedom cannot flourish under the shadow of an absolute object. Instead, the goal of criticism is “to set humanity free”<sup>44</sup> from all kinds of objective chains and to benefit “my original essence”,<sup>45</sup> the absolute subject, overlooked and oppressed by *Schwärmerei*. In analogy with the Buddhist eightfold noble path that leads to *nirvāṇa*, the moral realization of the Absolute by criticism or dogmatism is bound to liberate humanity (criticism) or to plunge it into all kinds of slavery that takes place when human freedom is suffocated (dogmatism).

As seen, criticism and dogmatism are conflicting philosophical positions. But, how do they originate? Why are they kept as antagonistic tenets? What is the common ground on which they unfold themselves?

First of all, it is important to keep in mind that, for Schelling in DK, philosophy in its universal meaning, i.e., before it was formed into a specific system, concerns the human spirit as a whole, *Geist*, and not the whip of individuals. As a consequence, as he comes to investigate the origins of philosophy, he addresses our original, absolute and undifferentiated condition before the split into subject and object. In it there is no particular philosophical point of view, just because there is no subject opposed to object or object opposed to subject.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, a caveat must be taken into consideration. When I say that criticism and dogmatism are philosophical points of view, I do not intend to produce an absolute identity between criticism and dogmatism, on the one hand, and *dṛṣṭi*, on the other. The common horizon for them is the fact that they operate on a basis of partial and substantial realities, although the roles played by them in their own perspectives of perception is quite different. Therefore, it is not by chance that criticism, dogmatism and *dṛṣṭi* are indices of deficient readings of what is usually referred to as reality. For this very reason, they generate conflicting interpretations and leave no room of appeasement among the diverging standpoints.

Our absolute condition is immediately and directly grasped by an intuitive act of reason named by Schelling as “intellectual intuition”, by which “an instantaneous unification of opposing principles arises in us”.<sup>46</sup> It means that it gives up on the conflicting opposition between subject and object, by which we are confined to a particular position, even though we frequently do not see

44 “die Menschheit frei zu machen”, DK, 2<sup>o</sup> Brief, p. 56.

45 “mein ursprüngliches Wesen”, DK, 2<sup>o</sup> Brief, p. 56.

46 “augenblickliche Vereinigung der beiden widerstreitenden Principien in uns entsteht”, DK, 1<sup>o</sup> Brief, p. 51.

ourselves restrained by it. Therefore, the intellectual intuition puts us beyond all kinds of limitations that mark another act of reason, the discursive one.

If, on the one hand, the intellectual intuition is that act of reason by which we put ourselves in the infinite amplitude of the Absolute, the discursive act of reason, on the other hand, puts ourselves in a particular and limited horizon of the self-manifestation of the Absolute, since “reason [...] is not intelligible out of our absolute being, but only out of *limitation* of the Absolute”.<sup>47</sup> In this context, I read reason as discursive reason, and that explains the fact that both criticism and dogmatism represent conflicting rational positions, rather than a conflict of a rational position of criticism against the irrational point of view of dogmatism.

Taking the subject as starting point, the limitation of our understanding of the Absolute occurs when we transit from an intuitive reason to a discursive one, and that generates conflicting philosophical positions, as they are seen by contenders adopting criticism or dogmatism as their rationally explained standpoints on selfhood, world, and the Absolute. Such explanation of the origins of philosophical struggles is what I call the subjective, epistemological explanation. But, alongside the subjective explanation, there is also the ontological, objective explanation. In this latter case, the “*original* conflict in the human spirit”,<sup>48</sup> and inside it, “the conflict of the philosophers”<sup>49</sup> are seen as resulting from the “*egress from the Absolute*”,<sup>50</sup> as a movement originating from the Absolute itself, “stepping out from itself”, so to speak, instead of a movement between two kinds of rationality inside the subject, as in the former explanation.

The link of the subjective, epistemological explanation to the objective, ontological one is not quite clear and evident in Schelling’s text. Anyway, it is sure that the philosophical controversies belong to a broader context, that of the human spirit as such, an unavoidable fracture that takes place when the individual moves from the intuitive reason to discursive reason or the Absolute “moves out from itself”. Accordingly, conflicting philosophies are just a subset inside the whole set of conflicts that go through the several forms of manifestation of human spirit. The role to be played by philosophy – using the tools of discursive reason and, consequently, associated with all kinds of deficiencies of this sort of reason, as it can be illustrated by both subjective,

47 “Vernunft ... ist nicht aus unserm absoluten Sein, sondern nur durch *Einschränkung* des Absoluten in uns begreiflich”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 93.

48 “*ursprünglichen* Widerstreit im menschlichen Geiste”, DK, 3<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 59.

49 “der Streit der Philosophen”, DK, 3<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 59.

50 “*das Heraustrreten aus dem Absoluten*”, DK, 3<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 60.

epistemological and objective, ontological explanations of the origins of the philosophical controversies – is to identify the starting point of the contents inside which the human spirit and philosophy are succumbed to, as well as to suggest a way out of it.

However, even philosophy's attempt to indicate a way out of the controversies is not always destined to succeed. In fact, dogmatism is theoretically and practically refutable, i.e., to be defeated by rational arguments. Theoretically, the objective Absolute cannot be proved. Instead, dogmatism seeks refuge in the practical realm. But here again it is also rebuttable, because criticism opposes to dogmatism as a subjective realization of the Absolute. However, that is not sufficient to do away with dogmatism and to establish the unconfutable realm of criticism in the human spirit. Schelling himself recognises the continuity of the philosophical disputes even if there are rationally well-founded arguments to confute the dogmatism. Dogmatism is, then, not disputable for the individual who accepts rational arguments for his annihilation under an objective and absolute causality, under which "he finds, sooner or later, his (moral) downfall".<sup>51</sup> If the critical philosopher believes that his arguments show rational superiority over those of a proponent of dogmatism, that is not true for the latter. And this refusal to accept criticism's arguments confirms the everlasting conflict of rational positions in the human spirit.

For Schelling, it seems that the philosopher must know how to move from intuitive reason to objective reason, from absolute consensus to the dissension of all kinds of positions (among them, philosophical ones), and back. He must know how to articulate the experience (*Erfahrung*) of intellectual and immediate intuition (*Anschauung*)<sup>52</sup> with the rhythm of concept (*Begriff*) mediating between conditioned and conflicting tenets, on the one hand, and unconditioned, absolute consensus, on the other hand.<sup>53</sup>

### II.3 Some Other Topics Of The Dialogue Between *Nāgārjuna* and Schelling

#### II.3.1 Svabhāva And "Original Essence"

As seen above, unlike Nāgārjuna, Schelling defends the thesis of *svabhāva* of the subject. According to him, this subjective *svabhāva* constitutes "our

51 "er früher oder später seinen (moralischen) Untergang findet", DK, 10<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 109.

52 "Dieses Princip – Anschauung und Erfahrung – allein kann dem todten, unbeseelten Systeme Leiben einhauchen", DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 88; "This principle alone – intuition and experience – can breathe life into the dead and inanimate system".

53 DK, 4<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 63.

original essence”<sup>54</sup> that is apprehensible by intellectual intuition and partially manifested, for instance, by the synthetic act of theoretical reason, as this act conveys knowing activity over the object that comes under the binding procedures interconnecting the subjective, *a priori* elements and the objective, *a posteriori* data. In the practical sphere, our subjective, unconditioned freedom affirms itself before the objective, conditioned realities. Consequently, criticism is philosophically and humanly better than dogmatism, because it does justice to the human essence, whereas dogmatism enslaves human beings by its attempt to confine human activity and freedom to the boundaries of objectivity, whose final product would be a moral passive being.

If the liberation of human being from the enslaving paws of objectivity promoted by criticism bears some similarity with the overcoming of suffering envisaged by Nāgārjuna, it is also certain that the latter refuses not only to resort to objective *svabhāva* (as Schelling also does by confuting dogmatism), but also to subjective *svabhāva*, as Schelling does not by embracing criticism. Therefore, the sort of liberation intended by Nāgārjuna shows here its radical side, since any kind of *svabhāva* is rebuttable and rebutted. In this precise sense, Schelling’s thesis, viewed from a Nāgārjunian perspective, is still limited by the subjective *svabhāva*. Besides, it does not witness the true, authentic idea of liberation and criticism, as intended by Schelling, cannot set humanity free and overcome suffering.

### II.3.2 The Absolute And Its Versions

Schelling recognizes attempts in the Eastern philosophy in order to fulfill the purpose of overcoming what he means by dogmatism and its consequences, as said above. In his view, however, they failed because the intellectual intuition was objectified and the Absolute was identified with nothingness.<sup>55</sup>

His criticism is expressed in a general way and addressed to “cabbalists, Brahmins, Chinese philosophers [...] more recent mystics”<sup>56</sup> without detailed specifications as to whom he might be individually referring to. All of them remove from human beings what should be searched inside them. For this reason, they deserve to be classified as Eastern representatives of *Schwärmerei*, although he recognises himself that the *Schwärmerei* practiced by both Eastern and Western representatives are formally identical, but not materially, since it

54 The German text reads: “von unserm ursprünglichen Wesen”, DK, 2<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 56: “from our original essence”.

55 “Nichts”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 96.

56 “[...] der Kabbalisten, der Brachmanen, der Sinesischen Philosophie [...] der neuern Mystiker”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 96.



would be false to affirm, for instance, that the *Schwärmerei* defended by a Western representative of a moral, objective God, as Schelling attributes to dogmatism, would be formally and materially identical with, say, Lao Tse's *Dào* [道].

Nonetheless, there were “some Chinese sages”<sup>57</sup> who went much further and suggested nothingness as the ultimate goal of our life. Nothingness means, in this context, an objectively intuited non-object. As a consequence, we have to cease our thoughts and understanding, i. e., to annihilate our subjectivity. And Schelling is not alone in his criticism of what he considers to be Eastern *Schwärmerei*. In a footnote, Schelling refers to Kant's text, *The End Of All Things*, which alludes to Lao Tse who, in Kant's eyes, makes the supreme good (*das höchste Gut*, that is, the *a priori* founded link of morality as cause to happiness as effect) equal to nothingness. According to Kant, this nihilism is a proof that the reason of the one who falls victim to mystic – where the individual merges into the Godhead and, consequently, annihilates his personality – ends up falling prey to *Schwärmerei*.<sup>58</sup>

Schelling's across-the-board criticism ascertains only formal identities and neglects very important material differences between him and thinkers referred to, among them Eastern thinkers themselves, as if the differences of content were simply to be overlooked. His assessment of these authors reduces the extremely complex philosophical context of oriental thought into a threefold scheme – Absolute, criticism and dogmatism. Besides, his text does not allow us to know how deep Schelling's text expresses detailed knowledge of them. In the absence of such discussion with them, Schelling seems to reproduce, in an uncritical manner, opinions widely spread out back in the eighteenth century – and still present in the nineteenth century – describing Buddhism as “a religion of negativity and nihilism” (Tuck, 1990, p. 33). This deficiency in Schelling's interpretation becomes evident, for instance, when we see it from a Nāgārjunian perspective: Schelling's criticism neither promotes human freedom nor overcomes suffering, because it is still attached to subjective *svabhāva*. Far from being someone who professes an esoteric philosophy, characterized by his radical defense of human liberty, Schelling is still a member of a conventional, exoteric way of seeing things, if we keep in mind that *svabhāva* belongs to those who are citizens of *vyavahāra* and

57 “Ein Theil der Sinesischen Weisen”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 96.

58 Kant. *Das Ende aller Dinge*, A 513-514; DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 96, footnote E; Lütkehaus (2004, p. 21); Schelling also speaks of *Schwärmerei der Vernunft* and *Selbstlosigkeit*, DK, 10<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 110.

overlook the *tattva*<sup>59</sup> of all things. That is a tremendous setback for those of all ages who expect to criticize *Schwärmerei*.

### II.3.3 Objectified intellectual intuition and its link to the issue of karma

Also as consequence of objectifying intellectual intuition, there is “the fiction of antique philosophy”,<sup>60</sup> which states that the soul lives in the “dungeon of the objective world”,<sup>61</sup> so that this kind of life is the result of punishment for “past crimes”.<sup>62</sup> Karma is an illustration of *Schwärmerei*, because the “egress from the Absolute” and consequently from non-duality and the beatitude (*Seeligkeit*)<sup>63</sup> existing in the Absolute – which is the overcoming of the duality constituting the conflict between morality and happiness<sup>64</sup> – throws the souls into all kinds of affliction and repeated sorrow. The fiction of karma gets even worse under the circumstance of recovering it once again by intuiting the Absolute as an absolute object or by regarding it as “attainable” or even “attained”, instead of considering the individual’s moral strive to be an “unlimited activity”.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, Schelling disapproves any attempt, even that of criticism, to find an “objective, historical”<sup>66</sup> moment where the Absolute might be realized. If this were realizable, the Absolute would be confined to a relative and limited sphere that could claim to be the (privileged) seat of the Absolute.

Schelling and Nāgārjuna converge at one point: in fact, karma is a fiction. But, why is it a fiction? This is where the point of contention starts.

As seen before, during the discussion on the existence of Self in past lifes, we had already studied the issue of karma. The idea of karma has to be given up, if there is identity of Self with the appropriation (*upādāna*) of objects by it, because the Self would be so impermanent as the appropriation and would reach its end sooner or later.

Therefore, the karmic link demands the falsifying representation (*vikalpa*) of a substantially existing and permanent Self that is capable of going through several lifes. This kind of Self plays the role of both causing and receiving defilements (*kleśa*) expressed in its karmically conditioned lifes, such as:

59 On *tattva* see below.

60 “die Fiction der alten Philosophie”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 91.

61 “Kerker der objektiven Welt”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 91.

62 “vergangene Verbrecher”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 91.

63 “Wo absolute Freiheit ist, ist absolute Seeligkeit, und umgekehrt”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 94: “Where there is absolute freedom, there is absolute beatitude, and vice versa”.

64 DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, pp. 91 and 95.

65 “erreicht”, “erreichbar”, “uneingeschränkte Tätigkeit”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 106.

66 “objectiv, historisch”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 91.

passions, nescience, points of view, etc. As a result, the attachment to mental construct, a giant unfolding (*prapañca*) of multiple objects and mental activities associated with them, drags us into the sufferings of the world.

However, not only the representation of a permanent Self (*ātman*), criticized by Nāgārjuna and accepted by Schelling, leads us to the fiction of karma, but also that of a non-Self (*anātman*), rebutted by both Nāgārjuna and Schelling, pulls us into the same kind of illusion. The middle way implies that the teaching of the Self and that of the non-Self by the Buddhas (MMK, XVIII.6) is *upāya*, a pedagogical means and skill aimed at the instruction of specific audiences<sup>67</sup> without becoming attached to any of them.

Schelling has correctly seen, at least from Nāgārjuna's perspective, that the falsifying representation of a (substantial) non-Self has proven fatal to the endeavour of overcoming *Schwärmerei*. Nevertheless, he was not able to see that the substantialization of the Self causes no less affliction and suffering than that of the non-Self. In effect, the overcoming of suffering/*Schwärmerei* in an absolute, objective reality is as illusory as in absolute, subjective reality. The very act of coming back to one's Self in intellectual intuition is misleading, because it bears witness of a permanent Self and its falsifying representation. For the victory over the torment of duality is not attained by deeds that seek outside one's Self – and, least of all, inside one's Self – what exists neither outside one's Self nor inside one's Self.

As Schelling was not radical enough to question both the substantialization of Self and that of non-Self, he gave up on the one fiction, that of non-Self, in order to embrace the other, that of Self.<sup>68</sup>

### II.3.4 Absolute and Tattva

Although the differences between Schelling's Absolute and Nāgārjuna's *tattva* must always be brought to mind in order to avoid false identities, we can nevertheless approximate them as they converge to similar goals in which earlier and inadequate stages of knowledge are overcome.

*Tattva* is thus presented by Nāgārjuna: “not conditioned by other, appeased, not manifested by means of discursive proliferation, without falsifying conceptualization, without differentiated meaning. That is the characteristic

67 *anūsāsana*; MMK, XVIII, 8. Siderits and Katsura (2013), commentary on verse 18.6, pp. 3403-3431.

68 Parmenides' and Schelling's tenets are one-sided. While the former chooses Being over Non-Being (Ferraro, 2012b), the latter chooses subject over object. Compared to both tenets, Nāgārjuna follows the middle way: neither Being nor Non-Being; neither subject nor object.

of the truth of reality”.<sup>69</sup> On Schelling’s side, intellectual intuition, as seen before, is that kind of immediateness by which “an instantaneous unification of opposing principles arises in us”.<sup>70</sup> Here is our starting point where we see how both Nāgārjuna and Schelling converge and diverge simultaneously.

The first characteristic of the truth of reality is *aparapratyaya*, not conditioned (*a-pratyaya*) by other (*para*). According to Candrakīrti, *aparapratyaya* means “not dependent upon anything different and other than upon itself and unattainable by the instruction of another. It means accurate knowledge that should be accomplished only by one’s self”.<sup>71</sup> As illustrated by Candrakīrti, even if instructed by a person of sound vision, the individual with deficient vision sees hair where there is no hair, this individual will still keep seeing things that do not exist and will not understand what the truth is for a person of sound vision, unless he or she apprehends things directly by him or herself. Likewise, the one who does not know *tattva* directly, without any kind of mediation, will not apprehend what is beyond conventional truth. Therefore, the discourse on *tattva* does not replace the direct experience of it, even though one accepts its conclusions for, in this case, the understanding of *tattva* is attained, so to speak, from outside and tainted by several sorts of distortion that such an access to *tattva* can produce. Therefore, lack of immediate experience of *tattva* causes either the denial of it or a deficient perception of it.

Schelling’s correspondent position to that of Nāgārjuna’s states that the intellectual intuition is only intelligible to those who form an “alliance of free spirits”<sup>72</sup> and whose philosophy is esoteric, merely because they have a direct experience of the Absolute that is not intelligible to those to whom the most radical experience of freedom is incomprehensible. As pointed out by Candrakīrti, the instruction of others will not or hardly convince those who deny it, while the ones who only have a conceptual and discursive knowledge of it, as stressed by Schelling, can be misled, as it is the case with the dogmatic thinker who regards the Absolute as an object. The point is that Schelling himself claims that philosophy would be an activity deprived from life (*Leben*)

69 *aparapratyayaṃ śāntaṃ prapañcāir aprapañcitam|  
nirvikalpaṃ anānārthaṃ etat tattvasya lakṣaṇam||* MMK, XVIII, 9.

The translation of *tattva* as the truth of reality intends to convey the idea that the difference between the cognizant subject searching for truth and the objective reality does not exist any more.

70 “augenblickliche Vereinigung der beiden widerstreitenden Principien in uns entsteht”, DK, 1<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 51.

71 *Nāsmiṃ parapratyayo’stītyaparapratyayaṃ paropadeśāgamyam svayamevādhigantavyamityarthaḥ,* Candrakīrti, PP, 373.1-2.

72 “Bund freier Geister”, DK, 10<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 112.

and existence (*Dasein*), confined to “the most ground-off concepts”,<sup>73</sup> if it did not have as starting point intuition (*Anschauung*) and experience (*Erfahrung*): an immediate and intuitive experience “brought about by one’s self and independent from any objective causality”.<sup>74</sup> Without this sort of experience and its discursive legitimation by the esoteric philosophy, the reality revealed by the intellectual intuition becomes meaningless.

The next set of characteristic is *nirvikalpa*, without falsifying conceptualization, and *prapañcair-aprapañcita*, not manifested by means of discursive proliferation. Since there is no intrinsic nature of things on which we could pin the seal of essence, there will be nothing left but the conceptualizing acts (*vikalpa*) of a cognizant subject who, not being him/herself a substantial essence, also finds no essential support in the objective sphere. As a matter of fact, *vikalpa* produces subjective representations and represented objects, all of them happening “inside” the representational activities of a cognizant subject. *Vikalpa* is nothing more than the result of the full unfolding of discursive, conceptual proliferation, *prapañca*. *Prapañca* is, on the one hand, the full development of conceptualizing acts and, on the other hand, the full set of objects produced by those acts, so that both spheres, subject and object, reinforce each other reciprocally. Thus, it is important to emphasize that the discursive and conceptual proliferation has both sides, the subjective and objective ones, but at the same time paying attention to the fact that *prapañca* is deprived from any *svabhāva*, for the subject’s discourse has no substantial basis on which the discourse can be founded.

Accordingly, after overcoming the illusions of the deceived and incurable ones who cling to intrinsic nature superimposed on objects, the remaining conceptualizing subject and its conventionally conceptualized world are no less deceiving. In fact, the conceptual inflation is also a set of falsifying acts that obscure the knowledge of *tattva* and reveals its conventionality. Therefore, *tattva* is a sign that the multiple varieties of the relation between subject and object – that generates huge discursive proliferation and conflicts of interpretation – come to an end.<sup>75</sup>

As seen before, Schelling, in his turn, reads discursive reason as “not intelligible out of our absolute being, but only out of *limitation* of the

73 “Leben”, “Dasen”, “Anschauung”, “Erfahrung”, “die abgezogensten Begriffe”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 88.

74 “von einer [...] selbsthervorgebrachten und von jeder objectiven Causalität unabhängigen Erfahrung”, DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 88.

75 MMK, XVIII, 5; Brosamer and Back (2005, p. 67).

Absolute".<sup>76</sup> Consequently, the subject's discourse cannot evade the problems linked to this limitation, such as the oppositions between criticism and dogmatism, happiness and morality, necessity and freedom, idealism and realism, Stoicism and Epicureanism.<sup>77</sup> All of them reveal some aspects of the Absolute, although each opposing and relative part claims to be identical with the Absolute, and, by doing so, falsifies both itself and the Absolute. Accordingly, Schelling's *Einschränkung* and Nāgārjuna's *prapañca* produce both discursive and conceptual proliferation and, at the same time the eclipse of *tattva* or *das Absolute*. Nevertheless, if this proliferation is well managed, it can lead to the ultimate goal. After all, Schelling and Nāgārjuna also make use of discourses in order to make a good case for *tattva* and *the Absolute*.

Finally, after the silence of discursive, conceptual proliferation, *śānta*, appeared, and *anānārtha*, without differentiated meaning, come into play. Peace results from being free from intrinsic nature, *svabhāva-virahita*.<sup>78</sup> Otherwise, one would never be able to be detached from suffering and illusory points of view that engender differentiated meanings and conflicting interpretations, as this was illustrated in MMK, XXVII. Like the one who always sees hair where there is none, the one who sees *svabhāva* everywhere will always be subject to the afflictions of conflict that have no end. Under these circumstances, peace will never be attainable. For Schelling, the "*egress from the Absolute*"<sup>79</sup> originates both the "*original conflict in the human spirit*",<sup>80</sup> and "*the conflict of the philosophers*".<sup>81</sup> The peace of a universal and absolute consensus is broken out and we are thrown into the *inferno* of conflicts witnessed by criticism and dogmatism.

Knowing both the peace offered by *tattva*, intellectual intuition or intuitive reason, and the conflicts caused by the unfolding of conceptualizing acts brought about by the limited discursive reason, Nāgārjuna and Schelling build a bridge between two worlds and their truths, so that suffering and conflict/*Schwärmerei* are not to be interpreted as starting points and final terms of our experience. Although the transcendence of suffering and conflict/*Schwärmerei*, as well as the method to do it are not the same for both, besides the fact that Schelling still embraces a subjective *svabhāva*,

76 "Vernunft ... ist nicht aus unserm absoluten Sein, sondern nur durch *Einschränkung* des Absoluten in uns begreiflich", DK, 8<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 93.

77 DK, 9<sup>er</sup> Brief.

78 Candrakīrti, PP, 373.8.

79 "das Heraustreten aus dem Absoluten", DK, 3<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 60.

80 "*ursprünglichen* Widerstreit im menschlichen Geiste", DK, 3<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 59.

81 "der Streit der Philosophen", DK, 3<sup>er</sup> Brief, p. 59.

one cannot overlook their theoretical efforts of overcoming the inadequacy of the syntetical, conditioned, and inflationist discourses which nevertheless catapult their proponents into the ultimate truth.

## Conclusion

I conclude this paper by pointing out some topics that deserve to be debated in Nāgārjuna's and Schelling's thoughts, without going into all the issues related to their arguments – as it would be impossible to do here – and retaking what was discussed earlier, as it would be, I think, superfluous.

Concerning Schelling, his own intellectual development – occurring, according to Hegel, before his readership<sup>82</sup> – exposed a huge change of his thought. One of the reasons for this change can be found here in DK. By considering dogmatism as rational as criticism, since both are legitimated by the KrV, Schelling distanced himself from Fichte, to whom dogmatism, on the contrary, did not deserve such a philosophical status.<sup>83</sup> Schelling's reading of the KrV and his assessment of dogmatism led him to interpret nature as being able of an immanent evolution instead of being the objective counterpart of the Self and, then, subjected to the subject. Therefore, there is a rationality of the nature (non-Self) itself that cannot be reduced to the movement of a self-affirming and determining Ego any more. Consequently, it is a theoretical necessity to look into the logic of nature, no longer captured by the logic of a self-centered Ego. That is the birth of his philosophy of nature.

Hence, the Absolute could not be read as an absolute subject as in DK, as he refused any absolute object right from the start. The alternative to both refusals was to elaborate his philosophy of the identity that, denying both absolute subject and absolute object, defended an Absolute that was neither object nor subject. Accordingly, he came close to the position accepted by Nāgārjuna. So, besides the flaws detected earlier as a result of the criticism brought about by Nāgārjuna's perspective, his own philosophical development unmasked his theoretical attempt of founding philosophy on an absolute subject.

Nāgārjuna's *prasajya-pratiṣedha* introduces a theme that would be very interesting to explore into more details: the theme of negativity. But, what I want to stress here is the fact that the negation promoted by Nāgārjuna does not build a chain of subject matters brought about by a repeated denial of

82 Hegel, 1986, p. 421.

83 DK, *Editorischer Bericht*, pp. 41-42.



standpoints, so that a certain standpoint, out of its necessary denial, would give rise to another one that would be denied again and so on. For instance, it is not the denial of the standpoints about the conditions of origination and annihilation of beings discussed in the first chapter that engenders the subject matter, the motion, of the second chapter. They seem to be put side by side without an immanent link interconnecting them in a paratactic-like structure, rather than a syntactic-like one. However, this immanent succession of themes stemming from a recurrent denial of points of view seems to occur only inside each chapter on account of the tetralemma, as it can be seen, for example, in the first chapter of MMK: self-causality, hetero-causality, both of them, self-causality and hetero-causality, and, finally, no causality at all; or in the 27th chapter of MMK: I existed in the past, I did not exist in the past, I existed in the past and I did not exist in the past, and, finally, I neither existed in the past nor I did not exist in the past. Another illustration of this kind of immanent negation is the tetralemma linked to Schelling's reading of the KrV, according to its spirit, as above shown.

This means that the thematic organization of the whole MMK does not originate right from the movement of negation produced by the non-implicative negation and tetralemma. After all, the continued denial of standpoints is not able, out of itself, to arrange them into a structured chain of denied standpoints. Thus, without the help of an exterior hand, the thematic whole does not come to an order, since it externally adds to the denied standpoint (for instance, the conditions of origination and annihilation of beings discussed in the first chapter) another subject matter (motion, the second chapter) that is not originated "inside" the denial that took place in the first chapter. Consequently, the negativity is not radical enough to undertake the task of ordering the whole set of negated viewpoints stemming from the exposure of their unmasked deficiencies, since that exterior hand has necessarily to finish it. This topic would deserve to be deepened in a more detailed manner, since both Nāgārjuna's thought and Schelling's philosophy cannot unfold their conceptuality without making use of the negation, such as that of conventional, synthetic truth in favor of ultimate, tethic truth.

Connecting both kinds of criticism presented above, the theory of consciousness that takes into account the several sorts of deficiencies in its development and, at same time, intends to overcome them has to satisfy at least these two necessary requirements: 1) it has to defend strong arguments for the development of the individual and collective consciousness that has to go through all of its points of view until it reaches that point in which the misinterpretations associated with them have no more such imposing, coercive

and authoritative force on it as it did in the earlier stages of its evolution. That is what Nāgārjuna's idea of *tattva* and Schelling's concept of *das Absolute* seem to convey, in my opinion; 2) it has also to defend strong arguments for that kind of development of the individual and collective consciousness that takes places out of the denied claims for truth linked to each and every standpoint. Each and every standpoint has, so to speak, admitted, as reluctantly as it might be, its failed understanding of truth.

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