

THE PARADOX OF PHILOSOPHICAL DISAGREEMENT:
A STUDY OF NĀGĀRJUNA, HARIBHADRA, AND GADAMER

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ABSTRACT

Taking direction from contemporary epistemology and its recent focus on the question of how to react rationally to peer disagreement, this dissertation explores the related topic of philosophical disagreement in a comparative key. A close examination of some controversial assumptions at work in the current epistemological debate about disagreement reveals a tension, in philosophical discourse and disagreement, between interestedness and disinterestedness. After allowing this tension to be highlighted by the controversiality of those assumptions, this dissertation offers reconstructions of how Nāgārjuna, Haribhadra, and Hans-Georg Gadamer might alternatively illuminate or resolve the tension between interestedness and disinterestedness in philosophical discourse. Through these reconstructions, the dissertation also articulates a shared subject matter between four distinct traditions — i.e., contemporary epistemology, Indian Buddhism, Jainism, and hermeneutics — whose distinct assumptions are otherwise apparently incommensurable.

The dissertation consists of five chapters. The introductory chapter problematizes the phenomenon of disagreement as framed in recent literature and articulates the underlying tension between interestedness and disinterestedness in a paradox: the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 explore alternative resolutions to that paradox — the dialectical refutationism of Nāgārjuna, the non-absolutism of Haribhadra, and the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Chapter 5 situates this expansion of the contemporary debate within a larger debate in comparative philosophy about voices relevant in philosophical discourse.

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INTRODUCTION: Disagreement

Disagreement does not matter to everyone always, but it does matter to everyone sometimes. From simple perceptions to complex political or philosophical views, it will sometimes give us pause when our peers disagree with us. Suppose I think I clearly hear a siren, but several people around me deny hearing it. This will make me wonder. I may wonder at the quality of each person's hearing. I may wonder at the various other possible causes of the disagreement. No matter how I wonder, the disagreement itself matters.

Suppose I am in a reading group with peers, and while reading some passage I detect a logical fallacy. If several partners in the reading group are confident that this particular passage utilizes a valid argument form, how shall I react? If all disagree with my interpretation, I am likely to wonder at its quality. Here, too, the disagreement matters.

When disagreement matters, a range of possible reactions present themselves. If one is interested in winning arguments, one might claim to *understand yet disagree*. If one is interested in interpersonal harmony or safety from criticism, one may respond in certain cases by *agreeing to disagree*. If one is interested in approximating knowledge or truth, one might take for granted that a disagreement *reveals a misunderstanding* by some party to the debate. Each of these possible responses is common in non-philosophical discourse. A doctor who wishes to avoid serious discussions about alternative medicine may agree to disagree. Parents who are interested in winning an argument with their child may understand yet disagree. An economist may take theoretical disagreements to be a symptom, somewhere, of misunderstanding or an inadequate paradigm.

In philosophical discourse the same range of reactions is possible, but each is necessarily subject to further intellectual scrutiny. Choosing the right meta-discursive response to disagreement is a matter of consistency, in philosophy. It is not a matter of winning, of consolation, or of protection from criticism. In philosophical discourse, *understanding yet disagreeing* may follow from epistemically warranted steadfastness,¹ *agreeing to disagree* may be a response (relativist, consensus-based, or pluralist) to a perceived incommensurability (linguistic, foundational, or evaluative),² and *suspecting misunderstanding* in cases of disagreement may result in justifiable hermeneutic skepticism.³ Thus, quite naturally, the nature and significance of philosophical disagreement has been subjected to careful and enthusiastic investigation throughout the history of philosophy. It has been given sustained and direct attention more recently in contemporary epistemological literature. This literature asks many interesting questions: To what extent does philosophical disagreement involve a failure of understanding? Does philosophical disagreement with peers warrant belief revision? Should widespread disagreement in philosophy make one skeptical of philosophical discourse?

Taking direction from contemporary epistemology and its recent focus on the question of how to react rationally to peer disagreement, this dissertation explores the related topic of philosophical disagreement in a comparative key. A close examination of some controversial assumptions at work in the current epistemological debate about

¹ See Kelly, Thomas, “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement”, *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, 1 (2005), 167–95.

² See Connolly, Tim, *Doing Philosophy Comparatively* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), especially chapters 4 and 5.

³ See Rasch, William, ‘Noise into the System : Injecting Hermeneutics and the Necessity of Misunderstanding’, *SubStance*, 67 (1992), 61–76.

disagreement reveals a tension, in philosophical discourse and disagreement, between interestedness and disinterestedness. After allowing this tension to be fore-fronted by the controversiality of those assumptions, this dissertation offers reconstructions of how Nāgārjuna, Haribhadra, and Hans-Georg Gadamer might alternatively illuminate or resolve the tension between interestedness and disinterestedness in philosophical discourse. Through these reconstructions, the dissertation also articulates a shared subject matter between four distinct traditions — i.e., contemporary epistemology, Indian Buddhism, Jainism, and hermeneutics — whose distinct assumptions are otherwise apparently incommensurable.

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CHAPTER 1 Philosophical Disagreement and its Paradox

1.1 Why philosophical disagreement?

Take any of my philosophical views, and I find myself surrounded by antagonists, living and dead: Shall I suppose myself to know better? I am sharper, more perceptive; I see things which they miss. I think we should all blush to think such thoughts, but if you do not think them how will you explain the disagreement?⁴

For students of philosophy, the ubiquity of philosophical disagreement is a fact at times fascinating, at times frustrating. Considering the diverse history of philosophy, there is virtually no philosophical view one can express without an audience of detractors.

Indeed, a disagreeing audience is often desired by professional philosophers. Given the reflexivity of philosophical inquiry, issues regarding how and whether philosophers must or must not reach consensus are quintessentially philosophical issues. It should be obvious to anyone familiar with the history of philosophy that, much like familiar philosophical issues such as the nature of causal necessity or the existence of free will, those surrounding the nature and significance of disagreement in philosophy are neither new nor obsolete. Moreover, like other important philosophical issues, those surrounding disagreement have been perpetuated rather than resolved by close scrutiny. And yet, the range and significance of such philosophical-disagreement-centered disagreements have not even been fully acknowledged, much less exhausted by the considerations of contemporary philosophical literature. Disagreements about philosophical disagreement need to be reframed in order for a full appreciation of their role in contemporary philosophical discourse to emerge.

⁴ Ribeiro, Brian, 'Philosophy and Disagreement', *Crítica: Revisit Hispanoamericana de Filosofía*, 43 (2011), p. 13.

1.1.1 Philosophical disagreement is a long-standing problem

Philosophical disagreement is certainly not new, but one might think that its causing problems within philosophical discourse is new. It is not. The significance of controversy in philosophical reasoning in the Indian tradition is at least as old as Naciketas' dialogue with Yama in the *Katha Upaniṣad* and in the Western canon it goes back as far as Plato's *Euthyphro*, not to say anything of the issue's antiquity in other traditions. In the first case, the dissensus of the wise regarding metaphysical questions about the possibility of life after death gives rise to the truth-seeking Naciketas' wonder at such questions as well as Yama's hesitancy to expound upon them.⁵ In the second, Euthyphro's definition of piety as "what is dear to the gods"⁶ stumbles over the gods' own disagreements about what is and is not pleasing.⁷

Sometimes, disagreement is deep and seemingly incommensurable, in which case its significance is foregrounded and worthy of more direct considerations. This is not new, either. Zhuangzi, for instance, has reflected upon the problem of attempting to resolve such disagreements without introducing more and relevant disagreement in the process:

⁵ Mascaró, Juan, tran., *The Upanishads* (London: Penguin Books, 1965). pp. 56-57.

Naciketas. When a man dies, this doubt arises: some say 'he is' and some say 'he is not'. Teach me the truth.

Death. Even the gods had this doubt in times of old; for mysterious is the law of life and death. Ask for another boon. Release me from this.

Nachiketas. This doubt indeed arose even to the gods, and you say, O Death, that it is difficult to understand; but no greater teacher than you can explain it, and there is no other boon so great as this.

⁶ Plato, 'Euthyphro', in *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), p. 6, 7a.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8. In particular, see 8a-e, where Socrates concludes, "And those who disagree, whether men or gods, dispute about each action, if indeed the gods disagree. Some say it is done justly, others unjustly. Is that not so?" Euthyphro agrees and Socrates demands a resolution: "Come, try to show me a clear sign that all the gods definitely believe this action to be right. If you can give me adequate proof of this, I shall never cease to extol your wisdom." Euthyphro, though undaunted, then urges, "This is perhaps no light task, Socrates, though I could show you very clearly."

Shall we get someone who agrees with you to decide? But if he already agrees with you, how can he decide fairly? Shall we get someone who agrees with me? But if he already agrees with me, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who disagrees with both of us? But if he already disagrees with both of us, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who agrees with both of us? But if he already agrees with both of us, how can he decide?⁸

The dissensus within what has blossomed into a multi-millennial body of literature containing insights into the nature and significance of philosophical disagreement is staggering and seemingly compounded by any such systematic attention to it. Rather than waiting for or seeking philosophical consensus about dissensus — no more worthwhile than waiting for Godot — some philosophers have been impelled by the fact of widespread disagreement in philosophy to celebrate, revise, or renounce philosophical discourse altogether.

Some have celebrated the fact of widespread disagreement in philosophy. The existence of philosophy departments at all would seem to be a celebration of this fact at some level. An early celebration of the fact might be the Jain philosophical tradition which, in various ways, has espoused a certain philosophically justified pride in the partial truth to be found in various views. A contemporary example of such philosophically justified celebration of disagreement is the work of Nicholas Rescher, whose view is mentioned again below. Rescher seems to celebrate this fact by identifying disagreement as an essential characteristic of genuinely philosophical issues.

In the revisionary camp, Charles S. Peirce took a methodological approach to assuaging the worries caused by widespread philosophical dissensus in his “The Fixation

⁸ Zhuangzi, *Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 43. Quoted from Connolly, Tim, *Doing Philosophy Comparatively* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), p. 94.

of Belief," arguing that on account of the lack of consensus which is found in former logical methods, philosophers should embrace the newer scientific method as he understood it. Philosophers should, according to Pierce, accept as authority persisting external data "upon which our thinking has no effect."⁹

Immanuel Kant, too, wanted to revise philosophical inquiry because of he saw its inability to produce consensus as a problem. He referred to metaphysics as a "combat arena of...endless conflicts"¹⁰ and made efforts - by means of his "Copernican Revolution" — to revise the discipline and clear away the debris of centuries of destructive, dogmatic philosophical dispute.¹¹

Others, for their part, have softly renounced philosophical discourse on account of its tendency to produce disagreement. Bob Plant,¹² reviewing the work of contemporary scholars Hilary Kornblith and Nicholas Rescher, has concluded that the case for broad skepticism of philosophy is compelling. Brian Ribeiro¹³ reviewing the work of Hegel, Pierce, and others, has independently expressed skepticism about the legitimacy of philosophy on the basis of its failure to produce consensus. However, renunciation, like revision, is not a new strategy. Philosophers throughout history — Pyrrho, Nāgārjuna,

⁹ Peirce, Charles Sanders, 'On the Fixation of Belief', *Popular Science Monthly*, 12 (1877), p. 9.

¹⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), p. 6, Aviii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21, Bxvi-xvii. "The situation here is the same as was that of *Copernicus*...Having found it difficult to make progress there when he assumed that the entire host of stars revolved around the spectator, he tried to find out by experiment whether he might not be more successful if he had the spectator revolve and the stars remain at rest. Now, we can try a similar experiment in metaphysics, with regard to our *intuition* of objects."

¹² Plant, Bob, 'Philosophical Diversity and Disagreement', *Metaphilosophy*, 43 (2012), 587.

¹³ Ribeiro. *Op. cit.*

Montaigne and others — have utilized widespread philosophical dissensus as a premise in their disagreement-based skeptical arguments.¹⁴

1.1.2 Philosophical disagreement is a non-trivial problem

By no means new, philosophical disagreement-centered debates are not trivial, either. In just the last half century, there has been more than enough scholarly output dedicated to the philosophical dimensions of disagreement and related debates to suggest the opposite. Distinct dimensions of the phenomenon have even led to distinct bodies of literature.

For example, the large body of contemporary epistemological literature to be discussed in detail below is dwarfed by the tomes of output from a related debate about the incommensurability of scientific theories. Philosophers no less influential than Paul Feyerabend, Thomas Kuhn, and Larry Laudan have contributed classics to that debate.¹⁵ Donald Davidson and David Wong have given the topic further consideration with respect to language and conceptual schemes more generally.¹⁶

Alongside this 20th century debate, the problem of disagreement was explored directly in a number of different ways. In 1965, Freddy Verbruggen wrote an article entitled “The Attitude Theory and the Disagreement or Controversy within Philosophy and between Philosophy and Science.” This article foreshadowed, in many ways, where inquiries into philosophical disagreement were headed. Its central claim is that

¹⁴ Machuca, Diego E., *Disagreement and Skepticism* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁵ See Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), Feyerabend’s *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1975), Larry Laudan’s *Progress and Its Problems: Towards a Theory of Scientific Growth* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978),

¹⁶ See Donald Davidson’s “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), and David Wong’s “Three Kinds of Incommensurability” in *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

the disagreement and controversy within philosophy and between philosophy and science can be solved by a Theory of Persuasive Communication and Argumentation, of which philosophy and science form parts and in which the attitudes, grounding every "thought system," are determined by a psycho-sociological research, and in which the means to change attitudes are indicated.¹⁷

Verbruggen thus took a reductive psychological approach to solving the issue of philosophical disagreement.

Reduction away from overtly philosophical considerations was prominent enough at the time to appear in a Presidential Address to the APA. In his 1971 address, W.T. Jones traced philosophical disagreements to the diversity of intellectual preferences and tendencies in different thinkers, claiming that the issue was perhaps one of primarily anthropological, rather than philosophical or epistemological concern.¹⁸

Such responses are reductionist about the issue of philosophical disagreement in that they suggest that this widespread phenomenon arises for non-philosophical reasons, and therefore can be addressed by inquiries which are not themselves philosophical. Such approaches, to be sure, may lead to certain important insights. However, they will not themselves explain how philosophical methods are mistaken. Rather, they will explain how it may have come to be that elements considered by these approaches — anthropological elements, psychological elements, or otherwise — lead to disagreement. In other words, they will not solve the *philosophical* problem. It is philosophically troubling that given any of my philosophical views, I find myself surrounded by thinkers holding incompatible views. In this fog of disagreement, one is often unable to make

¹⁷ Verbruggen, Freddy. "The Attitude Theory and the Disagreement of Controversy within Philosophy and between Philosophy and Science." *Philosophica*, v. 3, 1965, p. 159.

¹⁸ Jones, W. T., 'Philosophical Disagreements and World Views', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 43, pp. 24–42.

completely intelligible the reasoning behind opposing views. Non-philosophical reductionism about this troubling experience is neither the only viable approach nor a particularly satisfying one, for it is itself embedded in the problem of philosophical disagreement.

One would expect, in this context, a more philosophical account to emerge. Unsurprisingly, many accounts have been offered. Nicholas Rescher's unique 1978 contribution to *The Review of Metaphysics* is a great example. It takes an alternatively meta-philosophical approach to disagreement in philosophy. In his essay, Rescher claims that the very nature of philosophical inquiry necessitates the constitution of its problems as "aporetic clusters," or clusters of *prima facie* cogent arguments for mutually incompatible theses.¹⁹

However it has been explored, philosophical disagreement has remained a non-trivial issue not just for those interested in philosophy as a discipline and product of human culture but also for philosophers themselves.

1.1.3 Philosophical disagreement is a far-reaching problem

The issue of philosophical disagreement is neither new nor trivial, and to this we must add that literature which discusses it currently does not do justice to the scope of the problem, which is extremely far-reaching and thus of bridge-building potential across thick philosophical boundaries.

For better or for worse, whether the ubiquity of dissensus in philosophical discourse is oriented toward consensus, anthropologically determined, philosophically

¹⁹ Rescher, Nicholas, 'Philosophical Disagreement: An Essay Towards Orientational Pluralism in Metaphilosophy', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 32 (1978), 217–51, 220.

necessary, or indicative of methodological errors or psychological biases, such ubiquity has nearly always been and remains a matter of concern for philosophers. Throughout the history of philosophy, Buddhists, Jains, hermeneuts, comparative philosophers, and many others have taken interest in the phenomenon of disagreement. And with thinkers as widely diverging in philosophical style as Ernest Sosa²⁰ and Jacques Rancière²¹ exploring the issue recently, the bridging potential of this issue is ready to be cultivated.

This problem is a potentially bridge-building one because it arises between otherwise sequestered and segregated fields, subfields, individual thinkers and culturally distinct philosophical traditions. Considered as an objective phenomenon, philosophical disagreement occupies the in-between space of philosophical discourse as a relationship which holds together views which hold themselves apart. Considered from the perspective of a disagreeer, philosophical disagreement is the foggy lens through which one sees one's most compelling philosophical detractors. The confounding relationship this phenomenon embodies is intimidating, the foggy confusion it produces is discouraging. An inquiry which can clear this fog or resolve this internally-opposed relationship promises to relieve a certain frustration in philosophy and open border-crossings in philosophical discourse between individuals, traditions, fields, and sub-fields.

As we will see in the survey that follows, contemporary literature alone has not been able to address the problems of disagreement with a comprehensiveness and

²⁰ Sosa, Ernest, 'Can There Be a Discipline of Philosophy? And Can It Be Founded on Intuitions?', in *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 190–204.

²¹ Rancière, Jacques, *Dis-Agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

cohesiveness sufficient to facilitate the cultivation of this border-crossing potential. Current literature is hampered by its own parameters — its limited scope of application and its controversial operating assumptions. Therefore, renewed consideration of the topic with more comprehensive assumptions and with a wider range of philosophical sources is necessary and demanded by the issue in order to gain a proper grasp of the wide scope of its occurrences.

It is the project of this dissertation to begin to cultivate the bridging potential of this issue by way of an inquiry into the following question: What lies at the root of a common concern with the significance of disagreement across philosophical boundaries, and how is that common concern variously addressed by otherwise apparently incommensurable thinkers?

1.1.4 Chapter outline

In the next section, current literature on the topic of disagreement is surveyed with an eye to exposing some of the shortcomings of its approach, considered generally. These shortcomings motivate a new conception of the conditions which lead to philosophically relevant disagreements. This new conception, it is argued, can account for most philosophical cases of disagreement as also *relevant* philosophical cases. This new conception also generates a paradox. The structure of and potential resolutions to this paradox are explored in the third section in order to re-emphasize the limited scope of current approaches and pave the way for wider considerations. The fourth section secures the non-arbitrariness of philosophical hermeneutics, Jainism, and Buddhism as alternative sources of insight in the resolution of the paradox.

1.2 The contemporary debate

As a matter of historical fact, contributions to the epistemology of disagreement²² have taken the most straightforward approach to meta-analyses of disagreement in recent English language scholarship. Contemporary work in analytic epistemology is one of just a few bodies of scholarship in English in which a deliberate and sustained exposition of the issues surrounding disagreement can be found, and of them, it is primary.

Although the topic has already received direct treatment for over a half century in epistemological circles, it reached a moment of consensus as to its theoretical state and jargon when the Feldman and Warfield anthology on the topic was published in 2010.²³ This group of essays was deemed a necessary appendix to a debate that had been brewing in social epistemology as early as 2006 on the topics of expert and peer disagreement.²⁴ The discussion has since grown substantially, inviting numerous journal articles,²⁵ a second anthology of essays in 2013,²⁶ an introductory textbook in 2014,²⁷ and most recently an advanced review of the topic in 2015.²⁸ Another anthology focuses on skepticism and disagreement²⁹ and another advanced review has made use of the insights

²² Christensen, David, ‘Disagreement as Evidence : The Epistemology of Controversy’, *Philosophy Compass*, 4/5 (2009), 756–67. While Christensen in this article refers to the debate, perhaps more aptly, as the “epistemology of controversy,” I follow the common convention here and refer to it as the “epistemology of disagreement.”

²³ Feldman and Warfield, eds., *Disagreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7n. See also Feldman (2006) and Elga (2007).

²⁵ The article count on philpapers.org/browse/epistemology-of-disagreement/ has reached 417 as of April 11, 2018.

²⁶ Christensen, David, and Jennifer Lackey, eds., *Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁷ Frances, Bryan, *Disagreement* (Malden: Polity Press, 2014).

²⁸ Matheson, Jonathan, *The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

²⁹ Machuca, *Op. cit.*

of this debate in a book addressing religious disagreement.³⁰ Dozens of articles have been published on the topic of disagreement as it relates to philosophical discourse, as well.³¹

Painting with a broad brush, one can understand the majority of this literature as a cooperative inquiry that asks which epistemic moves are appropriate subsequent to disagreement with an epistemic peer. The inquiry relies upon a refined scenario of disagreement to answer this question. Specifically, it postulates factors which, when symmetrically present in opposing parties to a disagreement, establish that these parties are epistemic peers to the disagreement, then explores what these parties can know once they become aware of a disagreement between them. This scenario is referred to as “revealed peer disagreement.”³² A more specific question which is commonly explored in this literature is How should the discovery of disagreement among two or more parties effect each party’s confidence level with regard to the belief about which they disagree?

Philosophers, unsurprisingly, disagree about how to answer this question.³³ Three answers, though, have been prominent: conciliationism, steadfastness, and skepticism. Conciliationism asserts that disagreements with epistemic peers demand some adjustment of those peers’ original beliefs. Steadfastness is the position that peer disagreement is not compelling enough evidence to make any such general demand. Disagreement-based skepticism is the view that peer disagreement should lead one to suspend judgment on the subject of disagreement.

³⁰ Kraft, James, *The Epistemology of Religious Disagreement: A Better Understanding* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

³¹ For a detailed list with links to articles, see <http://philpapers.org/browse/disagreement-in-philosophy>.

³² Feldman, *Disagreement*, p. 3.

³³ See Weatherson (2013) and Christensen (2009) for summaries. There is disagreement about how this disagreement should occur — Elga (2010) — and there is even disagreement about whether or not there is disagreement in this literature — Worsnip (2014).

All this disagreement about disagreement turns upon the question of whether or not disagreement with an epistemic peer should itself be considered epistemically significant. If it is, then should it affect each peer's belief in some way — *à la* conciliationism or skepticism? If it is not, is it ever justifiable for either peer's confidence in the original belief to remain relatively unaffected by the fact of disagreement — *à la* steadfastness? The debate has given rise to many insightful proposals as well as objections which have prevented those proposals from being uncontroversial. Furthermore, as a general characterization of how peers in any subject might respond meta-philosophically to disagreement, the theories discussed in the contemporary debate apply to cases of philosophical disagreement as much as they do to cases of disagreement in any other area of discourse. In what follows, each major answer to the question of peer disagreement will be summarized along with its most compelling objections, and these will be explored further in terms of their relevance to a consideration of *philosophical* disagreement.

1.2.1 Conciliationism

The most basic conciliatory view — called the equal weight view (EW) — is perhaps the most intuitively plausible response to revealed peer disagreement. Thomas Kelly defines this view in the following way:

The Equal Weight View. In cases of peer disagreement, one should give equal weight to the opinion of a peer and to one's own opinion.³⁴

³⁴ Kelly, Thomas, 'Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence', in *Disagreement*, ed. by Ted A Warfield and Richard Feldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 111–154, p. 112.

To be sure, this view is on the extreme end of the spectrum as far as conciliationism is concerned. Nonetheless, the reasoning in support of it is rather straightforward. Epistemic peership entails a symmetry of epistemic situations — epistemic peers have equal evidence, time for consideration, cognitive capabilities, etc. So when two epistemic peers fully disclose their evidence and reasoning to each other with respect to belief *p* and realize that they disagree about whether or not *p* despite having the same body of evidence, neither party's belief will have any special privilege over the other. For this reason, neither party will have any special reason to see their own belief as either superior or inferior to the belief of the other party. Special privilege can only be afforded to one of the beliefs by reasoning or evidence independent of the disagreement itself.³⁵ But no such reasoning or evidence is available in a revealed peer disagreement. Neither can it be insisted that both *p* and not *p* are simultaneously justifiable,³⁶ since this would entail a blatant contradiction. A *somewhat* skeptical conclusion follows: equal weight should be afforded to each belief.³⁷

The equal weight view has been subjected to many criticisms, but one major objection seems to hold good: broad spectrum conciliationism is self-undermining. This is because in order to hold a conciliatory view, one must be simultaneously fully committed and partially committed to conciliationism itself.

Adam Elga puts the “self-undermining problem” in the following way:

³⁵ Christensen, David, ‘Disagreement as Evidence : The Epistemology of Controversy’, *Philosophy Compass*, 4/5 (2009), 756–67, p. 758.

³⁶ Cohen, Stewart, ‘A Defense of the (Almost) Equal Weight View’, in *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays*, ed. by David Christensen and Jennifer Lackey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 101. This is often referred to as the principle or thesis of Uniqueness: “Given a proposition *h*, and a body of evidence *e*, there is a unique attitude toward *h* that is rational on *e*.”

³⁷ Feldman, ‘Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement’, p. 232.

in many situations involving disagreement about disagreement, conciliatory views call for their own rejection. But it is incoherent for a view on disagreement to call for its own rejection. So conciliatory views on disagreement are incoherent.³⁸

Two points are made here. First, conciliationism in many cases calls for its own rejection. Assume, for example, that you hold the equal weight view. Imagine that an epistemic peer advocates a form of steadfastness. The equal weight view recommends that neither the equal weight view nor the steadfast view held by your peer in such a case should be privileged. The two views should be given equal weight and thus your own view (the equal weight view) requires that you no longer acknowledge any special reason to maintain that very view. You lessen your confidence in the equal weight view on the basis of the equal weight view. This is a problem for conciliationism in general, since any view which recommends even a slight credential accommodation of opposing views in cases of peer disagreement will tend toward its own dissolution in cases where the subject of disagreement is conciliationism itself. The second step in this argument, alluded to here, is that such self-undermining is incoherent. It is incoherent for a view to both recommend and prohibit its own rejection. Conciliationism both requires and prohibits full commitment to itself in cases where a proponent of it encounters steadfastness in a peer. Therefore, it is incoherently self-undermining.

While Elga has successfully shown that broadly conciliatory views are self-undermining, he has also made a strong case for restricting conciliationism in cases of disagreement about disagreement. He reasons that “it is in the nature of giving consistent

³⁸ Elga, Adam, ‘How to Disagree about How to Disagree’, in *Disagreement*, ed. by Ted A. Warfield and Richard Feldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 175–86, p. 179.

advice that one's advice be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness,"³⁹ insisting that since this is a general reason to believe that conciliationism should be restricted in this manner, it would not be ad hoc or arbitrary to restrict it in just that manner. However, it is altogether unhelpful, in a philosophical context, to suggest that a view is justified in ignoring incompatible alternatives merely because it offers advice, since advice must be dogmatic with respect to itself in order to be consistent. This would justify dogmatism with respect to a great deal of bad advice and a great deal of controversial philosophical approaches. This reason, specific to disagreement in philosophy but perhaps applicable elsewhere, outweighs the general requirement that advice should be dogmatic with respect to itself, and so conciliationism with respect to disagreement in philosophy remains self-undermining.

1.2.2 Steadfastness

Steadfastness is another initially defensible alternative upon intuitive premises. Jonathan Matheson describes steadfast views as "views that claim that it is rational to stick to your guns about p even after you have gained evidence that you are party to an idealized disagreement about p."⁴⁰ A version of this is explored by Kelly as The Symmetrical No Independent Weight View. He defines the view in the following way:

The Symmetrical No Independent Weight View. In at least some cases of peer disagreement, both parties to the dispute might be perfectly reasonable even if neither gives any weight at all to the opinion of the other party.⁴¹

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁴⁰ Matheson, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁴¹ Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

This is a strong view, but the reasoning in support of it is rather straightforward, just as with the equal weight view. There are at least three separate motivations for this view.⁴²

The first motivation which will support any version of steadfastness is that conciliationism is unpalatable. To this point, a proponent of steadfastness may insist that conciliationism is self-undermining. She may, alternatively, appeal to a consideration of the philosophical disagreements in which so many of our views participate. There are a great number of qualified detractors with respect to many of our philosophical views. It seems that a certain version of conciliationism recommends that we give equal weight to both our views and those of our detractors. Many may find this recommendation to be absurd,⁴³ for it implies that a large majority of our beliefs should be abandoned in favor of agnosticism.

The second motivation for steadfastness is the concern that the Uniqueness Thesis is implausible.⁴⁴ The Uniqueness Thesis is the idea that for any particular body of evidence, there is one, most reasonable interpretation of it. This thesis is maintained by some proponents of conciliationism.⁴⁵ The Uniqueness Thesis is not, to the steadfast theorist's credit, an obvious claim.

There are good reasons to think that the Uniqueness Thesis is false in even very constrained circumstances. Consider the following example, taken from Frances (2014):

Reggie and Amanda are in the same economics class... Reggie and Amanda are equal in every relevant respect noted thus far: overall, ability, relevant background

⁴² Christensen. 'Disagreement as Evidence : The Epistemology of Controversy', p. 757-759. He mentions two and goes on to discuss independence in a separate section.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 757.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 758. See also Kelly (2010), p. 119-121.

⁴⁵ Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 101, argues that a conciliationist does not need to assume the truth of the Uniqueness Thesis. According to him, a weaker thesis will do.

knowledge, time devoted to the question, and data and evidence generally. But, whereas Amanda works on [an economics] problem without any annoying distractions, Reggie is surrounded by boisterous children vying for his attention [while working on the same problem].⁴⁶

Despite the many epistemic constraints upon this situation implying that Reggie and Amanda are peers, Frances suggests that this is a case where the two can come to different but reasonable answers to the same problem in their economics class while having the same evidence. If steadfast theorist can convincingly show that the uniqueness thesis is implausible through examples like this, then she will go a long way toward proving that neither party to a peer disagreement needs to give any weight at all to the opinions of the other parties because more than one interpretation of the same evidence is reasonable.

The problem with the above example is that the reasoning offered in support of steadfastness is *independent* of the evidence shared by each party, such independent reasons will of course explain disagreement in such cases, but they will not be epistemological justifications of steadfastness, so much as circumstantial justifications.

This criticism makes a third motivation in support of steadfastness essential. That motivation is the idea that the principle of independence is false in some cases of disagreement.⁴⁷ The principle of independence states that “in evaluating the epistemic credentials of another’s expressed belief about P, in order to determine how (or whether) to modify my own belief about P, I should do so in a way that doesn’t rely on the reasoning behind my initial belief that P.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Frances, Disagreement, p. 25.

⁴⁷ Christensen, ‘Disagreement as Evidence : The Epistemology of Controversy’, p. 759.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 758.

Consider the following example.

Ben and Jerry's Song. Ben and Jerry are writing a song. Both have both carefully listened to a recording of their song twice. Ben insists, after these listenings, that the musical break following the second verse lasts one beat too long and that the remainder of the song sounds awkwardly out of time because of it. Jerry does not think so, and cannot for the life of him hear it otherwise. Jerry thinks that something has gone wrong with Ben's evaluation, but Jerry does not know what it is. His only reason for believing that he is correct is that Ben disagrees.

For those who think Jerry's steadfastness is reasonable, this example may support the idea that one can remain steadfast in a case of peer disagreement and that there are times when the reasons for "sticking to one's guns" in a peer disagreement do not need to involve reasoning external to the disagreement itself.

So the proponent of the Symmetrical No Independence View can insist all at once that conciliationism is unpalatable, the Uniqueness Thesis is unlikely to be true, and the principle of Independence is false. This implies, she can claim, a steadfast conclusion: in some cases, neither party to a peer disagreement should give the opinion of the other party independent weight.

While steadfast theories of disagreement are easier to defend than conciliatory theories since they utilize an existential rather than universal quantification, a problem remains. The problem with steadfast theories of disagreement such as this one is that they appeal to the asymmetry of epistemic situations for counterexamples to conciliationism. More specifically, defenses of steadfastness appeal to non-evidential asymmetries — such as the relationship between evidence and belief, the context of a peer's analysis of the evidence, etc. — in order to develop counterexamples to evidentialist arguments for

the equal weight view and other forms of conciliationism. This is an advantage for the position in general, as such appeals to new and subtler asymmetries show conciliationism to be problematic beyond the issue of self-undermining: conciliationism's refined notion of peership turns out to have very few, if any, real-world instances.⁴⁹ But the use of such asymmetries is also a problem for steadfastness because it reveals a self-serving tendency in attempts to justify steadfastness with respect to peer disagreement, especially when arguing against the Uniqueness Thesis and Independence.

Consider, first, the Uniqueness Thesis. The rejection of this thesis in particular tends to rely on asymmetry in epistemic situations. Think again of the economics problem of Reggie and Amanda. There is an asymmetry in this scenario which is the very reason appealed to in order to problematize the Uniqueness Thesis. The asymmetry in this story that Reggie is distracted while Amanda is not, though it satisfies independence, negates the peership of Reggie and Amanda on this particular economics problem. In this way, it fails to be a counterexample to conciliationism and it does not illustrate the implausibility of the Uniqueness Thesis, both of which are premised upon a more perfect symmetry of epistemic situations.

To this, a steadfast theorist could respond, as Thomas Kelly does, that if a restricted notion of perfect symmetry is required to make the Uniqueness Thesis relevant in disagreements, it is still a very "strong and unobvious claim."⁵⁰ Perhaps this is true, but it does not follow from the unobviousness of the Uniqueness Thesis that in every

⁴⁹ King, Nathan L., 'Disagreement: The Skeptical Arguments from Peerhood and Symmetry', in *Disagreement and Skepticism*, ed. by Diego E. Machuca (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 193–217, p. 199.

⁵⁰ Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

situation of peer disagreement, one can safely infer that both beliefs are reasonable ones. Nor does the rejection of the Uniqueness Thesis entail that no one is ever more correct than anyone else in a disagreement. So even without the Uniqueness Thesis, peer disagreement still presents one with a general reason for skepticism.

Assuming that subtle and non-evidential asymmetries can be present in an epistemic peer disagreement is conceptually problematic. Since peership requires symmetry, noting such asymmetries seems to miss the point. Yet, a steadfast view will find support only if these asymmetries are known and acknowledged by one or more of the parties. Consider an example given by Kelly which is supposed to show that the Equal Weight View ignores relevant asymmetry:

Despite having access to the same substantial body of evidence E, you and I arrive at very different opinions about some hypothesis H: while I am quite confident that H is true, you are quite confident that it is false. Indeed, at time t_0 , immediately before encountering one another, my credence for H stands at 0.8 while your credence stands at 0.2. At time t_1 , you and I meet and compare notes...In fact, hypothesis H is quite unlikely on evidence E. Your giving credence 0.2 to H is the reasonable response to that evidence. Moreover, you respond in this way precisely because you recognize that H is quite unlikely on E. On the other hand, my giving credence to H is an unreasonable response and reflects the fact that I have significantly overestimated the probative force of E with respect to H.⁵¹

Kelly thinks that in such a case, a conciliationist would advocate splitting the difference in degrees of belief to 0.5 since the interlocutors are peers, thus resulting in the “dubious consequence”⁵² that the conciliationist will ignore the asymmetry produced by her more correct evaluation of the relationship between E and H. Kelly has good reason to believe that conciliationists might indeed make such a move, citing Earl Conee and Richard

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

Feldman (2004), two prominent conciliationists about disagreement who claim that justification supervenes upon evidence.⁵³ While some evidentialist conciliationists might ignore this evidence, then, a conciliationist who is not also an evidentialist about justification would, when such an asymmetry is known to one or both parties, not ignore its relevance to the scenario.

In rejecting the Independence principle, a steadfast theorist may rely on a restricted range of justification (typically evidentialism) in order to show that without independent evidence, one can still be justified in being steadfast of belief subsequent to a peer disagreement. At first glance, the story of Ben and Jerry's song is an example of this. Insofar as such appeals are appeals to hidden asymmetries, however, they do in fact offer reasons independent of the disagreement itself to justify steadfastness and are therefore not counterexamples to conciliationism!

The flaw in the kinds of counterexamples appealed to against Independence and the Uniqueness Thesis is common: an appeal to hidden asymmetry.⁵⁴ Why this is a flaw is revealed when one considers that either the presence of an epistemic asymmetry is known or it is unknown to the disagreeing parties.

If it is known, it can be pointed out by the knowing party and explained to the group. After all, the parties to this disagreement are peers and such independent reasons should be important to their subsequent evaluation. But independent reasons will normally dissolve the disagreement if accepted, propel the disagreement back to symmetry if rejected, or block the epistemic symmetry required for peership if deemed

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ See King, *op. cit.* He appeals to a chain of asymmetries in rejecting conciliationism.

disqualifying. So independent appeals to revealed asymmetry, if accepted, imply that there is no genuine disagreement, that the parties are not epistemic peers or, if rejected, lead back to a symmetrical disagreement.

If, on the other hand, the asymmetry is not known to either party, if the asymmetry is hidden — e.g., one view is more reasonable than the other but at most only third parties are aware of this — there is no independent reason available to either party which could non-dogmatically justify steadfastness. In summary, if an asymmetry is not hidden, it will be pointed out and dialogue will ensue. If an asymmetry is hidden, then it is not available to justify the steadfastness of either party. In either case, the scenario of revealed peer disagreement is not significantly problematized by an appeal to asymmetry, and steadfastness finds no non-dogmatic support.

Conciliationism may be self-undermining, but it seems that steadfastness finds theoretical room for itself only by pushing back the line of epistemic symmetry to a very limited range of application. While this demonstrates successfully that conciliationism is not an especially helpful stance, the appeal to asymmetry by steadfast theories can only be self-serving since it alters the example of idealized symmetry with which the debate began. Moreover, it does not show disagreements to be irrelevant so much as it shows them to be non-existent. Relevantly symmetrical situations by definition give no special reason to favor either position in a peer disagreement, so if steadfast theories appeal to hidden asymmetry they wind up speaking past conciliationists, and if they do not appeal to asymmetry they wind up being straightforwardly dogmatic. If they appeal to non-

hidden asymmetry, they are no longer debating about peer disagreement, but claiming that the discussion has not yet met the stalemate of peer disagreement.

1.2.3 Skepticism

Disagreement-based skepticism — suspension of judgment on some topic as a result of widespread disagreement regarding that topic — is another strong yet distinct and intuitively plausible answer to the question of peer disagreement. Disagreement-based skepticism is more common, historically speaking, than either conciliationism or steadfastness. Skepticism has been adopted on the basis of disagreement by thinkers of many traditions — Pyrrho, Montaigne, Nāgārjuna, and more recent authors like Brian Ribeiro and Bob Plant come to mind. Nathan King describes such arguments in the following way:

disagreement-based skepticism involves the attempt to use conciliationist epistemic principles in an argument for skepticism.⁵⁵

Skepticism on the basis of conciliationist principles is more broadly skeptical than conciliationism itself. Although conciliationism is moderately skeptical, it differs from disagreement-based skepticism in that, as Diego Machuca puts it:

Conciliationists argue either that discovery of peer disagreement does not always mandate suspension of judgment; or that, even if it does, this kind of dispute is infrequent; or that, despite being a common phenomenon, peer disagreement does not extend across the board.⁵⁶

Conciliationism, in other words, refers to restricted circumstances and therefore to a limited range of cases. Skepticism is different. It mandates suspension of judgment across

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁵⁶ Machuca, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

the board on the basis of the claim that relevant disagreements are common and widespread.

Nathan L. King argues convincingly against skeptical arguments from peer disagreement. Such arguments, according to King, rely on conditional principles of peerhood or symmetry. For instance:

If S believes that P and acknowledges that S's epistemic peer, T, believes \sim P and S has no reason (independent of the disagreement and the evidence that S shares with T) to think that S is more likely than T to be correct about P, then S is not justified in believing that P, and should suspend judgment about whether P.⁵⁷

Such conditional principles, to be successfully employed in globally skeptical arguments, must be true principles and their antecedents must be broadly satisfied. The problem with this is that when the antecedents of these principles are satisfied, the principles themselves are false — i.e., they tend to admit of counterexamples, and when the principles are true — i.e., they do not admit of examples — their antecedents are rarely satisfied.⁵⁸ For example, it is very hard to imagine that the antecedent of the above principle is commonly, if ever, satisfied. Specifically, it is extremely difficult to confirm and uncommon to even diligently pursue confirmation that all and only the same evidence is shared between disagreeing parties.⁵⁹ If the antecedent is weakened to make it more commonly satisfied, then examples which satisfy the antecedent do not seem to lead to skepticism. If for example, the condition of shared evidence were weakened, surely the case for suspension of judgment on the basis of (apparent) disagreement would be, too.

⁵⁷ King, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

So even skeptical arguments on the basis of peer disagreement seem to present intractable problems.

1.2.4 Problematic assumptions

Of course, many of the problems presented by these responses may not be intractable.

Attempts to salvage these theories continue to be made with tentative success. However, even revised responses to the scenario of revealed peer disagreement are likely to retain some fundamental problems concerning assumptions common to each response, since it turns out that these responses to peer disagreement do share some common and, importantly, controversial assumptions. One common assumption is that justification can be explained on the basis of evidence alone — evidentialism. Another is that epistemic peerhood is a reliably critical starting point from which to consider philosophically relevant cases of disagreement. A third is that these arguments share an understanding of understanding as a cognitive occurrence which aspires to reasonableness, not necessarily to completeness. Each of these assumptions contribute to the local success, but the global shortcomings of this debate.

1.2.4a Evidentialism

The first problematic assumption made in this literature is that evidentialism is a reliable theory of justification by which to determine the implications of epistemic peer disagreement. Conciliationists, steadfast-theorists, and skeptics alike tend to take various forms of evidentialism for granted. “Evidentialism,” according to Karyn Freedman, “holds that evidence is the sole mark of justified belief.”⁶⁰ In other words, evidentialism

⁶⁰ Freedman, Karyn L., ‘Interests, Disagreement and Epistemic’, *Dialogue*, 52 (2013), pp. 589-590.

is the view that the justifiability of a proposition *p* depends solely on the evidence one has in support of *p*. Freedman argues that this view leads to an underappreciation of the role of subjective interests in the formation of and justification of beliefs⁶¹ and therefore cannot provide a reliable answer to the question of how one should respond in cases of revealed peer disagreement:

By failing to take into account certain subjective facts about an individual, by focusing on evidence and evidence alone, evidentialism lacks the tools necessary to apply its own epistemic norms and as such leaves us hamstrung in trying to evaluate the epistemic status of belief.⁶²

The point is that two individuals who share the same body of evidence are not, contra evidentialism, identical with respect to justification.⁶³ She insists that to the degree that one has interest in a belief, to the degree that one has something at stake in the truth of that belief, to a proportional degree one's justification demands a higher burden of evidence.⁶⁴

Freedman does not go far enough, though, since she assumes that our relevant interests are internal to our justificatory capacities, that they are available to us. Many interests relevant to disagreements are in fact unacknowledged and even unacknowledgable presuppositions. Thus, what it means to be interested in the truth of some proposition is bound up with what constitutes interest in general, and that extends far beyond the factors readily available to parties to a peer disagreement.

1.2.4b Epistemic peership

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 592.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 602.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 591.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 599-600.

Another problematic assumption is that epistemic peership is a helpful constraint in determining the philosophically relevant cases of disagreement. This assumption turns out to be problematic because it restricts relevant cases of disagreement so far as to be almost non-existent.⁶⁵ While, as an idea, epistemic peership does indeed aid in the philosophical negotiation of two opposed beliefs among supposed peers, it also disguises a more comprehensive significance of disagreements by ignoring cases in which epistemic symmetry is absent. There are many cases in which it is not obvious that opposing parties are peers, superiors, or inferiors. In fact, these form the vast majority of cases. Two prominent examples for anyone reading this may be the anonymous disagreement in comments sections of online articles and more official disagreements with unknown scholars at conferences. Despite and because of the fact that peership cannot be verified in such cases, it is not at all clear that such disagreements are irrelevant.

So either such disagreements are relevant beyond cases of peerhood and symmetry or, if they are not, the only relevant cases of disagreement which occur do so very rarely. But disagreement is a broadly disturbing fact, and unless we are to have nothing philosophical to say about the majority of cases, a more comprehending set of conditions which set the stage for philosophically relevant cases of disagreement must be sought.

⁶⁵ King, Nathan L., 'Disagreement: What's the Problem? Or A Good Peer Is Hard to Find', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, LXXXV (2012), 249–72, and Frances, Bryan, 'The Reflective Epistemic Renegade', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 81 (2010), 419–63.

We must, in other words, make an assumption about the conditions of relevant disagreement which does not dismiss interlocutors who, on account of the alienness or presumed difference of their understanding, cannot be subsumed under the headings of peer, superior, and inferior. Perhaps they have a regionally sourced understanding of causality. Perhaps they have been educated in the logical methods of what seems to one to be a completely alien philosophical tradition. Are such differences radical? Are they radical enough reasons to dismiss disagreements from these interlocutors as incommensurabilities and therefore unworthy of philosophical consideration?

As J.N. Mohanty has argued, it makes more sense to deduce radical difference from failed understanding than it does to deduce impossibility of understanding from “presumed radical difference.”⁶⁶ It just makes more hermeneutic sense to do so. And one can add to this that the tendency of a criterion to imply the impossibility of understanding alien traditions is enough reason to doubt that criterion’s reliability. Such is the case with the criterion of epistemic peership.

1.2.4c Understanding

The third problematic assumption made in this literature has to do with its understanding of understanding. For the sake of theoretical convenience, this literature typically operates on a weak criterion for what constitutes understanding. Bryan Frances writes, for example, that “it would be asking too much to demand *perfect* precision and understanding in order for there to be genuine disagreement.”⁶⁷ Briefly, the problem with this lowered standard of understanding is not that it is impractical, but that in ruling out

⁶⁶ Mohanty, J.N., *Self and Its Other* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 117.

⁶⁷ Frances, *Disagreement*, p. 15.

ideal cases and by cutting short the natural process of *approximating perfection* in understanding this methodologically hardened imperfection will conceal just as much in its purported practicality as it reveals.

1.2.5 Response

From these problematic assumptions, new assumptions must be allowed to grow. What was previously a mistaken understanding of justification as evidential must give way to an understanding of justification as also interest-relative and thoroughly bound up with hermeneutic prejudice. Justification depends upon interests, theoretical and pre-theoretical ones. These interests are events, results and self-evident preconditions that set the stage for interpretations. They are conditions to which we are often passive, and so unless our philosophizing is to be reduced to the formalism of adjudicating between propositions which are not even held to be true, we must take for granted that interests are a relevant component to any approach to justification which is to address the shortcomings of evidentialism.

Furthermore, what was in the above considerations a useful recognition of symmetry in epistemic backgrounds (epistemic peership) must be allowed to develop out of its self-affirming limitation. Richard Fumerton has captured the point quite nicely while discussing his reasons for considering all philosophical discourse unreliable:

If I try to check the reliability of a philosopher with respect to a given area of philosophy by presupposing my own reliability, I will obviously reach the conclusion that the only philosophers who are reliable are those who generally agree with me.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Fumerton, Richard, 'You Can't Trust a Philosopher', in *Disagreement*, ed. by Ted A. Warfield and Richard Feldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 108-9.

The assumptions of epistemic symmetry and peership as criteria for determining the relevance of disagreements have the same undesirable circularity. They must grow, therefore, into a recognition of a more fundamental symmetry, the symmetry of subjectivity presented by otherness itself. This latter symmetry is much more powerful than the former, and it increases the range of significance of philosophical disagreements. This symmetry of humanity and subjectivity is more fundamental to, and even concealed by, a concern with epistemic symmetry. Consideration of this new symmetry of subjectivity is provoked in a sensitive interpreter by the mere presence of another subject with beliefs.

Finally, the pragmatic stipulation that a reasonable though less than perfect understanding of another's view is a sufficient condition for epistemic analysis and can therefore be utilized in determining the relevant symmetry of the epistemic background of that view must pass into the constant and nagging acknowledgement that perfect understanding has not been and can never finally be achieved. It must be admitted with realistic humility that the task of understanding the views of others is always incomplete.

1.3 The Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement

The idealized scenario common to considerations in current literature on disagreement relies on a notion of justification which is problematically evidentialist, a notion of peership which was shown to be immaturely dismissive of disagreeing views, and a stipulative definition of understanding whose practicality perpetuates disagreement by concealing it. The newly proposed scenario of philosophically relevant disagreements is one in which justification must become ineliminably subjective and interest-relative,

peership must grow into a more comprehensive symmetry of subjectivities, and hermeneutic completeness must be aspired to as an unachievable yet necessary ideal in the attainment of interpersonal understanding.

This maturation of the scenario in which philosophically relevant disagreements occur reveals an even more formidable challenge to would-be disagreeers than the one posed by the limited scenario of “revealed peer disagreement.” It reveals a paradox which is frustratingly fundamental to philosophical discourse, in particular, and which arises because of a tension, in that discourse, between interestedness and disinterestedness. On the one hand, this new scenario finally admits that our enculturated and idiosyncratic *interests* in certain facts, methods, and interpretations essentially pre-determine the scope of our philosophical views. And yet a demand remains that, should a disagreement arise between our interested views and the interested views of others, that very disagreement will be either compelling or troubling only insofar as it arises between views whose constitution and development have been guided by *disinterest* in those very facts, methods, and interpretations. Thus, the paradox of philosophical disagreement arises that, *in the case of a philosophical disagreement, interests both must and cannot be determining factors in the articulation of each disagreeing party’s philosophical view.*

For example, Buddhists and Jains disagree as to whether or not there is a substantial self persisting through our changing psychological and physical aggregates. In response to the question “Is there a substantial self?” Buddhists answer in the negative and Jains, with qualification, answer affirmatively. Both parties must, on the one hand, acknowledge that the interests which constitute their cognitive backgrounds predispose

and even predetermine their answers. Suppose, for example, that neither of them are converts. The Buddhist was raised as a Buddhist while the Jain was raised as a Jain. One may reasonably suspect that this will predispose each to take for granted certain premises in their answers. On the other hand, these parties cannot pose their philosophical answers except *as if* these constitutive biases and interests were irrelevant to the question. When the Buddhist answers this question philosophically, she submits that “There is no self,” not, “There is no self *according to me and my intellectual culture.*” Likewise with the Jain. This is because, as a reason for believing, the accident of one’s being raised in a particular culture is not something that can be shared by anyone who is not a part of that culture, and therefore is not something which can be a relevant reason for anyone outside that culture. Parties to a philosophical disagreement thus pose their incompatible answers as claims about the way things are rather than about the way their interests happen to be coordinated in or prior to the processes of belief formation. So, in a philosophical disagreement, as mentioned at the outset, each thinker is pulled in two opposite directions.

1.3.1 Disagreement and interestedness

Why, in a disagreement, are philosophers pulled in the direction of acknowledging interest? We have already seen that justification in general is pulled in this direction,⁶⁹ but this question can also be answered by way of a consideration of disagreement’s centrality in philosophical discourse.

⁶⁹ Freedman, *op. cit.*

Philosophical views have the common characteristic that they are disagreement-engendering. Disagreement is ubiquitous in the discipline, a fact attested to by the history of philosophy. However, that fact alone neither proves that anything particularly “philosophical” gives rise to the disagreement in philosophy nor that there is a necessary relationship between philosophy and disagreement. And it certainly does not yet establish that philosophical views must be *interested*.

Indeed, one may object to this characterization of philosophy as broadly entrenched in disagreements by responding that insofar as philosophical discourse produces disagreement, it is not truly philosophical discourse. This Platonic invocation suggests, in effect, that “philosophical disagreement” is an oxymoron. More appropriate, perhaps, is “political disagreement” or “religious disagreement,” but “philosophical disagreement” smacks of inconsistency.

One simple retort to this objection would be to point out that since many disagree with it, it would prove rather than disprove the characterization of philosophical claims as disagreement-engendering. The more effective response, however, is to point out that comparatively little is rejected in the tradition itself as utterly indefensible or non-philosophical and comparatively much is accepted as defensible and philosophical. True, there have been and remain major issues of exclusion and privileged dogmatism in the discipline. Despite this, the range of views which are treated as philosophically defensible spans from absolutist to nihilist, from commonly held beliefs to extremely rarified and counter-intuitive ones. This diversity is so widespread that developing or defending a philosophical view at all engages or at least invites disagreement. Even new and

revolutionary philosophical views engender disagreement with what has come before. Otherwise, views tend to remain philosophically irrelevant, whether this means they are discarded by the tradition as non-philosophical or taken for granted by it as straightforwardly true.

So, to return to the Buddhist and Jain example, a disagreement is in fact engendered by each party's articulation of an answer to the question "Is there a self?" Whether the conception of self or its very existence is at issue, questions like "Is there a self?" enable the articulation of multiple defensible but mutually incompatible answers. The Buddhist's answer to this question in particular engenders disagreement in virtue of the many views which already exist that firmly assert the existence of the self. The Jain answer, moreover, runs up against many traditions which either deny that there is a self for elaborate philosophical reasons or deny that this claim needs qualification in the way that Jains suggest.

One might object at this point that, while it may be the case that philosophical views are disagreement-engendering in the sense that they always find themselves in the midst of detractors, this does not mean that no answers win out as the best answers in philosophical debate. At first glance, this is a difficult objection to address. It rings true, but problematically suggests that disagreements in philosophy are merely apparent, all detracting views falling into a hierarchy at the top of which is one correct interpretation. This view was encountered earlier as the Uniqueness Thesis. However, while it must be acknowledged that some interpretations are better than others, the idea of a uniquely justifiable interpretation advocated here is not all that different from the invocation of

Plato which was rejected in the earlier objection. It basically asserts that some answers are the *truly* philosophical ones, while others can be shown to be erroneous, even if the proponents of these supposedly erroneous views never acknowledge that such an error has been made.

For reasons independent of those which debunked the appeal to Plato, this objection falters. First, it falters in that it is not a very useful claim. Claiming there is a best interpretation is a theoretical postulate. In order to verify the best interpretation, one will need to have the best criteria and the best understanding of those criteria in order to judge the interpretation in relation to them. But this understanding of the criteria is itself an interpretation which will need to be the best in order to be reliable in aiding judgment of the first order interpretation. But the second order interpretation cannot beg the question. It, too, must be shown to be the best interpretation by a third interpretation. There is thus an infinite regress to this interpretive hierarchy.

Beyond the difficulty of dealing with an infinite regress of verifications in practice, the Uniqueness Thesis is actually a hotly debated position. The notion that there is a best interpretation rather than merely better ones assumes that the process of supplanting interpretations with better ones has an end in which disagreements are suppressed and harmony is achieved. This is a highly dubious assumption.

Some answers indeed wind up being better than others. But since philosophical discourse makes its way in large part by problematizing assumptions and postulates — e.g., the Uniqueness thesis — one can always expect from philosophy an appeal to matters taken for granted by each party to a disagreement. The fact that so little can be

safely assumed to be uncontroversial as an argumentative starting point in philosophy is what makes disagreements in philosophical discourse seem so intractable and meta-philosophical skepticism seem so attractive. So the notion that there is a best view, far from dissolving disagreement, actually perpetuates it.

This brings us back to our initial question. Why, in a disagreement, are philosophers pulled in the direction of acknowledging interest? As was just pointed out, disagreements in philosophical discourse are intractable largely because of the inevitable presence of controversial assumptions, and this is what implicates interest in the formation of philosophical views. Disagreement involves interest in the form of presupposed preferences as to which side to take in already present or potentially present philosophical controversies. So while most will acknowledge that interest is embedded in all events of understanding, disagreement implicates interest in a way that strengthens the necessity of acknowledging this connection in philosophical discourse in particular. Once one uses an assumption in an argument — and one always does — one has declared an interpretive preference and staked an argumentative interest. So if one grants that philosophical views are disagreement-engendering, and that disagreements are intractable in philosophy because of an infinite regress of assumptions which are taken for granted, then interests are a necessary condition to disagreements in philosophy. In philosophy, that is, interest is what allows argumentation and inquiry to ensue because it forms the foundation of any argument by providing (apparently) self-evident premises.

One is compelled, then, at the risk of self-deception, to admit that *philosophical views are disagreement-engendering*, that *interestedness is a necessary condition of*

genuine disagreement, and therefore that *interestedness is a condition necessary to the expression of philosophical views*.

1.3.2 Universalizability and disinterestedness

Why are philosophical views also pulled in the direction of claiming disinterest? This question can be answered through a consideration of the role of universalizability in philosophical discourse.

Philosophical views have the common characteristic that they aspire to universalizability. When the Buddhist insists, “There is no self,” we do not read into this statement any *relativizing* qualifiers, even though we may understand that the claim comes from an *individual*. The claim itself is expressed as if true about the world, independent of what seems to be so for certain individuals. In other words, the claim is not taken to mean, “(I think) there is no self.” In fact, a philosophical claim does not seriously contain a hedge. It cannot. But why not?

One may object from the start that self-referential hedges like “I think” obviously occur in purely philosophical discourse. Examples abound. After all, if the Buddhist herself does not *think* that there is no self, who does? A very Buddhist question, isn’t it? Playfulness aside, this objection would miss the point. The point is not that “I think,” “according to me,” and other hedges are never used or never logically entailed in philosophical discourse. It would be naïve to suggest this, for one can safely add an “I think” to any claim without adding meaning. The problem is that with an addition of this sort, force of meaning is usually subtracted, for the most common function of such a

hedge is to declare tentativeness of stance.⁷⁰ This type of qualification problematically privileges the idiosyncrasy of philosophical claims, and doing so places undue emphasis on the personal backgrounds of the proponents of views. If a claim is in fact made with such a qualification — an “according to me,” a “my background tells me that,” etc. — the reason-giving in defense of that claim shifts from philosophical reason-giving to what one could broadly refer to as autobiographical reason-giving.

When resorting to autobiographical reasons, the Jain may point out his family’s beliefs and their potential role in forming his belief that there is a substantial self with changing attributes. The Buddhist may cite her personal relationship with a Buddhist monk or mentor as a major influence in her belief formation. Such answers, though, reveal a misunderstanding of or a refusal to answer to the philosophical question.

The philosophical question that the Buddhist and Jain are answering is not autobiographically-oriented but rather world-oriented. The distinct question to which these hedged, tentative answers are appropriate is the overtly auto-biographical “What if my idiosyncratic situation leads me to claim that there is (not) a self?” and not the philosophical “Is there a self?” In this autobiographically-oriented context, objections become diagnostic, justifications psychogenetic, and even ordinarily conciliatory remarks such as “I see your point” are reduced to the more self-congratulatory “I see why someone in your situation would say so.” Philosophical questions and inquiries lose their

⁷⁰ Cf. Kaltenböck, Gunther. “Pragmatic Functions of Parenthetical I Think” in *New Approaches to Hedging*. In a survey of 379 instances, Kaltenböck determined that only 19 percent of occurrences of “I think” have an independent tone which would make them *potential* candidates for hedges which have an extra commitment to the propositional content they hedged, a “booster function” (p. 255). The most common role of this hedge is a “shield function,” which lends a tentativeness to the propositional content it hedges (p. 242-244).

philosophical force as soon as disputants give such answers or begin to attribute answers given to the idiosyncrasies of their proponents.

Weakened by an “according to me” or an “according to you,” potentially philosophical claims are safely protected from both scrutiny and mind-changing force. If we focus on the difference and otherness which form the idiosyncratic basis of claims, we protect ourselves. Focusing on reasons which are uniquely possessible by one’s interlocutor enables one to dismiss the universalizability of the interlocutor’s belief by attributing it to factors which are by definition not reasons for anyone but the belief holder. The Buddhist’s claim to have a personal relationship with a monk is not something the Jain can *disagree* with, nor is the Jain’s claim that family upbringing influenced his beliefs. These reasons are unique to each believer and cannot be convincing if they remain autobiographical. What is dismissed in seeking such reasons is the force of whatever claim is being made, its very aspiration to be universalizable! That is why philosophical inquiries avoid the self-promotion or self-protection of autobiographical reason-giving.

Abandoning the diminishing force of shielding hedges, philosophical claims (as well as other types of claims, to be sure) preserve their significance in a debate context. They struggle to express themselves, therefore, as universalizable, as having essentially nothing to do with one’s idiosyncratic background or constitutive interests but as having everything to do with the way things actually are. The struggle, for the Buddhist philosopher, is not merely to discover why the Jain believes what he believes, but why she might believe it, too.

This brings us back to our initial question. Why are philosophical views pulled in the direction of claiming disinterest? The aspiration to universalizability which preserves the philosophical character of a discourse suggests that it is possible for a view to actually be universalized. What makes a view universalizable is a reliance on disinterestedness, a departure from autobiographical, pre-theoretical, and ineliminably subjective reasons. A philosophical view, since it necessarily aspires to universalizability, is only properly philosophical to the extent that it is not or aspires not to be predetermined by a thinker's contingent and pre-theoretical interests. Specifically, it must be disinterested or aspire to disinterest with respect to the facts, methods, and interpretations involved in the claim being made.

One is compelled, then, at the risk of eliminating philosophical discourse altogether, to admit that *philosophical views are universalizability-aspiring*, that *disinterestedness is a necessary condition of universalizability*, and therefore that *disinterestedness is a condition necessary to the expression of philosophical views*.

1.3.3 The Paradox

So philosophers, because they find themselves in the midst of disagreements from all sides, and because they necessarily avoid auto-biographical reason-giving, find themselves at the same time compelled to move in two different directions: to interest and to disinterest. This gives rise to a paradox. On the one hand, philosophy's widespread dissensus proves its embeddedness within various backgrounds and purposes which are peculiar to its varied participants: philosophical views must be interested. On the other

hand, it depends upon an aspiration to universalizability and therefore a reliance upon apparently disinterested claims: philosophical views must be disinterested.

We can restate the paradox clearly, translating it into predicate logic for the purpose of deductive clarity. Assume the following interpretation for a predicate logic translation:

Universe of Discourse (UD): views	
Ux: x is universalizability-aspiring	Ix: x is interested
Dx: x is disagreement-engendering	Px: x is philosophical

This will permit the following reformulation of the paradox:

1. Disinterestedness is a necessary condition of universalizability-aspiring views.
 $\forall x(Ux \supset \sim Ix)$
 2. Interestedness is a necessary condition of disagreement-engendering views.
 $\forall x(Dx \supset Ix)$
 3. Philosophical views are disagreement-engendering and universalizability-aspiring.
 $\forall x(Px \supset (Dx \& Ux))$
- Therefore, paradoxically, both interestedness and disinterestedness are necessary conditions of philosophical views.
 $\therefore \forall x(Px \supset (Ix \& \sim Ix))$

1.3.4 Resolutions

There are two ways to address this paradox as developed here. One can either reject one or more of the premises or one can accept the conclusion and justify that acceptance somehow.

1.3.4a Reject premise 1

One could, in the first place, reject premise 1. This would produce the symbolization, $\sim \forall x(Ux \supset \sim Ix)$. By the conditional equivalence rule, logically equivalent to this statement is $\sim \forall x(\sim Ux \vee \sim Ix)$, which further simplifies to $\exists x \sim (\sim Ux \vee \sim Ix)$, to $\exists x(\sim \sim Ux \& \sim \sim Ix)$ by

deMorgan's Law, and finally to $\exists x(Ux \& Ix)$ by double negation. Translated to colloquial English, the rejection of premise 1 amounts to the thesis that there are some views which are both universalizability-aspiring and interested, such that interest is neither problematic in association with aspirations to universalizability nor as being constituent of the views. One could have avowed or unavowed cultural, tradition-centered, or personal interests in a certain philosophical position and yet have reason to believe that these interests are inconsequential to the universalizability of the position in question. Gadamer, Heidegger, and the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics articulate positions similar to this one.

1.3.4b Reject premise 2

One could, alternatively, reject the second premise. This would produce the symbolization, $\sim \forall x(Dx \supset Ix)$. By the conditional rule, logically equivalent to this statement is $\sim \forall x(\sim Dx \vee Ix)$. This statement is equivalent to $\exists x \sim(\sim Dx \vee Ix)$ which simplifies to $\exists x(Dx \& \sim Ix)$ by deMorgan's Law. That is, some views are both disagreement-engendering and disinterested. Is it somehow possible for disagreement-engendering views to be genuinely disinterested? It is hard to see how this could, strictly speaking, be possible. However, if it is assumed for the purpose of a more easily navigable problem, philosophically interesting results may accrue. Such is the assumption of current epistemological literature on disagreement. In predominantly adopting evidentialist theories of justification, various formulations of epistemic peership and symmetry, and in stipulatively lowering the standard for interpersonal understanding, it has done just this. Others throughout the history of philosophy have proposed that a certain extra qualified

person — a genius, a person of taste, or an unattached intellectual — is able to judge disinterestedly. We know that these supposedly disinterested judges either do not exist, or if they do, they disagree, so proponents of such judges are in fact likely to reject the second premise.

1.3.4c Reject premise 3

One could also deny the third premise. This would produce the symbolization

$\sim\forall x(Px\supset(Dx\&Ux))$. By the conditional rule, this is equivalent to

$\sim\forall x((Px\supset Dx)\&(Px\supset Ux))$. One can then reapply the conditional rule to each of the

conjuncts, converting them a conjunction of disjunctions: $\sim\forall x((\sim Px\vee Dx)\&(\sim Px\vee Ux))$.

This is equivalent to an existential negation of the form $\exists x\sim((\sim Px\vee Dx)\&(\sim Px\vee Ux))$

which, by deMorgan's Law is equivalent to $\exists x(\sim(\sim Px\vee Dx)\vee\sim(\sim Px\vee Ux))$. Finally, each of

these disjuncts can be converted again by deMorgan's Law, resulting in

$\exists x((Px\&\sim Dx)\vee(Px\&\sim Ux))$. That is, one can either assert that there is a philosophical

view which is not disagreement-engendering, or assert that there is a philosophical view

which is not universalizability-aspiring, or both.

In the first case, one must surely mean that the disagreement-engendering views in philosophy are only apparent, for it is a tangible fact that they are widespread. There must then be some explanation of this appearance as misleading, or misunderstood — e.g. by revision as in Kant, by absolutism as in Hegel, or by an appeal to authentic discourse as in Plato.

In the second case, one needs some explanation as to how, if some philosophical view does not aspire to universalizability, it differs from mere opinion. Haribhadra and

Nāgārjuna, for instance, both deny the universalizability of philosophical views, but they do not assert in place of this a completely relativized position. These philosophers, of course, are questioned as to whether their denial of universalizability is universalizable. Each must and does address this issue. Richard Fumerton comes close to this rejection of the third premise when he conceives of a reason to deem philosophers unreliable when it comes to philosophical truth. His reason? Widespread philosophical disagreement.⁷¹

Lastly, one can deny both that all philosophical views are disagreement-engendering and that they are all universalizability-aspiring. It is hard to imagine anyone holding this position, since it suggests that a view can be philosophical which neither extends beyond one's private opinions nor produces any disagreement. If one is, however, a radical relativist who insists on appealing to psychological and other reasons and never philosophical reasons, something close to this view is imaginable. Nonetheless, not being able to appeal to universalizability such a thinker will be seemingly unable to account for why others should agree with this view and thus be compelled to admit that their philosophical view is in fact disagreement-engendering. If not, this must be because the views of others are not true, and hence that their own position is universalizable. So, in either case, this position does not seem a tenable one.

1.3.4d Accept conclusion

Finally, one could accept the paradoxical conclusion to this argument: $\forall x(Px \supset (Ix \& \sim Ix))$.

That is, one could accept both consequences in the case of philosophical views — interestedness and disinterestedness — as a dialetheist might. One might thereby claim

⁷¹ Fumerton, *op. cit.*

that any view which is philosophical is in the same way and with contradiction intended both interested and disinterested. One could, alternatively, assert rational pluralism to account for the paradox as producing independently justifiable conditions of philosophical discourse. One could even take a Jain approach to this issue, arguing that the impossibility of either being absolute requires a partial admittance of each.

1.3.5 Summary

Each of these denials or acceptances constitutes an initially plausible resolution to the paradox of philosophical disagreement. In noting that each resolution has been a serious option for philosophers, too, one can see that this new set of conditions reframes the problem of philosophical disagreement in a more broadly encompassing and philosophical way than it can be captured when the issue is restricted in scope to disagreement among evidentially symmetrical peers.

1.4. Why juxtapose Nāgārjuna, Haribhadra, and Gadamer?

Beyond merely permitting renewed consideration, it is necessary to the aim of this dissertation that the problems of disagreement are able both to unify a thriving area of inquiry in contemporary philosophical discourse and reach beyond it. With that in mind, it will be necessary to justify the return to Gadamer's hermeneutics, classical Buddhist philosophy, and medieval Jaina thought.

1.4.1 They are independent authorities with respect to philosophical disagreement

First of all, each thinker to be explored is idiosyncratically authoritative on the topic of philosophical dispute and disagreement. It would be hard to convince anyone familiar with the writings of Nāgārjuna, Haribhadra, or Gadamer that any of the three is either a

philosophical novice or unconcerned with the fact that philosophical discourse is often mired in dissensus. Each thinker is well-respected by his sympathetic and non-sympathetic readers alike. They are not only concerned with why philosophers disagree, but those who disagree with these philosophers at the same time respect their creative contributions, whether dialectical refutationism, non-absolutism, or philosophical hermeneutics. Further, while each philosopher is authoritative, each is in disagreement with the others about the nature and value of philosophical discourse. In this way, they supply food for thought on the experience of that cognitive dissonance we have come to refer to in English as “disagreement” and represent seemingly incommensurable approaches to philosophical discourse which nonetheless come together in resolving uniquely the tension between interestedness and disinterestedness in philosophical discourse.

1.4.2 They form a cohesive panel

While it is obvious, then, that each thinker can contribute independently to dialogues on disagreement, these thinkers may still seem arbitrarily juxtaposed. In fact, Nāgārjuna, Haribhadra, and Gadamer form a cohesive panel in this inquiry each with something to contribute regarding the Paradox.

My exploration of Nāgārjuna’s major works pays special attention to his method of dialectical refutation (*vāda-vitaṇḍā*) and the question of the extent to which his work can be understood in terms of the Mahāyāna Buddhist notion of skillful pedagogical means (*upāya kausalya*). Noting his insistence, in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (Dispeller of Disagreements), that he has no view and therefore can commit no error, it explores the

sense one might make of the consequence that opponents necessarily misunderstand him. In refusing to allow his own position to be dogmatically reified as a metaphysic, and in defending that refusal, he purports to avoid disagreement altogether.

The Jain method of philosophical reconciliation — *anekāntavāda* or the doctrine of non-absolutism — which is employed by Haribhadra in his *Anekāntajayapatākā* (Victory Banner of Non-Absolutism) developed out of historically related efforts to work beyond philosophical dissensus. In scrutinizing objections to the Jaina metaphysical worldview, Haribhadra is able to articulate a philosophical argument for the simultaneous correctness of qualified but opposing theses. While clearly engaging the issue of disagreement, Haribhadra's response, in contrast to Nāgārjuna's deconstructive philosophical approach, is an optimistic and constructive one. For Haribhadra, views are flawed insofar as they are dogmatic or absolutizing in character, not when self-professedly partial. The qualifiers put in place by Haribhadra in order to restrain metaphysical hyperbole result from a string of reductions to absurdity which are similar to Nāgārjuna's. The major difference with Haribhadra's arguments is that they hold on to the residue of such reductions, taking them to be grounds for indirect proof.

Gadamer, for his part, has very explicitly engaged the connection between interestedness and truth-seeking discourse. By insisting that and describing how our acts of understanding are never separated from our own interpretive horizons, Gadamer's hermeneutics promises a broadly and humbly cultured (*gebildete*) approach to dialogue. For Gadamer, the fact that we are historical beings makes it difficult for us to recognize the extent to which our embeddedness within a tradition predisposes our interpretive

scope. In virtue of the fact that history determines in advance our prejudices and, thereby, the things we consider important and unimportant in any act of understanding or misunderstanding, we have a need to become conscious of this hermeneutical situation. His notion of the consciousness of the history of effect, or “historically effected consciousness” (Gm. *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*), arises out of this need.

While Gadamer has been largely neglected in contemporary literature on the topic of disagreement, there are many very obvious inroads to a consideration of disagreement on the basis of this Gadamerian understanding of our historicity. This is especially true of the connections he attempts to draw between dogmatism and failures of understanding.

Scholarship on Nāgārjuna has become very popular, so the connection of his work with these issues can be explored with much academic feedback. Haribhadra’s thoughts on philosophical reconciliation represent an analysis aporetically opposed to Nāgārjuna’s, but one that is underexplored. Gadamer has been utilized in comparative philosophical circles as a meta-justification for additive and contemporary approaches, and his work directly engages issues common to the other two thinkers. Each of the three, in philosophical practice, resolves the tension between interestedness and disinterestedness in a distinct way. Thus, they form a cohesive panel in the current discussion.

1.4.3 They offer unique resolutions to the Paradox

In addition to being independent authorities who form a cohesive panel of thinkers on the topic of philosophical disagreement, they offer unique resolutions to the paradox of disagreement outlined earlier in this chapter. Current literature on disagreement, generally speaking, resolves the paradox of disagreement by rejecting the second premise. It rejects

the idea that interestedness is a necessary condition of disagreement-engendering views, resolving the tension between interestedness and disinterestedness by adopting a predominately evidentialist theory of justification. In what follows it will be explored how exactly Nāgārjuna, Haribhadra, and Gadamer can be said to resolve this same tension.

CHAPTER 2

Nāgārjuna's Resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement

2.1 Introduction

For evidentialists, the tension between interestedness and disinterestedness in philosophical discourse is always already resolved because evidentialists hold that the justification for a philosophical view supervenes upon the bodies of evidence one possesses for that view. Interests are not, according to evidentialism, relevant factors in justification. An evidentialist stance to justification, along with a practical definition of the term 'understanding' and a helpful notion of 'epistemic peership', has led many in the contemporary debate about disagreement to take for granted that it is possible for views which engender disagreement to not be interested. It is thus of no surprise that the ways in which interests may be constitutive of beliefs rarely factor in to the meta-analyses of disagreement featured in this literature. The fact that the major assumptions underlying this common approach are controversial, however, suggests that there are alternative routes to explaining or explaining away the tension between interestedness and disinterestedness in philosophical discourse. Indeed, this is largely what the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement serves to highlight. Such alternative routes, however, are systematically inaccessible to the debate so long as evidentialism and these other assumptions are taken for granted. In other words, such a controversial solution to the tension revealed by widespread disagreement in philosophy cannot be a widely

convincing one, since the problem itself *is* controversy.⁷² Thus, expanding the debate and exploring genuine alternatives, as is done in the case of any philosophical issue, is a necessary step in the case of philosophical disagreement.

Of the many writers who may be read as offering such a genuinely alternative route to resolving this tension, the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna, founder of the Madhyamaka or Middle Way tradition, stands out as one of the most influential and innovative. His work is bold and philosophically difficult, and has had varied and global philosophical and spiritual influence over what will soon be two millennia.⁷³ In that influence, his work has also proven salient with respect to the philosophical issues surrounding disagreement in philosophy.

Nāgārjuna's diagnosis and dismissal of philosophical disagreement purports to be non-controversial by being immune to disagreement. Nāgārjuna adopts, on the one hand, a method which suggests that opponents cannot intelligibly disagree with him, because he has no view. On the other hand, if interpreted as simultaneously adopting a prominent Buddhist pedagogical tactic he can be seen as avoiding aspirations to universalizability while nonetheless expressing philosophical views.

In the present chapter, it will be demonstrated how Nāgārjuna's work — interpreted as embodying one or both of the two approaches above — can be seen a counterexample to the generalization given in the third premise of the Paradox of

⁷² Of course, this is not to say that disagreement about disagreement is either impermissible or unintelligible, for even the very root of detecting disagreements — i.e., the law of the excluded middle — has had detractors. See, for instance, Graham Priest's article on Dialetheism (2013) in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. It is only to say that such disagreement about disagreement is *evidence* of an underlying issue.

⁷³ This assumes that Nāgārjuna lived and wrote in the second century of the common era. See, e.g. Walser (2005), p. 63.

Philosophical Disagreement. The third premise, again, states that all philosophical views are both disagreement-engendering and universalizability-aspiring. A rejection of this universal quantification will minimally require a counterexample. Namely, it requires that there is at least one philosophical view which is either not disagreement-engendering or not universalizability-aspiring. On one reading of Nāgārjuna's method — i.e., that it is dialectically refutationist (*vāda-vaitaṇḍika*) — it seems that if Nāgārjuna's method expresses a philosophical view at all, it does *not* at the same time express a disagreement-engendering view. On yet another reading of at least some of Nāgārjuna's ideas — i.e., that they are instances of pedagogical skillfulness (*upāya kauśalya*) — it seems that those ideas do *not* aspire to universalizability. Again, to the extent that either or both of these readings of Nāgārjuna is compelling, his work appears to constitute a novel solution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

2.1.1 Nāgārjuna's doctrine of emptiness (*śūnya-vāda*)

A common touchstone for these readings of Nāgārjuna's method and ideas is to be found in his doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyavāda*) and in the way in which he attempts to convey that doctrine philosophically. The doctrine expresses the philosophical conclusion that all things are empty of intrinsic natures (Skt. *svabhāva*), and justification of it is littered throughout his works and the works of his commentators.

Svabhāva — literally “own-nature” or intrinsic nature — is an extremely important concept in Nāgārjuniana. *Svabhāva* refers to a thing's putative essence, neither

dependent upon anything else nor created by anything else.⁷⁴ Nāgārjuna suggests by his doctrine of emptiness that no matter where one looks or how closely one analyzes entities, such putative essences are nowhere to be found. Nāgārjuna’s doctrine of emptiness, as Perrett puts it, is “tantamount to denying that anything has an essence.”⁷⁵

In exploring this doctrine that all things are devoid of essences, I restrict myself naturally to those works in which Nāgārjuna discusses the doctrine of emptiness at length, and especially to those in which he responds to objections to this doctrine or articulates the reasons for this doctrine’s immunity to disagreement. Such works include his *magnum opus* the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*⁷⁶ (henceforth, MMK) “Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way,” and its apparent companion text in which Nāgārjuna responds to objections, the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*⁷⁷ (henceforth, VV) “Thwarter of Disagreements.” This chapter also draws heavily upon Nāgārjuna’s auto-commentary to the latter text and the commentaries on Nāgārjuna’s works by Candrakīrti. The latter is taken here to be an authoritative source for a reconstruction of the former’s methods. The *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*⁷⁸ (henceforth, VP) “Monograph on Dissolution,”⁷⁹ though of questionable authorship, is another relevant work here, if only for its exemplary extension of Nāgārjuna’s method beyond categories of merely Buddhist significance. Finally, this

⁷⁴ See Westerhoff, Jan, *Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp 24-40, for an elaboration of this understanding of *svabhāva*. This is also the definition Nāgārjuna gives of the term at MMK 15.2.

⁷⁵ Perrett, Roy W., ‘Essence and Emptiness’, in *The Moon Points Back*, ed. by Koji Tanaka and others (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 102.

⁷⁶ Nāgārjuna, *Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, trans. by Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2013).

⁷⁷ Nāgārjuna, *Nāgārjuna’s Vigrahavyāvartanī: The Dispeller of Disputes*, trans. by Jan Westerhoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷⁸ Nāgārjuna, *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa: Nāgārjuna’s Refutation of Logic*, trans. by Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004).

⁷⁹ See Westerhoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

study draws lightly upon Loizzo’s translation of Nāgārjuna’s *Yuktiṣaṣṭika* (YŚ) “Sixty on Reasoning” and the accompanying commentary by Candrakīrti.

Questions of authorship aside,⁸⁰ the resounding connections among these texts are that they have been *consistently* attributed to the same philosopher for almost two millennia now and that they each either assume or defend the doctrine that all things are empty of essences. This consistent attribution and commonality of content has led to a well-ordered commentarial tradition, and an array of consequent philosophical ideas and insights relating to the doctrine of the emptiness of essences.

2.1.2 Summary

Evidentialism, based as it is in controversial assumptions, is one of many alternative resolutions to the tension in philosophical discourse between interestedness and disinterestedness. Nāgārjuna’s work presents a pair of these alternatives. In addition to being appreciated in various conflicting ways by Buddhist traditions, Nāgārjuna is also variously understood in academic circles, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. There are indeed significant disagreements about his work, but what is more significant with respect to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement is that his central doctrine of that all things are devoid of essences does not engender disagreement, and is supposedly particularist rather than universalist in its aspiration. The goal of this chapter is thus to demonstrate that within the collection of texts and commentaries mentioned above — i.e.,

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* Of the texts of the Yukti Corpus, the VP attracts the most doubt with respect to authorship, but is attributed to Nāgārjuna’s corpus by Tibetan Madhyamaka authors and with deference to that authoritative tradition it will be retained here. The other texts, even outside of Tibet, pose few major problems of attribution.

within Nāgārjuniana — one can find plausible alternative solutions to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

2.2 What does Nāgārjuna have to say about the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement?

It is not unprecedented to understand Nāgārjuna's work as saying something significant about philosophical disagreement in general. T.R.V. Murti, in particular makes the connection between Nāgārjuna's work and a general problem of disagreement prominent and central.

In his monumental study of Madhyamaka philosophy, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, Murti takes Nāgārjuna to be employing a form of “dialectic” which responds to the general condition of interminable conflict in speculative philosophy. Murti understands dialectical method, with Kant, as a sustained, dialogical critique of the super-sensible employment of reason. The super-sensible employment of reason and understanding, according to Murti, creates the necessary condition of this dialectic's emergence: diametrically opposed viewpoints (i.e., disagreement).

In speculative philosophy, where diametrically opposed viewpoints inevitably arise in the understanding and reason and cannot be adjudicated with reference to sense-experience, “[d]isputes become interminable conflicts.”⁸¹ Kant, Nāgārjuna, and other thinkers thus turn to dialectic as a means of philosophical critique which does not presuppose any knowledge of the super-sensible and therefore promises the potential to resolve such conflicts without begging the question. In other words, these thinkers take

⁸¹ Murti, T.R.V., *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1955), p. 125.

dialectic to be a solution to a general problem of philosophical disagreement. Murti summarizes the situation thusly:

Philosophy, when cultivated seriously and systematically, leads to interminable and total conflict. [Thus, d]ialectic is implicit in philosophy. Dialectic is at once the consciousness of this interminable and total conflict in reason and the attempt to resolve it.⁸²

The important takeaways of Murti's view here are the centrality of dialectic to philosophy, the centrality of philosophical dialectic to Madhyamaka thought, and finally the framing of Madhyamaka philosophical dialectic as a resolution to the inevitable and interminable disagreements produced by speculative philosophical discourse. Together these takeaways of Murti's interpretation make philosophical disagreement the central problem of Madhyamaka philosophy, and that is the same spirit with which the interpretive work of this chapter will proceed.

Here, the notion that philosophical disagreement is the central problem of Madhyamaka philosophy will be developed in terms of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement and the tension between interestedness and disinterestedness that it articulates. Nāgārjuna will be shown to resolve the Paradox by rejecting the third premise: "Philosophical views are disagreement-engendering and universalizability-aspiring." His doctrine purports to be an example of an uncontroversially *philosophical* view which either does not engender-disagreement or does not aspire to universalizability. In the remainder of the chapter, each of these claims will be defended in turn.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 126.

2.2.1 Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka does not engender disagreement, it employs dialectical refutation (*vāda-vitaṇḍā*)

Nāgārjuna offers a potential resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement through his refutation of opposing theses and his defensible refusal to pose a counter-thesis in the context of philosophical debate. It will be argued here that this unconventional approach — dialectical refutation (*vāda-vitaṇḍā*) — renders the doctrine of emptiness a counterexample to the third premise of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. That is, his approach renders intelligible the idea that the doctrine of emptiness expresses a philosophical view which is not disagreement-engendering.

“Dialectical refutation” is my own translation of *vāda-vitaṇḍā*, a Sanskrit compound which combines the names of two debate types which find canonical definition in the *Nyāyasūtras* (something of a manual on philosophical debate and discussion). *Vitaṇḍā* is often translated as “wrangling.” To avoid negative connotations, I translate *vitaṇḍā* as “refutational debate” or “refutation” instead. Refutation is a debate style or strategy in the Indian tradition in which one does not assert, in response to opposing views, a counter-thesis. Instead, the strategy is to merely refute opposing views by reviewing the logic internal to those views. Refutation is contrasted, in the *Nyāyasūtras* to dialectical debate (*vāda*) and competitive debate (*jalpa*). What I have termed “dialectic” or “dialectical debate” refers to genuine, truth-seeking debate among clearly stated theses and counter-theses on the same topic.⁸³ “Competitive debate” refers to victory-seeking debate of the same kind.

⁸³ I have chosen this translation of *vāda* to align with Murti's interpretation of Madhyamaka, cited above, and in so doing to associate this approach with a central focus on philosophical conflict and disagreement.

In this context, refutation is a strategy which results, functionally, in skepticism. It results in the non-assertion of any position. It takes no position with respect to a common subject matter, but explores and exposes only the *reasoning* internal to opposing views. However, refutational debate is itself either earnestly exposing error or, in so doing, merely competing for victory. That is, it is either dialectical or competitive. Thus, one could imagine its resulting skepticism, too, to be either an authentic or a sophistical skepticism. This has led some commentators to further categorize refutation as either dialectical refutation (*vāda-vitaṇḍā*) or competitive refutation (*jalpa-vitaṇḍā*).⁸⁴

A charitable reading will take for granted that Nāgārjuna's form of refutational debate and its resultant non-assertion are dialectical — i.e., truth-seeking. Thus, in what follows, I show how his use of this debate method skillfully and justifiably defers or avoids disagreement.

While Nāgārjuna and commentators Āryadeva and Candrakīrti may not self-identify as dialectical refutationists, it is easy to understand each as employing an authentically dialectical approach which is, like Nāgārjuna's also refutational:

If I had any thesis, that fault would apply to me.
But I do not have any thesis, so there is indeed no fault for me.⁸⁵

Against one who holds no thesis that [things]
Exist, do not, or do and do not exist,
Counter-arguments cannot be raised
No matter how long [one tries].⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Matilal, Bimal Krishna, *The Character of Logic in India*, ed. by Jonardon Ganeri and Heeraman Tiwari (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 55.

⁸⁵ VV 29.

⁸⁶ Āryadeva, and Gyel-tsap, *Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas*, trans. by Ruth Sonam (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1994), v. 400, p. 300. Gyel-tsap compares the attempt to disagree with Madhyamaka to “drawing pictures in space or causing space pain by beating it with an iron bar.”

The adversary is bound to a conclusion which is perverse by logical necessity (*prasaṅgaparītena*). We are not so bound because we advance no thesis of our own. It is therefore impossible to invalidate any argument of ours.⁸⁷

In each case, a refutational debate strategy is revealed by the lack of a thesis. And in each case this leads, in a subtly distinct way, to a supposed immunity to disagreement.

According to Nāgārjuna, to a thinker without a thesis or view an opponent can attribute no error. According to Āryadeva, to a thinker without a thesis an opponent can raise no counter-argument. According to Candrakīrti, to a thinker without a thesis an opponent cannot offer a refutation. Thus in all these thinkers supposed immunity to disagreement — whether via the attribution of error, the raising of a counterargument, or the supposed immunity to logical consequence — results from the lack of a thesis (*pratijñā*). Such a strategy is obviously compatible with with refutational debate.

While the three clearly employ a similar debate strategy, the question remains whether this can be seen as a *legitimate* debate strategy — i.e., as a dialectical rather than merely a competitive one. This question has given rise to a controversy, within the Madhyamaka Buddhist commentarial tradition, between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika readings of Nāgārjuna’s work. This controversy surrounds the necessity of opposition-independent syllogistic arguments (*svatantra anumāna*) in addition to opposition-dependent refutational (*prāsaṅga*) arguments. A Prāsaṅgika reading is associated with commentators Candrakīrti and Āryadeva. Such a reading takes for granted that opposition-dependent analyses or arguments which merely *refute* opposition by exposing an undesired logical consequence — called “*prasaṅga*” and often associated with

⁸⁷ Candrakīrti, *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way*, trans. by Mervyn Sprung (Boulder: Prajñā Press, 1979), p. 38.

reductio ad absurdum arguments — are sufficient to establish the doctrine of emptiness.

A Svātantrika reading is associated with Bhāviveka. Such a reading insists that Madhyamaka thinkers can and must contribute opposition-independent and positive arguments in defense of this doctrine.

Bhāviveka's Svātantrika reading takes the refutational debate strategy to be illegitimate. Thus, he offers opposition-independent inferences in defense of the doctrine of emptiness such as the following:

Here earth and so forth do not ultimately have the identity of the gross elements, because they have a cause and so forth, like cognition.⁸⁸

Although this positive formulation of the doctrine is here more precisely the thesis of dependent origination,⁸⁹ and how this particular inference is defended in detail is of no consequence here. What matters is that Bhāviveka sees this positive formulation as necessary. He takes it as obvious that Madhyamaka must be seen as taking a position.

Bhāviveka clarifies:

This [inference] is not *vitaṇḍā*. We have a position, which is emptiness of identity (*svabhāvaśūnyatvam*), and this is the nature of the *dharmas*. In this way we establish that our position is free from fault.⁹⁰

One can see that Bhāviveka's response to the accusation that the Madhyamaka philosophical project takes no position is a stark departure from the formulations of Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, and Candrakīrti cited above. Bhāviveka agrees that Madhyamaka must take a position. By embracing a thesis, he avoids the accusation that Madhyamaka

⁸⁸ Quoted from Malcolm David Eckel, *Bhāviveka and His Buddhist Opponents*, Harvard Oriental Series (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 52.

⁸⁹ This doctrine is seen, in Madhyamaka thought, as functionally equivalent to the doctrine of the emptiness of essences because it places everything in an *exhaustively* relational context that empirically leaves no apparent room for essences.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

thought engages in a kind of objectionable, competitive refutationism. This is evidence that Prāsaṅgika interpretations of Madhyamaka such as Candrakīrti's have been accused of engaging in refutation from within a Buddhist framework.

This accusation is thus obviously controversial within a Buddhist framework, too. If it is correct to label Prāsaṅgika interpretations of Madhyamaka as competitively refutationist from both within and without a Buddhist framework, it seems to follow that the same interpretations are unacceptable or at best misleading.

In the remainder of Section 2.2.1, it is argued that despite Bhāviveka's position and a number of canonical objections, refutation is neither unacceptable nor misleading as a characterization of Madhyamaka. In 2.2.1a, it is explained how the Madhyamaka use of refutation avoids disagreement successfully despite problems posed by Nyāya commentators to the *Nyāyasūtras*, a familiar dilemma from the "Dispeller of Disagreements," and an objection by Nāgārjuna himself. In 2.2.1b it is shown that Madhyamaka thinkers like Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti have independent reasons to believe that the assumption they reject is itself the cause of, not the solution to, disagreement and philosophical dispute. In 2.2.1c, "dialectical refutation" (*vāda-vitaṇḍā*) is further defended as supporting an interpretation of the doctrine of emptiness which is not disagreement-engendering.

2.2.1a Nāgārjuna employs dialectical refutation and avoids disagreement

Refutation alone, it appears, can be accused of *self*-refutation. Commentators on the *Nyāyasūtras*, opponents in the VV, and even Nāgārjuna himself all suggest as much. If

Nāgārjuna is to be labeled a dialectical refutationist who successfully avoids disagreement, these objections must be addressed in turn.

Beginning with the *Nyāyasūtras*, one can see that Vātsyāyana and Uddyotara in their discussion of refutation suggest that this approach — because it employs only *reductio*-style arguments but offers no counter-thesis — is untenable.

In the *Nyāyasūtras*, refutation is defined as “disputation [*jalpa*]...when there is no establishing of the counter-conception.”⁹¹ In both dialectical and competitive debate, on the other hand, each debater is expected to agree upon some common locus (*pakṣa*) of discussion. Each is also expected to attempt to establish some quality as pervading or not pervading that agreed-upon locus. Thus, in dialectical and competitive debate, there is straightforward disagreement. Refutation, however, is a disputative practice in which no such direct disagreement is required or engendered because no counter-position is meant to be adopted.

Both the commentary of Vātsyāyana and the notes of Uddyotara on these definitions offer objections to the notion that refutationist is free of commitment and thereby immune to disagreement. Their objections pose a general problem for any who would wish to authentically employ a refutation-only approach, and so are also objections to the current reading of Nāgārjuna as a dialectical refutationist. Vātsyāyana reasons that even if the motive of refutational debate is merely to show the untenability of the opponent’s thesis, a four-fold presupposition is entailed by the very practice of refutation. All practitioners of refutational debate assume the substantial existence of (1) the refuter,

⁹¹ Gauṭama, *The Nyāya-Sūtras*, trans. by Gaṅganatha Jhā (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass), p. 521, Sūtra 1-2-3.

(2) the opponent, (3) the opponent's view, and (4) the dialectical process which leads to the rejection of the opponent's view. If this is accepted, the refutationist is technically not a refutationist at all since he engages the same presuppositions shared by the opponent. Those assumptions make disagreement evident and intelligible between a refutationist and opponents. Assuming, on the contrary, that the refutationist does not accept this four-fold presupposition, his refutation amounts to nonsense,⁹² for without this four-fold foundation, how could there be any intelligible refutation at all? Uḍḍyotara agrees, and points out further that this is why it is best to not assume that a refutationist only refutes.⁹³

Anyone familiar with Nāgārjuna's "Dispeller of Disagreements" (VV) will notice that the reasoning offered above by the commentators on the *Nyāyasūtras* echoes the opponent's reasoning in the VV: Either the negation of essence in all things is itself an empty negation, or it is non-empty. If it is empty, then it is impotent to perform its task of negating essence in all things and it is nonsense. If it is non-empty, then since it is a member of all things it is self-refuting and hence an unacceptable philosophical thesis.⁹⁴

Vatsyāyana's is a parallel dilemma. The refutationist must either reject the aforementioned four-fold presupposition or accept it. If he rejects it, the refutationist's action in the debate amounts to nonsense, and cannot perform its task of rejecting the opponent's view. If he accepts it, however, he is self-refuting, for by adopting presuppositions of the opponent, he is no true refutationist after all.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46, Bhāṣya 1-1-1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 523. Vārṭtika 1-2-3.

⁹⁴ VV 1-3.

Thinkers like Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti of course accept that the doctrine of emptiness is itself empty, but they do not accept that this amounts to nonsense. By analogy, they would almost certainly reject the idea that refutation requires a four-fold presupposition, but would not accept that this reduces a refutational strategy to nonsense. Nāgārjuna can consistently remain non-committal with respect to the ontological discreteness of the refutationist, his opponent, the opponent's view, and the dialectical refutation of that view. Indeed he must do so in order to remain consistent.

How this is possible can be clarified through a discussion of the logical residue of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. Candrakīrti insists, to this point, that a counter-thesis does not need to follow from the exposure of undesirable logical consequences:

If one who holds that particular things do not have [essence] exposes the logical faults in the view they have, how can there be logical inconsequence in an argument which merely exposed logical inconsequence?⁹⁵

The clumsiness of this sentence in translation is unfortunate, but the point can be made clear: a debater who exposes a logical error in a view whose presuppositions it does not share does not, in so doing, give an indirect proof that the opposite is true. Since Nāgārjuna does not presuppose that things have discrete essences, his refutations are merely suggestions not proofs that things do not have essences. In other words, *reductio ad absurdum* of this Madhyamaka variety is not the same as indirect proof. Admittedly, to those who do presuppose that things have discrete essences, this can seem frustrating.

⁹⁵ Candrakīrti, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

Herein lies the uniqueness of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka use of refutational debate. T.R.V. Murti, mentioned above for his disagreement-centric reading of Madhyamaka philosophy, explains that approach in the following way:

How does the Mādhyamika reject any and all views? He uses only one weapon. By drawing out the implications of any view he shows its self-contradictory character. The dialectic is a series of *reductio ad absurdum arguments* (prasangāpādam). Every thesis is turned against itself. The Mādhyamika is a prāsaṅgika or vaitaṅḍika, a dialectician or a free-lance debater. The Mādhyamika *disproves* the opponent's thesis, and does not prove any thesis of his own.⁹⁶

The tenability of such an authentically non-committal approach thus rests upon the tenability of a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* argument which is *not the same* as indirect proof.

Where these two styles part company can be grasped simply enough. Consider, as Murti does, the Kantian distinction between the sensible and the super-sensible. Reason finds orientation in the sensible world due to intuitions, but of the super-sensible world beyond intuitions one can have no determinate orientation. Outside of the sensible realm, there is no touchstone for reason, no basis for interpersonal consensus. Hence, according to Kant, metaphysics is a “combat arena of...endless conflicts.”⁹⁷ Since “we do not have adequate representation” of the super-sensible, Murti argues that it would be circular to arrive at knowledge of it through indirect proof.⁹⁸

The circularity of indirect proof is not a problem when reference to accessible sensory perception is available as a common touchstone. So, for instance, either it is or it

⁹⁶ Murti, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁹⁷ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), p. 6, Aviii.

⁹⁸ Murti, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

is not the hottest day of the summer. If it is false that it is the hottest day — in case it is in fact not the hottest day — then it is true that it is not the hottest day, and vice versa.

Basically, the law of the excluded middle compels one to accept that if any intelligible, falsifiable declarative sentence *G* is false, then the logical opposite of that sentence, not-*G*, is true. This law provides the impetus for turning any *reductio ad absurdum* argument into an indirect proof.

However, indirect proof turns out to be circular in the case of philosophical issues about which there is no falsifiable or intelligible foundation. In other words, the truth or falsity of *G* depends upon the semantic intelligibility of the claim for which it stands. If *G* represents “God is good,” for instance, *G* is only subject to the law of the excluded middle if it is an intelligible claim. That is, it must be taken for granted in an indirect proof on this point that it is true that coherent, non-question-begging claims can be made about super-sensible things such as God. If this is not taken for granted, it would not only be unnecessary to conclude not-*G* when *G* leads to contradiction, it would be philosophically misguided.

Nāgārjuna, being non-committal with respect to the generally presupposed discrete essences of entities, is likewise not committed to indirect proof when refuting arguments using language which does presuppose that it refers to entities with essential natures. Furthermore, Nāgārjuna need not assume a four-fold presupposition in employing a refutation-only approach so long as he is thus non-committal with respect to an ontology of discrete essences. This non-committal engagement in philosophical discourse is precisely what makes him a dialectical refutationist.

At this point, one might object in another way, noting that if one looks to another of Nāgārjuna's texts, the "Monograph on Dissolution," one finds that Nāgārjuna himself seems to rule out the possibility that he takes a refutational approach. This text considers categories from the *Nyāyasūtras* (VP) and exposes their logical flaws in Madhyamaka fashion. Nāgārjuna (or an imitator) insists there that dialectical debate, competitive debate, and refutational debate are all empty categories, in that they have no discrete essences. In that text, one finds an explicit condemnation only of dialectical debate, but Nāgārjuna there leaves instructions for the further analysis of competitive and refutational debate, mentioning that the same reasons which were given in the analysis of one are to be offered in the case of the others.

The reasons given for the rejection of dialectical debate are that if it is to be seen as legitimate, it can only be so upon the presupposition of a philosophical of language which asserts some definite relationship between language and a separate world. Granted such a presupposition, either word and object are the same, different, or both the same and different.⁹⁹ If word and object were the same, the word "fire" would burn this page.¹⁰⁰ If different, the word "fire" would not bring to mind knowledge of fire.¹⁰¹ If both the same and different, both of the aforementioned problems would obtain at the same time.¹⁰² Therefore, a Madhyamaka may conclude that refutational debate, too, is an empty category.

⁹⁹ This is of course an incomplete instance of Nāgārjuna's well-known "tetralemma" (*catuskoṭi*) through which an exhaustive list of possible understandings of a concept are presented and (typically) rejected.

¹⁰⁰ VP 83.

¹⁰¹ VP 83.

¹⁰² VP 85.

This would be an uncharacteristically unsubtle argument for Nāgārjuna to espouse, and it should be noted again that the authorship of this monograph is in question. However, even if the argument is accepted as Nāgārjuna's, it shows that he, if only in a crude way, is willing to reject the very notion of refutational debate. If so, it would seem that reading him as a dialectical refutationist is flawed.

Such an objection assumes, with Nāgārjuna's other opponents considered above, that refutational debate either exists as a discrete category or element of the discipline of debate¹⁰³ or it does not really exist. Again, *reductio ad absurdum* for Nāgārjuna is not also an indirect proof because it does not share this assumption. This means that while a Madhyamaka thinker may find flaws in the notion that refutational debate is an essentially discrete logical category, that thinker need not consequently accept that refutational debate is *not* an essentially discrete logical category. Rather, in response to observing such logical flaws for her interlocutor, the Madhyamaka thinker will simply not assert anything regarding the essence of this presumed category!

So while one can grant that given the treatment of debate strategies in the VP, Nāgārjuna (if the author) would be unlikely to self-identify as a refutationist. His usage of *reductio ad absurdum* to refute refutation in the VP makes use of *that very strategy* precisely as we have been understanding it. Nāgārjuna's non-commitment to the semantic theory of his interlocutors in the VP is consistent with a refusal to accept the four-fold assumption of the *Nyāyasūtras*' commentators. So, as with other concepts in Madhyamaka, it is important to remember that the rejection of a refutationism does not

¹⁰³ This is not a completely implausible reading of its mention as a category (*padārtha*) of logic or debate (*nyāya*) the *Nyāyasūtras*.

entail any indirect proof of its non-existence. Rather, one can conclude that Nāgārjuna can be called a refutationist only if refutation is understood as empty of essence.

In summary, there are many advantages to understanding Nāgārjuna as employing a dialectical refutation. Such an understanding makes clear how Nāgārjuna is able to avoid disagreement by avoiding making shared presuppositions with his opponents. It also suggests that Nāgārjuna has taken a refined approach to *reductio ad absurdum* which does not carelessly jump to indirect proof in the aftermath of refutation. Thus, despite his own rejection of refutation as a discrete debate concept, portrayal of Nāgārjuna as a dialectical refutationist weaves his philosophical earnestness together with his non-commitment and his supposed immunity to disagreement.

2.2.1b Nāgārjuna's opponents necessarily engender disagreement

While Nāgārjuna's approach is supposedly *not* disagreement engendering, orthodox approaches, on his view, are. There is plenty of evidence of the point that non-empty philosophical outlooks are seen within Madhyamaka thought as invariably disagreement-engendering. For instance, in a commentary to a verse from the *Yuktiśāṣṭikā* about the lack of a position in Madhyamaka, Candrakīrti writes:

...fixation on addictive views grows out of the commitment to this and that as [objectively existent] things. Since, when one is maintaining a view, one seeks to prove the reality of one's claim and to dismiss the claims of others, the disputes that arise from asserting an addictive view grow from the root of addiction to [objectively existent] things, which in turn gives rise to other [disputes].¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Nāgārjuna, and Candrakīrti, Nāgārjuna's Reason Sixty (Yuktiśāṣṭikā) with Chandrakīrti's Commentary (Yuktiśāṣṭikāvṛtti), trans. by Joseph Loizzo (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2007), p. 197.

That is, attachment to the essence of this or that thing leads to addictive views more generally. These are views based in unexamined and ultimately unwarranted presuppositions regarding the discrete natures of entities, and these same views lead inevitably to metaphysical disagreements. To the inevitability of philosophical disputes arising from non-empty views, Candrakīrti adds that such disputes are self-replicating: disputes beget more disputes. This is akin to Kant's assessment of the situation in metaphysics, as well as Murti's assessment of speculative philosophy noted above.

Nāgārjuna's assessment, though, is neither specifically that metaphysical discourse lacks determinate orientation (as in Kant) nor that it requires a close dialectical development (as in Murti's interpretation). His assessment is that, at bottom, all addicted metaphysical views derive their force from a foundational presupposition that there are independent, essential natures to things which distinguish them from each other. This assumption, he tries to demonstrate, enables the very disagreements about which those views debate. Such a fixation of positions is sometimes unsurprising, other times surprising, depending upon one's foundation in Buddhist insights or lack thereof. Nāgārjuna is not surprised, for instance, that Vedic philosophers cling to inherent existence in their philosophical inquiries.¹⁰⁵ After all, this is a doctrinal presupposition in many orthodox traditions of Indian philosophy. He is amazed, however, that Buddhists themselves are often in the same predicament. It is "truly amazing"¹⁰⁶ to him that those who doctrinally *reject* persistence and substantiality can be so persistent in clinging to the way in which they imagine things not to be persistent! Whatever the case may be, his

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., v. 40.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., v. 41.

consistent assessment is that opponents are projecting their own problem of disagreement and dispute upon him:

...the objection that you make concerning emptiness cannot be a faulty consequence for us for emptiness... You, throwing your own faults on us, are like the person mounted on a horse who forgets the horse.¹⁰⁷

It is not only that the opponent has made a mistake, but that disagreement itself has been made possible by the assumptions the opponent makes. For Nāgārjuna, metaphysical reifications — i.e., claims born out of an assumption that things exist on account of discrete essences — contaminate human discourse because they rigidify the natural fluidity of our conventional discourse, they make the change we experience impossible,¹⁰⁸ and they make metaphysical disagreements necessary.

One noteworthy illustration of how an approach which is not dialectically refutational engenders disagreement in this way occurs in Nāgārjuna's auto-commentary to the VV. There, he develops an objection to his own view from the perspective of a philosophical opponent. He demonstrates how his hypothetical opponent's assumption that things have discrete essences engenders a 6-fold disagreement (*ṣaṭkoṭiko vādaḥ prasaktaḥ*).

The Madhyamaka dilemma presented in the VV and summarized above provides a background for this illustration. The dilemma, again, is typically understood as hinging upon the status of the claim that "All things are empty of essences." Either this is itself an empty claim or it is not. Since the opponent believes that existence presupposes essence,

¹⁰⁷ MMK 24.13, 24.15.

¹⁰⁸ See MMK Chapter 2.

the opponent takes it for granted that emptiness constitutes non-existence. This assumption leads to several dimensions of dispute.

First, one can consider whether or not the negation is a member of its own universe of discourse. Second, one can of course consider the ontological status of this negation. For the opponent, this is to ask whether it is or is not empty of essence. Finally, one can consider whether or not empty statements like this one can be causally efficacious.

These options, specifically, engender a 6-fold dispute (*Evaṃ ṣaṭkoṭiko vādaḥ prasaktaḥ*) regarding the status of the statement. That is, the statement that “All things are empty of essences” could be

1. included in “all things”
2. not included in “all things”
3. existent
4. non-existent
5. causally efficacious
6. not causally efficacious

Each group of two corresponds to a way in which the the negation can be understood. To put it briefly, it can be understood in terms of self-reference, ontological status, or causal efficacy, respectively.

With respect to self-reference, the statement could be including itself in “all things” or it could be excluding itself from all things. If it includes itself, then it is, on the opponent’s understanding alone, non-existent. But surely a non-existent thing can neither be appropriately included among all things nor establish anything, so including itself is problematic for the self-reference of this statement. If, alternatively, the statement

excludes itself from all things this can only be because it is existent. But surely an existent thing cannot be excluded from all things! So this, too, is a problem for the statement's self-reference. Therefore, with respect to itself the statement is self-refuting. Indeed, the opponent has already objected prior to this dispute that if Nāgārjuna's negation is non-empty (read "non-existent"), it is refuted (*hatā*). It contains a discordance (*vaiṣamikatva*), and as such requires a special reason to prevent self-refutation.¹⁰⁹

With both options for self-reference being untenable, the opponent moves to a general consideration of the ontological status of the negation. Either the negation exists or it does not. If it exists, then as shown above it cannot be included among all things since the negation itself asserts that all things are empty of discrete essences. They do not exist. Thus, for it to be included among all things is absurd, so this option is untenable on account of its being self-refuting. If the negation does not exist, however, then it must be included among all things. But again, not existing, it can neither coherently be included among all things nor can it establish anything. In either case, the ontological status of the negation leads to insurmountable difficulties.

Finally, the opponent considers directly the causal efficacy of the negation. The negation is either causally efficacious or it is not.¹¹⁰ In considering these two options, the opponent takes for granted that the statement is non-existent. For only when included among all things would the question of a thing's causal efficacy apply, and if included among all things, the negation must be empty (these problems were covered above). If

¹⁰⁹ VV 2.

¹¹⁰ Here, I follow Westerhoff in rendering "*kāryakriyāsamarthā*" — lit. "the ability to produce an effect" — as "causal efficacy."

the negation is taken to be causally efficacious, however, this means that non-existent causes can have effects, which is similarly absurd. If, on the other hand, the negation is not-causally efficacious, then clearly it cannot establish any coherent meaning.

The opponent insists, then, that if emptiness means non-existence, then the Madhyamaka doctrine is neither self-referentially, ontologically, nor causally tenable. The opponent is only able to disagree with Nāgārjuna on the basis of this misunderstanding.

To the dilemma presented in the main verses of the VV, Nāgārjuna addresses the accusation of discordance in VV 2 by pointing out that his statement is itself empty, affirming once again that it is the opponent's error in understanding emptiness as non-existence that causes the disagreement in the first place. The opponent is tied to an essence-based ontology. To this more elaborate objection that a hexalemma or six-fold dispute arises from his statement, Nāgārjuna gives no direct response in the VV or its auto-commentary, although the same or a similar response is certainly to be assumed.

It is worth noting, however, that Nāgārjuna does claim to be involved in the dispute (*vādaḥ*) and not to be improperly avoiding it. While Nāgārjuna would reject all the six *koṭis* mentioned by the opponent on account of their misunderstanding emptiness as non-existence, he would accept the fifth if emptiness were properly understood. The auto-commentary states:

In the case that it is empty and there is a negation by it (it is potent), then indeed “All things are empty.” Therefore though empty, all things would be likewise capable of performing actions. But this not tenable (lit. “desired”).¹¹¹

In this way, he has not ceased to be involved in philosophical dispute. But as Nāgārjuna sees it, his negation, although engaged, is not dispute engendering, since it generates none of the binary extremes that would be made available through indirect proof and an essence-based ontology. Because only the opponent assumes this, only the opponent can construct intelligible disagreements!

That opponents engender-disagreement by misunderstanding Nāgārjuna’s statement that all things are empty of essence obviously does not alone prove that Nāgārjuna’s statement is an exception to the claim that all philosophical views are disagreement-engendering. However, in conjunction with the analysis given above, this does suggest that Nāgārjuna’s claim is unique in its approach and that he sees the refusal to presuppose essences as both the reason that his own statement does not engender disagreement — i.e., it is not a “view” in the orthodox sense — and the reason that his opponents’ views *necessarily* engender disagreement — i.e., they make an unwarranted presupposition to which multiple opposing attributions are possible.

2.2.1c Disagreement and dialectical refutation

Dialectical refutation thus allows Nāgārjuna to avoid the philosophically misguided shortcomings of non-empty discourse, for

¹¹¹ Nāgārjuna, *The Dialectical Method of Nāgārjuna: Vīrahavyāvartanī*, trans. by Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, E.H. Johnston, and Arnold Kunst, 2nd edn (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002), p. 4, my translation. *atha śūnyamasti cānena pratiṣedhaḥ śūnyāḥ sarvabhāvā iti tena śūnyā api sarvabhāvāḥ kāryakriyāsamarthā bheveyuḥ | na caitaḍiṣṭam |*

Once they commit to (intrinsic things) / they are trapped in painful malignant views / which produce attachment and aversion / and the disputes which arise from them.

That [reality habit] is the cause of all views...

Disagreements, in other words, are the results of being “trapped” in views. The question-begging circularity which enables indirect proof — the presupposition that things have discrete essences — is precisely what sets this trap.

Candrakīrti’s commentary elaborates on the point:

Here, “attachment” is defined as an insistence on one’s own perspective [and] “aversion” is defined as turning away from the perspective of others. The sources of attachment and aversion are those [views] “that generate attachment and aversion.” Since their consequences are extremely unpleasant and exceedingly difficult to bear, [Nāgārjuna calls such views] “unbearable”; and, since they are hard to escape and harm one’s mental continuum, [he calls them] “malignant.” What is all this? Being thoroughly trapped in views.

Moreover, this fixation on addictive views grows out of the commitment to this and that as [objectively existent] things. Since, when one is maintaining a view, one seeks to prove the reality of one’s claim and to dismiss the claims of others, the disputes that arise from asserting an addictive view grow from the root of addiction to [objectively existent] things, which in turn gives rise to other [disputes].¹¹²

So, according to Candrakīrti, commitment to discrete essences leads to disagreement.

This misunderstanding first leads to metaphysically erroneous views. Those, guided by attraction (*rāga*) and aversion (*dveṣa*) to certain interpretations of presupposed essences, lead in their turn to a clinging to one’s own views (*svadrṣṭyabhiniveṣa*) and a putting aside of the views of others (*paradrṣṭyapakṛtaḥ*).¹¹³ This traps one in a cycle of ignorance whose philosophical root is the alluring but erroneous assumption that the things one

¹¹² Candrakīrti, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, p. 197.

¹¹³ Stroud, Scott R, ‘Comprehensive Rhetorical Pluralism and the Demands of Democratic Discourse: Partisan Perfect Reasoning, Pragmatism, and the Freeing Solvent of Jaina Logic’, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 47 (2014), 297–322. Stroud refers to this as “partisan-perfect reasoning.”

refers to in language have essences. A non-empty philosophical outlook is thus seen within Madhyamaka thought as incorrigibly dispute-engendering as well as deeply philosophically flawed.

These verses and Candrakīrti's commentary verify that in Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka, disagreement is a consequence of addiction to views which is facilitated by our natural inclination to seek essence in the world, to grasp at permanence. This connects, with the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. Again, the third premise of the Paradox is that all philosophical views are either disagreement-engendering or universalizability aspiring. Nāgārjuna's method provides a background upon which the doctrine of the emptiness of essences might be interpreted as a solution to this Paradox by way of a counterexample to the first conjunct of the third premise. That is, the doctrine can, if interpreted as expressed through the method of dialectical refutation, be understood as a philosophical doctrine which does not engender disagreement.

2.2.2 Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka does not aspire to universalizability, it is an instance pedagogical skill (*upāya kauśalya*)

The third premise of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement, once again, is the following: "Philosophical views are disagreement-engendering and universalizability-aspiring." As a dialectical refutationist, it was shown that Nāgārjuna can engage in metaphysical and other philosophical dispute without making any commitments therein, and therefore without engendering disagreement. This, on its own, is sufficient to resolve the Paradox, since it offers a plausible counterexample to the first conjunct of this third premise. Interestingly, however, a case can be made that Nāgārjuna's philosophical

project rejects the second conjunct as well. Namely, it embodies a counterexample to the idea that any philosophical view must aspire to universalizability.

This case is made by an appeal to his employment of a Buddhist strategy called pedagogical skillfulness (*upāya kauśalya*). The *locus classicus* of this tactic is the *Lotus Sūtra*, where the designation “*upāya*” (lit. “means”) and sometimes the more elaborate “*upāya kauśalya*” (lit. “skillful means”) denotes that a Buddhist teaching is contrived according to the dispositions of those reading or hearing it.¹¹⁴ And with the understanding articulated in this text and other early Mahāyāna texts as its basis, pedagogical skillfulness has come to explain several peculiarities in the tradition, including the supposedly provisional nature of the “lower” Buddhist vehicles,¹¹⁵ the general unity-in-difference of the various Buddhist philosophical schools,¹¹⁶ and the freedom of an advanced practitioner to utilize diverse means for the benefit of sentient beings.¹¹⁷ Each of these explanations is made possible by the fact that teachings which are pedagogically skillful are relevant for some and not for others.

It is primarily for this reason — i.e., that this strategy appeals to the individual experience and readiness of specific learners — that pedagogical skillfulness seems incompatible with aspirations to universalizability. The doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyavāda*) is itself an instance of pedagogical skillfulness according to many

¹¹⁴ Pye, Michael, *Skillful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 56.

¹¹⁵ Federman, Asaf, ‘Literal Means and Hidden Meanings: A New Analysis of Skillful Means’, *Philosophy East and West*, 59 (2009), 125–41.

¹¹⁶ Anonymous, *The Skill in Means Sūtra (Upāyakauśalyasūtra)*, trans. by Mark Tatz (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), p. 16.

¹¹⁷ Schroeder, John, ‘Truth, Deception, and Skillful Means in the Lotus Sūtra’, *Asian Philosophy*, 21 (2011), p. 45.

interpreters and perhaps even to Nāgārjuna. Therefore, it will be argued, the doctrine of emptiness is incompatible with aspirations to universalizability.

The ensuing argument will give rise to a few important objections. The first is that if the doctrine of emptiness is incompatible with aspirations to universalizability, then for that very reason it is not philosophical. The second, related objection, is that even if the doctrine of emptiness is philosophical, it is not a philosophical *view* (*dṛṣṭi*), and therefore cannot admit of a higher perspective by which it could be rendered a skillful means. That is to say, emptiness cannot be an instance of pedagogical skillfulness. Each of these objections will be addressed in defending the overall claim that Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka successfully resolves the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement by rejecting the second conjunct of its third premise.

2.2.2a Employment of pedagogical skillfulness is incompatible with aspirations to universalizability

The strategy of pedagogical skillfulness privatizes the importance of the views it employs by restricting the scope of their intelligibility and application to the dispositions of a select range of learners or practitioners. Since aspirations to universalizability require that the importance of a claim be subject to the public scrutiny it needs to be broadly available outside a strict range of learners. Since pedagogical skillfulness denotes a teaching within such a restricted range, it is incompatible with aspirations to universalizability.

The first point is easily substantiated, for there is clear consensus about this privatizing and “bracketing” function of the strategy. Andrew McGarrity expresses concern that the concept itself, utilized in isolation, can diminish the significance that the

tradition of Buddhism itself places upon philosophical views, their diversity, and their broad appeal:

Upāya appears to be an indigenous and traditionally accepted tool for fulfilling a task that modern academic investigators engaged in the study of religion usually have to do for themselves. That is, the concept of *upāya* as a normative framework appears to demarcate an area in which the internal claims of the religion under examination can be considered on their own terms, and hence be made provisionally autonomous and impervious to the universalising claims of science and post-enlightenment secular modernity. *Upāya*, in other words, can appear to function as a kind of *epoché* or “bracketing off.”¹¹⁸

Pedagogical skillfulness, or *upāya*, is a strategy whose method is to strictly limit the scope of the application of a claim to those who can benefit from hearing it. For better or for worse, such claims do not seem to aspire to universalizability.

John Schroeder, in contrast to McGarrity, is not concerned that this privatization represents a problem. Schroeder insists that to think of Buddhist discourse as engaging in strictly metaphysical discussions is straightforwardly flawed:

What is interesting about *upāya* is that it has little in common with traditional Western metaphysics: it is not concerned with the nature of space and time, causality, personal identity, or consciousness, and it resists the tendency to conceptualize liberation apart from Buddhist praxis. To think otherwise is to assume that the Dharma can be abstracted from its soteriological and rhetorical context and that Buddhism can be preached without any particular audience in mind.¹¹⁹

The major reason that a strictly metaphysical interpretation of Buddhist philosophy is an erroneous one thus seems to be, in Schroeder’s estimation, that refusal to privatize or personalize the teachings of Buddhism omits the soteriological import of the content of

¹¹⁸ McGarrity, Andrew, ‘Using Skilful Means Skilfully: The Buddhist Doctrine of *Upāya* and Its Methodological Implications’, *Journal of Religious History*, 33 (2009), p. 207.

¹¹⁹ Schroeder, John, ‘Nagarjuna and the Doctrine of “Skillfull Means”’, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol 50, No (2000), p. 559.

that discourse. Pedagogical skillfulness is thus a strategy which, as Michael Pye points out, is at times elicited to explain the very existence of a Buddhist tradition.¹²⁰

The apparent difference between McGarrity's and Schroeder's accounts thus has to do not with the nature of pedagogical skillfulness. On that they more or less agree. Rather, the difference of opinion has to do with its hermeneutic significance from the perspective of modern scholarship. Either it is problematic when used as a hermeneutical tool by scholars because to do so enables an aphilosophical and therefore uncharitable interpretation of Buddhist discourse, or it is absolutely necessary to be used as a hermeneutic tool because to neglect its role in the formation of such discourse would be to miss the meta-practical or soteriological point of Buddhist teachings. Pedagogical skillfulness, in each case, takes on a privatizing function which is opposed to aspirations to universalizability which, according to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement, characterize all philosophical views.

That instances of the employment this strategy have a privatized importance because of the restricted scope of their intelligibility is illustrated in the well-known "Burning House" simile from the *Lotus Sūtra*. The text recounts the story of a father whose children are stuck in a burning house. The father, upon seeing that his children are distracted, lures them outside with promises of gifts. The gifts appeal, respectively, to each child. Furthermore, the gifts promised are not the same gifts as those actually received.¹²¹ Since the promises of gifts represent the Buddha's teachings, one can gather

¹²⁰ Pye, Michael, *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 3.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

that pedagogical skillfulness as understood here involves both pedagogical fabrication and a marked preference for effective soteriology over accurate metaphysical articulation. Since each promise of a gift is itself an instance of the employment of pedagogical skillfulness, none of these promises needs to be strictly fulfilled, except in their leading the children to a higher, superior understanding. Similarly, Buddhist discourse and philosophical doctrine, if interpreted as instances of the employment of this strategy, need not be taken as if strictly true or as if aspiring to universalizability.

Aspirations to universalizability, which are partly responsible for the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement, require a complete transparency and publicity of importance that would be subject to the scrutiny of all intelligent beings. This is elaborated in Chapter One (1.3.2), where it is argued that what makes a view universalizable is its reliance upon disinterestedness. To the extent that a view departs from autobiographical, pre-theoretical, and ineliminably subjective reasons in defense of its claims, it is philosophical, disinterested, and hence aspiring to universalizability.

However, since the employment of pedagogical skillfulness entails teaching with an applicability restricted to students of certain dispositions and is thus not completely transparent or publicly philosophical, such employment is incompatible with aspirations to universalizability.

John Schroeder further corroborates the point:

Asserted independently of any rhetorical context and apart from the karmic dispositions of individuals, [various erroneous interpretations of Buddhist teachings] are expressed with the assumption that there is a single cause to all human suffering and a single cure. If it is true that Nāgārjuna is speaking in this way, and that his doctrine of "emptiness" is supposed to cure all "ills" no matter

what the time, place, or cultural context, then it is debatable just how *upāyic* his philosophy really is. Given that *upāya* rejects sweeping generalizations about human beings and their suffering, he would then suffer from the exact "illness" that "skillful means" is trying to cure.¹²²

Thus, interpreting any doctrine of Buddhist philosophy as an instance of the employment of pedagogical skillfulness entails an unwillingness to universalize that philosophical doctrine outside its relevant pedagogical or soteriological context. Such interpretations make these doctrines incompatible with aspirations to universalizability.

2.2.2b Since doctrine of emptiness is an instance of the employment of pedagogical skillfulness, it is incompatible with aspirations to universalizability

When the MMK is deemed an instance of the employment of pedagogical skillfulness (*upāya*), it is often with specific reference to the apparently self-refuting claim that the doctrine of emptiness is itself empty. Such an interpretation supported by the fact that Nāgārjuna himself claims that the doctrine of emptiness is an expedient.¹²³ Further, there are a few claims from the MMK which are difficult to make sense of without such an interpretation. Nonetheless, scholars are not of one voice about this classification. There are general problems (some considered above) attendant to referring to the doctrine of emptiness as an instance of the employment of pedagogical skill. There are general problems attendant to *not* referring to the doctrine of emptiness as an instance of skillful means, too. It is argued here that whether or not Nāgārjuna himself intended it to be so, calling his doctrine an instance of the employment of pedagogical skill makes the most

¹²² Schroeder, 'Nagarjuna and the Doctrine of "Skillful Means"', p. 580.

¹²³ MMK 13.8.

sense of its self-proclaimed provisionality as well as a few other claims in the MMK which would be perplexing otherwise.

Nāgārjuna insists at verse 8 of chapter 13 of the MMK, “Emptiness is taught by the conquerors as the expedient to get rid of all [metaphysical] views.” Since his central assertion — i.e., that all things are empty of essences — is self-professedly a dependent concept (*upādāyaprajñapti*)¹²⁴ or an empty statement, it is an effective pedagogical tool in guiding only those with non-empty habits of discourse. It is a teaching which applies to itself, and therefore requires an entire change of outlook in order to be understood.

Additionally, there are a few important claims from the MMK which are difficult to make sense of without such an interpretation. Take the following as an example:

This halting of cognizing everything, the halting of hypostatizing, is blissful.
No Dharma whatsoever was taught by the Buddha to anyone.¹²⁵

Surely what is meant here is not that the Buddha never taught. This would fly in the face of tomes of canonical Buddhist literature. Rather, this is more likely to be suggesting that the Buddha never taught a dogmatic and unwaveringly universalizable doctrine. All teachings are to be understood in the Buddhist tradition as provisional. It would be uncharitable to commit Nāgārjuna to the irony of suggesting that he himself was taking his own teachings in this very text to be the doctrinal final word.

As McGarrity points out, if a text is made immune to external criticism on the basis of such a reading, then it is legitimate to question this text’s philosophical merit and the philosophical value of classifying a text in this way.¹²⁶ The strategy would be a

¹²⁴ MMK 24.18.

¹²⁵ MMK 25.24.

¹²⁶ McGarrity, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

counterproductive hermeneutic device if it merely provided a way for interpreters to protect themselves from taking seriously the philosophical claims of the text. On such an interpretation, the MMK would “be forced to abandon its claim to be saying something true.”¹²⁷ But, as Schroeder has pointed out, there is a general problem attendant to *not* referring to the doctrine of emptiness as an instance of skillful means:

The *Lotus Sūtra*'s emphasis on the variety of soteriological paths and its declaration that all the Buddha's teaching are none other than 'skill-in-means' warnings against reducing the Buddha's teachings to any single religious practice, view, or philosophical position—including 'emptiness' itself. This is expressed positively through the bodhisattvas who, like Vimalakīrti, reject all fixed doctrines and views and who refuse to 'review' or 'settle down' in any single perspective.¹²⁸

So it seems that whether or not Nāgārjuna himself intended it to be so, classifying his doctrine of emptiness an instance of the employment of pedagogical skillfulness makes sense of this doctrine's self-professed provisionality as well as a few other claims in the MMK.

2.2.2c Objections and Replies

One objection to this reading could be that while it may be true that the doctrine of emptiness does not aspire to universalizability, for this very reason it is not a philosophical view. Hence, it cannot resolve the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

A strong argument can be given in support of this objection. First, as was granted in the opening chapter, philosophical views aspire to universalizability. This was because philosophical views, in order to be taken seriously as more than mere fancy or private

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

¹²⁸ Schroeder, John, 'Truth, Deception, and Skillful Means in the Lotus Sūtra', *Asian Philosophy*, 21 (2011), p. 51.

opinion, must be committed to the absence of relativizing hedges. Thereby, philosophical views commit to disinterestedness. So, by counterposing this claim, it is the case that if a view does not aspire to universalizability, it is not a philosophical view. Yet, it was just argued that Nāgārjuna's doctrine of emptiness, if interpreted as instance of the employment of pedagogical skillfulness, is not compatible with aspirations to universalizability. Since the doctrine does not aspire to universalizability, it is not a philosophical view. Further, only a philosophical view can resolve the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. Therefore, the doctrine of emptiness cannot constitute a resolution to the Paradox.

Such objection, though strong, has not taken into account the unique status of emptiness on the fringe of what constitutes a philosophical view. Emptiness is a philosophical view according to the standards set out in Chapter One despite not aspiring to universalizability.

As the objection points out, it was claimed in the first chapter that all philosophical views aspire to universalizability and it follows that views which do not aspire to universalizability are not philosophical. This, however, was not a stipulative definition. Rather, it was argued that because a philosophical view aspires to represent itself without relativizing hedges which would privatize its importance, it aspires, *consequently*, to universalizability.

Since the employment of pedagogical skillfulness is not apparently compatible with aspirations to universalizability, it follows that most instances of *upāya* are unlikely to pass as philosophical. It was granted, for instance, that all such instances are

relativized and relegated to a limited scope by some higher perspective. McGarrity has pointed out that not only is this implicit in Tibetan dGe lugs pa interpretations¹²⁹ but it is quite obviously implicit in the concept of pedagogical skillfulness itself. He writes, “the doctrine of *upāya* makes little sense without a viewpoint that transcends our mundane viewpoint.”¹³⁰

Yet, emptiness, since it is an instance of this strategy with reference to itself, rather than with reference to some higher, truer view, it represents an exception to this rule. The doctrine of emptiness is a unique instance of the employment of pedagogical skill which is neither aphiosophical nor universalizability-aspiring. This is because emptiness, being such an instance, does not aspire to universalizability but rather accommodates the private interests of anyone who is addicted to essences in their discourse. Further, since emptiness is self-referentially pedagogically skillful, it is philosophical in that it requires no relativizing hedges. It is only applicable within the world of orthodox philosophical discourse to which the presupposition of discrete essences lends support, and it at the same time is not universalizable beyond that discourse. The key point is that there is a “beyond that discourse.” Nāgārjuna’s assessment of orthodox philosophical discourse is that it depends upon the presupposition of essences. Thus, it is neither universalizability aspiring, since it restricts its scope of listeners to those engaged in orthodox philosophical discourse or any discourse subject to that presupposition. This includes most, but presumably not all people. It excludes Buddhas, for instance, and perhaps other established practitioners of Buddhism. And yet,

¹²⁹ McGarrity, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-212.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

it is decidedly philosophical since its very aspirations are precisely to the limits of that orthodox philosophical discourse!

At this point another objection may be raised. Specifically, it could be urged that emptiness cannot be an instance of the employment of pedagogical skillfulness. If it were, it would have to represent a standpoint or view. As we know, emptiness is not a view according to Nāgārjuna and other Prāsaṅgika interpreters. Therefore, it is absurd to suggest that the doctrine of emptiness is such an instance.

To elaborate this point further, in Buddhist hermeneutics, a distinction is made between statements “whose meaning is determined” (*nitārtha*) and statements “whose meaning is to be determined” (*neyārtha*). Put simply, this is distinction between statements with definitive or exegetically constant and interpretable or exegetically flexible meanings.¹³¹ Pedagogical skillfulness is sometimes seen as subordinate to this distinction in that instances of it are concomitant with those classified as having interpretable (*neyārtha*) meaning. On the basis of this definition, any claim that some Buddhist doctrine is interpretable or pedagogically skillful must be made from a higher or truer perspective, from a perspective which recognizes the provisionality and non-universalizability of that doctrine. Thus, to refer correctly to the doctrine of emptiness as pedagogically skillful is to acknowledge the possibility of a standpoint superior to the standpoint of directly understanding the doctrine of emptiness. But, this is a contradiction, since the doctrine of emptiness is not a standpoint and thus there is no

¹³¹ See, for instance, Lamotte, Étienne, ‘Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism’, in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. by Donald S. Jr. Lopez, *Studies in East Asian Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), pp. 11–28.

higher or truer perspective than it. Not being a standpoint, standpoints cannot stand higher or lower in relation to this doctrine. Thus, by *reductio ad absurdum*, one could object that emptiness cannot be referred to as an instance of the employment of pedagogical skill.

This objection takes the claim that emptiness is not a view to be distinct from its provisionality, from its being an instance of the employment of pedagogical skill. However, this doctrine is such an instance precisely because it is provisional with respect to itself.

As has been made clear already, such instances are provisional teachings which are offered seriously to students of certain appropriate dispositions and thus not universally applicable. It is thus only through the provisionality of emptiness that this very doctrine can be taken seriously as a philosophical claim, as the VV and other texts make clear. For if emptiness were not itself empty and in that very sense provisional, it would be self-refuting. Not being self-refuting, emptiness must be self-referentially empty. The emptiness of emptiness is, according to Nāgārjuna himself, is the teaching to be understood. It is, furthermore a teaching whose relevant scope is restricted to those engaged in orthodox philosophical discourse, since it is only those engaged in such discourse whose views are effected by this doctrine. Thus, it is a doctrine which does not matter to Nāgārjuna himself and thus is not a view *to him*. It is a view *to orthodox philosophers*.

2.2.3 Summary

By the method of dialectical refutation (*vāda-vitaṇḍā*), Nāgārjuna is able to avoid the presupposition of essences in orthodox philosophical discourse and is thereby logically compelled to refrain from offering a counter-thesis in the very same discourse. Thus, the doctrine of emptiness is a philosophical view which does not engender disagreement. This is the first of Nāgārjuna's solutions to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

Taken to be an instance of the employment of pedagogical skillfulness, too, the doctrine of emptiness is predicated upon a restricted, rather than universal range of appropriate listeners. That range, in particular, is the range of those involved in orthodox philosophical discourse. It follows from such a classification that the doctrine of emptiness is a philosophical view which is at the same time incompatible with aspirations to universality. This is the second of Nāgārjuna's solutions to the Paradox of philosophical disagreement.

2.3 Nāgārjuna rejects the third premise of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement

The third premise of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement, again, was that "Philosophical views are disagreement-engendering and universalizability-aspiring." This resulted in a paradoxical commitment to both interestedness and disinterestedness on the part of philosophical views. Solutions to this paradox might reject this third premise by offering a counterexample to either of its conjuncts. That is, one might either give an example of a philosophical view which does not engender disagreement or give an

example of a philosophical view which does not aspire to universalizability. Nāgārjuna, by way of his doctrine of the emptiness of essences, does both.

As a dialectical refutationist, Nāgārjuna can engage in dispute without making ontological commitments therein, and without engendering disagreement. Able to respond to objections from Nyāya commentators to the refutational method, and able to respond also to the demand from within the Buddhist tradition that the doctrine of emptiness be defended positively, Nāgārjuna has articulated a doctrine which is not also a view. He has shown, in a commentarial exploration of the opposing view, that while he is able to avoid disagreement altogether regarding his doctrine of emptiness, his opponents are unable to prevent disagreement from arising because of their faulty, essence-presupposing interpretation. Thus, Nāgārjuna has articulated a philosophical view (though not an orthodox one) without also engendering disagreement. This alone constitutes a resolution to the Paradox.

As pedagogically skillful thinker, too, Nāgārjuna's central doctrine of emptiness makes his Madhyamaka project one which is philosophical and yet uniquely avoids aspirations to universalizability. It was shown in particular that, as a strategy, the Buddhist notion of pedagogical skillfulness is incompatible with aspirations to universalizability. A difference of scholarly opinion regarding the merit of such a strategy in interpreting Buddhist philosophy notwithstanding, it was shown that the doctrine of emptiness can be successfully interpreted as an instance of this pedagogical strategy. The doctrine, interpreted as such, is both a philosophical view (though again not an orthodox one) which is self-referentially provisional and thus not universalizable beyond the range

of orthodox philosophical practitioners. Thus, here too Nāgārjuna offers novel solution to the perennial philosophical issue of disagreement in philosophical discourse as framed by the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

CHAPTER 3

Haribhadra's Resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement

3.1 Introduction

For evidentialists, the tension between interestedness and disinterestedness in philosophy is not a problem because justification, on that view, is based upon evidence alone.

Interests are not relevant factors. Having shown in the first chapter that such a solution is controversial at best, the debate was expanded by means of a demonstrated diversity of logically possible responses to this tension as articulated in the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. The first new party to this debate was the dialectical refutationist Nāgārjuna, whose philosophical doctrine of the emptiness of essences was shown to neither engender disagreement nor aspire to universalizability, to be neither interested nor disinterested. This amounted to a rejection of the third premise to the Paradox. Now, yet another new voice will be heard, that of 8th century non-absolutist Haribhadra.

Haribhadra Yākinīputra has a reputation for being philosophically non-partisan, yet in his monograph called *Anekānta-jaya-patākā* ('Victory Banner of Non-Absolutism'; henceforth, AJP) he attempts to make peace between logical opposites, defending what appears to be a partisan doctrine. This chapter will examine the first section of his monograph, where Haribhadra responds to the objection that no object having both an existent and non-existent form can be established except by a kind of faith-based absolutism or one-sidedness (*ekāntatva*). Drawing upon this, the present chapter explains how, in line with a rich tradition of Jain philosophy, Haribhadra has offered here yet another unique resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. He can accept,

with some qualification, the conclusion of the Paradox. Namely, he can accept the tension between interestedness and disinterestedness in philosophical discourse.

The first section of the present chapter examines Haribhadra's work, including starting points for a connection between his work and the topic of disagreement, and his specific contributions from the AJP. In the second section, it will be argued that the doctrine of non-absolutism (*anekāntavāda*) does not engender disagreements. In one way, the doctrine reveals that a thing is experienced as a paradoxical intermixture of properties and their logical opposites. In another, it reveals that philosophically-engendered disagreements are juxtapositions of mistakenly absolutized, but actually partial truths. Thus in two distinct ways Haribhadra's arguments might be understood to resolve the contradiction between interestedness and disinterestedness which gives rise to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. The final section clarifies the consequence of these two methods: that the conclusion of the Paradox can thus be qualified and accepted on the basis of Haribhadra's work.

3.1.1 Haribhadra and disagreement

For his translators and commentators alike, Haribhadra's non-sectarianism is the subject of generous praise. One reads about Haribhadra's humanism,¹³² his broad reaching yogic reconciliation,¹³³ his being non-sectarian,¹³⁴ and his being a *samadarśī* (lit. "one who

¹³² Lindtner, Christian, 'The Humanism of Haribhadra', in *Jambū-Jyoti* (Munivara Jambūvijaya Festschrift), ed. by M. A. Dhaky and J. B. Shah (Ahmedabad: Shresthi Kasturbhai Lalbhai Smarak Nidhi, 2004).

¹³³ See Chapple (2003), and Tatia, Nathmal, *Studies in Jaina Philosophy* (Calcutta: The Modern Art Press, 1951), pp. 296-300.

¹³⁴ Haribhadra Yākinīputra, *Yogaḍṛṣṭisamuccaya*, trans. by Christopher Key Chapple and John Thomas Casey (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), vv.129-152.

looks upon everyone as equal”).¹³⁵ As a brahminical convert to Jainism, Haribhadra was acquainted with the many schools of Vedic thought, as well as Buddhist and Cārvāka systems (*darśana*). In the literary output of Haribhadra, one finds a classical and correct Sanskrit,¹³⁶ a refined and thorough account of non-Jain traditions,¹³⁷ and a nearly perennialist reading of many non-Jain systems. All of this suggests that Haribhadra, like Nāgārjuna, saw himself as offering a resolution to disagreements between and among his contemporaries. For this reason, one might suspect that Haribhadra will also have something to contribute in attempts to resolve the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

The primary connection between Haribhadra and the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement, however, is the most obvious one: he offers an extremely sophisticated demonstration and defense of the Jain doctrine of non-absolutism (*anekāntavāda*). This term itself is variously translated, but “the doctrine” — *vāda* — “of non-one-sidedness” — *anekānta* — is both a literal and an appropriate rendering. Also common and interchangeable with this translation is “the doctrine of non-absolutism.”

The “doctrine of non-absolutism” is actually a cover-term. It is often used interchangeably with the “doctrine of conditional predication” (*syādvāda*) to designate a set including itself and up to three other inter-related doctrines. In all cases, however, this

¹³⁵ See Dundas, Paul, *The Jains*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 228 with reference to Saṅghavī, Sukhlāl (1963).

¹³⁶ Williams, R., ‘Haribhadra’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 28 (1965), p. 102.

¹³⁷ For examples, one can look to Haribhadra Yākinīputra, *Yogabindu*, trans. by K. K. Dixit, Lalbhai Dalbatbhai (Ahmedabad: Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Bharatiya Sanskriti Vidyamandira, 1968), Haribhadra Yākinīputra, *Ṣaḍ-Darśana Samuccaya*, trans. by K. Satchidananda Murti (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1986), or Haribhadra Yākinīputra, *Śāstravārtāsamuccaya*, ed. by Jitendra B. Shah, trans. by K. K. Dixit (Ahmedabad: L. D. Institute of Indology, 1969).

doctrine indicates both the rejection of philosophical absolutisms and the affirmation of the infinite manifoldness of any object.

The doctrine can take on an ontological, epistemological, or strictly logical or pragmatic form.

In its ontological form — i.e., as the doctrine of non-absolutism — the doctrine asserts the realist position that objects are manifold, having infinite qualities accessible in limited ways to epistemic agents (souls). A distinction between pure and finite agents — one that is both canonically grounded and conjecturally compelling — guarantees that the qualities of objects are only ever partially grasped by finite agents. While the infinite qualities of objects are all accessible in principle, some of them are contradictory and thus cannot be known at the same time. They must be acknowledged perspectively in deference to experience.

Thus arises the doctrine in its epistemological form — i.e., “the doctrine of standpoints” (*nayavāda*). This epistemological non-one-sidedness insists that all conceptual knowledge is partial, always accessed from particular vantage points (*nayas*) on those qualities that a particular standpoint foregrounds over others. This typically involves the distinction between two exclusive and exhaustive perspectives which could provide the background assumptions for any given cognition. These two are the general or substantial standpoint (Skt. *dravyāstika naya*) and the particular or modal standpoint (Skt. *paryāyāstika naya*). The first involves an orientation toward the underlying, more or less permanent or ‘essential’ aspect of the content of a cognition. The second involves an orientation toward the ephemeral and momentary ‘accidental’ aspects of the content of a

cognition. Together, permanence and moments, substance and modes, essence and accidents constitute the whole thing that undeniably appears in experience. The thought is that, through understanding this mutual exclusivity in perspectives, one must eventually come to acknowledge the necessary partiality of the standpoint grounding one's cognitions and, by implication, one's assertions.

Thus arises the doctrine in its logical or pragmatic form — i.e., “the doctrine of conditional predication” or “sevenfold predication” (*syādvāda* or *saptabhaṅghi*). In this form, the doctrine suggests that because assertions are necessarily bound to a partial standpoint, they must be qualified by the Sanskrit modal particle “*syād*,” meaning “somehow,” “possibly” or “maybe.” Standpoints reveal a consequent fact that the same objects which have a certain quality from one standpoint can very well lack it from another. Given basic rules of logic, one cannot simultaneously express this intermixture of logically opposite qualities in an object. Thus, of any object one may correctly state that it has a quality, x, that it lacks quality x, and that it is inexpressible with respect to quality x. Each such assertion would need to be qualified. This results in the enumeration of seven possible but qualified predications, a staple consequence of the Jain doctrine of non-absolutism:

1. In a *certain* sense it (i.e. the object in question) is x. (*Syād evāsti.*)
2. In a *certain* sense it is not x. (*Syād eva nāsti.*)
3. In a *certain* sense it is and is not x. (*Syād evāsti ca nāsti.*)
4. In a *certain* sense it is inexpressible with respect to x. (*Syād evāvaktavya.*)
5. In a *certain* sense it is and is inexpressible with respect to x. (*Syād evāsti cāvaktavya.*)
6. In a *certain* sense it is not and is inexpressible with respect to x. (*Syād eva nāsti cāvaktavya.*)
7. In a *certain* sense it is and is not, and is inexpressible with respect to x.¹³⁸ (*Syād evāsti nāsti cāvaktavya.*)

It is easy to see how this seven-fold system can be derived from an understanding of the primary division of standpoints, and why, as a pair, both the doctrine of standpoints and the doctrine of qualified predication are often spoken of simultaneously under the heading “non-absolutism.” To speak of things in this qualified way is to acknowledge their partiality which is to acknowledge, in turn, the infinite manifoldness of objects in general.

According to the Digambara tradition of Jainism, the doctrine of non-absolutism was first elaborately defended in conjunction with the Jain worldview by Pūjyapāda in his early 6th century commentary on Umāsvāti’s *Tattvārthasūtra*,¹³⁹ though according to the Śvetambara tradition of Jainism, Umāsvāti’s own auto-commentary (*svopajñā*) on that text is earlier and more authoritative than the widely published commentary of Pūjyapāda. Rudiments of the doctrine one finds in Haribhadra’s work were present perhaps even earlier in the writings of 2nd century mystic Kundakunda. There are

¹³⁸ I have added italics to “certain” to convey the emphasis suggested by the Sanskrit particle “*eva*” or “indeed” which occurs in each predication. In the latter sections of this chapter, I simplify “*syādeva*” — lit. “somehow indeed” or “in a *certain* sense” — to “somehow.”

¹³⁹ *Anekānta* is mentioned and discussed in Pūjyapāda’s SS commentary at TS 5.32. See Jain (1992), p. 158. On the date, I follow Ohira (1982), pp. 135-137, who has proposed that Pūjyapāda wrote the SS around 50 years after the finalization of the TS. Having placed the date of the TS to the “late middle” of the 5th century, Ohira places Pūjyapāda’s discussion of the topic around the early 6th century CE.

rudiments of the position in the Jain canons (*āgamas*), too, although in such cases there are only resources for the reconstruction of a philosophical doctrine. Intellectual defenses of this doctrine in the Jain philosophical tradition continue to this day, but appear to have reached their pinnacle sectarian expression in the writings of the great Śvetāmbara logician Yaśovijaya in the 16th century.¹⁴⁰

The doctrine of non-absolutism, in its various forms, has been appealed to as a philosophical basis for pluralism in a wide range of academic literature, although the oft-touted argument that the tenet of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) is the ethical underpinning of this doctrine's development is unlikely to be correct.^{141,142} In contrast to the thrust of such interpretations, the Jain post-canonical literature on the doctrine usually purports to establish victory of the Jain metaphysical picture over others.¹⁴³ One of the most surprising and intellectually revered examples of this can be found in the work by Haribhadra mentioned above most often referred to as the "*Anekāntajayapatākā*."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ See Dixit, K. K., *Jaina Ontology* (AhmedabadL.: L. D. Institute of Indology, 1971), pp. 160-164.

¹⁴¹ Textually, the Jain tradition has been a basis for the promotion of peaceful and tolerant lifestyles. This is largely due to the centrality for Jains of the ethical tenet of *ahiṃsā*, or non-violence. In Jainism, *ahiṃsā* is to be adopted and practiced in thought, word, and deed (see TS 7.1 and commentary). Despite, this, there is an absence of canonical evidence in support of an interpretation of the doctrine as an intellectual extension of *ahiṃsā*. See John E. Cort (2000), p. 327 and Dundas (2002), p.232.

¹⁴² See Matilal (1981) and Ganeri (2001). It has been noted that *anekāntavāda*, e.g., as defended by Haribhadra in his *Anekāntajayapatākā* (Victory Banner of Non-Absolutism), developed out of efforts to work beyond philosophical dissensus. The Jain response to a certain fork in the road of Indian intellectual history has been understood as a positive, constructive one which can be read straight-forwardly as a diagnosis of and solution to the problem of philosophical disagreement. See also Trikha and the conference proceedings *The Lessons of Ahiṃsā and Anekānta for Contemporary Life* (Sethia, ed., 2002).

¹⁴³ See, for example *Syādvādamañjari*, *Āptamimāṃsā*, and others.

¹⁴⁴ This epithet is more precise than the commonplace "Haribhadra Sūri," since this latter has for a long time conflated what turn out to be two distinct writers in the Jain philosophical tradition. "Yākinīputra" refers to the fact that Haribhadra considered himself the spiritual son (*putra*) of a Jain nun named Yākinī. See R. Williams (1965), and Chapple (2003) for more on this distinction.

3.1.2 Haribhadra's *Anekāntajayapatākā*

Let us turn, then, to Haribhadra's version of non-absolutism as defended in his *Anekāntajayapatākā* (AJP). Its full title is actually *Anekāntajayapatākākkhyam Prakaraṇam*, or "Monograph Called the Victory Banner of Non-Absolutism."

The AJP is composed of six sections. They are not titled in the base text, although the auto-commentary gives titles for each which reflect their content. The primary goal of each chapter is to respond, in turn, to the various subjects of objections raised at the start of the first chapter.¹⁴⁵ The first section defends the expressibility of an existent-cum-nonexistent object. The second section addresses the expressibility of a permanent-cum-impermanent object. The third and fourth address generality-particularity and expressibility-inexpressibility along the same lines. The fifth departs from this oppositional pattern and offers an exposition and refutation of Yogācāra Buddhism. The sixth and final section addresses the doctrine of liberation in the context of the previous considerations.

The text is written in a classic philosophical style and it presupposes some familiarity with Jain philosophical terms as well as the latest Buddhist philosophy of Haribhadra's time.¹⁴⁶ It is written in Sanskrit, and so its audience is likely to have extended far beyond those literate in Haribhadra's regional Prākṛt. The text actually begins with the self-proclaimed purpose of "enlightening the confused,"¹⁴⁷ by which Haribhadra appears to mean those who have not understood metaphysics properly. Given

¹⁴⁵ See Haribhadra Yākinīputra, *Anekāntajayapatākā*, ed. by H. R. Kāpadī, henceforth, AJP, Gaekwad's Oriental Series (Bombay: Nirṇaya Sagar Press, 1940).

¹⁴⁶ Williams, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁷ AJP, v. 10, p. 2, *jaḍavabodāya*. My translation.

his likely audience and the subject matter of later chapters, this would probably have extended to non-Jains, and especially, given the content of the fifth section, Yogācāra Buddhists such as Dharmakīrti, about whom Haribhadra is known to have had some definite scholarly opinions. It is specifically with respect to the doctrine of non-absolutism that his purpose of enlightening the confused is carried out in this text.

The first section of the AJP defends against objections to the very expressibility of the most basic building block of perceivable reality Jainism: an object of existent-cum-nonexistent form. “Existent” here translates the Sanskrit “*sat*.” “*Asat*,” being the negation of this, is what is rendered here “nonexistent.” It is worth noting that the context of Haribhadra’s philosophy is one of experiential scrutiny, rather than metaphysical speculation. This means that one’s understanding of *sat* or *asat* must go beyond a metaphysical claim of the presence or absence of a given object in one’s ontology. *Sat* refers to an object’s being *apparent in* and *relevant to* one’s experience. So, an object of existent-cum-nonexistent form is one which is somehow simultaneously both apparent and non-apparent to one’s perceptual and cognitive experience.

In articulating how such an object can obtain at all, Haribhadra establishes the legitimacy of the doctrine non-absolutism by way of an example. Thus, the first section of the AJP is fundamental to this establishment because it formulates the objections that will be addressed in the monograph as a whole, and also because it offers answers to the first and most fundamental set of these objections, which center around this issue of simultaneous existence and nonexistence.¹⁴⁸ An account of this “existent-cum-

¹⁴⁸ Dixit, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

nonexistent object” (*sadasadrūpaṃ vastu*) thus provides the philosophical basis for the analyses that will follow. It even forms the general basis for later Jain philosophers to formulate a more general theory of ‘the co-presence of opposites’.¹⁴⁹

3.1.3 Summary

Haribhadra has a reputation for being a level-headed, unbiased analyst of disagreeing systems of thought, and in developing the doctrine of non-absolutism, his work is a source of great potential in attempting to resolve the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. Nowhere in his work is this more clear than in the AJP, where he undertakes to prove that the very same object can (indeed must) have logically opposite properties.

The remainder of this chapter will examine the approach to non-absolutism which Haribhadra traces in the first section of that text — aptly titled “the expressibility of an object of existent-nonexistent form” — with an eye to tracing a direct resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

3.2 What does Haribhadra have to say about the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement?

Haribhadra establishes the doctrine of non-absolutism (*anekāntavāda*) in his AJP in two separate ways, and the consequences for each mode of establishment lead to a common resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. The first way is through a close scrutiny of experience, and the second is through a unique use of indirect proof. In putting the experience of the object of discussion under close scrutiny, Haribhadra is able

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 142.

to point out that the simultaneous but mutually-clashing co-assertion of two diametrically opposed theses as a disagreement is really something that should give way to a simultaneous, qualified, and harmonious assertion of both theses. In his use of indirect proof, following the work of his predecessor Samantabhadra, Haribhadra is able to make a more general case for the plausibility of a qualified co-assertion of diametrically opposed theses. By both methods — experiential scrutiny and indirect proof — disagreements are explained as the qualified co-assertion of former absolutisms. In both ways, too, the recommendation regarding the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement would be that one can accept a qualified version of the conclusion of the Paradox by way of a rejection of the absolutisms in it.

3.2.1 Haribhadra’s Non-Absolutism (*anekāntavāda*) does not engender disagreements, it reveals that a thing is experienced as a paradoxical intermixture of properties and their logical opposites

Haribhadra’s defense of the intelligibility of an object which is at once existent and non-existent comes first in the AJP presumably because it represents the most basic conceptual building block of our experience. What could be more basic, after all, than a thing’s merely being apparent or non-apparent to one’s experience?

Haribhadra’s treatment of this basic entity differs markedly from those Jain philosophical treatments which have come before with respect to its length,¹⁵⁰ its articulated sophistication,¹⁵¹ and its attempt to articulate the co-presence of opposites as

¹⁵⁰ Samantabhadra’s *Āptamimāṃsā*, for instance, offers a succinct, but parallel defense in just 14 verses.

¹⁵¹ Compare, again to the *Āptamimāṃsā* or Siddhasena’s *Sanmati Tarka*.

opposed to merely relativizing contradictory assertions to distinct standpoints.¹⁵² And yet the doctrine is worthy of apology and appraisal.¹⁵³ A brief and similar discussion of simultaneously existent and nonexistent objects is to be found as early as Siddhasena Divākāra's *Sanmati Tarka*.¹⁵⁴ By and large, though, the AJP follows the contents of Samantabhadra's *Āptamimāṃsā*. Yet what Samantabhadra has put beautifully and neatly in at most a few dozen verses per topic, Haribhadra spends a whole monograph articulating in long, prose chapters. The beauty and advantage of the AJP for a reader curious about non-absolutism beyond terse articulations in texts like the *Āptamimāṃsā* is something Haribhadra makes clear in the very first line of prose:

There will be no refutations of the unexplained claims of charlatans here — i.e., their claims will be explained.¹⁵⁵

Haribhadra promises that this text will not be devoid of an elaborate exposition of the the opposing view. This lends some philosophical credibility to the otherwise stark and apparently dogmatic expressions of earlier Jain authors.¹⁵⁶ To the best of my knowledge, there has been only one full-fledged English-language study of the first section of this text,¹⁵⁷ and no full English translation has been offered.

3.2.1a Method — non-one-sided approach (*anekānta-vāda*)

Before digging into Haribhadra's analysis, it will be worth noting some non-absolutist aspects of his approach.

¹⁵² Dixit, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142.

¹⁵³ There are some articulations which amount to philosophical appraisal. See Mookerji (1978), Bhattacharya (2000), and Ganeri (2002) for examples.

¹⁵⁴ Divākara, Siddhasena, *Sanmati Tarka*, ed. by Dalsukh Malvania, trans. by Sukhlāl Saṅghavi and Bechardās Doshi (Benares: Indian Press, Ltd., 1939), vv. 5 and 6, p. 113.

¹⁵⁵ AJP, p. 10. *iha ca nanupanyastānām śaṭoktīnāmapākaraṇānīti tā evopanyasyante*. My translation.

¹⁵⁶ Dixit, p. 139.

¹⁵⁷ A more detailed exposition has, fortunately, already been done masterfully by Bossche.

First, Haribhadra makes frequent reference to dogmatism, or “attachment to one’s own philosophy.” His frustration at this point crops up repeatedly. His opponents, in his eyes, are either not properly seeing that they have in fact already understood him, or they have held on to some kind of absolutism, or both:

Alas! Attachment to one’s own philosophy is miserable. Repeatedly stated, it is not ascertained...Enough of this mind seduced by attachment to its own philosophy!¹⁵⁸

This point is congruent with Haribhadra’s critical endorsement of pluralism in other texts.

Second, he frequently identifies self-serving philosophical preferences as an obscuring reason for not comprehending the whole truth.¹⁵⁹ He writes in one place: “an object of an existent-cum-non-existent form should be accepted by logicians who have driven away preference.”¹⁶⁰ It is thus without preference to Jain philosophical dogma — i.e., to the doctrine of non-absolutism itself — that one should come to adopt non-absolutism.

Third and finally, it is worth noting again that Haribhadra’s central appeal is to experience as the arbiter of the truth of his interpretation, not mere logic:

And therefore, in one place, even the contradiction of existence and non-existence is not possible, because of different causality — because of the causality of its own substance and the substance of the other toward the existent and the non-existent — and because this is *established by experience*. To explain: only the object having a form agreeing with and different from its form and that of the other is experienced.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Haribhadra Yākinīputra, *Anekāntajayapatākā*, p. 57.

¹⁵⁹ Stroud (2014) has connected this non-absolutist critique of preferential reasoning to a problem identified in the field of rhetoric: partisan-perfect reasoning.

¹⁶⁰ AJP, p. 63.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63. *ata eva caikatra sadasattvayorvirodho 'pi na sambhavati bhinnanimittatvāt, svadrasyaparadravyādinām sadadaddhetutvāt, anubhavasiddhatvāc. tathāhi — svapararūpānudṛttarūpameva tad vastvanubhūyate.* My translation.

So, Haribhadra expresses frustration with dogmatism, praise of non-partisanship, and finally here a central appeal to experience as the arbiter of truth. Haribhadra's appeals to the experience itself and its conceptual parameters, allowing those to dictate which analysis is correct, rather than some pre-conceived notion or law. It will be shown in the next section that this appeal to experience resists, in particular, the *a priori* notion that existence and non-existence cannot intermix. Haribhadra admits that logic prevents existence and non-existence from being articulated as intermixed in the same object *simultaneously*, but insists that their experienced simultaneous intermixture can be articulated *successively*.

3.2.1b Instance — object of existent and nonexistent form (*sadasadrūpavastu*)

In the first four sections of the AJP, Haribhadra is at pains to describe something which seems impossible to describe. He wants to articulate how it is that the Jain doctrine of non-absolutism can be true given its apparently absurd implication that any given object can both exist and not exist, can be both permanent and transient, can be both general and particular, and, paradoxically, can be both expressible and inexpressible.

This task of the first section — i.e., to demonstrate the expressibility of an object of existent-cum-nonexistent form — is difficult for at least two reasons. First, in asserting an object in which opposites simultaneously inhere, Haribhadra needs to avoid *merely* relativizing each opposite to a different locus. The explanation cannot state that existence qualifies one locus and nonexistence qualifies another locus. To do so would be to relegate this claim to a triviality that can easily be accepted by most philosophers. This

gives rise, though, to the second difficulty. Namely, if Haribhadra's insight is not to be a triviality, it has to address its apparent violation of the law of non-contradiction.

This object of existent-cum-non-existent form was already under discussion in philosophical literature prior to Haribhadra, and in ways that make headway in resolving the above difficulties. The most striking examples are Siddhasena Divākāra's *Sanmati Tarka* and Samantabhadra's *Āptamīmāṃsā*.

The *Sanmati Tarka* describes the non-existent aspect of objects of existent-cum-nonexistent form in the following way, "Everything is non-existent from the standpoint of dissimilar particulars that are absolutely different from the thing."¹⁶² All existent objects, that is, are also nonexistent from the point of view of all that they are not. This accentuates the above difficulties in that it relativizes the locus of the apparently contradictory qualities.

This kind of reasoning is thought to be generally applicable. Indeed, Siddhasena suggests that the applicability of non-absolutism is both far-reaching and self-referential:

The doctrine of *Anekānta* shows all possible sides of a thing and thus does not postulate about a thing in any fixed way, in the same way *Anekānta* itself is also subject to this possibility of other side — that is to say, it also sometimes assumes the form of onesidedness (*Ekānta*). The author admits that thus *Anekānta* may also become *Ekānta* if it does not go against the right view of things.¹⁶³

The doctrine shows all possible sides of a thing through its revelation that, when strung together, innumerable apparently conflicting absolutized claims are not actually conflicting when achieved in a non-absolutist fashion. "The self is permanent" conflicts with the claim that "The self is impermanent." These claims cannot both be true. The

¹⁶² Siddhasena, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

claims “Somehow the self is permanent” and “Somehow, the self is impermanent,” however, do not conflict. The non-absolutism inherent in the latter claims is only genuinely (i.e., self-referentially) non-absolutist if it takes *each* observation, including such synthetic observations, to be partial. The self is, in this analysis only in a certain sense both permanent and impermanent. It must, that is, go against the “right view of things,” as Siddhasena puts it.

The description given in this text and others suggests that one can predicate logically opposite characteristics of the same object, so long as one does this successively and from mutually exclusive standpoints. But if this were all there is to this doctrine, it would again appear to be a triviality, for who would deny that an object can exist with respect to the way it currently appears and not exist with respect to the way it does not currently appear? A closer look at the arguments given by Jain philosophers such as Samantabhadra and Haribhadra, however, suggests that a much more controversial point is being made, one that goes against the grain philosophically and does appear to challenge the law of non-contradiction.

The standpoint relativism required to make each logically opposite assertion is not a trivializing relativism. The Jain point — at least that of Haribhadra and Samantabhadra — seems to be more important. It is that one cannot make complete experiential sense of an assertion like “This pot is existent” without an entailment of the logically opposite assertion that “This pot is non-existent.” Existence of any particular object is always only part of what determines it. The object is only fully determined in experience by its simultaneous non-existence. But since this experiential simultaneity of opposites is

verbally inexpressible because of the law of non-contradiction, it must be asserted successively.¹⁶⁴

One can see, for instance, that while in the *Sanmati Tarka* it is implied only that existent things are also non-existent from the standpoint of all that they are not, this receives a more sophisticated and conceptually interdependent treatment in Samantabhadra's work:

In the body of one and the same entity (-possessed-of-attributes) the character 'being' is invariably accompanied by its opposite (i.e. by the character 'nonbeing'), the reason for it being that 'being' is a qualifier; this is just as in the body of one and the same probans the (noticed) character 'presence-in-homologues' is found to be invariably accompanied by its opposite (i.e. by the character 'absence-in-a-heterologue') as soon as the speaker intends to bring to light the dissimilarity obtaining between this probans and certain other objects (viz. its heterologues).

Likewise, in the body of one and the same entity (-possessed-of-attributes) the character 'nonbeing' is invariably accompanied by its opposite (i.e. by the character 'being', the reason for it being that 'nonbeing' is a qualifier; this is just as in the body of one and the same probans the (noticed) character 'absence-in-a-heterologue' is found to be invariably accompanied by its opposite (i.e. by the character 'presence-in-homologues') as soon as the speaker intends to bring to light the similarity obtaining between this probans and certain other objects (viz. its homologues).¹⁶⁵

Setting aside the controversial issue of whether "being" or "existence" is a quality for now, this suggests that "as soon as the speaker intends to bring to light" similarity or dissimilarity, whatever quality is the subject of attention is found invariably bound up with its opposite. This is the case whether that quality is something which qualifies the object positively (i.e., presence-in-homologues), or qualifies it negatively (i.e., presence-

¹⁶⁴ Samantabhadra, and Akalaṅka, *Āptamīmāṃsā*, Sanskrit-Sanskriti Granthamālā (Ahmedabad: Dr. Jagruti Dilip Sheth, 1999). v. 16.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, vv. 17-18.

in-heterologues). An entity's existence, in other words, is not sufficient to determine the object itself in its similarity to or distinction from other objects without noticing its non-existence. The object exists as a determined object only insofar as it also does not exist in a certain sense. Its non-existence is just as important to its obtaining as a determinate object in our experience as its existence. The claim is thus that no single description is itself sufficient to uniquely characterize an object without appeal to its logical opposite.

Haribhadra expands upon Samantabhadra's analysis further by making the even more subtle case that the intelligibility of any single object itself depends upon an understanding of the intermixture of logically opposite qualities in it. And again, since the synthesis of existence and nonexistence in an object is only a specific example of what is seen to be a general rule, Haribhadra's analysis can be applied to other objects and instances. We can see this by a closer look at Haribhadra's response to objections.

In Haribhadra's AJP, he lays out three major objections to the idea of an object of an existent-cum-nonexistent form. He has an opponent object that the qualities in question are straightforwardly contradictory, that on a more subtle level the appeal to a distinction between qualificand and qualities will not help to resolve this apparent contradiction in a single object, and that the object in question is contradicted by experience.

This first objection offered in the opposing view is the most straightforward. The opponent insists that existence and nonexistence are contradictory qualities and therefore that they cannot qualify the same object. It is argued that the co-presence of such

opposites can only be established by faith, not by knowledge.¹⁶⁶ Thus, the Doctrine of Non-Absolutism is literally “contrived by the ignorant.”¹⁶⁷ Appealing to the law of non-contradiction, the opponent insists:

How is just one object — the form of a pot, etc. — existent and nonexistent? That is, existence is established by the rejection of nonexistence, nonexistence by the rejection of existence. Otherwise, there would be no difference between the two. For if something is existent, how is it not existent? How can what is existent be “nonexistent”? This is problematic because of the contradiction of existence and nonexistence in one place.¹⁶⁸

The very object Haribhadra would wish to establish is self-contradictory from the start, the opponent claims.

But suppose that Haribhadra is attentive in his demonstration of this object to its metaphysical structure, and that by taking account of the relationship between these contradictory qualities and the object they qualify he attempts to explain away this apparent contradiction. The opponent explores this avenue in detail and objects that it will not aid in the articulation of the object in question. The opponent reasons that the qualificand and qualities of the object could be different from each other, they could be non-different, or they could be both. If the qualities — i.e., existence and non-existence — are different from the qualificand — i.e., the object — or vice versa, then the qualities are separate from the object they qualify. However, the object is one unified thing and such a conception of the qualities being separate from their qualificand would seem to result in multiple distinct objects, so difference is not a tenable solution. If the qualities

¹⁶⁶ AJP, p. 16-17.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15. *ajñaiḥ samupakalpitaḥ*. My translation.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11. *kathamekameva ghaṭādirūpaṃ vastu saccācca bhavati? tathāhi — sattvamasattvaparihāreṇa vyavasthitam, asattvaṃ sattvaparihāreṇa; anyathā tayoraviśeṣaḥ syāt. tataśca tad yadi sat kathamasat? athāsat kathaṃ saditi? ekatra sadasattvayorvirodhāt*. My translation.

are non-different from their qualificand, they are simply identical to the qualificand. But in such a case existence and non-existence are not separate from the nature of the object they qualify, and the qualities are themselves would in this case be one and the same. Since existence cannot be identical to non-existence, non-difference between qualities and qualificand is not a tenable solution, either. If the qualities are both different and non-different from the qualificand, then in addition to compounding the problems inherent in each former alternative, there is a problem of entailment. Difference cannot entail non-difference and vice-versa. The co-presence of difference and non-difference could not be established by one or the other. How could the idea that existence and non-existence are different from the object they qualify entail that they are non-different from it? How could the idea that they are non-different from it entail that they are different from it? An appeal to the metaphysical structure of objects will thus not, according to the opponent, aid in the explanation of this seemingly contradictory object.

A third and final objection is that the object in question is neither observed nor possibly observed at the level of perceptual cognition. Both aspects of this objection could be addressed by a single counterexample. This is what Haribhadra's account attempts to provide.

Before summarizing Haribhadra's responses to these three objections, it is worth making sense of what is meant by contradiction (*virodha*) in the Jain context. Ganeri gives the following analysis:

The Jaina answer is that two properties are in contradiction just in case one is 'not found' where the other is. Two properties are not in contradiction simply because one is truly assertible of an object and the other is truly deniable. We will see,

however, that denial for the Jaina is assertion of the negation (Chapter 5.5). So the claim is that the statements ‘Fa’ and ‘not- Fa’ are not contradictory, even though the statement ‘Fa & not-Fa’ is a contradiction! One can truly assert that the pot exists and, without contradiction, truly assert that it does not exist. But one cannot truly assert that the pot exists and does not exist.¹⁶⁹

It thus only the simultaneous assertion of logical opposites which is contradictory, not our simultaneous *experience* of logical opposites. Successive assertion of opposites need not be considered contradictory, especially if it gives intelligible account of our experience of these opposites’ simultaneity. In fact, it will be argued by Haribhadra that such successive assertion of opposites is necessary.

With this unique account of contradiction in mind, Haribhadra’s response to the first objection is that to assert that existence and non-existence contradict each other without qualification bears results which themselves contradict our experience of objects. He gets straight to the point:

[T]he object is existent through the form of its quality, time, place, and substance, and it is non-existent through the form of the quality, time, place, and substance of another; and therefore it is both existent and non-existent, because otherwise there would be the undesired consequence of its absence.¹⁷⁰

Two points can be made about his response here. First, with a long line of Jain thinkers, Haribhadra states that the object of an assertion is to be fully understood with reference to its state (*bhāva*), time (*kāla*), place (*kṣetra*), and substance (*dravya*). Its very existence and non-existence are indexed to these in terms of its own form — i.e., its own state, time, place, and substance — and the form of what is other — i.e., the state, time, place, and substance of its other. Beyond this relativization — which most opponents will grant

¹⁶⁹ Ganeri, Jonardon, *Philosophy in Classical India* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 132.

¹⁷⁰ AJP, p. 36. *yatastat svadravyakṣetrakālabhāvarūpeṇa sad vartate, paradravyakṣetrakālabhāvarūpeṇa cāsat; tataśca saccāsacca bhavati, anyathā tadabhāvaprasaṅgāt.* My translation.

— there is of course a second, more philosophically controversial point. This is that in a very real sense, existence and non-existence are co-present and interdependent in every object so that there would be the consequence of absence of the object itself if either was taken absolutely. That is, “The pot exists,” as a standalone assertion without a very elaborate context, is *never* true.

This can be understood through an examination of what exactly is meant by “the undesired consequence of its absence.” The point here, according to Haribhadra, is that if an object exists absolutely, then there is no way to distinguish it from what it is not. If it is non-existent absolutely, then its nonexistence will necessarily intrude upon the parts of it that we experience as existing. That is, if it were not a constitutive fact about the object that it really is nonexistent in some way and really existent in another way, then its existence would not be barred from extending into those qualities, times, etc., which are other than its own. Likewise, if it were not a constitutive fact about the object that it really is existent-cum-nonexistent, its nonexistence would not be barred from extending into those qualities, times, etc., which are its own.

Here’s an example. If it were not the case that a pot's existence in the city of Pataliputra was accompanied by its non-existence in all other places, times, states, and substances, the assertion that the pot exists would, conceptually, not be able to rule out that it exists both where it does *and* where it does not. Such an assertion would apply everywhere and nowhere, existence having been asserted without reference to the distinctions upon which the objects actual experience relies. The rebuttal is the same for

non-existence. When asserted categorically, non-existence cannot but establish the absence of the object, since non-existence alone establishes nothing positive.

Thus, the object is underdetermined by an assertion if that assertion elides the intermixture of both existence and nonexistence in the object. Haribhadra laments how close opponents are to acknowledging this insight:

[Y]ou say, “the very existence of earthen substance is the qualified non-existence of water, etc.” Yet not even then do you know the object of an existent-cum-nonexistent form. Such a blunder is unprecedented. Having renounced the form of dual presence and absence of the existence of itself and the other, the specificity of the object is not possible.¹⁷¹

This passage gives the reader a taste of both Haribhadra’s frustration at the opponents’ inability to understand the consequences of their own plausible claims as well as the elegance and attentiveness to experience of his doctrine. Haribhadra’s response to the first objection, then, is that while opposite characteristics are indeed contradictory in some sense, an object is simply unintelligible without reference to this dual intermixture of logically opposite characteristics.

Haribhadra’s response to the all three objections can be found together in the following passage:

[T]hat very object has an existent and non-existent nature, the non-existence of the form of the other is not present separate from the existence of its own form, nor is existence of its own form unmixed with the non-existence of the form of the other. Nor is it just the unity of both because both are properly known without discord. Nor is it the mere plurality because of the impossibility of the arrangement of them both because of their not being known in this way. *Thus, that*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44. *pārthivadravryasattvameva viśiṣṭamavādyasattvamiti vakti, na ca sadasadrūpaṃ vastu pratipadyate ityapūrvō vibhramaḥ. na hi svaparasattābhāvāvobhayarūpatāṃ vihāya vastulo viśiṣṭataiva sambhavati.* My translation.

*qualified object, having the state of difference and non-difference, inter-mixed with one another, is both.*¹⁷²

This passage responds to the first objection by pointing out that the qualities of existence and non-existence are not in direct contradiction but are mixed in the experience of the object. They are mixed in the sense that they cannot, without qualification, be said to be absolutely identical or distinct from each other without underdetermining the object they qualify. It responds to the second objection similarly by pointing out that this very intermixture is to be understood as the qualified difference and non-difference of these qualities from their object. Finally, he responds to the third objection in his implication that the object's existence and non-existence are not observable as separate, but only as intermixed.

Internal to this passage, too, is a compelling account of this last point. If the object were not understood as an intermixture of existence and non-existence, the object's own apparent form (i.e., the form associated with its existence) would be either separate from the form of what is other than it (i.e., the form associated with its non-existence), identical to it, or separately juxtaposed to it.

Each of these options is, according to Haribhadra, untenable. His analysis divides the object into two necessary parts: the form by which it is positively apparent — its “own-form” — and the form by which it is positively non-apparent — “other-form.” The idea is that these two forms, necessary for the determination of an object, are either

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 59-60. *vastveva tat sadasadātmakam, na tatra svarūpasattvapṛthagbhūtam pararūpāsattvam, na ca pararūpāsattvāsamprkṛtam svarūpasattvam. na cānayorekatvameva, avigānataḥ samyakubhayopalabdheḥ. na ca nānātvameva, tadvavasthāyogāt tathā'nupalabdheḥ. ityanayonyānuviddham bhedābhedavṛtti tatsvabhāvaṃ viśiṣṭamubhayameva tat.* My translation.

separate and unrelated, unified and identical, juxtaposed but not mixed, or inter-mixed. If they were separate and unrelated, the form of any single object would have no connection to the things it is not. Experience tells us that this is patently false, and would underdetermine an object. If the form of the object associated with its existence were unified and identical with the form(s) associated with its non-existence, then any single object would be indistinguishable from the objects which it is not. Indeed, any object would be the only object. This, too is patently false. If the two were juxtaposed but not mixed, there would still be a problem of showing how the object is in any meaningful sense *determined* by its other form without being at the same time *qualified* by this form. Bare plurality of the object's existence and non-existence is not sufficient to account for this relationship.

Haribhadra has attempted to show that in fact experience *demand*s that the conceptual features of the object be acknowledged as intermixed with each other: "only that object having a form both agreeing with and different from its own form and that of the other is experienced."¹⁷³ And despite the fact that this may appear to be merely a conceptual rather than real feature to some, as Mookerji has pointed out in defense of the doctrine, "It cannot be legitimately contended that the implication of the opposite by the affirmation of a positive characteristic is only a necessity of conceptual thought and so does not argue its objective status in a real. Conceptual thought is not unfounded in reality."¹⁷⁴ The object's conceptual features, in other words, are the ways in which we may delimit its ontological status in philosophical discourse. For this reason, it is taken

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 63. *tathāhi — svapararūpānuvṛttavyāvṛttarūpameva tad vastvanubhūyate*. My translation.

¹⁷⁴ Satkari Mookerji, *The Jaina Philosophy of Non-Absolutism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), p. 11.

for granted by Haribhadra that insofar as any given object *must be understood* as having an intermixture of logical opposites, it *really possesses* an intermixture of logical opposites. Hence, the victory banner of non-absolutism!

In summary, the opponent has objected that the object in question possesses qualities in straightforward contradiction, that on a more subtle level even a distinction between qualificand and qualities will not help to resolve this contradiction, and finally that such an object is in principle unobservable. Haribhadra responds first by pointing out that once one sufficiently specifies how these opposing characteristics are asserted, what is objectionable about this contradiction dissolves. Even when the object is further scrutinized as having a substance-attribute structure of qualificand and quality, the necessity remains the same that there be an intermixture of logical opposites in terms of the difference and non-difference of these metaphysical features. Haribhadra finally insists that insofar as one must admit that it is only through acknowledgement of the non-existence of an object with respect to everything it is not that its existence is fully determined, one *must* have recourse to this dual form of the object in perception. So the third objection, too, does not hold. The doctrine as Haribhadra understands it embraces the conflict of opposites and demonstrates its complicated and intermixed expression in objects-as-experienced, while acknowledging that such an apparently contradictory nature is only assertible indexically and successively. The modal operator “*syād*,” functions to qualify each assertion according to his analysis, converting exclusive to non-exclusive statements,¹⁷⁵ and enabling logically opposing assertions to be made at the

¹⁷⁵ Ganeri, Jonardon, *Philosophy in Classical India*, p. 138.

same time, in a certain sense.¹⁷⁶ Because of the general applicability of the method which produces this defense of an apparently self-refuting object, the doctrine of non-absolutism holds the potential to resolve the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreements in being applied to the apparent contradiction identified by that paradox.

3.2.1c Application — interested and disinterested views

Existence and non-existence are contradictories, but “they can qualify the same object because they do not overlap.”¹⁷⁷ Slightly misleading, this is to say that from the same perspective or viewed under the same aspect, these qualities do not overlap. For neither quality is, after analysis, found to be applicable without qualification. This same set of statements, it will be shown, can be said to apply to interestedness and disinterestedness insofar as they apply to philosophical views.

With respect to objects, the qualified co-application of contradictories is to be found primarily in Haribhadra’s claim that an object’s non-existence is to be found in the form of what is other than it, while its existence is to be found in its own form. As was pointed out above, Haribhadra and Samantabhadra see the non-absolutist method as a general process of analysis, even a criterion, which can be applied to pairs of opposites insofar as they are associated with any object. In evaluating the conclusion to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement — i.e., that philosophical views are both interested and disinterested — one can utilize this method. Following the opponent’s objections to the object of existent and nonexistent form, one can attempt to apply this same analysis to the

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁷⁷ Bossche, Frank Van Den, ‘Existence and Non-Existence in Haribhadra Sūri’s Anekānta-Jaya-Patākā’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 23 (1995), p. 448.

apparently paradoxical notion of a philosophical view of of both interested and disinterested form.

Reviewing the objections and replies above, it was shown how Haribhadra responded to the accusation that an object of existent and nonexistent form is contradictory in three ways. It is contradictory due to the incompatibility of these two characteristics in one locus. It is contradictory whether or not the object and its characteristics are the same, different, or both. Finally, it is contradictory the two are neither perceived nor perceivable together. Each objection and response can be modified to accommodate an analysis of a view (rather than an object) of interested-cum-disinterested (rather than existent-cum-nonexistent) form.

A philosophical view is of both interested and disinterested form, the Paradox concludes. These two descriptions of the basis of philosophical justification are incompatible. For a view to be disinterested, *simpliciter*, its essential denotations must not be supported by inaccessibly private interests or preconceptions about the topic in question. That is, a disinterested view, insofar as it is philosophical, is devoid of interest. To say of a view that it is interested, *simpliciter*, is to claim that its essential denotations are grounded in private interests or preconceptions about the topic in question. That is, an interested view, insofar as it is philosophical, is incompatible with its also being disinterested. This mutual incompatibility, one may object, rules out acceptance of the conclusion of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement — i.e., that philosophical views are both interested and disinterested. A response to this objection, through the non-absolutist method, simply needs to point out that an absolutist understanding of

philosophical views with respect to their interestedness or disinterestedness results in underdetermination of each view.¹⁷⁸

The unqualified assertion that a philosophical view is interested cannot properly characterize such a view since it neglects the interpersonal and shared hermeneutic space necessary for a view to be understood as philosophical. If there were only private reasons given in support of a philosophical view, that view would not give rise to genuine disagreements, but only to apparent disagreements between superficially similar views which actually have no deliberately shared basis. Likewise, the unqualified assertion that a philosophical view is disinterested cannot properly characterize the view since it would neglect the necessarily private and inaccessibly personal grounds revealed by the ubiquity of philosophical disagreement. If there were no private reasons whatsoever supporting a philosophical view, that view would not give rise to genuine disagreements, but only to superficial disagreements with interested views. Thus, in either case, the unqualified assertion of one characteristic at the expense of the other fails to account for one's experience of philosophical views or for the very occurrence of genuine disagreement in philosophy.

Since the analysis here is focused on views, rather than objects, the second objection needs to be clarified. This objection is that even if the object in question is structured in terms of qualities and a qualified object which underlies them, there can be no intelligible, non-contradictory account of logical opposites therein. This is because the qualities must either be different from, non-different from, both different from and non-

¹⁷⁸ Ganeri, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

different from, or neither different from and non-different from each other in such an object. In all cases, contradiction or absurdity arises.

Views are the objects of this analysis, insofar as they are characterized by either interestedness or disinterestedness. These qualities are either different from the views they characterize, non-different from them, both, or neither. If different, they are unrelated to the view and cannot modify it, nor are they in real conflict since they are themselves different and lack a shared basis. If non-different, then disinterestedness is the same as the view and interestedness is, too, since they are both identical to the view, and thus transitively identical to each other. But this is absurd. If both different and non-different from the view they qualify, the problems of the first two cases would obtain simultaneously. Also, this explanation would not be saved by the suggestion that interestedness entails disinterestedness and vice versa, an absurdity as well. Finally, the characteristics cannot be neither different from nor non-different from the view they characterize, since this would only make sense if there were no characterized view (or object) at all, a non-starter in the Jain picture.

In these four cases — different, non-different, both, and neither — the assumption that a view can be both interested and disinterested turns out to be contradictory or absurd in some way. The opponent, however, neglects to consider a fifth and final possibility. Namely, there is also the possibility that the qualities and the view they qualify are in a relationship of qualified inter-mixture.

This can be explained by way of a response to the third objection, which is that two opposing characteristics are neither observed nor in principle observable as occurring in the self-same view.

Such a view is not observed in experience, it may be argued, because we notice that a philosophical view is interested, or we take it to be disinterested. If it is noticed in one way, this means that we have not at the same time noticed it in the other way.

The criticism continues: beyond this contradiction simply not occurring in experience, one would also be justified in never expecting such a view to be observed in the future because it is impossible to simultaneously experience contradictory characteristics having the same locus. Interestedness and disinterestedness are contradictory, and so if one were to observe one, this would logically preclude the observance of the other.

Furthermore, disinterestedness itself presents its own problem in terms of observability. Language carries with it an invariably interested set of background assumptions and experiences. If disinterestedness were sufficient for a belief to be supported, objective views could arise in language or at least proto-linguistically with no background assumptions from unique believers, and such a consequence is absurd. All believers have unique background assumptions and experiences which form an inseparable basis for their language use. If disinterestedness were sufficient for a belief to be held, then provided that disinterestedness occurred the world would be full of beliefs without believers! So the only truly disinterested view is an unexpressed one, and an unexpressed view is no view at all.

One can respond to these objections in a non-absolutist fashion. One can insist that although such problems do arise if disinterestedness and interestedness are thought of as simultaneously characterizing a single view from the same perspective, problems also arise when separately and absolutely characterizing any such view.

All philosophical views reveal interestedness insofar as they are expressed through *one's own understanding*. The same views are revealed to be disinterested insofar as they are *understood by another* and taken to be potentially legitimate claims. This is because a view can only represent a shared reality when its justification is not a matter of merely private reasons. Thus, interestedness in one's own understanding is thus invariably accompanied by disinterest in the understanding of another when a view is philosophically discussed. With respect to views, then, we will make the same "own-" and "other-" distinction that Haribhadra makes with respect to objects. Rather than making this distinction with respect to form, we will make it with respect to understanding. A view's disinterestedness is to be found in conjecturally shared understanding of another, while its interestedness is to be found in one's own self-understanding. Both, in that sense, overlap or are intermixed. Yet, they do not overlap from the same perspective. Furthermore, a philosophical view cannot be philosophical without being both. If it were merely interested, it would not be a shareable philosophical view. If it were merely disinterested, it could not be privately possessed by anyone and it could exist without a believer. That an interested philosophical view exists requires its shareability from in the understanding of another. That a disinterested view exists in the understanding of another requires its private possession by oneself!

3.2.1d Result — intermixture of opposites

The results of a non-absolutist analysis of an interested and disinterested views are three-fold. First, this analysis reveals that any assertion that a philosophical view is exclusively either interested or disinterested is an underdetermining assertion. One cannot make sense of an interested expression of one's own understanding of a philosophical view without also acknowledging its disinterestedness with respect to the understanding of others. As Ganeri has written, "Rationality, in the hands of the Jaina, is a method for exposing the *underspecification* implicit in ordinary language use. When this is properly done, conflict and contradiction drop away of their own accord."¹⁷⁹ This "underspecification" is what I have termed "underdetermination." Second, the analysis revealed that these characteristics are neither separate and distinct, together and identical, nor juxtaposed and unmixed. Rather, they are intermixed in an otherwise inexpressible fashion. Finally, this analysis revealed that although it would seem that incompatible characteristics are not even observable in the same locus, such an intermixture of logically opposite characteristics is actually a condition of the intelligibility of philosophical views as such.

Non-absolutism can, in this way, be applied generally. Taking for an example Haribhadra's articulation of a non-absolutist understanding of objects of existent-cum-nonexistent form, it was seen that these opposing qualities must be understood as intermixed in objects. This intermixture is balanced through an indexing of existence to an object's own-form, and nonexistence to the form of what is other. Applying this same analysis to views of interested and disinterested form, one can balance the same

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133. My italics.

intermixture of these opposites through an indexing of interestedness to one's own-
 understanding and of disinterestedness to the understanding of others. Thus it seems that
 the doctrine of non-absolutism would suggest a compelling innovation with regard to the
 adjudication of philosophical disagreements, and to the Paradox of Philosophical
 Disagreement, in particular. Whether one's view is philosophical emerges through and is
 occasioned by the engagement of our own constitutively interested views by another *as*
 being founded on a potentially sharable, that is to say disinterested, foundation.

Having offered an account of how logical opposites can be intermixed, intelligibly
 asserted in succession, and mutually necessary when cognized in an object, Haribhadra
 paves the way toward accepting the conclusion of the Paradox of Philosophical
 Disagreement. That is, his non-absolutism, applied to this paradox, makes way for an
 explanation of how a view might be both interested and disinterested without
 contradiction.

3.2.2 Non-Absolutism (*anekāntavāda*) does not engender disagreements, it reveals that disagreements are juxtapositions of mistakenly absolutized, but actually partial truths

If disagreement is understood to be the assertion of logically opposite sentences by
 respective parties to a debate, then how can disagreement arise in a Jain worldview?

Logical opposites, it is seen, are intermixed in any object. To say that a soul exists and to
 subsequently assert that a soul does not exist is not to endorse a contradiction. Rather, it
 is to acknowledge the mutual interdependence of logical opposites. One can neither
 affirm that a soul exists without negating the ways in which it does not, nor negate that a

soul exists without affirming the ways in which it does. To assert absolutely either extreme of existence or non-existence is to misunderstand the very character of souls and, generally, to misunderstand the very character of objects. Disagreement, subsequent to such an analysis, is understood to be a potential consequence of asserting absolutely things which can only be partially true given the limits of expressibility and the nature of finite perspectives. The partial assertions which are recommended as a result of the Jain analysis do not, because of their self-professed partiality, come into disagreement.

Although this resolution is consistent with Haribhadra's positive articulation of the object of existent and nonexistent form, it can be achieved in yet another way. The same point is also reached in Jain literature through *reductio ad absurdum*-style arguments. In the work of Nāgārjuna, such arguments did not result in indirect proof. In the work of Samantabhadra and Haribhadra, such arguments, exercised upon absolutisms, are in fact taken to be indirect proofs of partial assertions.

In just fourteen short verses (9-23) of the *Āptamimāṃsā*,¹⁸⁰ for instance, Samantabhadra attempts to establish both the doctrine of non-absolutism and its corollary of conditional predication. He rejects, with respect to an object of existent and non-existent form, the idea that an object must either be or not be, with no third option between or beyond the two. He does this by showing that each option on its own leads to discursive absurdities. In verses 9-11, he demonstrates that the assumption of a thing's absolutely existing without also not-existing would make four different plausible kinds of negation unintelligible, and therefore leads to four respective absurdities. He points out

¹⁸⁰ Samantabhadra, *op. cit.*, vv. 9-23.

that to claim of a thing that it absolutely does not exist would make uttered sentences with regard to the thing unintelligible, whether these be affirmations or negations involving the thing in question.¹⁸¹ Enemies of the Jain doctrine, he insists, are unable to acknowledge this existence-cum-nonexistence as more than blatant self contradiction.¹⁸² In reality, such assertions are always non-absolute when sufficiently specified. He writes, as quoted above, “as soon as the speaker intends to bring to light” similarity or dissimilarity, an affirmation is forced to reveal its intermixture with negation and vice versa.¹⁸³ Therefore, idea of the co-presence of opposites does not entail any vicious contradiction.¹⁸⁴ He then goes on to more succinctly outline the seven forms of qualified predication which are characteristic of Jain pragmatics, insofar as these would apply to the qualities of existence and non-existence.

Samantrabhadrā’s text was clearly an influence for Haribhadra’s AJP, as the latter takes up three of the ten pairs of opposites taken up by the former, and both begin with a consideration of existence and non-existence.¹⁸⁵ Below, Samantabhadrā’s structure is followed and the details of Haribhadra’s arguments are used to strengthen the case, but the overall point here is to show that beyond its sophisticated articulation of the simultaneity of existence and non-existence in the same experienced object, the AJP also makes use of a unique kind of *reductio ad absurdum* argument as it applies to absolutist views.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, v. 12.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, v. 13.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, vv. 17-18.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, v. 14.

¹⁸⁵ Dixit, K. K., *Jaina Ontology* (AhmedabadL.: L. D. Institute of Indology, 1971), p. 139.

3.2.2a Method — *reductio ad absurdum*

While Nāgārjuna claims that all things are empty of essences, Haribhadra claims that all things are non-absolute.¹⁸⁶ If one thinks that Nāgārjuna's claim that all things are empty is an instance of the employment of pedagogical skill, it can be understood without much strain as a meta-metaphysical claim. Matilal has made the same claim about the Jaina doctrine of non-absolutism, since it is a doctrine derived from observations about metaphysical claims.¹⁸⁷ The positive claim of non-absolutism could, in this way, be understood as a generalization derived from the broadly available consequences of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. The approach in question utilizes an orthodox understanding of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments as a basis for indirect proof. Furthermore, both claims are absolutisms of a kind. But while Nāgārjuna is non-committal about the establishment of anything without qualification, Haribhadra is non-absolutist about such establishment. For Nāgārjuna, non-commitment to essences makes all possible because it avoids absolutisms about discrete natures which give rise metaphysical absurdities in explaining concepts. For Haribhadra, non-absolutism is a reliable alternative. It makes all possible because it similarly avoids absurdly absolutizing discourse. While Haribhadra makes assertions, to be sure, his assertions are non-absolutist assertions. They are the logical consequences of absurdities discovered through inquiry into absolutist assertions.

One can find a loose application of this strategy in Haribhadra's work, but much more clearly in the work of his predecessor, Samantabhadra. In his *Āptamīmāṃsā*,

¹⁸⁶ Matilal, Bimal Krishna, *The Character of Logic in India*, p. 127.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Samantabhadra makes very clear use of the strategy for resolving a number of different disagreeing theses.

Samantabhadra begins with the two theses “Things absolutely exist” and “Things absolutely do not exist.” These constitute a disagreement to be resolved as concealing an non-absolutist truth. Each thesis turns out to be false because each is absolutist. Thus by *reductio ad absurdum*, the contradictories of each assumption are true. That is to say, somehow things exist and somehow things do not exist. One can conclude from Samantabhadra’s analysis that a disagreement among absolutist or one-sided theses can be resolved as a juxtaposition of mistakenly one-sided, but actually partial, truths.

The claim that things absolutely exist is incompatible with that claim that things absolutely do not exist. This represents the same set of extremes considered by the Buddha in the *Kaccayana Gotta Sutta*. Both the Buddhist (Madhyamaka) tradition following this *Sutta* as well as the Jaina tradition following the same distinction reject each extreme. However, since the Madhyamaka thinker is a dialectical refutationist, he does not have any logical compulsion to posit a thesis himself. The Jain thinker, on the other hand, assumes with each disagreeing party that there are entities about which partially intelligible things are being said. This means that Haribhadra’s *prasaṅga* argument, in contrast to Nāgārjuna’s, entails indirect proof.

3.2.2b Instance — object of existent and nonexistent form

According to Samantabhadra, absurd consequences follow whether one assumes the position that things absolutely exist or whether one assumes that they absolutely do not

exist. To these two extremes, Samantabhadra astutely adds a third, the position that the existence and non-existence of things is absolutely inexpressible (*avaktavyapakṣa*).

Assuming things absolutely exist, Samantabhadra claims, causes problems in that it makes all forms of “non-being” unintelligible. From such an assumption it would follow that any given entity has no beginning, has no end, shares its form with all other entities, and lacks a form of its own.¹⁸⁸

Things would have no beginning because *prior* non-being is ruled out by the thesis of absolute existence. Things would have no end because *posterior* non-being is ruled out, too.¹⁸⁹ Things would possess the form of all other things because the non-being of these things *in all that they are not* is ruled out by the thesis of absolute existence. Thus, things cannot have a form of their own either, since one cannot define a thing *whose form is outside of itself*.¹⁹⁰

Assuming things absolutely do not exist, Samantabhadra argues further, causes equally intractable problems. Assuming things absolutely do not exist, he claims, causes problems as a result of making all forms of “being” intelligible. If being — or more aptly, “presence” — is not applicable or intelligible, then what is? From such an assumption it would thus follow that no given entity can be known either through words or cognitions. With only absence and no presence, clearly there could be no establishing or refuting of theses!¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Samantabhadra, *op. cit.*, v. 9.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, v. 10.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, v. 11.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, v. 12.

But one cannot intelligibly utter that a thing is both present and absent, both is and is not, either. On pain of contradiction, such assertions can only be made in succession.¹⁹² And yet, somehow, it was shown that they are simultaneously necessary, and since this is not utterable without contradiction, Jain philosophers appeal to a third possible predication corresponding to the obviously obtaining yet perplexing co-dependence of logical opposites in entities. This third possibility, combining “being” (*bhāva*) and “non-being” (*abhāva*) — existence and non-existence, in Haribhadra’s AJP — is termed “inexpressibility.” Assuming that things are absolutely inexpressible carries absurd implications, too. The most important of these is that in that case things could not be *expressed* as such.¹⁹³

The disagreement, then, is among four competing and logically incompatible theses. The first is that things absolutely exist. The second is that things absolutely do not exist. The third is that things are absolutely inexpressible. The fourth, unmentioned but taken assumed by the first two and rejected by the third, is that things are absolutely expressible. Each thesis is demonstrated by Samantabhadra to be false.

By *reductio ad absurdum*, the falsity of these absolutisms or one-sided claims entails indirect proof of their contradictories. For instance, the contradictory of the absolutist affirmation “X is absolutely y” is the non-absolutist affirmation “Somehow, x is not y.” The contradictory of an opposite but absolutist affirmation “X is absolutely not y” is the non-absolutist affirmation “Somehow, x is y.”

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, v. 16.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, v. 13.

The conclusions to these indirect proofs are thus as follows. By rejecting “Things absolutely exist,” one derives “Somehow, things do not exist;” by rejecting “Things absolutely do not exist,” one derives “Somehow, things exist;” by rejecting “Things are absolutely inexpressible,” one derives “Somehow, things are expressible;” and by rejecting “Things are absolutely expressible,” one derives “Somehow, things are inexpressible.”

Bringing together these four conclusions, one comes very quickly to the traditional seven-fold articulation, the pragmatic corollary to the Jain doctrine of non-absolutism:

1. Somehow, things exist.
2. Somehow, things do not exist.
3. Somehow things both exist and do not exist (successive predication of opposites).
4. Somehow, things are inexpressible (simultaneous predication of opposites).

This last possibility — i.e., “inexpressible” — is then combined variously with the first three assertions in order to achieve completeness in the expression of partial truths.

Hence, the remaining three assertions:

5. Somehow, things are and are inexpressible.
6. Somehow, things are not and are inexpressible.
7. Somehow, things are, are not, and are inexpressible.

Thus, the disagreeing theses with which Samantabhadra’s analysis begins resolve into juxtaposed partial assertions. Absolutisms turn out to be mistaken universalizations of partial truths.

3.2.2c Application - interested and disinterested views

This method of analysis via *reductio ad absurdum* can be applied to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement's conclusion that any philosophical view is both interested and disinterested. As Samantabhadra himself puts it:

Whatever is a qualificand amenable to verbal utterance is possessed of the characters 'being' as well as 'nonbeing' (lit. is capable of being posited as well as negated), just as an attribute belonging to the locus-of-probandum will be a probans or not a probans depending on conditions (i.e. depending on what happens to be the probandum in a particular case).

Taking any philosophical view as the probandum — i.e. as the locus of our analysis — and taking the characteristics of interestedness and disinterestedness as each a potential probans — i.e. property to be proven as inhering in the locus under scrutiny — one can conduct a parallel analysis.

The first and second premises of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement assert the necessary interestedness and disinterestedness of disagreement-engendering and universalizability-aspiring views, respectively. It turned out in the Paradox that philosophical views are a subset of both of those types of views, being both disagreement-engendering and universalizability aspiring. The disagreeable conclusion followed that all philosophical views are both interested and disinterested.

Pulling apart what is presumably paradoxical about this conclusion, it is necessary to evaluate two separate, disagreeing theses in turn. First, one can consider the claim that "Philosophical views are (absolutely) interested." Second, one can consider the claim that "Philosophical views are (absolutely) disinterested." Having shown each to be absurd, indirect proof would produce the contradictories: "Somehow, philosophical views are

disinterested,” and “Somehow, philosophical views are interested.” This dual indirect proof results in a non-one-sided conclusion in seven parts: All philosophical views are somehow interested, somehow disinterested, somehow both interested and disinterested; somehow inexpressible; somehow interested and inexpressible; somehow disinterested and inexpressible; and somehow interested, disinterested, and inexpressible. What remains to be shown is some absurdity which would follow from each absolutist thesis to legitimize this specific use of indirect proof.

Fortunately, absurdities as a result of these theses are not difficult to find. The first thesis is obviously false, for if any view is indeed philosophical, that could only be because its constitutive justification is not merely private and personal, but is taken to have universal applicability. A philosophical view, to be understood as philosophical, must be disinterested in that it must be taken as if intelligible and mutually understandable beyond the scope of its utterer’s private sphere. It is thus not true that all philosophical views are (absolutely) interested. Thus, by indirect proof, our assumption that philosophical views are absolutely interested leads to the conclusion that, somehow, philosophical views are disinterested.

The falsity of the second absolute statement is also readily seen. The fact that philosophical views engender disagreement suggests quite clearly that philosophical views must be interested, that they must be undergirded by private and personally held convictions. This contradicts the notion that philosophical views are (absolutely) disinterested. Since what is *common* and *non-different* among the bases for philosophical convictions could not be the cause for disagreement between them, what is *private* and

different among them must be at fault. Thus, by indirect proof, the absolutist assumption that philosophical views are (absolutely) disinterested leads to the conclusion that, somehow, they are interested.

Bringing the conclusions of these indirect proofs together, one comes to the non-absolutist conclusion that somehow, philosophical views are both interested and disinterested. Furthermore, since this cannot be stated but in succession, they are somehow inexpressible.

3.2.2d Result — qualified assertion with *syād*

As above, non-absolute statements must be designated by a qualifier in order to distinguish them from their false, absolutist forms, and Jain philosophers prefer the indeclinable ‘*syāt*’ for this purpose.

The conclusions to these indirect proofs are thus as follows. By rejecting “Philosophical views are (absolutely) interested,” one derives “Somehow, philosophical views are disinterested”; by rejecting “Philosophical views are (absolutely) disinterested,” one derives “Somehow, philosophical views are interested”; and by rejecting “Philosophical views are (absolutely) both interested and disinterested” one can derive “Somehow, all philosophical views are inexpressible.”

Bringing together these three conclusions, one comes very quickly to another instantiation of the traditional seven-fold articulation (*saptabhaṅgī*) of *syādvāda*:

1. Somehow, philosophical views are interested.
2. Somehow, philosophical views are disinterested.
3. Somehow, philosophical views are both interested and disinterested.
4. Somehow, philosophical views are inexpressible.
5. Somehow, philosophical views are interested and are inexpressible.
6. Somehow, philosophical views are disinterested and are inexpressible.
7. Somehow, philosophical views are interested, are disinterested, and are inexpressible.

This, then is the practical and discursive result of the Jain use of non-absolutism by way of *reductio ad absurdum*.

Here, too, non-absolutism paves the way toward accepting the conclusion of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. The conclusion, again, was the internally conflicted assertion that philosophical views must be both interested and disinterested. The non-absolutist method of demonstrating the absurdity of absolutist claims leads to the qualified assertion of the contradictory of each such claim. This led to a claim which is compatible with the truth of the conclusion of the Paradox, namely that somehow, philosophical views are both interested and disinterested.

3.2.3 Objections and Replies

There are a number of potentially disastrous objections which could be made to this reconstruction of a Jain response to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. The first objection can be extrapolated from remarks made by Frank van den Bossche in his analysis of the first section of Haribhadra's AJP. These remarks suggest that Haribhadra's is a naive solution the problem of negative existentials. This objection is made even more problematic by a second, related objection, namely that this analysis cannot be successful since it falsely assumes that existence is a predicate. The third and final objection has to

do with the conclusion reached through the Jain analysis, that as a result of the insights gained through *anaikāntika* analysis, one ought to qualify all subsequent assertions with ‘*syāt.*’ Above, it was claimed that no seriously held philosophical view can be intelligibly expressed with a relativizing hedge. The Jain view, however, recommends precisely that one qualify *all* philosophical claims with a relativizing hedge. In this section, each of these three objections will be addressed.

The first two objections involve Haribhadra’s central claim in section one, that all objects have an existent and non-existent form. The idea that all objects have a non-existent form runs up against the problem of negation. The idea that all objects have an existent form runs up against the general concession that existence is not a property. Given the problems associated with either component of Haribhadra’s thesis, it is unwise to accept Haribhadra’s account of objects as having, in reality, an existent and nonexistent form.

By “the first law of dialectical realism” van den Bossche refers to the major thesis defended by Haribhadra in the first section of the AJP, the thesis that “an object (*vastu*) is existent by way of its own form (*svarūpasattvaṃ*) and non-existent by way of what is other than it (*pararūpāsattvaṃ*)” (Skt. *svarūpa-sattvaṃ pararūpāsattvaṃ ca vastu*).

Van den Bossche, after a detailed analysis of Haribhadra’s thesis, glosses it in the following way:

For all objects *x* it is true that *x* [1] is qualified by its own form *s* (or its *svarūpa*) **through** or **via** qualification by existence *sa* (or *sattva*) and [2] is qualified by any other form *p* (or any *pararūpa*) **through** or **via** qualification by non-existence *as* (*asattva*).¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Bossche, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

In addition to making the controversial claim that existence can be predicated of a thing with respect to its own form, this thesis also states that predications of nonexistence refer to actual ontological structures in which ‘nonexistence’ (*asat*) is an inherent property of things. This law thus assumes that the “linguistic structures of our descriptions of the world reflect actual ontological structures.”¹⁹⁵

Thus, when Haribhadra claims that a pot exists and does not exist, he does not refer to the truth and falsity of certain assertions. That is, he does not make the weak assertion that *it is true* that the pot exists in some sense and *it is not true* that the pot exists, in some other sense. Rather, he makes the more counter-intuitive, positive ontological claim that the pot is *existent* in some sense and the pot is *nonexistent* in some other sense!

But, because of the problem of negation, it is generally considered naive to be realist about negative existential claims in the way that Haribhadra apparently is.¹⁹⁶ That is, non-existence (*asattvam*) is not uncontroversially a first-order property.

The problem of negation, as Bossche frames it, is the problem of explaining how a negative proposition can be descriptive of reality, if at all.¹⁹⁷ The problem is, put simply, that of the relationship between negation and reality.¹⁹⁸ It has been a problem for classical as well as contemporary philosophers of many traditions.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Upadhyaya, K.N., ‘Indian Tradition and Negation’, *Philosophy East and West*, 38 (1988), p. 281.

One iteration of this problem in philosophical work in classical India involves two opposed, semantic approaches. First, there is *abhihitānvaya-vāda* (lit. “the doctrine [that a sentence is] the logical connection of [distinct] words.” This doctrine holds that the meaning of a sentence is the sum of the meanings of each word in it. Second, there is *anvītābhīdhāna-vāda* (lit. “the doctrine [that a sentence is] an expression of togetherness”). This doctrine holds that the meaning of a sentence is a function of the totality of the words in it.

In each case, the relationship between negation and reality must be distinctly characterized. In first case — *abhihitānvaya-vāda* — since all parts of a sentence have meanings with ontological correlates, any negative particle in a sentence must reflect a negative reality. And to the extent the a negative word reflects a negative reality, paradoxically, the negative word will reflect a positive!¹⁹⁹ This is the problem of negation as it arises for realists about language.

In the case of *anvītābhīdhāna-vāda*, there are more interpretive possibilities, depending upon how a thinker accounts for the totality of meaning in a sentence. There are too many to address here, but one point will suffice illustrate how the problem of negation might be resolved more easily on this picture. Considering a sentence like “The table is not black,” an *anvītābhīdhāna-vādin* will need to recognize a difference between one’s coming to know the table as not black and its actually being, for instance, red. If the table were not actually red, or some other non-black color, one could not know the table

¹⁹⁹ Raju, P.T., ‘The Reality of Negation’, *The Philosophical Review*, 50 (1941), p. 585.

as ‘not black.’ This suggests that ontologically, there is only existence, and that negative sentences make sense as derivative of existent entities.

It is clear that, straightforwardly, the realist position is far less intuitively plausible than the nominalist position on negative existentials. For this reason, the objection may go, it should be conceded that Haribhadra’s assumption that language tracks reality is at worst false, and at best controversial.

There is a further point to be made against Haribhadra’s assumption, too. Namely, since it is generally conceded that existence is not a property, even positive existential assertions do not track reality isomorphically. That is, existence is not uncontroversially a first-order property.

This point helps to clarify the problem of negation. Presumably, one must have a stance on whether existence (*sat*) can be a property (*dharma*) of a thing (*dharmin*) before one takes a stance on whether nonexistence (*asat*) can be a property. Then there are the further questions of whether existence is distinct from either essence (*svabhāva*) or appearance (*pratibhāsa*).

Basically, since it does not make sense to speak of things as having properties without presupposing that things exist, it makes no sense to speak of existence (or non-existence) as a first-order property of things. The Fregean and Russellian solution to this is the most widely known, and suggests that positive and negative existentials refer not to specific properties, but to the instantiation or non-instantiation of properties in general.

Because of the controversiality of the problem of negation as well as the treatment of existence as a predicate, it is unwise to assume that the linguistic structures of our

descriptions of the world do not reflect actual ontological structures, and therefore unwise to accept Haribhadra's thesis.

Fortunately, Haribhadra is able to avoid the major reasons for the implausibility of either taking negatives as reflecting reality or of rejecting existence as a predicate. This is because, firstly, Haribhadra's understanding of the reality of negation addresses a significant issue with the framing of the problem of negation. Secondly, Haribhadra's belief that all things both exist and do not exist avoids the problems encountered by otherwise admitting existence as a predicate.

Regarding the problem of negation, Bossche claims that the Jains are *abhihitānvaya-vādins*, or realists about word meaning, and suggests that this explains their insistence upon treating negations as *positive* predications of negative properties.²⁰⁰ However, it is important to note that Jain philosophers such as Haribhadra are distinct from other realists about language in that, as Upadhyaya points out, linguistic realists of the Indian tradition *typically* divided the world into two ontological categories: existence (*bhāva*) and non-existence (*abhāva*). Buddhists and others, who accepted an equivalence between existence (*bhāva* or *sattva*) and reality (*tathatā* or *sattva*), found no place for absence (*abhāva*) or nonexistence (*asattva*) in their ontological scheme, and thus made no such division.²⁰¹ Haribhadra and other Jains, however, take a completely unique position here by accepting both existence and nonexistence as co-extensive properties of all things. Not only is there for Haribhadra no division of reality into distinct categories of existence and non-existence, but there is also here an acceptance of both existence and

²⁰⁰ Bossche, *op. cit.*, p. 440.

²⁰¹ Upadhyaya, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

nonexistence as genuine properties of things! In this way, he presents a solution to the problem of negation on the basis of uniquely held assumptions.

P.T. Raju has captured this uniqueness while speaking more generally of the Indian tradition in dealing with the problem of negation. Raju considers in detail a certain under-appreciated dimension of the problem of negation. Namely, there is what one might call the problem of ontological differentiation. When one has a cognition such as “The table is not black,” one must also already recognize that the table is some non-black color (or range of non-black colors) such as red. Red, then, is a reality upon which and with respect to which negative descriptions of the color of the table are directed. The predicate ‘non-black’ relies upon the actual property ‘red.’ Yet, Raju points out, the actual property ‘red’ could not be a reality if were not really distinct from black. But, in order to be distinct from black, red must really be non-black! It must, in other words, constitutionally exclude black. Unlike the initial cognition of a non-black table, the ontological dimension of red’s being ‘non-black’ has no deeper reality to which it can refer. Thus, while the table’s being non-black in our understanding seems derived from the table’s being red in reality, its being red in reality seems dependent upon a mutually necessary reality of red’s being non-black. Since this paradoxically suggests that not-black is a positive characteristic of red, the functionalist approach is in need of reconsideration.²⁰² A close consideration of precisely this is the hallmark of Haribhadra’s responses to objections in the first section of AJP.

²⁰² Raju, *op. cit.*, pp. 586-587.

Regarding the status of ‘existence’ as a predicate, Haribhadra’s belief that all things both exist and do not exist avoids the problems encountered by the above consideration of the issue. The above consideration assumes two things. First, it assumes that existence and non-existence cannot overlap in terms of the objects they qualify. Second, it assumes that either some things exist or that all things exist. Now, if one accepts the first horn of this dilemma — that only some things exist — it must be the case that there are things which do not exist. This is would then encounter the problem of negation, but is sometimes thought to be a resolution to such issues (cf. Meinongianism). If one accepts the second horn of this dilemma — that all things exist — nothing does not exist. This gives rise to some trouble explaining the meaning of non-existence claims. The Russellian solution is to treat existence as a higher-order property which refers to the instantiation of first-order properties. The Meinongian solution and the Russellian solution commonly assume that existence and non-existence cannot overlap with respect to the objects they qualify. This is precisely where Haribhadra’s analysis can avoid their direct objections.

Haribhadra accepts the disjunction: it is true that either some things exist or all things exist. However, he rejects the assumption that nothing which is existent is also nonexistent. In rejecting this assumption, he is able to entertain the possibility that existence and non-existence are genuine first-order properties of *all* things. This amounts to a Jain rejection of the *aikāntika* position that all things absolutely exist, in favor of the *anaikāntika* position that *somehow* all things are existent, and *somehow* all things are non-existent. This allows him, further, to accept that existence is neither the different nor

non-different from reality. All things possess existence, and all things also possess non-existence. A real (*dharmin*), therefore, is an intermixture of existence through its own form and of nonexistence via other forms.

Thus, since Haribhadra can respond tentatively to each point in the above objection. Thus one cannot reject, on grounds of general controversiality, Haribhadra's account.

There remains another potentially disastrous objection to Haribhadra's thesis, and it involves not his presuppositions, but a doctrinal consequence of his defense of *anekāntavāda*. His defense of the doctrine leads to a pragmatic recommendation, common to Jain philosophers. Namely that all assertions be qualified by the indeclinable *syāt*. However, this seems to constitute a relativizing hedge. Above it was claimed that such hedges are incompatible with philosophical discourse. Therefore, Haribhadra's claim, his view, is non-philosophical and cannot constitute a coherent resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

To make such an objection would be to confuse and conflate a personally relativizing hedge in a *reason* with a recommendation to adopt relativizing hedges as a consequence of a *conclusion*. What makes hedging an anti-philosophical discursive practice is not simply that it relativizes, but that it relativizes *reasons* to an inaccessibly private space. Such an act makes philosophical dialogue impossible since no interlocutor can share such reasons. However, the pragmatic hedge '*syāt*' does no such thing. It is a pragmatic recommendation made on the basis of conclusions reached through publicly accessible, non-hedged, philosophical reasons. Thus, to accuse Haribhadra of being non-

philosophical on the basis of his conclusion is, ironically, to refuse to treat his arguments philosophically.

3.2.4 Summary

So it has been demonstrated that Haribhadra does indeed present a potential response to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. His doctrine of non-absolutism purports to not engender disagreement on two counts. First, it reveals that opposites are in fact compatible with reference to experience. Second, it diagnoses disagreements as juxtapositions of mistakenly absolutized, but actually partial, truths.

The first point is accomplished in the first section of the AJP, where Haribhadra's skillful description of an object of existent and nonexistent form. Opposites, here, are shown to intermix in the case of the properties of existence and nonexistence. This was shown to apply quite analogously to the notion of a philosophical view which is an intermixture of interest and disinterest. This description, however, attracted two related objections. One objection is that negations are not positively representative of an ontological picture. Another objection makes the more fundamental point that existence and non-existence are not properties. Both these objections are not applicable to Haribhadra in the way that they are applicable to other philosophers. This is because he does not share the common assumption that existence and nonexistence cannot overlap in any intelligible sense with respect to the objects they qualify.

The second point, that disagreements are juxtapositions of mistakenly absolutist views, is reached by a uniquely Jain use of *reductio ad absurdum* proof. Opposites, it was argued, only constitute disagreements if falsely absolutized! This was also shown to

readily apply in the case of paradoxically interested and disinterested views. This attracted an obvious objection related to the justification of the Paradox itself, namely that since it recommends that one relativized one's claims with the hedge "syāī" or "in a *certain* sense" or "somehow," it is non-philosophical. After all, it was claimed in defense of the notion that philosophical views are disinterested that this is because they rely on claims which resist the temptation to utilize relativizing, and therefore reason-privatizing, hedges. This objection conflates, however, the relativization of reasons with the recommendation that one relativize reasons as a conclusion to a philosophical argument. The Jain position recommends the latter form of hedging.

It is in this two-fold manner that Haribhadra is able to offer a uniquely Jain solution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

3.3 Haribhadra accepts the conclusion of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement

The first premise of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement was that, "Disinterestedness is a necessary condition of universalizability-aspiring views." The second premise of the Paradox was that, "Interestedness is a necessary condition of disagreement-engendering views."

The third was that "Philosophical views are disagreement-engendering and universalizability-aspiring." The third, in turn, led to the conclusion that, "Paradoxically, both interestedness and disinterestedness are necessary conditions of philosophical views."

In the AJP, Haribhadra can be seen to offer two distinct approaches to resolving the tension between such incompatible characteristics asserted of the same locus. Each approach can be thought of as together scrutinizing and rejecting each conjunct of the conclusion, leading to a qualified version of the conclusion itself.

The first approach is unique, and best represents Haribhadra's uniquely sophisticated defense of this Jain method of non-absolutism. This approach involves a close scrutiny of our experience of an object such that we realize there can be no unqualified assertion of some characteristic thereof. When one asserts, "The pot exists," one must also admit "The pot does not exist." One characteristic straightforwardly entails its opposite. The second approach is not unique to Haribhadra, but is still compelling and interesting in the context of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. The second approach is to use indirect proof to demonstrate that for any disagreement among two logically opposite absolutisms, the appropriate resolution is to reduce these to simultaneously true, non-absolutist assertions. When one asserts, "The pot absolutely exists," the absurdities involved lead to indirect proof of the claim that "Somehow, the pot does not exist." When one asserts, "The pot absolutely does not exist," the absurdities involved lead to indirect proof of the claim that, "Somehow, the pot does exist." Thus, the non-absolutist position is that "Somehow, the pot both exists and does not exist."

CHAPTER 4 Gadamer's Resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement

4.1 Introduction

The Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement, it has been shown thus far, can be resolved in unique ways by evidentialists, dialectical refutationalists (*vāda-vaitaṇḍikas*), and non-absolutists (*anekāntavādins*). In this chapter, it will be demonstrated that philosophical hermeneuts, too — i.e., philosophers of interpretation in the European philosophical tradition — have the resources for a resolution to the Paradox. They have the resources, in particular, to provide a counterexample to the notion that a view, in order to aspire properly to universalizability, must be disinterested. This, in a way, also serves to resolve the tension that was identified in philosophical discourse between interestedness and disinterestedness.

The most prominent figure in modern European philosophical hermeneutics is German thinker Hans-Georg Gadamer. He is, in this capacity, another source of potential insight when seeking resolutions to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. His thought on philosophical hermeneutics suggests that it is *because of our interestedness* that we can authentically aspire to universalizability at all. One's idiosyncratic experiences and cultural inheritances constitute a framework of interpretive prejudice, for Gadamer. Such prejudice — a kind of interestedness — is a necessary and productive part of our interpretations of texts and the words of others. Without such prejudice, there could be no interpretive aspiration to mutual understanding, and thus there could be no aspiration to universalizability. In this chapter, this connection between interestedness

and aspirations to universalizability in Gadamer's work will be developed and defended as a resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

4.1.1 Gadamer and disagreement

Just as with Nāgārjuna and Haribhadra, the justification for including a study of Gadamer within this project is that, both generally and specifically speaking, Gadamer has something to contribute to a philosophy of disagreement. He is dialogue-oriented, inspired by cross-cultural philosophy, deferent to otherness, and concerned with the proper understanding of understanding. For these reasons, one might suspect that Gadamer will likewise have something to contribute to attempts to resolve the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

4.1.2 Gadamer's hermeneutics and disagreement

Gadamer is a contributor to any discourse on disagreement primarily because he has something important to say about *agreement*. He does not often write directly about disagreement.

Take, for instance, Gadamer's understanding of philosophical hermeneutics or, loosely put, the philosophy of interpretation. Gadamer writes: "Hermeneutics is the art of agreement [(*Verständigung*)],"²⁰³ His use of the German *Verständigung* here commits him to a notion of understanding as agreement. The term suggests understanding in the sense of *coming to agree* with what one has interpreted, in the sense of a successful compromise or negotiation.

²⁰³ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Reply to My Critics," in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: from Ast to Ricoeur*, Ormiston, Gayle L. and Alan D. Schrift, eds. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 273.

However, on a certain common understanding of understanding, one can understand and, in the same sense, disagree. Since one of the primary tasks of hermeneutics is to offer up a proper understanding of understanding, this common understanding presents itself as a competing conception. Thus, *prima facie*, the notion that understanding in the sense of coming to agree with what one has interpreted (*Verständigung*) must be the goal of hermeneutics will seem false to many. Gadamer, can respond that this common understanding of understanding which allows both understanding and disagreement is superficial and secondary. This is not to say, however, that there is *no* primary sense in which one can understand yet disagree, but simply that the common sense in which one might make this claim is hermeneutically secondary, relying as it does upon an overly historical or psychological method of interpretation. Any rejection of Gadamer on account of his sense of understanding as agreement would thus mistakenly take him to be naive on the point that we can sometimes understand and yet disagree.

Any understanding of understanding which assumes that genuine understanding can be achieved by interpreting something in terms of historical or psychological causes presupposes that the words interpreted do not primarily make any claim about a common world shared between interpreter and interpreted.²⁰⁴ But if this is not assumed, then how could understanding take place? In moving the object of interpretation from the words of a speaker to the subject matter of the words, Gadamer makes hermeneutics a dialogical practice in which psychological and historical effects are at play, of course, in the

²⁰⁴ Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd edn (New York: Continuum, 2012), p. 294.

dialogue, yet are not assumed to be the very explanation of the words used in that dialogue. Since it is acknowledged openly and forcefully by Gadamer that all speakers involved in a conversation speak from a prejudiced and interested foundation, to explain their views away *as interested* would be to explain one's own views away *as such* as well. For example, to the extent that my political opponent's views do not matter to me in public discourse because I associate them with her personal or cultural history, to that same extent those of my views which can be readily associated with my enculturation and personal history are deemed irrelevant to public discourse, too. The problem is that interestedness thus cannot be a distinguishing feature for ruling out the legitimacy of any particular view, since it is common to all views. Thus, appeals to the historical and psychological causes of another's view which would allow one to claim that one understands and yet disagrees in same sense support only the derivative, and according to Gadamer, hermeneutically insufficient and incomplete sense of "understanding."

To put the definition back in Gadamerian terms, hermeneutics is necessarily dialogical in that it is open to the truth of the interpreted. The dialogue which emerges reveals that conversation is "the process of agreement [*(Verständigung)*]"²⁰⁵ in the sense of coming to agree with the interpreted. It thus makes sense that hermeneutics is, for Gadamer, the art of agreement. In responding to what is seen as a naive conception of understanding which allows for only a derivative sense of "understanding yet

²⁰⁵ Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 2nd Edition, (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1965), p. 363. "Gespräch ist der Vorgang der Verständigung." My translation.

disagreeing," Gadamer's very understanding of understanding carries with it a response to and account of the general value of disagreement.

It is in Gadamer's *magnum opus*, in particular, that one can find an elaboration of the concepts relevant to reconstructing this built-in account of disagreement in general into a resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. *Truth and Method* is a massive work of scholarship, written in a spiraling and meandering style. The strategy throughout is to reveal, through a text-historical account of understandings of understanding, presuppositions and subsequently to take up their natural revisions in the same work moving forward. The work itself is divided into two main portions, and has many famous passages. For the purposes of this study, only the sections on 'true conversation' and 'consciousness of the history of effect' will be considered in detail as they relate to the central concept of 'fusion of horizons' and as they contribute to a resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

4.1.3 Summary

Given Gadamer's understanding of agreement, it is clear that his work will have unique implications for a philosophical account of disagreement. Even more interesting for the present work is his work in *Truth and Method*, where a detailed account of authentic conversation and the notion of 'consciousness of the history of effect' provide the conceptual foundation for a unique, hermeneutic solution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

This chapter will draw upon the sections of *Truth and Method* in which Gadamer examines these concepts in order to explain how these might inform an alternative resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

4.2 What does Gadamer have to say about the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement?

Resolution of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement can be achieved through a challenge to any part of any of the premises, or perhaps through acceptance of the conclusion. Since, as mentioned above, Gadamer is being targeted as potentially harboring an objection to the first premise, it is worth examining in detail how such an objection would have to look.

The first premise of the Paradox states that any view which aspires to universalizability is necessarily disinterested. As pointed out in the first chapter, the negation of this statement is logically equivalent to the claim that there is at least one view which is both universalizability-aspiring and interested.

There are two relatively obvious ways in which the metaphors and concepts at play in Gadamer's work may be thought to support this alternative. The first is that, according to Gadamer, it is quite obvious that in any consciousness — hermeneutically-trained or otherwise — interests are *necessarily* conditions of the possibility of interpretation. All views are necessarily interested, for Gadamer. The second is that, according to Gadamer, a consciousness which is "hermeneutically-trained" may intelligibly aspire to universalizability in that such a consciousness is a foundation for the possibility of achieving, through dialogue, whatever could possibly be meant by a

“common diction and a common dictum.” So one obvious account of a Gadamerian solution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement is to say that a conversation among hermeneutically-trained consciousnesses or between such a consciousness and a text, though *necessarily* interested, can yet intelligibly aspire to universalizability (though the aspiration need not be equal to the achievement).

4.2.1 For Gadamer, consciousness of the history of effect (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) reveals interest in all views

The first route to this resolution to the Paradox begins with Gadamer’s philosophical considerations concerning the nature of understanding. Given that there is a certain circularity to the notion that one’s interpretation is ultimately correct given that one can always acquire new information, Gadamer is led to consider the significance of temporal distance in securing a kind of reliability in interpretation. One question, for example, is whether the fact that an interpretation holds up over time makes it a more reliable account. Such considerations lead him to introduce ‘consciousness of the history of effect’ (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*).²⁰⁶ Gadamer is with this concept attending to the extent to which any literary work sends ripples of interpretive prejudice throughout the future. Literary works do this in light of their subsequent commentaries and interpretations, which in turn influence each other and their surrounding linguistic contexts, and which together form the context of the interpreter and the interpreted. In this sense any interpreter’s temporal distance from the interpreted inevitably plays a role, along with the author's original intended meaning and audience, in the co-determination

²⁰⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 291-299

of the meaning of a text.²⁰⁷ For example, the meaning of Nāgārjuna’s “Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way,” though undoubtedly with an original intended audience and meaning, is always co-determined by the personal and cultural historical situation of the interpreter because that interpreter’s presuppositions, part of her own experience and tradition, form an inseparable and necessary part of her hermeneutic situation. This is to say, an interpreter’s interestedness is an inescapable factor contributing to her interpretation.

Because of this, a consciousness adequate to the task of understanding a text or interlocutor truly must take account of “the reality and efficacy of history within understanding itself.”²⁰⁸ This reality and efficacy Gadamer terms the “history of effect” (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). This special term is one which Gadamer then broadens in the sense that it comes to describe a fact about the language in which we communicate, a fact about our very consciousness. That fact is that our consciousness is historically effected; it is a “historically effected consciousness” (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*). A properly attuned consciousness, furthermore, is one that is closely attentive to the history of effect, and only such a consciousness can properly and authentically aspire to universalizability.

In this sense, in *Truth and Method* the concept of “history of effect” (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) is elevated to the status of a principle.²⁰⁹ From it, important conceptual elements of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics can be derived. The

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.* Gadamer himself refers to it as such.

consciousness of the history of effect is the most central of those elements. It is also the most immediate consequence of the aforementioned principle. History — both in the sense of one’s personal, idiosyncratic history and in the sense of one’s enculturated preconceptions and inheritances — determines in advance one’s prejudices and, thereby, the things one considers important and unimportant in any act of understanding. To note the importance of “history of effect” is to acknowledge urgent and obvious need to become conscious of and attentive to this hermeneutical situation in any event of understanding, conscious of and attentive to the fact that *interests* — broadly speaking — constitute the interpretive background of one’s views.

Gadamer explains that such consciousness is absent in those conversations and inquiries where we factor the horizon of the author or speaker (the psychological makeup and intentions of the speaker) or the historical horizon of a text (its original context and intended meaning or audience) into our interpretation. The criticism he levels against any such approach is a strong one:

In both cases, the person understanding has, as it were, stopped trying to reach an agreement. He himself cannot be reached. By factoring the other person’s standpoint into what he is claiming to say, we are making our own standpoint safely unattainable.²¹⁰

The task of a genuine philosophical hermeneutics is not exegesis alone. It is not to clarify cases of understanding *why* certain things have been spoken or written or to clarify the original context of a text or utterance. Rather, it is to clarify those cases in which we understand *that* something is spoken about and *what* that thing is. Therein lies the connection between the task of hermeneutics and the consciousness of the history of

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

effect: the latter consciousness keeps one attuned to what is potentially true in the text or the words of a speaker.

It may seem counterintuitive to suggest that an acknowledgement of one's own prejudicial basis for interpretation — one's horizon, in Gadamerian terminology — should lead one to *avoid* factoring that basis and that of a text or interlocutor into one's interpretation. The point to bear in mind, for Gadamer, is that avoiding factoring horizons into one's interpretation is a function of one's aspiration to understand the text or speaker in a way that is universalizable and thus sharable by both interpreter and interpreted. One aspires, in a true conversation or a genuine interpretation, to what Gadamer terms a 'fusion of horizons' (*Horizontverschmelzung*). Fusion of horizons is the achievement of a shared understanding. This achievement involves the expansion of one's own horizon of understanding into a hermeneutic space shared by one's interlocutor. It is a kind of reciprocal and expanded access to a common subject matter whose very being necessarily includes one's own understanding.²¹¹ In this achievement, horizons overlap, but they do not, of course, become one. One does not, therefore, elide the interpretive effect of different horizons in a genuine conversation. Rather, one allows horizons to engage in mutual dialogue so that they may achieve a common understanding. This common understanding is one which, though an agreement, *broadens* each horizon and always also insurmountably tinged with idiosyncratic personal and cultural histories from within each horizon. Thus, in a very real but distinct sense — in the sense that one's idiosyncrasies *add* to any interpretation one has — understanding as agreement is always

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

also disagreement. In this more technical and less derivative sense, then, one can of course understand (in Gadamer's sense of understanding as agreement) and also disagree (in the sense that one of course retains some constitutive, private prejudices and interests in any interpretation).

Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, insofar as it exalts the archetype of a questioner whose questions are always meant, and insofar as this archetype emphasizes the ordinary miracle of understanding in which interlocutors come to refer to the world in some common way, is focused specifically on the positive effects of cultivating a sustained awareness of one's hermeneutic situation, one's awareness of the fact that one's views are always already interested. Since this consciousness is at the same time interpretively concerned to come to agreement with a text or a person in a 'fusion of horizons', the clarification of its moments – finitude, orientation toward experience (*Erfahrung*), acknowledgment of interests, etc. – becomes a significant part of the task of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

4.2.2 For Gadamer, true conversation is universalizability-aspiring though interested

Having articulated the interpretive background for consciousness of the history of effect, Gadamer, applies this understanding to the complexities of dialogue.²¹² In order to understand another person in conversation, he argues, one must be open to the possibility her words being true. He compares inauthentic conversation to a public examination or a doctor's visit, because often the questions asked in such conversations are merely

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 299 - 306.

intended to come to know the specific horizon of the student or patient. Pedagogical questions, too, are examples of inauthentic questions, since in them questioner is not seeking to know more than whether the horizon of the student contains a particular, expected interpretation. The problem with all of these forms is thus that in adopting a *method* of inquiry or in taking for granted a certain type of answer, true conversation is prevented. By recognizing itself as an inheritor of a certain historical or traditional set of prejudices and realizing this fact as fundamental, a hermeneutically-trained consciousness will not make any attempt to hide this fact through method or pre-conceived answers or to highlight this fact in another in an attempt to prohibit the other's claim to truth. Rather, it will, in conversation, put its own prejudices at risk.

While all interpreters are necessarily interested, and some interpreters seek universalizability by hiding or bracketing this fact via the employment of method or a focus on the horizon of the other, interpreters who have an appropriate consciousness of the history of effects (i.e. of their own additive interestedness and how that interestedness is always already at play in any interpretation) may intelligibly aspire to universalizability in philosophical conversation.

In this section it will thus be argued that the goal of true conversation, as with hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, is agreement. Specifically, the goal is coming to an agreement with the interpreted. Further, it is claimed that this sense of agreement and orientation is consistent with what is referred to in the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement as an aspiration to universalizability.

Here is an attempt to put this insight into non-Gadamerian terms. If one thinks of agreement as sameness of reference, then agreement can never occur. Whether with another person in conversation, with a text in interpretation, or with an original expression in translation, such sameness is steeped in difficulties. For two important reasons, such a formula for agreement breaks down in practice. The first reason is that all interpretations are additive. Since every conscious state is affected by, largely an effect of, an idiosyncratic history, one cannot reconstruct a cognitive experience without the added difference that this reconstruction remains one's own. There is always this indiscernible difference between apparently agreeing views or interpretations. This difference prevents an interpreter from conclusively affirming her agreement with anything, and it even prevents her from agreeing with herself on different occasions! The second reason is that human experience is finite, always delimited by an idiosyncratic linguistic horizon as well as the horizon of time. Human finitude cautions that any apparent sameness of reference is always also not-yet-discerned difference of reference. These two aspects of our interpretive situation render agreement problematic so long as it is conceived of as sameness of reference.

A reader familiar with the hermeneutic thought of Gadamer as well as earlier hermeneutic thinker Friedrich Ernst Schleiermacher will notice that these ordinary insights correspond, respectively, to the former's claim that an interpreter is always carried along into each interpretation in virtue of her being a "historically effected consciousness" and the latter's insistence that the task of interpretation is infinite by way of his emphasis on the avoidance of misunderstanding. Perhaps, as Jean Grondin has

suggested, each of these insights follows from an elaboration of “historically effected consciousness” alone. Regarding the hermeneutic significance of this notion, Grondin writes,

On the one hand, it means that present-day consciousness is itself shaped – indeed, constituted – by history... On the other hand, the concept suggests that becoming conscious of being so effected is a task always still to be undertaken.²¹³

One’s inherited and acquired prejudices and preferences constitute one’s interpretive being. While it is possible to acknowledge this fact, the ubiquity of it renders the final attainment of an objective view impossible. Thus one can never be sure, in an apparent agreement, that misunderstanding has really dissolved. Our task is infinite, as Schleiermacher insisted, in virtue of the fact that “we want to trace a past and future that stretch into infinity.”²¹⁴ So one can perhaps put the point more strongly: despite appearances to the contrary, agreement as sameness of reference can never be reached. While the downside of these insights is thus a rejection of the possibility of agreement conceived as sameness of reference, the upside is that they recommend a revised formula. In other words, if agreement is to be possible, any earnest description of how this is so must accommodate the modesties recommended by Gadamer’s hermeneutic of finitude and historically constituted human consciousness. Put yet another way, if one is to intelligibly aspire to universalizability, one must accommodate these modesties.

While Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics incorporates these modesties with respect to agreement, it also suggests as pointed out above understanding itself involves

²¹³ Grondin, Jean. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Joel Weinsheimer, trans. (New Haven, 1994), p. 114.

²¹⁴ Schleiermacher, Friedrich Ernst. “The Compendium of 1819,” in *The Hermeneutic Tradition from Ast to Ricoeur*. Ormiston, Gayle L. and Alan D. Schrift, eds. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), p. 112.

agreement. In no uncertain terms, Gadamer claims that “Hermeneutics is the art of agreement [(*Verständigung*)],”²¹⁵ and that “Conversation is the process of agreement [(*Verständigung*)].”²¹⁶ Yet, as pointed out above, the association of this inquiry into the nature of understanding and the “art of agreement” remains a controversial point, and it cannot be made without qualification.²¹⁷ In what follows that association will be qualified in even more detail through a reading of “*Verständigung*” — the process of coming to an agreement — in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*.²¹⁸ After exploring some linguistic resonances of the German “*Verständigung*” in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, this section goes on to solidify an understanding of Gadamer’s notion of true conversation as it relates to both “coming to an agreement” (*Verständigung*) and aspirations to universalizability.

Verständigung, with no straightforward equivalent in English, bears an acknowledgement of the finite and additive nature of interpretation. Again, this is the term which Gadamer uses when he claims that hermeneutics is the art of agreement and that conversation is the process of agreement. Further, in its denotation of both agreement and understanding, it promises to shed more light on the connection Gadamer draws

²¹⁵ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Reply to My Critics,” p. 273.

²¹⁶ Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 363. “*Gespräch ist der Vorgang der Verständigung*.” My translation.

²¹⁷ Grondin, Jean. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*. Kathryn Plant, trans. (Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), p. 57. Davey, Nicholas. *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), p. 5. Grondin makes this point about qualification with respect to the counterintuitive association of the claims, while Davey, to that effect, stresses the importance of difference in addition to sameness as sustaining aspects of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics.

²¹⁸ The question of the association of understanding and agreement is at play in the Derrida-Gadamer encounter as well as the debate between Gadamer and Habermas on the ability of hermeneutics to maintain a critical moment. This reading avoids these debates in favor of an exploration of *Verständigung* as relevant to clarifying this connection.

between each. To this end, some exploration of the term's appearance in the German is necessary.

In the now standard translation by Weinsheimer and Marshall of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, variations on the English "agreement" occur with some frequency.

"Agreeing," "agreement" and "to agree" occur in similar contexts, often adjacent to key philosophical terms. This may lead a reader to suspect that these English renderings transpose a single German term and modifications of it. It also may lead a reader to believe, after an initial reading, that whatever this single term may be, it must have a technical significance for Gadamer.

Upon examining the German, however, one finds that this is not the case.

"Agreement" and its relatives are offered as translations of at least five different German words – *Verständigung*, *Einverständnis*, *Vereinbarung*, *Verständnis*, and *übereinkommen*.

Each of these has a distinct meaning and semantic field. *Verständigung* again means loosely "coming to an agreement" as in the case of a legal compromise. *Einverständnis* means loosely "consent" or "assent." A *geheimes Einverständnis*, or "secret assent," for instance, is the legal phrase equivalent to "collusion." *Vereinbarung* indicates "stipulative agreement" in the sense that definitions might be offered in a contract.

Verständnis means "understanding" in the most common English sense of the term.

Übereinkommen means "agreement" in the most common English sense of the term.

There is good reason for *Verständigung* to be rendered "coming to an understanding" more often than "coming to an agreement," despite the fact that it also suggests a kind of agreement. For one, the English "agreement" is neither

interchangeable with nor obviously entailed by “understanding,” and so rendering *Verständigung* consistently as “agreement” would appear in English to elide its relation, both etymologically and semantically, to “understanding.” Moreover, one can straightforwardly translate the German “*übereinkommen*” as “to agree,” while “understanding” approximates a number of distinct German terms, but especially *Verständnis*. It is necessary, then, given that *Verständigung* is often used in close proximity in the text with other words denoting either “agreement” or “understanding,” to grant some contextual variance to its renderings as the translators have done.²¹⁹

The other terms help to construct a clearer sense of this more significant one. In one instance, Gadamer employs “*übereinkommen*” to explain, with reference to Aristotle, that in a true language community people do not agree on what language to use before using it. Rather, they have “always already reached an agreement” (*[Sie sind] immer schon übereingekommen*)²²⁰ in that regard. This primary kind of agreement about a language is an always presupposed, abiding and tacit consensus. It is presupposed, rather than stipulated, in every conversation for the conversation to be possible at all. On the basis of such a presupposition, the process of coming to an agreement (conversation) is rendered possible. There is, at the end of this process, an aspiration to universalizability.

Coming to an agreement, to put it another way, is possible precisely when language is *not* stipulated. If a stipulative agreement about which language to use were necessary for any agreement to occur, then that stipulative agreement would itself need to

²¹⁹ For a succinct account of the relationship between understanding and agreement, see Weinsheimer and Marshall’s translator’s preface, to the 2nd edition of their translation of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. xvi.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

be made in a previously stipulated language. This language, too, would require a previously stipulated language in which to be agreed upon, *ad infinitum*. Without the always already presupposed agreement upon a common language that is the very condition of conversation, Gadamer suggests, that very process of coming to an agreement could not get off the ground.

In another place, Gadamer goes so far as to distinguish more and less hermeneutically fundamental forms of coming to an agreement:

Coming to an agreement [*Verständigung*] about a language is not the proper case of coming to an agreement [*Verständigung*], but the special case of agreeing [*Vereinbarung*] about an instrument, a system of signs which does not have its being in dialogue but rather serves as a means to convey information.²²¹

This passage suggests that *Vereinbarung* is the kind of instrumental agreement one might associate with a legal contract, and that *Verständigung*, with all its communicative connotations, is hermeneutically primary.

Artificial languages, Gadamer has argued, are derivative in the same way that historical and psychological understanding (which enable us to “understand and disagree”) are derivative of true understanding. Of course, an artificial language can be stipulatively and in that sense perfectly agreed upon, but language in general cannot be. Agreeing about an artificial language is *not* an instance of agreement proper since all such agreements presuppose an always-already-agreed-upon (*immer schon übereingekommen*) language. Fundamentally, language is not a tool or an instrument in

²²¹ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 423. “*Verständigung über eine Sprache ist nicht der eigentliche Fall einer Verständigung, sondern der Sonderfall einer Vereinbarung über ein Instrument, ein Zeichensystem, das nicht im Gespräch sein Sein hat, sondern als Mittel zu Informationszwecken dient.*” My translation.

the process of understanding. Rather, it is the medium in which this process occurs.²²²

Stipulative language inserts an artificial and hermeneutically problematic distance between the interpreted and the interpreter, feigning objectivity by obscuring the additive nature of all interpretation — i.e., obscuring the insight that, “*Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event.*”²²³ Any stipulative agreement, or *Vereinbarung*, about language use obscures this fact, and in doing so obscures a more primary sense of agreement.

In doing so, a stipulatively agreed-upon language also makes incoherent, rather than coherent, legitimate aspirations to universalizability in conversation, since aspirations to universalizability have to be aspirations to what is truly common. One cannot aspire to understand a common world by *obscuring* the private and idiosyncratic basis of understanding unless that private basis is inessential. Since Gadamer claims to have shown, however, that such a basis is essential, only through allowing one’s idiosyncrasies and presuppositions to be put at risk by *avoiding* stipulation can one truly aspire to universalizability.

The proper case of coming to an agreement — *Verständigung* — is the hermeneutically primary basis, process, and goal of coming to understanding and agreement in opposition to derivative, stipulative forms. It is precisely this that enables conversation to aspire to universalizability.

In this context, Gadamer argues that one is hermeneutically impelled to seek the rightness of the other or the text in any interpretation or conversation, and that in

²²² Gadamer. *Truth and Method*, p. 385.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

consequence one is impelled to seek agreement with the other. When this agreement (*Verständigung*) is not achieved, neither is understanding. It follows from this that if understanding is achieved, to that extent agreement is also. Thus, in the connection between conversation and *Verständigung* the association of understanding and agreement comes into focus, too.

In fact, after Gadamer claims that “Conversation *is* a process of coming to an understanding,”²²⁴ he continues:

Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual, but what he says. What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of his opinion, so that we can be at one with each other on the subject. Thus we do not relate the other's opinion to him but to our own opinions and views.²²⁵

There are two key points regarding *Verständigung* to be gleaned from this passage. First, Gadamer has made the revisionary claim that the fulfillment of the process of *Verständigung* requires that one accept the viewpoint of the other, that one entertain the other's expression as proceeding from a legitimate point of view or at least seek to find the “substantive rightness” of the other. Second, Gadamer suggests that the goal of conversation is the achievement of agreement, not merely understanding, regarding a shared subject matter.

The first point – that coming to an understanding requires that one treat the other person's opinions as valid – is a critically important part of any true conversation, but it is not obvious why it should be true. After all, some views seem too alien to warrant any

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 387. Emphasis mine.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 387. *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 363.

postulate of legitimacy. As Grondin points out, however, “[Gadamer] wishes to take issue with the notion that to understand is to reconstruct, in a *disinterested* fashion, the meaning of the text according to its author (*mens auctoris*).”²²⁶ Understanding cannot be a mere reconstruction of a previous cognitive event, since “Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well.”²²⁷ The meaning of a text, because that meaning is dialogical, always goes beyond its author in the sense that interpretations of that text are inevitably tinged with new significance due to the prejudicial horizons of new interpreters. The fact that one’s horizon provides a *unique* basis for one’s understanding means that what a text means does not depend solely on the horizon of the author.

All this does not mean that true conversation lacks an aspiration to universalizable construction. Rather, it means that despite the most earnest intentions, any interpretation is always called outside of itself as time passes or as it is renewed because of its constitutive interests — i.e., because of “the reality and efficacy of history within understanding” — and because understanding is a fusion of separate horizons rather than the achievement of a single common horizon. That is, any true aspiration to universalizability is always already outrun by the universalizable meaning itself, upon which every moment of history adds some meaning and to which each horizon involved relates distinctly. It is partly in this revision of the interpretive task and partly in his

²²⁶ Grondin, Jean. “Gadamer’s *Basic Understanding of Understanding*” in *Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Robert J. Dostal, ed., pp. 36-51. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 40. My italics.

²²⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 296.

critique of the “will to method” that Gadamer’s reasons for postulating the legitimacy of the views of the other become hermeneutically clear. Gadamer’s critique of method and reconstruction in interpretation has a parallel critique of the practice of conversation.

Yet another bridge from Gadamer’s critique of method to his hermeneutic of conversation is his distinction between the orientation of the “experienced person” and the self-certainty of the dogmatist:

The hermeneutical consciousness culminates not in methodological sureness of itself, but in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man from the man captivated by dogma.²²⁸

“Readiness for experience,” of course, characterizes hermeneutic consciousness.

“Experience,” or *Erfahrung*, is associated with encountering the unfamiliar. The experienced person openly faces the unfamiliar with this same readiness, while the dogmatic person is someone who, in contrast, is not ready for new experience in certain ways. In the extreme case, a dogmatic person is someone who denies his historical nature by taking the familiar to be somehow independent of the unfamiliar. Remaining closed to new experience, then, is tantamount to neglecting the hermeneutic truth that “we are always already affected by history,”²²⁹ and that prejudices are constitutive of our being:

Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*²³⁰

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

One way to show why the view of the other must be sought as substantively right, is to show that prejudice is wrongly characterized and must be “rehabilitated,” for the judging subject is not the self-sufficient source of its own authority.

The extreme case of dogmatism that Gadamer is quick to reject is the self-referential one, embodied in the Enlightenment’s “prejudice against prejudice.” Quite literally, a person with this prejudice has no “consciousness of the history of effect.” Dogmatism, then, can be epistemic or dispositional. Epistemically, it is characterized by a denial that one needs prejudices – as in the Enlightenment extremes. Dispositionally, dogmatism is characterized by an unwillingness to put one’s prejudices at risk in a situation of interpretation.

This conception of a conversationally debilitating kind of dogmatism — an unwillingness to put one’s own prejudices at risk — extends Gadamer’s criticism of method back to conversation, to its conditions and its goals. While Gadamer does set his sights on Enlightenment thinking in order to rehabilitate two necessary sources of prejudices – authority and tradition – he is also concerned to point out the illusion of objectivity that one is inclined toward in the dismissal of others in actual conversational practice.

Gadamer insists, “we must place ourselves in the other situation in order to understand it.”²³¹ He emphasizes that it is not the individual that one wants to understand, but her view. Excessive concern with the individuality of the other in these cases cannot lead to a proper understanding since there is nothing being commonly sought.²³² This

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 387.

conversational reductionism is an “expression...of an inability to face the risks of dialogical exposure.”²³³ One has to put one’s interests at risk by juxtaposing one’s views with those of the other with regard to a common subject matter in order to truly converse.

This leads to another point, also mentioned above: the pinnacle achievement of a genuine conversation is agreement, not merely understanding. In conversation, partners seek to agree with each other on a subject matter,²³⁴ they aspire to some sort of universalizability beyond their own world-pictures. Beyond the mere *potential* of “universalizability,” Gadamer is actually optimistic about the results of such a process:

If this happens mutually, and each of the partners, while simultaneously holding onto his own arguments, weighs the counterarguments, it is finally possible to achieve – in an imperceptible but not arbitrary reciprocal translation of the other’s position (we call this an exchange of views) – a common diction and a common dictum.²³⁵

It is hard to render “common diction and common dictum” as anything other than an agreement, as the result of an aspiration to universalizability. Nonetheless, such agreement is of course hermeneutically qualified. The process of coming to an understanding (*Verständigung*) is to result in a shared meaning, and this shared meaning, while a proper case of understanding, is also a proper case of agreement though necessarily interested from each interpreter’s side!

For Gadamer, then, it is necessary to postulate the substantive rightness of the other on hermeneutic grounds. Only when such a conjecture is present will a true conversation commence. It is clear that the end of this process of conversation is the

²³³ Davey, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

²³⁴ Grondin, “Gadamer’s Basic Understanding of Understanding,” pp. 40-41.

²³⁵ Gadamer, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

achievement of shared meaning with respect to a shared subject matter — i.e., agreement.

Taking this association of understanding and agreement even further, Gadamer claims that if one fails to agree, one fails to understand:

If a person fails to understand what the other person is really saying, he will not be able to fit what he has misunderstood into the range of his own various expectations of meaning.²³⁶

and elsewhere,

The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed.²³⁷

Another way to put it, as Gadamer famously does, is that an interpretation is correct when it disappears into the text.²³⁸ Until and unless an interpretation has done so, understanding has not been achieved. Further, transposing the point that if one does not agree, one does not understand, it follows with the same qualifications that if one comes to understand, one comes to agree. This is a point captured nicely by the meaning of *Verständigung*. One can say that *Verständigung* is thus of central importance to Gadamer's project, both as a proper case of agreement and as a proper case of understanding. Gadamer explains this with a reflexive verbal relative of *Verständigung*:

In most cases, people understand each other immediately, and accordingly they make themselves understood (*verständigen sich*) to the end of achieving mutual agreement.²³⁹

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

²³⁹ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 168. “[*Die Menschen verstehen einander*] zumeist unmittelbar, bzw. *Sie verständigen sich bis zur Erzielung des Einverständnisses.*” My translation.

In other words, the process of coming to agreement in conversation proceeds from a background of tacit agreement and it seeks to establish further agreement.

The first premise of the Paradox, again, was that disinterestedness is a necessary condition of views which aspire to universalizability. To reject this claim is to assert that there a view can aspire to universalizability despite being constitutively interested.

Gadamer's account of true conversation asserts that, indeed, it is only by way of a background of constitutive interests that one can aspire to universalizability in the sense of shared understanding in the first place. By rejecting the third premise in this way, Gadamer's account also explains away the tension apparent in philosophical discourse between interestedness and disinterestedness.

4.2.3 Objections and Replies

Since all agreement is understanding, according to Gadamer, to agree is (as to understand) also to produce something new. If pursued properly, agreement is the event of production in both speakers that is precisely the newly found legitimacy of a shared articulation in the event of conversational understanding. Interpreted in this way, the claim that understanding at all aspires to universalizability sounds much less problematic than it otherwise would.

It is worth noting, though, that this view generates some strange implications. Primarily, it implies that without misunderstanding disagreement cannot really occur. Grondin notes that a superficial reading might take Gadamer to be implying that to understand any text is to agree with it, as if disagreement or objection were impossible,

that, “understanding necessarily means to be in agreement with what is understood.”²⁴⁰ As Grondin admits elsewhere, though, the kind of historical and psychological understanding required to both “understand” and not agree is, to Gadamer, hermeneutically secondary.²⁴¹ Such a reading, then, only seems superficial in that it sounds patently false outside of a Gadamerian hermeneutic context.

There are, of course, texts and people with whom one will disagree, but this disagreement occurs in virtue emphasizing the alienness of the hermeneutic horizons of those texts and people. Such an emphasis rules out mutual understanding from the start. One only tends to disagree, Gadamer’s understanding of understanding suggests, when one in this way neglects to put oneself at risk in true conversation. Disagreement can be said to occur only when one wrongly distances oneself from the thing understood, although to be clear this does not at all guarantee that agreement will occur. It is not surprising, either, that when one seriously approaches the views of another with a mind to understanding those views as legitimate articulations of a shared world, the completion of the process either necessarily results in agreement with those views or in the frustration of one’s attempt to understand. A failed attempt to understand, in the end, is not disagreement except in a trivial sense. This lack of fulfillment of the interpretive task is actually a result of misunderstanding or failure of understanding. In other words, Gadamer allows that one can understand and disagree only if one refuses to put oneself at risk by means of a historical or psychological reading. If one puts oneself at risk and still cannot come to an agreement, one does not understand and thus cannot disagree. Coming

²⁴⁰Grondin, Jean. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, p. 57.

²⁴¹ Grondin, “*Gadamer’s Basic Understanding of Understanding*,” p. 41.

to an understanding is, again, coming to an agreement about something as a result of interested aspiration to universalizability.

So, while embeddedness in a linguistic and historical context reveals that admitting a not-yet-discerned difference of reference is necessary to accommodate the epistemic modesty required by human finitude that was mentioned above, treating agreements as also involving indiscernible differences of reference is necessary to accommodate the additive nature of interpretation. Neither of these modesties are sufficient, however, to guarantee agreement. Agreement and understanding are only *sought* through the aspiration to universalizability — engagement in and toward the proper case of agreement — that is the path and result of the process of *Verständigung*.

One can also imagine another major objection being raised to Gadamer's resolution here. One may object to the very compatibility of aspirations to universalizability with interestedness. If the response to this objection is, as it must be, to point out the tentativeness of the type of universalizability to which Gadamerian hermeneutics aspires, then a follow-up objection will of course be that the basis of this tentativeness introduces a vicious relativism into philosophical hermeneutics which contradicts such aspirations. Specifically, the impermanence or the tentativeness of agreement according to hermeneutics rests in the linguisticity of our world constitution. If worlds are linguistically constituted, however, they will be inevitably ideological and this introduces a vicious relativism into the hermeneutical picture, a relativism incompatible with aspirations to universalizability.

Gadamer addresses this ideological objection in his second supplement to *Truth and Method*, arguing essentially that the nature of our linguistic worlds is that of an infinite interior dialogue of the soul with itself and an anticipation of dialogue with others which may lead to a socialized set of universals.²⁴² These universals, though socialized conventions which in that sense carry with them an ideology, are accompanied by this infinite internal dialogue which carries with it a spontaneous readiness to come to renewed agreements with ourselves and others.²⁴³ While this may not seem non-relativistic, neither is it relativistic in the vicious Whorfian sense.

4.2.4 Summary

Thus, according to Gadamer, hermeneutically trained consciousness is necessarily interested as a result of consciousness of effective history. Yet this same consciousness can intelligibly claim to have universalizability-aspiring views in the context of true conversation or interpretation because pursuit of the universal in acknowledgement of interest is far more coherent than the pursuit of the universal which eschews interest.

4.3 Gadamer Rejects the First Premise of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement

This brings us back, then, to the main event. The first premise of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement is, “Disinterestedness is a necessary condition of universalizability-aspiring views.” For Gadamer, because interests are put at risk in any true conversation, and any true conversation aspires to universalizability, there are at least some views which can be said to be both interested and universalizability-aspiring. By de

²⁴² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 547.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 548.

Morgan's Law, this is equivalent to claiming that there are at least some views for which it is not the case that they are neither interested nor universalizability-aspiring. This converts to the claim that it is not the case that for any view, that view is either disinterested or not-universalizability aspiring. This further converts, conveniently (and more intelligibly), to the claim that it is not the case that for any view, if the view is universalizability aspiring, it is disinterested. That is to say, not all universalizability-aspiring views are disinterested views. Thus, Gadamer's sense of the pervasiveness of interest and the goals of true conversation constitute a direct rejection of the first premise of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

CHAPTER 5 Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

Beginning with widely recognized premises about the nature of philosophical disagreement, this project has shown that at the very basis of current philosophical discourse lies a tension between interest and disinterest. If the extreme of objectivity and disinterestedness is juxtaposed with the equally pressing demand of relativism and interestedness of views, a contradiction is produced. This contradiction between interestedness and disinterestedness is uniquely problematic in philosophical discourse. This is because philosophers, on the one hand, follow an “imperative to seek the unassailable”²⁴⁴ or a “will to universality”²⁴⁵ — I have termed this an “aspiration to universalizability.” On the other hand, philosophers must inevitably take part in an inherited tradition of language and literature which is decidedly *not* shared universally and which is constitutive of tentative but necessary cross-cultural and cross-traditional incommensurabilities and disagreements — I have labeled this characteristic of philosophical views “disagreement-engendering.” Philosophical views, in virtue of their aspirations to universalizability and engendering of disagreement, are paradoxically both interested and disinterested.

This paradoxical tension, which I have termed the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement, was formalized in the opening chapter as follows:

²⁴⁴ Olberding, Amy, ‘It’s Not Them, It’s You: A Case Study Concerning the Exclusion of Non-Western Philosophy’, *Comparative Philosophy*, 6 (2015), p. 27n.

²⁴⁵ Ganeri, Jonardon, *Why Philosophy Needs Sanskrit, Now More than Ever*, 2017, p. 12.

1. Disinterestedness is a necessary condition of universalizability-aspiring views.
2. Interestedness is a necessary condition of disagreement-engendering views.
3. Philosophical views are disagreement-engendering and universalizability-aspiring.

Therefore, paradoxically, both interestedness and disinterestedness are necessary conditions of philosophical views.

As with any argument arranged in this manner, the weight of this paradox can be lifted by rejecting one or more of the premises, or by explaining why the conclusion is acceptable after all. In chapters 1 thru 4, it was shown how the Paradox is resolvable in unique ways by at least four types of philosophers who have engaged in controversy about controversy: evidentialists, dialectical refutationists (*vāda-vaitaṇḍikas*), non-absolutists (*anekāntavādins*), and philosophical hermeneuts.

Evidentialists were shown to resolve the Paradox by rejecting the second premise. That is, they reject the the notion that a view must be constitutively interested if it is to meaningfully engender disagreement. This is because evidence alone, on the evidentialist view, is sufficient to form the justificatory basis for a view. Dialectical refutationists were shown to resolve the paradox by rejecting the third premise. That is, they insist that a philosophical view need neither engender disagreement nor aspire to universalizability. This is supported by their articulation of how disagreement and universalizability are achieved or sought on the basis of an unwarranted presupposition that things have discrete essences. Non-absolutists were shown to resolve the paradox by accepting the conclusion. They employ a method for rejecting absolutisms which, when applied to the claim that philosophical views are both interested and disinterested, produces the qualified acceptance of this claim with the philosophically justified hedge that *somehow*,

philosophical views are both interested and disinterested. This acceptance is in light of the possibility that logical opposites may be co-extensive in the same locus, and that their contradictory absolutisms are straightforwardly false. Philosophical hermeneuts, finally, were shown to resolve the paradox by rejecting the first premise. They not only reject the notion that in aspiring to universalizability a philosophical view must be disinterested, but they also attempt to articulate a counterexample to this by articulating how all views might be seen as interested and how, through authentic conversation, one might nonetheless aspire to universalizability.

To sum up, philosophical hermeneuts reject the first premise, evidentialists reject the second, dialectical refutationists reject the third, and non-absolutists accept the conclusion of the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. Thus, Gadamer, contemporary epistemologists, Nāgārjuna, and Haribhadra are made surprisingly appropriate parties to the same debate. This final chapter reflects upon the wider significance of the connection established here among these seemingly incommensurable thinkers.

5.2 Philosophical authority and the Paradox

The ambition of this project — an intention to open up a contemporary conversation about *disagreement* in its philosophical relevance to global and historical philosophical insights — connects with controversy about the appropriate scope (historical, cultural, and stylistic) of philosophical discourse. As Jay Garfield and Bryan van Norden have argued in their 2016 New York Times op-ed, given what is actually taught in North America, many a “Philosophy Department” should change its name to the “Department

of European and American Philosophy."²⁴⁶ The controversiality of that position can be linked to philosophical orthodoxy surrounding what is often referred to as ‘western philosophy’ and its often exclusionary assumptions.

This controversy is about what can and cannot, should and should not be considered philosophical, and its participants have articulated and challenged otherwise tacit ethnic, racial, and gender boundaries in what passes for the orthodox philosophical tradition in North America. In their provocative claim that this tradition often does not amount to much more than intellectually charitable area studies, Garfield and van Norden make the question of philosophical curriculum appropriately a question about whose voices are worthy of an earnest ear when considering some of humanity’s most speculative and perplexing questions.

Along with these scholars, Olberding, Smith, and others are at pains to point out that philosophy departments in the United States are notoriously narrow in *cultural* scope. This traditional narrowness betrays some dubious assumptions regarding philosophical authority. Justin E. H. Smith has put this in the following way:

On the terms on which the academic discipline is currently defined, there can be no dialogue of equals *across* traditions, since the perception reigns that it is only the other member of the attempted dialogue who belongs to a tradition at all, and that this is intrinsically an inferior form of engagement with ideas.²⁴⁷

Authority, in the orthodox view, is secured by a non-traditional, objective approach. And if the anglo-American tradition adopts primarily a universalist, tradition-abandoning self-

²⁴⁶ Garfield, Jay L., and Bryan van Norden, ‘If Philosophy Won’t Diversify, Let’s Call It What It Really Is’, *New York Times*, 11 May 2016. Accessed 22 August 2017.

²⁴⁷ Smith, Justin E H, ‘Tradition, Culture, and the Problem of Inclusion in Philosophy’, *Comparative Philosophy*, 6 (2015), p. 2.

conception and takes it as a default characteristic of non-anglo-American philosophies that they have *traditional peculiarities*, then to call them philosophies at all will be oxymoronic, and to engage them in conversation would only ever pass as less than philosophical.

Amy Olberding has captured the utter absurdity of this demand that cross-cultural interlocutors be both philosophical and traditional: “Show us something we have not seen before, but be sure it looks well and truly familiar to us too.”²⁴⁸ The detrimental effects of this awkward demand are not merely inter-cultural. To demand that interlocutors be both surprisingly different and comfortably the same will stifle engagement with the non-academically trained public, with thinkers throughout history, and with diverse inter- and intra-cultural avenues of intellectual speculation. It is no surprise, then, that philosophical scholarship rarely attracts public scrutiny, it tends toward a history-effacing style, and it often relegates cross-cultural, decolonial, gender-sensitive, and literary discourse (among other types) to non-philosophical speculation.

As irksome as it may seem to those who reject this sort of reasoning, this kind of exclusion is not a uniquely anglo-American analytic tendency. One needs only to look to the off-the-record rejections, out of hand, of the significance of the anglo-American tradition by philosophers in the continental tradition in order to understand that exclusion and philosophical universalism go hand-in-hand.

With this problem in mind, the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement has been an attempt to avoid the assumption that philosophy is non-traditional and hence merely

²⁴⁸ Olberding, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

disinterested. It has likewise been an attempt to avoid taking the opposite for granted, that philosophical views must be traditional and hence interested. Rather, by accepting the orthodox proposal that philosophical discourse adopts a disinterested aspiration and at the same time accepting contemporary calls to acknowledge the fact that all philosophical discourse is constitutively interested, the Paradox accommodates this controversy about controversy by *taking both sides seriously*. Philosophical discourse does operate upon constitutive prejudices — i.e. with interest. Philosophical discourse does also engage with an eye toward articulating a public, shared world — i.e. with disinterest. This sets up a controversy regarding who can genuinely speak about that shared world given that all voices are prejudiced in one way or another. Hence, questions about philosophical authority are ultimately those which set the foundation for the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

5.3 Lessons from Nāgārjuna, Haribhadra, and Gadamer

The question of philosophical authority is in a sense opened up, in this inquiry, through the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement. This framing of the tension between interestedness and disinterestedness provided an opportunity to reflect upon where various philosophers might fall in relation to the subsequent paradox. In considering the ideas of Nāgārjuna, Haribhadra, and Gadamer, it was shown that there is a wide range of defensible foundations from which one can articulate a response to this paradox. Each of those foundations demonstrated a distinct mode in which to make sense of and in which to accommodate widespread disagreement in philosophical discourse. In this section, the lessons of these thinkers in this respect will be revisited.

In his autobiography, Gadamer recollects that an encounter with only sub-par scholarship on the wisdom of non-European philosophical traditions was sufficient to relativize his thinking.²⁴⁹ This led to his characterization of the philosophical genre as a forever-tentative pursuit of enlightenment: “Philosophy is enlightenment, but precisely also enlightenment with regard to its own dogmatism.”²⁵⁰

It is this anti-dogmatism that is the common thread of the three assumptions drawn out by the philosophers considered above in chapters 2 thru 4. Of course, the positions of Nāgārjuna, Haribhadra, and Gadamer have their share of detractors. Yet each also offers a plausible basis for understanding this tension. Each offers a basis which transcends the narrow confines of epistemic peership by extending the parameters of disagreement’s significance beyond those of philosophical orthodoxy. Each also in its own very distinct way resolves the tension between interest and disinterest with which we began.

Within the larger debate within comparative philosophy, it is worth pointing out that the examples covered make clear that the conceptual foundations one sets for discourse delimit the range of voices with which one is willing to communicate. “Epistemic peership,” for instance, is a concept the dimensions of which make permit relevance to only a certain range of philosophical disagreements and voices, for only those with comparable evidence and training can be epistemic peers and only from those whose peership status is self-evident will disagreement be problematic. “Emptiness” is a

²⁴⁹ Gadamer, Hans-georg, ‘Autobiographical Reflections’, in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, ed. by Richard E. Palmer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 6.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

concept which eliminates the possibility of disagreement by refusing to assent to any position in the first place. “Non-absolutism” allows logical opposites to be co-extensive in the same locus and consequently permits opposing sides of any true disagreement to remain partially true. Earnest voices are illegitimate only to the extent that they absolutize their claims. “Consciousness of the history of effect,” as another example, is a notion which notes as constitutive the meaning of the interpreted for an interpreter, and thus challenges one to focus on the subject matter in question in a disagreement, rather than the background of the speaker or the original context of the text. This makes anyone a potentially relevant voice in a disagreement.

Thus, each philosophical approach that has been explored offers some insight into the dogmas of philosophical traditions as well as those of current philosophical orthodoxy regarding philosophical disagreement. Each of the philosophers explored offers a resolution to the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement.

5.4 The Paradox as a comparative philosophical tool

Thus, while it is neither the best nor indeed the only philosophical tool by means of which one might explore beyond the confines of what constitutes philosophical orthodoxy in one’s tradition, the Paradox of Philosophical Disagreement is a tool for comparative philosophical exploration.

Any philosophical expression will take for granted some interpretation of or resolution to the problem posed here. Insofar as one can be shown to respond to it, the paradox establishes a common-coordinate system which as such guarantees the partial commensurability of one’s convictions about the boundaries of philosophical discourse

with those of otherwise ignored modes of and voices in philosophical discourse. Thus, it is a tool for comparative philosophical inquiry.

In this project, the Paradox has been utilized as just such a comparative philosophical tool. In challenging the circularity of orthodox appeals to authority in philosophical discourse, it opened up a common ground upon which thinkers with vast foundational differences can nonetheless speak on a common issue. The work of contemporary authors on disagreement as well as Nāgārjuna, Haribhadra, and Gadamer have provided case studies for the usefulness of this Paradox.

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