The Cessation of Sensory Experience and *Prajñāpāramitā* Philosophy

Jayarava ATTWOOD

Jayarava ATTWOOD is an independent Buddhist scholar based in the United Kingdom, with no academic positions or affiliations. He has been a member of the Triratna Buddhist Order since 2005. Since 2012, Jayarava's research has been focused on the history, philology, and hermeneutics of the *Heart Sutra*. This project has produced fourteen peer-reviewed articles since 2015 (appearing in *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, *Pacific World*, *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies*, *Buddhist Studies Review*, *Asian Literature and Translation*, and *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*). Jayarava has led the field in testing and ultimately demonstrating Jan Nattier's thesis that the *Heart Sutra* was composed in Chinese. Jayarava has been highly critical of Edward Conze as editor, translator, and exegete, arguing that he consistently misrepresented *Prajñāpāramitā*. Jayarava's writing has a strongly revisionist flavour and contributes to an emerging new paradigm of *Prajñāpāramitā* hermeneutics that is more focussed on epistemology.
Email: jayarava@gmail.com

International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture Vol.32. No.1 (June 2022): 111–148

https://doi.org/10.16893/IJBTC.2022.06.32.1.111

The day of submission: 2022.3.13.
Completion of review: 2022.5.12.
Final decision for acceptance: 2022.6.20.

Abstract

Received traditions of Prajñāpāramitā *interpretation embrace a hermeneutic in which truth and falsehood are one and the same. This philosophy has deep roots in Indian Buddhism, and it gained prominence in Europe and her colonies through the writings of D. T. Suzuki and his devotee, Edward Conze. It is relatively easy to show that the "contradictions" that form the main axiom of their reading are the result of misunderstanding the texts they relied on. Having done this I discuss a new way of understanding* Prajñāpāramitā *which shifts the emphasis towards an epistemological reading along the lines of Sue Hamilton's epistemic approach to Pāli texts. I show how* Prajñāpāramitā *makes sense in relation to a particular type of meditation practice that aimed to bring about the cessation of sensory experience leaving the meditator in a state of contentless awareness which early Buddhists called* suññatāvihāra, *"dwelling in [the] absence [of sensory experience]."*

Key words: *prajñāpāramitā*, *śūnyatā*, cessation, contradiction, epistemology, hermeneutics

Introduction

The emergence of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, around the beginning of the Common Era, is generally acknowledged to be a very important development for Buddhism. A *Prajñāpāramitā* text—in the form of a birch bark manuscript carbon-dated to ca. 74 CE (with a two sigma range of 47–147 CE)—is one of the oldest extant Buddhist documents (Falk 2011). *Prajñāpāramitā* texts began to appear at a fecund time in history when Buddhism was evolving beyond its historical origins. At about the same time, the first Pure Land sutras were composed, invoking visions of Buddhas from alternate realities. Abhidharma was being transformed from a way of organising ideas about Buddhism, into a distinctive approach to Buddhist soteriology. Early twentieth-century scholarship played up the discontinuities between *Prajñāpāramitā* and mainstream Buddhism, but this trend has begun to reverse, e.g. "This suggests that the [first *Prajñāpāramitā* sutra] was composed within a community very much in contact with the literary conventions, stories, and even worldview of the earlier literature" (Fronsdal 2014, 103). This continuity between *Prajñāpāramitā* and mainstream Buddhism and concomitant discontinuity with *Madhyamaka* is also a central thesis of Huifeng's book *Old School Emptiness* (2016).

Despite being so important to Mahāyāna Buddhism, and despite some revisions to how we see Mahāyāna,[1] the hermeneutics of *Prajñāpāramitā* is largely a monoculture based on early twentieth-century scholarship; itself largely based on unreliable nineteenth-century editions. Progress has been slow and this situation has not been helped by the recent deaths of Karashima Seishi and Stefano Zacchetti, both of whom made important contributions to *Prajñāpāramitā* studies. Some notable recent contributions to reimagining *Prajñāpāramitā* include Joseph Walser's revisionist project—*Genealogies of Mahāyāna* (2018). This clearly has affinities with my project although, I confess, I find his reasoning very difficult to follow. *Old School Emptiness* (Huifeng 2016) is perhaps the most thorough study of early *Prajñāpāramitā* ideas that we have, but is not widely available. Paul Harrison's (2006) work on the *Vajracchedikā* is vitally important; but, again, only available to date in an obscure Norwegian monograph series. Finally, Nattier's (1992) sorely neglected article on the Chinese origins of the *Heart Sutra* is widely available, but seemingly not taken seriously by mainstream scholars.[2]

The received tradition is that the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature is principally concerned with something called "wisdom" and that it uses contradiction as the means of communicating this. For example, Edward Conze asserts, "In a bold and direct manner the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* explicitly proclaim the identity of contradictory opposites, and they make no attempt to mitigate their paradoxes" (1953, 126). Such views—what we may call "Conze-isms"—are still widely read and uncritically cited, often accompanied by sycophantic praise of Conze. Conze largely escaped critical attention from his peers during his life and there has been no systematic review of his work since his death in 1979. And yet, Conze constantly made mistakes in Sanskrit and was noted by Griffiths (1981) as a leading exponent of Buddhist Hybrid English translations. We *can* do better.

In this essay, I try to expand the critique of Conze-ism initiated in Attwood (2020a), which showed that Conze's worldview was characterised by magical thinking and misanthropy. Here, I try to show that Conze's views were settled before he began to work on *Prajñāpāramitā* and *did not change* as a result of his encounter with that literature. I outline work by Paul Harrison and Matthew Orsborn (aka Huifeng), which shows that Conze was simply incorrect on the role of contradictions in *Prajñāpāramitā*; the contradictions in question are largely artefacts of poor editing and/or poor translating. I note that Conze's perverse approach to logic is not found in early Buddhist literature, which instead makes "common sense" use of logical principles. This sets the stage for offering an alternative hermeneutic, which foregrounds epistemic issues, thus avoiding the mystical metaphysics of Conze-ism and the disastrous philosophical consequences of repudiating the principle of noncontradiction.

My approach is eclectic and multidisciplinary. There is always scope for pluralism in Buddhism. Other readings may well be possible and even preferable; it's just that Conze-ism is not amongst them.

Critiquing Conze-ism

Conze's anti-science/pro-magic stance was evident in his published works *before* he began to study *Prajñāpāramitā* (e.g. Conze 1934, 1935, and 1937). Notably in his aborted *Habilitationsschrift—Der Satz vom Widerspruch: Zur Theorie des Dialektischen Materialismus* (1932)[3]—Conze had already rejected

Aristotle's principle of noncontradiction. His thesis was that logic is merely a social construct and, therefore, not universal. It is not that the principle of noncontradiction, along with all logic, is refuted in this way. Rather it is reconstrued as a matter of opinion. In his exegesis of *Prajñāpāramitā*, Conze takes this a little further, adopting the view that contradictory statements are all true. This is neatly summed up in Conze's (1958, 84) adaptation of a formula he derived from the writings of D. T. Suzuki, i.e. *A is not-A*. Conze comments:

> Logical asserting and denying cannot be regarded as ultimately valid operations where true reality is concerned… The identity of Yes and No is the secret of emptiness. (Conze 1958, 84)

Suzuki called this the "logic of is/not" (Jp. *sokuhi* 即非).[4] This effectively means that all propositions are true since it holds that P is true *and* ¬P is true. In European intellectual traditions, this is called *trivialism*. When all propositions are true, then "true" and "false" are indistinguishable. Conze's version of trivialism is frequently cited uncritically. We find it as a given in, for example, David Loy's (1988, 5–6) introduction to nonduality, and in Paul Williams' (1989) textbook *Mahāyāna Buddhism*. Avicenna (aka Ibn Sina, the eleventh-century Persian polymath) and I are of one mind in responding to those who deny the law of noncontradiction:

> The obdurate one must be subjected to the conflagration of fire, since 'fire' and 'not fire' are one. Pain must be inflicted on him through beating, since 'pain' and 'no pain' are one. And he must be denied food and drink, since eating and drinking and the abstention from both are one and the same. (Avicenna [1027] 2005, 43)

Conze's argument about logic is not found in any Buddhist text as far as I can see. Notably, the view is not found in early Buddhism. On the contrary, Kulatissa Jayatilleke (1963), in his monumental study of early Buddhist epistemology, observes that in the *Niganṭha Nātaputta Sutta* (SN 41:8), "we come very close to a formal statement of the principle of Non-Contradiction" (1963, 224). In the text, Nātaputto asks Citto if he has faith in the Buddha's teaching that "there is a samādhi without thought and examination, in which

thought and examination have ceased."[5] When Citto replies that he does not have faith, Nātaputto praises him as "straight, honest, and sincere" (*ujuko*, *asaṭho*, and *amāyāvī*).[6] However, when Citto further points out that he does not need faith because he has experienced the samādhi in question for himself, Nātaputto changes his mind and calls Citto "crooked, dishonest, and insincere" (*anujuko*, *saṭho*, and *māyāvī*). Citto points out that the two statements cannot both be true:

> "Sir, if the former is true, then the latter is false. If, however, the former is false, the latter is true."[7]

Rather than being a "statement" of the principle of noncontradiction, what we have here is an argument that *assumes* the principle of noncontradiction. This is not quite the same thing, though the fact that the principle of noncontradiction was assumed to be valid in early Buddhist literature is relevant. Similarly, in the *Kāḷaka Sutta* (AN IV 24), the Buddha points out that he knows "whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognised, reached, sought after, examined by the mind."[8] The statement boils down to "I know that" (*tam ahaṃ jānāmi*). The Buddha goes on, "Were I to say 'I don't know that,' I would be lying."[9] He continues, "If I were to say both I know and I don't know this would also be a lie. If I were to say that I neither know nor don't know this would be a catastrophe (*kali*)."[10] The Buddha *knows this* and thus to state "he knows" *is a true statement* (a correspondence theory of truth?). Any statement contrary to this, is *false* (*musā*; Skt *mṛṣā*) or catastrophic (*kali*). The distinction between true and false appears to be crucial to early Buddhist thought.

The treatment of logic in the Pāli suttas is very far from systematic or formalised. Still, it seems clear that early Buddhists broadly accepted what we Euro-centrically think of as "Aristotelian logic." Logical principles enunciated by Aristotle, such as noncontradiction, the excluded middle, and double negation, are all routinely *applied* in arguments in Pāli texts. Early Buddhists relied on what we could call a "common sense" approach to logic and they appear to treat logic as self-evident. In addition, Richard H. Jones (2010, 153), perhaps the most underrated living Nāgārjuna scholar, notes that "Many of Nāgārjuna's arguments proceed on the basis that X and not-X are mutually exclusive and that there is no 3rd possibility... e.g. MMK 8.7":

Kārakaḥsadasadbhūtaḥ sadasat kurute na tat
Parasparaviruddhaṃ hi sac cāsac caikataḥ kutaḥ (MMK 8.7)

> An agent that is both real and unreal does not bring about an object that is both real and unreal.
> For how can the real and the unreal, which are mutually contradictory, be one? (MMK 8.7; Siderits and Katsura 2013, 93–94)[11]

The fact that X and not-X are "mutually exclusive" is, as above, an argument that assumes the law of noncontradiction. Moreover, the exclusion of a third possibility is also a statement of the excluded middle. Jones (2018, 45), who has translated the entire Nāgārjuna corpus (Jones 2010) states this even more unequivocally: "Nāgārjuna does not violate any of the usual laws of logic and his use of logic is very evident in all his texts." Goran Kardaš (2015, 36) confirms: "it is now generally agreed upon, [Nāgārjuna] does not violate any fundamental law of reasoning (or classical logic)." Leading Mādhyamika apologists—Yasuo Deguchi, Jay L. Garfield, and Graham Priest—admit that "after the arrival of the Buddhist logicians Dignāga and Dharmakīrti who explicitly endorsed the law of noncontradiction, Indian and Tibetan Mādhyamikas stressed never accepting contradictions" (2013, 427; cited in Jones 2018, 42). Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest argue—seemingly against Nāgārjuna—for the acceptance of some contradictions, a position for which Priest coined the term *dialetheism* (which is just Sanskrit *dvisatya* "two truths" translated into Ancient Greek). It follows that "[the dialetheists] must argue that later Mādhyamikas *misunderstood* Nāgārjuna and indeed that we had to wait until the twenty-first century when paralogicians came along and started applying their ideas to Nāgārjuna for anyone to see the light (Jones 2018, 42). The problem, according to Jones, is that "Nāgārjuna speaks of a conflict of properties, not statements—i.e. he states that something cannot be or have properties x and non-x or that x and non-x cannot be in the same place at the same time." He does not add that this is more or less how Aristotle argues about contradiction viz-à-viz existence, e.g. in the *Metaphysics*:

> This is the most certain of all principles, since it possesses the required definition; for it is impossible for anyone to suppose that the same thing is and is not. (Tredennick 1933, 161–162)

Note that Aristotle does not say that it makes it impossible to *say* contradictory things. We can still state the liar's paradox. It's just that "lie" is not a property of a thing in the way that existence is. In this case, we might ask where the Buddhist obsession with contradiction comes from. Suzuki's repudiation of logic emerged from his (mis)reading of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* (hereafter *Vaj*). Conze followed Suzuki's reading but, as noted, had already independently arrived at a similar conclusion via "dialectical materialism" as a graduate student. The same reading informs the work of Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest (2008) and their critic, Tom Tillemans (2009).

In notes on his new translation of *Vaj*, Paul Harrison (2006, 136–140) showed that Suzuki misread the Sanskrit compounds that are involved in the negations that form the basis of his hermeneutic. To take Harrison's principle example, Conze (1958, 52) translated Section 13c into Buddhist Hybrid English as:

> And that which as a world system was taught by the Tathagata, as a no-system that has been taught by the Tathagata. Therefore it is called a 'world system.' (Harrison 2006, 138)[12]

Suzuki and Conze follow the Chinese translators in treating *lokadhātu* as a *karmadhāraya* compound, i.e. *loka-dhātu* is a kind of *dhātu* as a *blackbird* is a kind of bird. And we treat "bird" as a real category. In the case of *lokadhātu/adhātu*, the Chinese construe this as, "the world system is not a system"; or "...is a non-system"; or "...is no system at all." Note that Conze's "a no-system" is not a possible translation of *adhātu* and makes no sense in English. Tibetan translators and commentators, by contrast, treated these terms as *bahuvrīhi* or adjectival compounds, i.e. *adhātu* "lacks a system" or "there is no system in it" (Harrison 2006, 138). Therefore, the phrase in 13c should be read, "Any world-system there is has been preached by the Realised Ones as systemless. Thus it is called a world system" (Harrison 2006, 138). Having established the correct reading of these kinds of passages, Harrison concludes:

> The [*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*] is not therefore an expression of some kind of mystical paradoxicality, but is rather analogous to the standpoint taken by Nāgārjuna, in asserting that conventional language only makes sense because of the ultimate emptiness of the things it names, embedded as they are in a network of causal relationships. (Harrison 2006, 140)

The point I take away is that *dhātu* used in this way is an abstraction. Just because we can list different types of *dhātu* does not make the abstraction a concrete entity. My sense is that *Vajracchedikā* is arguing (unsystematically) for a species of nominalism, i.e. the view that abstractions (notably including *categories*) are *ideas* about experience, not observer-independent entities in their own right. Curiously, Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest (2008) cite passages from Paul Harrison's (2006) translation of *Vaj* as examples of contradictions but fail to mention that this is the very publication (just cited) in which Harrison repudiates the idea that such statements are contradictory.

From *Vaj* we now move to the *Heart Sutra*, a seventh-century Chinese Buddhist text composed mainly of extracts from Kumārajīva's *Móhē bōrě bōluómì jīng* 《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》 (T no. 223). It was probably translated into Sanskrit before the end of the seventh century and was successfully passed off as an Indian text (Nattier 1992; Attwood 2020b, 2021). In 2014, Matthew Orsborn (writing as Huifeng), showed that *aprāptitvāt* in the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra*—Conze translates, "because of his nonattainmentness"—is a mistranslation of the Chinese term *yǐwúsuǒdégù* 以無所得故 coined by Kumārajīva to convey the Sanskrit *anupalambhayogena* "by the yoga of nonapprehension." This changes the way we read the apparent contradictions in the *Heart Sutra* also. As Orsborn puts it:

> It is our view that this shifts emphasis from an ontological negation of classical lists, i.e. 'there is no X', to an epistemological stance. That is, when the bodhisattva is 'in emptiness', i.e. the contemplative meditation on the emptiness of phenomena, he is 'engaged in the non-apprehension' of these phenomena. (Huifeng 2014, 103)

This result has been almost completely neglected by scholars of *Prajñāpāramitā*, although Joseph Walser also appears to take an epistemic approach when he comments on the message of *Prajñāpāramitā*: "it touts a *state of mind* in which no conceptual identifications are to be made. It is a state of 'non-perception' or 'non-grasping'" (2018, 149. Emphasis added).

Modern Mādhyamikas seem to have a weak grasp of the literature on *Prajñāpāramitā*. For example, Jan Westerhoff (2018) said in an interview:

> Take, for example, the famous passage from the *Heart Sūtra* which asserts

> that "in emptiness there is no matter, no feeling, no notion, no formations, no consciousness… The text goes through all of the major categories postulated as fundamental entities by the early Buddhist systems and *argues that none of them are indeed fundamental, since they are all empty*.

Huifeng (2014) had already shown that this reading could hardly be more wrong. *Rūpa* is not "matter," or any substantive property: *rūpa* is to the eye as *śabda* (sound) is to the ear. Matter in our eyes is not vision, it is a trip to the hospital. Buddhists do not postulate the *skandhas*, *dhātus*, *nidānas*, noble truths, or noble persons as "fundamental entities" and the *Heart Sutra* does not argue that they are all empty. Huifeng (2014) showed that they are *not apprehended* while one is in the state of emptiness (*śūnyatāyām*) arrived at through the yoga of nonapprehension.

Commenting on his translation of the *Rohitassa Sutta* (SN 2:26), Bodhi notes the importance of epistemology in thinking about early Buddhism:

> The world with which the Buddha's teaching is principally concerned is 'the world of experience,' and even the objective world is of interest only to the extent that it serves as that necessary external condition for experience. (Bodhi 2000, 394, n.182).

Moreover, early Buddhist teachings are pragmatic. As Sue Hamilton observes:

> The point of commonality of the teachings is that they are all concerned with how something works: none of them is concerned with what something is, or, indeed, with what it is not. (Hamilton 2000, 21–22)

Given these observations, we have reason to be doubtful about any metaphysically oriented hermeneutic of contradiction; reason enough to reject it as early Buddhists and Nāgārjuna himself did. Therefore, I propose a novel reading of *Prajñāpāramitā* that is principally concerned with epistemology rather than metaphysics or ontology. Having introduced Bodhi's comments on the *Rohitassa Sutta*, let me dwell on what this text is saying and why it demands an epistemic approach. This will inform an epistemic reading of *Prajñāpāramitā* and allows us to better see continuities previously obscured by Conze-ism.

The End of the World

In the *Rohitassa Sutta,* a *devaputta*[13] named Rohitassa asks the Buddha, "Is it possible to know the end of the world by travelling."[14] In this context, the "end of the world" (*lokassa antaṃ*) is associated with not being born, not ageing, not dying, not falling, and not rising (*na jāyati na jīyati na mīyati na cavati na upapajjati*), i.e. the "end of the world" is *nibbāṇa*.

Rohitassa explains that in a former life he had once tried to find this state in the physical world by travelling around (*gamanena*) but that he died along the way without ever reaching his goal. Part of the Buddha's response to Rohitassa is:

> Friend, I say that without having ended the world, there is no end to misery. Indeed, friend, I make known the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the way to the cessation of the world *within this arm-span measure of body*.[15]

A verse at the end of the *sutta* describes the one who has ended the world as *lokantagū*, meaning "one who goes (or has gone) to the world's end" (AN I 62). This term also occurs in the old part of the *Suttanipāta* (Sn 1133) where *lokantagū* is an epithet of the Buddha, the one who has attained *nibbāṇa*. Bodhi's notes on the *Rohitassa Sutta* tell us that this idea is further elucidated in the *Lokantagamana Sutta* or *Discourse on Going to the World's End* (SN 35:116). Here, the Buddha repeats the words from the *Rohitassa Sutta* and leaves Ānanda to elucidate them. Ānanda adds an important clarification about "the world."

> Friend, that by which in the world one is a perceiver of the world (*lokasaññī*) and thinks of the world as one's self (*lokamānī*),[16] this is called 'the world' in the discipline of the noble ones.[17]

He further explains that it is the "eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body" that make one a *lokasaññin* and a *lokamānin*. As we will see this is similar to other epistemic definitions of "the world." At this point, Buddhaghosa's commentary cites the Buddha: "I do not, friend, declare these four truths in (or with respect to) grass and wood, but I declare them only in (or with respect to) this body

of the four great elements."[18] Digitised texts make it easy to show that this passage does not occur in the extant Pāli literature, so we must be cautious about how we use it. Still, the idea expressed in Buddhaghosa's commentary seems consistent with the text he is commenting on.

Several commentators have noted that, in many cases, *loka* is synonymous with *dukkha*. For example, Rupert Gethin (1986, 42), anticipating Bodhi's comments, concluded, "All these expressions [i.e. *dukkha*, *loka*, etc] apparently represent different ways of characterising the given data of experience or conditioned experience." Similarly for Sue Hamilton (2000, 205), "one's experience (*dukkha*), the apparatus of which is one's *khandhas*, is one's world (*loka*)." Hamilton has also elucidated the equation of *dukkha* with conditioned experience: "*dukkha* is not contingent to experience. Rather one cannot have an experience that is not *dukkha*" (2000, 68) and

> *dukkha* is not descriptive of the world *in which* we have our experience: it is not descriptive of everything we *perceive out there* and then react to. Rather *dukkha is* our experience. (2000, 82. Emphasis in the source)[19]

Compare this verse from the *Vajirā Sutta* (SN 5:10):

> For only *dukkha* is produced, persists, and ceases.
> None other than *dukkha* is produced; none other than *dukkha* ceases.[20]

This strongly suggests that dependent arising was seen, at least in some early Buddhist circles, as describing the arising and ceasing of *experience*. *Loka* "world" can be substituted where we expect to see *dukkha* "sensory experience" and vice versa. As we have already seen *loka* is sometimes substituted in the formula of the four noble truths (*ariyasaccāni*). Examples of this are easy to find:

> I declare the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the way leading to the cessation of the world.[21]

And,

> What, monks, is the origin of the world? Eye-cognition arises based on the eye and appearances. The three together are "contact." With contact as condition,

> feeling arises; with feeling as condition, craving arises; with craving as condition, clinging arises; with clinging as condition, birth arises; with birth as condition, ageing, death, remorse, grieving, disappointment, misery, and despair arise. This, monks, is the origin of the world.[22]

In light of such passages, Eviatar Shulman (2008, 307) has asserted, "There is no reason to believe that dependent-origination originally discussed anything but mental conditioning." This seems entirely plausible. In this connection, we may also cite the *Sabba Sutta* (SN 35.23) and related texts. The phrase *idaṃ sarvaṃ* is frequently used in Upaniṣads with the sense of "the world" or "creation." It means "all this," i.e. everything that presents itself to a human observer, the phenomenal world as distinct from the noumenal *brahman*. The *Sabba Sutta* appears to reference this Brahmanical phrase but gives it a new spin: "all this is the eye and appearances, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and tangibles, the mind and mental phenomena."[23] Furthermore, the next sutta (SN 35.24) says these factors of sensory experience are "to be abandoned" (*pahātabbaṃ*).

The sutta following the *Discourse on Going to the World's End,* is the *Discourse on the Cords of Pleasure* (SN 35.117). This incorporates all of the preceding *sutta* within a larger framework. As part of this frame the Buddha recommends:

> Therefore, monks, that stage (*āyatana*) where the eye ceases and perception of appearances ceases should be known… that stage where the tongue ceases and the perception of taste ceases should be known… that state where the mind ceases and perception of phenomena ceases should be known.[24]

Why would anyone want to abandon the world of experience? Why would the cessation of sensory experience be a good thing? In the *Āditta Sutta* (SN 35.28) we learn that "everything is burning" (*sabbaṃ ādittaṃ*). And the definition of *sabba* here is the same as in the *Sabba Sutta*, i.e. it is sensory experience. The *Āditta Sutta* tells us that sensory experience is burning with attraction (*rāga*), aversion (*dosa*), and confusion (*moha*). In other words, it is reactions to sensory experience that fuel karma, which is the engine of rebirth. To achieve *nibbāṇa* and bring the cycle of rebirth to an end, one must end the world in the sense of ending sensory experience.

We are now getting closer to the heart of the matter. According to the

picture in these selected texts, we live immersed in a "world" of sensory experience that arises in dependence on conditions. The conditions are our sense faculties (visual, aural, etc) and their objects (light, sound, etc). And this world must be abandoned to bring about the extinction of rebirth; the cessation of one entails the cessation of the other. It may well be that the world in a more objective sense *also* arises in dependence on conditions, but this idea seems not to have interested early Buddhists. They were trying to *end the world*, so why would it?

In the *Lokāyatika Sutta* (AN 9.38), the Buddha redefines the problem of reaching the end of the world by travelling. Here, "the world" is defined "as the five objects of sensory pleasure" (*pañcime kāmaguṇā*), i.e. "appearances cognised by the eye… sounds cognised by the ear, etc."[25] This is simply another way of talking about sensory experience. The text then begins to enumerate the stages of *jhāna* meditation. But until the last stage, there is a caveat. Some say, for each stage, that the one who attains it has reached the end of the world. In this text, the Buddha disagrees. For each of the four *jhāna* stages and the four *āyatana* stages (sometimes referred to as "higher" *jhānas* or "fifth-to-eighth" *jhānas*), the Buddha comments, "He is also included in the world, he is not yet released from the world."[26] Here *ayaṃ* could be read as "this," referring to the meditative state rather than the meditator. It is only when the meditator goes beyond *jhāna* and *āyatana* that they leave the world (of sensory experience) behind:

> Furthermore, Brahmins, a *bhikkhu* completely transcends the stage of perception and non-perception, and he dwells having attained the cessation of perception and experience. And having seen this with cognition (*paññāya*) his sources of karma are removed.[27] This, Brahmins, I call a *bhikkhu* going to the end of the world, dwelling in the world's end, one who has crossed over desire for the world.[28]

Here, "cessation of sensory experience" is equated to "removing the sources of karma," and both to "the end of the world."

This is a variation of a common theme in Theravāda literature, i.e. that one attains liberation by passing through the levels of *jhāna* and *āyatana* combined into a single scheme. However, we have reason to believe that *jhāna* and *āyatana* were once distinct practices. Some accounts of liberation focus solely on *āyatana*. And amongst these the most apposite is the *Cūḷasuññata*

Sutta (MN 121). This *sutta* is notable because rather than ending the world or dwelling "having attained the cessation of perception and experience" (*saññāvedayitanirodha*) the meditator "dwells in absence" (*suññatāvihāra*). And this term, *suññatāvihāra*, gives us a potential link to *Prajñāpāramitā*: since Pāli *suññatā* is Sanskrit *śūnyatā*.

It is de rigueur to slavishly translate *śūnyatā* as "emptiness" in all cases and to shoehorn this translation into texts whether it makes sense or not. As with most words, this one is used in different ways according to context and sometimes "emptiness" simply does not fit. The history of the word and its uses has been outlined numerous times, e.g. Anālayo (2015), Choong (1999),[29] Huifeng (2014), Yinshun (1985). The adjective *śūnya* is not used as a technical term in Pāli. Rather it simply means "empty," e.g. an empty place (*suññāgāra*) or an empty house (*suññageha*). Here it is synonymous with *ritta* "devoid, empty, free of, rid of" and *tucca* "hollow, vain, deserted." Pāli texts are complicated by the word *suññato* (the ablative case in *-to*, used as indeclinable) which also simply means "empty, devoid, deserted, etc" but this has no Sanskrit counterpart (**śūnyataḥ*). The abstract noun *suññatā* (Skt *śūnyatā*) is used as a technical term in early Buddhist texts and in ways that suggest more continuity than is generally acknowledged. It is used in expressions for meditative states associated with liberation, e.g. Pāli *suññatāvihāra* (Skt. *Śūnyatāsamādhi*; Ch. *kōng sānmèi* 空三昧), which denotes the "absence of craving," or "absence of desire, hatred, and delusion" (Choong 1999, 13). I argue that, at least in the *Cūḷasuññata Sutta*, *suññatāvihāra* denotes the absence of sensory experience, i.e. the end of the world, i.e. *nibbāṇa*. Additionally, *suññatā* is used to denote the *absence of self*, for example in the *Suttanipāta* (Sn 1119), "removing the view of self, see the world as empty" (Choong 1999, 13). The world is empty (*suñño loko*) because it is "empty of self or anything associated with self (*suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā*), which in plain English becomes "the world has no self." It would be a mistake here to take "world" as having a metaphysical sense. As noted above "the world" (*loka*) has a range of senses, but in this context seems to refer to *the world of experience*. This is why, for example, Gethin and Hamilton are able to equate *loka* with *dukkha* and to take both as synonymous with sensory experience. Whatever the etymology of the word—and note that Buddhists were not bound by etymology in defining words (Attwood 2018)—we have to be cognizant of the dictum, deriving from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, that "meaning is use."[30] And these words, including *suñña/śūnya,* are all used to indicate the

absence of something, and very often in the sense of something being absent from sensory experience.

In this context, the solution to the problem of *dukkha* is to reach *the end of the world* which is the same as dwelling in absence following the cessation of sensory experience. How would this work in practice?

Cessation and Dwelling in Emptiness

The *Cūḷasuññata Sutta* (MN 121) is unusual amongst Pāli *suttas* in that it gives fairly detailed instructions on how to do a Buddhist meditation practice. This unnamed practice revolves around a contrast between what is present (*asuñña*) and what is absent (*suñña*) to the meditator. The basic procedure is established using a practical example. The meditator is encouraged to seek out a secluded spot in the forest and there to reflect that, in this spot, the disturbances (*daratha*) caused by the people and animals in the town are absent. Early Buddhists frequently treat sensory experience as "a disturbance." Such disturbance as is present to a person out in the forest is due only to the objects found in the forest and it has a unity (*ekatta*) to it because of this.

Note that the existence of external objects, such as the people and animals in the town, is a *given*. There is no question but that these objects exist, that they are independent of the mind of the meditator, and that such objects are necessary conditions for sensory experiences. It's just that, as Sue Hamilton (2000) pointed out, the focus is on the experience, not on the object. The general concern of the Pāli suttas is epistemic rather than metaphysical.

The initial aim of the *suññatā* meditation practice is to eliminate gross sensory stimulus by physically moving away from the sources of it. This creates favourable conditions for the next phase which is to make subtle sensory experiences disappear from the sensorium through inattention (*amanasikāra*) to the objects of the senses. This approach highlights a special feature of experience. If I stop paying attention to sensory experience, I no longer have an experience of it. It is this quality of experience ceasing in the absence of attention that this meditation seeks to leverage. As we withdraw attention from sensory experience our bodies cease to be perceptual centres. In practice, the instruction becomes rather vague as the stages progress, but in each case by narrowing one's focus, more and more of sensory experience is absent, and

less and less of it is present. In this style of meditation, one uses techniques aimed at withholding attention from sensory experience for prolonged periods, causing it to temporarily cease.

The various practices listed under the heading of *sīla* can be seen in terms of reducing sensory stimulation as preparatory to meditation. These include: restraint (*saṃvara*); guarding the doors of the sense faculties (*indriyesu guttadvāra*); wise attention (*yoniso-manasikāra*); dwelling vigilantly (*appamattassa viharato*); and mindfulness and attentiveness (*sati* and *sampajañña*) (Attwood 2013). These practices seem designed to accustom the practitioner to reduced sensory stimulation as a prelude to diving into the prolonged sensory deprivation of *samādhi*. That a system of morality was developed around some of these ideas is also significant, but for Buddhists, the goal of practice was not good behaviour in any case, because even good karma leads to rebirth. The Buddhist goal was to end rebirth, to end the world, to end misery (*dukkha*), and a key aspect of this was ending karma, both good and bad. Morality in the sense of "doing good" is not irrelevant, but it is not central to the goal of ending the world, which requires "not doing."

In the course of increasing focus, sensory experience is progressively reduced in scope and intensity until one's "world" gradually stops arising. One thereby moves through the *āyatana* stages until one dwells in the final *āyatana*, the stage of neither-perception-nor-nonperception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). This stage too can be transcended (*samatikkamma*) and in other texts, this leads to the cessation of perception and sensation (*saññāvedayitanirodha*). In the *Cūḷasuññata Sutta*, the result is first the *animitta-samādhi*, in which there may still be sensory experience, but there is no sign (*nimitta*) by which one might recognise it (c.f. Anālayo 2015, 140). Going beyond even this rarefied experience, one "dwells in absence" (*suññatāvihāra*), i.e. in the absence of sensory experience.

In the terms established above, the state of *suññatāvihāra* is equivalent to the world's end (*lokassa antaṃ*) where "the world" is the world of experience. Having transcended it through inattention to the last vestiges of sensory experience, "the world" qua sensory experience ceases without concomitant loss of consciousness. In traditional Buddhist terms, sensory experience is explained by the doctrine of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, i.e. in terms of the arising of mental phenomena (*dhammā*), which are cognised by the mind sense (*manas*). When we pay attention to the sensory faculties, the appearance (*rūpa*) of an object may strike our eye (*cakkhu*) and cause an eye-cognition (*cakkhuviññāṇa*) to

arise, according to the formula, "this being that arises" (*imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti*). For this reason, the phenomena of sensory experience are said to be *saṅkhata* or "constructed." But as we withdraw attention from the sensorium, the lack of attention means that *dhammas* (qua objects of *manas*) do not arise, i.e. "this not being, that does not exist" (*imasmiṃ asati, idaṃ na hoti*).

The *Cūḷasuññata Sutta* and related texts suggest that *all* such arising can cease. The ceasing itself, we have seen called "cessation of perception and experience" (*saññāvedayitanirodha*) and the result is, the "state of absence" (*suññatāvihāra*). If *suññatāvihāra* occurs only when all conditions for the arising of *dhammas* are absent and it does not rely on the presence of any condition, it can be said to be "unconditioned" (*asaṅkhata*; Skt. *asaṃskṛta*). This yields a straightforward definition of this normally tricky term that avoids the usual hand waving. Furthermore, the state of absence is equivalent to extinction (*nibbāṇa*) [of rebirth] and this is why *nibbāṇa* is also sometimes called an "unconditioned phenomenon" (*asaṅkhatadhamma*). This observation also allows us to make sense of the infamously gnomic *Nibbānapaṭisaṃyutta Sutta* (Ud 8.3) where the Buddha says:

> There is, monks, that which is unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned. If there were not, monks, no escape from born, become, made, and conditioned could be discerned.[31]

We can now see that it must be a reference to the state that occurs when no conditions are present, i.e. to *suññatāvihāra* or something very like it, rather than to some metaphysical absolute. Incidentally, note that this assertion assumes the principle of noncontradiction: there is a distinction to be made between *saṅkhata* and *asaṅkhata*

So now the picture is this: "the world" is the world of sensory experience, also known as *dukkha*. It is *dukkha* because this world is on fire with greed, hatred, and delusion which drive one to perform karma. And this causes one to be reborn; only to create more karma. And so on. This world, *saṃsāra*, can end, not in a physical sense rather it ends only with the cessation of sensory experience. The end of the world is equated with the absence (*suññatā*) of sensory experience and with extinction (*nibbāṇa*). Those who attain this state in Pāli suttas are apt to declare afterwards: "birth is cut off, the Holy life is lived, what needed to be done is done, there is no more being here."[32] In other words,

at least some early Buddhists believed that by ending the world, one ended rebirth. This was presumably based on the analogy of *suññatāvihāra* with death, though it is never made plain.

The Buddhist repudiation of the world of experience makes sense in the light of having the ability to dwell, at will, *without* sensory experience. It is precisely the "experience" of having all sensory experiences cease without losing consciousness that makes all the difference in understanding Buddhism: *this is nibbāna*, *vimokkha*, *āsavakhaya*, *śūnyatā*, etc.[33] This epistemic reading is not the only thread in the tapestry and not one that is prominent in many modern accounts of Buddhism, but it *is a thread* and it gives us a basis from which to reconsider the philosophy of *Prajñāpāramitā*. There are, however, some pitfalls and wrong turns to avoid and the remainder of the essay looks at how this new reading of Prajñāpāramitā avoids them.

Stumbling Blocks

An Ontological Fallacy

One of the great stumbling blocks for understanding *Prajñāpāramitā* is that exegetes do not adequately distinguish between "not knowing" (*avindan*, *anupalambhamāno*, and *asamanupaśyan*) and "non-existence" (*nāsti*). In the opening chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (hereafter *Aṣṭa*), Elder Subhūti says "Bhagavan, I do not *perceive* that dharma, i.e. '*bodhisatva*.'"[34] He does not say that the *dharma* "bodhisatva" doesn't exist.[35] The verb here is *samanu√paś* "perceive." Of course, *bodhisatvas exist.* Elder Subhūti is the voice of absence, or perhaps we could say that his lines are what someone imagined it would be like to speak while dwelling in that state (in which speech is not possible). In "emptiness"—i.e. *in the absence of sensory experience*—no *dharmas* can be *perceived* because dharmas are the components of experience, and sensory experience has *ceased*, due to the deliberate withdrawal of attention from sensory experience. This is an epistemic observation; almost a tautology. Subhūti does not make metaphysical observations on the *nature* of bodhisattvas or even on the nature of phenomena. Recall Hamilton's comment above that Buddhists are concerned with how things work rather than if they exist or not.

It is Elder Śāriputra who introduces the subject of existence (*asti*) two

paragraphs later in trying to understand the idea of "thought without thought" or perhaps "mind without thought" (*cittaṃ acittaṃ*), an expression that we can now see describes a person who is alert but whose discursive mind is quiescent, i.e. someone dwelling in absence. He asks Subhūti "does that mind which is without thought exist?" (*asti tac cittaṃ yac cittaṃ acittaṃ*). And Subhūti redirects his question by asking whether the mind without thought is "found" (*vidyate*) or "apprehended" (*upalabhyate*). Śāriputra answers, *na hi*, which is an emphatic "no." At this point, Subhūti asks if the question about existence or nonexistence is "appropriate" (*yukta*, literally "connected"). Again, Śāriputra replies emphatically, "No, it is not." And it is not connected—not "on topic"—precisely because the Buddha and Subhūti are not talking about metaphysics in *Aṣṭa*, they are talking about sensory experience ceasing to *register*. That is to say that, here and throughout, they are talking about epistemology.

According to Conze-ism, this is all very contradictory and mystical. And yet, if we read Subhūti as the voice of absence, and as making epistemic points, what he says straightforwardly makes sense. We may ask why the Buddhist tradition itself interpreted this literature as being contradictory and mysterious. One of the main drivers of this seems to have been *teleology*.

A Teleological Fallacy

In *Old School Emptiness*, Matthew Orsborn (Huifeng 2016, 8–28) detailed an important problem for anyone studying the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. There is a common *telos* which sees everything related to *Prajñāpāramitā* as leading up to Nāgārjuna and culminating in the *Madhyamaka* metaphysics of his commentators. As Conze (1968, 144) puts it "The *Mādhyamikakārikā*[36] and the *Prajñāpāramitā* expound exactly the same doctrine." Yet, as Richard H. Jones (2012, 218) points out, "it is far from clear that the Perfection of Wisdom has any direct influence on Nagarjuna… not only does Nagarjuna never quote any of the [*Prajñāpāramitā*] texts… he ignores many central concepts of the Perfection of Wisdom." Linnart Mäll (2003, 49) concurs:

> Unfortunately the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* has so far been studied too one-sidedly: only aspects that confirmed the hypothesis about the origin of Nāgārjuna's teaching from the teaching of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras were sought in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā's śūnyatā*.

Mäll also provides a useful potted history of such attempts (2003, 48–49). Luis Gomez (1976, 156) made a similar point in his conclusions on "proto-Madhyamaka" in *Pāli* suttas, noting that the *Aṭṭhakavagga* of the *Suttanipāta* appears to "anticipate some of the axial concepts of *Madhyamaka*," but that aspects central to the *Aṭṭhakavagga* are "absent in the Madhyamaka and scarce in other works of Nāgārjuna" and "Moreover, the theoretical framework of the Mādhyamika is totally absent from [the *Aṭṭhakavagga*]." That is to say, there is some slight overlap but not enough to justify the label "proto-Madhyamaka" in his title. Nowadays we might be tempted to call Gomez's title "clickbait".

A more recent example of this telos can be found in Alexander Wynne's article "Early Buddhism as Proto-śūnyavāda" (2015, 219), where he regards the Buddha as a "sort of proto-śūnyavādin." Wynne, who specialises in Pāli and Theravāda Buddhism, overlooks Gomez's careful hedges and his negative conclusion concerning the idea of "proto-Madhyamaka." He cites Gomez (1976) as also arguing for this telos. Wynne asserts, in an explanation of a passage from the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* that "its [i.e. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā's*] core idea is that phenomena (*dharma*) are not ultimately real since they are 'empty' (*śūnya*) of their 'own-being' (*svabhāva*)" (2015: 214). Wynne then segues, without qualification, to a quote from Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* as though the two sources can be treated as being on the same topic. But *where* does *Aṣṭa* say that "dharmas are not real" or that this unreality is due to the absence of "*svabhāva*"? Wynne does not say and I cannot find such a passage in *Aṣṭa*. He appears to invoke Nāgarjuna's two truths doctrine—i.e. *saṃvṛtisatya* and *paramārthasatya*—but these are terms that *do not occur* in *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* (though of course, they do appear in some Abhidharma texts).

Recently, Ananda Mishra (2018, 49) made an even stronger claim: "According to *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, all dharmas, as well as the soul, are non-existent." But the passage he cites in support of this claim *does not say this*. Rather, in the relevant passage, Elder Subhūti says:

> Beings, O Devaputras, are *like* illusions (*māyopama*). Beings are *like* a dream. Beings and illusions are not two, and this is indivisible. Beings and dreams are not two, and this is indivisible. All phenomena, O Devaputras, are also *like* illusions, *like* dreams.[37]

Nothing in this passage tells us that dharmas *do not exist*. Compounds in

-*upama* form *similes* rather than concrete nouns. For example, *rūpaṃ māyā* means "appearance is an illusion" while *rūpaṃ māyopamaṃ* means "appearance is *like* an illusion." Even if the text did say that beings *are illusions* this cannot be equated with the idea that beings *do not exist*. We think and we interact with each other; so we undoubtedly *exist*. To treat beings as though they "don't exist" would be monstrous. Buddhists think that sensory experience is not what it appears to be because Buddhists know (or have known at some point) that sensory experience can cease without the loss of alertness; that one can dwell in the complete absence of sensory experience. Mishra's passage from *Aṣṭa* tells us about the appropriate attitude towards ephemeral experience, i.e. "treat it *like* a dream." It tells us nothing about the ontological status of experience. Mishra's presupposition about dharmas being "non-existent" is not borne out by even a cursory reading of the passage he cites to justify it, or generally, in the text the passage comes from.

The conflation of *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Madhyamaka* is not a new phenomenon. When the seventh or eighth-century translator of the *Heart Sutra* into Sanskrit saw the Chinese phrase:

> When the Bodhisattva Guānzìzài practised the deep paragnosis, [He] examined the five aggregates, [saw them as] all absent, and overcame all suffering.[38]

They mistranslated it as

> When noble Avalokiteśvara bodhisattva practised the deep practice of paragnosis, he examined the five skandhas and saw them as lacking self-being.[39]

The Chinese *Heart Sutra* does not use the word *svabhāva* "self-being" (*zì xìng* 自性) at all. The translator has interpolated it into the Sanskrit text. Confusion about the provenance of the *Heart Sutra* has delayed our understanding of this issue because it led exegetes to privilege the Sanskrit text.

This word, *svabhāva*, so central to Nāgārjuna's philosophy and his definition of existence is not a "core" idea in *Prajñāpāramitā* at all. Nāgārjuna uses the word to mean *autopoietic* "self-creating," whereas in *Prajñāpāramitā* it still carries the older meaning of *sui generis*, i.e. that which makes something itself, or that which makes an object unique and recognisable. The negative language of *Prajñāpāramitā* is typically epistemic: "I don't know" (*na vedmi*), "I don't

find" (*na vindāmi*), "I don't apprehend" (*nopalabhe*), and "I don't perceive" (*na samanupaśyāmi*); it is not ontological, "It doesn't exist (*nāsti*)." Such passages are difficult, to be sure, but they are not improved by superimposing *Madhyamaka* ideas on them. I want to address one more contextual issue before concluding.

A Perennial Fallacy

Thomas Metzinger (2009) observed from personal experience that out-of-body experiences have a compelling reality to them. We might even say that they seem *hyperreal* or more real than reality. He notes:

> For anyone who actually had [an out-of-body experience] *it is almost impossible not to become an ontological dualist afterwards*. In all their realism, cognitive clarity and general coherence, these phenomenal experiences almost inevitably lead the experiencing subject to conclude that conscious experience can, as a matter of fact, take place independently of the brain and body. (2009, 78. Emphasis added)

Metzinger's (2009) book could be said to be an extended explanation of why he eventually abandoned this conclusion as fallacious. William James (1960) commenting in his 1901–1902 Gifford Lectures, reports on his experiments with nitrous-oxide intoxication:

> Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance…. I cannot wholly escape from its authority… *I feel as if it must mean something*... (emphasis added)

Mystical experiences are *compelling*, but as the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature take pains to emphasise: *seeming* is not *being*.[40] It does not logically follow that because sensory experience can stop that the absence of experience is reality. Or that understanding the nature of experience provides any corresponding insight into the nature of reality. The meaning attributed to such experiences, like all meaning attributed to all experiences, comes from the experiencing mind. It is inevitably culturally conditioned. We can see the same kinds of events—e.g. loss of sense of self, cessation of sensory experience, etc.—

described across cultural boundaries, but within such boundaries, we see these events *interpreted* according to a tradition of interpretation. Undergoing the cessation of sensory experience, the Christian mystic might feel that they are communing with God; the Brahmin that they *are Brahman*; the Buddhist that *this is nirvāṇa*; and so on. The events are all similar, but the metaphysics are all different, though similar enough in Theistic circles to sustain the perennial philosophy fallacy for some centuries.

As a specific example, take the description of reality in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, a *sūtra*-style text composed ca. 350–450 CE and attributed to Īśvarakṛṣṇa, but thought to reflect a much older Indian philosophical tradition. In Sāṃkhya, phenomena are aspects of *prakṛti*, which we can roughly translate as "nature." When active, *prakṛti* produces all kinds of phenomena in sets of five (c.f. the Buddhist term *prapañca*). When *prakṛti* is made quiescent or "original" (*pradhāna*) through religious practices, then another aspect of reality is revealed, i.e. *puruṣa*. Where *prakṛti* is active, changeable, and illusory, *puruṣa* is passive, stable, and real. *Puruṣa* is untouched by the activity of *prakṛti* it witnesses. *Puruṣa* is timeless, unchanging, and aware, just as *Brahman* is "being, consciousness, and bliss" (*saccidānanda*). The awareness of *puruṣa* is sometimes referred to as "non-attributive" (Michaels & Wulf 2011). This all sounds very much like the cessation of sensory experience viewed through a different religious lens, where the state following cessation is given an abstract metaphysical spin. For example, the loss of a *sense of time passing* is interpreted as *real timelessness*; the loss of the feeling of extension in space is interpreted as *real infinity*; or the loss of first-person perspective is interpreted as meaning that we don't have a self. This amounts to a reification of the absence of sensory experience. The Sāṃkhya worldview is much closer in spirit to Nāgārjuna—who also seems to reify absence—than to early Buddhism or *Prajñāpāramitā*—which definitely do not. We can equate *prakṛti* to the limited reality of *saṃvṛtisatya* "the truth of appearances," and *puruṣa* to the ultimate reality of *paramārthasatya* "truth in the final analysis," in Madhyamaka thought.

Perennialists, including Edward Conze, see such convergences as evidence of a transcendent truth about the universe: a metaphysical *Absolute* as he called it. But we do not have to accept this interpretation of cessation and absence. We could, for example, take the view that meditative techniques allow us some glimpse into the mechanisms of our own subjectivity, at least in part because in practising the techniques we stop interacting with the objective world. We can

withdraw attention from sensory experience and plunge ourselves into a state in which all sensory experience stops but we retain awareness.

If this is accurate, then we have an explanation of why some Buddhists were forced into denying the reality of objects (c.f. comments by Mishra above). If the cessation of sensory experience is assumed to give us accurate and reliable knowledge about reality, then anything that is associated with the senses is, ipso facto, not real. Looked at from the other direction, if all experience is *a priori* an illusion, then reality—defined as the absence of illusions—must consist in the absence of experience. As with all deductive logic, *givens* do the heavy lifting. If one sets out accepting the axiom "phenomena don't exist," and then proceeds by deduction from more or less any proposition, one will inevitably deduce that *phenomena don't exist*, and it will look (and *feel*) like a valid conclusion. It may even be accompanied by an "aha!" feeling that makes it seem certain. If one is thinking about this in an *overtly religious milieu* in which orthodoxy is a requirement for membership, there is strong pressure to *interpret* sensory experiences as confirming that orthodoxy.

Conclusion

The most common hermeneutic for reading *Prajñāpāramitā* requires several unsatisfactory philosophical manoeuvres. Most notably, the received tradition requires that we abandon the principles of logic, especially the principle of noncontradiction. I reject this on several grounds. It is not reasonable to reject logic, since all propositions are trivial when we do. The rationale for rejecting logic has been that the texts themselves advocate trivialism. Harrison and Orsborn have shown that the apparent contradictions on which the rejection is based disappear when we edit and read the texts carefully and in relation to an appropriate context. Contra Suzuki and Conze, outright contradiction plays little or no role in *Prajñāpāramitā*. We note, for example, that Gil Fronsdal's (2014) survey of the themes in the *Daoxing jing* (an early Chinese translation of a *Prajñāpāramitā* text) *never mentions contradiction*. Moreover, there seems to be a consensus that Nāgārjuna employed the principle of noncontradiction, along with other basic axioms of logic, in his arguments. Buddhist enthusiasm for contradiction appears out of nowhere and comes to dominate some forms of Buddhism. So much so that even the earliest Sanskrit document of the

standard *Heart Sutra* has interpolated contradictions that render the text unintelligible at points.[41] *Prajñāpāramitā* exegesis that embraces contradiction has been unhelpfully shackled to Nāgārjuna's repudiation of mainstream Buddhism: the *Madhyamaka telos*. This has led to an under appreciation of continuities between mainstream early Buddhism and the literature of *Prajñāpāramitā*. *Mādhyamika* scholars like to portray *Prajñāpāramitā* as a stepping stone to the ultimate teaching of *Madhyamaka* and this has become—as one of the anonymous reviewers commented—"entirely conventional." But it is also entirely uncritical in most cases. Where scholars have investigated putative links they find that Nāgārjuna does not refer to *Prajñāpāramitā*. Such passages as he reuses all seem to come from early Buddhist texts. So much so that David Kalupahana (1986) suggested that the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* was a commentary on the *Kaccānagotta Sutta* (Kalupahana's ideas seem not to have caught on). Mādhyamikas like to recount the legend about Nāgārjuna receiving the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts from *nāginīs* but the basic *Prajñāpāramitā* text was composed at least a century before Nāgārjuna (probably) lived, keeping in mind that his historicity, like that of the Buddha, is a matter of speculation since he cannot be positively linked to any historical event.

We have every reason to reject the received tradition of *Prajñāpāramitā* exegesis. An epistemic reading allows us to avoid the problems created by the trivialist reading of *Prajñāpāramitā*. We can employ logic as we usually do, as Nāgārjuna does. *Prajñāpāramitā* is not a species of "wisdom tradition" or "mysticism." *Prajñāpāramitā* may appear paradoxical to those who take it as metaphysics, but the *apparent* contradictions are not (and never were) real contradictions, they are artefacts of tendentious scholarship. Moreover, when we resist the Madhyamaka teleology, we can see considerably more continuity with mainstream early Buddhism than has been allowed.

It is unhelpful to think in terms of *proto-* anything since it suggests a process of culmination. Evolution, however, is not teleological and doesn't ever culminate because the environment is constantly changing requiring further evolution. Evolution is open-ended and not moving towards a goal. This holds for the evolution of texts also. One can work to make a certain future real, but it's clear that no one in mainstream early Buddhism anticipated Madhyamaka metaphysics (to be clear any discussion of truth, reality, and existence, *is metaphysical*). Of course, many Buddhists in antiquity *did not* take *Madhyamaka* seriously, or saw it as, at best, a provisional statement of ultimate reality. Hierarchical

schemes of Buddhist doctrine constructed by Buddhists in China and Japan, for example, typically place *Madhyamaka* below *Yogācāra*, *Avataṃsaka*, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, and *Mantrayāna* Buddhism.[42]

An epistemic reading also offers some peripheral advantages. For example, we now have an easily comprehensible account of what Buddhist meditation employing focused attention *does*, i.e. it plunges us into a state in which there is no sensory experience but there is some residual awareness. We now have a comprehensible account of the previously mystical term *asaṃskṛta*. We can begin to see how some of these obscure terms fit into a broader doctrinal picture. As well as giving us a better sense of chronological and doctrinal continuity, an epistemic reading helps us to make better connections between Buddhist doctrine and Buddhist practice, a discontinuity that has been a recurring problem in the history of Buddhist ideas.

"Buddhism" is a highly pluralistic and diversified range of ideas, attitudes, customs, and practices. Some of the forms it takes appear to be entirely incompatible with other forms, though this hardly seems to bother pragmatic Buddhists. My argument here is not that this is the one-and-only correct reading of *Prajñāpāramitā*. The Buddhist critique of absolutes is noted and accepted. Of course, I have tried to present the strongest case for the validity of a particular alternative reading; and the job of critiquing my thesis is now the reader's.[43] Even at this very broad level of outline, an epistemic reading has its own internal logic and results in a coherent narrative that accounts for the main facts and a number of seemingly unrelated facts. Moreover, this account manages, as far as I can tell, not to break any known laws of physics or to make an appeal to magic or the supernatural.

Acknowledgements

This essay owes a huge debt to Richard Gombrich. I first encountered many of these ideas, and notably the name Sue Hamilton, in his SOAS Numata lecture series of 2006/2007, subsequently published as *What the Buddha Thought*. Moreover, Richard was a sympathetic editor who published my first five articles on the *Heart Sutra* (this is my thirteenth). I hope his retirement is going well.

My thanks to Will Buckingham who read and helpfully critiqued a draft of this essay. I also thank Durelle Dean, Stephen Attwood, Thomas and Leslie Quinn, and several other benefactors for their generous financial support. I thank Matthew Orsborn for gifting me a copy of *Old School Emptiness* which breaks new ground and deserves a wider audience.

I thank the anonymous reviewers, one of whom offered a detailed critique of the article, pointing out a number of problems that allowed me to substantially improve it. I am, of course, responsible for any remaining errors and infelicities.

Lastly, I have learned so much from reading Jan Nattier. I'm grateful that she has been so conscientious in showing her working. Without her, none of this would be possible.

Notes

1 For example, Drewes states: "Mahāyāna was not a distinct sect. It did not involve the worship of bodhisattvas. It was not developed by lay people. It was not an offshoot of the Mahāsāṃghikas. It was not a single religious movement." (Drewes 2010a: 59). For an overview, see Drewes (2010a; 2010b).

2 Hopefully Attwood (2021) will set the matter to rest: the *Heart Sutra* is unequivocally a Chinese text.

3 Published in English translation by Holger Heine (Conze 2016), with a preface by *Mādhyamika* logician, Graham Priest. Priest is an expert on trivialism (see e.g. 2005) and, with others, has discussed Madhyamaka in the light of paraconsistent logics that allow for limited contradiction to be valid (Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest 2008). See also comments on this thesis by Tillemans (2009).

4 For a recent discussion of Suzuki's logic of *sokuhi* see Yusa (2019).

5 *Atthi avitakko avicāro samādhi, atthi vitakkavicārānaṃ nirodho* (SN IV 298).

6 *Idaṃ bhavanto passantu, yāva ujuko cāyaṃ citto gahapati, yāva asaṭho cāyaṃ citto gahapati, yāva amāyāvī cāyaṃ citto gahapati* (SN IV 298).

7 *Sace te, bhante, purimaṃ saccaṃ, pacchimaṃ te micchā. Sace pana te, bhante, purimaṃ micchā, pacchimaṃ te saccaṃ* (SN VI 299).

8 *Yaṃ, bhikkhave, sadevakassa lokassa samārakassa sabrahmakassa sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya diṭṭhaṃ sutaṃ mutaṃ viññātaṃ pattaṃ pariyesitaṃ anuvicaritaṃ manasā, tamahaṃ jānāmi* (AN II 24).

9 *Tam ahaṃ na jānāmīti vadeyyaṃ, taṃ mamassa musā* (AN II 25).

10 PED offers a definition "4. Sinful, a sinner." But I think Cone (2001, 655) comes closer in her definition. The term *kali* comes from gambling and gamblers are common a symbol of immoral behaviour in the Pāli world. A *kali* is the losing throw at dice, or more precisely the die that causes one to lose. It is bad luck (which was taken very seriously), defeat, downfall, or catastrophe. The implication is that this last assertion is the worst of all.

11 Cf. Jones (2010, 11) translation of *pada* cd: "for real and unreal are opposed to each other—how could that exist together simultaneously?"

12 *yo 'pyasau lokadhātus tathāgatena bhāṣitaḥ, adhātuḥ sa tathāgatena bhāṣitaḥ | tenocyate lokadhāturiti ||*

13 *Devaputta* is a curious term. Both *deva* and *putta* are Pāli words and the compound literally means "son of a deva," but I have never found a good explanation of what a *devaputta* is. They are supernatural beings related to *devas* in some way.

14 *Sakkā nu kho so, bhante, gamanena lokassa anto ñātuṃ* (SN I 61). This text (which also occurs at AN 2.45 and 2.46) has been commented on numerous times. For example, on Alexander Wynne's "nominalist" reading of the *Rohitassa Sutta*, "The Buddha could be regarded as a sort of proto-*śūnyavādin*, whose realisation of ineffability in the present

was elaborated into a nominalistic doctrine, according to which existent things (such as 'consciousness') are equated with concepts which are then negated" (2015, 218–219).

15 *Na kho panāhaṃ, āvuso, appatvā lokassa antaṃ dukkhassa antakiriyaṃ vadāmi. Api ca khvāhaṃ, āvuso, imasmiṃ yeva byāmamatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake lokañca paññapemi lokasamudayañca lokanirodhañca lokanirodhagāminiñca paṭipadanti* (SN I 62).

16 I follow Gombrich's (1996, 94) suggestion on translating *lokamānī*. He observes that the commentary, and Pāli literary style, would suggest reading *lokasaññī* and *lokamānī* as synonyms. However, "*mānin* at the end of a compound… never means simply "thinking of." It seems always to have a reflexive sense, "thinking oneself to be x", as in *paṇḍitamānin* 'thinking oneself to be very clever'." This is true in Sanskrit also. Gombrich connects this with the eternalistic view that identifies experience of the world with selfhood, though in this article he doesn't catch the connection to the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* where one of the six speculative views is: "As the world, so myself" (*so loko so attā*: MN I 135). PED links *mānin* to *māna* "conceit" rather than *mano* "mind".

17 *yena kho, āvuso, lokasmiṃ lokasaññī hoti lokamānī – ayaṃ vuccati ariyassa vinaye loko* (SN IV 95).

18 *Iti nāhaṃ, āvuso, imāni cattāri saccāni tiṇakaṭṭhādīsu paññapemi, imasmiṃ pana cātumahābhūtike kāyasmiṃ yeva paññapemī ti dasseti* (SNA I 118). The locative case can be used concretely "in" or figuratively "with respect to" and it is not clear which is intended here.

19 Given this, we may also need to rethink terms that are also read as metaphysical, such as *lokiya* and *lokuttara*.

20 *dukkhameva hi sambhoti, dukkhaṃ tiṭṭhati veti ca; nāññatra dukkhā sambhoti, nāññaṃ dukkhā nirujjhatī ti* (SN I 136).

21 *lokañca paññapemi lokasamudayañca lokanirodhañca lokanirodhagāminiñca paṭipadanti* (AN I 61).

22 *Katamo ca, bhikkhave, lokassa samudayo? Cakkhuñca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññāṇaṃ. Tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso. Phassapaccayā vedanā; vedanāpaccayā taṇhā; taṇhāpaccayā upādānaṃ; upādānapaccayā bhavo; bhavapaccayā jāti; jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavanti. Ayaṃ kho, bhikkhave, lokassa samudayo* (SN II 73).

23 *Cakkhuñceva rūpā ca, sotañca saddā ca, ghānañca gandhā ca, jivhā ca rasā ca, kāyo ca phoṭṭhabbā ca, mano ca dhammā ca* (SN IV15).

24 *Tasmātiha, bhikkhave, se āyatane veditabbe yattha cakkhu ca nirujjhati, rūpasaññā ca nirujjhati, se āyatane veditabbe…pe… yattha jivhā ca nirujjhati, rasasaññā ca nirujjhati, se āyatane veditabbe…pe… yattha mano ca nirujjhati, dhammasaññā ca nirujjhati, se āyatane veditabbe ti* (SN IV 98).

25 *Pañcime, brāhmaṇā, kāmaguṇā ariyassa vinaye lokoti vuccati. Katame pañca? Cakkhuviññeyyā rūpā iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasaṃhitā rajanīyā; sotaviññeyyā saddā…pe… ghānaviññeyyā gandhā… jivhāviññeyyā rasā… kāyaviññeyyā phoṭṭhabbā*

iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasaṃhitā rajanīyā; ime kho, brāhmaṇā, pañca kāmaguṇā ariyassa vinaye lokoti vuccati (AN IV 430).

26 *ayam pi lokapariyāpanno, ayam pi anissaṭo lokamhā ti* (AN IV 430).

27 Literally "the influxes are destroyed" (*āsavā parikkhīṇā honti*). This is my interpretation of the observation that *āsava* is originally a Jain term meaning the influx (*āsava*) of substance (*dravya*) caused by actions (*karman*), which sticks to the soul (*jīva*) and weighs it down in *saṃsāra* causing rebirth (*punarbhava*).

28 *Puna caparaṃ, brāhmaṇā, bhikkhu sabbaso nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ samatikkamma saññāvedayitanirodhaṃ upasampajja viharati, paññāya cassa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti. Ayaṃ vuccati, brāhmaṇā, bhikkhu lokassa antamāgamma lokassa ante viharati tiṇṇo loke visattikan ti* (AN IV 431–2).

29 Huifeng notes that Choong appears to rely heavily on the original Chinese version of Yinshun (1985).

30 The actual quote from *Philosophical Investigations* is: "For a large class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein 1967, 20).

31 *Atthi, bhikkhave, ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ. No cetaṃ, bhikkhave, abhavissa ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ, nayidha jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyetha* (Ud 80).

32 *khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā ti* (SN II 21 etc).

33 The variety of terminology combined with the tendency to use the same word for different things suggests to me a well-developed sectarianism that is not fully integrated in the Theravāda literature. Or we could say that the Pāli canon is one possible synthesis of a body of quite disparate approaches.

34 *nāhaṃ bhagavaṃs taṃ dharmaṃ samanupaśyāmi yaduta bodhisatva iti* (Vaidya 1960, 3).

35 Walser's (2018, 135) translation of the passage in *Dào xíng bōrě jīng*《道行般若經》by Lokakṣema (T no. 224) does appear to deny the existence of the dharma: "I don't see that there is a dharma 'bodhisattva' at all. Neither the name nor dharma of the bodhisattva exists at all." 了不見有法菩薩, 菩薩法字了無, 亦不見菩薩, 亦不見其處 (T 8, no. 224, 425c20–21). Compare this to Huifeng (2017, 206) translating from Kumārajīva (T no. 223), "I do not see any dharma which is known as a 'bodhisattva'. O Blessed One! I neither see a bodhisattva, nor apprehend a bodhisattva; neither see nor apprehend Prajñāpāramitā." 我不見有法名為菩薩。世尊！我不見菩薩，不得菩薩，亦不見不得般若波羅蜜 (T 8, no. 227, 537b.10).

36 I.e. the *Mūlamadhyamaka kārikā.*

37 *māyopamāste devaputrāḥ sattvāḥ / svapnopamāste devaputrāḥ sattvāḥ / iti hi māyā ca sattvāś ca advayam etad advaidhīkāram, iti hi svapnaś ca sattvāś ca advayam etad advaidhīkāram / sarvadharmā api devaputrā māyopamāḥ svapnopamāḥ /* (Vaidya 1960 20).

38 觀自在 菩薩 行 深 般若波羅蜜多時, 照見 五蘊皆空, 度一切苦厄 (T 8, no. 251, 848c4).

39 *āryāvalokiteśvaro bodhisatvo gambhīrāṃ prajñāpāramitācaryāṃ caramāṇo vyavalokayati sma*

pañcaskandhāṃs tāṃś ca svabhāvaśūnyān paśyati sma | Revised text from Attwood (2015).

40 Recent research seems to show that "Aha" moments can seem hyperreal leading to misinterpretation of them and erroneous validation of false insights. See for example: Grimmer, et al 2021; Laukkonen et al 2020, and Laukkonen, et al. 2022.

41 In the Hōryūji manuscript, the phrase *nāvidyā nāvidyākṣayo yāvan na jarāmaraṇaṃ na jarāmaraṇakṣayo* becomes: *na vidyā nāvidyā na vidyākṣayo nāvidyāksāyo yāvan na jarāmaraṇaṃ na jarāmaraṇakṣayo*. (My transcription). *Āvidya* and *jarāmaraṇa* being the first and last *nidānas* and thus making a set, connected by *yavan*. It makes no sense to add *na vidyā*, since *vidyā* is not part of the list of *nidānas*. Moreover, *Prajñāpāramitā* is frequently referred to as a *mahāvidyā*, *anuttarā vidyā*, *asamasamā vidyā* (Attwood 2017).

42 Anonymous reviewer No.1 suggests that Madhyamaka is "certainly accepted as the highest teaching e.g. in Geluk Orthodoxy." I know little about Tibetan Buddhism and draw on East Asian traditions such as Shingon. See e.g. Hakeda's translation of Kūkai's *Benkenmitsu nikyō ron* (1972, 151ff).

43 Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber (2011) note that this *argumentative paradigm* appears to be how reasoning evolved to work in human beings; and this approach of presenting the strongest possible case to others who then criticise it—sometimes written off as "confirmation bias"—is a feature of reasoning, not a bug. Reasoning, in this view, *only* comes into play when critiquing someone else's ideas.

Abbreviations

AN *Aṅguttara Nikāya*
MN *Majjhima Nikāya*
PED *Pali-English Dictionary*. Pali Text Society, 1999.
Sn *Suttanipāta*
SN *Saṃyutta Nikāya*
T Takakasu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, et al., eds. 1924–1932(–1935). *Taishō shinshū dai zōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (Taishō edition of the Buddhist canon). 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.
Ud *Udāna*

Pāli texts are from: (1995) *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana Tipiṭaka* (Version 4). Igatpuri, India: Vipassana Research Institute.

References

Anālayo 2015 *Compassion and Emptiness in Early Buddhist Meditation*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications.

Attwood, Jayarava 2013 "The Spiral Path or Lokuttara Paṭiccasamuppāda." *Western Buddhist Review* 6: 1–34. http://www.jayarava.org/texts/the-spiral-path.pdf

2015 "Heart Murmurs: Some Problems with Conze's Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya." *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 8: 28–48.

2017 "Epithets of the Mantra in the *Heart Sutra*." *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*12: 26–57. http://jocbs.org/index.php/jocbs/article/view/155

2018 "Defining Vedanā: Through the Looking Glass." *Contemporary Buddhism* 18(3): 31–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2018.1450959

2020a "Edward Conze: A Re-evaluation of the Man and his Contribution to Prajñāpāramitā Studies." *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 19: 22–51. http://jocbs.org/index.php/jocbs/article/view/223

2020b "The History of the *Heart Sutra* as a Palimpsest." *Pacific World*, Series 4(1): 155–182. https://pwj.shin-ibs.edu/2020/6934

2021 "The Chinese Origins of the Heart Sutra Revisited: A Comparative Analysis of the Chinese and Sanskrit Texts." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 44: 13–52.

Avicenna [1027]2005 *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, trans. Michael Marmura. Provo: Brigham Young University Press.

Bodhi 2000 *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications.

Choong, Mun-keat 1999 *The Notion of Emptiness in Early Buddhism*. 2nd. Ed. New Delhi. Motilal Banarsidass.

Cone, M. 2001 *A Dictionary of Pāli. Part I: A-Kh*. Bristol: Pali Text Society.

Conze, E. [1932]1976 *Der Satz vom Widerspruch: Zur Theorie des Dialektischen Materialism*. Frankfurt: Neue Kritik.

1934 "Social Implications of Logical Thinking." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 35: 23–44. Retrieved February 4, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4544248

1935 "The Objective Validity of the Principle of Contradiction." *Philosophy*, 10(38): 205–218.

1937 "Social Origins of Nominalism." *Marxist Quarterly* (January-March, 1937): 115–124. Reprinted in *Further Buddhist Studies.*

1953 "The Ontology of the Prajñāpāramitā." *Philosophy East and West* 3(2): 117–129.

1958 *Buddhist Wisdom Books: Containing the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

1968 *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies*. Oxford and Columbia: Bruno Cassirer and the University of South Carolina Press.

2016 *The Principle of Contradiction*, trans. Holger Heine. Lanham MD: Lexington Books.

Deguchi, Y., Garfield, Jay L., and G. Priest 2008 "The Way of the Dialetheist: Contradictions in Buddhism." *Philosophy East and West* 58(3): 395–402. doi:10.1353/pew.0.0011

Drewes, David 2010a "Early Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism I: Recent Scholarship." *Religion Compass* 4(2): 55–65. DOI:10.1111/j.1749–8171.2009.00195.x

2010b "Early Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism II: New Perspectives." *Religion Compass* 4(2): 66–74. DOI:10.1111/j.1749–8171.2009.00193.x

Falk, Harry 2011 "The Split Collection of Kharoṣṭhī texts." *ARIRIAB* (Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University) 14: 13–23.

Fronsdal, Gil 2014 *Dawn of the Bodhisattva Path: The Early Perfection of Wisdom*. Berkeley: Institute of Buddhist Studies and BDK America.

Gethin, Rupert 1986 "The Five Khandhas: Their Treatment in the Nikāyas and Early Abhidharma." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 14(1): 35–53.

Gombrich, Richard F. 1996 *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*. 3rd Indian Reprint. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.

Gomez, L. O. 1976 "Proto-Mādhyamika in the Pāli Canon." *Philosophy East and West* 26(2): 137–165.

Griffiths, P. 1981 "Buddhist Hybrid English: some notes on philology and hermeneutics for Buddhologists." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 4(2): 17–32.

Grimmer, H., Laukkonen, R., Tangen, J. and W.von. Hippel 2022 "Eliciting false insights with semantic priming." *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 29: 954–970. https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423–021–02049–x

Hakeda, Yoshito S. 1972 *Kūkai: Major Works*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hamilton, Sue 2000 *Early Buddhism: A New Approach.* London: Routledge.

Harrison, Paul 2006 "*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*: A New English Translation of the Sanskrit Text Based on Two Manuscripts from Greater Gandhāra." In *Buddhist Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection* (Vol. III), ed. Jens Braarvig, 133–159. Oslo: Hermes Publishing.

Huifeng 2014 "Apocryphal Treatment for Conze's Heart Problems: Non-attainment, Apprehension, and Mental Hanging in the *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya*." *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 6: 72–105.

2016 *Old School Emptiness: Hermeneutics, Criticism, and Tradition in the Narrative of Śūnyatā*. Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism.

2017 "An Annotated English Translation of Kumārajīva's *Xiaŏpĭn Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*." *Asian Literature and Translation* 4(1): 187–236.

James, William 1960 *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. London: Collins, Fount Paperbacks.

Jayatilleke, Kulatissa N. 1963 *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

Jones, Richard H. 2010 *Nagarjuna: Buddhism's Most Important Philosopher. Plain English translations and summaries of Nagarjuna's essential philosophical Works*. New York. Jackson Square Books.

2012 *The Heart of Buddhist Wisdom. Plain English translations of the Heart Sutra, the Diamond-Cutter Sutra, and other Perfection of Wisdom Text*s. New York. Jackson Square Books.

2018 "Dialetheism, Paradox, and Nāgārjuna's Way of Thinking." *Comparative Philosophy* 9(2): 41–48.

Kalupahana, David J. 1986 *Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way. Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kardaš, Goran 2015 "Some (critical) Remarks on Priest's Dialetheist Reading of Nāgārjuna." *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 11(2): 35–49.

Laukkonen, R. E., et al. 2020 "The dark side of Eureka: Artificially induced Aha moments make facts feel true." *Cognition* 196 (Unpaginated). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2019.104122

Laukkonen, R. E., Kaveladze, B. T., and J. Protzko, et al. 2022 "Irrelevant insights make worldviews ring true." *Nature: Scientific Reports* 12(1): 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598–022–05923–3

Loy, David R. (1988)2019 *Nonduality: In Buddhism and Beyond*. Yale University Press. Somerville. Wisdom Publications.

Mäll, Linnart 2003 — *Studies in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā and Other Essays*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Mercier, H. and D. Sperber 2011 — "Why Do Humans Reason? Arguments for an Argumentative Theory." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. 34: 57–111. doi:10.1017/S0140525X10000968

Metzinger, T. 2009 — *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*. New York: Basic Books.

Michaels, Axel and Christoph Wulf 2011 — "Rethinking the Body: An Introduction." In *Images of the Body in India: South Asian and European Perspectives on Rituals and Performativity*, eds. Axel Michaels and Christoph Wulf, 9–24. New Delhi: Routledge.

Mishra, Ananda 2018 — "Nāgārjuna's Śūnyatā: Beyond Being And Nothingness." *Journal of East West Thought* 8(1): 47–53.

Nattier, Jan 1992 — "The Heart Sūtra: a Chinese apocryphal text?" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15(2): 153–223.

Priest, Graham 2005 — *Doubt Truth to be a Liar*. Oxford Scholarship Online. https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0199263280.001.0001/acprof–9780199263288

Shulman, Eviatar 2008 — "Early Meanings of Dependent-Origination." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36(2): 297–317.

Siderits, Mark and Shōryū Katsura 2013 — *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way. Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Tillemans, Tom 2009 — "How do Madhyamikas Think? Remarks on Jay Garfield, Graham Priest and Paraconsistent Logic." In *Pointing at the Moon. Buddhism, Logic, Analytic Philosophy*, ed. M. D'Amato, J. Garfield, and T. Tillemans, 83–99, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tredennick,Hugh 1933 — *Aristotle: The Metaphysics*. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; New York: G. P. Putnams.

Vaidya, P. L 1960 — *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, 4. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute.

Walser, Joseph 2018 *Genealogies of Mahāyāna Buddhism: Emptiness, Power, and the Question of Origin*. London: Routledge.

Westerhoff, Jan 2018 "Emptiness And No-Self: Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka." (Interview by Richard Marshall). 3(16). https://www.3-16am.co.uk/articles/emptiness-and-no-self-nāgārjuna-s-madhyamaka. [viewed 8 May 2022]

Williams, Paul 1989 *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. London and New York: Routledge.

Wittgenstein 1967 *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd Ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Wynne, A. 2015 "Early Buddhist Teaching as Proto-śūnyavāda." *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 11: 213–241.

Yinshun 1985 *An Investigation into Emptiness (Parts 1 and 2)*, trans. Huifeng. Towaco, NJ: Noble Path Buddhist Education Fellowship.

Yusa, Michiko 2019 "D. T. Suzuki and the 'Logic of Sokuhi,' or the 'Logic of Prajñāpāramitā.'" In *The Dao Companion to Japanese Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. Gereon Kopf, 589–616. New York: Springer, 589–616.