

THE TRUTH OF NAGARJUNA: SOMETHING BEYOND NIRVANA

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By considering his (in terms of) Logic-related works, we shall call **Arya Nagarjuna** as the most important **Buddhist** thinker in the Indian Antiquity. The most important parts of his works are the criticisms of thoughts which were presented by Buddhist tradition.¹

An important part of Nagarjuna's work is a critiques of ideas that forwarded in Buddhist tradition.²

Nagarjuna, who develops his ideas from the critical point of view by considering both **Buddhist** and it's opposite **Nyaya** system of thoughts, is accepted as the founder of **Madhyamaka**³ which is called either **Buddhist** and also unique system of thought as its own.⁴

This brilliant and famous dialectician in his own period,⁵ manifests the most important parts of the fundemental princibles of his doctrine by six of his works.⁶ Especially four of six, which are throughly related with his studies on logic, includes these fundemental principles.

These four main logical works of his are known as **Vigraha-vyavartanikarika**, **Pramana-vihetana/Pramana-vidhvamsana**, **Upaya-kausalya-hrydra-**

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¹ Vidyabhushana, Satischandra, **A History of Indian Logic: Ancient Mediaeval and Modern Schools**, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2006, p. 252.

² **A.e.**

³ Madhmayamaka literary means absolute middle. www.spokensanskrit.de. In western literature it is mostly translate as middle way. Vidyabhushana, p. 253; Ruegg, David Seyfort, **The Buddhist Philosophy of the Middle Essays on Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka**, Tom J. F. Tillemans Foreword, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2010., p.13; Jay L. Garfield, **The Fundamental Wisdom of Middle Way, Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika**, Trans. By. Jay L. Garfield, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, **b.a.**; Priest, "Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarikā", p. 130.

⁴ David Seyfort Ruegg, **The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of philosophy in India**, Otto Harrosowitz Wiesbaden, 1981, p. 4, 6; Satischandra, **a.g.e.**, p. 251.

⁵ Westerhoff, Jan, **Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka, A Philosophical Introduction**, Published by Oxford University Press, Inc. New York, 2009.p. 8.

⁶ Satischandra, **a.g.e.**, p. 255-261; Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p.5-6.

sastra and **Mulamadhyamaka-karika (MMK)**.⁷ First three of these works contains his criticisms on **Aksapada**'s logical studies and alternative ideas that he developed in this direction. But of course undoubtedly the most important work of his own is **MMK**, which is also a milestone in the Indian history of logic.

Even though this work of his doesn't give direct information on *the methods of reasoning*, we must say that it is very rich and comprehensive work with regard to its logical contents.

In MMK, Nagarjuna emphasizes that Nirvana, which was firstly asserted and comprehended as *ultimate truth*⁸ by Buddhist doctrine, is essentially *absolute truth*⁹ that also must be comprehended and expressed by the concept of *emptiness (sunnyata)*. For proving this Nagarjuna, who is also one of the Buddhist thinker as well, wanted to disproof that Nirvana is the ultimate truth as most of the Buddhist thinkers defends.

Buddhist doctrine accepts Nirvana as undetermined one. However, on the contrary to this, Nagarjuna shows in his doctrine that just because of what Buddhist thinkers generally say: "*Nirvana can not be undetermined one*", it also can not be the ultimate truth but it only can be the one face of The Truth.

In fact according to Nagarjuna, the ultimate truth itself is "*there is not a such a thing as ultimate truth*"; if one needs to talk about *The Truth* itself, only this can be said: "*Everything -even emptiness itself- is empty*".¹⁰

Nagarjuna developed the idea ground of his fundamental assertion over his criticisms on fundamental concepts of Nyaya ontology namely *svabhava* (substance) and **nasti** (negation); at the same time tried to demonstrate it by applying fundamental elements of Buddhism namely **madhmayamaka** (absolute middle /middle way) and

⁷ Satischandra, **a.g.e.**, p. 253, 256, 257, 259.

⁸ Priest, Graham, "Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarika", *Topoi* (2013) 32, Published online, 25 January 2013© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2013, pp. 129–134., p. 131; Jay. L. Garfield & Graham Priest, "Nagarjuna and The Limits of Thought", **Philosophy East & West**, Volume 53, Number 1, University of Hawaii Press, January 2003, p. 6.

⁹ Satischandra, **a.g.e.**, p. 254; Robinson, Richard H., "Did Nagarjuna Really Refute All Philosophical Views", **East and West**, Vol. 22, No. 3 Published University of Hawai'i Press, Jul., 1972, pp. 325–331., p. 327.

¹⁰ Garfield & Priest, **a.g.e.**, p.6.

catuskoti (four fold negation/Buddhist method of reasoning).¹¹

As generally accepted Nirvana, which is a very fundamental element of Buddhist doctrine, includes only metaphysical meaning. But as we know, Nagarjuna build his assertion of this concept not only on metaphysical basis' but also ontologic, epistemologic and logical ones.

According to Nagarjuna, Nirvana is a concept which needs to be solved in the context of The Truth. In his MMK he proves that it is not such a thing hat we can call as ultimate. And beside this, by asking "...so what is Truth?", he asserts that it is something as we can call a dialectical whole which is also beyond Nirvana.

In this paper, by following his logical works, we will try show the big picture of Nagarjuna's understanding of The Truth which is a complete structure by is metaphysical, ontological, epistemological and logical aspects.

By considering this first we will talk little bit about his criticisms in MMK on Svabhava and Nasti to figure out his understanding of essence as emptiness. Secondly we will take a look at two fundamental Buddhist Princibles called Madhmayamaka and Catuskoti to understand how he epistemologically and logically grounds his both ontological and metaphysical ideas on two faces of the truth as so called Samsara and Nirvana. Than we will have our clear conclusion on The Truth by explaining what we are metioning with "Something beyond Nirvana": *"The Truth is there is no Truth at all!"*

1. Criticisms on Svabhava and Nasti in MMK.

Nagarjuna objects to Nyaya doctrine over two main concepts namely **Svabhava** (substance) and **Nasti** (negation). His criticisms on svabhava are the natural consequences of his ontological acceptance. Nyaya thinkers accepts that every bhava

¹¹ Priest, "Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarikā", p. 130-131; Garfield & Priest, **a.g.e.**, p. 4-5, 13; Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p. 68; Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p. 19-52, 53-65, 73, 89.

(being) contains svabhava (substance) and this is that substance which is the only cause of their existence. For Nyayikas svabhava is the thing that makes thing as it is.¹² Beside them Nagarjuna says that nothing comes to existence by svabhava. Because there is not such a thing as svabhava (substance) in any being.¹³ But from his side, this situation does not mean that *this so called being* does not exist because of lack/absence of it (svabhava (substance)). Different from this it means *this so called being* does exist as *empty*.¹⁴ Something being empty does not mean that something does not exist at all. The negation, which is directed to substance here, gives us the emptiness as rest from its lack. The substance does not exist in being means that substance doesn't live in the presence of being. So it means that this so called being is empty. Things do exist because of this absolute emptiness of their own. Beings that are ontologically equal to each other because of their empty existence *exist together as conditionally to each other*.¹⁵ The principle of together existency of beings is *emptiness*. Because of conditional existency is existence because of emptiness here emptiness in Nagarjuna's terminology corresponds to svabhava not as in the meaning of substance but essence.¹⁶ Here what Nagarjuna does is to change the meaning and content of the subject svabhava which is asserted in Nyaya doctrine for building up and making semantically valid his own doctrine.

Nagarjuna, beside his different understanding of svabhava, does draw attention to one of the Buddhist comprehension of *nasti* (negation) that differs from Nyaya doctrine. As matter of fact, this kind of *nasti* (negation) brings itself in to open in *catuskoti*. What Nagarjuna wants to do in here is to show up this different kind of *nasti* comprehension that developed in the frame of Buddhist understanding clearly over *catuskoti*. According to Nagarjuna the negation in Nyaya doctrine directly points at *non-being of such being*. In other saying this so-called negation is here is negation that is regarding to predicate.¹⁷ On the other hand, from Buddhist thought Nagarjuna

¹² Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p.24.

¹³ Priest, "Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarikā", p. 130; Garfield & Priest, **a.g.e.**, p. 6; Satishchandra, **a.g.e.**, p. 254.

¹⁴ Garfield & Priest, **a.g.e.**, p.6.

¹⁵ Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p. 25-26.

¹⁶ J. W. De Dong, "The Problem of Absolute in Madhmayamaka School", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol 2 (1972), Canberra, 1972, p.21.

¹⁷ Prasajya-negation. Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p. 54, 69, 70.

identifies another kinds of negation that differs from Nyaya compresion which he calls as absolute negation.¹⁸ In right here the negation is regarded to premises all itself. The only thing that remains from this kind of a negation is *emptiness* itself.

2. Two Fundamental Princibles of Buddhist Thought in MMK: Madhmamayamaka and Catuskoti.

The comprehension of madhmamayamaka (absolute middle) which Nagarjuna placed on the ground of his doctrine is firstly asserted by Siddharta Gautama (Buddha). According to Buddha: “One must choose th absolute middle (middle way) for making (one thing) *something* or *nothing*”. As Nagarjuna mentions in MMK 15.7: Buddha considers it necessary to internalize the absolute middle (middle way) between absolute being and absolute non existence (in other way to say: between something and nothing / *between reifying and noughtfying a thing*).¹⁹ Nagarjuna tries to make comprehesnsion of absolute middle (middle way) clear which Buddha points out as like: while talking on something it can not be asserted that either thing is absolutely exist or non-exist and just like this while talking on (about) anything she/he can not assert that neither this thing is absolutely exist nor non-exist.²⁰ Catuskoti as another princible that Nagarjuna applied in the frame of Buddhist thoguht is an a technic which is used by every Buddhist intellectual as like Buddha himself in the Buddhist tadition.²¹ There is no certain information on who did ever invented and produced this technic at first place. But, it has been seen that every asserted problems in the Buddhist sacred texts always handled within the scope of four seperated possible point of views that is by catuskoti.²² So does Nagarjuna applies this four fold reasoning model, shaped by negation that is kept as ontological, epistemological and metaphysical based princibles of Buddhist notions (sights), in every judgements and demonstrations he asserts.²³

As well as with the same inspiration with other Buddhist thinkers both

¹⁸ David Seyfort Ruegg & Jan Gonda, **A History of Indian Literature**, Volume VII, Buddhist and Jaina Literature, Fasc. 1 Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India, 1981, p. 37, 70.

¹⁹ Priest, “Nāgārjuna’s Mulamadhyakamakarika”, p. 130.

²⁰ **A.e.**

²¹ Seyfort, **The Buddhist Philosophy of the Middle Essays on Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka**, p. 37.

²² Priest, Graham: “The Logic of Catuskoti”, **Comparative Philosophy**, Volume 1, No. 2, 2010, pp. 24-54, p. 25.

²³ Priest, “Nāgārjuna’s Mulamadhyakamakarika”, p. 130; Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p. 67.

contemporary and before to him differently from them Nagarjuna improve catuskoti by firstly affirming and than negating all four cotis altogether at once and succeed in getting it its real and final identification which ofcourse was according to him. Thus he got opportunity to demonstrate his assertion which is as being an absolute Truth, Nirvana itself is an absolute emptiness (the space).²⁴ And this opportunity of demonstration is make it possible for him to show in his next step that -if it is necessary need to talk on *The Truth* – this absolute Truth only can be one face of The Truth²⁵ and this so called The Truth is only can be non-ultimate(final) Truth which is beyond the all supposititious. Despite all this, no explanation could be found on usage of neither his nor traditional version of catuskoti in Nagarjuna’s MMK.²⁶

3. The Application of Madhmamayamaka in MMK

According to Nagarjuna Nirvana which was advised by Buddha is absolute Truth namely **sunyata** (emptiness).²⁷ Nagarjuna defends that for understanding of the subject sunyata (emptiness) first it must be make clear and comprehend that what **sunya** (being empty) is. As it was mentioned before one by one every being, every particular even emptiness itself is empty. ²⁸Here what means by *empty* is something not being in something, being empty concern of being non exist. According to Nagarjuna this thing which is not being exist in other thing itself is svabhava (substance).²⁹ Shortly by Nagarjuna being empty be identified as not including substance in itself. In this direction Nagarjuna asserts in his MMK that non of the beings have substances in themselves.³⁰ According to Nyaya doctrine svabhava is something that does not depend on anything or occur, non changeable, non conceptual, non comprehensible,

²⁴ Priest, “Nāgārjuna’s Mulamadhyakamakarika”, p.130; Garfield & Priest, “Nagarjuna and The Limits of Thought”, p. 4-5, 13; Westerhoff, “Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka,” p. 68; Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p. 73, 89.

²⁵ Garfield & Priest, “Nagarjuna and The Limits of Thought”, p. 4-5; ayrıca bkz.: Priest, “Nāgārjuna’s Mulamadhyakamakarika”, p. 131.

²⁶ Ruegg, **The Buddhist Philosophy of the Middle Essays on Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka**, p. 40.

²⁷ Priest, “Nāgārjuna’s Mulamadhyakamakarika”, p. 132. Ayrıca bkz.: Satishchandra, **a.g.e.**, p. 252.

²⁸ Garfield & Priest, “Nagarjuna and The Limits of Thought”, p. 6.

²⁹ Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p. 19.

³⁰ Priest, “Nāgārjuna’s Mulamadhyakamakarika”, p. 130; Garfield & Graham, “Nagarjuna and The Limits of Thought”, p. 6; ayrıca bkz.: Satishchandra, **a.g.e.**, p. 254.

stable, ineffable something which does not contains any varieties.³¹ According to Nagarjuna just because of that it is not possible to say anything about its existency. So no bhavas (beings) includes svabhavas.³²

This idea of Nagarjuna's did criticized by Buddhist thinkers contemporary to him. Nagarjuna does answers these critics in that direction in his MMK 24th and 25th. In these critics these thinkers who are dealing to Nagarjuna asserts that if there is no possibility for four noble truths and so forth the existency of Nirvana if everything is empty at all.³³ Nagarjuna says that someone who does this kind of critics is one who is in semantical confusion between being empty and non existency. Up to Nagarjuna, being empty and being non exist are two realities which are independent from each other.³⁴ As we have mentioned above, being empty means non existency of substance in anything. Here we clearly see that Nagarjuna separates non existency and emptiness that is rest as result of something being vanished from each other.

According to Nagarjuna being empty does not mean non existency at all.³⁵ Emptiness itself is the cause of interdependent existency.³⁶ Nagarjuna says that every being does exist in some determined relations between each other. In other way to put this, everything co-arise contingently and dependently to each other.³⁷ This conditional situations do appear as qualities, reasons, results, and etc.³⁸ Every being does come to being with some qualities and combined between each other.

Nagarjuna explains this situation in the frame of Madhymakamaka (absolute middle/middle way) as everything (every bhavas) being exist independently from svabhava (substance) but inter-related with other beings. This also means that the whole only exists with particles (pieces) by principle of interdependent existency (that is contingently and dependently co-arisen (svabhava /essence)) and vice versa.³⁹ This interdependent existence means that no being that does not has substance

³¹ Richard Hubert Jones, "The Nature and Function of Nāgārjuna's Arguments", **Philosophy East and West**, Vol. 28, No. 4, University of Hawaii Press, Oct., 1978, p.488; Robinson, **a.g.e.**, p. 326.

³² Robinson, **a.g.e.**, p. 325-331, 326; Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p. 24.

³³ Garfield, **a.g.e.**, p. 294-295, 322-323.

³⁴ Priest, "Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarika", p. 5.

³⁵ Garfield, **a.g.e.**, p. 6.

³⁶ **A.e.**

³⁷ Robinson, **a.g.e.**, p. 326; ayrıca bkz.: Garfield & Priest, "Nagarjuna and The Limits of Thought", p.6.

³⁸ Priest, "Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarika", p. 130.

³⁹ Satishchandra, **a.g.e.**, p.254; ayrıca bkz.: Garfield, "Nagarjuna and The Limits of Thought", p. 6.

(svabhava) could exist independently from each other. On account of being empty, every being is equal to each other in terms of ontology.⁴⁰ These every equal beings do exist because of this principle itself. Nagarjuna gives examples on his ideas of interdependent existence in MMK5.⁴¹ According to him substantiality of special qualities of something can not be asserted. And the very reason of this is un-possibility of referring special qualities of something without its existence (while it is non-existent). And in the same way it is not possible to talk about something which does not have special qualities.⁴² As it is understood, according to Nagarjuna the principle of interdependent existence becomes the shape of absolute existence.⁴³ In this direction, the absolute existence is existing as being empty that is emptiness (sunyata) itself.

One can clearly see that Nagarjuna by saying particulars do assert win by absolute existence, he contextually changed svabhava the substance (which he asserts as does not exist) into svabhava the essence as being the very exclusive element of existence by conserving its function of existence. From now on Svabhava does not comprehend as substance but essence.

By saying *everything -even emptiness itself -is empty* Nagarjuna mentions that the emptiness which he approves as absolute Truth (sunyata) does assert win with this essence which he calls as absolute True. And by saying *the only thing which does not exist is something which is not empty*, he asserts that the only and very Truth is there is no ultimate Truth as absolute truth at all. Yet when we talk about Truth by considering its existence this Truth itself must be empty. And accordance with this essence (sunyata), its (Truth) existence necessitate another being which it can interdependently exist by completing that dualist structure of theirs.⁴⁴

Nagarjuna's explanation of absolute existence as being the principle of interdependent existence and by that mentioning two kinds of existence as being *interdependent* and *absolute* can cause us to think that he comprehends Buddha's doctrine of absolute middle (middle way) as *something does exist or vice versa, but both of them are true anyway*. Thusly Satishchandra in his History of Indian

⁴⁰ Priest, "Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarikā", p. 131.

⁴¹ Garfield, **a.g.e.**, p. 149-152.

⁴² Garfield & Priest, **a.g.e.**, p. 6.

⁴³ **A.e.**

⁴⁴ **A.e.**, p.7.

Logic⁴⁵ says that Nagarjuna asserts and accepts that both of these premises are True and the knowledge is some kind of reality that leads us to some kind of Truth.⁴⁶

In view of Nagarjuna, madhmayamaka (the absolute middle /middle way) is a comprehension of this dualist structure which we have mentioned above.⁴⁷ Because of that, the comprehension of absolute middle (middle way) is the most important and essential element of knowing absolute Truth. According to Nagarjuna for to understand emptiness which is absolute Truth is only possible by knowing what is absolute being that is sunya (being empty). And knowing absolute being is only possible by comprehension of principle of interdependent existency. And comprehension of the principle of interdependent existency is only possible by cognizance of mulamadhyamaka (the doctrine of absolute middle /middle way).⁴⁸ The doctrine of absolute middle /middle way brings us to The Truth by working together with the principle of interdependent existency and absolute being which we comprehend because of it. Nagarjuna says that one should comprehend absolute middle /middle way as the opposite of unidirectionality. So to speak when we say *being is either exist or not exist*, we only point out one direction of this so called being.⁴⁹ Whereas being is not thinkable separately from non-being. This comprehension is only possible by absolute middle/middle way. The very feature of absolute middle/middle way which should be comprehend as opposite of unidirectionality is avoidance of extreme ends like being and non-being. According to Buddha by avoidance of all extreme ends absolute middle /middle way itself will comprehended spontaneously.⁵⁰

Absolute middle/middle ways is to see the whole picture as both being and non-being. In this regard absolute middle/middle way should not understand as something right between extreme ends. As a matter of fact what is mentioning here is not something like acceptance of the third choice (possibility) between being and non-being. At the same time, by considering absolute middle/middle way it does not mean

⁴⁵ Satishchandra, **a.g.e.**, p. 254.

⁴⁶ Priest, "Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarika", p. 131; Garfield & Priest, **a.g.e.**, p. 6,10.

⁴⁷ Satishchandra, **a.g.e.**, p. 255

⁴⁸ Ruegg, **The Literature of the Madhyamaka School**, p. 15.

⁴⁹ Satishchandra, **a.g.e.**, p.251.

⁵⁰ **A.e.**, p. 254.

to avoid these extreme ends and rejecting them. Because absolute middle/middle way which brings all every determinations under itself, under one unique whole does not stands beyond these determinations. It is a *unifying principle*. Every particular determinations takes their characteristics from this universal *unity*.⁵¹ Therefore in Nagarjuna's doctrine absolute middle/middle way means avoiding two extreme ends and arrive at an agreement between them. To say it in other way, it is the cognizance of division of two kinds of satyas (Truths) which stays on the base of its ontological, epistemological and metaphysical sights and the cognizance of unity at this division. Once this division get comprehend as whole (One), Nirvana which is the fundamental element of Buddhism will show itself up to us as absolute Truth.

The doctrine of absolute middle/middle way gets us to comprehend two kinds of Truth Absolute Truth only can be cognized comprehension of these two satyas (Truths) as together but also distinctively. The very first of is called as samvrti-satya (Conditional Truth)⁵² and second one is paramartha-satya (Absolute Truth)⁵³. So Nagarjuna asserts his idea on that in his MMK24:8-10 by these words of his:

‘The Dharma Doctrine of Buddha bases on two kinds of Satyas (Truths) as worldly tradition and absolute. One who can not understand the difference between these Truths would not be able understand deeply Truth (Nirvana) of Buddha. Without basing on worldly Truths (samvrti-satya) the importance of absolute can not be thought. Freedom can not be reached.’⁵⁴

Nagarjuna, the frame of his madhmayamaka (absolute middle/middle way) Doctrine draw attentions to two Realities which corresponds to comprehension of two Truths and two Truth Values which gives us these Realities.⁵⁵ The truths (doğrular) which stays in field of conditional Truths and gives us Conditional Realities are called as Conditional truths (trues/Doğrular). Conditional truths (trues) are all about empirical world (the world in appearance).⁵⁶ By more open statement we shall say, the premises which includes knowledges about being or non-beings in combined relations

⁵¹ A.e., p. 251.

⁵² www.spokensanskrit.de

⁵³ www.spokensanskrit.de

⁵⁴ Priest, “Nāgārjuna’s Mulamadhyakamakarikā”, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Westerhoff, a.g.e., p. 9; ayrıca bkz.: Jones, a.g.e., p. 495; ayrıca bkz.: Garfield & Graham, a.g.e., p. 4; Jones, a.g.e., p.495.

⁵⁶ Garfield & Priest, a.g.e., p. 5.

carries these kinds of Truth Values. Conditional Truths (trues) are the Truths (trues) that are adopted in daily life, relative and deceptive time to time. Because of that they never give us absolute Realities and so absolute Truths.⁵⁷ Particular beings which are exist because of absolute being namely conditional beings and related things to their complex relationships are the conditional Truths (trues). These conditional Truths (trues) only gives us conditional realities. In other way to put it conditional beings and conditional true values about them only about conditional realities.⁵⁸ Because of that Conditional truth values (trues) only helps us to comprehend conditional Truth itself. Conditional Realities conceptually points at the field of conditional Truth. This understanding of Conditional Truth has a very important place in Nagarjuna's system because of the comprehension of absolute Truth that is called Nirvana. Conditional Truth is a step which carries us to hold absolute Truth. In MMK 24:8-10 Nagarjuna makes it very clear from Buddha's mouth (as we have mentioned before).⁵⁹ According to us, the field of conditional Truth for Nagarjuna is a cyclical field which includes every components of absolute being and presents us some truths (trues) which can help us to comprehend the conditional Truth. This so called the Conditional Truth is the field which we can call as Samsara (which is a very fundamental element of Buddhism again).⁶⁰

Samsara is the field of conditional Truth. Samsara is the field which we say being is exist and being is non-exist. Our adoption of Samsara here as the field of Conditional Truth has great and determined importance according to absolute Truth which Nagarjuna tries to demonstrate as absolute emptiness. In the frame of Buddhist thought Samsara is the circle of life which includes being and non-being (existence and non-existence) that gives living beings pain and suffering. A Nirvana which Nagarjuna mentions as absolute Truth and Buddhist Thought accepts as ultimate Truth is the salvation of this life circle and thus achieve freedom itself.

According to Nagarjuna knowing Nirvana (the Absolute Truth) is only possible by comprehension of absolute True. The Absolute True is the judgement of *-everything*

⁵⁷ Priest, Graham, "Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarika", p. 2.

⁵⁸ Garfield & Priest, **a.g.e.**, p.7.

⁵⁹ Priest, "Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarika", p. 131.

⁶⁰ Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p. 9.

is empty.⁶¹ On account of this, it is possible to cognize sunyata (emptiness) as absolute True.⁶² In this context sunyata points at the absolute direction of The Truth.

As we have mentioned before, emptiness is the absence of svabhava in every particular beings.⁶³ And this emptiness is the principle of interdependent existency itself as absolute being (existency). Absolute being is the *essence* that expresses imperative (necessary) relations between imperative (necessary) beings which Nagarjuna asserts as implicit knowledge adversely to Nyaya's substance in particular beings. Because this essence is something exist in and for itself and for other beings that exist because of it, it has its characteristics as being absolute. Absolute True gives us absolute Reality and thus absolute being (existency). In this respect Absolute reality is essence which is absolute. Nagarjuna, moving from his acceptance of absolute Reality which is put forward by absolute True corresponds to conceptionally the field of absolute Truth, asserts that absolute Truth itself is the emptiness which is absolute as it is.

4. The Application of Catuskoti in MMK

By asserting his understanding of Truth from his ontological and epistemological acceptance by catuskoti, Nagarjuna thus tries to show logical unity of this idea in itself. Although Nagarjuna did not give any information on this application in his MMK, his method did set forth after some works on this text with its fundamental features. Catuskoti (four fold negation method), which's steps does not follow each other in order shows us that it is possible to give four possible answers to every questions. In orderly these four answers are like: yes, no, both yes and no and neither yes nor no.⁶⁴ In other way to put it we can say it is affirmation, non-affirmation, either affirmation and non-affirmation and neither affirmation nor non-affirmation. These four fundamental elements of Catuskoti also can be shown as:

It is not true to say that some things are exist.

It is not true to say that some things are non-exist.

⁶¹ Garfield & Priest, **a.g.e.**, p. 6., ayrıca bkz.: Priest, "Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarikā", p. 4.

⁶² **A.e.**

⁶³ Robinson, **a.g.e.**, p. 326. Ruegg, **The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of philosophy in India**, p. 3; Westerhoff, **a.g.e.**, p. 53.

⁶⁴ Priest, "The Logic of Catuskoti", p. 25.

It is not true to say that some things are either exist or non-exist.

It is not true to say that anythings are neither exist nor non-exist.

Beside the presentation of these four fundamental elements of catuskoti which we have mentioned above there is one another thing which must not be ignored. When we take a look at these premises we see that every statements does establish with by negation with the expression of non-. As we have mentioned before it is the integrated feature of Buddhist thought to define something by its negation. This feature is seemed as the most problematic feature of catuskoti in the councils that called as parishads. Because during the argument every disputer must give their best shot on guessing which koti that they should apply. The most interesting part of this is neither Buddha himself nor his followers give any method on choosing any of this kotis during the argumentation. The general way that they follow is to choose either one them or beside this either affirming or negating four of them at the same time.⁶⁵

In his MMK, Nagarjuna, by aiming to constitute logical bases to his onto-epistemological sights, he tries to demonstrate the truthness of the knowledges of the fundamental concepts of his own doctrine by supporting it with catuskoti. Beside the other Buddhist thinkers acceptance of Nirvana as being ultimate Truth, in his model, Nagarjuna applies the way of affirming and negating every four Kotis at the same time for to show Nirvana can not be the ultimate Truth.

Well, as we have mentioned before the the based concepts of Nagarjuna's thought are The Truth, Absolute Truth (paramartha-satya/Nirvana), Conditional Truth (samvrti-satya/samsara) Conditional Trueness, Absolute Trueness, Conditional Reality, Absolute Reality, svabhava (essence/ the principle of interdetermined existency), madhmayamaka (absolute middle /middle way), sunyata (absolute existency), Sunya (absolute being).

By holding these concepts by catuskoti, Nagarjuna examines of their existency and non-existency and also them having or not having combined structures with other things by some features. In other way to say he inspects them as being or not being conditional trues. And he places them in to the Truth field which they have to be in. In

⁶⁵ Westerhoff, *a.g.e.*, p. 67.

the same way he does inspect the fields that he called as Samsara and Nirvana by applying catuskoti and as result he does verify that the only thing that can be called as ultimate is the judgement that asserts everything is empty.

The importance of Catuskoti by considering it can make such inspect, is the reality that confirmed by every Buddhist thinkers. Such that Arya Deva, who is a student of Nagarjuna says this by referencing his teacher:

“Being exist and being non-exist, both being exist and non-exist, neither being exist nor non-exist, a wise man should use this method for every determinations and every other things.”⁶⁶ According to Nagarjuna, the concept of absolute middle /middle way got its meaning by catuskoti. As a matter of fact, this comprehension which is advised by Buddha and accepted by Nagarjuna himself as two trues, in according to cognization emptiness as absolute trueness sources the thought of two trueness that corresponds to two realities which also corresponds to two Truths itself.

In Nagarjuna’s model absolute existency in relation to absolute middle /middle way shows itself in the third koti of catuskoti as being principle of interdetermined existency. And absolute absolute existency as absolute being is get itself to comprehend in the fourth koti of catuskoti as being the negation of third koti.

Nagarjuna accepts these first three kotis as knowledges that points at determined trues and places them in to the field of conditional reality which is the comprehension of conditional Truth. He places the forth koti which is negation of these three kotis in to the absolute reality field that is the comprehension of absolute Truth because of the absolute trueness of essence (absolute existency) which is the reason of all these determinations.

As we have several times mentioned, according to Nagarjuna the only ultimate Truth is the non existency of the ultimate Truth. If one has to talk about the Truth, it can only be the true judgements on the reality. According to Nagarjuna the only judgement which is true in absolute meaning is the idea that states *everything is empty*. AND because of that The Truth can only be emptiness which is also absolute. This Truth has nothing like as Buddha mentions. In shortly saying, it is not ultimate. Such as in the frame of Buddhist doctrine the main feature of absolute Truth is to be

⁶⁶ Priest, “The Logic of Catuskoti”, p. 27.

indetermined and inaffiable. But on contrary to this emptiness as absolute Truth has such determined structure in many ways. Because this emptiness is absolute existency that is the principle of indetermined existency Nagarjuna says that it is the unique reason of the existency of conditional beings. Emptiness as absolute true is the essence which is absolute at the same time. In this content, Nirvana itself is also empty and does get determined by the field of conditional Truth. Nagarjuna explains this field as Samsara. Samsara is the field of Truth where every combined beings and non-beings come to existency. This distinction of Nagarjuna between Samsara and Nirvana makes crystal clear of his idea of The TRUTH which has two sides as like medallion. In MMK 28:8 Nagarjuna says:

“Everything is real, nothing is non-real, everything is both real and non-real, and nothing is neither real nor non-real”⁶⁷

By applying catuskoti to show these Truths, he does come over the problem of being abstract of its explanation. According to him, Samsara which is determined as conditional Truth by the Truth which has dualistical unity (as being the One) includes the first three steps of catuskoti in itself. As we have said before, something does exist by some other things except itself by having imperative relationships with them. And this situation can be exposed in catuskoti like this:

I.Koti: p

II.Koti: $\neg p$

III. Koti: $p \wedge \neg p$

In here it is clear what these kotis are pointing at. The third koti is all about the cognization of these first two kotis as whole at once in the direction of absolute middle. What is meaning here is indetermined existency. In contrast with this, Nagarjuna places the expression of forth koti $\neg(p \vee \neg p)$ in Nirvana which he determines as absolute Truth. As we can remember according to Buddhist thought, Nirvana is the negation of Samsara and at the same time very reason of it as being absolute existency. At right this point, this forth koti includes the symbolical application of the Truth which

⁶⁷ Priest, “The Logic of Catuskoti”, p. 36.

Nagarjuna tries to assert. Having a general look at it, this third koti so called as Samsara does includes every elements of the Truth. In this situation, Nirvana, which is the negation of this third koti should be expressed as $\neg((p \wedge \neg p))$. In other representation, if we present Samsara as (S) and Nirvana as (N) than it will follow as $(N) = \neg S$. In other clear way to put this, by the statement of $\neg S$ which corresponds to (N) can be expressed as being something as neither something nor nothing. As Graham Priest remarks in his text called The Logic of Catuškoti the demonstration of this expression ($\neg((p \wedge \neg p))$) can be done as $\neg(p \vee \neg p)$.⁶⁸

On the other hand, as being absolute existency, Nirvana must be the reason for both itself and Samsara. As being on of the sides of The Truth, Nirvana is something (as we call emptiness) which does exist because of the absence of Samsara. As Nagarjuna asserts in the begining, the emptiness itself does exist because of the emptiness itself by Samsara. Until here we did mention that Nagarjuna does have two kinds of comprehensions on negation that differs from eachother in the frame of Buddhist tradition. Because of that as Westerhoff points out, for showing Nirvana as emptiness which is also absolute, we should take a look at this assertion:

Instead of $(N) = \neg S = \neg((p \wedge \neg p))$ presentation we can apply this presentation which is below:

$$(N) = \neg S = \neg(p \vee \neg p)$$

So according to Nagarjuna, The Truth can be represent as like this:

$$\text{The TRUTH} = S \wedge N = S \wedge \neg S = ((p \wedge \neg p) \wedge (\neg((p \wedge \neg p)))) = ((p \wedge \neg p) \wedge \neg(p \vee \neg p))$$

This representation is the assertion of the affirmation of these all four kotis at the same time. By this assertion Nagarjuna gets possibility of not only to that the Nirvana (which belongs to Buddhist thought) is not the ultimate Truth but also that there is no such a thing as ultimate Truth.

⁶⁸ Priest, "The Logic of Catuškoti", p. 27.

How? Well, in the direction of both Buddhist thought and Nagarjuna's thought this so called Truth which was asserted as the affirmation of all kotis has conditional situation with something other than itself, because of the principle of absolute existency. At this point Nagarjuna by following the direction of negating all of these four kotis at once he differs himself from the other Buddhist thinkers. So according to him, there need an upper Truth beyond this so called The TRUTH. And once again Nagarjuna, by applying to catuskoti shows that this upper Truth can be assertable by as affirming and then negating all kotis at once (as $T \wedge \neg T$). And all we can have here the repetition of what we have started at the very first time. According to us this situation which we can call as the paradox of eternal going back is the perfect demonstration of his claim that is "the ultimate truth is there is not such a thing as like ultimate truth". In fact Nagarjuna even talks about the unnecessary for having this kind of proof in his MMK 22: 11-12 as like:

"Empty shouldn't be demonstrated; non-empty shouldn't be demonstrated; neither both of them nor non of them shouldn't be demonstrated. Only should apply them namely"⁶⁹

Nagarjuna's assertion of Samsara by applying catuskoti and considering it from absolute emptiness Nirvana and showing these two Truths as the sides of The TRUTH has very important place in Buddhist epistemological-logical studies. Because Nagarjuna points out that these all can be comprehend by absolute middle and verifies it by applying catuskoti and with these make Buddhist critics on him more clear. Beside this, him showing the Truth is unity which includes dualistic structure in itself in catuskoti by affirming and negating all kotis at once to show that there is no ultimate Truth at all is very important in history of Indian, especially Buddhist traditional thinking. Because Buddhist thinkers who deals with Indian Logic after Nagarjuna takes Nagarjuna's studies as their starting points not Nyayikas.

It is clear that Nagarjuna puts distinction between him and Buddha himself by negating all four kotis at once. With this he also shows the difference of his understanding of The Truth from Buddha's. Nagarjuna's assertion on Nirvana as determined-indetermination⁷⁰, instead of Buddha's approval of it as ultimate Truth,

⁶⁹ Priest, "Nāgārjuna's Mulamadhyakamakarika", p. 2.

⁷⁰ Garfield & Priest, *a.g.e.*, p. 18. Ayrıca bkz.: Priest, "The Logic of Catuskoti", p. 47.

makes our opinion more strong on it. By his forthly affirmation in MMK 28:8, Nagarjuna shows that Buddha's doctrine of absolute Truth does includes every determinations.

Everything is conditionally real; nothing is absolutely real; everything is both real as conditionally and absolutely; nothing is real neither as conditionally nor absolutely.

In his own doctrine Nagarjuna comes over of the ineffability of Nirvana's indeterministic structure on three bases. At the very begining of his doctrine while he was underlying that there is no ultimate Truth but there is Nirvana as absolute Truth which can also be named as absolute emptiness, he did bring it in to determined situation. Beside this, by affirming Samsara as conditional Trtuh he also shows that as being negation of it Nirvana is the emptiness which stays still after the absence of Samsara.⁷¹ By this he does confirms the existed deterministic stuctre. Here the absolute emptiness is free from and also combined with conditional existency as being absolute existency. If we need to put this in more open way, Nagarjuna determines absolute emptiness firstly as being at, for and because of itself. And secondly as putting it in realtionship with conditional Truth that so called Samsara. The absolute Truth in Nagarjuna's thought aside being determined it also has indetermined feature from one another sight. That is the cause of cyclic structure which we have mentioned before that brings it in sight that there is no ultimatizaiton of the Truth. As we can see beause of that according to Nagarjuna Nirvana which Buddha was claimed as undetermined is in fact determinated-indetermination because of coming to the being beacuse of absolute existency (emptiness) and also by Samsara.

⁷¹ Ruegg, **The Literature of the Madhyamaka School**, p. 18.

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