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# Mind and Reality: An Exploration of the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna

JOSEPH MILNE

May I begin by saying that I feel greatly honoured to be invited to speak here at the Nehru Centre because I have a deep love of Indian culture and wisdom, and I stand before it all with great reverence. But also I feel greatly honoured to be invited to speak in this series of talks on Buddhism as a non-Buddhist, and I do so with some trepidation. I am aware that it is a general rule of the Temenos Academy to invite speakers from inside their traditions, so I do hope that what I shall say in this talk will be worthy of the breaking of this general rule.

By way of justification, at least on my part, I should say that I love the Eastern religions as much as the Western and through my studies of them all I feel I have learned things which one alone would not have taught me. My interest in Nāgārjuna in particular stems from my interest in the world religions and in certain fundamental and universal concerns of philosophy and theology: namely the question of the meaning of Being and the question of the meaning of Knowledge – what are technically called ontology and epistemology in Western thought. These two concerns converge in the thought of Nāgārjuna.

As a non-Buddhist, as a non-Indian, and as a kind of outsider, simply as a member of the extended human family in all its diversity, I would therefore like to approach my discussion of Nāgārjuna in the spirit of enquiry, as a person engaged in the questions that our human situation gives rise to. This enquiry is centred on the question: What is the relation of thought and reality? This is a huge question. It is indeed one of the great questions of philosophy in all traditions, wherever philosophy is still honestly pursued. Can thought touch reality? Can reality touch thought? Is all thought, in the end, nothing more than an overlay or projection upon reality? Would we be wiser to fall silent and simply hearken to reality? Or are we called by reality to think? Is there a mode of thought which leads us towards reality, towards truth itself, even though truth itself is ever-free and stands solely by itself and in itself? And are there modes of thought which lead us away from reality and truth and into illusion? How is truth to be distinguished from

illusion? Why is there a problem of reality and illusion? Why do we not simply light upon reality without effort? After all, nothing else can be disclosing itself to us but reality itself, so why is there any problem of the relation of reality to thought?

Well, there certainly is a problem, and there seems no escape from facing this problem. As human beings, simply because we are human beings, we think. We cannot help but conceive reality. The root of the word *man* means *mind*. The human being is the thinking being, and the human being is the being who must understand the nature of thought. This has always been one of the central concerns of philosophy, and the great philosophers have found that thought is grounded in reality, although finding that ground is very difficult. It involves finding the ground of thought and the ground of reality at the same time; and when that is achieved both reality and thought are known entirely differently. Thought ceases to be mere imposition upon reality, and reality ceases to be distinct from the knower of reality. This convergence of thought and reality is a common factor of the greatest Eastern and Western philosophy, even though they may be articulated very differently. If we study these philosophers in the spirit of enquiry, we see they point our gaze to a region that cannot be seen or grasped without a total transformation of thought. We cannot bring faulty or deluded thought to the gates of truth. But neither can we transform thought without understanding its nature. On the contrary, the process of understanding thought is itself the means of transforming it. This is a common factor between such great philosophers as Heraclitus, Plato, Shankara or Nāgārjuna, different as they may be in a thousand other respects. Thought proceeds to reality through a transformation of thought itself: through thought coming to a knowledge of its ground. The nature of the known, the knower and knowing have all to be known in a single act. That is the aim of the highest philosophy and of the highest mysticism. We may go further and say it is the aim of mind or intelligence itself. The mind has no resting place other than truth itself. How could it have a different resting place? What else could satisfy thought and intelligence than truth itself – not a concept of truth, but truth itself?

Not a concept of truth, but truth itself. Here lies all the difficulty of thought. Not a doctrine of truth, but truth itself. Not a belief, but truth itself. Not a theory, but truth itself. Not an interpretation, but truth itself. Not an ideology, but truth itself. Not a system, but truth itself.



Truth itself, free of any distortions imposed by thought. Truth itself, so the greatest thinkers tell us, cannot be replicated by thought at a distance from itself. It cannot be taken out of its ground in itself. How, then, can thought possibly come to it?

Is that enough questions? These are profoundly interesting questions, are they not? They make us pause. So, how does Nāgārjuna approach these questions? Let me first just say that Nāgārjuna is probably the greatest Buddhist philosopher, if we can say such a thing in a Buddhist context. He was born in South India probably in the early second century AD. There are many legends about him, but I will not go into those here – save to remark that these legends attest to his greatness. At an early age he entered the Buddhist Order. The works attributed to him are now known to us only through Tibetan translations. Various good English translations are available of these works. They are very terse and difficult – so be warned before you embark on reading them, particularly if you have little familiarity with Buddhism.

Nāgārjuna's starting point is very simple. It is this: the unreflective mind attributes ultimacy to that which is not ultimate. That is to say, the unreflective mind takes as absolutely true that which is not absolute, and in doing this it misconceives the nature of everything. In this act of attributing ultimacy to what is not ultimate, the mind 'clings' to an aspect of reality, a part of reality, which is not as it seems. This false 'clinging' is a central notion of Buddhism. It is a very profound insight into the mind or human nature. The mind lights on something and says to itself 'That is the real. I hold to that.' In saying 'I hold to that' the mind enslaves itself to something that is not firm and dependable, and so begins the great cycle of suffering or *dukkha*.

Well, that is straightforward and familiar enough, is it not? It is the tragic side of the human story. The mind allies itself to something as ultimate that is not ultimate and hopes or believes it will bring permanent happiness, but it does not. On the contrary, it brings distress and suffering. It is simple enough and we can all think of many examples. But two questions need to be asked of this. First, why is there this tendency of the mind to attribute ultimacy to that which is not ultimate, and second, what is the basic structure of this kind of mistaken thinking? The first of these questions I shall return to later. It is a very important question and requires careful philosophic examination. The second question – what is the basic structure of this type of mistaken thinking? – will lead us in the direction of an answer, so we



shall see what Nāgārjuna says about this first.

This brings us to a major part of Nāgārjuna's philosophy, to what are called the four extremes or *kotis*. The four extremes are what Nāgārjuna regards as the four characteristic ways in which the mind posits absolutes which are not truly absolute. There are several ways in which these extremes may be briefly formulated, and they come as options between different extremes or absolutes. For example take the concept of existence. If existence is taken as ultimate it raises the question of non-existence. The notion of non-existence raises the question as to whether the ultimate is both existence and non-existence together, or whether the ultimate is neither existence nor non-existence. Thus we have four *koti* or extremes: existence, non-existence, both existence and non-existence, and neither existence nor non-existence. According to Nāgārjuna all these views are wrong. This is because the Middle Way says reality is not to be reduced to any of these extremes but is a mixture of them all. They are all true at once, but none of them is true exclusively. But to see this requires a totally different order of thinking or understanding which transcends the dichotomies involved in the four extremes but which also negates nothing of the partial truth of them all. All the extreme views are either dualistic, or false unities, or false negations.

To illustrate this we may take this great city of London. Clearly it exists, yet also just as clearly it has come into existence and will one day go out of existence. So which of these two is true of London? Which is permanent or ultimate, its present existence, its previous or future non-existence? We surely cannot say that because it came into existence and will go out of existence that it is really non-existent, can we? We would not be here if it was non-existent. It exists now. But what is the non-existence of London? Does not the concept of the non-existence of London depend on the concept of the existence of London? We have to remember that the concept of the non-existence of something refers to the something that is said to be non-existent, so the concept of non-existence does not stand alone. Thus the two concepts of existence and non-existence belong with each other, and for the unreflective mind they simply remain in conflict with each other. So one person will go for existence as the real or ultimate, and another will go for non-existence as real or ultimate. But they are both wrong, according to Nāgārjuna. So is London both existent and non-existent at once? That too is plainly absurd and an extreme. Superficially it may appear to resolve

the dichotomy between existence and non-existence, but it remains only a theoretical concept and is not actually known. It is a false resolution of the duality of existence and non-existence. So what alternative is left? The remaining alternative is to conceive it as neither existent nor non-existent. This move attempts to overcome the dichotomy between existence and non-existence by negating both. It is the sister to the concept that it is both at once. This is the fourth extreme, or what is called nihilism. Nihilism refuses to account for existence and for non-existence. It does not answer the question but buries it out of sight.

Now, why is there such a problem in deciding if London exists, non-exists, exists and non-exists, or neither exists nor non-exists? Many modern Western analytic philosophers will say this is just a semantic problem, a mere play with words. But that reply is in fact the fourth extreme! It is to align oneself with one of the false answers. Another might say that, since truth is just a relative thing it is equally true to say that London both exists and non-exists for those for whom it seems so. But this is to adopt the position of the third *koti* or extreme. Modern relativism is one of the extremes, as old as ignorance itself. Just another extreme evasion which does not address the question fully. To say that truth is relative is an absolute or extremist position, just like the others. Notice that, although the mind gets pulled between these various answers, as if it were obliged to settle for one or another of them, none of them can actually bring thought into contact with reality itself, but rather they lead it away into abstractions, into theories which the mind wishes to test. But what is it that can test a theory of truth? What measures truth?

So why this difficulty? Nāgārjuna's answer is simple. Existence and non-existence are not ultimate. The problem arises through attributing ultimacy to any of the combinations or relations of existence or non-existence, or ultimacy to their negation. Existence and non-existence both come and go. They are there, plainly, yet they are not ultimate. To put this in Nāgārjuna's words, they co-originate. That is to say, that which is and that which is not belong together and engender each other simultaneously. They are not actually mutually exclusive, just as waking and sleeping are not mutually exclusive, or day and night, or left and right. They arise in relation to one another.

Nevertheless this does not answer the question as to how the notion of ultimacy arises in thought. Nāgārjuna is not saying there is no ultimate, and neither is Buddhism as a whole saying that. Buddhism



most certainly does not deny an ultimate, and neither is Nāgārjuna doing so. All he is saying is that we attribute ultimacy to things that are not ultimate. But there is that to which ultimacy truly belongs. To say there is no ultimate is just a further extreme position. The unreflective mind simply fails to distinguish between the relative and the absolute, or between the conditioned and the unconditioned. In the mundane realm of things, everything stands in relation to everything else. This means that the existent among observable things stands in relation to the non-existent and visa versa. They arise together. There could be no becoming if this were not so. For example, a child grows into an adult by ceasing to be a child. Being a child and being an adult are both part of being human. But the human being could not pass through these stages without the whole of the rest of the world also coming into being and constantly changing and transforming. And the world could not come into being without the universe coming into being. So everything is interdependent and related. The mistake lies in taking some aspect of all this as ultimate or absolute.

This may be seen better from another angle. If we take the solitary being of the self as ultimate, then there arises other than self. If I take 'I' as ultimate, then your self becomes other than my self. Linguistically we get 'I' and 'Thou', 'me' and 'you'. I cannot use the word 'I' in reference to you, and you cannot use 'I' in reference to me. To whom then does the word 'I' truly belong? In the realm of the conditioned we have to accept the difference, as language itself compels us to do. But which is ultimate: 'I' or 'Thou'? One answer is to say both. Another is to say neither. Another is to say neither – nor, meaning they are neither non-ultimate nor ultimate at the same time. But all these answers are extremes and therefore wrong according to Nāgārjuna. Why? Because selfhood is being misconceived in all cases. This is the meaning of the *Anatma-vada* or 'no-self' doctrine. The *Anatma-vada* or 'no-self' doctrine says that to attribute independent selfhood to any being is to attribute self-origination to that being. Plainly, no being could exist without the rest of the universe. Plainly no being brings itself into being as a self-enclosed entity. If that were so every being would live in its own independent world, or live alone in no world at all. It implies an infinite number of originations, one for every being.

To put that another way, we have seen in science the search for the fundamental particle, the bit that stands alone and brings itself into being. This is atomism, the theory that there is some primary bit or



particle that is prior to all the diversity of the universe of matter. From the Buddhist position this is the false assumption that there is one bit of matter that stands apart from the rest of matter, while in fact all matter comes forth together as a continuum in process. It is like mistaking an ingredient of a cake for its cause – while in fact the cause of the cake lies with the baker and the person who will eat the cake. If the cake has no independent existence from the baker and the final eater of the cake, how can it be considered that one of its ingredients is ultimate or primary? So likewise with every being. Each comes into being as part of the totality of the conditioned realm. This does not negate the integrity of each being, and it does not mean that nobody has selfhood, but it does mean that any notion of selfhood that regards the being as self-causing and independent from the rest of conditioned reality must be false. In short, ultimacy should not be attributed to anything that is just a part or element, or which is in process of change, or which comes into being or goes out of being.

The difficulty in all this is that the unreflective mind does not realise the implications of attributing ultimacy to the conditioned. That which is ultimate stands eternally by itself in relation to nothing else. The ultimate is non-relative. The ultimate has no opposite, and so the ultimate can never be one of a pair of things or the fusion of a pair of things. In Buddhist terms the ultimate does not belong to the realm of being or of non-being or of becoming. It does not stand in contrast to anything. That would make it relative. So how could these attributions belong to any entity or non-entity in the conditioned world? There is the realm of the relative and the realm of the non-relative. These have to be clearly distinguished. The problem Nāgārjuna is addressing is the confusion of the two. So long as they are confused, then neither is understood properly. Ultimacy gets mixed up with the relative, and the relative gets mixed up with the ultimate.

Now – for the sake of our Western minds and for the sake of coming out of the hard considerations for a moment – I would suggest that what Nāgārjuna is saying here is universally a problem of thinking. We are not merely discussing a Buddhist doctrine but principles that belong to proper thinking universally. What I have just said about maintaining a proper distinction between the ultimate and the relative applies equally in all genuine philosophical work and to all religions. Even though Buddhism is called by non-Buddhists a ‘non-theistic’ religion, all that Nāgārjuna says about the distinction between the

ultimate and the relative applies to the Christian distinction between God and the creation. This is not a matter of attempting to reconcile Buddhism with Christianity – an enterprise which I regard as wholly pointless because it reduces both to mere doctrines or systems – but simply because as thinking beings we need to distinguish the ultimate from the non-ultimate, the relative from the non-relative, the absolute from the non-absolute. We belong to this problematic no matter whether we are Buddhists or Christians, or if we go by no named religion at all. So I just want to point out that unreflective notions of God in our culture import relative ideas and impose them upon God. For example God is often regarded as an entity or a being among beings. Or God is thought of as intervening in the created order. There is, if I may just make this observation, a lack of theological consideration of the transcendence of God in Christianity at the present time. And this is because the meaning of ultimacy is no longer generally considered, and because of this a confused relativism prevails almost everywhere, perhaps even to the point where relativism is regarded as ultimate or absolute, even though such a notion is rationally incoherent. This leads to confusion in every walk of life. Everyone wants their own private truth, and yet they want everyone else to subscribe to their private truth – which obviously is impossible, not to say absurd. But the root is the failure to consider the ultimate in proper terms, as completely discontinuous with the relative. Truth is not democratic, it is the measure of all things, the measure of every notion, yet not itself a notion.

My point here is that metaphysical confusion, such as prevails in most modern Western thought, leads to confusion of thought in every realm. Metaphysics is not an optional extra in a culture. On the contrary, all thought and perception is grounded in metaphysics in the very obvious sense of what we take to be real or unreal, eternally true or temporally conditioned. It makes no difference whether we call ourselves believers, agnostics or atheists, this metaphysical distinction between real and unreal remains the ground of our thinking simply because it is the ground of mind, intelligence and consciousness themselves. Wittingly or unwittingly every human being attributes ultimacy to something or other – even to suppose there is no such thing as ultimacy is to do so.

This brings us to a matter that I believe needs to be cleared up in much that is commonly said of Buddhism. I said a moment ago that



Buddhism is a non-theistic religion, and I suggested this was a meaningless distinction. It is obvious that Buddhism does not speak in terms of a theistic symbolism. But it is also obvious that those religions that do speak in theistic symbolism are quite aware that they speak symbolically. It is understood in the highest Christian theology, for example, that the appellation 'God' is just an appellation and that all the theological attributes given to God do not capture God, because God is ineffable, wholly beyond that grasp of representative thought. Exactly the same holds for the Buddhist appellation *Sunyata* – 'unconditioned', 'void', 'emptiness'. It is no different to make *Sunyata* an entity among entities as it is to make God an entity among entities. The two words 'God' and '*Sunyata*' belong to two modes of discourse, the symbolic and the metaphysical. This distinction between symbolic and metaphysical discourse is a vast subject that merits much reflection in its own right, but we cannot pursue that now. All I wish to point out is that these two modes of thought should not be reduced to literal differences between religions and taken as a basis for doctrinal differences. Nor should they be reduced to mere psychological or cultural distinctions, a reduction I find quite abhorrent. On the contrary, both discourses direct the mind to the same, to the ultimate, the non-relative, to that which is prior to temporal reality, prior to mind and thought, prior to being, becoming and non-being, prior to the seeds, essences or archetypes of existent things – prior in the sense of eternally real or absolute, prior in the sense of 'there in advance of everything', prior in the sense of that which everything stands forth from and is distinguishable from, the indistinguishable which makes distinction possible.

I am quite aware that Buddhist literature rarely states this explicitly. Its orientation is the practical overcoming of the clinging that arises through attributing ultimacy to that which is relative. But the question naturally arises – or so it seems to me – How does it come about that the mind attributes ultimacy at all? Or, in more directly Buddhist terms, How does it happen that the mind attributes the unconditioned to the conditioned? Why is there any notion of the ultimate at all?

The answer is that if there were only the relative and contingent, there could be no conception of the non-relative and non-contingent. Indeed there could be no conception of the relative or contingent either. That is to say, the conditioned is itself only conceivable and discernible by virtue of an innate prior knowledge of the unconditioned, because the conditioned stands out from the silent background, so to speak, of the



unconditioned. Let me make this as clear as possible: Mind looks out from the unconditioned. The unconditioned is the vantage-point of mind or consciousness. That is why the unconditioned cannot be an object of perception or conception, just as the ear cannot hear the ear, or the eye perceive the eye. The rule is that whatever may be an object of perception belongs to the realm of the conditioned, and this includes all the contents and motions of the mind itself that are observable as objects. In short, the conditioned includes all that may be experienced, for experience means to go out, to savour difference and diversity, to attend to that which stands away from the seat of unconditioned Reality.

This is a very important matter to consider. Where does mind think and conceive from? Modern Western thought on this matter is almost non-existent. Thought is given over to inference from perception or from theory, but the ground of knowing itself is no longer considered in most modern philosophy. This is fine for the natural sciences, but it cannot deal with the question of the ground of mind itself, that is to say, metaphysical questions. From whence does mind gaze upon the things of sense? From whence does its gaze arise? Modern psychology is no help here either because it attempts to study only the contents of the mind as objects in the same way as the sciences do, as objects of sense. Thus it is preoccupied with images and personal history. It does not enquire into the nature of mind as such, or into the nature of knowing or epistemology. Indeed there is no psychology of Intellect which is the organ of knowledge. So where is the seat or ground of mind as such? From whence does it direct its gaze upon things, including the contents of the mind?

The answer is that mind gazes from the unconditioned itself, from truth itself. To put that more strongly, *truth or reality bring mind into being*. This is the metaphysical answer to this question. It is a straightforward fact, so to speak, which Nāgārjuna takes for granted when he discusses in such detail the errors that arise in confusing the ultimate with the relative. He does not ask the foolish question 'Is there such a thing as truth or reality absolute?' He asks, How can the mind be rescued from ignorance, from the confusion of the conditioned with the unconditioned? And his answer, which is utterly Buddhist, is to direct the intelligence to seeing the logical absurdity of the extreme views which confuse the conditioned and relative with the unconditioned and non-relative. The unconditioned and non-relative are taken as given. They are taken as given by Nāgārjuna and they are

taken as given by the ignorant. The difference lies in how they are understood in either case.

Its strikes our modern Western mind as curious that the seat of the gaze of the mind is from the unconditioned itself, from the ultimate itself, and that it is knowledge that looks outward to the objects of sense, to the conditioned. Since the 'Enlightenment' our Western culture has become accustomed to supposing that all that may be known can be known only as objects, as external entities, sense-perceptions from which 'knowledge' may be inferred empirically. We have become accustomed to supposing that knowledge is abstracted from perceptions, and that all such knowledge is subject to continuous revision. But prior to the 'Enlightenment' the great philosophers and theologians understood the knowing act of the mind quite differently. They understood that it was knowledge that formed mind and brought mind into being, and that the Intellectual world and the Soul exist prior to the objects of sense, as their cause. Thus the essences of things are in mind, universal mind, not in the materiality of objects, and essence knows essence without mediation. Non-essence cannot know essence. This means that essence cannot be inferred from empirical investigation of objects. This is a very important principle which is found in every high philosophical tradition or religion. It is the essence of mind that knows the essence of things. Thus Plato, for example, says that before its descent into the body – into the material world – the soul knew the essences of all things directly without mediation, not as entities outside itself but through union with them. Likewise Parmenides says that thought and being are the same, and at the close of the Middle Ages Aquinas says that the first thought of the mind is Being. Union is the essential meaning of our word 'knowledge' or the Greek 'gnosis'.

Because such knowledge is of the nature of mind itself, the ground of all thought, it cannot be thought of as mediated knowledge, as an object of knowledge distinct from the mind, such as psychological and material objects can be. Mind is knowledge present to itself as itself. It is knowledge that forms the mind, not mind that grasps knowledge. This is the highest level of the mind, of course. It was the realm of knowledge proper to the intellect, which knows from unity, as distinct from the reason, which infers from the senses and experiences. It is what Aquinas called Angelic Mind, or what Meister Eckhart calls the uncreated apex of the soul. It is mind participating in God's knowledge, and thus it is where being and knowing are identical. In Buddhist



terms, it is Sunyata knowing Sunyata.

This understanding of mind was lost in the 'Enlightenment', and so the thought of the previous ages, from the Presocratics to the Renaissance, has become largely unintelligible to us. But it can become intelligible to us again once we understand that the natural order of the universe and of being has been turned upside-down in modern Western thinking. That is to say, that Being, Truth, Reality, Essence and Knowledge are first in the order of things, not last, and that they are immediately present to themselves, not mediated, and that mind is the immediate reflection of these upon themselves as distinct from their identity in the mind of God. In God Being, Truth and Knowledge are at rest, while in mind they are creative and in motion.

In Buddhist thought – as in Eastern thought generally – the natural order has not been turned upside-down, and so we find it taken for granted that the subtlest and most ineffable comes first in the order of things, not last, and certainly not as an arbitrary extra. Therefore the thinking moves in quite a different way, and so the problem that Nāgārjuna deals with is that of mixing the unmediated knowing of the ultimate with the mediated knowing of the conditioned. It is a problem of mixing absolute knowledge with inferred knowledge. This is essentially the same problem that Plato deals with in speaking of distinguishing Reality from appearances.

What, then, are the implications of all this when considering the relation of Reality to thought? Is Reality – reality in the true sense of that which is eternal, absolute and ultimate – beyond the scope and power of thought? Is Nāgārjuna pointing us beyond all thought? Is he, through showing the errors of mixing the unconditioned with the conditioned, negating all thought? The answer to this question depends on what we understand thought to be. If by thought we mean only inference from objects of sense, then the answer is 'yes'. If by thought we mean holding concepts distinct from Reality itself, then the answer is 'yes' again.

However, that answer is not sufficient and is too simplistic. There is a mode of thought beyond and prior to inferential and conceptual thought. This higher mode of thought is the knowing that belongs to Reality as such, a mode of thought in which Reality is present to itself with conception un-separate from itself. If we might put it this way, Reality thinks its presence, or, Reality knows itself. This is the originary knowing that brings mind into being, mind in the universal



sense, and it is also the ground of every particular mind, the ground in which mind can reflect upon itself and upon everything else, both the unconditioned and the conditioned, the non-relative and the relative. This is thought in the true sense, the thought prior to and underlying all inferential or discursive thinking. It is the thought that belongs to Intellect as it was understood in the Middle Ages in the West, or thought that was once called contemplation or speculation. To contemplate or to speculate is to come to know from things themselves, to apprehend what reality of itself discloses of itself to itself. In the Christian tradition this is sometimes called 'participating in God's knowledge of all things.' In that knowledge everything is present to God without any distinction or division. In Buddhism this is Sunyata. Liberated from the confusion of the ultimate with the non-ultimate, which is the root of clinging, the mind is free to be informed directly by the knowledge that resides in all things – not in order to 'have' or 'get' knowledge of things, but rather to be impressed or stamped with the knowledge that speaks things themselves into being. The word 'informed' means to be 'formed by'. In other words, true thought is the thought which comes out of reality itself *as reality itself*. It is this thought which occurs in the liberated or non-clinging mind, and so mind is not separate from Reality, but Reality beholding itself, or knowledge in knowledge of itself.

This may well sound strange in the context of modern Western thinking, where epistemology has become wholly preoccupied with the problems of empirical inference, as we have already observed. But consider this: do we really believe that Reality is unknown to itself? Do we really think that Truth does not know Truth, or that the ineffable is oblivious of itself? Is Reality to be relegated to unconscious oblivion? I think these questions show the absurdity of such notions by themselves. It is therefore the responsibility of our intelligence to conform itself to the intelligence of Reality itself. That, I suggest, is the point of Nāgārjuna's pulling apart of all erroneous thinking. He intends to leave the mind free to participate in the unconditioned reality of Reality itself.