Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 16 | Issue 4

Article 3

10-1-1999

What Do Buddhists Hope for from Antitheistic Argument?

Paul J. Griffiths

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Griffiths, Paul J. (1999) "What Do Buddhists Hope for from Antitheistic Argument?," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 4 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil199916440

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol16/iss4/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

WHAT DO BUDDHISTS HOPE FOR FROM ANTITHEISTIC ARGUMENT?

Paul J. Griffiths

This essay begins by distinguishing an argument's validity from its cogency, and emphasizing the importance for understanding particular philosophers of knowing how they saw both matters (I). It then gives an introduction to the views of Mokṣākaragupta, an Indian Buddhist philosopher, on both these matters (II-III), and an analysis of his rebuttals of arguments for God's existence, and his arguments against the possibility of God's existence (IV). It concludes by showing that these arguments, though taken to be valid by Mokṣākaragupta, were not intended by him to be persuasive; it suggests, also, that this is a typical feature of such arguments.

I The Persuasive Power of Argument

There is now a fairly substantial secondary literature on scholastic Indian Buddhist argumentation about the existence and nature of *īśvara*, of God.¹ Most of it concentrates upon the formalities and technicalities of the arguments. These are of course extremely important, and their careful exposition and critical analysis is still at its relatively early stages: perhaps it will require another generation or two of work before exploration and use of these arguments have become part of the ordinary practice of the philosophy of religion in the West. But there are other fundamental questions about these arguments scarcely yet asked at all. One of these is: What persuasive power did those who developed and used these arguments take them to have? What was hoped for from their use? This is a question about what Indian Buddhists thought their arguments might achieve. Associated with it is a further question: Were they right to think what they thought about this? I'll address both these questions in what follows.

An argument's validity is not the same as its cogency; if an argument is valid it need not be cogent, and if cogent it need not be valid. It will therefore generally be important in philosophical discussion to know how the relation between the two is understood by participants. It is possible to think that good philosophical arguments (valid ones with true premises) have (or ought to have) a lot of cogency, a lot of persuasive power; if you think this then you may think, as Robert Nozick puts it (though without endorsing the view), that such arguments

... *force* you to a conclusion [because] if you believe the premisses you *have to* or *must* believe the conclusion ... A philosophical argument is

an attempt to get someone to believe something, whether he wants to believe it or not ... philosophers need arguments so powerful they set up reverberations in the brain: if the person refuses to accept the conclusion, *he dies*.²

This is the knockdown argument. A valid argument of this sort (there aren't any, of course) has maximal persuasive power. A valid argument taken to have somewhat less persuasive power might be thought to convict those presented with it and capable of understanding it of irrationality if they don't accept its conclusions. Some might think that textbook illustrations of *modus ponens* are like this. A valid argument taken to have less power still might be thought to make the acceptance of its conclusions plausible (or possible, or some such), but not to make such acceptance necessary for the preservation of rationality. Perhaps arguments about ethical questions are typically like this. And a valid argument taken to have relatively little persuasive power might be thought convincing or useful only to those who already, and independently, accept its conclusions. Arguments in macroeconomics might usefully be so understood, since they seem to persuade no one of anything.

When someone offers you an argument, then, it's important to understand what persuasive power they take it to have. If you think they take it to have maximal persuasive power and yet your brain doesn't explode upon not accepting it, you're likely to think that the argument has failed. But perhaps those who offer it to you take it to have much less power than this, and take your rejection of it if you don't already (and independently) take its conclusions to be true as entirely consonant with the argument's success (and with its validity and the truth of its premises). Or perhaps you judge an argument you're offered to have succeeded because it has made its conclusions plausible or attractive to you; but then it turns out that its propounders understand it to be much more persuasive than this, and take it to have failed because you don't find yourself compelled on pain of irrationality to accept its conclusions as true.

These points suggest that philosophical understanding (and productive philosophical engagement) require knowing not only what arguments someone offers, but what understanding of argument is implicit in such offerings. And it's just here that more questions need to be asked about Indian Buddhist antitheistic argumentation. What persuasive power did the scholastics (Vasubandhu, Bhavya, Dharmakīrti, Śāntarakṣita, Śāntideva, Kamalaśīla, Jñānaśrī, Ratnakīrti, to call only the more famous names on the roll) who propounded such arguments take them to have? It's very easy for late-twentieth-century western interpreters of the texts in which these arguments are found to abstract them from their context (and most often the context is a compendium intended principally for the training of Buddhist monks who already and independently take the arguments' conclusions to be true, not one of argumentative engagement with opponents) and assess them as though they were understood to have (and ought be understood by us to have) a high degree of persuasive power on the model of (say) Spinoza's *demonstrationes* in the *Ethica*. But perhaps the arguments were not (or not always) so understood.

In this paper I'll try to shed some preliminary light on the question of what persuasive power Indian Buddhist scholastics took their antitheistic arguments to have. This will involve saying something about what those arguments were like, but providing exposition of that sort will remain secondary to exploration of the former question. I'll proceed by looking at one work by a late Indian Buddhist thinker, Mokṣākaragupta.

II Mokṣākaragupta and the Tarkabhāṣā

We know relatively little about Mokṣākaragupta's life, but it is probable that he lived in Bengal in the late eleventh or early twelfth century and that he was a Buddhist monk learned not only in Buddhist philosophical literature but also in that of the nonbuddhist schools. This means that he lived at the end of the period in which Indian Buddhists were composing scholastic works in Sanskrit. After the beginning of the thirteenth century the institutional context that had made such activity possible largely ceased to exist in India (the monastery with which Mokṣākaragupta was connected was probably destroyed by Muslims in 1202).³

Mokṣākaragupta's surviving work suggests that he was not a particularly original thinker, and (as with most Buddhist thinkers) that he would have taken it as a compliment not to be so regarded. The central purpose professed by most such thinkers was the handing on, without change or damage, of a tradition of reasoning they had received from their teachers.⁴ The work upon which I'll comment is called *Tarkabhāṣā* in Sanskrit, which might be translated *A Description of Logic*, or (possibly) *The Language of Logic*.⁵ It is an introductory work, intended for monks beginning the study of *tarka*, which term covers parts of what we call epistemology, parts of what we call formal logic, and parts of what we (used to) call dialectics.

Mokṣākaragupta says of his own work that it is intended to elucidate the thought of Dharmakīrti (a figure of numinous importance in the history of Buddhist theorizing about *tarka*; he predates Mokṣākaragupta by four or five hundred years) for young students of small intelligence.⁶ It does not presuppose any extensive or precise knowledge of the topics it treats, and does not provide detailed treatment of controversial questions within those topics. Instead, it introduces students to the main divisions of the subject (*tarka*), to the technical terms deployed by those composing within its bounds, and to the main positions taken. It is an introductory lexicon and doxography, not too unlike the introductory textbooks used in our institutions of higher education. This makes it in many respects ideal for my purposes because it provides a conspectus of the basics of *tarka* (of its categories and subdivisions, of the intellectual equipment needed to do further work in it), and can reasonably be taken as giving what were then generally agreed to be the fundamentals of the discipline. Since (inevitably) much of it is concerned to set out for the novice a useful taxonomy of the subject's topics, it provides material on the basis of which reasonable generalizations can be made about what persuasive power arguments in general (and, in particular, arguments against God's existence) were taken to have.

The work has three major subdivisions. The first deals with the nature of accurate awareness (*samyagjñāna*) and the means or practices (*pramāṇa*,

which I shall render 'doxastic practice') by which we get it. The second division deals with arguments offered to oneself, for one's own benefit (*svārthānumāna*). Arguments treated under this head are intended to provide those who offer them with knowledge about objects or states of affairs not directly perceived by the senses. The standard example is that you can come to know by the construction of an argument that there is fire on a distant mountain even when you perceive only smoke because the mountain is too distant for you to see or feel the fire. The fire of whose existence you come to know is something not directly perceived by the senses. The third division of the work deals with arguments made for the benefit of others (*parārthānumāna*). These arguments use words (are vocalized, or possibly written), and are intended to convince others of things, to produce knowledge in others. That is, they have an argumentatively persuasive purpose, a dialectical purpose. The material in both the second and third divisions of the work treats matters of logical theory, and the theory is largely the same in each case; the difference between them is only that the third division is interested in persuasion while the second division is interested in the management of an individual's noetic structure. I shall not distinguish between the divisions in what follows, though obviously questions about persuasive power are of most significance for topics treated in the third division.

I'll now turn to a fairly lengthy exposition of what Mokṣākaragupta thinks about argument in general as a necessary prolegomenon to a discussion of what he thinks about its persuasive power.

III Mokṣākaragupta on Argument

A valid argument, according to Mokṣākaragupta, consists of only two elements. As he puts it: "For Buddhists, an expression that demonstrates something has only two members. They are called invariable concomitance and presence in the subject."⁷ The two elements are: (1) all A-possessors have B; (2) S is an A-possessor. The paradigm is (1) All smoke[A]-possessors have fire [B]; (2) This mountain [S] possesses smoke. The conclusion, (3) (Hence) This mountain [S] has fire [B], is left unexpressed, though it does state the knowledge that is gained through a proper argument for oneself (*svārthānumāna*; this was, recall, the topic of the second division of Mokṣākaragupta's work). In this formalization, A (smoke) is what Mokṣākaragupta calls the *liṅga*, the 'mark', or the *hetu*, the 'reason' (other synonyms are *sādhana*, 'that which proves', *jñāpaka*, 'that which makes known', *vyāpya*, 'that which is to be pervaded'). This mark is typically an observable property, and in order for it to be properly usable in an argument of this sort, it must have three characteristics.

First, *pakṣadharmatā*, 'presence in the subject'. This means that the mark must be present in S, that smoke must be present in the mountain. Mokṣākaragupta puts it thus:

Definite existence of [the mark] is ascertained in the locus to which the argument is directed: [This means] that the definite presence of the mark is ascertained in the property-possessor (the mountain is an example) to which argument is directed. This is one [of the three characteristics], and is called 'presence in the subject'.⁸

Second, *anvaya*, 'positive concomitance'. This means that the mark is present only in members of the class to which S belongs, things relevantly like S (in this case, all fire-possessors):

Existence of [the mark] is ascertained only in what is like the subject. The expression 'what is like the subject' means 'a thing of the same kind'; it indicates those things that, like the subject, possess a property indicated in an example [e.g., 'as in a kitchen', which is a fire-possessor]. This fact, that the mark is ascertained to exist only in what is like the subject, is the second [of the three characteristics], and is called 'positive concomitance'.⁹

Positive concomitance understood in this way does not require that the mark be present in all members of the relevant class (that smoke be present in all fire-possessors), as Mokṣākaragupta goes on to note. For instance, in the case of an argument that attempts to use the mark *being made by human action* to prove impermanence, the fact that some impermanent things (e.g., lightning) are not so produced does not make the argument invalid. *Anvaya* still obtains in such a case. Positive concomitance requires only that the mark not be present in anything not of the relevant class: that no non-fire-possessors be smoky.

And third, *vyatireka*, 'negative concomitance'. This means that the mark is absent in everything that is relevantly unlike S (in this case, all non-fire-possessors):

Definite absence of [the mark] is ascertained in what is unlike the subject. The expression 'what is unlike the subject' means 'a thing different from the subject'; it is the ascertainment of the definite absence therein that is the third [of the three characteristics], and is called 'negative concomitance'.¹⁰

This is logically equivalent to the statement of positive concomitance. If all As are B (*anvaya*), then no non-B is A (*vyatireka*).

The upshot is that all smoke-possessors are fiery, and that no non-fire-possessors are smoky. The claim is not that all fire-possessors are smoky (this may or may not be true, but it is not required for positive and negative concomitance). The absence of B (fire) then guarantees the absence of A (smoke); and the presence of A (smoke) guarantees the presence of fire. This relation between A and B is otherwise called *vyāpti*, which strictly means something like 'pervasion', but which I shall translate, following what is now almost a standard rendering, as 'invariable concomitance'.

Marks that have these three characteristics, and that can as a result be deployed in arguments of the relevant sort, are in turn of at least two sorts, says Mokṣākaragupta. The first is a mark related to that to which it stands in a relation of invariable concomitance as effect to cause. The phrase *tadutpatti*, 'arising from that', labels this kind of relation between A and B, and the example given is the one I've been using: smoke is the effect of fire, which means that it stands in the appropriate causal relation to fire (only when fire is present is smoke's presence caused). You typically come to

know that such a causal relation obtains by perception (*pratyakṣa*), but this does not mean that the relation of *tadutpatti* is a contingent one. It is, rather, necessary: all empirical observations will confirm it, and none can falsify it.

But A can also be related to B by identity (*tādātmya*; this is the second kind of mark). For instance, when S (this thing in front of me) bears the property A, 'being a *śiṃśapā*' (a kind of tree), which is glossed to mean "bearing distinguishing marks such as branches, leaves, color, and shape",¹¹ and B is the property 'properly being called a tree', then there is a relation of identity between A and B: all *śiṃśapās* are properly called trees, and where there is the absence of the property 'properly being called a tree' there is also the absence of the property 'being a *śiṃśapā*'. Coming to know that all A-possessors are also B-possessors in this kind of case doesn't require having observed instances of causal connection between A and B; it requires only knowledge of the proper uses of the term 'tree' (*vrkṣa*).¹²

There are interesting difficulties here. The properties *being a śiṃśapā* and *being a tree* aren't straightforwardly identical (not even in the sense that their differences are indiscernible), even though they do stand in a relation of invariable concomitance of a noncausal type (that is, possessing the property *being a śiṃśapā* doesn't cause you to possess the property *being a tree*). The most likely interpretation of Mokṣākaragupta's understanding of the *tādātmya* relation is that he is a realist about universals (although certainly not in the same way that some nonbuddhist philosophers, such as the Naiyāyikas, are), which is to say that he thinks universals exist (that the property *being a tree* is not just a product of conceptual activity on our part), and that some of them are related to others by necessary concomitance (*avinābhāva*) of a noncausal sort. But it is also possible that he is not a realist about universals and thinks of the relations between *being a śiṃśapā* and *being a tree* as entirely conceptual (i.e., you can't coherently think the former without also thinking the latter). Mokṣākaragupta doesn't say enough to permit a clear decision, and the matter became a topic for debate for later Buddhist scholasticism, especially in Tibet.

Mokṣākaragupta recognizes only these two kinds of relations (causal relations and identity relations, both of which are necessary), and so only two patterns of argument relating A to B. In order to provide a good argument that A and B have a relation of invariable concomitance, it must be shown either that A and B are identical, or that A and B are related causally by necessary conditionality. If either can be shown, a good argument (one that is valid and has true premises) has thereby been produced. Mokṣākaragupta is clear that both kinds of relation between A and B (*tādātmya* and *tadutpatti*) are relations of necessity, and that such a relation must be present in an argument in order for demonstration or proof to occur: "It is improper to arrive at what you want to prove simply by stating a thesis without logical necessity."¹⁴ The emphasis on necessity is evident also in Mokṣākaragupta's definition of invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*):

Invariable concomitance is defined as the statement of the necessary presence of B when A is present, and the necessary absence of A when B is absent.¹⁵

All arguments thought of by Mokṣākaragupta as good (valid and possessed of true premises) employ and require a strong notion of *sambandha*, of logical necessity, and this was one of the main points of difference between Buddhist logicians and some of their Indian counterparts (especially Naiyāyikas). The second element in the arguments (*S is an A-possessor*, recall) is intended to be uncontroversial and therefore not problematic so far as persuasion is concerned. It includes theses like 'there's smoke on the mountain', or 'I can't see a pot here', or 'this thing in front of me has leaves, branches, and a trunk'. And the first element (*all A-possessors have B*), since it obtains necessarily, is meant to show that one can demonstrate that, from the uncontroversial states of affairs mentioned, states of affairs such as 'there's fire on the mountain' or 'there's no pot here' or 'this thing in front of me is properly called a tree' necessarily follow. It seems at first blush that Mokṣākaragupta thinks of good arguments as bearing a high degree of persuasive power. Such arguments purport to show that a particular controversial (dubitable) state of affairs must obtain if some noncontroversial (indubitable) state of affairs obtains.

But there is of course a further question. If a good argument deploys as one of its central premises a claim about the invariable concomitance of two properties, may not disagreement arise about whether in fact such concomitance obtains? May there not be discussion as to how it is possible to know that such concomitance obtains? Here is what Mokṣākaragupta says about that:

It is the common opinion of all philosophers that what offers proof [S's being an A-possessor] certainly must establish what is to be proved [S's being a B-possessor] in every case in which a relation of invariable concomitance between what offers proof and what is to be proved has itself been proved by a doxastic practice that applies universally.¹⁶

A "doxastic practice that applies universally" (*sarvopasaṃhārapramāṇa*) is some method of producing judgment (Mokṣākaragupta, like most Buddhists, acknowledges only two of these, perception and reasoning or argument) that applies to (permits the making of true judgments about) all members of the set about which there is discussion. Either perception or argument may be used to come to know (to establish, to prove) that a particular instance of invariable concomitance obtains, though perception is used only to establish causal invariable concomitance (technically, the relation of *tadutpatti*), while reasoned argument is used to establish invariable concomitance entailed by identity (technically, the relation of *tādātmya*).

For example, perception may be used to establish the relation of invariable concomitance between *being smoky* and *being fiery* (recall that this relation requires that if you're smoky you're fiery and if you're not fiery you're not smoky; but not that if you're fiery you're smoky). That this is so shows clearly that Mokṣākaragupta takes universals (*being fiery* and *being smoky* are both universals; they can equally well be expressed by abstract nouns such as *fieriness* or *smokiness*, as they often are in Sanskrit) to be perceptible since the relations between them may be established

perceptually.¹⁷ In establishing the invariable concomitance between these universals perceptually, then, you perceive not only the universals but the necessary relation between them.¹⁸

In the case of using reasoned argument to establish a required instance of invariable concomitance, a typical pattern of argument is technically called “a doxastic practice that rules out the contradictory [of what you want to show]” (*viparyayabādhakapramāṇa*). Consider the example of invariable concomitance between the universals *momentariness* (*kṣaṇikatvam*) and *existence* (*sattvam*). To show, using the method mentioned, that such concomitance does obtain you must show that the negation of momentariness necessarily rules out existence (this entails that if something exists it is momentary). To put this slightly differently: you must show that denying momentariness to something rules out that thing’s existence. Mokṣākaragupta’s instance of this kind of argument begins with the claim *if S does not possess causal efficacy successively or nonsuccessively, then S does not possess causal efficacy at all*.¹⁹ This means that if a putative existent is capable of bringing something about, it must be capable of doing this at some particular time (nonsuccessively), or at a succession of particular times (successively). The next claim in the argument is that neither of these two kinds of efficacy belongs to a nonmomentary thing, from which the conclusion follows that a nonmomentary thing can effect nothing, which is the same as to say that such an entity does not exist. This final move is permissible given the pan-Buddhist axiom that existence (*sattvam*, *astitvam*) just means the capacity to bring something about causally (*arthakriyākāritvam*).²⁰

This argument is intended to show that nonmomentariness entails nonexistence, which is the same as to show that existence entails momentariness. To show this is to apprehend “by a doxastic practice” (argument) “that rules out the contradictory” (the claim that nonmomentariness is compatible with existence) the relation of invariable concomitance that is supposed to obtain between *existing* and *being momentary*. And once this invariable concomitance is known it can be deployed in other arguments—for example, against the idea of a permanent God.

To this point I’ve summarized Mokṣākaragupta’s understanding of argument. Because all the arguments he describes use as their central premise a claim about the invariable concomitance of two universals, they show (if their premises are true and they are formally valid) their conclusions to be necessary. In this respect the arguments he offers might seem to be taken by him to bear something like the maximal dialectical force suggested by the quotation from Nozick with which this paper began. This impression is only reinforced by the fact that, when he explains how to establish the truth of a claim to universal concomitance, Mokṣākaragupta typically offers an argument to show the incoherence of denying such concomitance. He is not, on the face of it, interested in probabilistic arguments, or arguments by which an interlocutor might reasonably not be convinced. But, of course, there is a difference between the claim that an argument (if it is good) ineluctably demonstrates its conclusions, and the claim that all who do not recognize it to be good are thereby irrational (or, in the extreme case, subject to death by brain-implosion) if the goodness of the argument is denied. The former is a claim about the logical properties of a particular

type of argument (and Mokṣākaragupta both makes it and should make it about the kinds of argument he describes). The latter is a claim about the persuasive power of a particular type of argument (and it is less clear whether he would or should make it, either about the kinds of argument he offers, or indeed about any).

To shed some further light on this question of what Mokṣākaragupta thinks about the dialectical (as distinct from the logical) force of argument, I'll now turn to his antitheistic arguments. These provide a relatively detailed instance of what looks like dialectical engagement; an examination of them should permit some tentative suggestions about the central question of this paper: just what was Mokṣākaragupta hoping for from the antitheistic arguments he deployed?

IV Mokṣākaragupta on Arguments About God (*īśvara*)

Mokṣākaragupta offers antitheistic argument at two places in the *Tarkabhāṣā*. In the first he offers a rebuttal of a traditional Naiyāyika argument that purports to demonstrate the existence of God; in the second he offers a positive argument of his own whose conclusion is that God cannot exist. I'll take these in turn.

The theistic Naiyāyika argument rebutted by Mokṣākaragupta (81-83) rests upon a classification of existents into three and only three kinds: those that have definitely been produced by an agent or agents (because such an agent is seen about his work); those that have definitely not been so produced (the example given here is *vyoma*, the sky or the atmosphere, which on the view being discussed here is not an effect: it has no beginning in time, no set of conditions that brought it into existence); and those about which it is doubtful whether they've been so produced because no agent has been seen to produce them (the examples given are ancient trees, *vanaspati*, and the earth, *kṣiti*). In its simplest form the Naiyāyika argument says: (1) All effects are produced by an intelligent agent (they are *buddhimatkartṛka*); (2) Existents of the third kind (those about which it's initially doubtful whether they've been produced by an agent) are effects (they have the property of *kāryatva*). From which it follows that they must have been produced by an intelligent agent, and since such an agent cannot be human, it must be divine.

The relation of invariable concomitance that powers this argument is said to obtain between *being an effect* and *being made by an intelligent agent*. If something has the former property it must have the latter; and (equivalently) if it lacks the latter it lacks the former. According to Nyāya cosmology (I oversimplify here, but not in such a way as to compromise the discussion to follow), the only thing that lacks the property *being an effect* is the sky/atmosphere; therefore, everything else (humans, animals, trees, the planet earth, and so on) possesses both the properties in question.

But how is the relation of invariable concomitance between *being an effect* and *being made by an intelligent agent* known? The Naiyāyikas say that it is known by a synthetic mental act (a judgment) based on repeated past perceptions of such a relation.²¹ You've seen lots of clay pots (the favorite

example of an effect) in the past, and you've observed that they are made by potters (intelligent agents). You then judge that a causal relation obtains between *being an effect* and *being made by an intelligent agent* of just the same kind as the one that obtains between *being smoky* and *being fiery*.

Mokṣākaragupta's response to this argument asks whether the agent referred to in the property *being made by an intelligent agent* is supposed to have a body or not. If the agent is embodied, it will follow that the agent ought to be visible. But in that case, says Mokṣākaragupta, the argument exhibits the logical fault of the shared mark (the *sādhāraṇahetu*)—the mark in this argument, recall, is *being an effect*. Suppose you're trying to prove *sound is permanent*, and you do so by saying *all objects of cognition are permanent* and *sound is an object of cognition*. Your mark is then *being an object of cognition*. If we follow the definitions given earlier (of 'presence in the subject', 'positive concomitance', and 'negative concomitance') it ought to be the case that this mark does not belong to anything impermanent. If it does, then there is no relation of invariable concomitance between the mark and the property whose presence it is supposed to prove (in the case of the example at hand, *being permanent*). But in fact the mark in question is found in all sorts of impermanent things, such as pots. The mark is therefore too widely shared: it cannot do the logical and persuasive work required of it. The same is true, says Mokṣākaragupta, of the mark *being an effect*. This is too widely shared because it belongs to things that we know have no visible (embodied) intelligent agent as their maker. The example he gives here is that of grass: we see it come into being and yet we don't see an intelligent agent producing it. If there were such an agent, and the agent had a body, we would see it. It follows that the theistic argument fails if it deploys the mark *being an effect* to demonstrate the presence of the property *being made by an intelligent embodied agent*.

But of course God (and *īśvara*) need not be thought of as embodied, and perhaps usually are not. So maybe the argument means to use the mark *being an effect* to demonstrate the presence of the property *being made by an intelligent disembodied agent*. But in this case, says Mokṣākaragupta, the argument exhibits the fallacy called *sandigdha vipakṣavyāvṛtti*, "doubt about the exclusion [of the mark] from those things relevantly dissimilar to the subject." The mark in the theistic argument is *being an effect*. Given the (Naiyāyika) threefold classification of existents mentioned above, it should be remembered that some things (e.g., the sky/atmosphere) are thought not to have been made by an intelligent agent. If the mark is indeed absent in all members of the class of things relevantly unlike S, things that possess the property *not being made by an intelligent disembodied agent*, then it ought to be the case that the mark (*being an effect*) is absent in, inter alia, the sky/atmosphere. But it is not clear that this is the case (says Mokṣākaragupta), and since this is so it is also not clear that the required relation between *being an effect* and *being made by an intelligent disembodied agent* obtains. Perhaps the sky, although not produced by an agent, is nonetheless an effect or product of agentless causes; it may be that it is not an effect at all, but this is not known. If this criticism is right, then formal invalidity applies also to the theistic argument construed as having to do with a disembodied agent.

The upshot of these criticisms, in Mokṣākaragupta's mind, is that the Naiyāyika theistic argument fails formally on the only two possible readings of it.²² It does not demonstrate that all effects are made by an intelligent agent, whether or not that agent is thought of as embodied.²³ Further, the failure has to do precisely (and not surprisingly) with doubt about the truth of the argument's central claim, which is that possessing the property *being an effect* entails possessing the property *being made by an intelligent agent*. As Mokṣākaragupta puts it by way of summary: "The logical relation between the two, whether one of causal necessity, of identity, or some other such as essential nature,²⁴ has not been proved by a prior reliable doxastic practice."²⁵

So much for Mokṣākaragupta's rebuttal of a positive argument for God's existence. The upshot of the rebuttal is only that no successful argument has been offered for an invariable-concomitance relation that would establish God's existence. Doubt remains as to whether the required relation in fact obtains, and it is a doubt that has to do with a matter of fact (is the atmosphere an effect or not?) rather than a matter of logic. This, it seems, is not a strong rebuttal. A Naiyāyika debater could well respond that, as a matter of fact, the atmosphere is not an effect, in which case the invariable concomitance between *not being made by an intelligent agent* and *not being an effect* remains. And a non-Naiyāyika theist (or anyone not committed to the idiosyncrasies of Nyāya cosmology) could provide the proverbial barren woman's son as an instance of something not made by an intelligent agent and also not an effect (because not an existent at all). These strategies are not pursued in the text, however.

Mokṣākaragupta's rejection of theism is not limited to showing that positive theistic arguments fail. He also offers a positive argument of his own whose conclusion is that God cannot exist. Consider, he says, the claim that everything has been made by an intelligent agent. Suppose, then, that such an agent is permanent (*nitya*). If this is the case then the agent's capacity to bring about effects (to act in such a way that the results he desires occur) would also be permanent, for a capacity of this kind is an essential property of an agent (or, if you prefer, is part of the definition of an agent). In the case of a divine agent (an eternal and omnipotent agent) there is nothing at any time that does or could obstruct or prevent the effects of divine agency from occurring. But one of the things that divine agency brings about (according to the view that Mokṣākaragupta wants to reject) is creation (*sarga*) of the cosmos; another is destruction (*pralaya*) of the cosmos.²⁶ It follows, absurdly, that at every time the cosmos is being both created and destroyed, for the divine agent would always be both creating and destroying it.

This argument proposes a relation of invariable concomitance between *being an eternal and omnipotent agent at t* (where *t* is some particular time) and *actualizing one's agential capacity at t*. It moves from this proposed relation by reductio (*prasaṅga*, the demonstration of an absurd entailment) to the conclusion that there cannot be an eternal, omnipotent agent whose capacities include creation and destruction. And since such an agent would be God (*īśvara*), it follows that there cannot be God.

Mokṣākaragupta cites two possible responses to this argument. The first is that the fact that all of God's agential capacities are not actualized at every time is explicable by the absence at some times (and presence at oth-

ers) of auxiliary or secondary causes (*sahakārin*). But this would make secondary causes independent of God,²⁷ and this conclusion ought to be unacceptable to theists for other reasons.

But suppose, says the theist, that the temporal separation of some of God's acts from others is to be explained precisely by the fact that He is intelligent, possessed of volition, and chooses to do one thing at one time and another at another, even though He could have done all things at all times?²⁸ Mokṣākaragupta's response to this is to say that if such temporally-indexed choices are part of God's nature,²⁹ then it remains inexplicable why He sometimes has them and sometimes does not; the principle assumed here is that if some property is essential to you, you cannot have it only sometimes. And, obviously, if the temporally-indexed choices mentioned by the opponent are not essential properties of God, then their occurrence at a particular time must be causally dependent upon things other than God, and this takes the debate back to the claim (mentioned in the preceding paragraph) that some secondary causes are indeed independent of God.

The principle underlying the proposed invariable concomitance between *being an omnipotent agent at t* and *actualizing one's agential capacity at t* is one that Mokṣākaragupta attributes to Dharmakīrti: that change is not predicable of an eternal entity's essential properties. If it were, the putative eternal entity would precisely not be eternal because it would at some times lack at least one of its essential properties.³⁰

This argument raises deep and interesting philosophical questions, among which are: Is it coherent to say that there are temporally-indexed properties of the kind *is potentially m*? Can it reasonably be said that an entity free of change possesses such properties? Can an entity free of change be related causally to temporally-indexed things or events? Mokṣākaragupta's positive argument for God's nonexistence doesn't demonstrate that a negative answer ought to be given to all these questions. Rather, it assumes such an answer in proposing invariable concomitance between *being an omnipotent agent at t* and *actualizing one's agential capacity at t*.

V The Persuasive Power of Argument: Reprise

Mokṣākaragupta's antitheistic arguments (and those offered by Indian Buddhists generally) were not persuasively effective: those to whom they were offered (Naiyāyikas and other Hindu theists) were not convinced by them to abandon theism. Similarly, the theistic arguments offered by Naiyāyikas and others suffered from dialectical failure: their nontheistic interlocutors (Buddhists and others) were not persuaded by them to become theists. Both Buddhists and Naiyāyikas were, of course, aware that their arguments failed dialectically in these ways. Why then did they persist in offering them? What, to return to the question of my title, did they hope for from them?

The persuasive failures of these arguments do not mean that all (or indeed any) of them are formally invalid, or lack true premises, or suffer from some other technical fault. Neither does it mean that those on one side

or the other were too stupid or sinful properly to understand the arguments they were being offered (though of course stupidity and sin were not less widely distributed in medieval India than they are in contemporary America, which means that there must have been many Buddhists and Naiyāyikas afflicted by them to the point of being incapable of understanding or using argument). Rather, the reasons for persuasive failure are deeper, more interesting, and of more general application, or so I shall now argue.

Recall that Mokṣākaragupta offers two kinds of antitheistic argument. The first is negative and responsive: it attempts to show that an opponent's positive argument for God's existence fails, and tries to do this by using nothing other than the terms of that opponent's argument. It works, that is, largely by *reductio* or *prasaṅga*. The second is positive and attempts to show in its own terms that God cannot exist. While both kinds of argument usually fail persuasively, the former does so less often and less drastically than the latter, and the reasons for failure are somewhat different in each case. It therefore makes sense to treat them separately.

If you offer an argument of any sort and you're faced with a rejection of it that shows (or attempts to show) that your argument fails in its own terms (a *prasaṅga* argument in Mokṣākaragupta's terms), you may of course ignore the rejection; but if you do pay attention to it your response is almost certain to belong to one or another of the following three kinds. First, you may object that the opponent's understanding and restatement of your argument is faulty, and that as a result the proposed *reductio* doesn't work. Second, you may acknowledge that the opponent has understood your argument well, that the difficulty indicated is genuine, but that the argument can be readjusted in such a way that it no longer exhibits it. Third, you may agree that the *reductio* is a success, judge that the argument cannot be salvaged, and therefore abandon it. The first and second responses may overlap in various ways: you may wish to say that the opponent has misunderstood your argument, but your restatement of it may nonetheless alter it in response to the criticism even if such alteration is not (for polemical or face-saving reasons) acknowledged.

In the case of Mokṣākaragupta's *prasaṅga* argument summarized above, responses of these sorts might require from Naiyāyikas an assertion that Mokṣākaragupta has misunderstood what they think about the sky/atmosphere, and that as a result the logical fallacy he indicates does not hold (a version of the first response); or that the argument can be made to hold by altering what has heretofore been said about the sky/atmosphere (a version of the second response); or that at least this version of the argument from *being an effect* to *being made by a rational agent* has to be dropped. There is some evidence in Nyāya thought of responses one and two (though it's beyond the scope of this essay to survey it), and little or none of response three (which is scarcely surprising). But notice that not even the third response requires dropping the view that there is in fact a relation of invariable concomitance between *being an effect* and *being made by an intelligent agent*; it requires only abandonment of a particular argument deploying that relation.

Prasaṅga arguments seem likely in principle to have some dialectical effect (and seem actually to have had some in the history of Indian debate

about God): they are likely at least to prompt further attention to and fine-tuning of arguments already in play. They may even occasionally result in the abandonment of particular arguments. But they are not likely to (and as a matter of fact do not) result either in the abandonment of the thesis for which the criticized argument argues (in this case the claim that *existents not seen to have been made by an intelligent agent have in fact been so made*), or in the abandonment of the view that there is a relation of universal concomitance (in this case between *being an effect* and *being made by an intelligent agent*) that indicates the truth of such a claim. It is therefore in *prasaṅga* arguments that what limited dialectical effectiveness there is may be found.

The failure to persuade of the second kind of antitheistic argument presented by Mokṣākaragupta (the positive argument whose conclusion is that God cannot exist) is deeper and more interesting. Its failure is largely attributable to the fact that it (and other arguments like it) always and necessarily axiomatically assume and deploy the truth of complex claims in metaphysics, epistemology, or logic (or all three). Such axiomatic assumptions are, by definition, not explicitly thematized or argued for as part of the argument; they are, instead, among the implicit requirements for the argument's validity. Assumptions of this kind may themselves become an explicit topic of argument, but when they do the arguments about them will then in turn deploy some (but now different) axiomatic assumptions. Further, such axiomatic assumptions are almost always not self-evidently true, which is to say that they may reasonably not be assented to; and yet assent to them is required in order for the argument to be persuasive. The absence of such assent, even in the face of an argument's formal validity, makes the argument fail as a tool of persuasion.

In the case of Mokṣākaragupta's argument for God's necessary nonexistence, an invariable concomitance between *being an eternal and omnipotent agent at t* (where *t* is some particular time) and *actualizing one's agential capacity at t* is assumed and proposed. Mokṣākaragupta acknowledges, as already shown, that any particular proposed instance of invariable concomitance may itself become a matter for question (for if the proposed relation is not actual, any argument that deploys it will fail), and that when it is questioned it ought to be shown to obtain by appeal to either perception or reasoning. But here is the rub. As I've already suggested, any attempt to show that this particular instance of invariable concomitance obtains will require appeal to (and argument about) such interesting matters (among many others) as the status of properties like *is potentially m* (and of an ontology that goes with asserting or denying the possibility of such properties). A perceptive theistic respondent to Mokṣākaragupta's positive antitheistic argument will rapidly see that in order to be persuasive the argument requires assent to all sorts of claims that it does not argue for, many of them deeply controversial and difficult of resolution. It follows rapidly that it will be easy to maintain rationality (not to mention a brain free of mortal reverberations) while not being persuaded by such an argument.

If there is a general principle here (and if this principle is a good one it applies to much more than antitheistic arguments propounded by Buddhists) it is this: the interest and scope of an argument's conclusion is (and ought to be) inversely proportional to that argument's persuasive

power. This is why Mokṣākaragupta's negative argument as to the failure of a Naiyāyika theistic argument is more dialectically efficacious than his own positive argument for God's necessary nonexistence. After all, there are not many theses more interesting or with wider scope than the thesis *it is incoherent to claim that there is an eternal agent* (which is, approximately, the upshot of Mokṣākaragupta's positive argument).

It remains to return to the question in this paper's title. Did Mokṣākaragupta (or did Indian Buddhists generally) have the modest expectations that I've argued they ought to have had for the persuasive power of their antitheistic arguments? This is not a question that I can yet answer clearly, though there are certainly indications in favor of a positive answer. Most Buddhist antitheistic argumentation appears to have been developed for the purpose of training monks to understand and deploy the technicalities of their own tradition, to become skilled practitioners of a certain mode of intellectual activity. Mokṣākaragupta's *Tarkabhāṣā* certainly has the character of a manual intended for that purpose, as do most of the other Indian works in which such arguments are developed. And in so far as that is the central purpose of antitheistic argument in the Indian Buddhist tradition, persuasive power is hardly relevant at all. But there are also indications on the other side, indications that at least some Buddhist scholastics engaged themselves directly and deeply with Naiyāyika (and other nonbuddhist) works, responded to them, and hoped or intended that their responses should in turn provoke a response (which they sometimes did: Buddhist critiques were among the influences upon the development of thought about many things among Naiyāyikas, Mīmāṃsakas, Jains, and many others in India). Even these facts, though, do not require the conclusion that Buddhists had a high evaluation of the persuasive power of their antitheistic arguments. My own preliminary judgment (although much further empirical work on the uses of argument in Indian scholasticism is needed) is that antitheistic argument for Indian Buddhists was principally a tool for elaborating, embroidering, and knitting together the conceptual fabric of their tradition, and only secondarily (if at all) a device for convincing anyone of anything. This too is largely what theistic argument has been (and ought still to be) for Christians.

The Divinity School, University of Chicago

NOTES

1. A good example of this literature is Roger Jackson, "Dharmakīrti's Refutation of Theism," *Philosophy East & West* 36 (1986):315-348; this is a careful translation and analysis of a seventh century Buddhist's arguments against the existence of God. It includes a useful overview of the development of Buddhist and Hindu thought on the topic. See also Richard Hayes, "Principled Atheism in the Buddhist Scholastic Tradition," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 16 (1988):5-28; this is also an exposition of the main Buddhist arguments against God's existence, and is especially valuable for the connections drawn between these and Buddhist views on the part-whole relation, and on the existence of universals.

2. Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts:

Belknap Press, 1981), p.4.

3. On Mokṣākaragupta's life see Kajiyama Yuichi (transl.), "An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy: An Annotated Translation of the Tarkabhāṣā of Mokṣākaragupta," *Memoirs of the Faculty of Letters [Kyoto University]* 10 (1966):1-173, at 6-11.

4. In his introductory remarks to the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* Śāntideva says that in his work he will say nothing that has not been said before: na ca kiṃcid apūrvam atra vācyaṃ, P. L. Vaidya, ed., *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1961), p.3. This is an entirely typical claim, and one made with not the slightest hint of apology or regret.

5. I've used the Sanskrit text in B. N. Singh, ed., *Mokṣākaraguptaviracitā Bauddhatarkabhāṣā* (Varanasi: Asha Prakashan, 1985). Parenthetical numbers in the text and notes indicate pages of this work. It also contains a largely incomprehensible and often inaccurate English translation; Kajiyama's version is much better.

6. śīśūnām alpamedhasām dharmakīrtimataśrutyai tarkabhāṣā prakāśyate (15).

7. vyāptipakṣadharmatāsaṃjñakam dvyavayavam eva sādhanavākyam saugatānām (62).

8. anumeye sattvam eva niścitam | anumeye parvatādaḥ dharminī līngasyāstitvam eva niścitam tad ekaṃ rūpaṃ pakṣadharmatāsaṃjñakam (60).

9. sapakṣa eva sattvaṃ niścitam iti vartate | samāṇaḥ pakṣaḥ sapakṣaḥ | pakṣeṇa saha sadṛśo dṛṣṭāntadharmīty arthaḥ | sapakṣa eva sattvaṃ niścitam ity anvayaṣaṃjñakam dvitīyaṃ rūpaṃ (60).

10. asapakṣe cāsattvam eva niścitam | na sapakṣo 'sapakṣaḥ | tatrasattvam eva niścitam vyatirekaṣaṃjñakam tṛtīyaṃ rūpaṃ (61).

11. śākhāpatravarnasamsthānaviśeṣavyavahārayogyatvāt (62).

12. Mokṣākaragupta also recognizes relations between A and B that have to do with absence rather than presence. For instance, for those things that have the property of being visible wherever they happen to be (*dṛśya*, *upalabdhiprāptalakṣaṇa*), there is invariable concomitance between A ('not being seen here') and B ('not being here'). But this does not suggest a third kind of relation between A and B so much as an argument as to their causal relation (*tadutpatti*) that appeals to absence rather than presence. Mokṣākaragupta devotes a good deal of discussion to subkinds of arguments to and from absence (63-65). But these details, important though they are in the context of Mokṣākaragupta's work, need not detain us here.

13. On this see Georges Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti's Philosophy and its Tibetan Interpretations* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp.171-178; *Tarkabhāṣā*, 89-90.

14. pratijñāvacanamātrāt sambandharahitāt sādhyapratipatter ayogāt (62).

15. sādhanasya ca sādhye niyatatvakathanam sādhyābhāvasya sādhanābhāve niyatatvakathanam nāma vyāptir abhidhīyate (81).

16. sādhanam khalu sarvatra sādhyasādhanaśoḥ sarvopasaṃhāreṇa pramāṇena vyāptau siddhāyām sādhyam gamayed iti sarvavādisammatam (81).

17. On this controversial topic Mokṣākaragupta explicitly denies that the bare particular, the *svalakṣaṇa*, is the only object of perception, and asserts that the universal, the *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*, may also be perceived (26). See also his discussion of universals (89-90), and of the kind of invariable concomitance grasped by perception (91). Useful remarks on this controversial (among Buddhists and especially among followers of Dharmakīrti) position are to be found in Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality*, pp.316-327.

18. There are difficulties here, of course, not least among which is whether

a single perception of the causal relation between smoke and fire suffices to establish the required relation between the universals *smokiness* and *fieriness*. For some discussion see Kajiyama, "Introduction," p.113, n.305.

19. I follow Kajiyama's reconstruction ("Introduction," p.115) of this passage into Sanskrit from the Tibetan version. The passage is lacking in the original Sanskrit.

20. On this topic see Nagatomi Masatoshi, "Arthakriya," *Adyar Library Bulletin* 31-32 (1967-68):52-72; Kano Kyo, "On the Background of PĀ II 12ab—The Origin of Dharmakīrti's Idea of *Arthakriya*," in Ernst Steinkellner, ed., *Studies in the Buddhist Epistemological Tradition* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 1991), pp.119-128.

21. *kāryaṃ tāvat buddhimataḥ kumbhakārād upajāyamānaṃ bhūyodarśanasahāyena mānasapratyakṣeṇopalabdham* (81).

22. What I've said to this point by no means exhausts Mokṣākaragupta's discussion of the argument. The *Tarkabhāṣā* goes on to analyze the Nyāya view of the logical relation called *svābhāvikasambandha* and its relevance to the theistic argument (82-83). But to summarize the points made in that discussion would lengthen this paper unduly, and would not significantly alter the argument.

23. Mokṣākaragupta adds (84) that even if the argument did succeed in demonstrating what it intends to demonstrate, it would not show that the intelligent agent in question is God (omniscient, eternal, and so forth). This is a familiar point in western critiques of the cosmological and design arguments for God's existence.

24. This is a logical relation proposed by Naiyāyikas as a *tertium quid* between necessary causal relations (*tadutpatti*) and identity relations (*tādātmya*). It is not accepted in this sense by Buddhists (82). For a very useful discussion of the sense in which *svābhāvavapratibandha* is accepted by Buddhists, see Claus Oetke, "*Svābhāvavapratibandha* and the Types of Reasons in Dharmakīrti's Theory of Inference," in Steinkellner, ed., *Studies*, pp.243-268.

25. *anayos tādātmyaṃ tadutpattir anyo vā svābhāvikādisambandhaḥ pūrvapramāṇena na prasādhitaḥ* (83).

26. The view that the cosmos undergoes periodic creation and destruction at God's hands is one held by many Hindu theists.

27. *nāpy anityena sahakāriṇā virahito 'nityasahakāriṇo 'pi tad āyattajanmatvāt* (90).

28. *buddhimāms tu kartum īśāno 'pi anicchan na karoti* (90-91).

29. *ta apicchāḥ svasattāmātranibandhaḥ* (91).

30. Mokṣākaragupta quotes Dharmakīrti's lapidary formulation: *nityasya nirapekṣatvāt kramotpattir na yujyate | kriyāyām akriyāyām ca kālayoḥ sadṛśātmanaḥ* (91).