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# The Metaphysical Turn in the History of Thought: Anaximander and Buddhist Philosophy

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**Abstract:** The present study, primarily of a theoretical nature, endeavors to accomplish two distinct objectives. First and foremost, it endeavors to engage in a thoughtful examination of the metaphysical significance that Anaximander's philosophy embodies within the context of the nascent Western philosophical tradition. Furthermore, it aims to investigate how it was contemporaneous Buddhist thought, coeval with Anaximander's era, that more explicitly elucidated the concept of the "void" as an inherent aspect of authentic existence. This elucidation was articulated through aphoristic discourse rather than being reliant on formal logical reasoning or structured arguments.

**Keywords:** comparative philosophy; Anaximander; Buddhist philosophy; metaphysics; Nāgārjuna



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## 1. Introduction

The current study, primarily theoretical in its nature, seeks to explore the metaphysical transformation brought about by the philosophical ideas of Anaximander within the evolving landscape of Western philosophy. Anaximander's metaphysical paradigm shift, which also finds resonance in the philosophy of Parmenides, has exerted a profound influence on the trajectory of Western philosophical thought. Concurrently, during a nearly contemporaneous era in India, Buddhism was instigating a comparable intellectual revolution. In order to achieve our objective, we shall employ a comparative framework to discern how the elements of Anaximander's metaphysical shift are more overtly discernible in the assertions of contemporary ancient Buddhist philosophy and its subsequent developments within the Madhyamaka school<sup>1</sup>. To present the issue in an organized manner, this work will essentially consist of two parts: the first part (paragraphs 3 and 4) will focus on delving deeper into the metaphysical shift in Anaximander and its ontological implications. The second part (paragraphs 5 and 6) will introduce a comparative analysis with Buddhist thought, elucidating how these assertions can serve as confirmation of Anaximander's theses, thereby opening the door to the possibility of a comparative discourse between the two philosophies, Greek and ancient Indian. In the first two introductory paragraphs (1–2), we will begin by attempting to specify how and why this metaphysical shift came into existence and how it branches from pre-Socratic philosophy.

In light of the foregoing, it is noteworthy that Anaximander indeed posits the necessity of a foundation that emerges above the realm of the founded and thus qualifies as limitless (*ἄπειρον*). However, he does not substantiate this necessity with arguments that denote the insufficiency of the finite (limited, determined) in itself. Hence, our curiosity has been piqued by the prospect of discerning how these arguments can, in part,

be rooted in contemporaneous Buddhist philosophical discourse during Anaximander's profound contemplations.

These arguments were articulated in Western philosophy, with full theoretical awareness, only centuries later. Consequently, the genuine meaning of the assertion that the determined is also de-limited, meaning it is circumscribed by a limit (πέρας), did not immediately become evident and did not allow for a complete understanding of the ontological inadequacy of the finite.

Conversely, Buddhist thought illuminates the "emptiness" (*suññatā*) of authentic being which characterizes the finite, even though it describes it through aphorisms rather than through reasoned or logical arguments. In this regard, we can identify the most significant of differences that exist between Western and Buddhist thought.

However, there is a second aspect that we intend to emphasize, as we believe it holds great theoretical-speculative significance. The notion of "foundation" (*Grundbegriff*) is often interpreted as capable of legitimizing the multiplicity of determinates (entities characterized by their determination), as if the so-called "descending path" were intelligible, i.e., the path that derives the many from the one, which is the foundation.

Anaximander's philosophical perspective, as interpreted not only by early proponents but also through subsequent analysis, appears to emphasize the foundational element as containing, at its core, what subsequently derives from it. In our perspective, it is conceptually untenable, however, to envision a relation between the foundation (ἀρχή) and the derived elements. Such a relationship would ultimately compromise the unconditioned state, specifically the absolute (unlimited), by integrating it into the relational framework, thereby subjecting it to external determination. In effect, even the unconditioned state becomes determined, existing by virtue of its relational otherness, and consequently loses its status as an absolute entity.

Furthermore, it is unreasonable to assume that the foundation, namely the absolute itself, which is such because it is *absolūtum*, i.e., because it is devoid of any extrinsic relation, can nevertheless anticipate an intrinsic relation, that is, a relation within its constitution. If such a relation were to be posited, the absolute would cease to hold its status as original (in the sense of the Latin *originārius*) and could not be considered "whole" (that is, *integrum*), i.e., undivided and indivisible. It would instead appear as an "ensemble" of determinations, in other words, as a whole composed of parts. In this capacity, it would cease to be deemed "autonomous and independent" since it would be contingent upon the constituent parts, which would ultimately render it determinate (as it would be bound by the determinateness of these parts), and hence, it would no longer be absolute<sup>2</sup>.

What we find extremely interesting is that the more astute Buddhist thought excludes the possibility of a relation between the absolute unconditioned (*asankhata*) and the conditioned (*sankhata*) relative (*paññatti*), a relation that would indeed place the unconditioned on the same level as the conditioned, thereby denying the emergence that must inevitably be indicative of its absoluteness. Furthermore, this also rules out the possibility of a relation within the unconditioned, as if it were sensible to conceive of an absolute that is constituted by the relative: the absolute cannot but be "one" in itself.

According to the most explicit and trenchant definition by Nāgārjuna himself, only the absolute reality, irrespective of its conceptualization as the "absolute reality", is incontrovertibly true. The what-is (*tattva*) [3] is ontologically singular, whereas the relative appears as a distinct and separate reality, but only because it arises from the mental delusions of perceivers: it is thus dependent on such illusions and on its ontological grounding in ultimate truth. Consequently, the "false view" (*micchāditṭhi*), to use a more archaic term of Buddhist philosophical discourse, does not originate so much from the truth itself, but it is by virtue of this very truth that one can recognize the limitation of this appearance.

In a broader context, at the core of Buddhist thought, one can discern a crucial ontological question that grasps truth (*sacca*, Sanskrit: *satya*) as the very absolute being. If apprehended from the finite perspective, that is, from the standpoint of the inevitable (one cannot ignore the finite since the seeking subject is immersed in finiteness), it is then as-

sumed as the foundation of things (the root of the term being: *sat-*, which is also the basis of the verb “to be”, accompanied with denominal adjective suffix to create *sat-ya* “truth”, “that which stands”). Conversely, when contemplated in its inherent existence, namely from the viewpoint of the undeniable (only the absolute is truly undeniable, i.e., real, as it transcends infinitely beyond negation), it reveals itself as that in which finite determinations dissolve and, for this reason, are transformed.

This can be stated as follows: only relative vision, opinion, or hearsay, which is *mic-chā*, a term rooted in the Indo-European tradition that possibly also gave rise to the Greek *μῦθος*, distorts reality by making things appear self-sufficient, thereby creating a cognitive distortion that regards as absolute what is only relative.

This second aspect will also be examined, and we will strive to reflect on this remarkable harmony between East and West, which, in our view, attests that the aspiration towards an authentic foundation constitutes the universality of thought. It could even be said that thought is universal precisely because it seeks the universal and does so by virtue of the universal itself.

## 2. Pre-Socratic Philosophy

Western philosophy, as is widely recognized, originated in Greece and initially found expression in the thinkers of the Ionian school. Among the paradigms of this school, two fundamental approaches can be discerned. One is a naturalistic orientation, in which the “principle” (*ἀρχή*) of all things is sought within an element of nature. The other is a metaphysical, or perhaps even transcendental, orientation that conceives of the principle in terms of foundation.

In accordance with this latter perspective, the objective is not to seek the origin of all things, that is, the initial determination that initiates the series of all other determinations, which, when considered collectively, constitute human experience. Rather, the aim is to identify the condition of their possibility, which coincides with the condition of their intelligibility.

This duality of approaches holds profound significance as it characterizes the entire history of philosophical thought. Specifically, the naturalistic approach, although it has never entirely faded, did not hold sway as the dominant perspective, at least until a certain historical period. It began to gain prominence only towards the end of the 19th century with positivism and became firmly established in the latter half of the 20th century.

On the other hand, the metaphysical approach has represented the very core of Western philosophy and has manifested itself as a quest for a foundation capable of legitimizing (justifying) human experience. The philosophical inquiry arises because empirical facts alone are incapable of self-justification, thus necessitating the presence of a reason that emerges above them and, through this emergence, can confer legitimacy upon them.

The two approaches we have delineated are aptly summarized by Emanuele Severino, who writes as follows:

“For those early philosophers who were among the pioneers of philosophical inquiry, the quest for the number of principles is synonymous with the search for the number of entities. They did not, in fact, recognize any other type of principles apart from material ones (that which constitutes the substance or essence of things). Thus, what constituted the essence or reality of things for them was solely the material, the material principle. Therefore, when they posited that the principle is singular (e.g., air or water), they meant to assert that there is only one entity, one reality, and that the various manifestations in nature are merely incidental modifications of this singular reality. [...] It is evident that for them, the term ‘principle’ signified ‘element’ (*στοιχείον*) or the substance of things”. (p. IX, [4])

In a certain sense, naturalism can be superimposed upon materialism: those who conceive the principle in the form of a natural datum refer to something material. For them, the principle is an aspect of nature and therefore a physical entity. Certainly, identifying what serves as the foundation of the universe poses a problem not easily resolved. Nev-

ertheless, the most significant point lies elsewhere. If the principle is understood as the first element in a series, then it cannot be avoided that it is understood in a determinate sense. Conversely, by determining it, one inevitably reduces the principle to a thing, thus to something that belongs to the universe of experience. This has an extremely significant consequence: the empirical universe is made to coincide with reality itself, and the principle is absorbed into it.

However, if the principle of all things is placed within the same domain as other things, then it cannot serve as their foundation. One finds oneself, in other words, faced with the following alternative: either the principle expresses a value different from what is proper to a foundation but then ceases to function as an authentic condition for the intelligibility of experience and becomes a mere presupposition, or to say “principle” is equivalent to saying “foundation”, but then it cannot be understood as something on par with other things; hence, it cannot even be the “first” of things.

If the principle holds the value of a foundation, which is the crucial point, then it cannot help but transcend the system of things, that is, transcend the system of determinations, and thus transcend the empirical universe. If it were to be regarded as “the first thing”, it would necessarily be related to the “second”, the “third”, and so on, in such a way that it would be bound to the entire series and could no longer serve as its foundation.

Severino continues (p. XII, [4]) along these lines, and it appears that he has articulated this concept in a particularly clear manner: “One soon realized the impossibility of qualifying the principle as water, air, or any other specific determination. For that which makes diverse things one, or the substance in which all things converge, cannot be qualified as one among things”.

This would be akin to stating that reducing the principle to an element—be it the first in the series or the indivisible minimal component from which the whole is composed—equates to conceiving the foundation as an element within the series itself. Consequently, rigorously speaking, the series must precede (must be presupposed by) its own foundation, conditioning what is sought as original and foundational. Severino, in specifying what unifies, refers to it as “the matter in which all things converge”. From this perspective, matter precisely configures the ultimate constituent of reality. Or rather, if authentic reality is considered experience, then it is impossible not to regard matter as its ultimate essence since sensory experience represents the initial and privileged form of experience.

However, the philosophical question at hand is precisely aimed at challenging the primacy of experience and, in particular, sensory experience. Is what presents itself true solely because it presents itself? As we have previously suggested, if the “fact”, namely the empirical datum, were capable of legitimizing itself, how could we explain the emergence of the question regarding its actual legitimacy? How do we account for the question of truth, namely the question of foundation, aimed at questioning the given?

Already in pre-Socratic philosophy, therefore, the naturalistic conception is progressively surpassed by the metaphysical conception precisely because empirical data proves insufficient in itself. This inadequacy is underscored by Anaximander. Specifically for this reason, our objective now is to examine his thought because it is with Anaximander that we transcend the empirical–formal universe in the search for a foundation that is authentically autonomous and self-sufficient, i.e., absolute.

### 3. Anaximander’s Thought and Heidegger’s Interpretation

The initial point that must be articulated pertains to the complexity associated with comprehending the philosophical thought of Anaximander. This complexity arises from the scarcity of extant fragments and, moreover, the paucity of those fragments that specifically address the subject matter of our concern.

Of utmost importance for our discourse is Fragment 1 reported by Simplicius [*Phys.* 24, 13] which reads “Anaximander...stated...that the principle of all beings is infinite...for from where beings originate, there they also have their dissolution by necessity” (...ἀρχὴν

...εἶρηκε τῶν ὄντων τὸ ἄπειρον...ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσις ἐστι τοῖς οὐσι, καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὸ χρεῶν).

Simplicius himself asserts that Anaximander “declared the infinite to be both the principle and the constituent element of the things that exist, and he was the first to adopt the term ‘principle’ for it. He states, in fact, that it is neither water nor any of the other elements that are commonly referred to, but rather a distinct infinite nature, from which all the heavens and worlds that exist originate” (...<ἀρχήν> τε καὶ στοιχείον εἶρηκε <τῶν ὄντων τὸ ἄπειρον>, πρῶτος τοῦτο τοῦνομα κομίσας τῆς ἀρχῆς. λέγει δ’ αὐτὴν μήτε ὕδωρ μήτε ἄλλο τι τῶν καλουμένων εἶναι στοιχείων, ἀλλ’ ἑτέραν τινα φύσιν ἄπειρον, ἐξ ἧς ἅπαντας γίνεσθαι τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ τοὺς ἐν αὐτοῖς κόσμους).

The points upon which it appears necessary to reflect, from a theoretical perspective, are at least two. The first—on which, in fact, reflection has already begun—concerns the meaning to be attributed to the expression “principle” [ἀρχήν], specifically whether it can be understood as an “element” when it is endowed with the status of a “foundation”. The second pertains to the derivation of determinations from the principle. To be more explicit, the question we pose is whether determinations stem from the infinite (ἄπειρον) or from the limit (πεῖρα, Attic: πέρας), which establishes their determinate identity. To address the aforementioned issues, we draw upon the profound reflection undertaken by Heidegger in his work, “*Der Spruch des Anaximander*” [5] because this text provides us with the opportunity to compare the conventional interpretation of Anaximander with the one that we, on the other hand, would like to propose.

In this work, Heidegger precisely revisits the fragment quoted by Simplicius. He also provides a translation of this fragment, which aligns with the one previously offered by the young Nietzsche, as explicitly indicated by Heidegger himself, who writes: “Woher die Dinge ihre Entstehung haben, dahin müssen sie auch zu Grunde gehen, nach der Notwendigkeit”, and which, in English, would sound like this: “from whence things originate, they must inevitably reach their conclusion, in accordance with necessity”.

As previously mentioned, it is essential for us to clarify the meaning of the expression “Woher” (ἐξ ὧν) as used in the context. Heidegger’s interpretation does not deviate from the conventional understanding, which is also shared by Aristotle. In relation to the concept of the infinite, Aristotle states [*Phys.* Γ 4. 203, b6]: “For this reason, we say that there is no beginning of it, but that it itself turns out to be the beginning of other things, comprehending them all and governing them all [...]”<sup>3</sup>.

This passage by Aristotle appears to be highly significant, as it assumes two relations: one between the infinite and the finite, and another concerning the intrinsic structure of the infinite. Indeed, if the infinite “encompasses” and “governs” things, it must possess an internal articulation, implying an inherent structure. Therefore, these are the topics that necessitate discussion, as one cannot avoid the pursuit of a scholarly interpretation of Anaximander’s ideas that allows for a theoretically rigorous understanding of the concepts of “infinite” and “finite”.

In the preliminary phase of our inquiry, it appears prudent to elucidate the following: the theoretical intent underpinning our investigation is eloquently articulated by Heidegger; even while maintaining the utmost respect for philological inquiry, in translation, we must first and foremost contemplate the essence. This is why, in the current endeavor to translate the utterances of this auroral [*früh*] thinker, only thinkers can assist us<sup>4</sup> [5].

The theoretical point we are interested in discussing is precisely this: Heidegger, as is known, invokes the distinction he discerns between being [*Sein*] and entity [*Seiende*], which he designates as the “ontological difference” [*ontisch-ontologische Differenz*]. This latter concept is articulated as the following assertion: the non-being-hiddenness of the entity, the clarity bestowed upon it, obscures the light of being. This notion is reiterated in another passage, in which Heidegger reminds us that in the appearance of the entity, the being conceals itself. In other words, the being withdraws into itself as it reveals itself in the entity (*Das Sein entzieht sich, indem es sich in das Seiende entbirgt*).

The main point upon which we intend to focus our attention resides, therefore, in adequately comprehending the relation between being and entities, or, to use the words of Anaximander, between the ἄπειρον (the infinite or indefinite) and determinate entities, which are such by virtue of the limit (πέρας) that constitutes them. In our perspective, the question at hand revolves around the determination of whether the concept in question can be contemplated within the framework of the ordinary relationship, which is characterized by two extreme terms connected by a middle term, as expounded by Heidegger's interpretation. Alternatively, one may consider whether the relationship should no longer be perceived as a construct but as the act of each term referencing the other—an act that is identical for both (*ūnum atque idem*). In this act, duality dissolves into unity.

Let us begin by noting that the relation between being and entities is also referred to by Heidegger as the relation between “being-present”, which corresponds to being itself, and “entity-present”, which corresponds to entities; the same relation between being-present and entity-present remains unthought. From the dawn, it seems that being-present and entity-present are each something unto themselves. Imperceptibly, being-present itself transforms into entity-present.

The discourse of Heidegger can be summarized as follows: from a certain standpoint, there exists an undeniable ontological difference between being and entity, such that the forgetting of being is the forgetting of the difference between being and entity [6]. From another perspective, as soon as one speaks of being-present, the imagination rushes to entity-present. Thus, being-present as such is not distinguished from entity-present and is resolved into the most universal and highest of entity-presences, namely entity-present. Consequently, the essence of being-present falls into oblivion (*Seinsvergessenheit*), along with the difference between being-present and entity-present [7].

Between being and entity, there exists, therefore, a distinction that tends to dissipate through the resolution of being into entity. Consequently, this represents a truly distinctive relation because in it, the difference between the terms is indeed preserved, as in any other relation, yet also negated, as one term, being, fades away and merges into the other term, namely entity. Heidegger articulates the peculiarity of this relation saying that the relation to the present entity, which occupies the very essence of being-present, is absolutely unique. It is incomparable to any other relation. It falls within the uniqueness of being itself.

This entails, first and foremost, that there exists no inherent relation between being and its act of relating: being exists entirely within this act of relating. The consequence of this assertion is twofold. Firstly, this act of relating cannot be comprehended within the framework of a mono-dyadic construct, which would reduce being to a mere term and, consequently, to an entity. More precisely, being is not even that specific entity which encompasses all others, often referred to as the “highest of present entities”. Being is, in fact, its own act of relating, and this inherent coincidence is emphatically reaffirmed by Heidegger, for whom being itself subsists [*west*] as a relation to the present entity, a relation that encompasses the present entity as such and thus maintains it (τὸ χρεῶν).

The second consequence—which, however, Heidegger does not seem to take into due consideration—seems to us to be inevitable: if being is understood as an act of relating, then it cannot be considered absolute. The absolute, in fact, is the active negation of any constraint (relation) to something other than itself, so that reducing being to relationality—or to “relation”, to use Heidegger's words—reduces being to a function of entities.

#### 4. Anaximander's Thought and the “Limit” of the Relation between the Foundation and the Founded

We were saying, therefore, that the ἄπειρον cannot be conceived in relation to determinations, lest it be reduced to a determination itself. The ἄπειρον is the absolute, that which is “unbound” by constraints, by relations. We are thus at the apex of the discourse, that is, at that point which allows shedding light on the theme of the relation between the absolute

and the relative: the relation coincides with the limit and, therefore, one cannot attribute to the *ἄπειρον* an external limit that would bind it to something other than itself, nor an internal limit that would reduce it to a “whole-of-parts”, to a “set” of determinations.

Nevertheless, according to many of its commentators, Anaximander himself is understood in this manner—that is, as endowed with an intrinsic or extrinsic relation. Diogenes Laertius (II, 1-2) writes, “[he asserted] that the parts change, but the whole remains immutable” (καὶ τὰ μὲν μέρη μεταβάλλειν, τὸ δὲ πᾶν ἀμετάβλητον εἶναι), as if the infinite were reducible to a set.

In a similar vein, Simplicius, as we have observed, asserts that Anaximander posits the derivation of all that exists from the infinite, thereby constraining the relation of “derivation” to the things that exist. Plutarch [*Strom.* 2 Dox. 579] writes: “For he says that from the infinite both the heavens and, collectively, all the worlds, which are infinite, have separated themselves” (...ἐταῖρον γενόμενον τὸ ἄπειρον φάναι τὴν πᾶσαν αἰτίαν ἔχειν τῆς τοῦ παντός γενέσεώς τε καὶ φθορᾶς, ἐξ οὗ δὴ φησι τοὺς τε οὐρανοὺς ἀποκεκρίσθαι καὶ καθόλου τοὺς ἅπαντας ἀπείρους ὄντας κόσμους), and this very concept is reiterated by Hippolytus [*Refut.* I, 6, 1–7].

Recently, Chiurazzi has articulated this conception very clearly [8]. He interprets the *ἄπειρον* “Platonically”, that is, based on the *Cratylus* (396a–b) and the *Politicus* (273–274), and, by drawing on a passage from the *Politicus* (373d), he writes: “For this reason, from time to time, the god comes to its aid to prevent the cosmos from sinking ‘into the infinite sea (*ἄπειρον*) of inequality’, restoring things to their proper order, readjusting them, straightening them out, reordering them, in other words, bringing them back in the right direction, counterbalancing their deviations”. (p. 13, [8]) Thus, *ἄπειρον* is conceived as a structured infinity of determinations that oppose each other.

Moreover, even Casertano understands Anaximander’s *ἄπειρον* in the sense of an “infinite” that, nonetheless, is structured by determinations: “Anaximander conceived the universe as a unique and eternal whole, immobile in itself, and called it *ἄπειρον* (‘infinite’ or ‘indefinite’) because it was not possible to think of it in terms of particular phenomena. But within the *ἄπειρον*, thanks to an also eternal movement, the infinite variety of particular phenomena is produced, that is, the *πέιρατα* (‘finite phenomena’, ‘limited’: from *πέιρας*, which means ‘limit’), the infinite worlds that populate the universe, and within each of them, mountains, rivers, winds, seas, living species, and man” (p. 46, [9]).

The fundamental theoretical problem, therefore, is to think precisely of the relation that exists between the infinite and the determinate, that is, between the unconditioned principle and the series of conditioned entities. It seems highly significant to us that the commentators of Anaximander, or at least many of them, have not grasped the aspect that constitutes the core of his thought: for Anaximander, there can be no relation (limit) within the absolute nor outside of it.

Thinking about the derivation of things from the infinite, however, cannot but mean admitting a relation (a limit) between the absolute and the relative. Precisely for this reason, we believe that Anaximander does not intend to say that things come from the absolute but from the limit, which also constitutes what they return to because it is the limit that decrees their end.

It is true that the unlimited is the condition that allows the limit to be perceived, but this does not mean that there is a relation between them: the condition is unconditioned, so it illuminates and allows one to see without being conditioned by what is seen. The unconditioned condition, that is the point, is irreducible to the series of conditioned entities, and irreducibility should not be understood in the form of a relation, even though language emphasizes the difference and thus the relation between what is irreducible.

Speaking of “irreducibility” avoids the mono-dyadic construct while maintaining the concept of “influence” that the unconditioned condition exerts on its conditioned entities, an influence that, in our view, cannot be reciprocal, as it would lead to the reoccurrence of the relation that would entail the identification of being. We want to emphasize this

point because only in this way can we claim to have theoretically confronted the “problem of Anaximander”.

So, let us return to the concept of “limit”, and for the reader’s convenience, let us restate our point of view: the relating of being is, strictly speaking, the relating of the entity, which in this act is wholly resolved. The relating of being, therefore, serves as the postulate of the entity, but this postulate cannot but be denied by the very absoluteness of being.

Being, understood precisely in its undeniable absoluteness, is the same necessity ( $\tau\acute{o}$   $\chi\rho\epsilon\acute{\omega}\nu$ ) that the entity resolves into in the act of its intrinsic reference to the ground (being), that is, in the act of transcending itself in order to truly be. It is precisely through this necessity that being imposes itself on the entity and founds it: it founds it by imposing the necessity of going beyond its empirical and immediate presence, that is, by surpassing itself.

On the other hand, being cannot be subjected to any constraint by the entity if it indeed functions as an unconditioned condition, that is, as a foundation. It does not undergo any constraint because the demand for the foundation, which translates into the claim to incorporate it, belongs only to the universe of the conditioned, where being is the necessity that brings to light the contradiction inherent in the entity’s claim, namely, the claim to incorporate being itself for instrumentalization as a founding function.

This contradiction, manifest in the limit that marks every entity as well as the universe that contains all entities (determinations), cannot be thought of as “something contradictory”, that is, as a hypostasis, because, on the contrary, it coincides with the contradiction (transcendence) of each entity (determination) as well as the universe itself.

What we intend to address now is precisely the theme of the limit and its expression of the intrinsic contradiction of the finite through Buddhist thought up to Nāgārjuna.

## 5. The Concept of “Limit” and the Remarkable Contribution of Early Buddhist Thought

Anaximander undeniably indicates the inevitable necessity of a foundation, which is such precisely because it emerges within the realm of what is founded. However, he does not explicitly articulate the reasons for this necessity. Therefore, our objective is twofold: on the one hand, to hypothesize the reasoning he might have undertaken to arrive at the concept of the *ápeiron* by addressing the inherent inadequacy of the determinate (and thus its intrinsic contradiction), and on the other hand, to demonstrate that not only is the same instance of foundation present in Indian thought contemporary to Anaximander’s<sup>5</sup> [10] but also that in Buddhist thought one can discern some of the reasons we believe are present in Anaximander but remain unexpressed.

The first point to highlight is that when Anaximander speaks of the *ápeiron*, he intends to emphasize the ontological difference that exists between the unconditioned, hence absolute, foundation and the series of conditioned entities that acquire a specific identity by virtue of their limits. In our view, Anaximander’s brilliant insight lies in recognizing the insufficiency of what is limited, finite, and determined. However, the question arises: how can this insufficiency be demonstrated? The answer we propose is this: by highlighting the characteristic of that limit that allows for determination to take place.

As we have attempted to elucidate, the concept of “limit” expresses what the concept of “relation” conveys. The limit, in fact, stands as an intermediary between extremes because it possesses two “facets”. If we take a determination and designate it as “A”, then it cannot be denied that what determines (*dētermināre*, namely, to delimit) “A”, i.e., what enables it to assume a specific form, is precisely the limit that circumscribes “A”. To determinate means, therefore, to de-limit (*delimitāre*). This holds true not only for sensory representations but for every determinate identity.

Now, the limit that enables the specific positioning of “A” is not endowed solely with the “facet” facing “A” but also with the “facet” facing everything different from “A”. Consequently, the limit is the mediator that distinguishes but also connects “A” and “not-A” ( $\neg A$ ), if by “not-A” we mean everything distinct from “A”. The “not-” ( $\neg$ ) that character-

izes “not-A” thus constitutes a negation of distinction; it permits the differentiation of each determination from all others, and it is only through its distinctive function that the limit serves an identifying purpose.

In the realm of determinates, specifically within a formal system (regardless of the specific formal system under consideration), the concept of the limit, or relation, assumes a paramount role—the role of identification and differentiation. Typically, two distinct functions are discussed in this context, yet they are two only by virtue of language itself, which configures the formal system par excellence by assuming determinate identity as if it were not structured through difference. The function of identification, conversely, inherently embodies differentiation, and vice versa, as it identifies only through differentiation and differentiates only through the identification of distinct elements.

It is precisely for this reason that one can assert that the relation, or limit, identifies because it differentiates and differentiates because it identifies. We have previously explored this aspect in other works: the relation, conceived as a medium between extremes, that is, as a mono-dyadic construct, on the one hand postulates the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the relata in order to consider it a genuine identity but on the other hand views itself as open and integrable to be bound to something beyond itself [11–13]. The theme of relation is intrinsically linked to the theme of identity, which, if determinate, necessitates difference and consequently “denies its own self-sufficiency”.

The point we wish to emphasize here is that, by highlighting the fact that every determined identity arises by virtue of its limit, Anaximander intends to demonstrate, at least in our judgment, four necessities: the necessity for every determined identity to be placed in relation to difference; the necessity to contemplate this relation; the necessity for a foundation that is not a determined identity; the necessity to interrogate the relation between the realm of determinations and their foundation<sup>6</sup>.

To address the theme of primordial necessity, it is imperative to recognize that it is articulated in a much more explicit manner within Buddhist thought than in Anaximander’s philosophy. An essential passage that deserves attention can be found in the monumental Nāgārjunian work, which reads as follows: “That which is ‘other’ is so in dependence upon that from which it differs [opposes]; it is not other independently of that by which it is defined as ‘other’. If that which is defined as ‘other’ were not distinct from that from which it is deemed ‘other’, then it would be distinct from itself [since] there would be nothing against which it could be defined as ‘other’. Alterity is not to be found in that which is defined as ‘other’, nor is it found in that which is ‘not-other’” (MK 14.5-7)<sup>7</sup>.

As demonstrated in other contexts [1], this passage represents the culmination that Nāgārjuna offers us, building upon ancient Buddhist considerations concerning the nature of identity and the interdependent relation between identities. These considerations are discernible in SN 12.15, a pivotal discourse on the dual nature (*dvayanissito*) of the world, which is explicitly referenced by Nāgārjuna. Furthermore, they are also elaborated upon in SN 22.62, where the themes of language and conventionality are addressed, and even in MN 139, which explores the conventional nature of designated names.

In our assessment, this passage appears to be significant; however, its conclusion is subject to debate. If, indeed, every determined identity arises due to its connection with difference, then it is conceptually flawed to position relation as an intermediary between extremes, namely, as subsisting between “A” and “¬A”. On the contrary, relation is situated within the intrinsic and constitutive structure of both “A” and “¬A”, in contrast to the assertion made in the concluding remarks of the aforementioned passage, which implies that difference constitutes the relation among the distinct.

In our judgment, precisely because relation constitutes the intrinsic structure of every determined identity, every “A” is inherently “A  $\wedge$  ¬A”, that is, it embodies a contradiction. Furthermore, for this very reason, every finite entity contradicts itself, thus transcending itself, and is unable to transcend into another finite form. Instead, it can only transcend into the infinite because only the infinite is absolute and, therefore, genuinely autonomous and self-sufficient.

To be clearer, it could be said that every finite entity, being insufficient unto itself (or, expressed differently, inherently self-contradictory, as it is inherently other than itself), seeks sufficiency (non-contradiction, intelligibility) in order to manifest as an existent entity. However, this ontological insufficiency cannot be filled by another finite entity, which is also insufficient, without leading to an infinite regress. This concept is well articulated in various passages of Buddhist thought. In Nāgārjuna's work MK 1.3, it is written: "There is no self-essence present in conditions, and if there is no self-essence, there can be no essence of the other-than-self"<sup>8</sup>.

In the context provided, the term "self-essence" (in Sanskrit: *svabhāva*) is used to denote that which exists in and of itself (καθ' αὐτό), constituting the distinctive characteristic of the absolute. While the absolute is, or at least should be by necessity, autonomous and self-sufficient because it does not require anything other than itself to exist—hence, it is self-founding or, in other words, it constitutes its own essence—determinations, on the other hand, are lacking, expressing a substantial ontological insufficiency. Therefore, no determination constitutes an authentic identity, as the only authentic identity is that of the absolute [1,14].

Every determined identity requires something other than itself; however, this "other" is still a determination and, therefore, expresses the same insufficiency, so that this path does not overcome the insufficiency of the finite; as we mentioned, the insufficiency of the given is not overcome through a relation with another given.

Already in the ancient canon, a foundational concept was identified that is also the basis for MK's more detailed arguments. In the analysis of physical and psychological phenomena (often collectively referred to in literature as "psychophysical", given Buddhism's limited inclination to recognize a substantial difference between the objective and the subjective), the Buddha had observed a fundamentally empty or "void" nature, where emptiness referred to an impossibility of self-subsistence, that is, of having its own identity. Please note that in antiquity, the term "non-self" (*anattā*) was fundamentally coincident with that of "emptiness" (*suññatā*), which only later assumed greater prominence in Buddhism (p. 41, [15]) [16].

In light of this comprehensive analysis, it was reasonable to conclude that every phenomenon inevitably relied upon another, which, in turn, depended on other phenomena, and so forth. There was thus no discernible foundation for impermanent phenomena, which were characterized by their "interdependent" nature (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), founded on relations. Due to this interdependent nature, it can be asserted that there is no single entity that is self-existent, and within this absence of self-existence, Buddhism initially conceived of non-identity (*anattā*) and subsequently emptiness (*suññatā*). However, asserting that an entity is empty does not imply that it is nothing. The concept of emptiness is aimed solely at explaining the absence of independence, its inherent conditionality, and co-conditionality. Thus, it should not be erroneously believed that the Buddha advocated any form of nihilism, as the nihilistic position (*ucchedavāda*) was explicitly and emphatically rejected<sup>9</sup> [17]. In addition to this, it has also been examined, drawing from the same Buddhist texts, how it is not tenable in any way to assert that Buddhist discourse implies nihilism. On the contrary, the Pāli canon clearly reveals that the original concept involved an indivisible totality (*sabbam ekattam*), implicit (and encompassed) within each of its manifestations [1]. The intrinsic emptiness of all that appears is thus the demonstration of "that-which-is" (*yathābhūtam*)<sup>10</sup> [1].

The response that we have begun to provide to this question can be succinctly summarized as follows: precisely because the entire realm of empirical-formal determinations proves insufficient unto itself, it necessitates a foundation that transcends this realm; that is, it requires an absolute foundation. Only the absolute, therefore, can be considered a genuine foundation, and this is precisely because only the absolute is truly self-sufficient and thus expresses authentic identity.

To articulate the ontological inconsistency of the finite, Buddhists speak of "emptiness": they assert that the world (*loka*) is empty, in the sense that finite entities do not truly

exist, for strictly speaking, they are not. Thus, in the passage codified in SN 35.85, appearing as a discourse to the disciple Ānanda, it is written: “‘The world is empty, the world is empty’, so they say, sir. What does it mean to assert that the world is empty?—Ānanda, [the Buddha replies] it is said that ‘the world is empty’ because it is devoid of intrinsic identity [self-essence] or anything related to it”<sup>11</sup>.

The world is void, therefore, because what is presumed to populate it is void as well, so that, with the disappearance of worldly things, the world itself, intrinsically bound to them, also ceases to appear. This same concept is reiterated by Nāgārjuna, who argues for the necessity that what is interdependent must also be empty: “All conditioned and interdependent entities can be explained by emptiness. Such a thing, being dependent on designation, is itself the middle way [the teaching that everything is empty]. Is there anything that is unconditioned? Such a thing does not exist. Therefore, not even one non-empty thing exists” (MK 14.18-9)<sup>12</sup>. Let us reiterate that asserting the vacuity of an entity  $x$  does not entail establishing an identification ( $x = y$ ) but rather serves to specify the condition of entity  $x$ . Indeed, within the framework of Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is recognized subsequently that Nāgārjuna proclaimed the vacuity of vacuity itself (*śūnyatāsūnyatā*). This seemingly paradoxical statement reconciles itself by elucidating the underlying intention, which is to signify the interdependent nature of conditioned entities, their inherent dependence on totality. Vacuity itself is empty because any designation, including that of “vacuity”, is inherently insubstantial.

## 6. The Buddhist Contribution to the Explanation of the Meaninglessness of the Relation between the Absolute and the Relative

In the third paragraph, we discussed that positing a relation between the absolute and the relative entails two catastrophic consequences from a theoretical-conceptual standpoint.

The first consequence is as follows: when the absolute is placed within a relational framework, it diminishes to a specific state, thereby ceasing to transcend the very order it is supposed to underpin by virtue of its absoluteness. Consequently, one could argue that the empirical-formal universe, on one hand, demands an absolute foundation because only the absolute is truly existent; on the other hand, it seeks to incorporate it for foundational purposes, thus contradicting itself by denying what it requires.

The second consequence is the absolutization of the relative. If, indeed, the absolute is negated and ceases to transcend the relative, then the relative can no longer be apprehended in its intrinsic relativity precisely because it is relative in reference to the absolute. With the absolute removed, the relative is also removed, and the relative appears to substitute for the absolute, as ordinary experience suggests. It is true that Nāgārjuna, in certain instances, appears to advocate for an equality between the absolute and the relative. Particularly, in MK 25.19-20, he clearly states that there is no substantial difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and that they “share the same boundaries” (*nirvāṇasya ca yā koṭiḥ koṭiḥ saṃsāranasya ca*). This is a rather remarkable assertion, considering that elsewhere Nāgārjuna seems to lean towards a very clear hierarchy, wherein the absolute is the only thing that “exists”, while the relative is nothing more than our misunderstanding of the absolute. However, affirming the equality of the two does not degrade the absolute in ontological terms. What he previously stated does not negate the claim of equality between the two terms, as the relative remains a distortion of the absolute: it is not an independent entity, and thus, we have always been and will always be in the absolute. There is no room for misunderstanding in this regard. Nāgārjuna seems to describe enlightenment itself as the realization of the inevitable condition of eternally being in the absolute. It is only deception that entraps us: believing ourselves confined to the limitation that is what appears in the relative [18].

The entities comprising ordinary experience are no longer apprehended in their intrinsic inadequacy but are instead assumed to be autonomous and self-sufficient, as evidenced by perceptual-sensory experience<sup>13</sup>. It can be concluded on this point, therefore, that while the relative requires the absolute, the absolute not only does not require the relative but

indeed constitutes the reason that compels the relative to remove itself, even if not empirically but transcendentally. For this reason, there is no reciprocity between them; thus, there is no relation. How could there be a relation, in fact, between being and non-being (the “void”, “emptiness” of being)?

Some of these considerations are also implicit in the Buddhist discourse on origination (SN 22.74). When asked by the Buddha to define the origin (*samudaya*) of something, he responds clearly by listing sensation, perception, mental constructs, and consciousness. What we perceive as “originated” is not so due to a foundational principle from which it evolves, but rather it is connected to the sense organs, perception, and consciousness, which “give rise to” (not in an ontological sense, therefore) what appears to us as the “world”<sup>14</sup>.

And a few words are necessary on the concept of the world. In a study entirely dedicated to the conception of the world in ancient Buddhist thought, it was demonstrated that this term precisely designates the set of impermanent constructs in constant—and apparent—becoming [19]. The “world” is not, therefore, everything that exists, but everything that can be thought within certain boundaries. Indeed, there is a close connection between the idea of the world and that of a field (*khetta*), boundary, delimitation<sup>15</sup> [19]. In the Vedic culture preceding Buddhist thought, the warrior-hero is seen as the founder of the world precisely because he first plows through the untamed ground within a perimeter in which he establishes his “conquest” [20].

In analogy, consciousness delineates in the world certain boundaries within which it establishes designations, imposing its dominion within “mundane” spheres. Buddhism rejects this idea of the world and embraces the ascetic path of withdrawal from society, refusing to recognize the authority of the established order. By proposing the pursuit of the “end of the world” (*lokanta*), Buddhism does not aim for the annihilation of things (the empirical removal of the empirical) but rather the attainment of an incontrovertible truth that can only be “transmundane” (*lokuttara*), beyond the bounds of the constituted world and the conceivable worlds. In this sense, since the axis of *loka/lokanta* is the foundational concept behind the dichotomy of *samsāra/nirvāṇa*, as well as that of relative/absolute (*saṃvṛti/paramārtha*) in Nāgārjuna, it follows that the transcendent realm can only be existence itself, independent and untouchable by human misinterpretations, which primarily concern the dimension of the “world”, namely relative and interdependent things<sup>16</sup>.

Equally important in this regard is the fact that in the analysis of all mundane phenomena, or the “whole world” (*sabba loka*), the Buddha exclusively recognizes entities characterized by conditionality. This quality is reserved for everything that is thinkable or perceptible by the sensory spheres (SN 35.23). There is only one exception to this category, which is not coincidentally the only “thing” (existent-being) defined as “unconditioned”, namely, *nirvāṇa*.

If, in Western thought, the relation between absolute and relative cannot be accepted, similarly in Buddhist conception, the relation of *sacca/micchā* cannot be accepted. Let us reiterate that by “relation”, we mean a relation of ontological dependence, not the actual nature of things. If the unerring nature of what appears is truth (*sacca*), while our misunderstanding is *micchā*, this does not imply a reciprocal dependence between the two. On the contrary, truth is immutable, and even though it appears mutable because it progressively reveals itself or is limited by the imperfections of our cognitive system, it has always and forever encompassed all possibilities, past, present, or future. Therefore, it is only *micchā* that is dependent on truth, as its reduction. But all possible interpretations of truth are already encompassed within it. There is, therefore, no possibility of influencing truth based on its interpretation.

The unintelligibility of such a relation in Western philosophy has been forcefully indicated by Parmenides, who excludes the possibility of a relation between being, which is absolute, and non-being, which is constituted by the world of relatives. Fragment 2 of his poem Περὶ Φύσεως articulates it definitively: there are only two paths, one inevitable (or “true”), which is, but if it is, then it is impossible for it not to be, the other that is not, and

therefore it is necessary for it not to be, in other words, it is impossible for what is to not be; conversely, if something “is not”, then it is not, and if it appears to us as non-being, evidently, its appearance demonstrates that it is and also indicates the impossibility of its non-being, which would also prevent its mere conceivability (ἡ μὲν ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι, πειθοῦς ἔστι κέλευθος—ἀληθείη γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ—, ἡ δ’ ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεῶν ἔστι μὴ εἶναι, τὴν δὴ τοι φράζω παναπευθέα ἔμμεν ἀταρπὸν· οὔτε γὰρ ἄν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἔόν—οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν—οὔτε φράσαις).

Buddhist thought, in turn, presents this same truth with very clear aphorisms and is, therefore, extremely significant. First of all, it should be noted that Buddhist thought also speaks of two paths, articulating them as “duplicity” (*dvayaadhammamāhu*, cf. Snp 4.12 on the relation between true and false) and later as “two truths” (*dve satye*). From the beginning of this articulation, it is evident that the duality of possibilities exists only in mental conception: we “think” things as true or false, but it is implicit in false things that they are not, precisely because they are not true. It is not evident, then, that only truth exists, and the rest “exists” as discourse about the truth, which, in attempting to deny it in falsehood, only reaffirms it. Indeed, the Buddha says in Snp 4.12: “and no, there are not many different truths that, apart from perception, endure in the world. Having reasoned from different viewpoints, they say there are two things: true and false” (*na heva saccāni bahūni nānā, aññatra saññāya niccāni loke; takkañca ditthīsu pakappayitvā, saccam musāti dvayaadhammamāhu*).

Subsequently, with the Abhidhamma, this duality is understood as the truth of the absolute (*paramattha*, Sanskrit: *paramārtha*) and the truth of the relative or conventional (*sammuti*, Sanskrit: *saṃvṛti*), which, however, cannot be considered true like that of the absolute, precisely because the relative is finite, conditioned, so that its truth ultimately resolves into its non-being, into its being an ontological void, as has been denounced in the preceding passages.

Similarly, categorical thought, by generating different and apparently independent concepts, constitutes a complex foundational system of the world based on division: concepts, as affirmed in SN 12.15 and 22.90, find their basis in their opposites because the cognitive system itself is dualistic: the world (*loka*) is based on duality (*dvayanissito*). Therefore, everything related to the dual (*dvayassa*) is a denial of truth (*sacca*). However, there is that which transcends the world, contemplated as the end of the world (*lokanta*), or simply liberation (*nibbāna*, Sanskrit: *nirvāṇa*), which is identified as the only unconditioned reality (*asankhata*) [21].

Based on the considerations made, including those concerning Buddhist thought, it can be strongly reiterated what was said just above: there can be no relation between being and non-being precisely because non-being is not. Their relation, therefore, is only a linguistic relation, in the sense that only language makes what is not be and hypostatizes non-being to oppose it (conceptually) to being. Therefore, everything that appears, including the relative, is existent. Nevertheless, this does not implicate that the relative is “ultimately” true, i.e., coincident with the whole possible being.

The Nāgārjunian discourse revolves around the concept of “two truths”, with the truth of the relative consisting in its lack of true existence, such that the only truth is that of the absolute. One of the most crucial passages regarding the “two truths” (*dve satye*) in Nāgārjuna is encapsulated in MK 24.9, which states: “Those who do not comprehend the distinction between the two truths do not grasp the foundation of the Buddha’s teachings”<sup>17</sup>. This references what is introduced in MK 24.8-11, namely: “The teaching of the Buddha’s law is presented through two truths: the relative truth of the world’s reality and the truth of the absolute. Those who fail to discern the difference between these two truths also fail to fathom the profundity of the Buddha’s teachings. Without employing worldly language, the truth of the absolute cannot be taught, and without realizing the absolute truth, nirvana remains unattainable. Misunderstanding emptiness wreaks havoc on those of weak intellect, akin to mishandling a serpent or improperly crafting a spell”<sup>18</sup>.

In this passage, not only are two truths discussed, but the concept is adequately specified. It could be expressed as follows: they are indeed two, but only when using the

language of the world (emphasizing the finite perspective) [19,22]. Similarly, Parmenides had articulated a similar discourse [23]. Using such language is inevitable because it constitutes the only language that humans know. However, the inevitable should not be confused with the undeniable, in the sense that the absolute, as articulated by humans, is not the absolute in itself, i.e., the authentic absolute, which is so precisely because it escapes any relation to something other than itself. Without the inevitable, the undeniable is not taught, but it is by virtue of the undeniable, and only by virtue of the undeniable, that one can grasp the necessity of the absolute as well as its irreducibility to any discourse about it. Furthermore, it is only by virtue of the absolute, i.e., the undeniable itself, which thus serves as a transcendental condition, that the limit of the relative can be apprehended, namely, the ontological void that characterizes it.

Moreover, if we seek the roots of the conception of the “two truths”, we can easily find them in ancient discourses concerning the nature of the unconditioned, such as the discourse in Ud 8.1 aimed at indicating its emergence beyond everything that belongs to the finite, i.e., the empirical-formal universe: “There is, O mendicants, a sphere in which there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air; in which there is neither the sphere of infinite space, nor that of infinite consciousness, nor that of nothingness, nor that which is neither-idea-nor-non-idea, where this world does not appear, nor a different world, nor both together, nor the moon, nor the sun. This, O mendicants, I tell you, is free from coming and going, from duration and decay; there is no beginning nor stability, no effect and no cause: this is truly the end of suffering<sup>19</sup>”.

In order to emphasize that the absolute is to be understood as an unconditional condition and, for this reason, indeterminable, one may refer to the concept of “suchness” or “essence in itself” (*tattva*) as proposed in MK 18.9 [3]. In this context, the absolute is described as follows: “Not dependent on anything else, tranquil, not manufactured by the construction of the mind, not thought, devoid of distinction; such is the nature of the absolute”<sup>20</sup>.

In this passage, it is clarified that conditioned reality can indeed be understood by Buddhists as originating. In fact, the principle from which “the world arises” is the same as that of dependent origination. However, this is precisely because everything that is conditioned is not truly existent. In this regard, one can refer to the rich Buddhist discussions on the origin of the world as a phenomeno-sensory construction that appears within the perceptual sphere of the senses [19].

The assertion of the world as neither finite nor infinite in MN 63 articulates the system of the fourfold negation (*catuskoṭi*) that will be elaborated upon by the Madhyamaka philosophy going forward<sup>21</sup>. This elaboration is a strong and strictly logical argument aimed at demonstrating the inconsistency of any discourse [24].

Now, it would be logically consistent to reduce this reasoning to the following formula:  $[\neg (a) \wedge \neg (\neg a) \wedge \neg (a \wedge \neg a) \wedge \neg (\neg a \wedge \neg \neg a)]$ . However, certain authors have preferred to summarize everything in the proposition  $\neg \neg (A \vee \neg A)$ , which has been considered by Westerhoff a departure from Nāgārjuna’s original intentions. In fact, if we “read the negation-symbols as just straight truth-functional negation, both this and the negation of the third alternative turn out to be equivalent to  $A \vee \neg A$ , and it is obvious that this is not the conclusion Nāgārjuna wants to draw” (p. 75, [25]).

We do not wish to take a particular logical position here. Instead, we believe that attempting to reduce Nāgārjuna’s philosophy to formulas of analytic logic means not understanding his fundamental attempt to “deconstruct” language, an attempt that is misunderstood due to the intentional paradoxical intention of deconstructing language through language itself [26].

In this context, we could say that the world exists but is not truly real. This explains why the world cannot be understood as authentically derived from the absolute, because such derivation would establish a relation, and hence a mutual connection, between the unconditioned and the conditioned, which exists only from the human perspective, i.e., the finite.

From this perspective, we can also employ the powerful metaphor used by Vasubandhu in his *Vimśatikā* (see *Vijñapti-mātratā-siddhih*), in which it is stated: “Since it appears as an unreal object, this world is mere conceptualization, just as the vision of hair on the moon by a cataract-afflicted observer” (*vijñaptimātram evaitad asad arthāvabhāsanāt yathā taimirikasyāsat keśa candrādi darśanam*).

The discourse pertains to a principle of causality (*paccaya*), which is unidirectional, meaning it is a unilateral conditioning exerted by the unconditioned condition. This condition conditions not in the sense of positing the world but in the sense of allowing one to grasp the constitutive limit, i.e., allowing one to mistake appearance for being.

Similarly, the dualism inherent in the concept of “double truth” is more of a pseudo-dualism, as it concerns the conception of mundane things. Even if a dualism were to be articulated between the absolute and the relative, it would still fall within the relative perspective, so that the absolute conceived as a term in relation to the relative cannot be confused with the absolute that emerges beyond the relative and its relation to it. The relative re-incorporates its own idea within itself, opposing it dualistically to the idea of the absolute. But only in the realm of ideas lies the conceptual opposition between the relative and the absolute, whereas the absolute conceived by Buddhists has nothing opposing it, certainly not the relative. This is well explained by those who have built on the work of the MK<sup>22</sup>.

Therefore, it would not be the absolute in its purest “suchness” (*tattva*), which is unattainable through discourses that fall into dualistic mechanisms of designation, as well explained in MK 24.8-11, that bypasses the ultimate nature of phenomena.

These arguments, though complex, cannot be avoided if one intends to fully grasp the Buddha’s intention to avoid the entification of being. What is intended to be affirmed through the middle position (*mādhyamaka*) is that neither A nor not-A (neither identity nor difference) can be considered genuinely essential, as the finite is its own transcending [ $\neg\exists(A \wedge \neg A)$ ]. What this middle position of neither A nor not-A wants to clarify is precisely the risk that lurks behind the entification of the absolute through the designation “absolute”. In this sense, no finite determination can be hypostasized, and even less can the absolute be reduced to a determination because that would entail its entification, the entification that language produces through the use of the word “absolute”.

The meditator must, therefore, bear in mind the pitfall concealed behind the use of language: the words employed designate meanings that are perpetually situated within the framework of relativity and, thus, are nothing more than mere tools with which the mind engages. In SN 22.65, the Buddha speaks of the instrument of language (*nirutti*), which is equated with the designation of “terminologies” (*adhivacana*) and descriptions, identified as “conventions” (*paññatti*). All words are conventional; hence, language cannot express the truth. When one uses the word “absolute”, it must be remembered that the value of the expression intends to transcend its linguistic meaning: the absolute can only be spoken of when accompanied by the awareness of the limitation of speech itself<sup>23</sup>. Every word is, by its nature, conditioned, and so is the term “unconditioned” itself. The solution proposed by Buddhism is contemplation, the only key to directly grasp what words confine. We will not delve into the practical aspect of meditative practice, as it pertains to the immediate experience, which cannot be described in conventional terms.

What piques our interest the most concerns the implicit acknowledgment of the impossibility of deriving the conditioned from the unconditioned. More precisely: the world (*loka*) relies on the unconditioned because if there were no unconditioned, there would be no conditioned (nor, from the Buddhist perspective, the possibility of recognizing the deception of the conditioned, as well expressed in Iti 43 on the necessary existence of the “unborn, unproduced, unfabricated: an unconditioned”)<sup>24</sup>; on the other hand, the unconditioned is, by its very definition, unconditioned and thus independent of worldly facts. The latter, by virtue of being a reduction or misunderstanding of the unconditioned, is also in some way an (impracticable) attempt at negation. Naturally, the Spinozian principle of *omnis determinātiō est negātiō* is inverted here: the conditioned, in its impossible attempt to

negate (reduce) the absolute, does nothing more than reaffirm it as implicit to itself. But the absolute, in turn, is the dimension that transcends worldliness (*lokuttara*) and cannot, therefore, be comprehended in terms of the latter, nor confined by its determinations.

The same discourse is reiterated in Ud 8.3, where we find confirmation that the unconditioned is liberation, namely *nibbāna*, and that if there were no unconditioned, not only would no conditioned phenomenon be possible, but liberation from their suffering would also be impossible. Liberation from the conditioned is itself conditioned (*tasmā jā-tassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇam paññāyati*) and therefore possible by virtue of the unconditioned.

However, it is transcendence that constitutes the true nature of this liberation, which would not otherwise be termed supramundane (*lokuttara*) or even the end of the world (*lokanta*) if it were not understood as the removal, or the extinguishing (*nis-vā, nirvāṇa*), of the limited. The inadequate can only remove itself (*atthaṅgama*) from the adequate, not preserve itself. Thus, Buddhist enlightenment can only be the removal of the conditioned in its striving towards the unconditioned. In Buddhahood, the limit resolves into its hypostasis.

## 7. Conclusions

In this exposition, we embarked on an examination of the metaphysical paradigm shift instigated by Anaximander within the context of Western philosophy. Our endeavor was to juxtapose this shift with the tenets of ancient Buddhist philosophy, specifically focusing on the Madhyamaka school and the earliest attestations found within the Pāli canon. This inquiry was rooted in the pursuit of comprehending the imperative nature of a foundational underpinning that transcends the finite realm and further seeks to elucidate the evolution of this concept within both Greek and Indian philosophical thought.

Anaximander's philosophical framework posits the necessity of an unlimited fundamental principle (*ἄπειρον*), although it does not provide explicit arguments justifying the inadequacy of finite things. Our investigation delved into how ancient Buddhist philosophical thought sheds light on the concept of the insubstantiality of the finite, on its being a "void" (*suññatā*), albeit often expressed through concise aphorisms rather than rigorous logical arguments. This exploration highlights the potential for future comparative studies between Western and Buddhist philosophical traditions in their respective approaches to the absolute and the relative.

Central to this paper was the concept of "relation". In concluding our work, we found it necessary to offer a brief note concerning the concept in question, which played a central role in the text but was not directly addressed in order to maintain the thread of the discourse. Typically, the concept of relation is understood as a "mono-dyadic construct" composed of two extreme terms and a middle term. Plato, in his dialogue *Παρμενίδης*, already demonstrated the aporetic nature of this construct when discussing the relation between ideas and empirical things. It entails two further relations: the one subsisting between the first term and the middle term, and the one subsisting between the middle term and the second term, and so on *ad infinitum*. For this reason, Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics* [*Met.* 990b<sub>17</sub>–1079a<sub>13</sub>, 1039a<sub>2</sub>], referred to the ordinary relation as the "third man aporia" (*τρίτος ἄνθρωπος*). In contemporary philosophy, Bradley, drawing from a fundamental Hegelian insight, highlighted the antilogical nature of ordinary relation. It is a contradiction because it reconciles two aspects that are inherently irreconcilable: the independence of the two terms, required for each to be considered independently of the other and codified (e.g., as "A") apart from the other (e.g., "B"), and their reciprocal dependence, essential for asserting that they are terms in relation to each other, i.e., such that one is posited "because" the other is posited.

In this work, we have emphasized that every finite (every determination, that is, every "A") is posited because it refers to something other than itself (to another determination, to "non-A"), precisely because it is insufficient in itself. However, this relation must be properly understood. If it is thought of as a construct, then it must be grasped in its intrinsic contradiction in such a way that the contradiction/relation is resolved in the act of

contradicting itself. In this sense, every finite contradicts itself and transcends itself into the infinite, or, in other words, every finite reveals itself as the act of referring to the absolute, so that every finite is grasped as a sign. The sign removes itself into meaning, a theme that seems to resonate in ancient Indian reflections on language, which later reached Buddhism [27]. If the essence of the sign consists in its transcendence into meaning, similarly, the essence of the finite lies entirely in its referring to absolute being because only absolute being is true being. In this way, even relation ceases to be understood as a construct and resolves into an act. Furthermore, it should be added that one cannot think of absolute being as the act of its referring, according to Heidegger's intentions, for the simple reason that it would negate the absoluteness of being itself. On the contrary, the finite must be understood as the act of referring to the absolute, which coincides with the act of removing itself into the absolute being to "truly be". In this sense, a relation placed between the absolute and the relative is entirely unintelligible; it is the relative that resolves into its referring (and thus into its removal) into the absolute, which is the only true reality. Moreover, if one were to inscribe the absolute into a relation, it would reduce it to a term, i.e., to the conditioned, and thereby deny its absoluteness. Therefore, since only the absolute is true, it follows that truth is indeterminable, and thus, one cannot claim to possess it but can only intend to be possessed by it, entrusting oneself to it and confiding in it.

Furthermore, our inquiry addresses the complexities associated with the notion of a "foundation" and presents an argument against the position of a causal relation between the fundamental entity and what is founded. We argue that such a relation could potentially compromise the intrinsic transcendence of the absolute and render it contingent upon the relative. Our analysis contends that ancient Buddhist thought categorically excludes the feasibility of such a causal connection, emphasizing the intrinsic unity present in the absolute (*paṭicca ekattam*).

This conception concerning the search for truth proposed by Buddhists also resonates with the "single path" articulated by Parmenides (μόνος δ' ἔτι μῦθος ὁδοῖο λείπεται ὡς ἔσται) and with what Anaximander has discussed. Buddhism also speaks of the "single path" (*ekayāna*) primarily in the context of meditative practice leading to enlightenment (DN 22). The recognition of the impossible relation between being and the individual, often represented as the thinking subject, holds profound philosophical significance. It is essential to acknowledge that this understanding is pivotal because it pertains to the individual's endeavor to establish a connection with being—a pursuit that consistently eludes definitive grasp. This ceaseless pursuit, often characterized as the intention of truth, impels the individual towards a yearning for self-transcendence. This innate yearning signifies a desire to surpass the limitations of the self, reaching towards an absolute state of being that resists a concrete relation but can only be intended as an act of entrusting oneself to the truth. Therefore, we propose to distinguish between "relation" and "intention": relation maintains a certain distance between two connected terms, while intention (*intentiō*) is an act of "tension towards" (*in-tendō*) to eliminate this distance and fully merge with the truth to finally be "true", without any claims to govern truth.

Also, our discourse engages with the concept of the "two truths" in Buddhist philosophy, where relative truth is considered devoid of independent existence, while only absolute truth is recognized as unconditioned. We draw parallels between this doctrinal position and ancient dialogues regarding the unconditioned, thus emphasizing the indeterminate nature that characterizes the absolute.

In conclusion, this brief treatise engages in a complex exploration of the evolution of metaphysical concepts regarding foundations and the intricate relation between the absolute and the relative within the conceptual frameworks of Western and Buddhist philosophy. This underscores the clear distinctions as well as the intriguing convergences that emerge between these two philosophical traditions as they address fundamental questions concerning the nature of existence and reality. Additionally, this study may pave the way for future comparative analyses between ancient Greek and Indian philosophy. While such endeavors exceed the scope of this article, it is evident that these prospective ventures

in comparative philosophy, which we advocate here, would prove beneficial not only to those who seek to deepen intercultural dialogue and the development of philosophy per se but also to historical studies concerned with tracing potential connections in antiquity between these two intellectual traditions. Some groundwork has already been laid in this regard [28–30], and it is desirable that future investigations proceed systematically to yield even greater insights and studies.

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## Abbreviations

<i>Phys.</i>	Φυσική ἀκρόασις
<i>Refut.</i>	Φιλοσοφούμενα ἢ κατὰ πασῶν αἰρέσεων ἔλεγχος
<i>Strom.</i>	Στρωματεῖς
<i>Met.</i>	τὰ Μετὰ τὰ Φυσικά (Ἀριστοτέλης)
<i>Snp</i>	<i>Suttanipāta</i>
<i>Ud</i>	<i>Udāna</i>
<i>Iti</i>	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
<i>MN</i>	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i>
<i>SN</i>	<i>Samyuttanikāya</i>
<i>AN</i>	<i>Aṅguttaranikāya</i>
<i>DN</i>	<i>Dīghanikāya</i>
<i>MK</i>	<i>Mūlamadhyamakakārikā</i>

## Notes

- Given the historical breadth and scope of various Buddhist schools over centuries, this article will focus on ancient Buddhist thought as codified in the Pāli canon, as well as the subsequent developments introduced by Nāgārjuna. Nāgārjuna is included as a significant author due to his demonstrated adherence to the Pāli canon, which serves as the foundation for his school of thought. However, it is important to note a certain divergence from the so-called Mahāyāna traditions in his teachings [1]. It is also noted that, as demonstrated by Sujato and Brahmali, early Buddhist thought, particularly that associated with the Pāli canon, exhibits the most original and autonomous ideas within the landscape of South Asian philosophies, in contrast to Mahāyāna [2].
- To assert that the absolute is one in itself but appears as manifold entails a failure to recognize that this constrains the being of the absolute to its appearance, thus imposing upon the absolute a relationship it cannot help but exclude, precisely because it is absolute: the relationship between being and appearance. The same applies to consciousness, conceived as transcendental consciousness. Both Kant and Hegel, in fact, distinguish empirical consciousness from transcendental consciousness (or pure apperception in Kant), which is in itself a unity because it functions as the foundation of states of consciousness. Hegel, in his “Phänomenologie des Geistes” [1807], states that transcendental consciousness is the act of surpassing all that is limited, including empirical consciousness, which is bound to the multiplicity of its contents.
- Original: διὸ καθάπερ λέγομεν, οὐ ταύτης ἀρχή, ἀλλ’ αὕτη τῶν ἄλλων εἶναι δοκεῖ καὶ περιέχειν ἅπαντα καὶ πάντα κυβερνᾶν, ὡς φασιν ὅσοι μὴ ποιῶσι παρὰ τὸ ἀπειρον ἄλλας αἰτίας οἷον νοῦν ἢ φιλία.
- As Heidegger writes (pp. 344–345, [5]): “The event, which marks the initial Greek inception of Western thought in the contemporary era characterized by the ‘decline’ of ‘metaphysics’, impels it towards its own possibilities and thus renders it distinctively as the ‘alternative inception’ of Western thought” (Erst das Ereignis, das den ersten, griechischen Anfang des abendländischen Denkens im heutigen Zeitalter der »Verendung« der »Metaphysik« in seinem »Eige Möglichkeiten auf und läßt ihn so »eigen« als »anderen Anfang« des abendländischen Denkens aufgehen).

- 5 Concerning the emergence of Early Buddhist philosophy, this article relies on a revised extended chronology, which situates the birth of the Buddha in the midst of the 6th century BCE. Recent revisions that lean towards a more cautious approach and post-date (short chronology) the birth of the Buddha between 480 and 450 BCE do not appear convincing to us, for reasons articulated in prior studies on the origins of Indian philosophies, which lead us to have greater confidence in the traditional dating [10].
- 6 It is noteworthy to observe how, both in first-order functional calculus (especially in first-order functional calculus with equality) and in second-order functional calculus, as well as in the algebra of relations, identity is construed as equality, which is a binary constant functional expressed in the form of a relation:  $xIy$ . It is thus established that even in formal logic, identity is structured through relation, i.e., through difference.
- 7 Original: *anyad anyat pratītyānyan nānyad anyad rte 'nyatah/yat pratītya ca yat tasmāt tad anyan nopapadyate yady anyad anyad anyasmād anyasmād apy rte bhavet/tad anyad anyad anyasmād rte nāsti ca nāsty atah nānyasmin vidyate 'nyatvam ananyasmin na vidyate/avidyamāne cānyatve nāsty anyad vā tad eva vā /*.
- 8 Original: *na hi svabhāvo bhāvānāmapratyayādiṣu vidyate/avidyamāne svabhāve parabhāvo na vidyate//*.
- 9 The Buddha's staunch opposition to any form of extremism leads him to reject the positions of "nihilists" (*ucchedavāda*), who are repeatedly criticized in his discourses for espousing absurdities that deny self-evident truths. It should be noted that the Buddha also rejects the opposite extreme, namely the uncritical eternalism of entities (*sassatavāda*). As Karunadasa explains well, it is the misunderstanding of the principle of plurality (*nānatta-nayassa micchāgahana*) that leads instead to nihilism (p. 25, [17]). The idea of a radical separation of things is actually adherence to the notion of annihilation (*ucchedābhīnivesassa kāraṇam*). However, the nihilistic position, which is understood as the belief that what is can, absurdly, become what is not, is clearly articulated by Nāgārjuna in the powerful opening verses of his MK (1.1): "Nowhere and in no way have there ever been beings arising from themselves, from another, from both, or without any cause" (*na soato nāpi parato na dvābhyām nāpy ahetutah; utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kva cana ke cana*). The discerning philosopher will recognize in these passages the Parmenidean principle of οὐδὲν ἔξ οὐδενός. If this is not sufficient to persuade the reader of the anti-nihilistic positions, one can also refer to MK 21.12, where the same matter is formalized clearly: "A being does not arise from another being. A being does not arise from a non-being. A non-being does not arise from a non-being. A non-being does not arise from a being" (*na bhāvāj jāyate bhāvo bhāvo 'bhāvān na jāyate; nābhāvāj jāyate 'bhāvo 'bhāvo bhāvān na jāyate*). The same intent is discernible in MK 5.6-8 in these passages: "If there is no thing, on what basis could there be a non-thing? What will be opposed as a thing and its non-thing, known as a thing and its non-thing?" (*avidyamāne bhāve ca kasyābhāvo bhaviṣyati; bhāvābhāvavidharmā ca bhāvābhāvāv avaiti kaḥ*), and again: "Those with limited minds perceive things as existing and non-existing. They are unable to see the complete cessation of what they perceive" (*astivam ye tu paśyanti nāstitvam, cālpabuddhayaḥ; bhāvānām, te na paśyanti draṣṭavyopāśamam, śivam*).
- 10 This is the pivotal point that we are advocating: the absolute exists within the manifold, as every manifold implies the absolute. Consequently, one is led to assert that the absolute manifests as the manifold. This assertion is erroneous: the absolute manifests within the manifold because every facet of what appears can only serve as evidence of the absolute itself. Simultaneously, however, there is no conceivable coincidence between the mere appearance, which is illusory, and the absolute, which transcends all semblance. This constitutes the fundamental distinction between asserting that every relative implies the absolute (i.e., the absolute is implied in every relative), as the Buddhist doctrine posits [1], and stating that the absolute appears as relative, which would lead to the contradiction of equating the absolute with the relative. While both are akin in their character as conventions [MK 25.19-20], it should not be inferred that the absolute is interrelated with the relative or dependent upon it.
- 11 Original: *suñño loko, suñño loko'ti, bhante, vuccati. kittāvatā nu kho, bhante, suñño lokoti vuccati ti? yasmā ca kho, ānanda, suññam attena vā attaniyena vā tasmā suñño lokoti vuccati.*
- 12 Original: *yah pratītyasamutpādāḥ śūnyatām tām pracakṣmahe / sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā // apratītya samutpanno dharmah kaścīn na vidyate / yasmāt tasmād aśūnyo hi dharmah kaścīn na vidyate //*.
- 13 Please note that in this context, the term "entity" is intended to be comparable to the Buddhist concept of dhamma (in Sanskrit: *dharmā*). The term in question is quite polysemous, but it is beyond doubt that Buddhists also use it to refer to the generic concept of a "thing", specifically in relation to the "phenomena" that manifest, and is therefore a central term in their analyses of causality and worldly phenomenology. Etymology also suggests a proximity to the concept of "entity": the word "*dhárma*" derives from the Indo-European root \**dher-* meaning "to support" and is also the origin of the Latin term "firmus", meaning "stable" or "firm".
- 14 The world assumes the guise of mere appearance, yet this does not entail that it is counterfeit or non-existent, nor does it imply any ontological disparity from absolute reality. The central concern here revolves around the phenomenal experience of the world, which "as if" illuminates, in our convictions, a world that we perceive as synonymous with totality, when in fact it is but a manifestation, a minuscule fraction thereof.
- 15 In accordance with the statement found in AN 8.34: "When the field is excellent, the seed placed within it is excellent, and the rain is excellent, then the harvest of grain will be excellent. [...] Having knowledge of what exists in the world and possessing a sublime vision, the one who excels in thought proceeds by relying solely on excellence in their path" (*yathāpi khetto sampanne, pavuttā bījasampadā; deve sampādayantamhi, hoti dhaññassa sampadā ... lokam ñatvā yathābhūtam, pappuyya dīttisampadam; maggasampadamāgama, yāti sampannamānaso*). This passage is better understood in light of the discussion regarding the origin and cessation of the world, for example, as elaborated in SN 12.44 and as explored in prior scholarly investigations (pp. 115–119, [19]).

- 16 If such a relationship were to be accepted, the absolute would expire within the confines of a relationship. In this case, it would not only expire definitively, but, instead of excluding every relationship, it would paradoxically end up being included in it. Absolute and relative, in essence, cannot stand in opposition in our interpretation because opposition itself constitutes a form of relation, and because the relative does not express a true existence like the absolute but an existence that is inextricably linked with non-existence, and for this reason, it is self-contradictory. In this manner, only the absolute truly is, and the relative is its own dissolution, that is, its transcendence.
- 17 Original: *ye 'nayo na vijānanti vibhāgamṣatyayor dvayoh/te tattoamṇa vijānanti gambhīrambuddhaśāsane.*
- 18 Original: *dve satye samupāsṛitya buddhānām dharmadeśanālokaṣaṁvṛtisatyam ca satyam ca paramārthatah//ye 'nayo na vijānanti vibhāgam satyayor dvayoh/te tattoam na vijānanti gambhīram buddhaśāsane/vyavahāram anāśṛitya paramārtho na deśyate/paramārtham anāgamya nirvāṇam nādhigamyate/vināśayati durdrṣṭā śūnyatā mandamedhasam/sarpo yathā durgrhīto vidyā vā dusprasādhitā//.*
- 19 Original: *atthi, bhikkhave, tad āyatanam, yathā n'eva paṭṭhavī, na āpo, na tejo, na vāyo, na ākāśānañcāyatanam, na viññānañcāyatanam, na ākiñcaññāyatanam, na nevaśāññānāśāññāyatanam, n'āyam loko, na paraloko, na ubho candimasūriyā, tad āham, bhikkhave, n'eva āgatim vadāmi, na gatim, na ṭhitim, na cutim, na upapattim; appatitṭham, appavattam, anārammaṇam eva tam, es'ev'anto dukkhassā ti.*
- 20 Original: *aparapratyayam śāntam prapañcair aprapañcitam/nirvikalpam anānārtham etat tattovasya lakṣaṇam//.*
- 21 In the powerful articulation of MK 18.8-9, it is stated: "Everything is that which is [*tathyam*] and is not that which is not [*ātathyam*], it is both that which is [*tathyam*] and is not that which is not [*ātathyam*], neither that which is [*tathyam*] nor is not that which is not [*ātathyam*]. This is the teaching of the Buddha. These are the characteristics of what is true [*tattovasya*]: independent, immutable, immune from conceptualization, unrepresentable, without diversity" (*sarvam tathyam na vā tathyam tathyam cātathyam eva ca; naivātathyam naiva tathyam etad buddhānuśāsanam; aparapratyayam śāntam prapañcair aprapañcitam; nirvikalpam anānārtham etat tattovasya lakṣaṇam*).
- 22 With the development of the Cittamātra doctrines, which are based on the Saṁdhinirmocana Sūtra, the Buddha's teachings are reinterpreted. What had been said until then was not wrong, but they were teachings to be interpreted, correct but not definitive. They would have been a skillful means that he would never have used to posit an absolute emptiness. The emptiness understood until then was an all-pervading emptiness; however, for the Cittamātra school, something exists, and this something manifests through a causal and continuous flow of perceptions. In the Trisvabhāva-nirdeśa, Vasubandhu postulates the existence of three forms of existence: the first is the conceptual form linked to linguistic systems. Languages segment the world through the system of signs, creating a virtual relative reality. Therefore, the conceptualized aspect refers to the object, meaning both what is perceived and who perceives it. By perceiving the object as such, one considers oneself detached from it when in reality, for another, the object could be us, so such a distinction does not exist. The conceptualized aspect is duality. The second form is dependent. Dependency is conditioned co-production; everything depends on the causal flow originating from the human mind, the stream of conceptions that determine duality and with it the erroneous distinction between subject and object. The third aspect is the perfected one. It is linked to an element defined as tathatā, corresponding to quiddity, which is perceived through meditation, i.e., the true nature of things. Emptiness is not merely the absence of intrinsic existence but the absence of duality, the absence of dichotomy between subject and object. In Cittamātra, the mind as perceived as a subject is denied, but not the causal flow of phenomena.
- 23 For instance, consider Iti 44: "For those who have attained a comprehensive understanding of the unconditioned, possessing liberated cognition and having completed the cycle of becoming, the essence of being is actualized, and they rejoice in its cessation. These individuals have renounced all states of becoming" (*ye etadaññāya padam asankhatam, vimuttacittā bhavanettisankhaya; te dhammasārādhigamā khaye ratā, ahamṣu te sabbabhavāni tādino*).
- 24 Original: *ajātam abhūtam akatam asankhatam*. Furthermore, it can be stated that: "If there were no un-born, un-produced, un-made, and unconditional, then no one could escape from the born, the produced, the made, and the conditioned. However, since the un-born, un-produced, un-made, and unconditional exists as a reality, liberation from the born, the produced, the made, and the conditioned is indeed possible" (*no cetam, bhikkhave, abhaviṣṣa ajātam abhūtam akatam asankhatam, nayidha jātassa bhūtassa katassa sankhatassa nissaraṇam paññāyetha. yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, atthi ajātam abhūtam akatam asankhatam, tasmā jātassa bhūtassa katassa sankhatassa nissaraṇam paññāyati ti*).

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