The Validity of Robinsonian Critiques on Nāgārjunian Logic
Centering on the Interpretation of Catuskoti

Kim, Taesoo

I. Introduction
II. Robinson and Kajiyama’s claims that the catuskoti is in violation of formal logic
III. The implications of ‘expedient’ in interpreting the tetralemma
IV. Conclusion: The implication of Nāgārjunian prasanga

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** PhD candidate, Seoul National University. tskim1003@snu.ac.kr
**ABSTRACT** [Keywords: catuṣkoṭi(tetralemma), the law of non-contradiction(3rd koṭi), the principle of excluded middle(4th koṭi), perspective(presupposition), expedient, dialectics]

The aim of this paper is to see whether Robinson and Kajiyama’s critiques of Nāgārjuna’s discourse of catuṣkoṭi, as contradicting formal logic, while following a dialectical formula is plausible. According to them, the 3rd koṭi is a violation of the law of non-contradiction, while the 4th koṭi, a violation of the law of excluded middle.

Yet, since catuṣkoṭi can be interpreted as containing different perspectives in its expression of each koṭi, the critique of violating the law of non-contradiction fails. Further, should a proper presupposition be added, the problem of excluded middle is resolved. Owing to the presence of this premise postulated as a real entity possessing intrinsic nature, it becomes perfectly valid, irrespective of all-out refutation of every option.

In this context, catuṣkoṭi can be seen as an ‘expedient’, representing different views of separate schools or perspectives without violating the principle of formal logic, nor postulating any hierarchical dialectics elevating into the higher grades among these koṭis. Likewise, catuṣkoṭi in Nāgārjuna can be viewed as revealing the absurdity of postulating any identity or precondition for causal relations in perceiving intrinsic substance.

I. Introduction

In his critique, Richard Robinson is raising several questions about Nāgārjuna’s reasoning for the catuṣkoṭi(tetralemma) and prasaṅga, arguing that Nāgārjuna is making mistakes which contradict the principles of classical formal logic in his ex-
planation on the 3rd and 4th koṭi (proposition).  

Along this line of critique, Kajiyama Yuichi delineates his view of the catuṣkoṭi, agreeing that the catuṣkoṭi is not a logic established on the ground of formal logic, but on dialectics with each following koṭi becoming higher than the previous one, while negating the previous koṭi.

Likewise, from these aspects of formal logic, Robinson and Kajiyama claim that the catuṣkoṭi reveals the following internal contradiction. First, in the 3rd koṭi, ‘p ∧ ¬p’ is a contradiction. Second, the 4th koṭi violates the law of excluded middle. And ‘¬(p ∧ ¬p)’ shares the similarity with the 3rd koṭi, while formally denoting the negation of the 3rd proposition. And accordingly, this corresponds to the process of thesis–antithesis and synthesis in Hegelian dialectics.

1) Robinson (1978) pp. 54–58: Here, Robinson cites the answer of Budhha on Vacchgottā’s question in Majjhima-nikāya 72 concerning the existence of the Tathāgata after his death. In Buddha’s catuṣkoṭi (tetralemma), each of the 3rd and 4th koṭi represents ‘both A and B’ and ‘neither A nor B’ formula.

2) 카지야마 (1994) p. 110: “Thus, it is problematic to understand catuṣkoṭi in the position of formal logic. It should be understood that catuṣkoṭi has a dialectical character as a process of negating a proposition established in certain area of discourse at a more multi–dimensional area of discourse.”

3) The term ‘Robinsonian’ is used in this paper, because Kajiyama Yuich shares a lot of similarities with Robinson on his evaluation of Nagarjunian logic in the appropriate context. Also the term ‘Nagarjunian’ is used to encompass the Later Madhyamika views which can be seen as adequate interpretations of Nagarjuna’s.

4) Robinson (1978), p. 56; 카지야마 (1994), pp. 109–110. Robinson and Kajiyama considers the ultimate truth to be posited as something similar to a binary negation formula of 4th koṭi in tetralemma. Based on this substantialist conception denoting Hegelian connotation,
Then, is it fair to judge Nāgārjunian scheme as "a failure due to its violation of formal logic, while asserting the assumption on which the opponents do not accept?"\(5\) And can it be seen as corresponding to Hegelian gradational dialectics?

To evaluate the validity of these critiques, this paper will examine each case of the tetralemma while concentrating on the problems of the 3rd and 4th koṭi to see whether they have any contradictory or dialectical features.\(6\)

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5) Robinson and Kajiyama understood the negation formula of 4th koṭi as an ultimate truth, not to be negated in that limit. For a refutation, I would argue that the horizontal logical structure of tetralemma differs from hierarchical structure of Hegelian dialectics that Robinson and Kajiyama's claim turns out to be not adequate.

5) Robinson (1972). Robinson's criticism is as follows: "The nature of the Madhyamika trick is now quite clear. It consists of (a) reading into the opponent's views a few terms which one defines for him in a self-contradictory way, and (b) insisting on a small set of axioms which are at variance with common sense and not accepted in their entirety by any known philosophy. It needs no insistence to emphasize that the application of such a critique does not demonstrate the inadequacy of reason and experience to provide intelligible answers to the usual philosophical questions."

6) Yet, here in this article, the first part, 'the question of transgressing the formal logic' is mainly discussed, while leaving the 2nd issue ('Hegelian dialectics') for another article.
II. Robinson and Kajiyama’s claims that the catuṣkoṭi is in violation of formal logic

1. The implication of ‘perspective’ or ‘presupposition’ in the catuṣkoṭi

Richard Robinson, in his Early Madhyamika in India and China,\(^7\) argues that “it is impossible to apply the formulas of ordinary logic to explain Nāgārjuna’s theory. In this context, after analyzing the catuṣkoṭi (tetralemma) of MMK using traditional formal logic, he claims that the 3rd and 4th koṭi are not valid because they violate the law of non-contradiction along with the principle of excluded middle. We will now examine Robinson’s claims.

That the Tathāgata exists after death, that the Tathāgata does not exist after death, that the Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death, that the Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death—these the Blessed One does not explain to me.\(^8\)

Further, Robinson cites the same verse (25.17)\(^9\) from Chandrakīrti’s Prasannapadā, explaining this tetralemma occurring in

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\(^7\) Robinson(1978) pp. 54–58.

\(^8\) Here, Robinson cites the answer of Budhha on Vachaṭṭa’s question in *Majjhima-nikāya* 72.

the context of conversation about the undecided questions (avyākrta vastūni).

75. It is not asserted that after his final cessation the Blessed One exists, does not exist, or both, or neither. (25. 17)

76. It is not asserted that during his life time the Blessed One exists, does not exist, or both, or neither. (25. 18)

As is seen here, the 3rd koṭi looks like a violation of the law of non-contradiction, while the 4th koṭi, a violation of the law of excluded middle.11)

[The 3rd koṭi: It is not the case that ‘p and not p’, because it contradicts the rule of contradiction./ The 4th koṭi: It is not the case that ‘neither p nor not p’, because it contradicts the principle of excluding the middle.]

However, it should be noted that at the time of Nāgārjuna, there was a tacit understanding or acceptance of the background knowledge/perspective in the debate (kāthā) and demon-

10) Pr 534.
11) According to Ruegg(2010: 43–44), “Although it has been alleged that Buddhist philosophers and Indian thinkers ignore or reject the principles of non-contradiction and excluded middle, this contention cannot be sustained as concerns Nāgārjuna and his schools, whose entire reasoning is founded on them. It is true that paradoxical and antiphrastic formulations are not infrequent in Mahāyāna sūtras, e.g. in Prajñāparamitā texts of which the Madhyamaka school has made abundant use; and Nāgārjuna was convinced of the paradoxicality of common-sense view of the world and the real based on the assumption of entities or essences possessing svabhāva as maintained by his predecessors and contemporaries. But in his theoretical scholastic treatises, of which the MMK is most representative, he does not seem to have himself employed paradoxes as such in an attempt to speak of reality.”
stratification (sthāpanā), as long as the relevant party remained consistent with their own basic principles.\textsuperscript{12)

In this context, the catuṣkoṭi should also be considered as containing implicit premises, i.e., as containing different perspectives in its expression of each koṭi. It thus follows that there occurs no violation of the law of non-contradiction.

Likewise, should we add the proper presupposition, the problem of excluded middle is resolved. Or, even though it might not be a common premise shared by all Indian Buddhists,\textsuperscript{13)}

\textsuperscript{12) In Kathāvatthu,} no matter how the contents of background knowledge differs or strategy changes depending on counterparts’s argument, we still can see that they respect and proceed their discourses following basic premises of common rules of debate (vāda). For instance, Theravādin and Pudgalavādin, who were major opponents of Nagarjuna along with other Abhidharmikas in those times, address to each other’s background knowledge on the conception of a ‘real and ultimate’ fact, while just changing or adding its sequence of p, q. with the series of debates consisting of (i) the fivefold affirmative presentation, (ii) the fourfold rejoinder, (iii) the fourfold refutation, (iv) the fourfold application and the fourfold conclusion on the existence of a personal entity. KV pp. 8–26.

\textsuperscript{13) Yet, we can also see that it was quite an accepted understanding in traditional India, considering Sapta-bhangi-naya of syāvāda in Jain’s logic.} If we reformulate catuṣkoṭi with syāvāda, it would be like this: 1. There is some respect that Tathāgata exists after death. 2. There is some other respect in which the Tathāgata does not exist after death. 3. There is another respect in which the Tathāgata does exist after death, and non-existent after death. 4. The state of Tathāgata is inexpressible. 5. There is some respect that Tathāgata exists after death, but it is inexpressible. 6. There is some other respect that Tathāgata does not exist after death, but it is inexpressible. 7. There is some respect that Tathāgata exists after death, while there is another respect that Tathāgata does not exist after death, but they are inexpressible./ Like this, although syāvāda does not admit a proposition fully, as is seen in its premise 'syāt (maybe),' we can see that it is contrived to admit opponents’ proposition at least partly. On
this kind of practice of acknowledging several perspectives within a debate can still be applicable to the textual analysis of MMK. Accordingly, as Siderits suggests, when applying different perspectives to this verse using parameterization, it can be viewed as follows.

1. Tathāgata exists after death. 2. Tathāgata does not exist after death. 3. There is some respect in which the Tathāgata exists after death, but there is another respect in which the Tathāgata does not exist after death. 4. The state of the Tathāgata is inexpressible.

And, should we assume that there is such a thing as a Tathāgata, then it follows that one of these four kotis has to be true. Yet, if one of these four must be true, when someone rejects all four, it seems that he violates at least one of the laws of formal logic. But, this is not the case, because all four kotis contain presuppositions that there are such things as Tathāgata.

In other words, in these kotis, there is an implicit premise that there is such an existence as a real entity which we call the Tathāgata. Accordingly, they don’t have to violate at least one of the rules of formal logic, even when all of these propositions are rejected. Owing to the presence of this presupposition postulated as a real entity possessing intrinsic nature, although all of these options are refuted, it becomes per-


14) In mathematics or in logics, it usually means, “the state of something which has a parameter as an important element to consider in evaluation or comprehension of an event, project, or situation.” Wikipedia dictionary; Bard(1974) p. 11 recitation.
fectly valid. With this premise, the four koṭis can be reformulated in this way.

1-1: There is such a thing as Tathāgata and the Tathāgata exists after death.
2-1: There is such a thing as Tathāgata and the Tathāgata does not exist after death.
3-1: There is such a thing as Tathāgata and there is some respect in which the Tathāgata exists after death, but there is another respect in which Tathāgata does not exist after death.
4-1: There is such a thing as Tathāgata and the state of Tathāgata after death is inexpressible.

Thus, unlike Robinson’s accusation of violating the law of classical formal logic, it is possible to negate all four koṭis without breaking any logical consistency. As Siderits accurately explains, this is how prasajya-pratiṣedha or non-affirming negation (‘commitmentless negation’) works. If we look at just 1-4 we might think that one of these four must be true, so that although someone rejects 1, 2 and 3, he would really be affirming 4. But once we see that 1 is really 1-1, etc., we also see how the denial of three of these four need not amount to affirming the remaining fourth koṭi. With this verification in mind, then let’s see each possible ground of rejecting all of these four koṭis within the rule of classical formal logic.

15) This idea is based on the approach of M. Siderits.
2. Ground of rejecting each koṭi

We have seen that Robinsonian misconception can be wiped out when we bear in mind the background premise or presupposition in each discourse of koṭis. Accordingly, notwithstanding the major differences in their views on deciphering each koṭi, each school’s interpretation can be rejected on the grounds of sharing the premise of ‘the existence of the Tathāgata.’ 16) Then, let’s examine the possible views on each koṭi, along with their grounds of rejection.

1-1: It is evident that 1-1 is the view of eternalism, of one who believes in the eternal existence of the substance which is called Tathāgata. As Chandrakīrti and Siderits explain, the thing would be eternal if it has intrinsic nature because anything with intrinsic nature cannot undergo alteration of nature.

Then, it follows that the action or practice of becoming the Tathāgata would never be done or performed. For the action to be done, it should alter its state 17) from one state to the other to complete the action required for becoming a Tathāgata. Then, let’s see how Nāgārjuna rejects this sort of eternalistic view in related case of MMK.

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16) In *Kathāvatthu*, we can see that each side is conversant with other’s background conception on the premise (like the conception of ‘the real and ultimate’), and strategically change the sequence of positive and negative binary concomitant formation (anvaya and vyatireka) with their own background knowledge(perspective), when going on a debate. KV pp. 19–26.

17) MMK p. 186.
If the action were something with intrinsic nature, then it would doubtless be eternal. And the action would be undone, for the eternal is not something that is done. If the action were not done, then there is the concern that there would be a result of what was not done, and there then follows the fault of incontinence. ... An action that has already ripened will produce a fruit yet again. If it follows the actions’s being determinate that it is endowed with an intrinsic nature.\(^18\)

We can infer from this passages that if there is such a thing as Tathāgata who has an intrinsic nature, then it follows that he would not change and there would be no way for any follower to alter his status to become a Tathāgata. On this ground, the 1st koṭī is negated.

2-1: It is the view of annihilationism (ucchedavāda), which asserts the total extinction of the Tathāgata after death. Yet, for such an extinction to be possible, there should be some existence beforehand. Yet, if there is no such thing as Tathāgata with an intrinsic nature, no annihilation is possible. And following this non-intrinsicness of such thing as Tathāgata, 2-1 cannot establish its view on a firm ground. And this logic can also be extended to 3-1 and 4-1, accordingly. Concerning this point, Nāgārjuna’s goes on like this:

If it is held that nothing whatsoever is eternal, then what will be

\(^{18}\) MMK pp. 185-187: (17-22) karma svabhāvataścetsyačchaśvataṃ syādasamśayam/akṛtaṃ ca bhavetkarma kriyate na hi śaśvatam/ 17-23) akṛtābhyaṃgamabhayam syātkarmākṛtakam yadi/ abrahma- caryavāsāṣa doṣastatra prasajyate/ (17-25) tadvipakvavipākaṃ ca punareva vipakṣyati/karma vyavasthitat yasmāttasmāt svabhāvikam yadi/
non eternal? What will be both eternal and noneternal, and also what will be distinct from these two?\(^{19}\)

3-1: It is the view based on 1-1 and 2-1, saying that in some respect, the Tathāgata can be seen as existing after death due to his intrinsic nature, which is eternal and thus leads into eternalism, and in some other respect, he cannot exist after death because even the Tathāgata is dependent on his skandhas which is not eternal. Then it leads into annihilationism. And if the former Tathāgata is identical with the latter, it is inconsistent. And if it is different, there is no causal link between these two. Like this, if it is rejected that there is such a thing as Tathāgata with intrinsic nature, then either way is rejected in due course.

4-1: This seems to be the view of Pudgalavādin, who was one of the most powerful opponents of Nāgārjuna. While putting nirvāṇa on the ultimate realm of unconditioned dharma (asamśkrta), Pudgalavādins are well known for their equating nirvāṇa with pudgala\(^{20}\) which is regarded as an ultimately real being, an Absolute\(^{21}\) which belongs to the 5th Dhatu of inex-

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19) MMK p. 329: (27-20) nāsti ceccāśvataḥ kaścitkobhavisyatyaśāśvataḥ / śāśvato 'śāśvataścāpi dvabhyāmābhyām tiraskṛtaḥ/


21) 三彌底部論(TD 32) p. 466a: 得無餘涅槃時, 便至不動樂。若人常者.
pressible (avyākṛta). Pudgala was originally expressed with the scheme of ‘neither the same nor different with the skandhas’, yet it possesses the inexpressible trait while remaining even in the state of nirvāṇa. Here, it naturally follows that the state of the Tathāgata is inexpressible.

As Siderits and Priestley also suggest, if we can equate

不生不死如涅槃 不生不死身亦不異 其智慧在所處處亦不異。
食不食苦樂無異常故 過去時事不忘 常故無變異 亦無縛無解。

22) Thich Thiēn Chāu (1999: 160-61) argues that the pudgala does not pertain to either compounded things (saṃskṛta) or the uncompounded (asaṃskṛta), saying that it constitutes one of the five things susceptible to being known (pañcaidhaṃjñeyam): things of the three times; 1. past, 2. present, 3. future 4. the uncompounded (nirvāṇa) and 5. the pudgala. And this category of 5 Dhatu is also found in Prajnaparamita sūtras. In 三法度論, it follows that “it is not possible to express on pudgala, whether it is differentiated from the three times or not.” (離三世更無此 不可說. TD 25, p. 18c.)

23) Kathāvatthu describes the Pudgalavādin’s theory like this; “The pudgala which has attained Parinirvana exists in its objectives, i. e., in Nirvana.” KV I. pp. 228–29; And in 三彌底部論, it explains this as “the supreme and unmoving happiness.” (得無餘涅槃時 便至不動樂。若人常者 不生不死如涅槃. TD 32, p. 466a.)

24) Of course, Priestley is cautious about equating nirvāṇa with pudgala. According to him, the pudgala itself cannot be said to exist eternally as nirvāṇa, since the pudgala depends on the support of its aggregates for its existence, whereas nirvāṇa is unsupported. Yet, using the analogy of fire, he clarifies the relationship between the uncreated nirvāṇa and the pudgala which is not separate from it. That is; “If it is one fire which appears as all the individual fires and to which the individual fires return when they are extinguished, then it should be the one nirvāṇa which appears as all the pudgalas and to which they eventually return when they attain Parinirvāna. When the fire returns to its primordial state, it is no longer a fire burning in the world, and as the Buddha is represented as saying in the ‘Upasīvamāṇavapucchā’, it “goes to its setting, beyond definition”(Suttanipata, 1074); so
nirvāṇa and pudgala in some aspects, while interpreting 'neither the bhāva nor abhāva', which is the 4th koṭi of nirvāṇa in chapter 25 as typical expression for denoting a sort of synthesis between bhāva and abhāva in Pudgalavādins's scheme, it is clear that Nāgārjuna would explicitly reject the 4th koṭi along with the others.

Meanwhile, this is where Robinson and Kajiyama misread Nāgārjuna’s logic on catuṣkoṭi as having a dialectical tone, while violating the rule of excluding the middle. Yet, if we interpret this in a way to denote “There is such a thing as Tathāgata and the state of Tathāgata after death is inexpressible”, it is not violating the rule of excluded middle.

Further, since the 4th koṭi is the opposite view of 3–1, which is ‘neither eternalism nor annihilationism’, the logical con-

likewise the pudgala that has attained Parinnirvāṇa is no longer a pudgala supported by the five aggregates but “goes to its setting, beyond definition. … What is present in the pudgala where the five aggregates support its manifestation is simply nirvāṇa.”


25) In the sense that pudgala persists when attaining nirvāṇa.

26) Actually, Siderits finds this expression of 'neither existent nor an absence' in 25.10 to be the view of Pudgalavādins, not exactly indicating the 4th koṭi. Yet, since the content of this verse is the same as 4th koṭi, which is shown in verse 15, 16, there would be not much problem in viewing that the content of 4th koṭi pertains to Pudgalavādin's view. His reasoning is as follows: Since Pudgalavādins held that “the person, while ultimately real, is neither identical with nor distinct from the psychophysical elements on the basis of which it is named and conceptualized”, verse 10 can be seen as Pudgalavādin's. Given that “nirvāṇa is the state of the person when no longer conditioned by or dependent on the psychophysical elements, it stands to reason that nirvāṇa should be thought of as a state that defies classification in terms of the dichotomous concepts of existent and absence.” Siderits (2013) pp. 296–97.
sequence follows the same line of the former koṭis. And since these are rejected, the 4th koṭi should also be rejected. Because there is no such thing as the Tathāgata to be negated, the 4th koṭi is likewise rejected. Related to this 4th koṭi, Nāgārjuna’s explanation is as follows.

If it were acknowledged both that it is eternal and that it is noneternal, then it would accordingly be established that it is neither eternal nor noneternal.\(^{27}\)

So since all existents are empty, views such as eternalism and the like—where will they occur, to whom will they occur, which of them will occur, and for what reason will they occur?\(^ {28}\)

Here, we can see that Nāgārjuna warns of the danger of adhering to a false conceptualization of any view which is intrinsically empty. Thus, by negating the presupposition of the very substance of Tathāgata, none of the criticism by Robinson and Kajiyama on the violation of formal logic succeeds.

And the thought does not hold, with reference to this (Tathāgata) who is intrinsically empty, that the Buddha either exists or does not exist after cessation. Those who hypostatize the Buddha, who is beyond hypostatization and unwavering, they all, deceived by hypostatization, fail to see the Tathāgata.\(^ {29}\)

\(^{27}\) MMK, p. 328: (27-18) aśāśvataṁ śāśvataṁ ca prasiddhamubhayam yadi/siddhe na śāśvataṁ kāmaṁ naivāśāśvataṁतयापि//
\(^{28}\) MMK, p. 333: (27-29) atha vā sarvabhāvānāṁ śūnyatvāccha- śvatādayah/kva kasya katamāḥ kasmātsambhaviṣyanti drṣṭayāḥ//
\(^{29}\) MMK, p. 250: (22-14) svabhāvata ca śūnye 'smimścitā navopapad-
yate/param nirodhādbhavati buddho na bhavatii vā// (22-15) prapañca yanti ye buddhaṁ prapañcātītamavyayam/te prapañcāhataḥ sarve na paśyanti tathāgatam//
Yet, Nāgārjuna was also well aware of another danger of understanding emptiness in a nihilist way as something non-existing. As Siderits suggests, “the idea of emptiness of all things could make one abandon the idea of an ultimate nature of reality, thereby abandoning the view that it is beyond words,” yet not in a nihilist sense. As Siderits goes further, in chapter 13, “Nāgārjuna is saying that in order for anything to be empty, and for it to be ultimately true that all things are empty, there has to be an ultimate bearer of emptiness.”

If the non-empty existed, then something that could be called the empty might somehow come to be. Nothing whatsoever exists that is non-empty; then how will the empty come to be? Emptiness is taught by the Conquerors as the expedient to get rid of all (metaphysical) views. But those for whom emptiness is a metaphysical view, they have been called incurable.

As this explanation shows, here Nāgārjuna seems to suggest emptiness in a semantic and non-dualistic way, as ‘expedient’ rather than a metaphysical view which is beyond our conceptual grasp, like the ‘reality is ineffable’ scheme of Pudgalavadins.

Thus, based on these verification and examples, we can accordingly draw the conclusion that, if there is no such thing as the Tathāgata as Nāgārjuna claims, any premise that the

31) MMK, p. 144: (13-7) yadyaśūnyaṃ bhavet kim citsyacchūnyamiti kim cana/na kim cidastyaśūnyaṃ ca kutaḥ śūnyaṃ bhavisyati/ (13-8) śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭānāṃ prakta niḥsaranāṃ jinaḥ/yēṣām tu śūnyatā- dṛṣṭistānasādhyān babhaśire/
"Tathāgata is existent or is non-existent, existent and non-existent, neither existent nor non-existent after death" cannot be established. In this way, all four koṭis are negated without violating the premise of classical formal logic.

III. The implications of ‘expedient’ in interpreting the tetralemma

Related to the use of ‘expedient’, Robinson is also drawing on Chandrakīrti’s commentary on this verse (13.7/13.8 in MMK) to account for the use of the catuskoṭi as a pedagogical device.

33) Ruegg also takes notes of what Chandrakīrti gives as examples of oneness, conjunction, and binegation respectively the satkāryavāda, asatkāryavāda, the sadasatkāryavāda, and the doctrine of the indeterminate nature of the relation of oneness/otherness between products and their causes. According to Ruegg, “this type of analysis is to establish the inapplicability of any imaginable conceptual position—positive, negative, or combination of these—that might be taken as the subject of an existential proposition and become one of a set of binary doctrinal extremes (antadvaya). and following what Chandrakīrti has termed the conventional worldly characteristics of reality, the relation between cause and effect once the Mādhyamika has been able to establish that neither the non-causal and eternalistic śāśvadatavāda nor the causal and non-eternalistic satkāryavāda withstands philosophical analysis.” Here, as Ruegg rightly points out, this tetralemma refers to “what might be called the antinomic and even irrational nature so long as the factors in question are supposed to be existent entities (bhāva)” like the premise of ‘the Tathāgata.’ Ruegg (2010) pp. 49–51.
92. It should not be said that the Tathāgata is empty, or that he is non-empty, or that he is both empty and non-empty, or that he is neither empty nor non-empty. But it is said for the sake of designation.(22.11).34)

Yet, while focusing on this use of catuskoṭi as a pedagogical device, Robinson further argues as follows.

... each lemma except the first acts as a counteragent to the one before it, while negating and cancelling its predecessor, and the whole argument moves forward to the negation of the fourth lemma, which is supposed to dispose of all views.35)

Yet, this is definitely a dialectical progression of Hegelian logic in its character. Now, we will examine the content of The Middle Treatise Commentary on the verse of 18.8, whether it denotes the dialectical tone as Robinson claims. The Middle Treatise commentary on this verse is as follows:

As for 'everything is real,' when you analyze the real-nature of the dharmas, they all enter the absolute truth, are all equal, are all of one mark, that is, they are markless. It is just like the different colors and tastes of all the streams which become one color and one taste when they enter the great ocean.

As for “everything is unreal,” when the dharmas have not entered the real mark, they are contemplated analytically one by one, and they all have nothing real in them. They only exist because of the combination of many conditions.

As for “everything is both real and unreal,” there are three classes of living beings—superior, medium, and inferior. The superi-

34) Pr, p. 444.
or contemplate the marks of the dharmas as 'not real and not unreal.' The medium contemplate the marks of the dharmas as 'all both real and unreal.' The inferior, because their powers of knowledge are shallow, look on the marks of the dharmas as 'partly real and partly unreal.' Because nirvāṇa, and the unconditioned dharmas are imperishable, they look on them as real. Because samsāra and the conditioned dharmas are counterfeit, they look on them as unreal.

As for "everything is not real and not unreal," the Buddhas declared 'not real and not unreal' in order to refute 'both real and unreal.'

Question: In other places, the Buddha declared 'detachment from not-real-and-not-unreal.' Why does it say here that 'not existent and not inexistend' is what the Buddha declared?

Answer: In other places, it was declared in order to demolish the four kinds of attachment. But here there is no prapañca regarding the tetralemma. When one hears the Buddha's declaration, then one attains bodhi. Therefore he says 'not real and not unreal.'

Here, there are two things to be considered. First, Robinson interprets this verse as a different mode of one proposition, giving progressively higher instruction to the different grades of living beings (as Hegel's explanation of a dialectical progression).

On the contrary, following Buddha's approach, Chandrakīrti sees these four separate propositions prescribed for four different groups, while utilizing mutually exclusive premises emphasizing 'the expedient' aspect. This is also true for Nāgārjuna who interprets each koṭi in catuskoṭi as a separate proposition to be rejected.

Second, following Robinson's argument, if we assume that

36) Robinson(1978) p. 56. [MT. T XXX. p. 25a18–b2 recitation.]
the four lemmas are modes of one proposition, then the tetra-lemma is to be interpreted this way:

It consists either of \([p(1)]\), or \([\neg p(2)]\), or \([p \text{ and } \neg p(3)]\) and \([\neg p \text{ and } \neg(\neg p)(4)]\), and the 4th koṭi \([\neg p \text{ and } \neg(\neg p)]\) is identical with \([p \text{ and } \neg p]\), if we assume that \(\neg(\neg p)\) equals \(p\).\(^{37}\)

Yet, although it is true that the \(\neg(\neg p)\) is equated with \(p\) in formal logic, should the role of ‘different perspectives’ or ‘expedient’ is admitted in separate proposition, we can separate four of each koṭi as representing different standpoint, without presupposing double negation as affirmation.

In this respect, catuṣkoṭi can be seen as representing different views of separate schools or different perspectives prescribed to the needs and conditions of the recipients, without violating the principle of formal logic, nor postulating any hierarchical dialectics.

Evaluating each proposition in question, the 3rd koṭi does not violate the principle of non-contradiction in that it consists of the proposition enlisting different perspectives. Nor does it follow the steps of dialectical progression into final synthesis with which the 4th koṭi is equated, as Robinson and Kajiyama argue.

Further, although the 4th koṭi represents Pudgalavādin’s view of ‘inexpressible’ scheme, if we understand this as denoting the premise of ‘the existence of Tathagatā’ as the presupposition of “the state of the Tathagatā is inexpressible”, then it does not violate the principle of excluded middle. Because, this premise is likewise negated, irrespective of different perspectives.

Meanwhile, should the Hegelian synthesis be applied, it might be more akin to Pudgalavādin’s scheme of samskṛta and asamskṛta (bhāva and abhāva), denoting a similarity of metaphysical scheme of inexpressible Dhatu. Likewise, Kajiyama and Robinson’s understanding of synthesis, which postulates graded progress into the highest religious truth of 4th koṭi, represents a substantial interpretation of catuskoṭi.

However, given the horizontal discourses on various perspectives and premises, it might be more appropriate for interpreting the tetralemma as an expedient of temporarily or dependently related propositions, which merely denotes “an event, state, or process that can be appealed to, in explaining another event, state, or process, without any metaphysical commitment to any occult connection between explanandum and explanans.”  

IV. Conclusion: The implication of Nāgārjunian prasāṅga

For the critique on the logical contradiction of certain proposition to be established, background assumption like premises

and perspectives shared by certain communities should be taken into account. If not, then no proposition can be accepted by the opponents.

Yet, vestiges of records on the various debates following certain logical rules show that, in traditional Indian context, among debaters, there was wide acceptance on the common sense premise behind the various perspectives that in interpreting certain proposition, counterpart’s background knowledge was tacitly acknowledged, while being negated from the aspects of its logical consistency and validity.

In our interpretation of the tetralemma, the wide equilibrium of perspectives (parameterization) and appropriate presupposition (common sense assumption) testifies that the 3rd and 4th propositions in catuṣkoṭi do not turn out to be violating the law of non-contradiction or the principle of excluded middle.

On the contrary, considering Nāgārjuna’s criticism of competing metaphysical views and the syllogistic passages used for strategic purpose in his discourse or evaluation, his analysis of the tetralemma should be seen as coherent and logical, based on prasaṅga reasoning.

We have seen that two concomitant predications (p, q), which differentiate four different categories of variables like four formulas of syllogism or catuṣkoṭi can be developed into useful tools to show non-intrinsicness (niḥsvabhāva), through negating each case based on various perspectives. Thus, it is critical to evaluate the content of presuppositions or perspectives belonging to each koṭi in deciphering the strategic purport and meaning of negation in catuṣkoṭi.

In tetralemma, the four koṭis up to “Neither existence, nor
absence” are associated with prasaṅga as a useful means to reveal the nihsvabhāva of identity and difference. With the negative use of language, Nāgārjuna seems to convey little about ultimate truth. Yet, with his conceptual and semantic use of emptiness, he conveyed coherent evaluation on the meaning of the tetralemma.39)

On this line of interpretation, Siderits’ or Garfield’s understanding of semantic non-dualism between the two truths40) seems to give a more adequate description than that of Robinson or Kajiyama who seems to take metaphysical understanding as the crown of ultimate truth.

All in all, the Nagarjunian perspective looks more epistemological than Hegel’s gradational approach which is based on the Abstract–Concrete–Absolute conception of metaphysics.41) And this is why Robinson and Kajiyama have failed to grasp the fact that identity in Nāgārjuna is the concept which can only be identified in relation to what it is not, as merely established from the different perspective at the secular level.42)

39) Ruegg(2010: 52) is also in the similar opinion to the extent that Madhyamikas’ doctrine of emptiness of own-being and non-substantiality of all factors apply to conventional worldly domain of the surface level. Following his point, “Madhyamika’s Middle Way does not involve either the ignoring or the rejection of the principle of the non-contradiction. And the fact, or truth, of the interdependent origination of things is then referred to by the term ‘śūnyatā’, a designation not belonging to the object-language.”
41) For Hegel, the Concrete, the Synthesis, the Absolute, must always pass through the phase of the Negative, that is, Mediation. This is the actual essence of what is called Hegelian Dialectics. Related to its application of this methodology, please refer to Ratner(2011) pp. 234–242.
Thus, unlike Hegelian logic, the conception of independent Absolute cannot be established in Nāgārjunian scheme, unless there is a possible way of positing some X, which does not need to exist in connection to what is dependent. In this context, the purport of using negative logics in Nāgārjuna is not to do with proving 'the identity or difference', or 'the identity in difference' thesis as in Hegelian logic.\(^{43}\)

Rather, it would to prove the meaninglessness of sustaining the view that “any identity or difference is empty (or not), or can be synthesized upon these.” The point here might simply be that the appropriate statement cannot be understood without the conception of the dependent origination, which is “what it is only in relation to what it is not.”

Thus, the Hegelian interpretation of Robinson and Kajiyama’s theses valuing 4th koṭi, as the most supreme form of synthesis(along with those of Stcherbatsky, Murti and most of Chinese Buddhists) does not fit well into the horizontal scheme of Nāgārjuna.

\(^{42}\) In respect of paramartha, Ruegg argues that “the overwhelming majority of interpretations from the Madhyamaka school have held that, no assertion whatever will be a real, self-existent (i. e. hypostatized) thing.” Yet, Kajiyama (and broadly Robinson) cannot be included in this group because their views do not represent the real purport of śūnyatā and dharmaḥsvabhāva/dharmanairātmya. Since their approaches definitely attempts to ascribe an ultimately real status to the entity of Nāgārjuna’s statement that these would fall under the eternalistic extreme, which the Madhyamaka avoids. VV, p. 451.

\(^{43}\) In this line of thought, nirvāṇa used to be misperceived as the limit of samsara, interpreting the statement of “there would be no limits that can be grasped in nirvāṇa and samsara”, as Hegelian understanding of synthesis, which amounts to an ‘identity in difference.'
On this line of interpretation, a corollary is that Nāgārjuna’s logic would be aiming at utilizing the pure negation based on logical reduction, revealing the self-contradictory character of the appropriate statement (prasajyapratīṣedha). And here, this strategy is equally applied to catuṣkoṭi, in that this method of reasoning is to negate any possible proposition of the counter-part, following each koṭi, without equating the double negation with affirmation.

Summing up, Nāgārjuna’s primary purport of the tetralemma seems to refute all competing metaphysical views strategically at the meta level of the discourse, rendering all conceptions of ‘svabhāva’ groundless by negating all the possible perspectives and presuppositions within each proposition respectively.
Abbreviation and Bibliography


TD: 大正新脩大藏経
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『三廼部論』，TD. 32.
『三法度論』，TD. 25

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요약문

용수 논리에 대한 로빈슨식 비판의 타당성 검토
_사구부정 해석을 중심으로_

김태수
서울대학교 철학과 박사과정 수료

이 글의 목적은 ‘용수의 사구부정 해석이 형식 논리학에 위배되며, 변증법의 형식을 따르는 것’이라는 리차드 로빈슨과 카지야마 유이치 비판의 유효성을 검토하려는 시도이다. 그들에 따르면, 사구부정의 3句와 4句는 각각 모순율과 배중율에 위배된다.

그런데 각 구의 해석이 상식적 전제가 추가될 경우, 네 가지 대안들 중 한 가지는 타당하다. 다만 여기서 모든 대안들을 부정할 경우 이 전제 또한 최소 하나의 형식 논리학 법칙을 위반하게 된다. 하지만, 자성을 지닌 실제로 상정된 공통 전제로 인해, 모든 대안은 형식논리학의 법칙을 거스르지 않고도 파기될 수 있다.

이렇듯, 사구부정은 각 구의 표현에 상이한 관점을 암묵적으로 내포한 것으로 볼 수 있다. 그 경우 사구부정은 형식논리학을 완전히 부정하거나, 각 구 사이의 수직적으로 단계 상승을 전제하는 변증법을 상정하지 않고도, 상이한 학파나 관점을 대변하는 방편적 입장으로 파악할 수 있다. 즉, 상주, 단일 혹은 동일성이나 인과관계의 조건을 전제로 불가의 자성을 구하고자 하는 이들의 무지를 깨우쳐기 위한 방편으로 이해할 수 있는 것이다.

주요어 : 사구, 모순율(3구), 배중율(4구), 관점(전제), 방편, 변증법

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