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KRISHNA DEL TOSO

Kārya and kāraṇa in Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*

For surely, if there be any relation among objects which it imports to us to know perfectly, it is that of cause and effect. On this are founded all our reasonings concerning matter of fact or existence.

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*
(Digiread edition, 43)

1. *Preliminary Remarks: Methodological Considerations*

In this paper I will try to consider the way according to which Nāgārjuna makes use of the terms *kārya* and *kāraṇa* in his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās* (*MMK*), pointing out how and when these words are employed – the aim of the present study being to underline the typical nāgārjunian usage of them in a peculiarly Buddhist context. I find this particular subject quite interesting because, to my knowledge, until now no specific work has been written on it. This means obviously that the suggestions contained here are necessarily to be taken as a starting point, or as a working hypothesis, for further examinations.

To begin with, two preliminary notes are needed: firstly, I will here restrict the field of investigation only to those passages in which *kāraṇa* means «cause» and *kārya* means «effect». As it is well known, indeed, in Sanskrit *kāraṇa* is generally – even if not always – used as synonymous of *hetu*, whereas *kārya* is taken to be a synonym of *phala*. It nonetheless appears to me that, in his *MMK*, Nāgārjuna operates a distinction between these terms, a distinction that appears to have a fundamental philosophical import. Secondly, as a cross-check of the main thesis expressed here, we will also take into account – in brief and as a matter subordinated to the study of *kāraṇa* and *kārya* – the use of *hetu* and *phala* made by Nāgārjuna.

Moreover, I have methodologically confined the present study to the *MMK* for the following two reasons:

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(a) because the Tibetan and the Chinese translations of Buddhist Sanskrit texts sometimes reveal a loss of semantic deepness and differentiation – as is the case of *hetu* and *kāraṇa*, which are both invariably rendered with *rgyu* into Tibetan and with 因 (*yīn*) into Chinese, whereas *phala* and *kārya* are both translated with 'bras bu into Tibetan, and with 果 (*guǒ*, lit.: «fruit») into Chinese –, here we necessarily need to refer to those works whose original Sanskrit is preserved; hence, the *Śūnyatasaptatikārikās*, the *Vaidalyaparakarāṇa*, a large part of the *Yuktiṣaṣṭhikārikās*¹ and the *Suhrllekha* either, cannot be proficiently used;

(b) because the aim of this paper is to discuss the abovementioned terms from a philosophical perspective, so to speak, *peculiarly* nāgārjunian, for this very reason I will not consider here both (b.1) those writings that are not strictly philosophical, and (b.2) those writings in which *external* – that is, occasioned by non-Buddhist opponents' objections – discussions are dealt with. These limitations are needed because in the texts belonging to (b.1) category it is highly probable that *kārya* and *kāraṇa* have been used mostly in their popular or common-sensical meaning, whereas in the texts belonging to (b.2) group they *could* have been employed in a 'spurious' way or, in other words, in a way that, for dialectical reasons, adheres, or is adapted, to the typical semantic declination of the philosophical tradition to which the non-Buddhist objector is said to belong. Under (b.1) we can, thus, list the *Catustava* and the extant Sanskrit parts of the *Ratnāvalī*,² and under (b.2) most of the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, with the exception of the occurrences – which are of a secondary interest here – of *hetu* and *phala* in the stanzas 54-56 and 70 (where peculiar Buddhist arguments are expounded), and of those places in which both *hetu* and *pratyaya* are mentioned.

The partial exclusion of the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (which is a philosophical text extant in Sanskrit) deserves here a further specific explanation. As is well known, in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* Nāgārjuna refutes the positions held by a hypothetical adherent of the *Nyāya* (or *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*) school, who plays here the role of *pūrvapakṣin*. Now, it can be noticed that, for instance in the commentary on the first stanza, the *pūrvapakṣin* recurs to a typical Buddhist terminology, making use of the couple of terms *hetu* and *pratyaya* to refer to «primary cause» and «secondary condition(s)». The reference of *pratyaya* as «secondary condition» is here of a central interest to us because this very term

¹ Consider that the compound *kāryavaśāt*, occurring twice in *kārikā* 33 of the *Yuktiṣaṣṭhikārikās*, means «for a particular purpose», «for a particular reason» and thus does not concern our discussion. We find the term *hetu* in *kārikās* 39 (as «primary cause» as opposed to *pratyaya*, «secondary condition») and 47, where the admission of the reality of the events (*bhāva*) is said to be the cause (*hetu*) of all the incorrect points of view.

² Consider, for instance, the use of *kārya* in the *Ratnāvalī*, where it mostly refers to the good practices or to the proper behaviour that the king should follow to be in accordance with the *dharma*; *kāraṇa* does not occur in the portions of the text preserved in Sanskrit.

can nowhere be found in the *Nyāyasūtras*, whereas in the *Vaiśeṣikasūtras* (7.2.21-22, 24) it occurs always with the meaning of «intuition» or «cognition», never as «condition». Hence, it can be suggested that this is a clear case in which, in the ‘fiction’ of the text, the non-Buddhist opponent resorts to the *uttarapakṣin*’s vocabulary – according to which *pratyaya* means «condition» – for disproving the latter’s Buddhist thesis. If we admit such a supposition, we should then expect that also the Buddhist *uttarapakṣin* – that is, Nāgārjuna – is behaving here in a similar manner when he employs philosophical terms in his answers to the *pūrvapakṣin*’s objections, being in a certain way forced to play on the ground established by the opponent’s argumentations.

To be clearer on this point, let us compare the use of *hetu* and *kāraṇa* in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* with their use in the *Nyāyasūtras* and *Vaiśeṣikasūtras*. Although in the *Nyāyasūtras* the two words appear to be almost interchangeable, nonetheless in the *Vaiśeṣikasūtras* only the term *kāraṇa* means «cause» (50 occurrences of *kāraṇa/akāraṇa*), whereas *hetu* (just 5 occurrences) is employed to refer to a logical and/or inferential «ground», «motive»;³ it is probably for this reason that in the *Vaiśeṣikasūtras* the term *phala*, which denotes the «effect» of *hetu*, does not occur at all, whereas *kārya* (the «effect» of *kāraṇa*) and its derivatives, as *kāryatva*, can be found at least 28 times. In the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, apart from the commentary on *karikā* 1 where, as we have seen, we find it in connection with *pratyaya* – thus reproducing a typical Buddhist concept –, the term *hetu* is always employed by the *pūrvapakṣin* with the meaning of «logical reason» (*Vigrahavyāvartanī* 2 and 17-19), whereas it is *kāraṇa* to be here used in the sense of «cause» (*Vigrahavyāvartanī* 20, commentary), and this seems to reflect a philosophical employment of these two words that is more in accordance with the *Vaiśeṣikasūtras* than with Buddhism in general.⁴ Now, even if this suggestion, being of course nothing but a working hypothesis, cannot in itself be taken as absolutely certain, it nonetheless appears to be – I think – quite likely. We should expect, hence, that also the *uttarapakṣin* formulates here his counter-arguments to the objections raised by the opponent by taking into account, and making use of, the same philosophical language adopted in the *pūrvapakṣa* section. For instance, the particular occurrence, in the commentary on *Vigrahavyāvartanī* 22, of *kārya* in the sense of «function», «peculiar operation», could remind us of *Nyāyasūtra* 3.1.6,

³ It is nonetheless interesting to note, here, that in *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 9.20 [= 9.2.4] – where it is affirmed: *hetur apadeśo liṅgaṃ nimittaṃ pramāṇaṃ kāraṇaṃ ity anarthāntaram – kāraṇa*, as all the other words of the list, has the meaning of logical reason (in a syllogism), that is, it refers to the second term of an inference.

⁴ According to Bronkhorst (1985: 123), the *Nyāyasūtras* were compiled «because someone who adhered to the Vaiśeṣika philosophy wrote a handbook on rules of debate». This consideration corroborates the idea that, in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, the Naiyāyika opponent of Nāgārjuna is making use – as he seems to do – of philosophical terms, such as *hetu*, *kāraṇa* etc., according to a background which is peculiarly Vaiśeṣika.

where *kārya* refers indeed to the body as site of the functions of *ātman*.⁵

On the contrary, in *Vigrahavyāvartanī* 54-56 and 70 the *uttarapakṣin* does not, *in primis*, refute the opponent's objections, rather he deals – so to speak – directly with subjects that are peculiarly Buddhist, such as *pratītyasamutpāda*, the four Noble Truths (*āryasatya*), the three jewels (*triratna*), *saṃskṛta* and *asaṃskṛta dharmas* etc. We can, thus, be quite sure that in this case the terms *hetu* and *phala* (*kāraṇa* and *kārya* being not present) respect a semantic value, which is typically *nāgārjunian*. Another passage in which *hetu* could have been used in reference to Buddhist doctrines is the commentary on *Vigrahavyāvartanī* 69, where mention is made of antecedent (*pūrvakālīna*), simultaneous (*yugapatkālīna*) and subsequent (*uttara*° or *paścātkālīna*) *hetus*: although the discussion here has probably been inspired by *Nyāyasūtras* 2.1.8-11, nonetheless Bronkhorst (1985: 107-11) has suggested that those very *sūtras* repeat nothing but the Sarvāstivāda arguments contained in the first chapter, *Maudgalyāyanaskandhaka*, of Devaśarman's *Vijñānakāya* – *Nyāyasūtras* 2.1.12-16 being their confutation. It can be argued, hence, that in the commentary on *Vigrahavyāvartanī* 69 Nāgārjuna, by denying the position of the Naiyāyika, is implicitly refuting also the Sarvāstivāda perspective on the subject matter discussed there, making use of a vocabulary that can be traced back to the abhidharmic speculations. Therefore, apart from these few examples, which all concern *hetu* and *phala* and not *kāraṇa* and *kārya*, we conclude that the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* cannot proficiently help us for the present study.⁶

The recourse to such a methodological sieve, hence, leads us to confine our textual horizon to the sole *MMK*. Now, as far as the *MMK* are concerned, a general introductory remark must be pointed out: although in that work a sort of unitary, linear development of the discussion can be detected,⁷ nonethe-

⁵ I say that it *could* remind us because there is still a serious problem in identifying the original composition of the *Nyāyasūtras* known to Nāgārjuna. See Bronkhorst (1985: 122-23, 129-30, note 14). In any case, *kārya* in this context seems to echo the concept of *kāryakriyāsamartha* mentioned in the commentary on *Vigrahavyāvartanī* 2.

⁶ The following is a general list of all the occurrences, in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, of the terms under examination here: (1) *kāraṇa*, in the commentary on *kārikās* 20, 42, 47-48, 51, always in the sense of «cause» (of course, the occurrences of *kāraṇa* in expressions like *kiṃ kāraṇam* etc., are not listed); (2) *hetu*, in *kārikās*, or in the commentary on *kārikās*, 1 as «cause» (with *pratyaya*), 2 and 17-19 as «logical reason», 21-22 as «cause» (with *pratyaya*), 23-24, 28, 30 and 33 as «logical reason», 53 as «cause» (with *pratyaya*), 55-56 as «[moral] cause» (referred to good and bad actions), 67-68 as «logical reason», 69 both as «logical reason» and as «cause» – in the tripartite technical sense of antecedent, *pūrvakālīna*, simultaneous, *yugapatkālīna*, and subsequent, *uttara*° or *paścātkālīna* –, 70 as «[moral] cause» (the occasion of *phala*); (3) *kārya*, in the commentary on *kārikās* 2 as «effect», «effective» – in the expression *kāryakriyāsamartha*, which seems to be more or less synonymous of the later *arthakriyāsamartha* (see Lindtner 1990: 257), note that this term is used in the *pūrvapakṣa* section – and 22 with the meaning of «function»; (4) *phala*, in the commentary on the *kārikās* 54 and 70 as «effect» of good and/or bad actions (*phala* is in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* always used with a moral sense).

⁷ On account of the internal structure of the *MMK* see, among others, Kalupahana (1991: 28-31).

less each chapter is written in opposition to different philosophical perspectives, upheld by adherents of other, non-Madhyamika, schools of Buddhism. This means that we have to be cautious in comparing different reasonings inserted in different sections of the work, because if the general context changes also the specific terminology could be subjected to some particular semantic variation. As a general rule, therefore, I assume that comparisons will be allowed only when Nāgārjuna is answering, even if in different chapters, to the same opponent or to the same objection.

After having clarified these preliminary points, let us begin by listing the occurrences of *kārya* and *kāraṇa* in the *MMK*.

2. The Occurrences of *kārya* and *kāraṇa* in the *MMK*

a) Occurrences of *kāraṇa*:

*rūpakāraṇanirmuktaṃ na rūpam upalabhyate |
rūpeṇāpi na nirmuktaṃ dṛśyate rūpakāraṇam || MMK 4.1||*

Form, separated from the cause of form, is not obtained; also, the cause of form, separated from form is not seen.

*rūpakāraṇanirmukte rūpe rūpaṃ prasajyate |
ahetukaṃ na cāsty arthaḥ kaścid ahetukaḥ kva cit || MMK 4.2||*

If form is [considered as] separated from the cause of form, [then] it follows that form is without reason, but nowhere there is anything without reason.

*rūpe saty eva rūpasya kāraṇam nopapadyate |
rūpe 'saty eva rūpasya kāraṇam nopapadyate || MMK 4.4||*

If indeed there is form, the cause of form does not take place; if indeed there is not form, the cause of form does not take place.

*niṣkāraṇam punā rūpaṃ naiva naivopapadyate |
tasmād rūpagatān kāmścin na vikalpān vikalpayet || MMK 4.5||*

However, a causeless form does not at all take place; therefore, one should not conjecture false notions concerning form.

*pratītya kāraḥ karma taṃ pratītya ca kārakam |
karma pravartate nānyat paśyāmaḥ siddhikāraṇam || MMK 8.12||*

The agent occurs depending on action, and action depending on that agent; we do not see another cause for establishing [the two].⁸

b) Occurrences of *kārya*:

*svayaṃ kṛtaṃ parakṛtaṃ dvābhyāṃ kṛtam ahetukam |
duḥkam ity eka icchanti tac ca kāryam na yujyate || MMK 12.1||*

⁸ No doubt that when we find the term *kāraka* in Nāgārjuna's writings, it always refers to the «agent», as synonymous of *kartr*, and not to the elements involved in an action (the pāṇinian *kā-rakas*). On this point see, among others, the considerations put forward by Scharf (2002: 125).

Some maintain that pain is made by itself, made by other, made by both [itself and other], without cause: but such an effect [*i.e.* pain] is not admitted.

c) Occurrences of both *kāraṇa* and *kārya*:

*rūpeṇa tu vinirmuktaṃ yadi syād rūpakāraṇam |
akāryakaṃ kāraṇam syād nāsty akāryam ca kāraṇam || MMK 4.3||*

Now, if the cause of form would exist free from form, the cause would be ineffective, but there is not a cause without effect.

*na kāraṇasya sadṛśaṃ kāryam ity upapadyate |
na kāraṇasyāsadrśaṃ kāryam ity upapadyate || MMK 4.6||*

An effect similar to the cause does not take place; an effect dissimilar to the cause does not take place.

*hetāv asati kāryam ca kāraṇam ca na vidyate |
tadabhāve kriyā kartā karaṇam ca na vidyate || MMK 8.4||*

If there is not reason, both effect and cause are not found; if those are not existent, activity, agent and the means of doing are not found.

*kāryam ca kāraṇam caiva lakṣyaṃ lakṣaṇam eva ca |
vedanā vedakaś caiva santy arthā ye ca ke cana || MMK 11.7||*

Effect and cause, characterized and characteristic, feeling and feeler and whatever objects there are. [MMK 11.8 should here be added:

*pūrvā na vidyate koṭiḥ saṃsārasya na kevalam |
sarveṣāṃ api bhāvānāṃ pūrvā koṭī na vidyate ||*

Not only the prior limit of the flux of existences is not found, but also the prior limit of all events is not found].

*kāryam ca kāraṇam caiva kartāraṃ karaṇam kriyām |
utpādam ca nirodham ca phalaṃ ca pratibādhase || MMK 24.17||*

You invalidate effect and cause, and agent, means of doing and activity, production, dissolution and fruit.

3. Analysis of the Passages

a) The *kāraṇa*-passages

In MMK 4.1-2 and 4-5, *rūpakāraṇa* is to be intended as *rūpaskandha-kāraṇa*: the cause, here, is whatever allows the existence of the aggregate of form but, according to MMK 4.7, the same can be said also for all the other four aggregates. Therefore, because the five *skandhas* are the components of a human being, *kāraṇa*, which is employed to mean the cause of *skandhas*, refers to the cause of human being. Now, in the light of MMK 12.2cd, where we read: *skandhān imān amī skandhāḥ saṃbhavanti pratītya hi ||* («Those aggregates surely comes to be conditioned by these aggregates»), we assume the idea that the cause of a *skandha* is nothing but a previous *skandha*. Hence,

rūpakāraṇa must refer to a previously existing *rūpaskandha*, from which the present one is derived. The general idea of generation, and the particular idea of birth/rebirth appear to be here involved.

In *MMK* 8.12 we find the compound *siddhikāraṇa*, referring to the reciprocal link supposed to exist between a doer and his/her deed; although in this place *kāraṇa* means simply «reason», «motive» etc., and not «cause», it can be noted, nonetheless, that the term seems here to have been used not by chance. Indeed, for instance Jacques May (1959: 154, n. 463) underlined that *siddhikāraṇa* is to be interpreted as *parasparāpekṣikī siddhi[kāraṇa]*, the cause of/reason for the establishment of «existence en dépendance mutuelle». Now, this particular mutual link is said to take place between a *kāraka*, a doer, and *karman*, action/object. In defining *karman*, Pāṇini (*Aṣṭādhyāyī* 1.4.49) writes: *kartur īpsitatamaṃ karma* («*karman* is the most desirable [thing/action] for the agent»). This definition conveys the idea that the relation existing between agent as *kāraka* and action/object as *karman* involves, implicitly or explicitly, some volitive nuances. Now, the pāṇinian interpretation of *karman* appears to be accepted also by Nāgārjuna, who in *MMK* 17.2ab writes indeed: *cetanā cetayitvā ca karmoktaṃ paramarṣiṇā* | («The supreme seer has said that *karman* is [both] volition and the object of volition»). As is well known, volitions according to Buddhism lead to appropriation: significantly, in *MMK* 8.13 *upādāna*, which represents the condition for further existence (*bhava*), is introduced. The *kārikā* (*pādas* abc) runs as follows: *evaṃ vidyād upādānaṃ vyutsargād iti karmaṇaḥ | kartuś ca* («From the abandonment of actions/objects and agent, one should understand in this way [also] appropriation»). The presence of *upādāna* in this context acquires even more significance if we consider the fact that the *skandhas* are generally called *upādānaskandhas* («aggregates of appropriation»). It can, thus, be suggested that *kāraṇa*, in the compound *siddhikāraṇa*, conceptually recalls in a certain manner the way of establishing – as Jacques May has pointed out – the reciprocal link *kāraka*↔*karman*, and refers consequently to the succession of *kāraka*→*karman*→*upādāna*→*bhava* (= *skandhas*). Hence, by means of an intelligent semantic play, *kāraṇa* – although not with the meaning of «cause» – has been used by Nāgārjuna in a context where the idea of (re)birth appears to be involved.

b) The *kārya*-passages

In *MMK* 12.1 we find *kārya* without *kāraṇa*. In this chapter Nāgārjuna affirms that pain (*duḥkha*) cannot be an effect because if it were an effect, it would be produced by something that, for being its cause, has necessarily to exist before pain, but to exist *before* pain means to exist *without* pain. Now, *duḥkha*, according to Buddhist philosophy, is generally identified with *skandhas* (for instance, *Samyuttanikāya* 5.421: *pañcupādānakkhandhā pi dukkhā*). The equation between pain and aggregates seems to be the fundamental point of *MMK* 12, as *kārikā* 2 indirectly points out, and as Candrakīrti explicitly indi-

cates in the very beginning of his commentary on this chapter, where the fundamental position of a hypothetical objector is expounded as follows: *iha hi pañcopādānaskandhā duḥkham ity ucyate* («Because here [*i.e.*, according to the opponent's perspective] it is said that the five aggregates of appropriation are pain») (de la Vallée Poussin 1903-13: 227). Now, if *skandhas* were the cause of pain, this would contradict the Buddhist doctrine because it would entail that the aggregates could exist before *duḥkha*. *MMK* 12.4abc, indeed, by substituting *pudgala* to *skandhas*, summarizes such a perspective by saying: *svapudgalakṛtaṃ duḥkhaṃ yadi duḥkhaṃ punar vinā | svapudgalaḥ* («If pain were accomplished by one's own person, one's own person [would be] without pain»), and this is a conclusion that is obviously inadmissible. It is exactly for this reason that *MMK* 12.1 affirms that *duḥkha* is not a *kārya*, it rather – so to speak – belongs both to the previous *skandhas* (those that in *MMK* 4 Nāgārjuna has called *rūpakāraṇa* etc.), and to the subsequent ones (those that, on the basis of the considerations put forward in the following paragraph, could be defined as *rūpakārya* etc., that is, the effect of *rūpakāraṇa* etc.).

c) The *kāraṇa*-and-*kārya*-passages

Now, as far as the occurrences of both *kāraṇa* and *kārya* together are concerned, we can notice how, in *MMK* 4.3 and 6, these two terms refer respectively to the cause of *skandhas* and to their effect. Again, if it is true, as indicated by the abovementioned *MMK* 12.2cd, that the causes of *skandhas* are previous *skandhas*, then it has to be likewise true that also the effects of *skandhas* must be further *skandhas*. Hence, in this case too, if *kāraṇa* refers to *skandhas*, also *kārya*, which is the effect of *kāraṇa*, must refer to them. This consideration sheds more light on *MMK* 12.1. To say that *duḥkha* cannot be a *kārya* means that, because *duḥkha* is proper to all *skandhas*, for this very reason it has to be found *both* in *kāraṇa* *and* in *kārya*: how can, indeed, *duḥkha* be the effect of *kāraṇa* if all the *kāraṇas* are *already* endowed with *duḥkha*? Thus, with these logical premises, to uphold that *duḥkha* could be an effect (*kārya*) is actually nonsensical.

As regards *MMK* 11.7 (and 8), the reasoning here adopted by Nāgārjuna can be summarized as follows: if things are considered as endowed with *svabhāva*, then no change is possible, and so no birth (*jāti*, *i.e.*, the *pūrva koṭi* of *saṃsāra* in *MMK* 11.8) can be consistently proved; without proving birth, also agedness-and-death (*jarāmaraṇa*) cannot be demonstrated (*MMK* 11.6). Consequently, both cause and effect, too, remain undetermined. Again, *kāraṇa* and *kārya* occur in a context whose principal subjects are existence and (re)birth. This seems to be confirmed also by the presence, in *MMK* 11.7b, of *lakṣya* («characterized») and *lakṣaṇa* («characteristic»), especially if we read this *kārikā* in the light of *MMK* 7.1c: *trilakṣaṇī* («three characteristics»), 7.2a: *utpādādyās trayo* («the three are origination and so on») and 25.4b: *jarāmarāṇalakṣaṇam* («the characteristic of agedness-and-death»), from which we

understand that *lakṣya* alludes to the ‘existing’, whereas *lakṣaṇa* refers to the various states of that which exists: origination, permanence and cessation, or birth, life and death.

MMK 8.4 is an interesting *kārikā*. As we have already pointed out above, chapter 8 of *MMK* deals with the relation between a *kāraka* and his *karman*, but not from a moral point of view (as it happens for *MMK* 17), rather from a – so to speak – ‘ontological’ perspective – the *nature* of *kāraka* and *karman* being here the matter. In *MMK* 8.1-2 we find, indeed, the term *sadbhūta* («who/what is really existent»), applied to both *kāraka* and *karman*, that conveys the clear sense of ‘substantial existence’ or, according to Nāgārjunian terminology, ‘endowed with *svabhāva*’.⁹ *MMK* 8.2 affirms, against a philosophical position that seems to fit with Vaibhāṣika tenets, that if *kāraka* and *karman* were really existent, then, on the one hand, *karman* would be without a *kāraka* (*pāda* b: *karma ca syād akartṛkam*) and, on the other hand, also *kāraka* would be without *karman* (*pāda* d: *kartā ca syād akarmakaḥ*). On the contrary, *MMK* 8.3 deals with the case of a non-existing agent performing a non-existing action/object: *karoti yady asadbhūto ’sadbhūtaṃ karma kārakaḥ | ahetukaṃ bhavet karma kartā cāhetuko bhavet ||* («If a non-existing agent performs/produces a non-existing action/object, the action/object would be causeless/groundless and the agent would be causeless/groundless»). Then we have *MMK* 8.4, which is in its turn followed by two *kārikās* where references are made, as we will see below, to the fruit (*phala*) of actions (*kriyā*) leading to emancipation and/or to further existences. It is here interesting to note that the same strategy of exposition – although in a different context – seems to have been adopted by Nāgārjuna also in *MMK* 24.17. Indeed, *MMK* 24.17ab is preceded by *MMK* 24.16, where it is affirmed that: *svabhāvād yadi bhāvānāṃ sadbhāvam anupaśyasi | ahetupratyayān bhāvāṃs tvam evaṃ sati paśyasi ||* («If you consider the existence of the events [as coming] from *svabhāva*, thus, you see uncaused and unconditioned existing things»; note the presence of *sadbhāva*, a concept very similar to *sadbhūta* of *MMK* 8.1-2), a conclusion that cannot be accepted. Moreover, *MMK* 24.17ab is followed by two *pādas* that point out the logical impossibility of establishing rebirth (*pāda* c: *utpādaṃ ca nirodhaṃ ca*) and emancipation (*pāda* d: *phalaṃ ca*) when a substantialistic perspective is upheld, and this is exactly the same conclusion that is drawn also in *MMK* 8.5-6.

At this point, as until now it has been noticed that *kāraṇa* and *kārya* refer to what undergoes (re)birth, that is, respectively, to *skandhas* as cause, and to further *skandhas* as effect, the question is: does this particular interpretation fit also for *MMK* 8.4 and 24.17? I think yes, and to corroborate and clarify this

⁹ Nāgārjuna is here probably playing with the term *karman*, by interpreting it both as «action» and as «object», in clear accordance with the abovementioned definitions of Pāṇini, and of *MMK* 17.2ab. See May (1959: 144, n. 413).

answer it will be useful, here, to take into account how the commentaries of Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti introduce the main subject matters of the two chapters. Let us begin with *MMK* 8. Bhāviveka, in his *Prajñāpradīpavṛtti*, affirms that in this chapter Nāgārjuna intends to discuss nothing but the real nature of *skandhas*, *dhātus* and *āyatanas*, that is, the constituents of human being. Bhāviveka indeed writes:¹⁰

da ni stong pa nyid kyi mi mthun pa'i phyogs kyi khyad par dgag pas phung po la sogs pa dag ngo bo nyid med pa nyid du bstan pa'i don gyi dbang gis rab tu byed pa brgyad pa brtsam mo

Now, because of the specific negation (*viśeṣapratīṣedha*) of voidness (*śūnyatā*) [proposed] by the opponent (*pratipakṣa*), the eighth chapter (*prakaraṇa*) will commence, on account of the meaning (*artha*) of the instruction (*nirdeśa*) on the being without intrinsic nature (*niḥsvabhāvatva*) of the *skandhas* etc.

Bhāviveka continues by considering a possible abhidharmic (probably Vaibhaṣika) objection – to which *MMK* 8 would be the answer – that can be summarized as follows: the Buddha has pointed out that, according to the highest truth (*paramārthataḥ*), only the *skandhas*, *dhātus* and *āyatanas* exist, because agent and action/object, which depend on them, do actually exist; the existence of agent and action/object, in the opinion of the objector, is proved by the reference made by the Buddha to good and bad moral conduct, which entails good and bad karmic retributions; thus, because agent and action/object do exist, it follows that also the *skandhas* etc. must be existent and cannot, for this reason, be empty (*śūnya*) – compare the steps of this reasoning with the counterarguments in *MMK* 8.1-6.

Also Candrakīrti, in the *Prasannapadā*, begins his commentary on *MMK* 8 by referring to the abhidharmic doctrine of *skandhas* etc. (de la Vallée Poussin 1903-13: 180):

atrāha | vidyanta eva saṃskṛtasvabhāvato vijñānādayaḥ saṃskṛtā dharmāḥ tadhetukakarmakāraśadbhāvāt | [...] ucyate | syād vijñānādikaṃ saṃskṛtaṃ yadi tasya niṣpādakakarmakāraśau syātām | na tu staḥ |

Objection: The composed *dharmas*, [like the *skandha* of] consciousness etc., exist exactly in themselves as composed [entities] because of the existence of action/object and agent, [which are] their cause. [...] Reply: If [the *skandha* of] consciousness etc. were composed, there would exist an action/object and an agent accomplishing them, but [*MMK* 8 will demonstrate that] the[se] two are not [existent].

Also Candrakīrti, as we can notice, approaches the problem in a way that is very similar to the one adopted by Bhāviveka: the objector upholds that the *skandhas* etc. exist because a previous existing agent has performed/produced

¹⁰ Peking bsTan-'gyur, dBu-ma, TSHa, f. 140a2-3. Xylograph reproduced in Pandeya (1988).

some likewise existing action/object which have led to the present existence of *skandhas* etc.

These commentarial excerpts confirm that the main purpose of *MMK* 8 is to analyse the, so to speak, ‘ontological’ status of the *skandhas* etc., that is, their actual nature: really existent (the abhidharmic view) or empty (Nāgārjuna’s view). On the basis of this consideration, we are allowed to conclude that, in *MMK* 8.4, Nāgārjuna makes use of *kāraṇa* and *kārya* in a context where the *skandhas*, and consequently (re)birth, are the principal subject matters. Moreover, it is here interesting to note that the passage of the *Prasannapadā* just quoted affirms that both *karman* and *kāraṇa* are the reason (*hetu*) of the *skandhas*. This particular aspect of the matter is, indeed, fundamental for our discussion because in *MMK* 4.2-3 Nāgārjuna states that neither an existing *kāraṇa* can perform an existing *karman*, nor a non-existing *kāraṇa* can perform a non-existing *karman*; but if *karman* cannot in any way be performed by a *kāraṇa*, then also that which is grounded on both *karman* and *kāraṇa* – that is, according to Candrakīrti, the *skandhas* – cannot be produced. *MMK* 8.4 expresses, in my opinion, exactly this concept: without *kāraṇa* and *karman*, neither *kāraṇa* nor *kārya*, which represent in this context a consequence of *kāraṇa* and *karman*, can be established. On the basis of these very reasons, my personal suggestion is that, in *MMK* 8, *kāraṇa* and *kārya* could refer, respectively, to *skandhas* as cause, and to other *skandhas* as effect. In a word: to *skandhas* as elements undergoing (re)birth. In any case, to be more cautious (because none among the commentaries, as we will see below, seem to interpret *MMK* 8.4 in this way), it can be affirmed that *kārya* and *kāraṇa*, if not directly referring to them, appear nonetheless to have definitely a strict conceptual relation/link with the *skandhas*.

Moreover, *MMK* 8.4cd affirms that when *kāraṇa* and *kārya* are denied, then also the doer (*karṭṛ*), his/her activity (*kriyā*) and the means for doing (*kāraṇa*) cannot be possible. It is worth noting here that, whereas *kāraṇa* and *karman* seem to represent the, so to speak, ‘ontological’ level of the discourse (that is, the basis on which the nature of *skandhas* is established, as suggested also by the abovementioned *MMK* 8.13abc, where reference is made to *upādāna*), *karṭṛ*, *kriyā* and *kāraṇa* have undoubtedly a moral value: indeed, *MMK* 8.5 proceeds in the chain of consequences by affirming that, if doer, activity and means for doing were non-existent, also good (*dharma*) and bad (*adharma*) actions (*kriyā*) would not be possible (consider that *phala*, the moral fruit, is here expressly said to derive from *kriyā*).

As far as *MMK* 24.17 is concerned, it is interesting to note that the conceptual background, here, appears to be the same as in *MMK* 8, at least if we make reference to the words of Candrakīrti. In the *Prasannapadā ad MMK* 24.1, indeed, he introduces the main subject of this chapter by means of the following opponent’s words (de la Vallée Poussin 1903-13: 475-76):

iha hi pūrvahetujanitāḥ pratīyasamutpannāḥ pañcopādānaskandhā duḥkhaduḥkhatayā vipariṇāmaduḥkhatayā saṃskāraduḥkhatayā ca pratikulavartitvāc ca pīdāmatkatvena duḥkham ity ucyate | [...] yady api pañcopādānaskandhā duḥkhasvabhāvā bhavanti tathāpi ya etān duḥkhātmakān paśyanti teṣām eva duḥkham vyavasthāpyate [...] | kadā ca tad duḥkham āryasatyam yujyate | yadā saṃskārāṇām udayavyayau sambhavataḥ |

Here [in our school], indeed, the five aggregates of attachment, born from a preceding cause, dependently arisen, are called «pain» because of [their] having the nature of suffering, being [them] disagreeable because [they are] pain that consists in pain, pain that consists in being compounded and pain that consists in transformation. [...] Although the five aggregates of attachment have the intrinsic nature of pain, nonetheless those who see these [five] as having the nature of pain, only by them the pain is [actually] determined [as such] [...]. And when is it proper [to say that] that pain is a Noble Truth? When the appearance and the disappearance of the compounded [*i.e.*, of the *skandhas*] are occasioned.

From this passage we easily infer the fact that the opponent, in *MMK* 24, must be the same as in *MMK* 8, that is, probably a Vaibhāṣika. Indeed, in both cases the *skandhas* are defined as compounded (*saṃskṛta* and *saṃskāra* are used as synonymous), and in both cases they are supposed to exist by virtue of an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). Moreover, the fact that this intrinsic nature is here said to be nothing but pain (*duḥkha*) leads us to suspect that also *MMK* 12 has been written against the same opponent, who indeed upholds – as pointed out by Candrakīrti in the abovementioned brief fragment of his commentary on that chapter – the identity of *duḥkha* and *skandhas* from a substantialistic perspective. Now, if we admit that these three chapters are directed against the same abhidharmic point of view – presumably Vaibhāṣika –, we are in this case allowed to interpret *kārya* and *kāraṇa* in *MMK* 24 according to the readings suggested above, for *MMK* 12 and *MMK* 8. Moreover, as regards *utpāda*, *nirodha* and *phala* in *MMK* 24.17cd, these three terms undoubtedly evoke the *dukkhasamudaya*, *dukkhanirodha* and *dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭi-padā*. Now, because Nāgārjuna is here answering to a hypothetical Vaibhāṣika who, as we have seen, upholds from a substantialistic perspective that *duḥkha* is nothing but the *skandhas*, we conclude that *utpāda* and *nirodha* – *phala* will be taken into consideration below –, by referring respectively to the origination of pain and to the dissolution of pain, indicate consequently the origination and the dissolution of the *skandhas* (*saṃskārāṇām udayavyayau*, in the words of Candrakīrti): this can be, I think, a further corroboration of the idea according to which, if not *directly* the aggregates, the main subject of *MMK* 24.17 is at least (re)birth as an event *affecting* the aggregates.

At this point, a first fundamental conclusion can be drawn: Nāgārjuna seems to employ the two words *kāraṇa* and *kārya* only in contexts in which the *skandhas* as substrate of (re)birth are, implicitly or explicitly, dealt with. Now, to be sure that this is the *peculiar* meaning of *kāraṇa* and *kārya* in the

MMK, we need to take into consideration, even if briefly, the way in which Nāgārjuna makes use of *hetu* and *phala*.

4. Hetu and phala in the MMK

When *hetu* does not mean «reason», «motive» etc., we find two main ways, in the MMK, according to which Nāgārjuna employs this word in the sense of «cause». On the one hand, *hetu* is the primary cause, distinct from *pratyaya* or secondary condition, as in the well-known MMK 1, where mention is made of one *hetu*, that is, *hetupratyaya*, and three *pratyayas*, that is, *ārambaṇa*^o, *anantara*^o and *adhipatipratyaya*. We find the same distinction in MMK 20, where Nāgārjuna speaks of the combination (*sāmagrī*) of one cause (*hetuḥ*) and several conditions (*pratyayānām*), and in MMK 15.1 in which the impossibility for *svabhāva* to be derived from *hetu* and *pratyayas* is analysed (consider also *Vigrahavyāvartanī* 21 and commentary thereon). In *Yuktiśaṣṭīkā-kārikā* 39ab the description of the strict interrelation existing between cause and condition reaches its summit: *hetutaḥ sambhavo yasya sthitir na pratyayair vinā* | («That which is occasioned by a cause, its permanence is not without conditions»). On the other hand, *hetu* means ‘cause’ in general, not necessarily referring to *skandhas* or (re)birth, as MMK 21.15-16 bear witness to: in these two *kārikās*, that should be red in the light of MMK 21.13, *hetu* indeed occurs in a discussion concerning *bhāva* – which means nothing but «event» –,¹¹ and even if in MMK 21.5c Nāgārjuna speaks of *janma* («birth») and *maraṇa* («death»), it rests the fact that these two terms refer here to the concepts of, respectively, *sambhava* («occurrence») and *vibhava* («destruction»), which are expressly said to apply to *bhāvas* (MMK 21.8 and 12-14), not to *skandhas*. This observation acquires all its argumentative force when we take into account MMK 11.8 (quoted above) – where Nāgārjuna seems to draw a sort of *distinction* (*na kevalam... apī*) between that which undergoes (re)birth (*saṃsāra*), and a ‘bare’ event (*bhāva*) – and MMK 8.13 – where a difference between *upādāna* (presumably referring to *skandhas*) and *śeṣān bhāvān* («the remaining events») appears to be implicitly pointed out.

In the light of these considerations, it can be suggested that *hetu* is used by Nāgārjuna with the value of a, so to speak, *objective* cause in a broad sense, whereas *kāraṇa* seems to have the particular meaning of *subjective* cause. This assumption appears to be confirmed by the analysis of the main subject matters of the chapters in which *hetu* as «cause» occurs: causation in general in chapter 1, *svabhāva* in chapter 15, the time or moment of the coming to be of events, *bhāvas*, in chapter 20, and arising and dissolution of *bhāvas* in chapter 21 – nowhere is there direct or indirect mention of the *skandhas* or rebirth.

As far as *phala* is concerned, when this term does not mean «fruit» in its

¹¹ On the philosophical meaning of *bhāva* in Nāgārjuna’s works see Priestley (1993).

literal sense (like in *MMK* 17.7-8), two principal uses can be detected in the *MMK*. According to the first one, *phala* is the general effect of *hetu* or of the combination of *hetu* and *pratyayas*. In *MMK* 1.11-14, in *MMK* 20.1-17 and 19-24, and in *MMK* 21.15-16 the effect of cause and conditions is always referred to as *phala*. In this case, if we take – as I have suggested – *hetu* as not necessarily involving subjectiveness, we can conclude that also *phala* does not. According to the second use, *phala* is the effect of *karman* (see *MMK* 17, and more in particular the *kārikās* 15d: *jāyate karmanām phalam*, «the effect of actions arises», and 30b: *karmajaṃ phalam*, «an effect born from actions»); note that *phala* is employed with this very meaning also by the *pūrvapakṣin* in *kārikās* 6 and 9-11) or of *kriyā* (in *MMK* 8.5, as underlined above, *phala* is said to be the effect of good and bad actions: *dharmādharmau [...] kriyādīnām*), where both these terms, in their respective contexts, refer to the moral aspect, and not – as in the case of *karman* in *MMK* 8 – to the ‘ontological’ aspect, of actions/objects performed. This sense of *phala* is reminiscent of the Canonical (doctrinal) usage of the term, as several passages of *MMK* 24 bear witness to: let us, for instance, come back to *MMK* 24.17cd where, as we have seen, *utpāda*, *nirodha* and *phala* refer respectively to the Pāli concepts of *dukkhasamudaya*, *dukkhanirodha* and *dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā*. Now, as is well-known, the idea of *dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā* has been elaborated in the abhidhammic context, for example in the *Vibhaṅga*, under the category of *dharme nāṇa* («knowledge in/of the doctrine»), which refers to the acquaintance with the four *maggas* and the four *phalas*, the same four *phalas* mentioned by Nāgārjuna in *MMK* 24.3 and 27. In this case, therefore, *phala* conveys the sense of «effect» developed after the acceptance of, or entrance into, the Buddhist path – a similar employment of *phala* can be detected also in *Vigrahavyāvartanī* 54-56, 70 and commentary thereon (where, as we have seen, *hetu* seems to refer to the moral «cause» of *phala*, a concept that apparently does not occur in the *MMK*).

5. Conclusion: Some Consideration on ‘Effect’

From what precedes, it can be suggested that, in the *MMK*, *kārya* represents the effect of a subjective cause (*kāraṇa*) having *primarily* a sort of – so to speak – ‘organic’ or ‘existential’ meaning, involving (re)birth, life etc. – I use the terms ‘organic’ and ‘existential’ in a broad sense, mainly in contrast both to inorganic entities (like pots etc.), and to what is moral –, in other terms, with *skandhas*; *phala*, on the contrary, is the word with which Nāgārjuna refers to both the effect of an objective cause (*hetu*) – *i.e.*, not necessarily involving life and (re)birth – and the effect *not* of a cause, *rather* of an activity (*karman*, *kriyā*) having moral implications. Consider *MMK* 8.5cd: *dharme cāsaty adharme ca phalaṃ tajaṃ na vidyate* || («If good and bad do not exist, the effect born from them is not found»), also *MMK* 24.6 (in which the posi-

tion of the *pūrvapakṣin*, who is taken to misunderstand the relation between *phala* and *dharmā/adharma* as something really existent, *sadbhāva*, is pointed out), and *MMK* 24.28-29, 34-35 (where Nāgārjuna explains the logical consequences of the *pūrvapakṣin*'s wrong perspective and suggests the right way for analysing the matter). Or, consider the 'positive' role played by *phala* for emancipation in *MMK* 8.6ab: *phale'sati na mokṣāya na svargāyopapadyate* | («If the effect does not exist, one does not arrive neither at liberation, nor at heavens») and in *MMK* 24.27 (in which it is affirmed that the extreme consequence of the admission of *svabhāva* is the invalidation of the four *phalas*). There are also passages in which *phala* is not explicitly related to good and/or bad fruits, and nonetheless its dependence on *karman/kriyā* suffices for considering that a moral nuance has to be implicitly intended: *MMK* 17.15, 19, 30 and 33. This peculiar distinction between *kārya* and *phala* appears to be indirectly confirmed by the fact that nowhere in the *MMK* is affirmed that *kārya* is the effect of an activity (*karman, kriyā*).

Of course, the difference just drawn between an existential – involving in a certain way 'ontology' – and a moral level has a mere philosophical value, because existence and morality represent the two main manners according to which a single event, in our case human life, can be interpreted. It is, I suppose, in the double philosophical meaning of the term *karman* (from which both *skandhas*, as in *MMK* 8, and *phala*, as in *MMK* 17, derive) that Nāgārjuna finds the conceptual knot on which a more complex perspective can be, and must be, pointed out. The complexity here lies in the fact that past actions (*karman/kriyā*) cause effects (*phala*) that determine the good or bad *conditions* (rebirth, liberation, heaven etc.) of the present *state of existence* (*skandhas* as *kārya*), which, in its turn, derives from a *previous* state of existence (*skandhas* as *kāraṇa*). This means that a person should be considered not only as a *kārya* of a former *kāraṇa*, but also as a *phala* of his/her past deeds. Hence, *kārya* and *kāraṇa*, on the one hand, and *phala* and *karman/kriyā*, on the other, refer to the one and the same subject (I think that it is exactly for this reason that Nāgārjuna introduces a reference to the moral aspect of the matter in both *MMK* 8.5-6 and *MMK* 24.17cd, that is, in contexts in which the discussion concerns existence and rebirth from an 'ontological' perspective). But only the first couple of terms indicates the living being as – so to speak – existential support for moral actions, and as receiver or collector of moral retributions, whereas those very actions and retributions are meant by the second couple of terms.

6. Addendum: a Note on the Commentaries on *MMK* 8.4ab

The discussion just concluded represents, of course, nothing but my personal and humble interpretation of a particular aspect of the *MMK*, which I hope the reader will find consistent both in itself and with the sources here examined. Notwithstanding my conclusions, it is nonetheless interesting to note

that all the commentaries on *MMK* 8.4 suggest another interpretation of the terms *kāraṇa* and *kārya* in *pādas* ab. Let us analyse them in brief, beginning with Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* (de la Vallée Poussin 1903-13: 182):

saty eva hi hetor abhyupagame hetunā yan niṣpādyate tat kāryaṃ tasya ca yo niṣpā-dakaḥ tat kāraṇam iti yuyjate | tadyathā ghaṭasya mṛdā hetur ghaṭaḥ kāryaṃ tasya ca cakrādayaḥ sahakāri kāraṇam ||

Indeed, only if the cause is admitted, it is proper [to say] that that which is originated by means of the cause is the effect and that which originates that [effect] is the cause. For instance: the cause of the pot is the clay, the effect is the pot and the co-operating cause is the [potter's] wheel etc.

Candrakīrti employs here *hetu* and *kāraṇa* as two *equivalent* terms (consider the use of the pronouns *yad* and *tad*). He then introduces the concept of *sahakāri kāraṇa* («co-operating cause», «supporting cause») which is not directly mentioned in the *kārikā*, unless we interpret *sahakāri kāraṇa* as referring to *kāraṇa*, the means for action, in *pāda* d. Unfortunately, there is no evidence for such a reading, even if this is the only possible interpretation because, if *hetu* is equated to *kāraṇa*, it follows that *kāraṇa* in the *kārikā* must refer not to some auxiliary cause, rather to the primary one. The philosophical problem originated by the presence of *sahakāri kāraṇa* in this context is that, as we will see by taking into account Buddhapālita's commentary, with all probability it actually refers to *kāraṇa*, rather than to *kāraṇa*, and this is an interpretation that in itself appears to have some logical inconsistencies (which are, being this the case of the *Prasannapadā*, of course improbable, but not impossible at all), because *kāraṇa* cannot, at the same time, function both as primary and as auxiliary cause.

In the *Akutobhayā* we can read: *rgyu med pa nyid yin na 'bras bu dang rgyu dag med par thal bar 'gyur ro ||*¹² In this passage *rgyu med pa nyid* can be intended as the Tibetan rendering of *ahetutā*, which could be translated with «non-causality» or «the condition of no cause/reason» – thus we would have: «if there is non-causality, it follows [that there is also] absence of effect and of cause» – or it can be interpreted as *rgyu'i med pa nyid* – and in this case the sense would be: «if there is absence (*nāstitva*) of cause/reason, it follows [that there is also] absence of effect and of cause». As we can observe, this excerpt does not shed more light on the philosophical meaning of our *kārikā*.

Buddhapālita, on the contrary, furnishes a more complex explanation. He indeed writes in his *Buddhapālitamadhyamakavṛtti*:¹³

¹² Peking bsTan-'gyur, dBu-ma, TSHa, f. 59b3. Xylograph reproduced in Pandeya (1988).

¹³ Peking bsTan-'gyur, dBu-ma, TSHa, ff. 224b7-225a2. Xylograph reproduced in Pandeya (1988). Unfortunately, this passage is not included in the Sanskrit fragment of Buddhapālita's commentary recently discovered and published by Ye Shaoyong (2007).

rgyu med na ni 'bras bu dang | | rgyu yang 'thad par mi gyur ro | | rgyu med na 'bras bu cung zad kyang 'thad par mi 'gyur te | rgyu med pa la 'bras bu ji ltar 'thad par gyur | ci ste 'thad na ni glo bur du thams cad 'byung bar 'gyur zhing | rtsom pa thams cad don med pa nyid du yang 'gyur bas de ni mi 'dod de | de lta bas na rgyu med na 'bras bu cung zad kyang 'thad par mi 'gyur ro | | rgyu yang 'thad par mi gyur ro | | zhes bya ba ni rgyu med na rkyen kyang 'thad par mi 'gyur ro | | zhes bya ba'i tha tshig go | de yang ji ltar zhe na | dngos po rgyu las byung ba rnams la rkyen kyang phan 'dogs par byed pa yin na rgyu med cing de nyid mi 'byung na rkyen rnams kyis gang la phan 'dogs par 'gyur ro | | phan 'dogs par mi byed na ni ji ltar rkyen rnams su 'gyur | de lta bas na rgyu med na 'bras bu yang 'thad par mi gyur la | rgyu yang 'thad par mi 'gyur ro ||

«When the cause does not exist, both the effect and the cause are not evident». If the cause does not exist, not even a little effect is evident: in which way[, indeed,] is an effect evident from a non-existing cause? But if it were admitted [that an effect can exist without a cause, in this case], because all [effects could] originate immediately [*i.e.*, by themselves], every coming to be [of the effects] would be without reason (*vaiyarthya*), [and] this is not accepted; thus, if the cause does not exist, not even a little effect is evident. «And the cause is not evident» means that, if the cause does not exist, the condition (*pratyaya*) too is not evident. And how is that [explained]? Conditions, being [them] subsidiary (*upakāraka*) for the events (*bhāva*) [which are] originated by a cause, if the cause does not exist and those very [events] do not originate, by means of what conditions is there assistance [to the cause]? If assistance [to the cause] is not performed, in which way are the conditions [supposed to exist]? Hence, when the cause does not exist, both the effect is not evident and the [secondary?] cause is not evident.

From the last part of this passage it emerges that Buddhapālita interprets *kāraṇa* as meaning *pratyaya*, that is, «condition». Furthermore, *pratyaya* is said to be «subsidiary» (*upakāraka*). Even if we cannot be sure, beyond any doubt, that Candrakīrti had in mind Buddhapālita's explanation when he wrote his own commentary on *MMK* 8.4, it is not so unlikely to think that this particular interpretation of Buddhapālita – which is followed also by Bhāviveka, as we will see in a moment – could have influenced Candrakīrti's abovementioned introduction of the concept of *sahakāri kāraṇa*.

Bhāviveka in his *Prajñāpradīpavṛtti* says:¹⁴

de ltar rgyu med na ni 'bras bu dang | rgyu yang 'thad par mi 'gyur ro | | rgyu dang rkyen so sor nes pa'i mthus bya ba nyid kyis 'bras bu zhes bya zhing | lhan cig byed pa'i rgyu tshogs su zin kyang de yod na 'byung ba nyid kyis 'bras bu'i rgyu zhes bya na | bltos pa med pa la ni rgyu med pa yang rgyur mi rung la | de'i 'bras bu med pa yang 'bras bur mi rung ngo ||

Thus, «when the cause does not exist, both the effect and the cause are not evident». [It is] called 'effect' [that which comes to be] by reason of the power of [certain] fixed (*pratiniyata*) cause and conditions (*pratyaya*); moreover, [it is] called 'cause' of the effect for its becoming that (*tadbhāvabhāvitā*) [effect, which is] grasped in the assem-

¹⁴ Peking bsTan-'gyur, dBu-ma, TSHa, ff. 142a8-142b1. Xylograph reproduced in Pandeya (1988).

blage of the co-operating causes (*sahakāri kāraṇa*); but if the cause does not exist, an independent [secondary?] cause is not admitted (*na yujyate*), and if the effect of that [first cause] does not exist, an[other] independent effect is not admitted.

Now, also Bhāviveka – like Buddhapālita, and may be Candrakīrti – apparently identifies *kāraṇa*, via *sahakāri kāraṇa*, if not directly or explicitly with *pratyaya*, at least with some secondary element involved in a causal process.

All the commentaries to *MMK* 8.4, with perhaps the sole exception of the *Akutoḥbhayā*, which proposes nothing but a mere paraphrase of the *kārikā*, seem to agree on interpreting *kāraṇa* as a secondary cause or as a subsidiary condition of *hetu*. But, as we have seen, when Nāgārjuna refers to primary cause and secondary condition(s), he always makes use of *hetu* and *pratyaya* (not *kāraṇa*) as a fixed formula. This leads us to suppose that *hetu* in *MMK* 8.4 (and consequently also the two occurrences of *ahetuka* in *MMK* 8.3, and those in *MMK* 4.2, too) should mean «motive», «ground» in general, rather than specific «cause».¹⁵

To conclude, it is not my intention to say here that the commentaries are definitely wrong on this point: as they are, indeed, the actual expression of the historical development of the Madhyamika philosophical tradition, their being right or wrong does not constitute a significant matter. However, it is exactly because they represent a *development* of Nāgārjuna's philosophy, that we can suppose that these commentaries contain some *differences* from the original message of the *MMK*. And this of ours *could* be one of such cases: to say the truth, my personal impression is that Buddhapālita, Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti, because of their – so to speak – ‘overinterpretation’ of the meaning of *hetu* in *MMK* 8.3a, are in a certain way forced to render *kāraṇa* as something subordinated to *hetu* (Buddhapālita and Bhāviveka undoubtedly uphold this point of view) and consequently to consider *kārya* – as clearly Candrakīrti does –¹⁶ as the direct effect of *hetu*, a conclusion that, we have seen, does not transpire at all from Nāgārjuna's words.

Krishna Del Toso
 Università di Trieste
 via Tigor 22, 34124 Trieste
 krishna.deltoso@gmail.com

¹⁵ This is the rendering of *hetuka* adopted for instance also by Bronkhorst (1985: 118) in his translation of *MMK* 8.3.

¹⁶ I mention here only Candrakīrti because his commentary is the only one preserved into Sanskrit, and for this very reason, in the light of point (a) of the preliminary remarks, only in this case we can be sure of the original terminology employed.

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SUMMARY

In this paper, Nāgārjuna's philosophical interpretation of the terms *kāraṇa* and *kārya* is analysed after having methodologically confined the specific field of interest to the *MMK*. From the study of all the occurrences of *kāraṇa* and *kārya* in the *MMK* (listed in paragraph 2), it emerges that Nāgārjuna makes use of these two terms to refer to *skandhas* as causes (*kāraṇa*) of further *skandhas* as effects (*kārya*), hence conveying with this words the idea of, so to speak, subjectivity and (re)birth. From the principal commentaries on the *MMK* (particularly Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti), we know also that, even when the reference of *kāraṇa* and *kārya* to *skandhas* is not explicitly pointed out by Nāgārjuna, it nonetheless can be inferred from the peculiar context in which these terms are employed.

This conclusion seems to be confirmed also by the crosscheck analysis of the philosophical usage of the parallel terms *hetu* and *phala*, which refer either to, so to speak, *objective* (i.e., concerning general *bhāvas*) causes and effects, or – in the case of *phala* as consequence of *karman/kriyā* – to moral results (these two meanings are confirmed also by some passages from the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*), but in no cases Nāgārjuna makes recourse to *hetu* and *phala* to refer to what could be called a *subjective* (i.e., concerning *skandhas*) level of causality.

To the paper an *addendum* is added, in which the commentaries on *MMK* 8.4 are taken into consideration. From this *excursus* it appears that at least Buddhapālita, Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti, by 'overinterpreting' the meaning of *hetu* in the *kārika*, are consequently forced to readapt the philosophical significance of *kāraṇa* and *kārya* in a way that does not fit so much with Nāgārjuna's original message.