

# Why is Interactivity So Important?

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- Is necessary for understanding certain phenomenon.

- Paul of Venice on interactive epistemic reasoning.
- Nāgārjuna's proof that everything is empty.

# Epistemic actions

*Scire propriissime sumptum est cuiuscunque notitia per demonstrationem potissimam acquisita, que qualiter a demonstratione quia distinguatur.* [Gaetanus of Thiene]

- *Consideratio* and *notitia*: Proper knowledge requires that the object of knowledge has been brought to the knower's attention, that he notices it and has consideration of it.
- *Demonstratio* and *probatio*: Demonstration/justification/proof plays an active role in epistemic reasoning.

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Assumption:

*(1) It put it to you (a) that you know A is one of the two 'God exists' and 'Man is an ass', and (b) that one A is every A, and (c) it is hidden from you which of the two is A, but (d) you know correctly that this is necessary: 'God exists' and the other is impossible 'Man is an ass'.*

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Premise:

*(i) It is consistent with the case supposed that A is known by you.*



## Paul of Venice on epistemic reasoning (2)

Proof that “It is consistent with the case supposed that  $A$  is known by you”:

Proof.

The following inference is valid:

*This proposition is known by you (indicating the proposition ‘God exists’), and that proposition is  $A$ , therefore  $A$  is known by you.*

The inference is sound. . .



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How is  $KB, B = A \vdash KA$  is sound? Especially since “The argument from one interchangeable term to the other with a preceding modal term is not acceptable, however” . . .

# The constructive face of epistemic logic

- Proofs are being presented from one person to another
- These proofs engender specific mental states in the people involved.
- This is a result of bringing a proposition to someone's notice (*notitia*) or forcing them to consider it (*consideratio*).

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Epistemic logic is a constructive logic: We not only reason about knowledge in a static setting but our very act of so reasoning or inferring or proving can be used to *create* knowledge.

Not just reasoning *about* knowledge but reasoning *involving* knowledge.

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His problem: Maintaining the consistency of his doctrine of universal emptiness with the very fact of its proclamation, i.e., with the act of its assertion.

# Against Nāgārjuna

- 1 Look! If all things are empty, then your assertion is [also] empty because your assertion is included among all things. [But] a negation through this empty [assertion] is not accomplished. Under these circumstances the negation “all things are empty” is not accomplished.
- 2 But if the negation “all things are empty” is accomplished, then your assertion, for its part (*api*), is non-empty. Because it is non-empty, the negation is not accomplished by it.
- 3 But if all things are empty and your assertion, by means of which the negation [is supposedly accomplished], is non-empty, then your assertion is not included among all things. Under these circumstances there is a contradiction to something obvious (*drṣṭāntavirodha*).



# Against Nāgārjuna

- 4 But if your assertion is included among all things and all things are empty, then this [assertion] is also empty. Because it is empty, there is no negation by means of it.
- 5 But if [your assertion] is empty and the negation “all things are empty” [is accomplished] by it, then all things would be capable of producing an effect, even though they are empty. And this is not desired.
- 6 But if, in order to avoid a contradiction to something obvious (*dṛṣṭāntavirodha*), [you say that] all things are empty and not capable of producing an effect, a negation of the intrinsic nature of all things by means of your empty assertion is not accomplished.

## Summarizing the 6 points

The six points function against the background of two possibilities:

- Empty things can be causes
- Empty things cannot be causes

Point 1 starts against the second possibility, and Point 5 with the first. With the exception of these two points, each point starts with the negation of the unwanted consequence of the previous point. The first four points form a circle in that the negation of the unwanted conclusion of Point 4 simply brings you back to Point 1. Points 5 and 6 are not circular; but Point 6 returns to Point 1.

If we accept that these two possibilities are the only two, then it seems that the six points exhaust all options.

What do we gain from looking at the dialogical structure? There is no real dialogue. . .

A number of assumptions are made in this framework:

- 1 The action associated with an utterance or assertions can succeed or fail.
- 2 Assertions can be empty or not.
- 3 The previous two points are possibly independent of each other.
- 4 Because assertions are things, they are covered by any statement about “all things”.
- 5 Contradicting “something obvious” is a failing move in the “debate”.
- 6 Failing to adequately demonstrate something — even if it could in fact be true — is a failing move in the debate.

## A (partial) typology of self-refutation

- Absolute self-refutation: “I prove that there can be no proof”.
- Pragmatic self-refutation: “I say that I am not saying anything”.

- ▶ *ad hominem* self-refutation:

*An argument in which the person's admission that he is speaking or thinking—as distinct from the fact that he is speaking or thinking—is used as an argument to show that what he is speaking or thinking cannot be the case.*

- Operational self-refutation: Self-refutation when the sentence may be true but cannot be coherently asserted, e.g., “I believe nothing”.

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- ‘Performative’ self-refutation

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## How does Nāgārjuna refute himself?

When Nāgārjuna asserts “There is no intrinsic nature” or “Everything is empty”, his assertion is :

- not absolutely self-refuting: On Mackie’s account, some type of action or operation is necessary to be prefixed; there is no such action/operation here. (E.g., Nāgārjuna *doesn’t* say “I assert that everything is empty”.)
- not pragmatically self-refuting: Likewise, there is no assertion of assertion going on.
- is not *ad hominem* self-refuting: In his utterance, Nāgārjuna does not admit that he is asserting/denial/affirming something.
- is operationally self-refuting?: Depends on what it means to ‘coherently assert’.

## “Performative” self-refutation

I introduce the label “performative” self-refutation to describe what I see going on here: It is not what he says, or the fact that he says it, or the admission that he says it, but rather the fact that he expects his utterance to have the capacity to affirm or deny that causes the problem. Thus, it is about the performative consequences of his utterance, not the utterance itself, that make the utterance self-refuting.

**Annihilation:** Successful refutation  $\neq$  proof of falsehood.

The opponent here is *not* arguing that N.'s emptiness thesis is false. He's instead arguing that N. has not succeeded in demonstrating that it is true.

This leaves open the possibility that the argument is correct and has true premises, it just cannot be asserted.



## Refutation without falsity

Nāgārjuna's thesis is a part of a family of theses which cannot be truthfully asserted:

- “All things are empty”.
- “ $\phi$ , but you don't know it”. (Fitch's paradox)
- “No proposition is negative”. (Jean Buridan, *Sophismata* ch. 8)

*It is only by understanding the dialectical framework in which the “six points” argument occurs that we can understand that argument itself.*

The argument is not invalid, but it fails to perform the task it must perform in the particular dialectical context in which it is employed. The criticism of the argument relates to its performative aspects, not to its logical content.