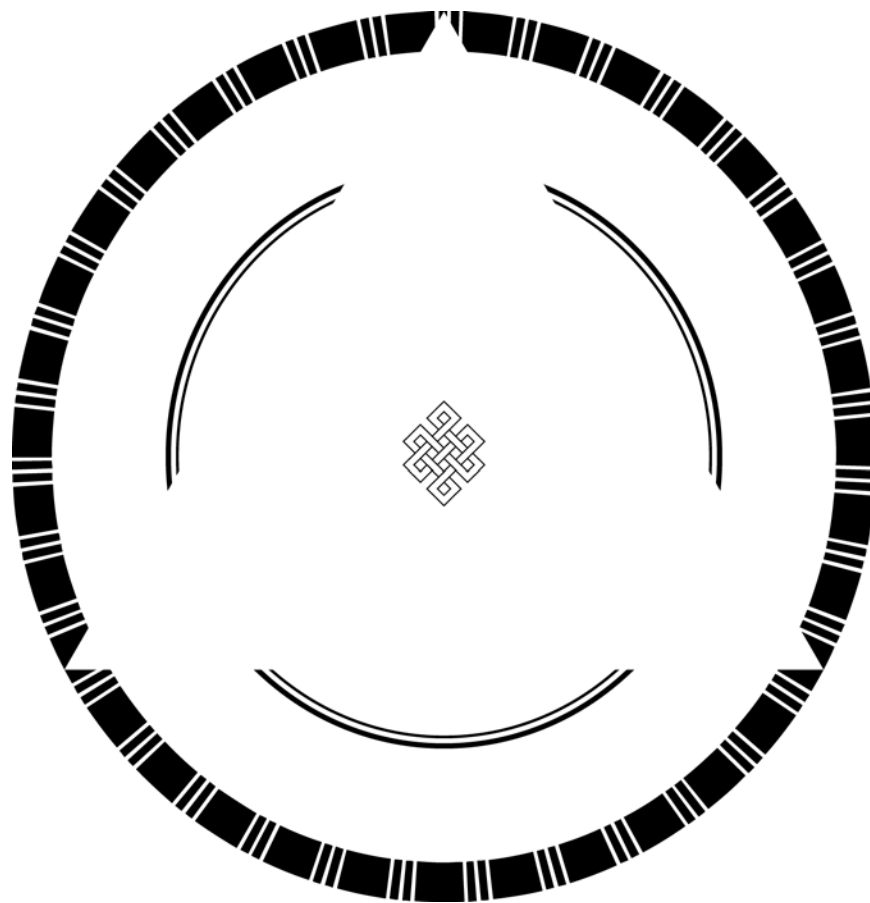


**Empty
When
Full**

**Full
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Empty**



Readings On The Middle Way

RIME SHEDRA CHANTS

ASPIRATION

In order that all sentient beings may attain Buddhahood,
From my heart I take refuge in the three jewels.

This was composed by Mipham. Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee

MANJUSHRI SUPPLICATION

Whatever the virtues of the many fields of knowledge
All are steps on the path of omniscience.
May these arise in the clear mirror of intellect.
O Manjushri, please accomplish this.

This was specially composed by Mangala (Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche). Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee

DEDICATION OF MERIT

By this merit may all obtain omniscience
May it defeat the enemy, wrong doing.
From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness and death,
From the ocean of samsara, may I free all beings

By the confidence of the golden sun of the great east
May the lotus garden of the Rigden's wisdom bloom,
May the dark ignorance of sentient beings be dispelled.
May all beings enjoy profound, brilliant glory.

Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee

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Empty When Full Full When Empty

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An introduction to the Middle Way

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Entering the Middle Way

By Chandrakirti

Chapters One and Six

Translated from the Tibetan By Ari Goldfield

The First Mind Generation: Perfect Joy

Shravakas and intermediate buddhas arise from the Mighty Ones,
Buddhas are born from the bodhisattvas,
And compassionate mind, non-dual awareness,
And bodhicitta are the causes of these heirs of the Victors. (1)

Since I assert that loving-kindness itself is the seed of the Victors' abundant harvest,
Is the water which causes it to flourish,
And is its ripening that allows it to be enjoyed for a long time,
I therefore praise compassion at the very outset. (2)

First, thinking "me", they fixate on "self",
Then, thinking "this is mine", attachment to things develops.
Beings are powerless, like a rambling water mill—
I bow to compassion for these wanderers. (3)

Beings are like the moon on the surface of rippling water—
They move and are empty of any self-nature.
The Victors' heirs see this and in order to free beings completely
Their minds come under the power of compassion, (4)

And perfectly dedicating their virtue with Samantabhadra's prayer,
They perfectly abide in joy—this is called "the first".
Having attained this ground
They are called by the name "bodhisattva". (5)

They are born into the family of Tathagatas,
They abandon all three that entangle so thoroughly,
These bodhisattvas possess extraordinary happiness
And can cause a hundred worlds to quake. (6)

Advancing from ground to ground, they fully progress upwards—
At that time, all paths to the lower realms are sealed off,
At that time, all grounds of ordinary beings evaporate—
They are taught to be like the eighth of the noble ones. (7)

Even those abiding on the first ground of perfect bodhicitta
Through the power of their merit, outshine
Both those born of the Mighty One's speech and the solitary sages.
On the ground *Gone Far Beyond*, their minds also become superior. (8)

At that time, the first cause of complete enlightenment,
Generosity, becomes pre-eminent.
When one is enthusiastic even about giving away one's flesh,
This is a sign of something that normally cannot be seen. (9)

All beings strongly desire happiness
But human happiness does not occur without objects of enjoyment.
Knowing that these objects arise from generosity,
The Mighty One taught generosity first. (10)

Even for those without much compassion
Who are extremely hot-tempered and self-concerned,
The objects of enjoyment they desire
And that pacify their suffering come from generosity. (11)

Even they, through an occasion of giving
Will meet a noble being, receive their counsel,
And soon after, completely cutting the stream of cyclic existence,
They will progress to peace, the result of that. (12)

Those whose minds vow to benefit beings
Quickly gain happiness from their acts of generosity.
It is for those who are loving and those who are not—
Therefore, generosity is foremost. (13)

The happiness of an Arhat attaining peace
Cannot match the joy experienced by a bodhisattva
Upon merely hearing the words, "please give to me".
So what need to mention their joy when they give away everything? (14)

The pain one feels from cutting one's own flesh to give it away
Brings the suffering of others in the hell realms and so forth
Directly into one's own experience,
And awakens one's vigor in striving to cut that suffering off. (15)

Giving empty of gift, giver, and recipient
Is a transcendent perfection beyond the world.
When attachment to these three arises
That is a mundane transcendent perfection. (16)

Fully abiding thus in the mind of a Victor's heir,
Gaining beauty through its light shining on this excellent base,
The joy of the first ground is like the jewel of the water crystal—
Utterly dispelling all the thick darkness, it is victorious! (17)

The Sixth Mind Generation: The Approach

Overview

The perfect [bodhisattvas], whose minds rest in the equipoise of the approach,
Approach the qualities of buddhahood.
They see the suchness of dependent arising
And from abiding in wisdom, they will attain cessation. (1)

Just as a person with eyes
Can easily lead a whole group of blind people wherever they wish to go,
So here, the mind endowed with wisdom
Guides the blind qualities to the victors' ground. (2)

The way [the bodhisattvas] realize the incredibly profound dharma
Was explained with scripture and reasoning.
Therefore, just as the Noble Nagarjuna did in his texts,
So will I explain things here. (3)

Those who even as ordinary beings, upon hearing of emptiness
Again and again experience great happiness within,
Have their eyes fill with the tears of this joy,
And the hairs on their body stand on end, (4)

[These are beings] with the seed of the perfect Buddha's mind.
They are vessels for the teachings on suchness.
They should be taught the truth of genuine reality
And all the good qualities coming from that will arise within them. (5)

Their discipline is always perfect,
They give generously, rely on compassion,
Cultivate patience, and the resulting virtue
They thoroughly dedicate to enlightenment in order to liberate beings. (6)

They respect the perfect bodhisattvas.
The individual who is skilled in the profound and vast natures
Will gradually progress to the ground of *Perfect Joy*.

Therefore, those who wish to do the same should listen [to the teachings about] this path. (7)

Establishing Emptiness by Rational Demonstration
Absence of Self in Phenomena
Refuting the Four Extreme Theories of Genesis

It does not arise from itself; how could it arise from something else?

It does not arise from self and other together; how could it arise without a cause?

Phenomena do not arise from Self

If it arose from itself, arising would be meaningless.

For something that has already arisen to arise again would be illogical. (8)

If, as you think, something that has already arisen arises again,
[Then] the sprout and what follows it would never have a chance to arise,
The seed would continue to arise again and again until the end of existence.
How could something destroy its very self [when it comes into existence]? (9)

According to your tradition, the sprout could never have
Shape, color, taste, potency, or ripening different from those of its cause, the seed.
If what was there earlier [the seed] is eliminated and changes into something else [the sprout],
How could the [earlier one] *become* the later one? [You say they are both the same thing!] (10)

And if your seed is not different from the sprout we have here,
Then just as we do not see the seed, so we should not see the sprout!
Alternatively, since the two are the same, just as [we see] the sprout,
So we should see [the seed]. Therefore, we do not assert [arising from self]. (11)

Since we all see the result even though the cause has ceased,
Even the world does not claim cause and result to be one.
Therefore, if we closely examine whether entities arise from themselves,
[We find that] they do not, either in suchness or in [the way things appear] in the world. (12)

To assert arising from self [is to claim that]
Producer and produced are one, and that actor and object of action are one.
Since these things are not the same as each other,
And because of all the other faults that have been extensively explained, we do not assert
arising from self. (13)

Phenomena do not arise from Other

If an entity arises from something different from itself,
Then pitch darkness would arise from a fire's flames.

Everything would arise from everything, and why is that?
Because all [causes] and non-causes are equally different [from the result]. (14)

“[The cause] has the ability to produce the result, so its result is certain.
And that which has the ability to produce [the result] is the ‘cause,’ even though it is different
[from the result].
[The result] is in the same continuum [as its cause], and is produced by [that which is suitable to
be] its producer.
Therefore, rice sprouts do not arise from barley seeds,” you say. (15)

However, just as a barley [seed], a flower stamen, and an evergreen tree
Are not posited to be the causes of a rice sprout, do not have the ability to produce one,
Are not in the same continuum as a rice sprout, and are not of a similar type,
So too does the rice seed lack these [four qualities], because it is just as different [from a rice
sprout as they are]! (16)

The sprout and the seed do not exist at the same time,
So how can the seed be different [from the sprout] if there is nothing there to be different
from?
Therefore, there is no arising of a sprout from a seed,
So please abandon this idea that things arise from something different than themselves. (17)

“But just as we can see that
The two arms of a scale move up and down simultaneously,
So it is with the arising of the produced and the cessation of the producer—they are
simultaneous,” you say.
If [cause and result both] existed at the same time, [this example would be correct], but since
they do not exist at the same time, [the example] does not fit. (18)

If we assert that what is being born is only approaching birth and does not yet exist,
And that what is ceasing still exists and is only approaching disappearance,
How could these be like the arms of a scale? [Only one of them exists at a time!]
Furthermore, “birth” in the absence of the one being born makes no sense at all. (19)

If the eye-consciousness exists at the same time as what produces it:
The eye and the other conditions, as well as the co-appearing mental discrimination that
occurs,
Then what need is there for this already existent [eye consciousness] to arise again?
If you say that the [eye consciousness] does not exist [simultaneously with its causes], the faults
in that [view of arising from other, where cause and result do not exist simultaneously],
have already been explained. (20)

If the cause is a producer that produces a product different [from itself],
Then does the result exist, not exist, both, or neither?

If it exists, why does it need something to produce it? If it does not, what does [the producer] do?

If both, [since that is impossible], what would the producer do? If neither, [since that is impossible, too], what would the producer do? (21)

You say, "Since we assert that ordinary beings' own experience is valid cognition, What do your reasonings [refuting arising from other] do, exactly? And since even ordinary beings know that a thing arises from something different than itself, What need for *reasonings* to prove arising from other?" (22)

There are two ways of seeing every thing: the perfect way and the false way.
Therefore, every thing found holds two natures within.
[The Buddha] taught that perfect seeing sees suchness
And false seeing sees the relative truth. (23)

Within false seeing, there are also two types:
[Perception] with clear sense faculties and [perception] with flawed sense faculties.
In dependence upon there being consciousness with properly functioning senses,
Consciousness when the sense faculty is flawed is called "wrong." (24)

The objects perceived by the six [consciousnesses] whose faculties are free from fault
Are the things that worldly people perceive,
And it is they alone who say these things are real.
Everything else is false, they say. (25)

Likewise, things like the [unborn, permanent] "self" that are imagined
By the non-Buddhists whose minds are overcome by the sleep of ignorance,
As well as mirages, illusions, and so forth, all these imaginary things,
Even worldly people know to be nonexistent. (26)

Just as the vision of one stricken by cataracts
Cannot controvert what the [eye-]consciousness of one with healthy vision perceives,
So those whose minds have rejected stainless wisdom
Cannot invalidate what those with stainless minds realize. (27)

Bewilderment obscures their true nature, so they are relative.
Whatever worldly beings fabricate appears to them to be true.
This the Mighty One called the "relative truth".
The noble ones know these fabricated entities to be relative. (28)

False entities that are imagined [to exist],
Such as the falling hairs [that appear to one stricken with] eye disease—
How their nature is seen by those with flawless eyes—
That is how we should understand suchness to be. (29)

If worldly beings' perceptions were valid,
Since worldly beings would see suchness, what need for the noble ones?
What would the noble ones' path accomplish?
The perceptions of fools are not valid cognition. (30)

Since worldly beings' perceptions are never valid cognition,
They can do no harm [at the time] suchness [is asserted].
If, however, it is something renowned in the world and you stay on worldly people's own
ground,
When you try to refute it, worldly people can controvert you. (31)

Just from planting a seed,
Worldly people claim, "I produced that child!"
Or, "I planted that tree!"
Therefore, even worldly people do not assert arising from other. (32)

Because the sprout is not different from the seed,
The seed does not cease when the sprout [comes into existence].
Because they are not the same thing,
We do not say that the seed exists at the time of the sprout, either. (33)

If there arose phenomena whose specific characteristics [actually existed],
The noble ones' wisdom would deny them and would therefore be a destroyer of entities.
Emptiness would therefore be the cause of entities' destruction.
Since that is illogical, entities do not exist. (34)

If you analyze these entities [to see if they arise from one of the four extremes],
Other than the reality of [unborn] suchness,
You will not find anything at all.
Therefore, do not analyze the world's conventional truth. (35)

When analyzing for ultimacy, these [middle way] reasonings find
That neither birth from self nor from other are feasible.
Since these same reasonings [demonstrate arising] to be illogical in conventional [reality] as
well,
As for your birth, what is it that [proves] its existence? (36)

Empty things, like reflections and so forth,
Are known to arise due to the coming together of causes and conditions.
Just as it is that from an empty reflection or otherwise,
Consciousness beholding the image of that reflection arises, (37)

So it is that even though all things are empty,

From their empty causes and conditions they vividly arise.
Since things have no inherent nature in either of the two truths,
They do not fall into the extremes of permanence or cessation. (38)

[Since actions do not truly exist], there is no such thing as “cessation” [of an action].
Therefore, even though there is no such thing as an “all-base,” [an action that has ceased] is
able to [give rise to a result in the future].
Sometimes, a long period of time elapses after the action has ceased,
But no matter—know that its result will most certainly arise. (39)

Having seen objects in a dream,
Desire [for them] can arise in fools even after they awake.
In the same way, although karmic actions have ceased and have no inherent nature,
They are [fully able to produce] results. (40)

Although the objects are equal in their very nonexistence,
Those with cataracts see the images of falling hairs
But not the images of other things, [like falling elephants].
Similarly, know that an already ripened action does not ripen again. (41)

Therefore, nonvirtuous results mature from negative actions
And virtuous results [from] virtuous actions.
Those who realize that there is neither virtue nor nonvirtue will be liberated;
Furthermore, [the Buddha said] we should not [attempt to determine precisely how] cause and
result function. (42)

When the Buddha taught, “the all-base exists,”
“The individual exists,” and “these aggregates alone exist,”
It was for those who could not immediately understand
The profound [nature of] reality. (43)

Although free of the view that the transitory collection [is the self],
The Buddha taught [using the words] “I” and “mine.”
Similarly, although things lack inherent nature,
[The Buddha] taught, “they exist,” as a teaching of the provisional meaning. (44)

You say, “Seeing neither a perceived object nor a perceiving subject
And perfectly realizing that the three levels of existence are consciousness only,
That bodhisattva abiding in wisdom
Realizes suchness to be mere consciousness. (45)

“Just as waves arise from a great ocean
When the wind blows strongly across it
So from the ‘all-base’, the seed of everything,

What is consciousness alone arises when its potency ripens. (46)

“Therefore, the entity that is the dependent nature
Is the cause for all imputedly existent things,
Arises without external apprehended objects,
Exists, and has a nature that is not the object of any fabrication.” (47)

What is your example of a mind that exists without external objects?
If you say, “it is like a dream,” then this is what is to be considered.
For us [in the middle way, neither outer objects] nor mind exists in dreams,
And so, there is no example you can use! (48)

If the fact that you remember the dream proved that mind existed [during the dream],
Then outer objects would have been just as existent!
For just as you remember [the mind] by thinking, “I saw [such and such],”
So you also remember the outer objects. (49)

“During sleep, the eye-consciousness is impossible,
So there are no [outer perceived objects]—only the mental consciousness exists,
And an aspect of it is taken to be something external.
Thus we [the mind-only school] assert that it is the same here in the daytime as it is in dreams.”
(50)

But just as you know that outer objects do not arise during dreams,
So mind does not arise then, either!
The eye and the eye’s object, and the mind these two produce—
All three of these are false. (51)

Ear and so forth—the [five] other triads [of object, faculty and consciousness]—do not arise.
Just as they are in dreams, so they are during the day.
These things are false—there is no mind,
No object to be experienced, and no sense faculty. (52)

Just as here in the waking state [the triad exists],
So it is that as long as one does not awaken, the triad exists [in a dream].
And as soon as one awakens, the triad is gone—
When one awakens from the sleep of bewilderment, that is how it is. (53)

From the perspective of the one whose [eye-]faculty is afflicted by cataracts,
Both the hairs appearing due to the cataracts
And the consciousness perceiving them are real.
For the one who sees clearly, however, both are false. (54)

If there could be mind without an object,

Then even the people without cataracts
Would have their consciousness perceive hairs when their eyes connected with a particular
location.

Since that does not happen, [mind without object] does not exist. (55)

“The reason that the one who sees clearly does not see falling hairs
Is that the appropriate potential has not ripened in her mind,
Not that there is no object there to see,” you say.
However, since no such potential exists, your argument is invalid. (56)

It is not possible for the potential [or cause] of what has arisen to exist,
And the potential [or cause] for what has not arisen does not exist, either,
Because without the quality, the bearer of the quality cannot exist.
[If it could, it would follow that] the son of a barren woman’s potential [or cause] would exist as
well. (57)

You assert: “Since [the consciousness] will come into being, [the potential that is its cause
exists].”
But since there is no potential [for the reason just explained, the consciousness] will not come
into being.
[Furthermore], things existing in mutual dependence [like consciousness and the potential for
consciousness]
Do not exist, the genuine beings have taught. (58)

If [consciousness] arose from the ripening of the potential placed by a ceased [consciousness],
Then [consciousness] would arise from a potential that was something different from itself.
Moments in the continuum [of consciousness] would be distinct from each other,
And therefore, everything would arise from everything. (59)

If you say, “[Those moments of consciousness] in the continuum are different,
But they are not of different continua,
So there is no flaw [in our argument]....”
Prove it! For it is unreasonable to say that [different moments of consciousness] comprise an
undifferentiated continuum. (60)

The phenomena dependent on Jason and Nancy, respectively,
Are not in the same continuum because they are different.
It is unreasonable for those things that are separated by virtue of their own characteristics
To belong to one continuum. (61)

You say, “From the particular potential [in the all-base] that will produce the eye consciousness
There will be immediate and complete production,
And that potential that is the support for the [eye-]consciousness
Is thought [by worldly people] to be a sense-faculty made of form, called ‘eye’. (62)

“Here, consciousness arising from the faculties,
From its respective seeds manifests as appearances, such as something blue,
Without the presence of outer perceived objects.
Not realizing this, people think and accept [those appearances] to be outer objects. (63)

“In dreams, without the presence of objects such as form that are different [from mind],
Consciousnesses that behold such images arise from their respective ripened potentials.
Here in the waking state, it is just like that—
Mind exists in the absence of anything external.” (64)

[Even though] there are no eyes in dreams,
There arises a mental consciousness that perceives blue and so forth.
Why would a similar consciousness not arise in blind people during the day
From the ripening of its seed without the presence of the eye sense faculty? (65)

If you say, “In a dream, the sixth consciousness’ potential ripens,
But it does not ripen during the day,”
Then why would it be unreasonable [for us] to say,
“Just as there is no ripened potential during the day, so there is none in dreams”? (66)

Just as the lack of eyes is not a cause [of sight during the day],
So sleep is not a cause [of a ripened potential] during dreams.
Therefore, [we] assert that even in dreams, the entity [of form] and the eye
Are the causes of a false consciousness’ cognition. (67)

Seeing that whatever other answers [the mind-only school] may give in response
Are all [baseless], just like their [original] assertion,
These debates are eliminated.
The buddhas never taught that entities exist. (68)

When yogis [meditate] on their lama’s instructions,
And see the whole place filled with skeletons,
Then, too, the triad does not arise,
Because it is taught that [this samadhi] is a mistaken mental application. (69)

[If that] mind meditating on ugliness [were real], then the [skeletons] appearing to that mind
Would be just like the objects of your sense consciousnesses,
And anyone directing their mind to that place would see them, too!
Furthermore, that [samadhi] would not be false. (70)

Hungry ghosts’ [minds] perceiving a river to be pus
Are equivalent [to consciousness when the eye] faculty [is afflicted by] cataracts.
In short, know that just as the object does not exist,

The mind [perceiving it] does not exist, either. (71)

If there exists the entity of the dependent nature,
Free of perceiver and perceived, empty of duality,
Then what knows of its existence?
It is unsuitable to say, "It exists but cannot be perceived." (72)

It cannot be established that it experiences itself.
If [you say], "The fact that I remember things later proves [self-awareness] exists,"
[The answer is, "Self-awareness] does not exist, [but] in trying to prove that it does,
[Memory] is not a valid reason—it cannot prove [that self-awareness exists]." (73)

Even if self-awareness did exist,
It would still be illogical to say that memory remembers,
Because [you say earlier and later moments of mind] are different, like things that occurred in
an unknown mindstream.
This reason also defeats any other types [of answers you may give]. (74)

In our tradition, memory is not something different from
The [earlier consciousness] that actually experienced the object.
Therefore, I remember what I saw [yesterday],
And this is what people in the world would say, too! (75)

Therefore, if self-awareness does not exist,
What is it that perceives your dependent nature?
Since actor, action, and object cannot be identical,
For it to perceive itself would be illogical. (76)

If it does not arise and it cannot be known,
And yet this dependent nature exists nonetheless,
Then why do you assert that it is illogical for the son of a barren woman to exist?
What harm could he do to your position [that has not been done already]? (77)

Since the dependent nature does not exist in the slightest way,
What is the cause of relative [appearances]?
When others cling to [the dependent nature as being] substantially existent,
They lose the ability to describe things as they are renowned in the world. (78)

Apart from the path of the honorable master Nagarjuna,
There is no method of attaining peace.
Others stray from both relative truth and the truth of suchness,
And since they do, they cannot attain liberation. (79)

Conventional reality is the method;

Genuine reality arises from the method.
Those who do not understand the classification of these two
Will follow an inferior path because their thoughts are mistaken. (80)

We do not assert things in the relative truth
To be [truly existent] entities, as you assert the dependent nature to be.
In order to lead [students] to the fruition,
Even though [relative things] do not exist, we say that they do, from the perspective of worldly
beings. (81)

The arhats have abandoned the aggregates and abide in peace,
And for them, [relative phenomena] do not exist.
If those [phenomena] were similarly nonexistent for worldly beings,
We would not say they existed [from a] worldly [perspective]. (82)

If worldly experience poses no threat to you [who assert the mind-only doctrine],
Then refute that worldly experience on its own terms.
You and worldly beings should debate right here,
And we will follow whoever wins! (83)

When bodhisattvas who approach the [perfect] manifestation of [dharmadhatu]
Realize that the three levels of existence are merely consciousness,
Their realization refutes [the notion that] a permanent self is the creator,
And so they realize that the creator is mind alone. (84)

Therefore, in order to cause the comprehension of intelligent ones to increase,
In the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the Omniscient One
Spoke the vajra-words that destroy the lofty mountain summits of the tirthikas
In order that we might discern his intention: (85)

Seeing that the creator was neither the individual
Nor anything else that the tirthikas claimed in their treatises,
The Victor taught that the creator of the universe
Was mind and mind alone. (86)

“Expansive [awareness of] suchness,” is called *sang-gye*,
And similarly, [when the Buddha taught] worldly beings that “mind alone is foremost,”
[He] said, “mind alone” in the sutras.
The meaning of these sutras is *not* the refutation of form. (87)

If [his intention] was to refute form [and establish mind alone as truly existent]
Through his knowledge expressed in the statement, “These three realms are mind alone,”
Then why later on did the Great One say
That [mind itself] arises from ignorance and karma? (88)

Mind itself is what produces
The universe of beings and their environment in all their incredible variety.
All beings without exception are born from karma, the Buddha taught,
And if mind is abandoned, there will be no karma, either. (89)

Although form does exist,
It is not the creator that mind is.
Therefore, [the Buddha] showed that there is no other creator besides mind
But he did not refute form [and assert mind to be real]. (90)

For those abiding in the mode of worldly beings,
All five of the aggregates exist, just as they are renowned in the world.
When primordial wisdom [realizing] suchness shines for the yogis,
None of the five arise. (91)

When there is no form, one cannot perceive mind,
And when there is mind, there will be form as well.
In the prajnaparamita sutras, the Buddha refuted both [form and mind],
And in the abhidharma, he taught the [existence of both]. (92)

Even by destroying the stages of the two truths,
You cannot establish your substance as existent, because it is refuted [by reasoning].
Therefore through the stages [of the two truths] you should know:
In suchness things have never arisen, and according to the world they do arise. (93)

When in the sutras the [Buddha] taught,
“There are no outer objects—mind appears as the variety of things,”
It was for those who had an intense attachment to form,
To alleviate [the mental afflictions arising from this attachment]. It was a [teaching of the]
provisional meaning. (94)

The teacher taught that these were provisional teachings.
Reasoning demonstrates that these were provisional teachings.
This scriptural passage makes it clear
That similar teachings in other sutras are also provisional teachings. (95)

“When [you know that] the object of consciousness does not exist, dispelling [thoughts of]
consciousness’ existence is easy.”
This all the buddhas have said.
When [one realizes] there is no object of consciousness, this proves that there is no
consciousness, either.
Therefore, first [the Buddha] refuted consciousness’ objects. (96)

Knowing the way of the scriptures to be like this,
Understand that whatever sutras do not teach suchness
[The Buddha] spoke as provisional teachings, and [use them to] lead others accordingly.
[As for the sutras that] teach emptiness—know these to be definitive teachings. (97)

Phenomena do not arise from both Self & Other

Arising from both self and other is also untenable
Because the faults already explained apply here as well.
[Arising from both] occurs neither in the world nor in suchness, we assert,
Because there is no arising from either [self or other alone]. (98)

Phenomena do not arise from no cause

If things arose without any cause at all,
Then everything would always exist and anything could arise from anything else.
Furthermore, no one would perform all of the hundreds of tasks, like planting seeds and so
forth,
That people ordinarily do to get results to arise. (99)

If beings had no causes
They would be like flowers in the sky—imperceptible.
However, we *do* perceive the universe in all its incredible variety, and so,
Know that the universe, like your own mind, arises from causes. (100)

From [your texts], the way you understand the four elements
Is not the way they really are.
And if you have that much ignorance in your minds about [the things that appear] here [in this
world],
How could you ever grasp what lies beyond this world? (101)

When you refute the existence of lives [beyond this one],
Your view of objects of knowledge is mistaken,
Because the basis of your view is the physical body, [which you think is truly existent].
It is just as when you assert that the elements exist. (102)

How it is that the elements do not exist has already been explained:
The refutations of arising from self, other, both, and without cause
Refuted the elements at the same time they refuted everything else.
To think there could be elements not subject to those refutations is absurd. (103)

Dependent arising as truth of all phenomena

Since things do not arise from self, other, both, nor without cause,

They have no inherent nature at all.
Like a mass of dark clouds, thick bewilderment enshrouds the minds of worldly beings,
And therefore, they perceive objects in a mistaken way. (104)

Just as some who suffer from cataracts
Mistakenly perceive falling hairs, the eyes on peacock feathers, bees, or double moons,
So the unwise, suffering from bewilderment,
Perceive a variety of composite things. (105)

Karma occurs in dependence upon bewilderment, and if there were no bewilderment, there
would be no karma—
The unwise should definitely understand this!
However, the sun-like, excellent minds of the wise who realize emptiness
Dispel the thick darkness [of ignorance by realizing that it too is empty], and are thereby
liberated. (106)

“If things did not genuinely exist,
Then conventionally as well, they would be completely nonexistent,
Like the son of a barren woman.
Therefore, things do inherently exist,” you say. (107)

However, those with ailments like cataracts
See falling hairs and so forth, even though these things have not really arisen.
So go debate with them for now,
And later you can debate with those stricken by the cataracts of bewilderment. (108)

How is it that you can see
Dream appearances, cities of gandharvas, water in mirages, optical illusions, and reflections?
Those things are unborn and just as nonexistent [as the son of a barren woman]!
So for you to see them at all contradicts [your own logic]. (109)

Even though, like the son of a barren woman,
Reflections and so forth are actually unborn,
That does not render them invisible to people,
And so your assertion is invalid. (110)

Just as the son of a barren woman does not inherently arise
In either genuine or worldly reality,
So it is that all things do not inherently arise,
Either genuinely or in the world. (111)

Therefore, the Teacher taught
That all phenomena are primordially peace, free from arising,
And that their nature is nirvana.

Therefore, nothing ever arises. (112)

In your tradition, you say that vases and so forth
Do not truly exist while still they are renowned in the world.
All things are just like that,
And it does not mean they are like a barren woman's son! (113)

Things do not arise causelessly, nor because of Ishvara,
Nor from self, nor other, nor both;
Therefore, we can definitively say
That things arise dependently. (114)

Since things only dependently arise,
Concepts [clinging to extremes] cannot withstand analysis.
Therefore, the reasoning of dependent arising
Completely cuts through the net of wrong views. (115)

Thoughts only arise when something exists,
But thorough analysis has shown how nothing exists.
And without anything existing, concepts cannot arise,
Just as in the absence of firewood, no fire can burn. (116)

Ordinary individuals are bound by their thoughts
While nonconceptual yogis are liberated.
And what is it that leads to this reversal of concepts?
Thorough analysis—this the wise ones have taught. (117)

The middle way treatises were not taught out of fondness for debate—
Rather, suchness was taught in order to liberate!
If, however, when suchness is explained,
Other views collapse, there is no fault in that. (118)

To be attached to one's own view
And to fight the views of others—these are mere concepts.
Therefore, those who dispel attachment and aversion,
And analyze thoroughly will quickly be liberated. (119)

Absence of Self in the Person

Seeing that all faults and afflictions without exception
Arise from the view of the transitory collection,
And understanding that the object of that view is the "self,"
Yogis refute the self. (120)

Refuting the person as something substantial

The self imagined by the tirthikas is an experiencer, is permanent, is not a creator,
Has no qualities and performs no activities.
Based on slight differences in how they classify this self,
There are different sub-systems of tirthika views. (121)

Their self is unborn, like the son of a barren woman,
And therefore it does not exist.
That it could even be the support for apprehending “I” is unreasonable,
So we do not even assert that it exists relatively. (122)

Whatever different kinds of self
The tirthikas may describe in their treatises
Their own assertion that it is unborn is the reason that invalidates their teachings,
And therefore, none of their different kinds of self exist. (123)

Therefore, there is no self different from the aggregates,
Because apart from the aggregates, nothing is perceived to be self.
Furthermore, the self [asserted by the tirthikas] is not asserted to be the support for the mind
thinking, “me,”
Because worldly beings still have ego-clinging even though they are totally unaware of [that
unborn self]. (124)

Even those who have spent many aeons as animals
Have not seen this unborn, permanent self, either!
Nevertheless, they still apprehend “me,”
And therefore, there can be no self apart from the aggregates. (125)

Since no self exists apart from the aggregates,
Only the aggregates are the focus of the view of self.
Some posit all five aggregates as the basis of the view of self,
And others say that only mind is the basis. (126)

If the aggregates were the self,
Since there are many aggregates, there would be that many selves.
The self would exist as a substance,
And the mind looking at it would perceive a substance and would therefore not be mistaken [in
thinking that the self existed]. (127)

When nirvana was attained, the self’s continuum would most certainly be cut,
And in every instant before nirvana, the self would arise and cease.
There would be no performer of karmic actions, and therefore no result of those actions.
The one who sowed the seeds would be different from the one who experienced the result.

(128)

[Should you say], “In reality there is a continuum, so there is no fault,”
Earlier analysis has shown the faults of positing that a continuum exists.
Therefore, it would be illogical for the self to be either the five aggregates or mind [alone].
Furthermore, the Buddha did *not* teach that the universe will end, or will not end, and so forth,
[for to do so would imply the existence of a self that would either end or not]. (129)

[Furthermore, if the self were the aggregates or mind], when your yogis saw selflessness,
It is certain that all things would cease to exist.
If you say that what is abandoned is belief in the *permanent* self,
At that time self could not be the mind *or* the aggregates. (130)

When your yogis realized selflessness,
They would not realize the suchness of form.
Looking at form, thoughts would engage,
And desire and so forth would arise because form’s essential nature had not been realized.
(131)

You say, “Since the Teacher said the aggregates are the self,
We assert that the aggregates are the self.”
However, [the Buddha] said that to refute [the notion] that the self could be different from the
aggregates,
And we know this because other sutras teach, “Form is not the self,” and so forth. (132)

Since other sutras teach “Form and feeling are not the self,
Discrimination and formations are not it,
And consciousness is not it, either,”
In short, the Buddha did not assert the aggregates to be the self. (133)

When the aggregates are called “self,” what is being referred to is the *collection* of the
aggregates,
And not the entities of the aggregates themselves.
[Since the self is just a mere collection,] it is not a protector, tamer, or witness—
Since the collection does not exist [as anything but a name], it cannot be [a real self]. (134)

[If the collection and the collection’s possessor were the same],
A mere collection of the chariot’s parts would be the chariot, and the same goes for the [parts
of] the self.
The sutras teach that the self is imputed in dependence upon the aggregates,
And therefore, the mere coming together of the aggregates is not the self. (135)

You may say, “The self is the shape” of the collection of its parts in proper order,
And since forms are what have shape, they would be the self.

However, the collection of mental [aggregates] would not be the self,
Because mind has no shape! (136)

For the appropriator to be the same as the appropriated would be illogical.
If they were, the actor and the object of its action would be the same.
If you think, "there is no actor but there are objects of action,"
That too is wrong, because without the former the latter cannot exist. (137)

The Mighty One taught that the self is imputed to exist in dependence upon
The six elements: earth, water, fire, air, consciousness, and space,
And the six supports for contact:
The eye, [ear, nose], and so forth. (138)

At other times, we impute the self's existence in dependence upon mind and mental events,
the Buddha definitively taught.
Therefore, the self is not different from the aggregates, nor is it the aggregates themselves, nor
is it the collection of them,
And therefore, no matter what its base of reference,
The mind thinking "self" is illogical. (139)

"When selflessness is realized, clinging to a permanent self is abandoned," you say.
But even you do not assert that [the permanent self] is the basis for apprehending "I".
Therefore, for you to say, "Realizing selflessness completely eliminates the view of self"
Is a fascinating statement, indeed. (140)

It would be like saying that someone who thought a hole in a wall was a snakes' nest
Could dispel their fear of snakes by saying,
"No, no elephants in there!"
Wow, would people laugh at that! (141)

The self does not exist with the aggregates as its support,
Nor do the aggregates exist with the self as their support.
If they were different from each other they could have such relationships
But since they are not different, such relationships are mere fabrications. (142)

We do not assert that the self has a body
Because there is no self, and therefore, there is nothing there to have anything!
If self and form were different, having a body would be like Devadatta having a cow,
And if they were the same, having a body would be like Devadatta having a body.
However, self and body are neither the same nor different. (143)

The body is not the self and the self does not possess the body
The body is not a support for the self and the self is not a support for the body.
Know that these apply to all five aggregates,

And so there are twenty views of the self. (144)

The vajra-like realization of selflessness
Destroys the apprehension of “self,” and at the same time,
The twenty lofty peaks of the mountainous view of the transitory collection
Are completely destroyed as well. (145)

Some assert the substantial essence of an individual,
Who is neither the same nor different from the aggregates, who is neither permanent nor
impermanent.
They assert that this individual is an object of knowledge perceived by the six consciousnesses
And that it forms the basis for the apprehension of “I”. (146)

Just as mind is not understood to be inexpressible in relation to body,
Things which exist are not inexpressible.
Therefore, if the self existed as a thing,
It, like mind, would not be inexpressible. (147)

For you, a “vase” does not exist as a thing.
Its essence is inexpressible in relation to the form [that is its basis of imputation].
Therefore, if the self were inexpressible in relation to the aggregates
It would not be understood to be something existent. (148)

You do not assert your own consciousness to be different from itself,
And you do assert it to be different from form and so forth.
An entity can only be seen to exist in these two ways [as the same as itself and as different from
something else]—
And therefore there is no self, because it does not have either of these qualities of an entity.
(149)

The person is dependently imputed

Therefore, the basis for apprehending “I” is not a thing.
It is not different from the aggregates, nor is it of the essence of the aggregates,
It is neither the aggregates’ support, nor their possessor—
It is only imputed to exist in dependence upon them. (150)

The chariot is not something different than its parts,
It is not the same as its parts, it does not possess its parts,
It does not depend on its part, the parts do not depend on it,
It is not the mere collection of its parts, nor is it the parts’ shape. (151)

If the mere collection of the parts were the chariot,
A heap of disassembled parts would still be a chariot.

And since there is no possessor of the parts, there can be no parts,
So the mere shape of the parts cannot be the chariot, either! (152)

If you say the parts each have the same shape they had when they were separate,
[Meaning that] when they are thought to be a chariot, their shape have not undergone any
change,
Then just as there was no chariot when they were disassembled,
So when assembled there is no chariot, either. (153)

If at the time there is a chariot
The wheels and so forth had different shapes than before they were assembled,
That difference would be perceivable.
Since it is not, the mere shape is not the chariot. (154)

Even in your tradition, the “collection” does not exist substantially at all,
And therefore, the shape [of the parts] is not the shape of the parts’ collection.
How could something like shape, suitable to be seen,
Exist in dependence upon something that does not exist at all? (155)

Just as you assert the “collection” to be unreal, a mere imputation,
So it is that in dependence upon unreal causes
Appear the images of results that are unreal by nature.
Know the arising of everything to be just like this. (156)

Thus it is illogical for the mind to [superimpose the existence of a] vase
Onto the form abiding in that way.
Since the form is unarisen, it does not exist.
Therefore, the vase cannot be the form’s shape. (157)

Although it is true that both in terms of suchness and conventional reality,
When analyzed, chariots and so forth can not be found to exist in any of the seven ways,
In the world itself where there is no analysis,
Things are imputed to exist in dependence upon their parts. (158)

Beings say, “That chariot has parts, it has sections,
That chariot can do things.”
Individuals, moreover, are known to be “appropriators”.
Therefore, do not destroy the relative appearances commonly known in the world. (159)

How could that which does not exist in any of the seven ways be said to exist?
The yogis find no such existence.
Through this realization, they easily engage in suchness,
And therefore, we must assert that the existence of things is only from the perspective of no
analysis. (160)

If the chariot itself does not exist,
Then since there is no possessor of the parts, the parts do not exist, either!
Just as if fire burned the chariot, its parts would also cease to exist,
So when the fire of knowledge burns the parts-possessor, it burns the parts as well. (161)

Similarly, the five aggregates, the six elements and the six sources of consciousnesses are
renowned in the world,
And in dependence upon them, the self is asserted to be their appropriator.
What are appropriated are the aggregates and so forth,
And the self is also asserted to be an agent of action. (162)

Since the self is not a thing, it is neither changing nor unchanging,
It is not born and it does not die,
It is neither permanent, impermanent, both, nor neither,
And it is neither the same nor different from the aggregates. (163)

Wandering beings constantly cling to some basis as being “me”,
And then conceive of other things as being “mine”.
The self that they have imagined and that is renowned in the world
Exists only when there is no analysis; the thought of it arises from bewilderment. (164)

If there is no actor, there is no object of action.
Therefore, if there is no self, there is nothing that could be said to belong to the self.
Seeing the emptiness of “me” and “mine”
The yogis are completely liberated. (165)

Using the same logic upon all existing things

Vases, blankets, tents, armies, forests, and garlands,
Trees, homes, pony-carts, inns and so forth—
Whatever things they may be, know that people claim them to exist in dependence upon their
parts,
[And do not examine people’s imputations], for even the Mighty One would not debate with
the world. (166)

The parts, qualities, desire, defining characteristics, firewood and so forth,
And the possessor of the parts, bearer of the qualities, desirous one, basis of characteristics,
fire and so forth—
When analyzed with the reasoning of the chariot, they are found not to exist in any of the
seven ways.
Only in a different way, through being renowned in the world, can they be said to exist at all.
(167)

Only if the cause produces a result is it a cause.
If no result is produced, there is no cause, because there is no reason for there to be one.
The result as well will only arise if there is a cause there to produce it;
So therefore, please tell me: which of these arises from which? Which one is present first, so
that the other can arise from it? (168)

If, as you assert, the cause meets the result when it is produced,
When meeting, they would be the same entity—cause and result would not be different.
[If they did not meet] and therefore were distinct things, causes and non-causes would be
equivalent.
Besides the two [possibilities of cause and result meeting, or not], there is no other concept of
how arising could happen. (169)

So how is it in your system? For if the cause does not produce a result, then there is no result,
And a cause without a result has no reason to be a cause, so it does not exist either.
Whereas we assert that both cause and result are illusory, and so,
Our tradition cannot be faulted and all the things of the world can also exist. (170)

“[Chandrakirti], does your refutation refute its object by meeting it, or not?
Whichever way you answer, will the same faults not apply to you?
When you enunciate your refutation, you only defeat your own position,
And so your refutation cannot refute anything. (171)

“[Chandrakirti], your specious reasoning defeats your very own words;
Without any logic you simply deny the existence of anything,
Therefore, you have spurned the assertions of the genuine ones,
For since you have no views of your own, you nihilistically attack the views of others.” (172)

[When you ask], “Does the refutation refute through meeting what it refutes, or not?”
The fault raised by your question definitely applies to your position [that things inherently exist]
But since we do not take that position
For such a consequence to come to us would be impossible. (173)

You will observe that all the particular circumstances of the sun, like an eclipse and so forth,
Are clearly visible in its reflection,
And while it is illogical that the reflection [arose through] the sun meeting it, or not,
In dependence upon [causes and conditions], the reflection, a mere convention, appears. (174)

Even though reflections are not real, that we can use them to make our faces beautiful proves
they have [a use].

Similarly, we see we can use the [middle way] reasonings to clean the face of our precise
knowledge.

Know that they cause realization of [our] thesis
Even though this function is actually untenable! (175)

For if the reason that causes understanding of the thesis actually existed,
And if the entity of the thesis to be understood existed, too,
The fault of the reasoning which asks, “Do they meet, or not?” would apply.
However, since they do not exist, the accusation you make is mere unsubstantiated opinion.
(176)

It is very easy to gain the understanding that entities do not inherently exist,
But there is nothing that can cause others to understand that things do inherently exist.
So why do you inferior logicians
Ensnare the world with your web [of concepts about true existence]? (177)

Other refutations of cause and result have been presented above—
They can also be employed as an answer to the opponent's question: “Does your refutation
meet its object or not?”
We do not have the fault of nihilistically attacking other views;
Rather, [our reasonings] have been explained, and all other [opponents'] positions should be
understood in their light. (178)

Since selflessness is what liberates beings,
The Buddha taught two types: the selflessness of individuals and of phenomena.
Then, in order to better help those to be tamed,
The teacher taught further divisions. (179)

The Categories of Emptiness established by Reasoning

In the extensive explanation of emptiness
There are sixteen divisions;
In the concise explanation [the Buddha] summarized these into four,
And these are explained to be the teachings of the mahayana. (180)

The Sixteen Emptinesses

Since it has no inherent nature,
The eye is empty of itself.
Ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind are the same way.
They are all described in a similar way. (181)

They do not last forever,
They do not remain for a short time and decay—
The eye and the rest that are the six inner ones
Are things that have no inherent nature at all.
This is called, “emptiness of the inner”. (182)

Since its nature is emptiness
Form is empty of form.
Sounds, odors, things that are tasted, what the body feels,
And mental phenomena are exactly the same! (183)

Form and so forth have no inherent nature:
This is called, "emptiness of the outer".
That both inner and outer have no inherent nature
Is called, "emptiness of the inner and outer". (184)

All phenomena have no inherent nature.
The wise ones call this, "emptiness".
It is asserted that this emptiness as well
Is empty of the essence of emptiness. (185)

The emptiness of what is called "emptiness"
Is the "emptiness of emptiness".
The Buddha taught it to counteract the clinging
Of the mind that thinks emptiness is a thing. (186)

Since they pervade everything without exception,
All sentient beings and the whole universe,
And since the immeasurables prove their infinitude,
The directions are given the name, "vast". (187)

All these ten directions' emptiness
Is called, "emptiness of the vast".
It was taught in order to reverse
Our clinging to the vast as being real. (188)

Because it is the supreme of all needs,
Nirvana is the ultimate.
Nirvana is empty of itself,
And this is the "emptiness of the ultimate". (189)

The Knower of the Ultimate
Taught the "emptiness of the ultimate"
To counteract the mind's tendency
To think that nirvana is a thing. (190)

Because they arise from conditions
The three realms are "composite", it is taught.
They are empty of themselves,
And this, the Buddha said, is the "emptiness of the composite". (191)

When arising, abiding, and cessation are not among its characteristics,
A phenomenon is “non-composite”.
These are empty of themselves,
And this is the “emptiness of the non-composite”. (192)

That to which extremes do not apply
Is expressed as being “beyond extremes”.
Its emptiness of its very self
Is explained to be the “emptiness of that which is beyond extremes”. (193)

Since it has no point when it began
Nor time when it will end, samsara
Is called, “that which has neither beginning nor end”.
Since it is free from coming and going, it is like a dream. (194)

Existence is void of existence—
This is the emptiness of
That which has neither beginning nor end.
It was definitively taught in [Nagarjuna’s] Treatise. (195)

To “abandon” something means
To throw it away or to get rid of it.
What should not be abandoned is
What one should never cast away from oneself—the Mahayana. (196)

What should not be abandoned
Is empty of its very self.
Since this emptiness is its nature,
It is called the “emptiness of what should not be abandoned.” (197)

The very essence of the composite and everything else
Was not created by the students, the solitary buddhas,
The bodhisattvas, or even the buddhas. (198)

Therefore, this essence of the composite and so forth
Is explained to be the true nature of phenomena.
It itself is empty of itself—
This is the “emptiness of the true nature”. (199)

The eighteen potentials, the six types of contact,
And from those six, the six types of feeling,
All that has form and all that does not,
The composite and the non-composite—these comprise all phenomena. (200)

All of these phenomena are void of themselves.
This is the “emptiness of all phenomena”.
The nonexistence of entities such as “suitable to be form” and so forth
Is the emptiness of defining characteristics. (201)

Form’s defining trait is that it is suitable to be form,
Feeling’s nature is experience,
Discrimination is what clings to attributes,
Formations move mind towards its objects. (202)

Awareness of individual objects
Is the defining characteristic of consciousness.
The aggregates are defined by suffering,
The potentials are asserted to be of the nature of a poisonous snake. (203)

The Buddha stated that the sources of consciousness
Are the doors from which [consciousness and suffering] arise.
The defining characteristic of something dependently arisen
Is that it arises due to the coming together of [causes and conditions]. (204)

Giving is the transcendent perfection of generosity,
Discipline is defined by the absence of mental torment,
Patience is the absence of anger,
Diligence is the absence of nonvirtue. (205)

Meditative concentration is that which draws inward,
Wisdom is the absence of attachment.
The above are expressed to be
The definitions of the six transcendent perfections. (206)

The meditations, the immeasurables,
And similarly the formless [meditations]_
The Perfectly Knowing One
Taught that these have the characteristic of being undisturbed. (207)

The definition of the thirty-seven branches of supreme enlightenment
Is that they lead to definite emergence from samsara.
The definition of emptiness
Is voidness because there is no focus. (208)

Signlessness is peace itself,
The definition of the third, [wishlessness],
Is the nonexistence of suffering and ignorance.

The definition of the doors of complete freedom is that they completely liberate. (209)

[The Buddha] taught that the strengths
Have the nature of incredible precision of [wisdom].
The Protector's fearlessnesses
Are of the essence of perfect stability. (210)

The perfectly discriminating awarenesses
Such as courage and so forth are characterized by being immeasurable.
To thoroughly accomplish the benefit of beings
Is the definition of great love. (211)

To perfectly protect those who suffer
Is the definition of great compassion.
Joy is when one rejoices in the happiness of others,
Equanimity is when attachment and aversion do not mix in [with one's mindstream]. (212)

The unique qualities of a Buddha
Are asserted to be eighteen in number.
Since nothing can take these away from the Teacher
They are defined by invulnerability. (213)

Primordial wisdom is omniscience itself—
It is defined as being direct cognition.
The others which are mere approximations
Are not asserted to be direct at all. (214)

All composite and non-composite phenomena
Have their own individual defining characteristics.
These are all empty of themselves—
This is the "emptiness of defining characteristics". (215)

The present does not remain;
The past and the future do not exist.
Wherever you look, you cannot see them,
So the three times are called, "imperceptible". (216)

The imperceptible is in essence empty of itself.
It is neither permanent and stable
Nor impermanent and fleeting—
This is the "emptiness of the imperceptible". (217)

Since entities arise from causes and conditions,
[They are mere] collections that have no essence.

This nonexistence of collections is empty of itself,
And this is the “emptiness of an essence in the nonexistence of entities”. (218)

In short, entities are everything included in the five aggregates.
These are empty of themselves, and this is the “emptiness of entities”. (219)

The Condensation into the Four Emptinesses

In short, non-entities are
All non-composite phenomena.
Non-entities are empty of themselves,
And this is the “emptiness of non-entities”. (220)

Phenomena’s true nature itself has no essence—
This is the “emptiness of the true nature”.
Since no one created it
It is called, “true nature”. (221)

Whether or not buddhas appear in the world,
The natural emptiness of all entities
Is proclaimed to be
The “other entity”. (222)

Other names for this are the “genuine limit” and “suchness”—
These are the “emptiness of the other entity”.
These [twenty emptinesses] were taught extensively
In [the sutras] of the transcendent perfection of wisdom. (223)

Conclusion

By [analyzing in] this way, the light of the bodhisattvas' intelligence illuminates the true nature
As if it were a magically transparent fruit lying in the palm of the hand.
The bodhisattvas realize that all three realms of existence are primordially unborn,
And conventionally, it can be said that they enter cessation. (224)

Though their minds are always resting in cessation,
They give rise to compassion for wandering beings who have no guardian.
Later, their minds are able to outshine
Both those born of the sugatas’ speech and the intermediate buddhas. (225)

With his broad white wings of the relative and suchness,
The king of swans soars ahead to lead the flock.
By the power of virtue’s wind
He crosses to the far shore of the ocean of the Victor’s supreme qualities. (226)

The Madhyamakavatara by Chandrakirti

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The Madhyamakavatara By Chandrakirti

Summary of The Major Arguments

1) Refutation of Self-production (v. 6:8-13)

- a) A refutation of self-production - from a cause with which the effect is identical**
 - i) Production accomplishes nothing
 - ii) Production is untenable
 - iii) Production is actually impossible; there is no point at which it might occur
 - iv) Seeds would be produced ad infinitum
- b) A refutation of the theory that causes and effects are identical in nature**
 - i) If causes and effects are identical in nature, they should not be observed at different moments
 - (1) The identity of cause and effect contradicts the samkya admission that causes modulate and change into their effects
 - (2) An identity of nature precludes differences of shape and so forth
 - ii) The fact that causes and effects are observed at different moments disproves their identity of nature
 - (1) The refutation itself
 - (2) If cause and effect are of the same nature, it follows that both terms should be equally perceptible or otherwise in their different phases
- c) Pointing out that there is no such thing as self-production on the level of ordinary experience**

2) Refutation of Production from Other Generally (v. 6:14-44)

- a) A refutation on the Ultimate Level by showing that if cause and effect are considered to be inherently other, there are unwanted consequences (v. 6:14-20)**
 - i) If cause and effect are considered to be inherently other
 - ii) Things could arise from things of a different type
 - iii) Things would arise without any predictability
 - iv) In terms of time of cause and effect
- b) A refutation by investigating the nature of an effect (v. 6:21)**
 - i) According to the fourfold ontological classification
- c) A refutation that ordinary experience validates production from other (v. 6:22-31)**
 - i) What can and cannot be invalidated by ordinary experience
 - ii) Inability to invalidate the ultimate true
 - iii) The only way empirical experience can invalidate our position is....?
 - iv) Thus the opinion of ordinary beings cannot prevail
- d) A refutation on the Relative level by showing that if cause and effect are considered to be inherently other, there are unwanted consequences (v. 6:32-44)**
 - i) Meditation of Aryas would destroy phenomena

- ii) Conventional truth would resist analysis
- iii) If something is established as true even conventionally, it cannot be disproved ultimately

e) Advantages of this refutation (v. 6:38-44)

- i) Freedom from extremes
- ii) Demonstrates connection between karmic cause and effect
- iii) Karmic cause and effect function even without the alaya
- iv) Effects are not produced ad infinitum
- v) Effects are not produced randomly

3) Refuting the Cittamatra Viewpoint of Production from Other (v. 6:45-97)

a) Refutation of consciousness devoid of outer objects (v. 6:48-55)

- i) Refutation of the dream example
- ii) Refutation of the example of black lines
- iii) Analogy of deluded mental consciousness
- iv) Analogy of deluded sense consciousness
- v) Analogy of deluded experience in meditation
- vi) Analogy of deluded visual perception

b) Refutation that consciousness arises in the absence of an object due to the potential of latent tendencies in the mind (v. 6:56-61)

- i) Refutation of inherently existent potential

c) Refutation that inert objects manifest by the ripening of habitual propensities latent in the consciousness (v. 6:62-71)

- i) Absurd consequences
- ii) Inconclusive arguments

d) Refutation of dependent nature as inherently existent (v. 6:72-83)

- i) Refutation of reflexive awareness as its proof
 - (1) It is not established by inference
 - (2) There is no direct evidence

e) Why the Cittamatra View was taught (v. 6:84-93)

- i) The correct interpretation of the sutras that teach Mind Only
- ii) Sutras that teach the Cittamatra view are expedient not ultimate

4) Refutation of Production from both Self & Other (v. 6:98)

- a) Already refuted separately
- b) This position is simply untenable

5) Refutation of Production from no cause (v 6:99-103)

a) General refutation of production from no cause

- i) If true, then effects would exist constantly
- ii) If true, then effects would arise from anything
- iii) If true, then nothing would ever arise

b) Specific refutation of belief in no after life

- i) Lack of evidence
- ii) Contradicts the ultimate status of things

6) Conclusion – Dependent Arising (v. 6:104-119)

7) Refuting the Self as different from the aggregates (v. 6:120-125)

a) Disproving the self as a permanent entity

8) Refuting the Self as identical with the aggregates (v. 126-141)

a) Revealing contradictions, unwanted consequences:

- i) The self would be a simple nonentity
- ii) It would be pointless to try to accomplish nirvana
- iii) The karmic principal of cause and effect would be inadmissible

b) Actual refutations

- i) Performed actions would have no effect
- ii) One would encounter the effect of actions that one had not performed
- iii) This belief contradicts scripture
- iv) This belief contradicts reason

c) Absurd consequences

- i) If the aggregates were the referent of the notion of “I” upon the realization of no-self, existent phenomena would vanish
- ii) If the aggregates existed, the self could never be refuted and one could never overcome the afflictions

d) Clarifying what the Buddha meant by saying the aggregates are the referent for the notion of the Self

- i) The sutra asserts the negation of an imputed, permanent self
- ii) The self is not the mere gathering of the aggregates
- iii) The self is conceptually imputed in dependence upon the aggregates
- iv) One must eradicate the referent of the innate ego-clinging

9) Refutation of additional beliefs about the Self (v. 6:142-149)

a) Refuting the idea that the self is the possessor of the aggregates

b) Refuting the person as something indescribable

- i) If the self exists it is inexpressible
- ii) If the self is inexpressible, it cannot be an existent thing
- iii) If it lacks two properties common to all things it is not a real entity

10) Conclusion (v. 6:150-178)

a) Presentation of the Self as dependently imputed using the simile of the chariot (v. 6:150-165)

b) Extending the logic to all existing things (v. 6:166-178)

INTRODUCTION to the MIDDLE WAY

Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara

with commentary by
Jamgön Mipham

TRANSLATED BY THE
PADMAKARA TRANSLATION GROUP



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Translators' Introduction

THIS BOOK is the result of a translation project that grew out of a series of teachings on Chandrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara* given by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche in Dordogne, France, in the course of four summer seminars in 1996 and from 1998 to 2000. Although the exposition was based on a commentary composed by the fifteenth-century Sakya master Gorampa Sonam Senge, when a translation of the root verses was called for, it was specified that it should be made according to the commentary of the nineteenth-century Nyingma master Jamgön Ju Mipham. Since the translation of Chandrakirti required constant reference to an authoritative source, we decided to make a complete translation of Mipham Rinpoche's commentary as well and to offer it here as a key to understanding the general meaning of the root text.

Madhyamika is challenging.¹ It is many-faceted and, at first, hard to understand. Throughout its long history, it has been variously interpreted, and dissension has given rise to systems and subsystems. In India and Tibet, it has been the object of intensive study within an elaborate and sophisticated educational system redolent of the scholasticism of medieval Europe. Despite its apparent difficulty, it is nevertheless considered, at least in Tibet, to be central to the correct understanding of Mahayana Buddhism, and this importance is perhaps reflected in the fact that, down the centuries, it has been the focus of fierce debate between scholars and schools. The discussion has often turned on difficult points of logic and epistemology; and it is unfortunate that, especially in more recent centuries, this has not infrequently degenerated into acrimony and the hardening of positions along sectarian lines.²

A first encounter with this material can prove disheartening, even

worrying, given that Chandrakirti tells us that liberation from *samsara* is impossible without a correct understanding of *Madhyamika*. Its literary expression, whether in the translations of traditional texts or in the expositions of Western scholars, is dry and daunting and often presupposes a knowledge that the general reader and practitioner does not possess or have time to acquire. Perhaps one reason for the difficulties encountered is that, in the study of *Madhyamika*, the preliminary steps are often passed over too hastily, and one finds oneself provided with answers long before one has had time to get the questions clear. One may well turn for help to the latest doctoral thesis, for example, only to find oneself submerged in difficult and abstruse technicalities, the sense of which is not always evident. Philosophical reflection, on the other hand, is important and interesting only to the extent that its practical relevance is perceived. And in the case of *Madhyamika*, the essential points are easy to miss; one so often fails to see the wood for the trees.

The products of Western scholarship are, to be sure, impressive, and it is true that the academic establishment, especially in America, has seen an increase, over the last thirty years, in the numbers of students of Buddhist philosophy who are themselves committed and practicing Buddhists.³ Nevertheless it is still possible to find scholars, oblivious or indifferent to the living tradition, who are happy to repeat the age-old misconception that *Madhyamika* is a species of nihilism, some even going so far as to say that it is incompatible with the pursuit of spiritual values. In any case, the learned disquisitions of academics do not as a rule provide the kind of help most needed by aspirants on the path. So it is worth remembering that with *Madhyamika*, as with all other aspects of the Buddhist teachings, the key to understanding is not normally to be found in an unaided reading of texts. Experience shows, at least in the case of the group of people attending the summer teachings in Dordogne, that the easiest and most effective kind of introduction is to be found in the oral exposition of a qualified master.

Fortunately for us, we had in Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche a scholar as well as a talented and entertaining teacher. Perfectly qualified in the subject, he had studied for years at the feet of some of the greatest living exponents of Tibetan Buddhism. He was able to take us by the hand and show us the essential meaning of *Madhyamika*, pointing out its vital relevance to our lives and to our spiritual aspirations.

He succeeded in drawing a large crowd of curious listeners, presented them with a difficult subject for which they had no preparation whatever, and transformed them into a class of enthusiastic students.

Perhaps the secret of his success was that, in slowly introducing his audience to a difficult text and the unusual, sometimes complicated ideas that it contained, he constantly reminded his listeners of the essential import and relevance of the *Madhyamika* teaching. He made the point on several occasions that, now that the period of Buddhism's introduction to the West is almost over, it is of great importance to consolidate and deepen the correct study and practice of the Doctrine according to an authentic tradition. Of first importance in this procedure must be the establishment of the view, the correct understanding of the nature of phenomena: the objects and situations that surround us in our daily lives and the thoughts and emotions that occupy and agitate our minds. The view, as presented in the *Madhyamika* texts, is the indispensable foundation of a stable and fruitful spiritual development. From the outset, it gives a clear idea of where the practice should lead and is a powerful tool for dealing with doubts and difficulties. Considerable intellectual effort is certainly required, but it leads to solid, tangible results. A correct understanding of the view imparts confidence and independence; it is like creating a suit of armor for oneself. It helps in the development of a clear-sighted, enduring devotion toward the teacher and the teachings, immune to whatever vagaries and difficulties may occur.

Another reason for studying the classic philosophical texts, we were told, is that they provide a firm criterion of doctrinal authenticity. There is a story that once when Atisha was in Tibet, he received news of the death of the master Maitripa. He was deeply grieved, and on being questioned about the reasons for his sorrow, he replied that Buddhism was in decline in India and that everywhere there was syncretism and confusion. Until then, Atisha continued, there had been only two masters in the whole of India, Maitripa and himself, capable of discerning the correct teaching from the doctrines and practices of the reviving Hindu schools. The time is sure to come, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche commented, and perhaps it is here already, when there will be an analogous situation in the West. Only the correct establishment of the view will enable one to find one's way through the religious confusion of the modern West and to distinguish authentic Buddhism from the

New Age "self-help" versions that are already taking hold.

Furthermore, a correct understanding of Madhyamika provides an excellent foundation and brings into focus the entire range of Mahayana practice. The view is none other than the absolute aspect of bodhicitta, indissociable from compassion, its relative aspect. The one cannot be perfected without the other. Compassion can never be mastered without the view of emptiness; wisdom can never be brought to completion without the perfection of compassion. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche remarked significantly that just as the practice of guru yoga is said to be the life of the Vajrayana, *lojong*, the mind training, is the heart of Madhyamika.

Given the presence of Mipham Rinpoche's commentary, there is no need here for a detailed introduction to the *Madhyamakavatara* itself. The reader may, however, be interested by the following reflections, the aim of which is to give a general summary of Madhyamika in terms of its essential meaning and its historical development in India and Tibet.

Chandrakirti and the Madhyamakavatara

Although Chandrakirti lived approximately five centuries after Nagarjuna, that is, roughly halfway through the period in which their tradition was extant in India,⁴ the *Madhyamakavatara* is often used as a convenient text with which to embark on the study of Madhyamika. Of the two elements that make up the treatise's title, *Madhyamaka* means "middle" or "middle way" and is in fact a reference to the *Madhyamakakarikas*, or *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, composed by Nagarjuna. *Avatara* means literally "to descend" or "to go down into." It is cognate with the Sanskrit word *avatar* and is to be found in such titles as the *Lankavatara-sutra* (*The Sutra of the Journey into Lanka*) and the *Bodhicaryavatara* (*The Entry into the Ways of Enlightenment*) by Shantideva. The title of Chandrakirti's text therefore means "an entrance or introduction to (Nagarjuna's stanzas on) the Middle Way." It is what Tibetan scholarship defines as a general meaning commentary and provides a conspectus or summary of the overall meaning of Nagarjuna's great masterpiece. The *Madhyamakavatara* may therefore be contrasted with Chandrakirti's later work, the *Prasannapada*, which also comments on Nagarjuna's text but in much greater detail. In fact, although the *Madhyamakavatara* is actually of greater length than the

karikas, its presentation of emptiness is actually simpler and less extensive in terms of subject matter and demonstration. Chandrakirti discusses fewer arguments but at greater length, in a manner more adapted to the beginner.⁵

The *Madhyamakavatara* is, therefore, a good place to start. Moreover, in addition to providing an accessible introduction to the teaching of Nagarjuna, it also gives a wider overview of the Madhyamika teaching as this developed in the centuries that followed him. Chandrakirti takes into consideration, for example, the position of the Chittamatra school, the other great stream of the Mahayana tradition, which came into prominence after Nagarjuna's time. And following the later division between the Prasangika and Svatantrika approaches to the Madhyamika dialectic, it was the Prasangika teaching of Chandrakirti that came to be accepted by all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism as the summit of Buddhist tenet systems.

Although the main theme of the *Madhyamakavatara* is the presentation of wisdom according to the view of Nagarjuna, it is important to advert to other aspects of the text, which, though subsidiary, are also important. It should be noted, for instance, that the dialectic is presented as an integral part of the Mahayana, the Buddhism of the great vehicle. At the beginning of the text, Chandrakirti emphasizes that the seed and accompaniment of the realization of wisdom is compassion, the desire to release beings from suffering. The twin aspects of ultimate and relative bodhicitta are never separate. Moreover, the exposition of the view is set within the framework of the ten *paramitas* and these are correlated with the ten Bodhisattva grounds of realization or *bhumis*. Finally, buddhahood itself is made the subject of a detailed presentation at the conclusion of the text.

The Origins of Madhyamika and the Buddha's Silence

When beginning the study of a complicated subject, it is often helpful to isolate a comparatively simple key idea that can provide a vantage point from which to view the whole terrain and that might serve later on as a landmark as one tries to thread one's way through the subsequent labyrinth. As suggested by the Indian scholar T. R. V. Murti and corroborated by Mipham Rinpoche in the introductory section of his

commentary on the *Madhyamakalakara*, one such idea is to be found in the characteristic attitude of the Buddha when confronted by a certain kind of question. He remained silent, refusing to answer or to express an opinion. These questions, usually fourteen in number, are mentioned on several occasions in the Pali canon. They are of a specifically metaphysical character and deal with subjects that of their nature lie beyond the possibility of common experience and empirical verification. On most occasions, they are posed by the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta and are as follows:

Whether the universe has a beginning, or not, or both, or neither.

Whether the universe has an end, or not, or both, or neither.⁶

Whether the Buddha exists after death, or not, or both, or neither.

Whether the self is identical with the body or different from it.

To each of his questions, Vacchagotta receives no answer or else, more pointedly, a negative reply to all four alternatives. He is thus faced with another, more fundamental question: Why is it that the Buddha refuses to be drawn into a discussion about such apparently fundamental topics, on which other thinkers had been more than ready to express their views? The silence of the Buddha has traditionally been interpreted as profoundly significant. Correctly understood, it constitutes a seminal anticipation of the *Madhyamika*, in both meaning and method. It was expressive of a profound insight of the Buddha, and its subtle implications were to be fully elucidated in the writings of Nagarjuna. Conversely, the *Madhyamika* is to be understood as the exploration and systematic expression of the Buddha's silence.

The fourteen unanswered questions are typical examples of the fundamental attempt, present in most philosophies, to go beyond the data of the phenomenal world in order to discover some kind of transcendent ground or reality that will explain the nature of things as they appear to us and the reason for their existence. Unlike commonsense reflection, which bases itself on concrete evidence and is interested not so much in what things are but in how they work, metaphysics tries to find out the reality behind appearances. And it is evident that in an inquiry that extends beyond the field of phenomenal appearance, there can be no appeal to the objective data provided

by the senses. The only possible course is deduction, reasoning from effect to cause. And since the conclusions arrived at cannot be verified empirically, their plausibility must rest exclusively on the quality of the arguments employed and on logical coherence alone. This kind of activity has occupied the minds of philosophers for thousands of years and represents a deeply rooted tendency of the human mind, which yearns for knowledge and the satisfaction and sense of security that this brings. Faced with the mystery of the cosmos, the spirit naturally tries to interpret what it encounters; and where knowledge is lacking, it will fill the void with speculation or myth. When one surveys even the little that is known of philosophical and religious history, and the successive attempts put forward to account for the world and our experience of it, one cannot but marvel at the sheer inventiveness of the human imagination.

Of course, in view of the fact that reason and logic seem to work well enough in the context of day-to-day existence, one is naturally inclined to think that, given a sound basis in experience and adopting a careful method of argument, it ought to be possible to reason one's way to conclusions that, even in the absence of material evidence, *must* be true. But here we encounter a paradox, which points to the precarious nature of such an assumption. At least on this point, the eighteenth-century European philosopher Immanuel Kant is in full agreement with Nagarjuna and the Buddha himself: the use of pure reason extended beyond the empirical sphere results not in knowledge but in antinomies, that is, contradiction. It is a fact that equally plausible and coherent arguments may be constructed upon the same premise only to arrive at diametrically opposite conclusions. One philosopher will propound an attractive thesis to show that the cosmos had a beginning in time; another, with equally persuasive reasons, will prove the contrary. No one has ever succeeded in inventing a rational philosophy that is wholly incontrovertible. A procedure that appears to give us truth in fact produces only theory and opinion. And since, where metaphysics is concerned, verification is ruled out, there being no objective evidence available to compel the assent of all parties, it is clear that, in such a procedure, conflict between contrasting opinions is not only inevitable but endless. The problem, it seems, lies not in the quality of this or that line of reasoning but in the very constitution of reason itself. We are thus led to the possibly unpalatable conclusion that any attempt to

express the transcendent in the empirical terms of thought and word cannot but fail. It produces illusion and not knowledge. It is in the light of such reflections that the Buddha's silence is best interpreted.

In other passages in the *suttas*, where the Buddha refers to his meeting with Vacchagotta, he makes it clear that the problem lay not in the difficulty of the subject but in the very nature of the question and the expectation that it implied. Vacchagotta was looking for either an affirmative or a negative reply. But what if the truth lies in neither of these alternatives? To reply according to the terms laid down by the questioner cannot but falsify the issue and make matters worse. The question "Is the self identical with the body?" demands an answer of yes or no. Yet neither of these answers is true, for there is no such thing as a self. Reflecting on this, Vasubandhu observed, "Since such a self is totally nonexistent, how could the Buddha have declared whether it was the same or different from the body? It is as though Vacchagotta had asked: 'Are the hairs of the tortoise bristly or smooth?'"

It is clear that the encounter between the Buddha and Vacchagotta was dominated by the latter's incapacity. Vacchagotta had posed a question in terms such that no true answer could be returned. A question framed according to the categories of ordinary experience demands an answer similarly expressed. But when the inquiry itself concerns matters that transcend experience, it is clear that silence is the only possible response. If further communication is to take place, it is first necessary to bring the questioner to the understanding that the question itself is faulty and must not be pursued in its present form. This is the purpose of the Buddha's silence, and this, as we shall see, is precisely the function of the *Madhyamika* dialectic.

When at the end of their interview the disconsolate Vacchagotta asked whether the Buddha had, after all, any theory of his own, the latter replied: "The *Tathagata*, O Vaccha, is free of all theories. But this, Vaccha, does the *Tathagata* know: the nature of form, of how form arises and passes away, the nature of feeling (and so on through the five aggregates). Therefore the *Tathagata* has attained liberation and is free from attachment, inasmuch as all imaginings, or agitations, or false notions, concerning a self and anything pertaining to a self have gone, faded, ceased, have been given up and abandoned." It would be easy to misread this passage as a simple rejection of metaphysics and a slightly condescending admonition to stick to the simple practice of

self-scrutiny and attentive living. But the message is much more profound than this. It is precisely because the Buddha does not immerse himself in theories about phenomena that he is able to discern their true nature, and it is this very discernment that confers liberation. To know things as they truly are is to free oneself from their tyranny. On the other hand, to elaborate theories about phenomena is not only to become engrossed in endless cogitation and verbiage; it is to veil the nature of phenomena even more and to fall even further beneath their spell. One becomes ever more entangled in what can only be productive of further frustration and sorrow.

"To hold that the world is eternal," the Buddha declared, "or to hold that it is not, or to agree to any other of the propositions that you adduce, O Vaccha, is the jungle of theorizing, the wilderness of theorizing, the tangle of theorizing, the bondage and the shackles of theorizing, attended by ill, distress, perturbation, and fever. It does not lead to detachment, passionlessness, tranquillity, and peace, to knowledge, and to the wisdom of Nirvana. This is the danger I perceive in these views, which makes me discard them all."⁸

It is important to assimilate this passage in its entirety. For although it expresses an unambiguous rejection of futile theorizing, it nevertheless indicates a truth that lies beyond the ordinary mind and becomes accessible precisely when theories are laid aside. It points, in other words, to a reality that transcends ordinary thought processes but is nevertheless still knowable. To say that it is possible to know something that is beyond thought carries the important, indeed astonishing implication that there is in the mind a dimension that in the vast majority of living beings is wholly concealed, the existence of which is not even suspected. As the Buddha says, it is passionless, tranquil, peaceful; it is the knowledge and wisdom of nirvana. This, the teachings say, is the true nature of the mind, which is discovered and actualized in enlightenment. Nagarjuna suggests⁹ that it is a state so subtle and so profound that in the first moments after his awakening, the Buddha remained silent and declined to teach, perceiving that there was little chance of ordinary beings' understanding him. Moved by the entreaty of Brahma Sahampatti, the Buddha, as we know, relented and began his compassionate mission for those who might be trained. And in words that resonate down the centuries, he declared: "Open to them are the doors to deathlessness, O Brahma. *Let those who*

have ears throw off their old beliefs."

These old beliefs undoubtedly refer not only to the belief in the self but to all theories and constructions of the ordinary mind, the inventions of philosophy and of religion, which operate according to the procedures of affirmation and negation and the two extreme viewpoints of existence and nonexistence. No one, so the Buddha and the Madhyamika affirm, can hold to either of these views and hope to be free. It is necessary to analyze such false trails and, having discovered their inner contradiction, to abandon them. Only then can one progress beyond samsara. When, in a meeting that Nagarjuna mentions explicitly in the *karikas*,¹⁰ Karyayana asked the Buddha for a teaching about the correct view, the latter replied that ordinary beings are used to thinking dualistically, in terms of affirmation or negation. In dealing with themselves and the phenomena that surround them, they think and speak in terms of "it is" and "it is not." They take things and situations to be "really real" or "really not real." They cling to them, act accordingly, and wander through the transient joys and sorrows of samsara, high and low, in heaven, hell, or any of the other six realms. But for those who have wisdom and correctly perceive the truth of how phenomena arise, abide, and pass away, the Buddha said, there is no "is" and no "is not." "That things exist, O Karyayana, is one extreme. That they do not exist is another. But I, the Tathagata, accept neither 'is' nor 'is not,' and I declare the truth from the Middle Position."

This position, this "Madhyamika," is the Buddha's Middle Way. On earlier occasions, it had been formulated ethically, as the path of moderation between the extremes of indulgence and excessive asceticism. Here it is expressed "philosophically" as the middle position between eternalism and nihilism, affirmation and negation. Confronted by Vacchagotta, the Buddha remained silent, refusing to involve himself in the inept attempts of philosophy and religion to reach beyond the world. This is exactly the attitude of Madhyamika. On the issue of transcendent reality, it adopts the Buddha's reserve and does not formulate a position. Rather, by a systematic analysis, whereby every possible position is exposed as false, the busy, restless mind (which, in failing to recognize its own nature, fails also to recognize the true status of phenomena) is reduced to silence. Conceptual construction must be stilled if the perfection of wisdom is to manifest; the mind must be brought to the Buddha's silence for lib-

eration to be possible.

The Development of the Madhyamika School

In the final stanza of the *karikas*, Nagarjuna wrote: "I bow to Gaurama, who out of compassion set forth the sacred Dharma for the rejection of all theories." The self-confessed mission of Madhyamika is to undermine the misrepresentations of philosophy and religion, the fruit of the discursive mind's deep-rooted tendency to elaborate theories in an attempt to explain phenomena, both of the outer world of things and the inner world of thought and emotion. In the hands of Nagarjuna, it is primarily a critique of other Buddhist tenet systems and secondarily, by implication, of the Hindu schools of ancient India. In the centuries that followed the Buddha's passing away, perfectly valid attempts were made to synthesize his teachings and facilitate their practice. But all of them, from the Madhyamika point of view, fall short to a greater or lesser degree, on the one all-important issue: the ultimate status of phenomena. All of them, in one way or another, affirm something to which they attribute real and ultimate existence.

In itself, therefore, Madhyamika is not a philosophy so much as a critique of philosophy. Its task is to examine the attempts of reason to give an account, in terms of thought and word, of "the way things really are" and to demonstrate its failure, showing that it is not in words and concepts that the nature of reality can be expressed. In this respect (but in this respect only) Madhyamika has been accurately compared with the philosophy of Kant.

In being a system of pure criticism, Madhyamika has no positive content of its own. Its evolution therefore cannot be assessed in terms of doctrinal elaboration and change. The history of Madhyamika is consequently no more than the account of the system's relationship with other philosophies. This is why the presentations of Madhyamika found in texts like the Wisdom chapter of Shantideva's *Bodhicaryavatara* and in the *Madhyamakavatara* itself, instead of being formal philosophical expositions, consist of a list of arguments with which other systems have been refuted. As Murti has observed, a study of the Madhyamika "shows the stresses and strains to which philosophy was subject in India down the ages."¹¹

The development of the Madhyamika system, from its appearance

in the second century C.E. till the disappearance of Buddhism from India in the twelfth, falls into three or four periods. The first is that of systematic exposition, achieved by Nagarjuna and his immediate disciple Aryadeva. The second stage (in the course of the sixth century) is marked by the appearance of two subschools, or rather tendencies, the Prasāṅgika and Svatantrika, occasioned by the divergence of the masters Buddhapaṇita and Bhāvaviveka in their approach to debate procedure and other connected issues. This period was brought to an end, or rather another period was inaugurated, about a hundred years afterward by Chandrakīrti, who, in defending Buddhapaṇita and refuting Bhāvaviveka, endeavored to establish *prasaṅga*, or consequential arguments, as the normative procedure in Madhyamika debate when defining the view. As we shall see, this entailed a quite specific attitude both to the position and the role of logic in such procedures as well as to a presentation of the conventional truth. Finally, the last important development in the Madhyamika, and of Indian Buddhist philosophy generally, was brought about by the great abbot Shāntarakṣita and his disciple Kamalaśīla. This consisted of a synthesis of the two great tenet systems of the Mahāyāna, namely, the Madhyamika and Chittamatra (Yogācāra), as ways of presenting the ultimate and relative truth respectively. It was Shāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla who established the Buddhist sūtra teachings in Tibet in the eighth century, and it was their brand of Madhyamika that was to prevail there until the translation of Chandrakīrti's work by Paṇṣap Nyima Drak and others at the beginning of the twelfth century. Long extinct in its country of origin, Madhyamika has remained a living tradition in Tibetan Buddhism until the present day.

Nagarjuna and Aryadeva

Nagarjuna, the founder of Madhyamika, "elucidated the sūtras of ultimate meaning through the sheer strength of his own genius, without recourse to other commentaries."^{*} His work marks a new departure in the history of Buddhism. His name is inseparably linked with the teachings of the Mahāyāna and especially with the Prajñāparamita sū-

^{*} See Longchen Yeshe Dorje, *Treasury of Precious Qualities* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001), pp. 257–58.

tras, which, according to tradition, he recovered from the land of the Nagas where they had been preserved from decline until a time more propitious for their effective propagation. The Prajñāparamita literature is enormous; Madhyamika may be regarded as its essential and systematic expression.

Nagarjuna is said to have been a prolific writer, and his total output was no doubt far greater than the works that have survived and can be attributed to him with certainty. Following the conventions of Tibetan scholarship, his writings are collected into three main groups: the texts on reasoning (*rigs tshegs*), the collection of hymns (*bstod tshegs*), and the collection of discourses (*gtam tshegs*). Of these, the most important in the present context are the six texts of reasoning. These are the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikas*, or *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*; the *Yuktisāstika*, sixty stanzas dealing with the principles of logic; the *Shūnyatāsaṁptati*, seventy stanzas on the doctrine of emptiness; the *Vigrahāvyaivartanī*, a defense in verse of the Madhyamika method and a refutation of objections; the *Vaidalya-sūtra*, a prose work delimiting the use of logical categories; and the *Vyavaharasiḍḍhi*, which is a discussion of the conventional truth.

Nagarjuna's masterpiece, the work in which he laid the foundations of his system, is of course the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikas*. Here, his principal task is to analyze and undermine the categories and assumptions implicit in the earlier Buddhist tenet systems. By this is meant the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika schools, which, although they differ in certain important respects, display, from Nagarjuna's point of view, the same kinds of faults and may in the present context be grouped together as the Abhidharmika system. In brief, Nagarjuna represents these earlier schools as having misunderstood, or only partially understood, the meaning of the Buddha's teaching.

When, as we have seen, the Buddha heeded the entreaty of Brahma and began to teach, he did not, of course, immediately set forth the truth in all its purity according to the level of his own understanding. He realized that this would have been far beyond the capacity of his hearers. Out of compassion, he set forth a doctrine suited to their powers, which was designed to draw them onto the path and foster their spiritual growth. His first task was to wean them away from the gross, naïve understanding of worldly beings: their unquestioning belief in the personal self and the reality of substances—physical objects ex-

tended in space and psychic experiences extended in time. He therefore spoke about the five aggregates, the six senses, and their objects and associated consciousnesses, showing, for example, how the human person can be analyzed without residue into form, feelings, perceptions, conditioning factors, and consciousness. Despite the ingrained tendency of all sentient beings to assume the existence of a self and to cling to it, analysis shows that, no matter how hard one searches, no self can ever be found. In the same way, by observing the impermanence of physical things and mental events, one can come to an understanding that phenomena, however solid and unchanging they may appear, are in a state of constant, momentary flux. On the basis of this insight, one can begin to dissolve the attachment one has to things and loosen the fetters that bind one in the round of suffering.

In creating the first synthesis of the Buddha's teaching, the Abhidharmika schools took his teaching about the aggregates and so on at its face value. Of course, they correctly grasped his primary message, namely, the denial of the personal self, but insofar as the Buddha had indeed spoken of the aggregates, *ayatanas*, and so forth, they understood him to imply that these were real. On this basis, incorporating the ideas of gross and subtle impermanence, but overlooking the Buddha's admittedly less frequent but nevertheless significant statements that the aggregates and so forth are themselves illusory, they elaborated a theory of really existing, partless particles of matter and instants of consciousness. And it was within this framework that they understood the doctrine of the two truths. Broadly speaking, the relative or conventional truth refers to the gross, physical objects, together with the thoughts and emotional states that we encounter in waking life, while the ultimate truth consists of the momentary but irreducible particles of matter and instants of consciousness. As a method for undermining naïve commonsense assumptions, the Abhidharmika embodies a profound and sophisticated tool.

Nevertheless, Nagarjuna's primary objective in the *karikas* is to show that the Abhidharmika synthesis is fatally flawed and in fact misrepresents the Buddha's meaning. Step by step, the various categories (production, movement, the sense powers, aggregates, elements, and so on), so crucial to the coherent structure of the Abhidharmika tenets, are relentlessly dismantled and shown to be empty of real existence, while the arguments adduced to support belief in them are refuted as

untenable absurdities. Chandrakirti comments that the twenty-seven chapters of the *karikas* are in fact a continuous, ongoing debate. Each successive chapter embodies an answer to a possible objection that could be raised in defense of the position demolished in the preceding section.

It is obviously not possible to discuss the *karikas* in any great detail here, but it is of some interest to review, however cursorily, a few of the text's most salient features, since this throws light on the work of Chandrakirti and the later tradition generally. In what was to become the standard procedure in Madhyamika literature, the work begins with a discussion about causation. It is, however, important to bear in mind that, in this context, causes are understood exclusively in a substantial or material sense.¹² The discussion, in other words, is about how things come into being and evolve.

Nagarjuna begins by showing that, appearances to the contrary, the everyday notion that real effects are produced by real causes is mistaken; it cannot possibly be true. Causes and effects, so much a feature of existence, are, he says, essentially definable only in terms of mutual dependence; they are not real things in themselves. To say that something has real existence in itself is to say that it is an autonomous, circumscribed entity, separate in all respects from other things. This is, as a matter of fact, how we habitually view things in the ordinary transactions of everyday life. We feel that we are self-contained individuals and relate to other self-contained individuals. We encounter objects, some pleasant, some unpleasant, which we try to acquire or avoid accordingly. More or less complicated situations arise, which themselves seem individual and real. We are happy and we suffer. To the uncritical observer, life consists of blocks; it is a collection of individual, discrete realities. But this is an illusion. In its anxiety for reassurance and security, the mind refutes situations and things, which it clings to and manipulates in its hopeless quest for lasting satisfaction. In order to expose this procedure as the false trail that it is, Nagarjuna relentlessly demonstrates the inconsistencies inherent in what ordinarily passes for common sense; he shows that the normal "worldview" is in fact riddled with contradiction. It is important to understand, however, that he is not trying to deny our experience of production and change, or of anything else in the phenomenal world. That would be absurd; the world-process is all around us constantly, undeniably. The objects of his critique are

not the empirical facts of existence that inescapably appear to us but the assumptions that we make about these facts. We think that real things give rise to real things; that real things come into being and pass away. But this notion of real, individual, self-contained entity is something that we impose on the raw material of experience. It is a figment of our imagination; in fact there are no real things in this sense. Self-contained entities can never change and can never enter into relation with other entities. The notions of coming into being or passing away cannot be meaningfully applied to them. Thus the first stanza announces: "No things are produced anywhere at any time, either from themselves, from something else, from both, or from neither." The mere fact of "coming into being" excludes real entity and vice versa. The true status of the phenomena that we experience is not, therefore, to be found in their supposed real entity, but in their relatedness, their interdependence with all other phenomena. This is Nagarjuna's interpretation of the doctrine of dependent arising, understood not in the sense of a temporal sequence (as in the Hinayana interpretation of the doctrine of the twelvefold chain of dependent production), but in the *essential dependence* of phenomena. This interdependence undermines the notion of individual, intrinsic reality in things; it is the very antithesis of "thingness." Phenomena, being the interplay of interdependent factors, are unreal. Their interdependence (*pratityasamutpada*) is their emptiness (*śūnyata*) of inherent existence.

Production or change, in the sense of the inner transformation of things, gives way, in the second chapter, to a consideration of change in the sense of movement. Compared with the more or less subtle processes involved in physical change, one might have thought that so obvious a fact as physical movement would be easy enough to describe. And yet, by a process of ingenious arguments, Nagarjuna shows that this too is beyond rational explanation. By a minute examination of the categories of space traversed, space yet to be traversed, moving body, and so forth—understood as real according to the common view of things—he demonstrates that reason is powerless to account for even the simplest of events, the displacement of a thing from one location to another. The whole of the second chapter of the *kārikas* is an astonishing and disconcerting performance, and the reader is forced to acknowledge that what had previously been taken as the straightforward certainties of existence is nothing but a tissue of naïve and ulti-

mately untenable assumptions. The entire worldview of common sense is shown to be completely incoherent.

If we follow Nagarjuna's arguments carefully, we can see—we are unable to deny—that they make sense. Nagarjuna is saying that if we think that the things of the world (ourselves included) are as they appear, self-existent and solid, we are not in touch with reality; we are living in a world of mirages. Phenomena appear to be real, but they are insubstantial, dreamlike. Given, however, that our perceptions are commonly shared, we might be tempted to dismiss Nagarjuna's ideas as no more than a curious paradox with little relevance to the facts of experience. Life, after all, goes on regardless of the theories of philosophers. Nagarjuna could be right, we may say, but since we all concur in our dreamlike experiences, why question them? What, finally, is wrong with the way we perceive things?

The answer is that there is nothing "wrong" with it; the issue is not a moral one. We are not condemned for being in samsara. To believe that phenomena are solid, real entities is not a "sin"; it is only a mistake. But it is a mistake with unfortunate consequences. In his first teaching following his enlightenment, the Buddha did not speak, though he could have done so, about the dreamlike nature of samsaric existence. Instead, he referred to a more pressing, less deniable problem, namely, that existence—the samsaric dream—is, as a matter of fact, painful. Beings suffer; they are not satisfied. Whatever may be the true nature of phenomena, we cannot deny that our lives are plagued by the ills of birth, sickness, old age, and death, the inescapable accompaniments of existence. It is true that suffering may be suspended by moments of happiness. But these turn out to be fragile and are marked by a transience so intrinsic as to render them, in the larger view, meaningless. Caught in the dream, unaware that they are dreaming, ordinary worldly beings endlessly try to manipulate phenomena in the interests of security and fulfillment. They do this by trying to create the conditions of material and emotional satisfaction and, if they are religious, by striving to create the causes of happiness in the hereafter, whether in terms of "going to heaven" or of securing a favorable rebirth in their future existences. Undoubtedly, the happiness thus produced is both good and necessary, but it is still samsara. It is still part of the dream; it is not the final answer, not liberation. For samsara to disappear, its cause must be identified and arrested. The Buddha is saying that a last-

ing solution cannot possibly lie in the reorganization of the dream, in a mere rearrangement of the furniture. A better plan is to recognize our state of deception—the fact that we are dreaming—and to wake up. And to wake from the dream, it is necessary to understand the nature of phenomena.

Throughout the *karikas*, Nagarjuna's critique is directed at the categories adopted by the Abhidharmika schools: the sense powers, aggregates, ayatanas, and so on. These too are shown to be hollow and dreamlike. To the non-Madhyamika, this is highly disturbing, for Nagarjuna seems to be undermining the doctrine itself. Everything is denied. Nothing is real; nothing makes sense. It is not surprising that in both ancient and modern times, Madhyamika has been stigmatized as philosophical and moral nihilism. The twenty-fourth chapter (perhaps the most important of the *karikas*) therefore opens with an expression of these qualms. If everything is empty, there is neither arising nor destruction. It follows that there is no such thing as the Four Noble Truths. Without the Four Noble Truths, there can be no wisdom, and the qualities of elimination and realization are impossible. Therefore the spiritual path is fruitless and meaningless. Attainment is out of the question. There is no such thing as liberation and enlightenment. There are no enlightened beings. There is no Doctrine and no Spiritual Community. The teaching on emptiness is therefore a rejection of the Three Jewels. Emptiness is the destruction of the Dharma. Good and evil and all the conventions of ordinary life are utterly negated and without significance.

These are the objections that Nagarjuna has been expecting and wanting. The whole gist of the *karikas* in the previous chapters in fact leads to this and is the cue for Nagarjuna to turn the objection on its head and show not only that emptiness is compatible with the spiritual path, but that it is precisely the factor that makes spiritual growth possible. In order to do this, he must expound his own teaching on the two truths, the single most important element in the Madhyamika. It is impossible, he says, to grasp the teaching of the Buddha without a correct understanding of the way the two truths are differentiated. There is no liberation without the realization of emptiness, the ultimate truth; there is no approach to the ultimate without correctly relying on the conventional. The doctrine of emptiness, however, is a double-edged sword, and Nagarjuna is the first to speak of its dangers.

Understood correctly, it leads to liberation; understood wrongly, it can be a source of spiritual and moral degeneration—as dangerous as a poisonous snake badly handled or a powerful spell ineptly applied. The teaching on the two truths is indeed profound and subtle, and it is important for the reader to reflect upon the explanations of an authoritative source.¹³ For the purpose of this introduction, it will perhaps be helpful to advert to the following important point.

We have seen already how, in the Abhidharmika system, the awareness of the impermanence of extended phenomena and mental events had implied a theory of indivisible particles of matter and instants of consciousness. This involved a distinction between two levels of reality: the gross, extended objects that populate our perceptions and constitute the phenomenal world, and the “real” entities that underlie appearance but are not experienced. All philosophy of any degree of sophistication is obliged to make a distinction between fact and appearance; intelligent reflection necessarily leads to the awareness that phenomena cannot actually be the way they seem.¹⁴ From the Madhyamika point of view, conventional truth comprises the things and transactions of everyday life—or, to use an expression more in line with Sanskrit and Tibetan usage, the things and events of the phenomenal world are themselves “conventional truths.” When analyzed, these same phenomena are found to be empty of unitary, intrinsic being. This is their ultimate truth. We have seen that emptiness, the ultimate status of things, the middle position beyond the categories of “is” and “is not,” is by definition inexpressible in thought and word. “The ultimate,” as Shantideva said, “lies not within the reach of intellect, for intellect is grounded in the relative.”¹⁵ This does not mean, however, that the ultimate is somehow remote from phenomena, floating free, as it were, in an absolute dimension of its own. The ultimate is said to be beyond the world only because it is veiled by the appearances of the world—and for ordinary beings, appearances *are* the world. In fact, the ultimate is not separate from phenomena; it is the very nature of phenomena. The ultimate is what the conventional really is; the conventional is the way the ultimate appears. The two truths are never separate; they merge and coincide in phenomena. The difference is not ontological but epistemic. According to Madhyamika, the distinction is not in the object; it is a matter of recognition within the cognizing subject. The objective dis-

tion of the two truths corresponds to the views of other systems, which by a process of reasoning, beyond the possibility of experience, arrive at some putative entity considered to be ultimately real (*prakṛiti*, for instance, or the indivisible particle, the *alayā*, *ātman*, God, the first cause, and so on). For these systems, the two truths are two separate entities.

Thus far, we have been considering Nagarjuna. We have seen that the focus of his attention had been mainly the tenets of the Abhidharmika schools. It was left to his foremost disciple and successor, Aryadeva, to apply the same dialectic to the refutation of the Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika schools of Hinduism, which he does in his chief work *The Four Hundred Stanzas*.¹⁶ Aryadeva was formidable in debate, and it was in large measure thanks to him that the position of the Madhyamika system was consolidated in the face of opposition both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Chandrakīrti remarks that in their view, Nagarjuna and Aryadeva agree in all respects. Tibetan scholarship refers to them as "Madhyamikas of the founding texts,"* for it is in relation to their writings that the later Madhyamika subschools defined themselves.

A Difference of Method: Buddhapaṇita, Bhavaviveka, and Chandrakīrti

Around the turn of the sixth century, an important disagreement occurred about the method whereby the Madhyamika view was to be established in debate. This question had important ramifications concerning the manner in which the relative truth was to be explained and how, within that context, the ultimate truth was to be presented. One side of the debate was represented by Buddhapaṇita, who had confined himself to the exclusive use of consequential arguments (*prasaṅga*). He was opposed by Bhavaviveka, who maintained that, in debate with non-Madhyamikas about the ultimate nature of phenomena and in order to establish one's view beyond doubt, the adduction of mere consequences was insufficient. It was both possible and necessary to prove one's point positively by means of independent inferences (*svatantra-anumāna*) adduced in syllogistic form. The fact that

* *gzhung phyi mo'i dbu ma pa*.

Buddhapālita returned no answer to this critique gave rise to the story that he had been intimidated by Bhavaviveka's princely rank. However, there are reasons for believing that he was already dead by the time the latter launched his attack.

Bhavaviveka was a famous scholar with an encyclopedic knowledge of the different philosophical and religious schools of his time, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. It is evident, too, that he was deeply interested in questions of formal logic, the study of which had been developing in India from the third century onward. And it has been suggested that the movement Bhavaviveka inaugurated was an attempt to create a bridge between the Madhyamika and the philosophical movement that reached its climax in the logical reforms of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti.¹⁷

The division between the Prasāngikas and the Svatantrikas is a large question and in certain respects highly technical. Fortunately, there exist a number of learned studies in English on this subject, and the interested reader is invited to refer to them.¹⁸ For the present purposes, we will attempt a summary of the main issues.

To begin with, it is useful to bear in mind that the final aim of Madhyamika, as of all other Buddhist teachings, is soteriological. Its sole purpose is to lead beings to ultimate freedom. As Nagarjuna said, it is only through the understanding and realization of the ultimate truth that freedom from suffering can be gained. Impelled by their vows of bodhicitta, Nagarjuna and the great Madhyamika masters who followed him were concerned, therefore, not only with the realization of the truth for themselves, but also with the communication of this truth to others. The disagreement between the Prasāngikas and the Svatantrikas turns on precisely this question: how is the view to be established and what is the best and most effective way of indicating it to others?

The disagreement between Bhavaviveka and Buddhapaṇita arose out of the interpretation of the very first stanza of the *kārikas*: "No things are produced anywhere at any time, either from themselves, from something else, from both, or from neither." Cast in a form that harks back, it will be remembered, to the fourteen unanswered questions, the primary dilemma between the first two alternatives (production from self and production from other) is expanded into a tetralemma (*catuskoti*) by the addition of two more alternatives intended to exhaust the entire

range of possibilities. These four alternatives, which provide the framework for Chandrakīrti's later discussion of phenomenal emptiness in the *Madhyamakavatara*, were usually associated, emblematically, with four schools of Indian philosophy: the Sāmkhya, the Buddhist Abhidharmika, the Jaina, and the Cārvāka respectively. We are to imagine a discussion between a Mādhyamika and the representatives of four types of philosophical realism, who believe that there is at least something, the intrinsic existence of which must be accepted. The purpose of the Mādhyamika critique is to demonstrate their mistake and to produce in their minds an understanding of the emptiness of all phenomena. How is one to go about this? The Prasāngikas and Svatantrikas disagree as to the best approach.

Buddhapālita refuted the Sāmkhya theory simply by pointing out that it entailed an absurd consequence. His argument, which is reiterated exactly in the *Madhyamakavatara*, runs roughly as follows. The Sāmkhyas believed that everything arises through modulations occurring in the primal substance, prakṛiti. All effects are therefore, in the most fundamental sense, identical with their causes. Buddhapālita argued that this assertion is untenable. To say that things arise "from themselves" is absurd, because if they already exist (being identical with their causes), no further coming into existence is needed. If, on the other hand, "coming into existence" is part and parcel of the supposedly produced thing, its production must be as unending as the produced thing itself. The Sāmkhya account is therefore incompatible with causality, either in theory or in fact. It is not necessary, at this stage, to enter into the details of Buddhapālita's argument. The point is that he disposes of the Sāmkhya claim simply by showing that it involves contradictions and is therefore unviable. In refuting the Sāmkhya view, he does not substitute a theory of his own.

Bhāvaviveka objected that Buddhapālita's procedure was logically deficient. The latter, he said, should have supported his contention by supplying a reason and an example. He complained, moreover, that the Sāmkhyas were being dealt with too summarily. They had their own arguments against the Buddhist critique, which Buddhapālita was failing to address. Finally, the simple negation of the Sāmkhya view by showing its untenable consequences was too open-ended. It could be taken to imply that Buddhapālita entertained an alternative position, which, since he was a Mādhyamika, was not the case. Simply to adduce

a consequence, therefore, leaves room for doubt in the opponent's mind. In order to remedy these defects, Bhāvaviveka argued that when refuting the Sāmkhya, it was both possible and necessary to prove Nāgārjuna's proposition (as given in the first stanza of the *karikas*) in terms of a syllogism—an independent syllogism, indeed, that expressed the contention in a self-contained manner, without reference to the opinion of the interlocutor. Bhāvaviveka evidently thought that this kind of approach would be more effective in convincing the opponent and helping him accept the Mādhyamika view. The kind of formula he proposed took the standard form of a syllogism as laid down in Indian logic: subject, predicate, reason, and so on.¹⁹ When used in debate, the syllogism is, or should be, founded on commonly accepted elements established by valid cognition, thereby deriving its cogency from basic premises shared by both parties. Such an argument is intended to convey real knowledge and induce conviction. To this standard format, Bhāvaviveka added a touch of his own, namely, the rider "on the ultimate level" or "ultimately."²⁰ The reasons for this addition will become clear in due course.

Buddhapālita no doubt represented a conservative element in the Mādhyamika tradition.²⁰ In confining himself to consequences, and in being evidently reluctant to involve himself in the sophistications of logic and epistemology as these were developing at his time, he emulated Nāgārjuna, who had employed consequential reasoning very often (though not exclusively) in the *karikas*, and who, in the *Vigrahāvartanī*, had been careful to confine the use of logic to the level of conventional truth, implying the illegitimacy of using it to establish anything transcending that sphere. Unlike Bhāvaviveka, who was a popular and influential teacher, Buddhapālita appears to have had few disciples. It was left to Chandrakīrti in the following century to defend him and to stem the Svatantrika tide.

As we have seen, the purpose of prasānga is to refute a position, not by stating a more plausible counterposition but by exposing a consequence unwanted by the proponents—on the basis of arguments that the proponents themselves accept. In adopting this strategy, the Prasāngika debater is not committed either to the immediate conclusion of the argument or to the principles invoked in the course of the

¹⁹ *Skt paramarthasūtrāḥ*, Tib *don dam par or yang dag par*.

investigation. It is only necessary for the proponents to accept them, the only object being to enable them to see for themselves the falsity of their position and to abandon it. The position of the adversary is not destroyed, as it were, from outside, by arguments adduced independently by the Madhyamika. It is shown instead to be intrinsically absurd, so that it collapses, so to speak, under its own weight. By using this technique in discussions concerning the ultimate status of phenomena, the Prasangikas are able to undermine the false notions of their opponents and to indicate the truth indirectly, without having to verbalize a position of their own.

Why is this last point so important? In order to answer this question, we must digress slightly. We have already seen that the Buddha himself had declared the ultimate truth to be beyond the scope of the ordinary mind. But though the ultimate is not to be expressed in thought and word, it can be indirectly indicated by demarcating the limits of conceptual construction and suggesting that there is, nevertheless, "something" beyond. In this procedure, logical arguments are used to demonstrate that when reason attempts to give an accurate account, in absolute terms, of "the way things are," it leads to antinomies and contradiction. This is the method of Nagarjuna and of Chandrakirti. Even if reason is unable to encompass reality, it can at least convince itself that it is unequal to the task and that the ultimate is to be approached and realized by means other than philosophical cognition. Reason understands, inferentially, that the ultimate truth exceeds its powers of comprehension and expression. The Madhyamika approach is, in other words, a *via remotioris*, to borrow a term from Christian theology: the dialectic approaches its goal by showing all that the ultimate is not; its purpose is to demolish the theories produced by the ordinary mind and to reveal the hollowness of their pretensions. The use of reasoning to demonstrate its own inadequacy is not, to be sure, an attractive prospect for the rationalist. In one sense, it is a bewildering discovery, and it did indeed prove the sticking point for Kant. Having understood the limitations of pure reason, he found of course that this purely intellectual achievement was unable to remove what he called the transcendental illusion: the impression, and therefore the constant temptation to think, that thought is able to lay hold of perfectly perspectiveless objectivity. He doubted that it could ever be removed, that the mind could ever pass beyond it.²¹ He could never

countenance the possibility of *jñāna*, the nondual wisdom in which the ultimate is known directly without the mediation of thought.²² He failed, in other words, to appreciate the immense spiritual significance of his discovery and, as Murri aptly observes, ended by putting it to a trivial purpose.²³ This was a mistake that Nagarjuna and the Madhyamikas did not make. And they did not make it because they had at their disposal not just the intellectual tools of their own brilliant minds but also their spiritual training on the Buddhist path and the realization of the masters who had transmitted it to them.

A perception of the limitations of thought may seem, as we have said, a sorry conclusion to the philosophical enterprise—until one notices that the implications for the mind that reaches this conclusion are immense. The very fact that the discovery is possible points to something beyond the ordinary intellect. To realize, by thought, that there is an ultimate truth that is not the object of thought is no ordinary finding. It is not just the negative conclusion of dialectical analysis, but also the discovery of a wholly new dimension in the mind itself. When the mind realizes emptiness, it overcomes the subject-object dichotomy. It does not just break through the appearances that conceal the ultimate status of phenomena; it also penetrates the veils of mental construction that had concealed its own true nature and had made the misperception of phenomena possible. When the true nature of phenomena is discovered, the mind's nature also stands revealed, for the realization of emptiness is the experience of nondual wisdom. Looked at from this point of view, the final outcome of Madhyamika analysis is not a negative but a profoundly positive experience.

Chandrakirti's defense of Buddhapalita and his refutation of Bhavaviveka are to be found in his detailed commentary on the *karikas* entitled the *Prasannapada*.²⁴ Here he considers each of the objections brought against Buddhapalita by Bhavaviveka and refutes them all on technical grounds.²⁵ To begin with, he rejects as unfounded the charge that Buddhapalita's use of consequences is inadequate because it fails to supply a reason and example. In fact a consequential argument can be restated in the form of what is technically known as an inference accepted by the opponent,²⁶ whereby the import of the consequence can be expressed in a syllogism in which both reason and example are pres-

* *gzhen la grags pa'i rjes dpag.*

ent by implication. In being an extension of the consequence, the inference accepted by the opponent is based on elements that need only be agreeable to the opponent, not to the proponent, in the debate. It is thus not to be confused with an independent inference in the terms of which the acceptance of the proponent is implied. Like the consequence, the inference accepted by the opponent does not compromise the proponent in the way that an independent inference does.

This fact, Chandrakirti argues, also acquits Buddhapalita of the second charge brought by Bhavaviveka, namely, that he fails to address the objections advanced by the Samkhyas. In fact, these objections are of necessity only advanced against a position positively expressed, that is, in an independent argument. This does not occur in the case of the inference accepted by the opponent.²⁶

Finally, that Buddhapalita's consequential argument implies a contrary position that inadvertently undermines his Madhyamika stance is categorically denied. The meaning and purpose of the consequence are clear from the context, and Buddhapalita's words are to be understood according to his evident intention.²⁷ A consequential argument, Chandrakirti insists, is perfectly adequate to the task of refuting the false position. If the adversary refuses to accept defeat even after it has been shown, on principles already acceptable to him, that his view is untenable, it is clear that the further adduction of an independent argument would serve no purpose. If the opponent still maintains his position even after its incoherence is laid bare, it is clear that he does so for motives that cannot be rational. Either he is too dull to understand the refutation or he clings to his position out of prejudice. This being so, it is futile to discuss further.

These are undoubtedly complex questions. The point to retain, however, is that Chandrakirti's objective is to defend a method of communication whereby proponents of Madhyamika can debate on matters concerning the ultimate truth without having to verbalize positions of their own, thereby betraying the Madhyamika's most important principle, namely, that the ultimate status of things is ineffable.

Having vindicated Buddhapalita, Chandrakirti turns to his assailant. "Bhavaviveka wishes only to parade his knowledge of the logical treatises. He adduces independent syllogisms, despite the fact that he claims to hold the Madhyamika view. The Madhyamika system, to be sure, creates lots of difficulties for such a would-be logician. He

makes one mistake after another."²⁸ According to the rules of logic, when an independent syllogism is framed, its validity depends on the fact that its terms denote exactly the same thing for both parties in the debate. This, Chandrakirti argued, is impossible in any discussion between a Madhyamika and a realist philosopher (such as the Samkhya) when the subject of discussion is the ultimate status of phenomena. A viable independent syllogism presupposes the existence of objects that both sides accept. But the whole purpose of the Madhyamika is to show that no such objects exist. In situations of this kind, therefore, the Madhyamika debater cannot use independent syllogisms without being fatally compromised. The Madhyamika teaching on the two truths, which is not accepted by the opponent, necessarily excludes any community of understanding with the realist concerning the existential status of phenomena. This being so, the Madhyamika is unable to advance an independent syllogism, without the syllogism itself, according to the rules of logic, being defective. If the two parties use the same terms but in effect mean different things by them, it is obvious that they are talking at cross-purposes; common understanding is ruled out. In brief, therefore, Chandrakirti castigates Bhavaviveka not only for compromising his Madhyamika principles but also for being an incompetent logician.

In defense of Bhavaviveka, it may be said that he was not unaware of the difficulties involved in his position, and it seems clear that the characteristic orientation of the Svatantrikas with regard to logic and the conventional truth is adopted with a view to consistency. The fundamental teaching of Madhyamika is the rejection of the ultimate existence of all entities. Like the Prasangikas, the Svatantrikas are concerned to communicate this view to non-Madhyamikas. Unlike the Prasangikas, they seek to do this not by consequences alone but by the use of logic and the making of positive statements—adducing, as we have seen, independent syllogisms that are based on elements commonly acceptable, on the conventional level, to both parties. In so doing, the Svatantrikas take a conciliatory step toward the opponent. In other words, they introduce the Madhyamika view in terms easier for ordinary people to understand. The motivation, as we have seen, is a good one, but the step cannot be made without compromise, and this consists in the creation of a provisional separation of the two truths.

Bhavaviveka and those who followed him say that whereas, on the ul-

timate level, phenomena have no reality whatever, on the conventional level, they do possess a certain existence (though not a true existence), and this is proved by the operation of conventional reasoning. Common sense can, for instance, distinguish a "real" object from an optical illusion. It does so on the basis of functionality (real water is drinkable, mirage water is not, and so on). Therefore, when phenomena are said to be without inherent existence, the Svatantrikas add the proviso "on the ultimate level." Conventionally, for the Svatantrikas (at least those who follow Bhavaviveka), phenomena do have a kind of "natural existence according to their characteristics."² When investigated by conventional reasoning, they are "found"; one can discuss them and entertain theories about them. For Bhavaviveka, therefore, meaningful discourse is still possible on the level of the conventional truth. Although ultimately empty, conventional phenomena can nevertheless be talked about without absurdity. It is still possible to philosophize, and this can be utilized to good purpose, in giving disciples a correct orientation and leading them gradually on the path. Thus the theory of partless particles, as presented in the Abhidharmika schools, is provisionally accepted. What the Abhidharmikas had taken to be ultimate truth remains valid, but only conventionally valid, for the Svatantrikas.

Chandrakirti and the Prasangikas will have none of this. For them no compromise is possible. The ultimate, being ineffable, is falsified by any attempt to express it. To separate the two truths is to deviate from Nagarjuna's meaning. Therefore, *when establishing the view and in debate*, the Prasangikas express no position, no thesis. In debate, they confine themselves to consequential arguments, the reduction to absurdity of the opponent's position; the ultimate truth is indicated only indirectly by the demolition of theories. For the Prasangikas, therefore, it is neither desirable nor possible to elaborate a theory of the conventional truth. Unlike Bhavaviveka, who discusses along Sautrantika lines, and unlike Shantarakshita, who presents the conventional truth in terms of the Yogachara view, Chandrakirti refers to the conventional as being simply the unexamined phenomena of ordinary experience, accepted as true by the common consensus. The Prasangikas do not care to theorize about the conventional. They do not philosophize. This does not,

² *rang mibam nyid kyis sgrub pa.*

of course, mean that they acquiesce in the ignorant opinions of worldly people, who believe firmly in the reality of the phenomenal and personal selves. It does mean, however, that, as a method of approach to the ultimate truth and as a medium with which to communicate with worldly people, the Prasangikas simply accept, without analysis, the things and events occurring in everyday experience.

As forms of philosophy, the four theories of production given in the tetralemma all claim to give an accurate account of conventional experience. All can be shown to be logically incoherent and are, the Prasangikas say, a source of confusion. Far from giving a sensible explanation of the world, their solutions are obscure and far-fetched. In Chandrakirti's opinion, they are quite irrelevant (as philosophy often is) to the perceptions and concerns of ordinary folk. No ordinary person consciously advocates either the theory of the Samkhyas or that of the Buddhist Abhidharmika—production explained in terms either of identity or difference of material causes and effects. A man who deposits a drop of semen in the womb of his wife will point to the baby nine months later and say, "I produced this child." The difference between baby and semen is routinely overlooked. In the same way a gardener points to the flowers that "he planted," whereas in actual fact he planted only seeds. In practice, therefore, people do not acknowledge a separation between material cause and material effect. On the other hand, if you ask someone whether the food they eat and the feces they excrete are the same, they will certainly say that there is a difference. They are very far from accepting the Samkhyas theory. On the level of *what actually happens*, it is impossible to say that cause and effect are either the same or different. The only thing one can and must allow is that, in experience, production does occur. Everyone is agreed about this and, as an account of the conventional, this is, for the Prasangikas, quite sufficient.

Indeed, in situations where one is trying to penetrate to the ultimate status of phenomena, the introduction of theories as a means of explaining the working of the phenomenal world fogs the issue and actually undermines the correct approach to the conventional truth. Far from elucidating the conventional, Chandrakirti says, theories actually undermine it. It is the conventional itself—what actually happens—that is the means of entering the ultimate. To create a theory as a way of explaining the mechanics of the conventional does not help to in-

roduce the ultimate; it merely complicates the matter. Therefore theories are dangerous, for they obscure the conventional; they hinder the procedure whereby one can "see through" the conventional appearance of phenomena and perceive their lack of intrinsic "thingness." Chandrakirti says that to create a theory about the conventional is in a sense to "destroy" the conventional; it produces an account that, however coherent it may be, is always at variance with what we actually experience. As such, it is at best irrelevant to the task in hand, namely, to perceive the true nature of phenomenal appearance. At worst it is a hindrance and a trap. The image often evoked is that of a man climbing a tree. Before he has caught hold of the branch above, it is inadvisable for him to move off the one below. In weaving their theories, this is precisely what philosophers do. To create a theory about the conventional is in a sense to move away from the conventional as experienced (which alone is the gateway to the ultimate). The progression from the conventional to the ultimate is rendered more difficult by the invention of ill-conceived hypotheses.

The following parable, borrowed from Bertrand Russell, may further illustrate this important point.²⁹ If I go up to a nuclear physicist and ask him to describe for me the physical constitution of a table, I will receive a long and learned answer, all about magnetic fields and atomic and subatomic particles moving around at great speed. These, he assures me, are the real constituents of the table; the object in the corner is little more than an optical illusion. On the other hand, if I approach the same scientist unannounced and simply ask whether there is a table in the room, he will, without a moment's hesitation, point and say: "It's over there, can't you see it?" However accurate the scientist's earlier description may be, it has clearly not interfered with his perceptions. But now let us extend the parable further and imagine the same physicist trying to use his bank card to get money from a cash machine outside a bank, and let us suppose that there is something wrong with the card, with the result that the machine swallows it and produces no money. Before long he will become annoyed and start beating on the machine with the same degree of frustration as any ordinary nonscientist. And I would be ill advised, at this point, to try to comfort him by reminding him that, after all, the bank card he has lost and the bank notes he has failed to receive are no more than a mass of subatomic particles. Sophisticated as the physicist's theory may be, it

has done nothing to free him from the suffering and perturbation always liable to manifest in the course of conventional transactions. In the same way, the propounding of theories about the conventional does nothing to remove the tyranny of phenomenal appearance. And the use of independent syllogisms, and the acceptance of conventionally existent entities, which this entails, necessarily implies a theoretical explanation of the conventional—of the kind that, in the above example, seemed only to intensify (when mentioned inappropriately) the impotent fury of the frustrated scientist.

Therefore, in discussions about the reality or otherwise of phenomena, the Prasangikas restrict the terms of discussion to the position propounded by the non-Madhyamika opponent. They do not allow themselves, by the use of logical arguments, to become involved in an exchange that might give the impression that they believe in the real existence of the topic under discussion. It must be stressed that in the debates between the Madhyamika and other philosophies, the only point of issue is real existence. The opponents, Samkhya, Buddhist, and so on, all contend in one way or other that something exists. The Madhyamikas deny this. Therefore, for Madhyamikas to discourse about phenomena as if they believed in their real existence would, the Prasangikas say, necessarily weaken the force of their argument.

It is important to be aware that a discussion about a thing's existence is radically different from a discussion about a thing's attributes. The standard example used to illustrate this point is the debate about the nature of sound. Buddhists find themselves in disagreement with certain Hindus who believe that sound is permanent, part of the primordial structure of the universe, and so on. The two positions are in total opposition. But in the discussion, both parties are agreed on one thing, namely, sound itself. Sound as a phenomenon can be observed by Buddhist and Hindu alike, irrespective of the ideas they have about it. However complicated the discussion may become, the situation is clear: both parties are referring to *sound*; they are disagreeing about its properties.

Discussions about existence, by contrast, are much less straightforward. And it may be observed in passing that the problem at hand evidently concerns the question of whether existence is a predicate. This topic has had a long and interesting career in the history of Western philosophy, and the matter is still not settled. But since Western Bud-

dhist scholars never seem to advert to it, and since the traditional texts formulate the matter differently, it would perhaps be hazardous to insist upon it too much in the present context. Briefly, the point is that when two people are debating the qualities of sound, for instance, they can both accept sound as the basis of the discussion without preempting the issue and committing themselves to conclusions that are yet to be established. Whatever the facts of the case, no illogicality is involved in saying, "Sound is either permanent or impermanent." It must be one or the other, of course, but this remains to be demonstrated. There is nothing, however, in the notion of sound itself that logically excludes either permanence or impermanence; and in an inquiry of this kind, one may analytically separate a subject from its properties, even though they are not separable in experience. One might suppose that the situation is exactly parallel in the statement "Sound is either existent or nonexistent." But this is an illusion created by the verbal structure of the sentence. Whereas sound, as a fact of experience, can be considered separately from its permanence or impermanence, it cannot be considered, with the same propriety and in the same way, in isolation from its existence. We may conceivably have a permanent sound, or an impermanent sound. But we cannot conceivably have a nonexistent sound—that is, a sound that has no existence—since a nonexistent sound is not a sound; it is just nothing. On the other hand, as soon as an object is consciously indicated, existence, or belief in existence, is logically implied.

Consequently, the Prasangikas conclude, in a debate about the existence of phenomena, if instead of confining oneself to an examination of the validity of the opponent's view, one makes an assertion about the phenomenon in question, this very fact is liable to imply that one acquiesces in the thing's existence. In such debates, therefore, the Prasangikas say that one must abstain from expressing an independent position of one's own on pain of already falsifying one's own position and misrepresenting the case.

Madhyamika in Tibet

However effective Chandrakirti may have been in vindicating the method of Buddhapaṇita and refuting Bhāvaviveka, it is clear that he did not succeed in convincing all his contemporaries. There is no

doubt that the Svatantrika method remained popular. Shantarakṣita himself, who in his synthesis of the Madhyamika and Yogachara schools represents the last great stage in the development of Buddhist philosophy in India, made use of independent syllogisms as Bhāvaviveka had done several centuries before. He is therefore classified as a Svatantrika, although, as we shall see, this question is more complex than it appears. It was, in any case, Shantarakṣita and his disciple Kamalashīla who, at the invitation of King Trisong Detsen, carried the Buddhist sūtra teachings to Tibet, with the result that the Madhyamika doctrine first established there was Yogachara-Svatantrika, in which form it was to flourish for approximately four hundred years. Only in the twelfth century, when Paṭsap Nyima Drak translated the works of Chandrakirti, did the Prasangika really take hold in Tibet.

According to *The Blue Annals*, Paṭsap was born in Penyul but left Tibet while still a child. He grew up in Kashmir and India, where he studied at the feet of numerous famous and important scholars. He returned to Tibet around 1160 and embarked on a career of translation and teaching. He expounded in particular the six logical treatises (*rigs tsogs*) of Nāgārjuna and, in collaboration with the Indian pandita Kanakavarman, translated Chandrakirti's *Prasannapada* and the *Madhyamakavatara*, together with its autocommentary, as well as the commentary on the *Yukishastika* by the same author. From slender beginnings he became an influential teacher, and his return home marked a turning point in the study of Madhyamika in Tibet.

The introduction of Prasangika ideas was the focus of intense interest. Convinced that they were in possession of a more accurate and profound understanding of Nāgārjuna's doctrine, the early Tibetan Prasangikas attacked the Svatantrika establishment with the enthusiasm of missionaries. They encountered a sturdy resistance. The period of persecution inflicted by King Langdarma (836–841) had been followed by an intense religious and scholastic renewal. And in the intervening period, before the return of Paṭsap, the Madhyamika had been closely studied, mainly according to the tradition laid down by Shantarakṣita and Kamalashīla, but also following the works of Bhāvaviveka, which had also been translated in the early period. A number of great scholars had been involved in this enterprise, and by the twelfth century the Svatantrika view was well able to resist, at least for the time being, the wave of novelty. The master Chapa Chökyi Senge, for exam-

ple, whose interpretation of Dignaga and Dharmakīrti was to form the basis of the logic tradition still upheld by the Gelugpa school, was a formidable debater and defended with brilliance the Svatantrika view against Prasāṅgika innovation. He composed several expositions of the Madhyamika system and numerous refutations of Chandrakīrti. It is recorded that, on one occasion, he encountered in debate, and defeated, the celebrated Indian Prasāṅgika master Jayananda.³⁰

Be that as it may, the Prasāṅgika view gained ground in Tibet and eventually triumphed. Even before the translation of Chandrakīrti by Patsap, the Prasāṅgika view was advocated by Atisha, whose role in the development of Tibetan Buddhism can scarcely be exaggerated; and it became intimately associated with the mind-training teaching of the Kadam pas, which exerted a pervasive influence throughout the tradition. In their different ways, all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism have adopted the Prasāṅgika approach—the teaching of Nagarjuna, as interpreted by Chandrakīrti—as the highest view on the sutra level. Svatantrika was driven into the shade, and nowadays, especially in the New Translation schools, it is relegated to the doxographical literature, in the context of which it is studied largely as a lower view to be examined and surmounted by students on their way to mastery of the Prasāṅgika system. It is comparatively rare for the original writings of Svatantrika authors—even of Shantarakṣita—to be studied at first hand.

Mipham Rinpoche and the Prasāṅgika-Svatantrika Distinction

It is therefore of some interest, before finishing with this topic, to advert to the attitude of Mipham Rinpoche toward the Svatantrika teaching, specifically in the form advocated by Shantarakṣita. Naturally, this finds its full expression in the great commentary on the *Madhyamakalanakara*, which is one of Mipham's great masterpieces, but it is appropriate to mention it briefly here, since not only does the view of Shantarakṣita represent the final development of Madhyamika in India, but it also profoundly qualifies the Nyingma understanding of the relationship between Prasāṅgika and Svatantrika, and of Madhyamika in general.

In the context of modern Madhyamika scholarship, dominated as it is by the Gelugpa and Sakyapa schools, the position of Mipham

Rinpoche is liable to appear unusual, certainly unfamiliar. It is not, however, a personal eccentricity. One of the main reasons for Mipham's scholarly work was to revive and reexpress the teachings characteristic of the Nyingma school; his understanding of Madhyamika is rooted in the tradition of the Old Translations. Without going into excessive detail, it is possible to summarize the Nyingma attitude (as expressed by Mipham Rinpoche) toward Madhyamika by saying that it accommodates the Prasāṅgika approach current in Tibet after the translation of Chandrakīrti's works, without betraying its original allegiance to the teaching of Shantarakṣita. And in this connection, one may advert to the paradox, with regard to the works of these two masters, occasioned by the fact that chronologically the order of translation in Tibet was the reverse of the order of composition in India. After Patsap, Chandrakīrti seemed "new" in Tibet and Shantarakṣita seemed "old," whereas it was the teaching of the latter that represented the final development of Madhyamika in India at a time when Buddhism was still at its zenith.

So far in this introduction, in distinguishing the teachings of Buddhapaṇita, Bhāvaviveka, and Chandrakīrti and their followers, we have followed the common convention of speaking about Svatantrikas and Prasāṅgikas. These terms are the Sanskrit renditions, contrived by Western scholars, of two Tibetan terms (*rang rgyud pa* and *thal 'gyur pa* respectively). It is important to realize that the Svatantrika-Prasāṅgika distinction, as such, is the invention of Tibetan scholarship, created as a convenient method for cataloging the different viewpoints evident in Madhyamika authors subsequent to Chandrakīrti's critique of Bhāvaviveka. There is no evidence that these two terms were ever used by the ancient Indian Madhyamikas to refer either to themselves or to their opponents. Moreover, although the Svatantrika and Prasāṅgika viewpoints differ on a number of interconnected issues, the actual terminology refers, as we have seen, to the characteristic method of debate adopted when the question of the ultimate status of phenomena is at issue. This divergence was emphasized by Chandrakīrti in the first chapter of the *Prasāṅgapāda*, from which it follows that the terminological distinction "Svatantrika-Prasāṅgika" became current in Tibet only from the twelfth century onward. Convenient as it may be, it is not without its difficulties.

If the Madhyamikas are differentiated solely according to

whether they use independent syllogisms or confine themselves to consequences, a twofold division results, with Buddhapalita and Chandrakirti on one side and Bhavaviveka and Shantaraksita on the other. The identification of the view of Chandrakirti and Buddhapalita is natural, but the placing of Bhavaviveka and Shantaraksita in one undifferentiated category is problematic. Historically, Bhavaviveka and Shantaraksita are separated by a period of about two hundred years, while Chandrakirti appeared approximately midway between them. Given that these three masters were scholars of the first magnitude, and given Shantaraksita's knowledge of the entire philosophical and religious field, as evidenced in the *Tattvasamgraha*, it is difficult to explain how, if Shantaraksita is merely continuing the Svatantrika stance of Bhavaviveka, he should have been so oblivious of Chandrakirti's critique—a development in the history of Madhyamika of which he could not conceivably have been ignorant. However convenient, the Svatantrika-Prasangika distinction, made exclusively in terms of debate procedure, is not wholly adequate as an account of the evolution of Madhyamika or as a general description.

There is, however, another set of criteria for distinguishing between the approaches of these three Madhyamika masters, namely, their way of speaking about the conventional truth. We have seen that one of the reasons Chandrakirti objected to Bhavaviveka's innovation was that, according to the rules of logic, independent syllogisms commit their user to an implicit and compromising acquiescence in the existence of the elements referred to. Bhavaviveka was apparently aware of this, and we have seen that, in the interests of consistency, his use of the independent syllogism went hand in hand with a view that, on the conventional level, phenomena do indeed enjoy a certain existence "according to their characteristics." By contrast, Chandrakirti's quite different attitude toward the role of *pramana* in establishing emptiness reflects his rejection of any kind of existence at any level. In the doxologies written in Tibet during the earlier period—that is, before the discovery of the teaching of Chandrakirti—the two kinds of Madhyamika known to Tibetans at that time were defined not according to debate procedure but on the basis of the attitude evinced toward the conventional truth, namely, the Svatantrika-Madhyamika and the Yogachara-

Madhyamika.³¹ This method of classification could theoretically be enlarged to accommodate the position of Chandrakirti, namely, that of the Madhyamika that accepts the common consensus as the conventional truth.*

The conventional truth corresponds to the world of everyday experience. It is the dimension, the field of perception, so to speak, in which ordinary beings live and interact. Viewed in the light of their soteriological aims, the attitude of Madhyamikas toward the conventional is largely a matter of communication. In trying to introduce beings to the Middle Way (the wisdom of the Buddha as expressed by Nagarjuna, by which alone samsara is destroyed and liberation gained), different approaches are both possible and necessary. This is what we would expect of any Buddhist system. Beings differ in their capacities and requirements; the form in which the teachings are expressed varies accordingly.

The characteristic approach of Chandrakirti and Buddhapalita is clear. When debating the final status of phenomena, they are content merely to deconstruct the false opinion; they refrain from verbalizing a position of their own. In the same way, they abstain from elaborating a theory of the conventional. Ultimately, phenomena are empty by their nature; conventionally, they appear by the force of dependent arising. The appearances of the common consensus are accepted, without analysis, as the conventional truth. No theory is advocated as to the nature of phenomena, and no sort of existence is attributed to them on a provisional basis. This approach seems simple and straightforward. In practice, it is less so.

A realist may hold to the view, let us say, that phenomena truly exist in the way that they appear. But in undermining this notion, the Prasangika does not intend to show that phenomena do not exist. On the contrary, the true status of phenomena lies wholly beyond both existence and nonexistence. It is subtle, inexpressible in thought and word. The Prasangika method, whereby the consequence is adduced without further comment, offers few concessions to the slow-witted and is obviously not without an element of risk. Admittedly, the de-

* Respectively *mdo sde spyod pa'i dbu ma pa*, *nyal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma pa*, and *jig rten greg pa'i dbu ma pa*.

struction of one position, by reduction to absurdity, is not taken in isolation; it is accompanied by the negation of the other alternatives of the tetralemma. Nevertheless, the Prasāṅgika does no more than expose the inadequacy of the opponent's position. The effectiveness of the consequential method depends as much on the acuity and honesty of the opponent as it does on the accuracy and cogency of the argument. Whether or not the opponent "gets it" and realizes the point that the Madhyamika is making, and whether or not he or she is then able to apply it to good purpose, depends not only on intelligence but also on merit, the positive orientation and receptiveness of the mind, which is the result of training in virtue on the path. It is merit that empowers the mind and renders it apt not only to understand in an intellectual sense, but also to progress into the direct experience of wisdom itself. It is therefore said that the Prasāṅgika approach, which, by a process of austere annulment of all intellectual positions, constitutes a direct introduction to the ultimate truth in itself, is appropriate for persons of the highest spiritual faculties, a qualification, incidentally, that is not to be confused with mere intellectual acumen.

By contrast, the Svatantrikas make use of independent syllogisms and thus adopt a "position" with which to interpret conventional experience (Sautrantika in the case of Bhāvaviveka, Yogachara in the case of Shāntarakṣita). Their approach is gradual; it makes allowances for the needs of beings who must be led along the path. In such a context, the two truths must be distinguished, unpacked, and presented in terms of words and concepts. In the nature of things, this distinction, whereby the conventional is contrasted with the ultimate—is—can only be—confined to the level of conventional truth. From the ultimate point of view, no distinctions of any kind can be made; it is only on the conventional level that the analytical investigation of phenomena takes place. Furthermore, two kinds of analysis are differentiated, depending on their object. On the one hand, there is ultimate or abolutist reasoning, which investigates and establishes the ultimate status or emptiness of phenomena. On the other hand, there is conventional reasoning, which determines whether a given object is "real" or "illusory" according to the general scheme of things accepted in the common consensus.

It is on the conventional level also that a further important distinc-

tion is made, this time with regard to the ultimate truth. In itself, the ultimate is utterly ineffable. It is beyond the ordinary mind and cannot become the object of a cognition in which there is a separation between subject and object. This is the "ultimate in itself."^{*} It is experienced by nondual wisdom and can never be expressed in thought and word, themselves the preserve of the conventional. The ordinary mind can, however, point to the ultimate indirectly, describing it, for example, as the counterpart of the conventional. This is the approximate ultimate.[†] It is the concordant image of, or gateway to, the ultimate truth in itself.

As methods of introduction to emptiness, the ultimate condition of phenomena and of the mind, the Prasāṅgika and Svatantrika approaches are adapted to two kinds of beings: those who are able to enter into the ultimate truth in itself directly, without the intermediary step of the approximate ultimate truth (*cig char pa*), and those who must progress toward it gradually (*rim bskyed pa*). It may be thought that Prasāṅgika is superior to Svatantrika, but if there is a hierarchy of levels, this refers only to the respective capacities of the disciples concerned, where the difference is one of merit. It is not a reflection on the quality of the approaches themselves, which, Mipham Rinpoche argues, are both indispensable and equally valuable. Neither are they interchangeable. The direct approach is useless for someone who must progress gradually; the gradualist approach is unnecessary for one who is able to perceive directly.

Furthermore, the adoption of these different methods reflects the compassionate activity of the masters concerned, not their own personal realization. With regard to the ultimate truth, all Madhyamikas, of whatever complexion, are in full agreement. Mipham Rinpoche observes that the ultimate in itself, beyond the domain of words or concepts, is what the Aryas see by stainless wisdom in their meditative equipoise; on this level, neither Prasāṅgikas nor Svatantrikas make assertions of any kind, and there is no differentiating them. The distinction comes only with regard to the conventional, for it is here alone that the Svatantrikas make their statements about the ultimate (the approx-

^{*} *nam rangs ma yin pa'i don dam.*

[†] *nam rangs pa'i don dam.*

imate ultimate). "A person who, by dint of practice, thus attains the experience of the ultimate truth in itself may be called either Prasangka or Svatantrika depending on the way he or she makes assertions with regard to the postmeditation period. But one should know that in the ultimate realization there is no difference between them. They both enjoy the wisdom of the Aryas."³² It is thus meaningless to place the Madhyamika masters themselves in a hierarchy according to the manner in which they instruct beings. In their own right, Buddhapalita, Bhavaviveka, Chandrakirti, Shantarakshita and so on are all equal—they are all, we might say, Prasangikas, possessed of the highest view.

For Mipham, therefore, Prasangka and Svatantrika are two approaches to be understood in harmony; they are not diverging views. This point is brought out very clearly in the introduction to his commentary on the *Madhyamakalanakara*, which has been described as one of the most profound texts on Madhyamika ever written. Having referred to the eighty-ninth stanza in the sixth chapter of the *Madhyamakavata*, where Chandrakirti says that the source of phenomenal experience is the mind itself, Mipham Rinpoche comments:

To say [on the contrary] that the phenomenal world does not arise from one's mind necessarily implies the belief that it is caused by something else. And since this involves the assertion that beings are bound in samsara or delivered from it through causes other than their own minds, it will doubtless cause one to fall into non-Buddhist tenet systems. It is therefore established step by step that if there is no external creator and no external world, extramental objects are but the mind's projection. This assertion that conventionalities are "only the mind" exists in all the Mahayana schools.

Why is it then that glorious Chandrakirti and others do not posit the conventional level in this way? As was explained above, when he establishes the ultimate in itself, which accords with the field of wisdom of Aryas while they are in meditative equipoise, it is sufficient for him to have, as the object of assessment, the phenomena of samsara and nirvana as they appear and are referred to on the empirical level, without examining them. Since, from the very beginning, these phenomena are beyond the four conceptual extremes, it is not necessary for him to enter into a close philosophical investigation of the way phenomena appear on the conventional level. When one assesses appearances with words and concepts, one may, for instance, say that phenomena exist or

do not exist, that phenomena are or are not the mind. But however one may assert them, they do not exist in that way on the ultimate level. Therefore, with the consequences of the Prasanga reasoning, which investigates the ultimate, Chandrakirti is merely refuting the incorrect ideas of the opponents. And given that his own stance is free from every conceptual reference, how could he assert a theory? He does not. In this way, he can refute, without needing to separate the two truths, whatever assertions are made as to existence and nonexistence. In the present Svatantrika context, since assessments are made with the reasoning specific to each of the two truths, one cannot refute or establish anything *without* separating these same two truths. But in Chandrakirti's tradition, assessment is made using the valid reasoning, which investigates the ultimate nature of the two truths—the ultimate in itself. As Chandrakirti quotes from a scripture in his autocommentary to the *Madhyamakavata*: "On the ultimate level, O monks, there are no two truths. This ultimate truth is one."

Therefore from the beginning, the honorable Chandrakirti emphasizes and establishes the ultimate in itself. He does not do away with mere appearances, for these are the ground for his absolutist type of investigation, the means or gateway to the ultimate. He therefore takes them as a basis of debate and establishes them as being beyond all conceptual extremes. Then, in the postmeditation period, he establishes or refutes all the propositions concerning the path and result in accordance with the way they are assessed by the two kinds of reasoning. And thus even the Prasangikas do not invalidate the conventional level. They assert conventional phenomena as mere appearances (*nyen nyid 'di pa*) or simply as dependent arisings. If, with regard to these mere appearances, an investigation is made using conventional reasoning, the Prasangikas do not deny the manner in which samsara and nirvana are produced through the forward and backward progression of the twelve interdependent links of existence. They show that phenomena arise dependently through the power of the pure or impure mind. And in this way they clearly express the tenet of mind-only.

In the present text (*Madhyamakalanakara*) by the great abbot Shantarakshita, emphasis is placed on the approximate ultimate. The two truths are, to begin with, distinguished; each of them is assessed with the appropriate kind of valid cognition and each is established as having assertions proper to it. Finally, the ultimate truth in itself, which is completely free from all assertion, is reached. These two approaches (Svatantrika and Prasangika) belong respectively to those who follow

the gradual path and those whose realization is not gradual but immediate. And since the essence of Shantarakshita's approach is the ultimate-in-itself, he does indeed possess the ultimate and essential view of the Prasangikas. And what he says in the text itself is in perfect agreement with the view of the glorious Chandrakirti.³³

Mipham Rinpoche and The Word of Chandra

Mipham Rinpoche was born in 1846 into an aristocratic family in the east of Tibet. His father belonged to the Ju clan, and the ancestors of both his parents had been ministers to the kings of Derge.³⁴ The circumstances of his birth entailed the advantage of material independence. And although Mipham Rinpoche was eventually to be acknowledged as an undeniable, indeed spectacular embodiment of Manjushri himself, he was never recognized as a *tulku*. He was therefore unhampered by the responsibilities and ties, both political and economic, that are often associated with that prestigious rank. He was able to devote himself exclusively to the pursuit of the Dharma in both study and practice.

He took his first monastic vows at the age of twelve at Jumo Hor-sang Ngakchö Ling, which was a dependency of the great monastery of Shechen Tennyi Dargye Ling in Kham. Conspicuous intelligence and aptitude for study soon distinguished him. An eighteen-month retreat on Manjushri, begun at the age of fifteen, marked a turning point in his intellectual and spiritual development. His practice was attended by signs of unusual accomplishment, and it is said that from that moment he was able to assimilate easily and without labor the entire range of Buddhist learning. The troubles provoked by the war in Nyarong obliged him to leave home. He traveled first to Golok in eastern Tibet and thence, on pilgrimage, to Lhasa, during which he spent a month at the great monastic university of Ganden. There, he was able to observe at first hand the scholastic methods of the Gelugpas, for which he acquired a lasting admiration. This was the first of many travels in the course of which he received instructions from many great masters. Mipham's most important teachers were Patrul Rinpoche, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, and Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé, the founding fathers and principal exponents of a new and vigorous movement that was to revitalize the Dharma in the east of Tibet and beyond. This was the so-called Rimé (*ris med*) movement, the

THE ADORNMENT OF THE MIDDLE WAY

Shantarakshita's
Madhyamakalankara

with commentary by
Jamgön Mipham

TRANSLATED BY THE
PADMAKARA TRANSLATION GROUP



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Translators' Introduction

THIS TRANSLATION of Shantarakshita's *Madhyamakalankara* and of the commentary on it composed by Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche was made following the detailed explanations given by Khenchen Pema Sherab of Namdröling Monastery, Mysore, India, during four summer study sessions at Chanteloube in Dordogne, France. When first requested to expound these texts, he remarked smilingly on their difficulty—much greater than in the case of the *Madhyamakavatara* of Chandrakirti, which, despite its profundity, is comparatively straightforward. One of the main challenges for the nonspecialist reader of Shantarakshita's text—and even more so that of Mipham—is that they presuppose a considerable knowledge of the teachings on pramana, the system of logic and epistemology associated with the Indian masters Dignaga and Dharmakirti. Khen Rinpoche went on to say, however, that one should not allow oneself to be discouraged by such difficulties. For in bringing together the traditions of Madhyamaka and Chittamatra, respectively associated with Nagarjuna and Asanga, the *Madhyamakalankara* is a key text—a valuable tool that facilitates the acquisition of a full and balanced understanding of Mahayana Buddhism. In addition, Mipham's commentary on it is widely recognized to be one of his masterpieces. It is a penetrating and wide-ranging analysis, which, in Khen Rinpoche's estimation, ranks as one of the most profound commentaries on Madhyamaka ever written. This is all the more amazing when one considers that Mipham composed the work at the age of thirty-one, spent no more than a few hours on it each day, and completed the task in three weeks!

Given the difficult and intricate questions discussed in Mipham's commentary and the appeal that it is likely to have for students who are already familiar with Madhyamaka ideas, it is unnecessary in the present

introduction to discuss basic principles, presentations of which are readily available elsewhere.¹ Instead, in order to place the present work in context, we wish only (and with all due diffidence) to draw the reader's attention to certain important issues that may help to explain the reason for Mipham's composition as well as its remarkably fresh and invigorating approach to what is indeed a profound and interesting subject. In addition to supplying a brief biographical note on Shantarakshita, therefore, we have attempted to review briefly three questions: the Svatantrika-Prasangika distinction, which Mipham himself discusses at some length; the role played by the Yogachara or Chittamatra doctrine in Shantarakshita's synthesis; and certain logical and epistemological issues that will perhaps be unfamiliar to the nonspecialist.

Shantarakshita and Mipham's Commentary

Although we have very few details of the life of Shantarakshita, the fact remains that, thanks to his importance in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, more information is recorded about him than most other Indian masters. The brief biographical notes supplied by Mipham in the general introduction to his commentary bring together the scant, more or less hagiographical details culled from various traditional sources: Butön, Taranatha, *The Blue Annals*, and so on. From these we may gather that Shantarakshita was the son of the king of Zahor, that he became the abbot of the great monastic university of Nalanda, that he was a faultless upholder of the monastic discipline, and that he was a formidable expert in the art of philosophical disputation, universally admired for his intelligence and learning. His reputation as a unique authority spread beyond the borders of his native land, and when the king of Tibet, who, Mipham tells us, "knew nothing about India," wished to propagate the Buddhist teachings in his country, it was to Shantarakshita that he naturally appealed.

With regard to the role Shantarakshita played in the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century, the few facts that we have speak for themselves. It was he who, at the behest of King Trisongdetsen, established the first important Buddhist institutions in the country. He began the construction of the first monastery at Samye, ordained the first monks, had texts brought from India, and inaugurated the great work of translation. In addition, and perhaps most crucial for the Tibetan tradition, it was Shantarakshita who advised the king to invite Guru Padmasambhava to Tibet in

order to quell the occult forces that were hindering their work, and to create a propitious environment for the propagation and practice of the Buddhist tantras. Finally, it seems to have been Shantarakshita who, foreseeing the difficulties to come, provided for the visit to Tibet of his disciple Kamalashila, who, according to tradition, successfully contended with the representative of a Chinese tradition of "sudden enlightenment" and established as normative the gradual methods of Indian Buddhism.

Shantarakshita's writings, lost for the most part in Sanskrit but preserved in Tibetan translation, give evidence of the encyclopedic range of his learning, which embraced all the religious and philosophical currents of his time, Hindu and Buddhist alike. The traditions of scholarship (teaching, composition, debate, and so on), for which Shantarakshita was famous, were favored by the cultural environment, which was stable and prosperous. Taranatha informs us that Shantarakshita's life coincided with the reigns of the first two kings of the Pala dynasty, whose rule, extending over the north-east of India, marked a period of confident expansion for Buddhist institutions. The great monastic complex of Vikramashila, for example, was founded during the reign of the second king, Dharmapala.²

The previous political dispensation, that is, the empires of the Gupta dynasty and of Harsha, although not hostile to Buddhism, had been favorably inclined to the development of Hinduism, and a spirit of religious and philosophical tolerance encouraged the growth of intellectual and scholarly activity. Hinduism, which in a still earlier age had been overshadowed by the dominant Buddhist culture inaugurated by Ashoka, revived. And stimulated in the long run by the penetrating critique implicit in the Buddhist teachings, it had evolved a powerful and sophisticated response. This resulted in intense intellectual exchange, in the refinement and reformulation of positions, and in an increase in subtlety on all sides. Within Buddhism itself, there was a proliferation of different schools, and as far as modern scholarship is able to determine, most known tenet systems of Indian Buddhism (including those associated with the early period) still existed in the eighth century—a spectrum of Hinayana and Mahayana views that were still living issues in Shantarakshita's time.³

Shantarakshita's importance in the scholarly field stems from the fact that he effected a synthesis that was to mark the last great development of Buddhist philosophy in India. To this synthesis—according to which the ultimate truth is presented in terms of Madhyamaka, while the conventional is understood in terms of the Chittamatra or Mind Only school—was added

another crucial component: the logico-epistemological tradition of Dig-naga and Dharmakīrti. This all-inclusive presentation of the Mahayana is the hallmark of Shantarakṣita's teaching. Moreover, the significance of the fact that this final synthesis was disseminated in Tibet not in the form of translated texts propagated by scholars, but through the direct intervention of its author, was not lost on the Tibetans, for whom it counts for much that Shantarakṣita went to Tibet himself and delivered his message in person. Throughout the early period of Buddhism in Tibet (that is, approximately the first four centuries), it was Shantarakṣita's synthesis that, on the level of the sūtra teachings, dominated the religious and intellectual scene.

With the passage of time and for reasons that we will discuss presently, the tradition of Shantarakṣita fell into shadow, superseded by a quite different systematization and presentation of the Madhyamaka teaching. There is therefore an element of controversy in the modern-day composition of such an extensive and lively commentary on the *Madhyamakalankara*, the principal statement of Shantarakṣita's view. For in Mipham's opinion, this view had been marginalized by an interpretation of Madhyamaka that, however influential and well established, was nevertheless severely flawed.

It is important to situate Mipham's intellectual and scholarly activities in the context of the Rimé (*ris med*) or nonsectarian movement inaugurated in the nineteenth century by such masters as Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Thayé, Patrul Rinpoche, and Loter Wangpo. In a bid to combat widespread intellectual narrowness, the bitter fruit of sectarian animosity, the aim of this great endeavor was to recover as much as possible the open-minded and eclectic spirit that had characterized Tibetan Buddhism in an earlier age but had vanished largely as a result of the political and religious conflicts that had troubled Tibet since the fifteenth century.⁴ Although the Rimé movement is sometimes described as "ecumenical," its aim was not to effect a union, still less a uniformity, between different traditions or religious obediences. Instead it was to collect and preserve the many teachings and practices of the entire spectrum of Tibetan Buddhism—especially those that were in danger of being lost—in an all-embracing initiative that recognized the value of all traditions and was tolerant of differences.

The Rimé movement exerted a powerfully revitalizing influence on the Sakya, Kagyu, and Nyingma traditions, which had previously felt themselves overwhelmed, if not actually supplanted, by the institutional and in-

tellectual hegemony of the Gelug school. Reviving interest, supported by the financial sponsorship of the secular authorities at Derge in Kham, led to the founding of new centers of learning that encouraged the study of the different scholarly traditions, contributing to a general enrichment of spiritual and intellectual life and providing respectable and viable alternatives to the dominant approach of Gelugpa scholasticism.⁵

In this new wave of activity, Mipham played an important role. As recorded in the biography composed by his disciple Kunzang Palden,⁶ he was commissioned by his teacher Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo to compose commentaries on all the great Mahayana shastras, presenting the characteristic approach of the Old Translation school in a form suitable for use in the Nyingma commentarial colleges.

In the final stanza of the introductory verses to his commentary on the *Madhyamakalankara*, Mipham remarked that the tradition contained therein had "dwindled now to embers." He was referring to the extraordinary fact that, despite the almost mythical status that Shantarakṣita occupied and continues to occupy in the religious history of Tibet, by the nineteenth century, his writings had been forgotten and were practically unknown. Composed in 1877, Mipham's commentary was the first to be written on the *Madhyamakalankara* in four hundred years. In keeping with the principles of the Rimé movement, however, Mipham's work was not intended merely as a piece of philosophical archaeology. It is clear that he meant to revive what he believed to be the specificity of the Nyingma understanding of Madhyamaka, reaching back through such figures as Longchen Rabjam and Rongdzom Pandita to the teachings and view of Shantarakṣita himself. Even more striking is Mipham's presentation of Shantarakṣita as the very equal of Nagarjuna and Asanga. He was the "third charioteer," whose *Madhyamakalankara* united the traditions of his illustrious predecessors, integrating in a profound synthesis the two great streams of Mahayana Buddhism. Mipham's commentary embodied, as we shall see, a powerful reassessment of Madhyamaka and was in effect a challenge to the establishment. Shantarakṣita's teachings had almost disappeared. "But if they be revived," Mipham's prefatory verses conclude, "and burn like forest fires, let those who chatter carelessly beware!"

Mipham and the Svatantrika-Prasangika Distinction

For the first four centuries after the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet, the Madhyamaka teachings were upheld principally according to the tradition of Shantarakshita. Bhavaviveka's commentary on Nagarjuna, together with its extensive subcommentary by Avalokitavrata,⁷ were also translated in the early period, and this gave rise, in the early doxographical literature, to the perception of two Madhyamaka traditions, differentiated according to the way they discuss conventional phenomena in terms of other, non-Madhyamaka, tenet systems. In his *lta ba'i khyad par*, therefore, Shantarakshita's disciple Yeshe De describes the view of Bhavaviveka (Bhavya for short) as Sautrantika-Madhyamaka (*mdo sde spyod pa'i dbu ma pa*) and refers to that of Shantarakshita and Kamalashila as Yogachara-Madhyamaka (*mul 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma pa*). The principal difference between these two views concerns the acceptance or rejection of extramental phenomena on the conventional level.⁸ Considering that, on the conventional level, phenomena are material and outside the mind, Bhavya explains them in terms of the Sautrantika tenet. Finding such a view to be philosophically untenable, Shantarakshita and his followers adopted the Yogachara position and denied the extramental status of phenomena appearing within the sphere of conventional truth. For them, conventional phenomena are the display of the mind and have no existence apart from the consciousness that observes them.

The general popularity of Shantarakshita's view no doubt owed something to the original impetus given to it by its founder—as well as to its acknowledged sophistication and the fact that it was more closely in line with the view expounded in the tantras. In any case, by the turn of the twelfth century, the Yogachara-Madhyamaka tradition was well established and counted among its adherents such important figures as the translator Ngok Loden Sherab (1059–1109) and the great logician Chapa Chökyi Senge (1109–1169).⁹ This situation began to change in the first half of the twelfth century when important works by Chandrakirti were for the first time translated into Tibetan by Patsap Nyima Drak (1055–1145).

When studying the history of Madhyamaka, it is important to resist the impression of timelessness created by the generally ahistorical character of the doxographical literature. For example, one often reads about the “dis-

agreement” between Chandrakirti and Bhavya, and one might almost imagine that these two masters contended face to face. Similarly, the fact that Bhavya and Shantarakshita are commonly referred to as Svatantrikas could give the impression that both these masters were the object of Chandrakirti's critique. It is easy to overlook the fact that, for the most part, the main protagonists in the history of Indian Madhyamaka were separated by long periods of time. Although Buddhapalita and Bhavya were historically quite close (both lived in the sixth century), there is no evidence that they ever met. The fact that Buddhapalita returned no answer to Bhavya's criticism gave rise to the legend that he was intimidated by the latter's princely rank. But there are reasons for thinking that by the time Bhavya composed his critique, Buddhapalita was no longer alive. Chandrakirti (seventh century), for his part, wrote his defense of Buddhapalita and critique of Bhavya at a distance of over a hundred years, and he himself was dead at least a century before Shantarakshita composed his works. The historical perspective is obviously crucial for an accurate understanding of the quite complex way in which the Madhyamaka tradition developed. It is important to be aware of the order in which the great Madhyamaka texts were composed in India and also of the quite different order in which they were translated in Tibet. For it is only by knowing what texts were available to the Tibetans, and when, that we can have some idea of the manner in which their understanding of Madhyamaka evolved.

Before the twelfth century, the Tibetan scholars who studied Bhavya's *Prajnapradipa* and its subcommentary would have been well aware of the fact that he had criticized an otherwise little-known master by the name of Buddhapalita,¹⁰ whose own commentary had also been translated in the early period. The reading of these works would have revealed that Bhavya had—no doubt as a means of underlining the correctness of his own approach—attacked Buddhapalita for what he considered to be the latter's unsatisfactory method of expounding Nagarjuna's text. It is worth considering this matter in some detail, since an awareness of what Bhavya was doing (and what he thought he was doing) is helpful in gaining a balanced understanding of the Svatantrika-Prasangika distinction.¹¹

It will be remembered that in the *Mulamadhyamaka-karika* (*Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*), Nagarjuna had subjected other Buddhist tenet systems to a searching critique. His aim was to show that despite their efforts to systematize the Buddha's teachings and facilitate their implementation, they had fallen short in their understanding of the nature of phenomena. In

making their assertions and negations in terms of phenomenal existence, they had failed to penetrate the heart of the Buddha's insight that ultimate truth lies beyond the expression of thought and word and is known only when the mind has transcended every conceptual extreme, whether of existence, nonexistence, both, or neither (this is the famous tetralemma). In pointing out this truth, it was obviously impossible for Nagarjuna to define, by any kind of positive statement, what he himself believed to be ineffable. When subjecting the imperfect view to critical analysis, therefore, Nagarjuna abstained from making any kind of positive assertion that could itself be taken as a description of the ultimate. Instead, his favorite method was not to contradict a defective position outright but to press it to its logical conclusions in accordance with principles acceptable to the opponent, thereby revealing its implicit absurdity by drawing out unwanted consequences that the opponent could not deny. By such a technique, theories are refuted not by being overwhelmed by some other, more cogent formulation but by being subjected to such a strain that they collapse under their own weight. When every possible position is thus annihilated, it is as if the mind is rendered speechless. For the implication is irresistible that the nature of phenomena—which, regardless of any theory, undeniably appears—lies beyond the range of the discursive intellect.

Bhavya was fully aware of Nagarjuna's intentions in adopting such a strategy. The use of consequential arguments had served Nagarjuna well. One could even say that given his evident objective—namely, to indicate the inexpressible nature of the ultimate truth—such a debate procedure was indispensable. Bhavya certainly had nothing to say against it. He nevertheless objected strenuously to the fact that, in his own commentary, Buddhāpalita had done no more than follow Nagarjuna's example and confined himself likewise to the exclusive use of *prasanga*, or consequential arguments. Bhavya severely castigated Buddhāpalita for what he had accepted in Nagarjuna without demur. What could be the reason for such a flagrant double standard? Bhavya has been accused of unfairness, but further reflection suggests that his criticism of Buddhāpalita was consistent with what he apparently considered to be the role of commentary.

We have seen that the very nature of Nagarjuna's intentions had necessitated the use of consequential arguments, the purpose of which was not simply to demolish the imperfect position but to suggest an insight that, by definition, remained unstated. Bhavya, on the other hand, seems to have thought that a technique that was both appropriate and inevitable in the

original text was quite out of place at the commentarial level. Commentary is after all a form of mediation. Its role is not to repeat verbatim the message of the original author but to elucidate it and to render its meaning accessible to a remote and uncomprehending audience. Now, the success of the kind of consequential argument just described depends not only on the cogency of the reasoning advanced but also on the ability of the interlocutor to understand the (unstated) point that is being made. As a result, there remains an inescapable element of doubt, which the exclusive use of consequentialist arguments necessarily leaves unresolved. For this reason, in Bhavya's view, the use of consequences—quite admissible in the original text—is undesirable in commentary because consequences leave the kind of uncertainty that it is precisely the role of commentary to remove. The task of the commentator, as mediator and teacher, is to assist the reader and to ensure, by the use of positive statements, that he or she understands what Nagarjuna means.¹²

In other words, it seems that Bhavya believed that Buddhāpalita was failing in his duties. As commentator, it was his responsibility to explain Nagarjuna's procedure, not merely to duplicate it. Nagarjuna had intended, by the indirect method of consequential arguments, to bring the mind to the limits of rational discourse and to point out the ultimate nature that lies beyond. By contrast, the commentator's role is not to repeat Nagarjuna's already superlative performance but to discuss it and to present it skillfully. The task at hand is to resolve the element of doubt intrinsic to the consequentialist method, to deal with possible objections, and generally to facilitate the intellectual comprehension of those who require explanation and who cannot as yet penetrate, directly and unaided, the profound message of the original author. To that extent, it is both necessary and fitting to make positive, explanatory statements. These do not of course perform the same function as Nagarjuna's arguments, which is to indicate the ineffable truth, but they at least have the merit of explaining what Nagarjuna is actually doing. Commentary therefore has an essentially secondary and ancillary role. It is a pedagogical tool, its modest purpose being to unpack the meaning, and remove the obscurities, of the original text.

Throughout his own commentary, therefore, Bhavya makes extensive use of formal logic, which, in the wake of Dignaga's important and still recent work, was very much in vogue at Bhavya's time. He devotes much energy to recasting, or rather "reversing," Nagarjuna's consequentialist arguments (*thal ldog*) in the form of independent inferential statements, in

other words, syllogisms or probative arguments consisting of (1) a subject, (2) a probandum, (3) an evidential sign endowed with forward and reverse pervasion or concomitance, and (4) an example. Following this enthusiastic lead, logic came to be closely associated with the kind of commentarial exposition of Nagarjuna's teaching of which Bhavya himself could be regarded as a pioneer. It is important to notice that at no time does Bhavya give the slightest suggestion that he is in any way questioning Nagarjuna's essential message about the ineffability of the ultimate truth. Nagarjuna himself had severely restricted the use of logic to the conventional level. Insight into the state beyond conceptual extremes obviously cannot be the conclusion of reasoned argument but arises only when the mind enters a state of silence that is free from all discursive activity. Similarly, although Bhavya, for his part, was greatly interested in logic as a means of producing intellectual certainty, he too seems to have been well aware of the provisional nature of its role in the Madhyamaka context. This becomes evident when one considers how the use of logic obliged Bhavya to make certain important adjustments in his presentation of the two truths.

Nagarjuna had emphasized that the two truths coincide and are perfectly united in phenomena. The ultimate truth of phenomena is their emptiness of intrinsic existence; their relative truth is the fact that they inevitably appear through the play of interdependence. Bhavya does not deny this. Nevertheless, he made a provisional division between the two truths in a move that reflected his essentially pedagogical concerns. The aim of this division was to create a basis for debate between Madhyamikas and non-Madhyamikas on the subject of the nature of phenomena.

Meaningful communication demands at least a modicum of shared premises. The participants in any debate must agree on what it is they are talking about. Let us take the stock example. Buddhists and Hindus disagree about the nature of sound. The former believe that sound is impermanent, the latter that it is permanent. They both accept, however, that what they are proposing to talk about is sound: the phenomenon that everyone experiences regardless of whatever properties they may ascribe to it. On the basis of this agreement, the debate can proceed, and both Buddhists and Hindus can go on to propound their own theories and respective arguments. By contrast, in matters where there is no shared ground, no meaningful exchange can take place. If, for instance, a Hindu were to approach a Buddhist wishing to discuss the various aspects attributed in the Vedas to "permanent sound," no debate is possible. Since the Buddhist con-

siders that there is no such thing as permanent sound, he or she has nothing to say about its supposed properties.

Turning to the question of the inherent existence of phenomena, it would seem that, since Madhyamikas deny this and non-Madhyamikas assert it, there is no shared ground. The two positions are at loggerheads and there is no room for discussion. From the Madhyamaka point of view, on the other hand, compassion demands that some effort be made to communicate the truth about the nature of phenomena (in other words, the view of the Buddha and of Nagarjuna). For it is only by the realization of this truth that the sufferings of samsara can be brought to an end. A bridge has to be created between the two sides; it is necessary to find a premise that they both share. Once this is done, the whole apparatus of reasoning can be brought into play and the non-Madhyamika can be induced, through logical argument, to see the error of believing in substantial existence. It is undoubtedly in this spirit that Bhavya adopts his important strategy. He divides the two truths on a temporary basis and accepts, for the sake of argument with his opponent, that phenomena exist "according to their characteristics." As a result, discussion between the Madhyamika and the non-Madhyamika can get under way. They are talking about phenomena, the characteristics of which they both perceive. They can now debate about whether or not such phenomena exist inherently in the way that they appear.

This division between the two truths and the implied necessity of defining them in relation to each other makes necessary a further distinction, this time in relation to the ultimate truth. In the *Tarkajvala*,¹³ Bhavya considered the important objection that since the ultimate truth transcends the discursive intellect, it follows that no verbal formulation can possibly express it. How therefore is it possible even to talk about the two truths, distinguishing ultimate truth in opposition to the relative? If the ultimate cannot be talked about, how can it be distinguished from anything at all? In response, Bhavya draws a distinction between two kinds of ultimate truth. On the one hand, he says, there is the ultimate that is "world-transcending" (*'jig rten las 'das pa*). This is the ultimate truth in itself, the completely ineffable state beyond conceptual elaboration, which can only be experienced but never expressed. On the other hand, there is an ultimate that Bhavya describes as "pure worldly wisdom" (*dag pa 'jig rten pa'i ye shes*), which, in the context of the division of the two truths, is the counterpart of the relative and is the object of thought and word. It is "the ultimate that can be talked

about." These expressions run parallel to another, better-known distinction, which first appears in another text also attributed to Bhavya,¹⁴ between the "ultimate truth in itself" (*nam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*) and the "approximate ultimate" (*nam grangs pa'i don dam*) or "concordant ultimate" (*mithun pa'i don dam*).

All these points serve to demonstrate the close association, established quite early between Madhyamaka and the use of logic within a commentarial tradition inaugurated by Bhavya, that in all probability constituted the mainstream presentation of Madhyamaka in India up to the time of Shantarakshita and beyond. As the inheritors of this tradition, the Tibetan Madhyamikas between the eighth and twelfth centuries would have been perfectly conversant with the expository methods and terminological distinctions just described. In other words, the logico-epistemological tradition of Dignaga and Dharmakirti was primarily and intimately linked with the kind of Madhyamaka that was dominant in both India and Tibet until the twelfth century—that is to say, the view that, after Patsap's translations of Chandrakirti's works, would be referred to as Svatantrika.

One is tempted to wonder how much the Tibetans before Patsap were aware of the importance of Chandrakirti. It seems inconceivable that Shantarakshita could have been ignorant of his illustrious predecessor, a confrere indeed of the same monastic center. But to what extent he enlarged upon Chandrakirti's view to his Tibetan disciples is something we shall never know. What we do know, however, is that a text by Chandrakirti—his commentary on Nagarjuna's *Yuktishastika*—was translated in the early period by Jinamitra, Danashila, Shilendrabodhi, and Shantarakshita's disciple Yeshe De. Thus, although Chandrakirti was known in Tibet as early as the eighth century, this was specifically in connection with the logical tradition. Approximately four hundred years were to pass before he was identified as a great master of Madhyamaka. It is worth noting too that even in India, and despite the excellence of his writings, Chandrakirti seems to have attracted almost no following and made no impact on the development of the Madhyamaka tradition there. The first known commentary on the *Madhyamakavatara*, for example, was composed by Jayananda, no earlier than the eleventh century, over three hundred years after Chandrakirti's death.

One can well imagine therefore that the translation of Chandrakirti's works, especially the *Prasannapada* (his detailed commentary on Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamaka-karika*) must have caused a sensation in Tibet. For the first time, Tibetan scholars were confronted with a new and important

fact, namely, that the hitherto obscure victim of Bhavya's critique had been powerfully vindicated, and that Bhavya had himself been subjected to withering criticism, by a commentator who was evidently of the highest capacity. Chandrakirti refuted Bhavya's criticism of Buddhapalita point by point, vindicated the use of consequential arguments as the best means of establishing the view, and rejected Bhavya's use of independent arguments as being wholly out of place in the Madhyamaka context. "Bhavaviveka," he says in the *Prasannapada*, "wishes only to parade his knowledge of the logical treatises. He adduces independent arguments, despite the fact that he claims to be a Madhyamika. The Madhyamaka system, to be sure, creates lots of difficulties for such a would-be logician. He makes one mistake after another."¹⁵ Chandrakirti's criticism of Bhavya's use of autonomous inferences was part of a wider rejection of the logico-epistemological tradition of Dignaga, which he regarded as a misguided attempt to find "philosophical completeness" and a sense of intellectual security that is antithetical to the fundamental insight of Madhyamaka.¹⁶ For Chandrakirti, Bhavya's division between the two truths was neither necessary nor desirable and was in any case a thorough misrepresentation of Nagarjuna's approach. This is not to say that Chandrakirti rejected the use of reasoning, but for him its purpose, as with Nagarjuna and Buddhapalita, was to mark the limits of the discursive inquiry. It is perfectly true that in debate about the true existence of phenomena, there is no shared ground between the Madhyamika and the substantialist. Therefore, in Chandrakirti's view, consequences (*prasanga*) are the only kind of argument appropriate for Madhyamikas, for it is only by such means that they can indicate the ultimate without making statements that of necessity compromise, or at any rate obscure, their own position. The use of autonomous arguments, for the very reason that they imply the acceptance (however provisional) of entities, is ruled out. In reply to Bhavya's thesis that such arguments are demanded by the very nature of commentary, Chandrakirti could and did point out that in the autocommentary on the *Vigrahavyavartani* (his defense of Madhyamaka method), Nagarjuna himself had abstained from using independent probative arguments.¹⁷ For Chandrakirti, it serves no purpose to divide the two truths or to explain the relative in philosophical terms. For such explanations do violence to the relative truth, in the sense that they produce theories that are more or less far-fetched in relation to the phenomena that are actually experienced. On the contrary, Chandrakirti says, the relative truth consists simply of

phenomena as we observe them, the unanalyzed constituents of the common consensus.

Following the work of Patsap, a new doxographical distinction came into being. It was now possible to differentiate Madhyamikas not, as previously, by the way they discussed conventionalities but according to the type of arguments they used to establish the ultimate truth. On one side are the Prasangikas, who in debate make no assertion of their own but seek to demolish the opponent's position by the adduction of unwanted consequences. On the other side, there are the Svatantrikas, who, not content with mere refutation, make their own positive assertions, independently of the views of their opponents. On the basis, therefore, of the critique laid out in the *Prasannapada*, it became customary to describe Buddhapalita and Chandrakirti as Prasangikas and Bhavya as Svatantrika. And given the fact that Shantarakshita and Kamalashila also made use of autonomous inferences, they too are classified in the doxographical literature as belonging, despite important philosophical differences, to the same group as Bhavya. Henceforth, an unwieldy terminological difference came into being between Sautrantika-Svatantrika-Madhyamaka and Yogachara-Svatantrika-Madhyamaka.

Once again it is important to emphasize the close connection between the Svatantrika school and logico-epistemological tradition (that is, the teachings on pramana) to which Shantarakshita himself made important contributions and in which the followers of his tradition, namely, the early Tibetan Madhyamikas, showed a keen interest. This was especially true of the school of Sangpu, founded by Ngok Loden Sherab and continued by Chapa Chökyi Senge. The latter composed the first Tibetan summary of Dharmakirti's thought and played a crucial role in the founding of Tibetan scholasticism.¹⁸ This is in contrast with the radical Prasangika distrust of "philosophy" (at least as far as Chandrakirti was concerned) and in particular of logic and epistemology as being relevant to the establishment of the view. Given the degree to which the earlier tradition of Madhyamaka was entrenched in Tibet and also the intellectual tools and debating skills already at their disposal, it is not surprising that, despite the intrinsic quality of Chandrakirti's texts, the introduction of Prasangika to Tibet met with a powerful resistance. Chapa, for example, who was reputedly formidable in debate, is said to have brilliantly defended the Svatantrika view against Prasangika innovation and to have composed several refutations of Chandrakirti. In the interesting story of the encounter between him and

the Indian master Jayananda, it was perhaps to be expected that the victory should go to the Svatantrika master of logic and not to his Prasangika opponent.¹⁹

Despite such opposition, the Prasangika approach gained in popularity and received powerful support from Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), the founder of the Gelugpa school, who greatly emphasized its superiority. For him, the two subschools of Madhyamaka are divided by a significant difference of view. The misguided use of autonomous inferences by Bhavya, Shantarakshita, Kamalashila, and others indicated important, if residual, ontological commitments that resulted in an imperfect understanding of emptiness. The Svatantrika view is hence considered a lower tenet. It presents a path that of itself is unable to lead to liberation, something that only the Prasangika approach can achieve. For Tsongkhapa, one of the criteria for having a correct understanding of Madhyamaka is precisely the ability to distinguish correctly between the Prasangika and Svatantrika views and to understand that they do not have the same object of negation. It is said therefore that the Prasangikas refute the reality of phenomena on both the ultimate and conventional levels but that the Svatantrikas, in claiming that phenomena exist conventionally according to their characteristics, only manage to do so on the ultimate level. Since the Svatantrika view retains a certain clinging to substantiality, it is to be classified as the highest of the lower views, ranked beneath Prasangika, the supremacy of which Tsongkhapa threw into even sharper relief by the formulation of eight special features: his so-called eight difficult points.

The brilliance of Tsongkhapa's teaching, his qualities as a leader, his emphasis on monastic discipline, and the purity of his example attracted an immense following. Admiration, however, was not unanimous, and his presentation of Madhyamaka in particular provoked a fierce backlash, mainly from the Sakya school, to which Tsongkhapa and his early disciples originally belonged. These critics included Tsongkhapa's contemporaries Rongtön Shakya Gyaltsen (1367–1449) and Taksang Lotsawa (1405–?), followed in the next two generations by Gorampa Sonam Senge (1429–1487), Serdog Panchen Shakya Chokden (1428–1509), and the eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje (1505–1557). All of them rejected Tsongkhapa's interpretation as inadequate, newfangled, and unsupported by tradition. Although they recognized certain differences between the Prasangika and Svatantrika approaches,²⁰ they considered that Tsongkhapa had greatly exaggerated the divergence of view. They believed that the difference between the two

subschools was largely a question of methodology and did not amount to a disagreement on ontological matters.

Not surprisingly, these objections provoked a counterattack, and they were vigorously refuted by Tsongkhapa's disciples. In due course, however, the most effective means of silencing such criticisms came with the ideological proscriptions imposed at the beginning of the seventeenth century. These followed the military intervention of Gusri Khan, who put an end to the civil war in central Tibet, placed temporal authority in the hands of the Fifth Dalai Lama, and ensured the rise to political power of the Gelugpa school. Subsequently, the writings of all the most strident of Tsongkhapa's critics ceased to be available and were almost lost. It was, for example, only at the beginning of the twentieth century that Gorampa's works could be fully reassembled, whereas Shakya Chokden's works, long thought to be irretrievably lost, were discovered only recently in Bhutan and published as late as 1975.²¹

The only reason for alluding to these unfortunate events is to make the simple point that by the time Mipham came to write his commentary on Shantarakshita, the general understanding of Madhyamaka in Tibet was defined by the Gelugpa interpretation to the point where no other assessment could be seriously entertained. The hierarchy of views, which exalted the Prasangika approach and relegated the Svatantrika to an inferior rank, was so well entrenched as to appear practically self-evident. Placed indiscriminately in the same category, Bhavaviveka and Shantarakshita were dwarfed by the towering figure of Chandrakirti, and their works had long since ceased to be the object of serious study. Their views were reduced to a few salient points preserved in the doxographical literature—little more than philosophical museum pieces—to be cursorily reviewed and refuted with stock arguments by students on their way to understanding and establishing the Prasangika view as the pinnacle of all tenets.

In view of these generally held assumptions, it is obvious that, in presenting Shantarakshita's *Madhyamakalankara*, Mipham could not proceed without first redefining the notions of Svatantrika and Prasangika. To advocate Shantarakshita's view without justification would have been automatically self-defeating. For in the intellectual climate that then predominated, it would have meant adopting a view that was universally held to be inferior. As one modern scholar has remarked, it would have been as bizarre and unintelligible as propounding the supremacy of Newtonian physics in the present century.²² No one who held such a view could hope

to be taken seriously. Mipham therefore prefaces his commentary with a long and important introduction in which he presents in fine detail an alternative and extremely refined interpretation of the Svatantrika-Prasangika distinction. He integrates them into a workable synthesis. He reformulates them, shows how they relate to each other, and affirms the necessity of both.

When discussing the two Madhyamaka approaches, Mipham of course uses the terms "Svatantrika" and "Prasangika." In his day, it would have been confusing and counterproductive to do otherwise. On the other hand, the question of dialectical preferences (the use of consequences as opposed to autonomous inferences) to which these terms allude is for him of only secondary importance.²³ For Mipham, the key to understanding the difference between Prasangika and Svatantrika lies in the distinction between the two kinds of ultimate truth: the actual ultimate truth in itself (*nam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*) and the approximate or concordant ultimate (*nam grangs pa'i don dam* or *miñun pa'i don dam*). The first to make this distinction was, as we have seen, Bhavya; it was part of his general pedagogical strategy of dividing the two truths. Given the importance of this distinction for Mipham, it is worth considering it a little further.

Chandrakirti says in the *Prasannapada* that the aim of the consequential dialectic is to bring the mind to a state of silence. This silence is not of course a state of mental paralysis. It is the silence of the wise, the silence of nonconceptual wisdom. For Chandrakirti, the purpose of the exclusive use of consequential arguments is to introduce the mind to the direct knowledge of emptiness, not to an intellectual understanding of it, however subtle. But here there is an obvious practical problem.

If the ultimate truth is ineffable, how can it be communicated to those who are without realization? How is one to avoid misunderstanding? What is to prevent one from taking Nagarjuna's message at face value and assuming that the ultimate is a mere negation, a kind of nihilism that undermines moral action? We know of course that Chandrakirti, like any other Buddhist teacher, must have expounded the doctrine and guided beings on the path, from the four noble truths onward. And, by milking the painting of a cow, he might have given his disciples a little help in calling into question their deeply held conviction of the solid reality of phenomena.²⁴ But when establishing the view, he makes no assertion and gives no description. From the very beginning, he presents the two truths as undivided: Phenomena appear yet are empty; they are empty and yet they appear. And

either we are able to understand this and immediately perceive the unreal, dreamlike quality of phenomenal appearance—grasping at once that “form is emptiness, emptiness is form”—or we are not. It is clear that the Prasangika approach makes no concessions to the spiritually unprepared. Its success depends not only on the skill of the teacher but also on the aptitude and merit of the disciple.

In contrast with this, the Svatantrika approach, while not denying that the ultimate is completely mind-transcending, seems devised to meet the needs of beings of more ordinary capacity. This being so, it is not surprising that for so many centuries it should have remained the dominant tradition. It accepts, on a provisional basis, that the phenomenal world is to all intents and purposes real—real according to the characteristics that appear in the common consensus of unenlightened beings, who have an ingrained tendency to apprehend as truly existent whatever appears to their senses. On the *ultimate level*, however, these phenomena do not exist, for ultimately phenomena are empty. For the purposes of explanation therefore, the two truths are separated, and the ultimate truth, understood in terms of this vision, is, as we have said, the *approximate ultimate*. It is the negation of the real existence of phenomena and is not to be mistaken for the *actual ultimate in itself*, which refers to an insight that transcends not only the existence but also the nonexistence of phenomena.

For Mipham, it is in relation to the distinction between the approximate and actual ultimates that the difference between the Prasangika and Svatantrika approaches is most clearly seen. “It should be understood,” he says, “that the authentic Svatantrika is the approach that emphasizes the approximate ultimate, while the Prasangika approach emphasizes the ultimate in itself, beyond all assertions.” Chandrakirti’s Prasangika method aims to place the mind immediately and directly in the state of freedom from conceptual elaboration (as experienced in the meditation of those who have attained the path of seeing and beyond). To this end, consequential reasoning is used only in order to abolish the attempts of reason to account for the true status of things. By contrast, the Svatantrika method is gradual. It begins with the phenomena of which the world seems to be composed and which impinge upon our senses. These phenomena—which ineluctably appear to us whether we think them real or not—are provisionally accorded a certain existence. This creates the space for debate and the reasoned demonstration that phenomena cannot possibly exist in the way that they appear. By this means, the (approximate) ultimate truth is

posited, in contrast with the conventional truth of appearance. “Finally,” Mipham says, “the ultimate truth in itself, which is completely free from all assertion, is reached.” The ultimate truth that the Svatantrikas expound and demonstrate by rational means is but a distant if concordant image, “no more than a conceptual reflection” of the ultimate truth in itself. And with regard to the latter—which is what noble beings on the Bodhisattva grounds “see with the utterly stainless primordial wisdom of meditative equipoise”—the Svatantrikas, like the Prasangikas, make no assertion. The final goal of the Svatantrika and Prasangika approaches is therefore the same. The difference lies only in the pedagogical methods adopted. Obviously, these reflect the needs of the disciples, not the level of realization of the teacher. Consequently, it is inappropriate to classify the great masters of Madhyamaka as higher or lower on the scale of views. If a hierarchical distinction does exist between the Prasangika and Svatantrika methods, it can only be in terms of the qualities and aptitudes of the disciples for whose sake they are expounded. “The two approaches, Svatantrika and Prasangika, belong respectively to those who follow the gradual path and those whose realization is not gradual (*rim skyed*) but immediate (*cig car*).”²⁵ Both approaches are therefore to be prized—especially the Prasangika, for “this profound view resembles the manner in which primordial purity is established in the texts of the Great Perfection.”²⁶ Finally, whereas the *Madhyamakalankara* embodies for the most part the Svatantrika method, brief but perfectly clear passages indicate that, on his own account, Shantarakshita “indeed possesses the ultimate and essential view of the Prasangikas.” Consequently, Mipham roundly declares, his view “is in perfect agreement with the view of the glorious Chandrakirti.”²⁷

Mipham’s point therefore is that, in addition to bringing together both the Middle Way and Mind Only teachings, the *Madhyamakalankara* also embodies a synthesis of the Prasangika and Svatantrika approaches. It is consequently an ornament for the entire Madhyamaka and not just for one subschool. By elaborating such a synthesis, Mipham’s aim is to recover the work of Shantarakshita and the Svatantrikas generally as objects of respectable study. And he shows at some length that the neglect of their teachings, encouraged by imperfect and superficial doxographical classifications, leads to a distorted understanding of the entire tradition and constitutes an important hindrance to the realization of the Madhyamaka view.

A Rival Interpretation

The form and content of commentary, given its essentially mediatory function, is dictated not only by the insights of the commentator into the meaning of the commented text but also by the needs and expectations of the targeted readership. In his presentation of Shantarashita, Mipham was obliged to deal with what he considered to be mistaken interpretations of Madhyamaka, and many of the topics referred to (sometimes quite indirectly) in his commentary, particularly in the field of pramana, were controversial, given that competing positions had crystallized along sectarian lines. These points of view were well known, and in refuting a given idea, it was often unnecessary for Mipham to specify its provenance. Generally speaking, however, in his various works on Madhyamaka, Mipham could not avoid calling into question the dominant Gelugpa view and answering the attacks of Gelugpa critics. He does this, as we have said, in the spirit of the Rimé movement. Although his writings show that he was certainly no stranger to the art of disputation, Mipham's purpose in writing was not polemic. The principal objective, as he himself declared, was to enrich, at the request of his teacher, the scholarly and religious field. Unlike the more controversial scholars of the preceding centuries, Mipham is invariably and sincerely respectful of Tsongkhapa, and his attitude toward the Gelugpa school, though occasionally stern, is generally irenic and accommodating. But even if he does not express himself with the same stridency as Tsongkhapa's earlier critics, it is clear that, on all important philosophical issues, he shares their opinions. In the case of the eight difficult points, for instance, a reading of Mipham's works shows that even if the tone is rather low-key and sometimes even humorous,²⁸ he rarely misses an opportunity to refute them.

Since, as we have said, most of Mipham's critique is directed at the Gelugpa presentation of Madhyamaka and its attendant issues, it would perhaps be useful to review, albeit tentatively, the basic position of this school and to highlight the specific points that Mipham, along with the majority of non-Gelugpa critics, found so objectionable.

We have seen that, following Bhavya, a close connection was established between the pramana tradition and the kind of Madhyamaka that was later to be designated as Svatantrika. Chandrakirti disapproved of

logic and epistemology²⁹ but had little influence on his contemporaries (as also, in this respect, on subsequent generations). The association between Madhyamaka and pramana continued in Tibet, notably, as we have also seen, in the Sangpu tradition and the key figure of Chapa. These facts are of relevance to an understanding of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka interpretation. Rejecting the Svatantrika view defended by Chapa in favor of the Prasangka view of Chandrakirti (and Patsap), Tsongkhapa nevertheless embraced with enthusiasm the pramana teachings of Dignaga and Dharmakirti, and this according to Chapa's interpretation. This was a highly paradoxical move. For he adopted the logical method but rejected the view with which it was traditionally associated, and proceeded to apply this same method to a view that had traditionally rejected it. Pramana plays an important role in Tsongkhapa's unique presentation of the Prasangka view,³⁰ which was on this account censured with great severity by his Sakyapa critics. Taksang attacked Tsongkhapa in terms that are strangely reminiscent of Chandrakirti's criticism of Bhavya quoted earlier.

The cause for such a burden of contradictions [in Tsongkhapa's writings] is that, despite [Chandrakirti's and others'] statements again and again [that phenomena exist] only for the world without analysis, [Tsongkhapa] applied reasoning and proved [their valid conventional existence] due to the force of his habituation to logic.³¹

For Tsongkhapa, the principles of logical discourse apply not only to the investigation of the nature of phenomena but also to the actual findings of such an investigation. Not only the relative truth but also the ultimate truth of emptiness must remain intelligible in logical terms. It seems, in other words, that, for Tsongkhapa, the ultimate truth is not completely ineffable and in a sense still remains the object of the discursive mind. For him, the purpose of the fourfold refutation familiar from Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti is not (as it is for Mipham and other non-Gelugpa Madhyamikas) to put an end to intellectual activity in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of being an introduction to a state beyond conceptual activity, the tetralemmic refutation is understood figuratively, as applying not to phenomena themselves but to a separate object of negation referred to as "true existence" or "intrinsic existence." And it is upon this object of negation, and not phenomena themselves, that the Madhyamaka reasoning is brought to bear. As the stock expression goes, "The pot is not

empty of pot; it is empty of true existence." For Mipham, by contrast, the purpose of the Madhyamaka critique is to mark the limit beyond which rational discourse has no place. Once the state beyond conception has been brought into view, the next step is not more thought, certainly not more talk, but the settling of the mind in meditative equipoise. When the Madhyamaka arguments have done their work, there is nowhere for the ordinary intellect to go. The next step can only be the cultivation of the direct experience of that to which the words "ultimate truth" only approximately refer.

Tsongkhapa took a quite different view. It would seem that for him, the above strategy is far too vague, far too open to delusion and self-deception. For him, ultimate reality is "understood through conceptual schemes that follow the classical canons of rationality."³² Meditation on emptiness "is not a matter of withdrawing from conceptuality."³³ At the risk of caricature, we could perhaps say that Tsongkhapa was defending discursive reason from the deconstructive onslaught that results from a particularly, let us say, "apophatic" interpretation of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti. For him, even after the tetralemmic refutation, philosophy is still possible.

Given the distinction, in Tsongkhapa's presentation of Madhyamaka, between phenomena and their true existence, there is a crucial step in the understanding of emptiness that consists in the so-called "identification of the object of negation." It is necessary to refute only the true existence of phenomena and not phenomena themselves, and this presupposes the ability to recognize, within the phenomena of conventional existence, the putative "true existence" that the mind deludedly reifies and ascribes to them.

Thus Madhyamaka deconstruction does not concern existence proper. Things do not exist ultimately, as Nagarjuna's deconstructive reasonings demonstrate, but they do exist conventionally (and therefore can be said to exist). Madhyamaka reasonings do not affect the existence of phenomena, including emptiness, that can be understood according to the canons of rationality presupposed by a moderate realist interpretation of Buddhist epistemology. Essentialness can then be integrated within a global account in which reality can be described coherently, without any conflict between the two truths. This account also strengthens the validity of the conventional realm, which gains a kind of existence (albeit only conventional).³⁴

One of the most surprising aspects of Tsongkhapa's interpretation (to which, however, Mipham does not refer in the present commentary) is the fact that although he said that the correct realization of emptiness is impossible without the recognition of the object of negation just described (true existence as distinct from conventional existence), he also said that the ability to distinguish these two factors is possessed only by those who have already realized emptiness. His presentation, in other words, seems to involve an insuperable contradiction. Tsongkhapa's followers are well aware of this conundrum, and, in practice, it is accepted that before emptiness is realized, the distinction between phenomena and the true existence falsely attributed to them can never be more than theoretical. It is something that ordinary beings cannot perceive but must accept in a "correct assumption," the result of mental analysis (*vid dpyod*). In terms of the realist epistemology accepted by the Gelugpa school, it is only after emptiness is realized that the object of negation is identified by valid cognition. Once again, the Gelugpas are aware of the further problems that this solution raises. "At the very least, it constitutes a sleight of hand that hides the radical difference between the two truths."³⁵ In point of fact, Gelugpa thinkers recommend various solutions as means to overcome these difficulties.³⁶

Anyone who has read Mipham's commentary on the *Madhyamakavatara* will know that this account of "true existence," as something separate from phenomena, is for him extremely problematic and dangerous. He attacked it repeatedly and at great length. The Gelugpa interpretation of Prasangka has often been described by its critics as a form of Svatantrika in disguise, since its presentation of "conventional," as distinct from "true," existence seems very close to the "existence according to characteristics" that Bhavya had ascribed to phenomena on the relative level. It is in reference to this that Mipham remarks ironically that it must have been owing to some causal interdependence (*rten 'brel*) set in motion by the fact that Madhyamaka first appeared in Tibet in the form advocated by Shantarakshita that Tibetan Madhyamikas always seem destined to revert to the Svatantrika position! Contrary to what one might expect, however, this is not a recommendation. The separation of a putative object of negation from phenomena themselves is regarded as a piece of sophistry with unfortunate results. The use of probative arguments to establish emptiness, and the acceptance of phenomenal "existence according to characteristics" that these same arguments imply, constituted, in the hands of the Indian Svatantrikas, a provisional strategy. As we have seen, within the context of the separation of the

two truths that this strategy implies, the ultimate truth is regarded as no more than an approximate, concordant mental image. This, however, is a temporary device. Its purpose is to elicit an understanding of emptiness on the intellectual level. As a mental image, it enables the mind to draw close to a reality (the actual ultimate) that it does not directly express but only resembles. For Bhavya, this is as much as the discursive intellect can do. The correct understanding thus achieved must then be supplemented by meditation, as a result of which the mind may blossom into a direct experience of the ultimate truth in itself, which is free from all conceptual elaborations. At no point in the Svatantrika approach is any attempt made to bridge the gap between the two truths in intellectual, rational terms. On the contrary, the reason for distinguishing the two kinds of ultimate is precisely because the construction of such a bridge is impossible.

This, however, is what Tsongkhapa seems to do. He insists that the emptiness is intelligible in terms of logic and epistemology. Reason can still lay hold of it, and it remains the object of the discursive mind. For if emptiness is not an object of valid cognition, he says, it is a mere nothingness. In Mipham's view, this is a serious mistake. He says that the ordinary mind of worldly beings, the object of which is phenomenal appearance on the relative level, is not a valid means of knowledge in relation to the ultimate truth. For the latter transcends all conventionalities. Ordinary consciousness is produced in dependence on a support, and this is precisely why it is unable to grasp the dharmadhatu. For the latter "is not based on anything and is the field of primal, world-transcending wisdom."³⁷ To claim therefore that intellectual cognition can attain to the ultimate truth is as foolish, Mipham says, as thinking that a newborn baby can look directly at the sun. Instead of entertaining a misplaced confidence in the powers of reason and the processes of logic, it is essential to make a clear distinction between the lack of true existence as apprehended as a mental object (namely, the approximate ultimate) and the authentic ultimate in itself, which is beyond all assertions and concepts. Of course, even when such a distinction is rejected, it is still possible to speak of a union of the two truths, but within the parameters of such a view, this amounts, in Mipham's opinion, not to a union but to a mere juxtaposition. The negation of an extrinsic real existence, which leaves phenomena untouched, results, so to speak, in the placing of the two truths side by side (like a black thread and white thread twisted together). They remain distinct and are not unified.

On the other hand, when it is applied to its proper object, intellectual understanding plays a vital and liberative role. For its function is to orient the mind correctly and thus provide a sound basis for meditative training.

By thus acquiring a certain conviction in that which surpasses intellectual knowledge, and by training in it, one will eventually actualize it. . . . And we should not only abandon the fond hope that strenuous mental effort in the ordinary sense of the word can achieve profound emptiness, but we should also avoid any kind of depressed discouragement, thinking that it is unattainable. . . .

Emptiness entails appearance; appearance entails emptiness. The two can never be separate. If you gain a conviction that this is indeed the way things are—a conviction that is irreversible though a thousand Buddhas should deny it—you have, by learning and study, penetrated to the deepest point of the Madhyamaka scriptures. You can then pursue in earnest the paths of the sutras and the tantras, for you have found their vital root.³⁸

Consequently, while being appropriate for different needs and temperaments, the approaches of the Prasangika and Svatantrikas converge. The latter is ancillary to the former. With regard to the ultimate truth in itself—the object of primordial wisdom experienced by the Aryas in meditative equipoise—Prasangikas and Svatantrikas are alike in making no assertions. But when in the postmeditation period distinctions are made, it is easier to divide the ultimate truth into two categories as the Svatantrikas do. Summing up his assessment of the practical value of the Svatantrika approach, particularly as this is enshrined in Shantarakshita's teaching, Mipham declares:

The intelligent should ask themselves sincerely whether they would be able to realize the profound view of the glorious Chandrakirti (the Middle Way of primordial wisdom in meditative equipoise) without relying on the path set forth according to the present approach.³⁹

Chittamatra

The four tenet systems familiar from the doxographical literature are arranged in a hierarchy of views according to the way in which they define the ultimate nature of phenomena, an ascending scale that culminates in Madhyamaka, which shows that the ultimate status of phenomena is beyond the reach of conceptual and verbal formulation.

According to the usual description, the Chittamatra, or Mind Only, school defines as the relative truth the field of phenomena that appears to the deluded mind as divided between perceived objects and the perceiving mind. In reality, however, phenomena are not separate from the consciousness that observes them. Furthermore, the mind that underlies the impression of subject and object but transcends them, being "empty" of both (*gnyis stong gi shes pa*), constitutes for the Chittamatra the ultimate ground or truth. Because the Chittamatra view establishes this ultimate as a specific entity, namely, the mind itself, it is refuted by Madhyamaka and is assigned a position lower down the doxographical scale.

The adequacy of this description of Chittamatra has been questioned. In the opinion of some modern scholars,⁴⁰ the Madhyamaka refutation is directed only against what was in effect a later distortion of the original teachings. This negative development had come about through the mistaken interpretation of certain passages, found in the writings of Asanga and Vasubandhu (400–480) to the effect that "All is consciousness." Instead of understanding such expressions in the sense in which they were intended, namely, as descriptions of meditative experiences, some later philosophers, notably Dharmapala (530–561), had interpreted them literally in an ontological sense. This led to the mistaken impression that Asanga and Vasubandhu had propounded a philosophically idealist position that "All is mind." The term "Chittamatra" has therefore been called into question as an appropriate name for the teachings of Asanga and Vasubandhu, preference being given to "Yogachara," a name that more obviously evokes the meditative context in which these teachings were first formulated.

Attractive as this thesis may be, the fact remains that no distinction is to be found in the doxographical literature between an original doctrine of Yogachara as opposed to a later idealist philosophy of Chittamatra. And in

his commentary, Mipham has no qualms in using the term "Chittamatra" (*sems tsam*) on all occasions and in a manner that is evidently synonymous with the term "Yogachara" occurring in the well-established expression "Yogachara-Madhyamaka." This is not to say, however, that the distinction just mentioned is imaginary. On the contrary, it appears to be corroborated by oral tradition, which recognizes a similar, if not identical, division between (1) the scriptural Chittamatra, that is, the Mind Only teachings found in the sutras (*bka'i sems tsam*), and (2) the Chittamatra regarded as a tenet system (*grub miha'i sems tsam*). The point of difference between these two forms of Mind Only doctrine is precisely the matter of whether the mind is considered to be a truly existent, ultimate reality. Only Chittamatra as a tenet system affirms this, and consequently it is only the tenet system that is the proper object of Madhyamaka refutation. By contrast, as recorded in the *Lankavatara-sutra* and the other scriptures that expound the Mind Only doctrine, the Buddha himself never said that the mind is truly and ultimately existent.

Without going into the question of how Chittamatra as a tenet system could have evolved from the Buddha's actual teachings and whether it constitutes a deformation of the original doctrine, the important point to bear in mind in the present instance is that, in Shantarakshita's synthesis, the adoption of the Madhyamaka view on the ultimate level necessarily implies a rejection of the fundamental position of the Chittamatra system, namely, that the mind is ultimately real. When therefore it is said that Shantarakshita accepts the Chittamatra on the conventional level, the view in question is identified as the scriptural Chittamatra (*bka'i sems tsam*) and not Chittamatra as a tenet system. It diverges from the doctrine expounded, for example, by Dharmapala, but it is nevertheless in perfect harmony with the statements of the Mind Only sutras, and this is specifically identified by Mipham as the authentic tradition of Asanga and Vasubandhu. The point is made furthermore that only the Chittamatra as a tenet system asserts the ultimate existence of the mind, and therefore it is only the tenet system that figures in the doxographical hierarchy of views, being assigned a subordinate position beneath Madhyamaka. By implication, the scriptural Chittamatra, insofar as it does not make such an assertion, escapes such a classification and need not be considered inferior to, or at variance with, the Madhyamaka view. This placing of Madhyamaka and Chittamatra (understood as *bka'i sems tsam*) on a comparable level is typical of the Nyingma approach, which resists the tendency to distinguish hierarchically the

scriptures of the second and third turnings of the wheel of Dharma (placing the second above the third, or vice versa). Instead, the teachings of the two turnings are accepted as complementary. The tradition of vast activities deriving from Maitreya and Asanga and the tradition of the profound view of Manjushri and Nagarjuna are regarded as equally important. Neither should it be thought that Shantarakshita's association of the Chittamatra with the relative, and the Madhyamaka with the ultimate, truth is meant to suggest that the latter is more important than the former. For the relative and ultimate coincide in phenomena and are of equal significance. All this is a reminder that there are limits to the usefulness of doxographical classifications. The latter are summary, simplified accounts of a reality that must have been far more complex and interesting.

It is important to recall that each of the four tenet systems presents its own version of the two truths. When defining the ultimate truth of phenomena (as the partless particle, the nondual, self-knowing mind, or the emptiness of intrinsic existence), each system is in effect formulating an ontology, informing us of what phenomena actually are. When, on the other hand, these systems go on to consider the relative or conventional truth, that is, the things appearing to the senses and with which we interact (defined as, for example, gross extended phenomena, or in terms of the duality of subject and object), the point of interest is not so much what phenomena are but how they are perceived and known. Ontology gives way to epistemology. In the context of Svatantrika-Madhyamaka, this parallel association between ontology and ultimate truth, and epistemology and conventional truth, is of particular importance. In both Svatantrika subschools, the ontological question of the ultimate nature of phenomena is settled in terms of Madhyamaka. This necessarily implies that the ontological component specific to each of the non-Madhyamaka tenet systems adopted with a view to explaining the conventional truth is annulled. The Sautrantika and Chittamatra tenets are refuted on the point of their ontology but retained for what is essentially their epistemological usefulness. Bhavya, for example, does not believe in the ultimate existence of the partless particle, but finding the theory of an extramental world to be plausible on the relative level, he uses the atomic theory of the Sautrantikas as a convenient means to undermine the belief in the reality of gross extended phenomena, and as a stepping-stone to an understanding of the Madhyamaka view. Likewise, Shantarakshita does not believe in the ultimate existence of the mind, but being well aware of the philosophical difficulties involved in claiming that we can have knowledge of an objective and extramental

world, he opts to present the conventional according to the much more subtle model of Mind Only. This will become clearer when we consider the role of the pramana tradition in Shantarakshita's synthesis. For the moment, it is important to keep in mind the essentially epistemological thrust of the Svatantrikas' respective explanations of the conventional truth, because it brings into focus the fact that in Svatantrika-Madhyamaka, non-Madhyamaka tenet systems are never adopted in toto on the conventional level. This would be an obvious absurdity. A "relatively true ontology" is a contradiction in terms.

What are the advantages of using the Mind Only teaching as a means to understanding phenomenal experience? Perhaps the most important effect of the Mind Only approach is to remove the enormous gulf that appears to separate the subjective observer from the "objective fact." This facilitates an understanding of the doctrine of karma, since it is understood that perceptions and experiences—even when they appear to impinge upon us from outside—are a matter of our own creation. And once one understands that experience, good or bad, happy or miserable, is the result of former action, one acquires the key to the creation of happy and wholesome states and the removal of misery. This knowledge is, for Buddhists, a source of meaning and freedom, the complete antithesis of a hopeless Heideggerian "thrownness" according to which the objective situations of life—the fact that, for instance, one is American or Iraqi, strong or weak, affluent or destitute, talented, cruel, good-natured, or whatever—are as unintelligible and uncontrollable as the chance throwing of a dice.

The Chittamatra approach emphasizes the fact that no matter how real and solid external objects may seem, all experience of them—including our knowledge about them and their apparently objective constitution—occurs wholly within the sphere of consciousness. This carries the important implication that even if one accepts the objective existence of phenomena separate from the mind, their extramental mode of existence, if such there is, is by definition unknowable. To reach beyond the mind and to experience phenomena exclusively from their side, in a complete self-contained objectivity, is as impossible as it is for us to climb out of our own skin. Indeed, the very suppositions that there is a "mind" and that there is a "world," and that there is a separation between the two, are themselves mental events.

Philosophically, Chittamatra provides us with an interesting and perhaps more cogent explanation of shared experience than realist theories do. The latter can only explain the apparently parallel perceptions of several observers by an appeal to extramental objectivity, the knowledge of which,

as we have just suggested, is problematic. Let us imagine that several people are looking at the same thing, a tree, for example. Their common experience is possible, the realist says, because there *really* is a tree endowed with objective existence, separate from the people observing it. It is assumed that the tree has a specific location, size, shape, color, texture, and so on. But what grounds have we for believing this commonsense assumption? A closer inspection reveals that so-called shared experiences are, at best, only approximate and never identical. There is no certainty that coexistent observers see exactly the same things. All knowledge about the tree, for example, even the understanding that there is a tree at all, must derive from perception. And perception generally depends on the kind and constitution of the sense powers available. We may assume, for instance, that humans and mosquitoes inhabit the same world, but given the very different organization of their respective sensory apparatus, it is unlikely that what they perceive is the same or even remotely similar. "Yes, of course," the realist will object. "Perceptions differ, but there must be an objective basis that gives rise to perception." This is the general assumption. But who is to say which set of perceptions—ours or the mosquito's—correspond more closely with the "real world." Even among humans, the physical considerations of location and perspective dictate that the simultaneous observation of a single thing must result in different sensory perceptions, none of which can claim to represent the object as it actually is. Because they must observe it from several locations, when different people see the "same tree," they cannot actually have the same visual experience. They see different shapes and colors according to the tree's remoteness or proximity, the angle from which it is seen, the way the light falls, and so on. Analogous sets of variables can be found for all the sense powers, and it is clear that the kind and quality of our perceptions of a given thing are imposed by factors that have nothing to do with the thing itself. Any perception of a thing is partial and inexact, and no perception corresponds to what we suppose the thing actually is. In other words, the belief that there really is an extramental object involves an assumption that goes beyond the data that are actually available to the observing mind. On a more general psychological level too, experience of a thing by different individuals varies according to their levels of interest and sensitivity. For these dictate the strength with which different aspects of things emerge. Certain characteristics of a tree, for instance, will be immediately apparent to a botanist but may completely escape the attention of the artist painting it, the civil engineer wishing to remove it, or the hurrying commuter who does not even notice it.

All such paradoxes, which emerge from a realist account of perception, are avoided by the Chittamatra view, which denies that observed objects exist in separation from the consciousness observing them. According to the Chittamatrins, the sort of world that we perceive and the phenomena that we encounter within that world are entirely a matter of the fructification of karmic seeds and tendencies lodged within the mind. Our perceptions of the world and its contents coincide (but not exactly) with the similar perceptions of other beings to the extent that the ripening of their karmic seeds resembles our own. The experience of beings is increasingly similar in proportion as their "karmic constitution" converges. It is unnecessary to go into further details at this point, but it is worth emphasizing that, from the point of view of spiritual training, the Chittamatra account of experience has, as we have already suggested, a practical application of obvious importance. Insofar as the experience of beings is explained entirely in terms of the mind, it follows that this same experience can be manipulated and transformed to the extent that the mind is understood and brought under control. The adoption of a Mind Only account in this sense consequently forms a useful basis for ethics, as also for meditative training, since it prepares the way for the tantric view of phenomena as the display of the mind. On the other hand, as Mipham mentions, the contrasting view set forth in the lower tenet systems is highly problematic. The view that there is an extramental world consisting of extended objects that may be broken down into real indivisible particles is difficult to reconcile with fundamental Buddhist ideas such as karma. If the indivisible particles that make up the universe exist separate from the mind, how are they to be accounted for? They cannot be the product of karma because, as Chandrakirti observes, karma is mind-dependent. If therefore the particles exist, they must either arise uncaused or be the product of a creator, whether puṛuṣa or some divine entity. Neither view is acceptable. By contrast, to say that the world has arisen through the power of the mind "is none other than the teaching of the entire Mahayana."⁴¹

This brief outline of the Chittamatra view emphasizes its psychological and pragmatic aspects. It is found to give a more satisfactory account of perception than realist theories and has a practical appeal in the sense that it focuses attention on the role of the mind in the understanding and transformation of experience.

As we have said, the Yogachara-Madhyamaka synthesis does not incorporate the Mind Only view as a complete philosophical system. Shantarakshita makes no claim that the phenomenal world is the mind alone, and it

would be incorrect, in fact absurd, to describe Shantarakshita as a philosophical idealist on the conventional level. For according to Madhyamaka, the true status of phenomena lies beyond conceptual and verbal qualification. Nevertheless, on the conventional level, Mind Only is an epistemological account—in fact the best and most profitable account—of phenomenal appearance. Viewed in this way, as Mipham points out, Shantarakshita's understanding of Mind Only is not different from the view expressed by Chandrakirti in the *Madhyamakavatara*.⁴²

The Madhyamakalankara and the Pramana Tradition

One of the features of the *Madhyamakalankara* most likely to cause trouble for the nonspecialist reader is the frequent reference to the logico-epistemological tradition of Dignaga (fifth century) and Dharmakirti (530–600)⁴³—a tradition to which Shantarakshita himself made important contributions.⁴⁴ Undoubtedly the full appreciation of Mipham's commentary would require an extensive knowledge of this difficult and complex subject. This is certainly not the place to attempt even a summary exposition of these theories, but the following reflections may help the general reader to gain an overall impression of the tradition's salient features and its relevance to the *Madhyamakalankara*.

Doxographically, Dignaga and Dharmakirti are usually referred to as “Sautrantikas following reasoning” (*rigs pa rjes 'brang gi mdo sde pa*). This classification identifies them as philosophical realists (who accept the existence of an extramental world) but distinguishes them from the position of the Vaibhashikas and the “Sautrantikas following scripture” (*lung gi rjes 'brang gi mdo sde pa*), owing to, among other things, their complex and sophisticated theory of perception. Dharmakirti, whose view for present purposes will be identified with that of Dignaga, refutes the naively commonsense approach of the Vaibhashika system, according to which nonmental objects are known directly by the sense organs. Taking as axiomatic the essential difference between mind and matter, the Sautrantikas following reasoning explain the process of perception by positing the existence of mental aspects. These are understood to bridge the gap between the inner consciousness and the outer world. Being of a radically different nature from matter, the mind cannot enter into direct contact with physical entities but detects them indirectly via the aspects, or mental images, that these same entities are said to cast upon it, in the same way that things

cause their reflections to appear in a mirror. The aspect, which is considered to be an accurate representation of the nonmental object that causes it, does not constitute a discrete entity within the mind but is best understood as a configuration of consciousness whereby consciousness itself assumes the form of the external thing. Being consciousness, this configuration is said to be automatically self-cognizant and does not require additional conscious activity for knowledge of the object (or more directly the aspect) to take place.⁴⁵ The impression that we have of being directly in touch with an external world is therefore an illusion. The mind is in direct contact only with the mental aspect, which is therefore said both to reveal and to veil phenomena. Mipham concludes his general presentation of this view with the remark that for those who posit the existence of an external world, no epistemology is “more coherent than this, and more tenable.”

Attractive as it seems, the theory of aspects, or *sakaravada* (which resembles the representationalist theories of certain Western philosophers), turns out to be problematic when subjected to close scrutiny. And the insuperable problems that emerge oblige Dharmakirti to adopt a procedure that is of great interest, especially in relation to Shantarakshita's *Yogachara Madhyamaka* synthesis. As a means of explaining perception, the mental aspect had been posited as a connecting link between material things and the nonmaterial mind. This solution, however, is only apparent; the problem is not removed but only displaced. The aspect seems to throw a bridge across the mind-matter divide. But since the aspect is itself a feature of consciousness, a new and unexplained gulf now opens between the external object, which is material, and the aspect itself, which is mental. This difficulty is the inevitable result of positing two radically different entities and then trying to connect them in terms of only one of these entities. The aspect theory tries to explain the link between consciousness and matter, but it does so exclusively in terms of consciousness. The difficulties of explaining perception within the parameters of the Sautrantika tenet system are thus insuperable. Only two solutions are possible, and both involve a rejection of Sautrantika presuppositions. Either one must posit a third principle, which is neither mind nor matter but somehow encompasses both, or one must decide that the separation between mind and matter is itself unreal. Dharmakirti adopts the second solution. When confronted by the ultimately unworkable nature of the aspect theory, he does not attempt to devise a solution in terms of Sautrantika but instead shifts his position to a *Yogachara* framework. This enables him to evade the difficulty rather than

answer it. According to Yogachara, the aspects are produced not by external objects but by latent tendencies in the mind. Since there are no objects outside consciousness, the problem of the relation between aspects and external objects does not arise.⁴⁶

This willingness to retreat to a more idealistic position is an important feature of Dharmakirti's system. It is also disquieting, since Dharmakirti appears to be contradicting himself on fundamental issues. His procedure, however, was essentially pragmatic and closely linked to the general strategy of defending Buddhism against its Hindu opponents, who for their part were strong believers in the reality of the external world. For his defense to be viable, Dharmakirti was obliged to present his view in terms that, at least to begin with, were acceptable to his mainly Nyaya opponents. Within the context of the philosophical confrontation, it would have served no purpose to advocate an idealist position from the outset, for this would have been rejected by the Hindus out of hand. Therefore, since his opponents were realists, Dharmakirti began by adopting the realist stance of the Sautrantika tenet system, thus creating a commonly acceptable basis for discussion. And the fact that he expresses himself in Sautrantika terms throughout most of his work does not alter the essentially provisional nature of this move. The Sautrantika position thus adopted did not, however, reflect Dharmakirti's own view. His references to Yogachara, although comparatively rare, are enough to show that he believed that it provided a more accurate and profound insight into the nature of reality. "It is well known," Mipham observes, "that Dharmakirti said, 'When I investigate outer phenomena, I take the Sautrantika as my starting point.'"⁴⁷ But in the long run, it is clear that Dharmakirti himself found this view to be inadequate, and he therefore adopted what has been called a strategy of an ascending scale of analysis, according to which "commonsensical views are subsumed by more critical but more counter-intuitive views."⁴⁸ A Sautrantika approach is adopted as a point of departure, but when, in the course of investigation, problems emerge that are unanswerable in Sautrantika terms, the conclusion is inevitable that answers can be found only by adopting a more elevated, less realist view. The purpose here is not merely apologetic. For Dharmakirti, reasoning demonstrates that it is impossible to formulate a coherent theory of perception in terms of a belief in the existence of external, nonmental objects. Some form of idealism is logically inevitable. The entire thrust of his exposition therefore is to prove to his Hindu opponents that philosophical

consistency demands that they abandon their belief in the real existence of entities and adopt the Buddhist position.

This logically induced progression of ideas is paralleled in the historical development of the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka tradition. Coming after Dig-naga but before Dharmakirti, Bhavya had adopted the Sautrantika tenet in his presentation of the conventional truth. But as Dharmakirti shows, epistemology, if it is to be consistent, is forced to retreat from a comparatively unsophisticated acceptance of external phenomena into a more idealist position. Set against this background, Shantarakshita's acceptance of Mind Only on the conventional level, which is, as Mipham remarks, "in agreement with the view of the glorious Dharmakirti," is both natural and inevitable. Based on the principles of logic and epistemology, Shantarakshita's Yogachara-Madhyamaka synthesis is therefore shown to be superior to the Sautrantika-Madhyamaka solution of Bhavya.

Universals and Exclusions

In addition to the theory of mental aspects and the complex discussions provoked thereby, the reader of Mipham's commentary will have to contend with the question of universals. This is a large and difficult field. Basically, and once again in terms of the Sautrantika tenet as he interpreted it, Dharmakirti made a radical distinction between two kinds of phenomena. On the one hand, there are the causally efficient entities that we encounter through sense perception. These are described as *specifically characterized* (*rang mtshan*), meaning that they are things (*dnegos po*) located in a given time and place and endowed with specific properties. They are impermanent, are produced by causes, and are themselves causally effective (*don byed nus pa*). These are the things that populate the "real," as distinct from the imaginary, world. Contrasted with such entities are abstract thoughts, such as the general ideas that enable us to identify and classify things, and the illusory (from the Buddhist point of view) notions of whole and separate thingness that we impute to collections of elements. These phenomena are described as *generally characterized* (*spyi mtshan*); they are nonthings (*dnegos med*) and cannot be specifically pinpointed in space and time. They are static, causally ineffective, conceptually constructed entities. Above all, they are unreal.

This distinction led Dharmakirti to a wholesale rejection of philosophical realism, especially in the extreme form advocated by the Hindu Nyaya.

For the Nyaya, language is regarded as an accurate reflection of reality. When, for instance, I say, "This is a house," two things are being referred to: "this," meaning the object in front of me, and "house," meaning a general "something" that all individual houses share and that is separate from them. In saying, "This is a house," I am saying that "This is an instance of house(ness)." So far, this account of universals is familiar from Western philosophy, but for the Nyaya, universals include not only the referents of general terms (such as houseness) but the wholeness and discreteness that are normally detected in individual extended objects and are usually felt to be distinct from their parts. A cloth, for instance, is not just reducible to its threads but is an added extra that comes into being when the threads are woven together.

As a Buddhist, Dharmakirti rejects this theory. For him, wholes and general ideas are no more than unreal mental constructs, imputed onto collections of real individual elements. From the epistemological point of view, however, the rejection of universals is problematic, since without them it is difficult to elaborate a theory of knowledge. How do I know that the flat-bottomed, bulbous, water-holding object I am holding is a vase if I do not have an idea of what "vaseness" is? And if there is no such thing as "vaseness," how am I to explain my ability to identify a variety of loosely similar objects with different shapes and sizes as vases, that is, as belonging to the class of vase?

In order to deal with this matter, the earlier philosopher Dignaga, who of course recognized the necessity of general ideas, devised a way in which the arising of these ideas could be explained without an appeal to a theory of real universals as propounded by the Nyaya. He elaborated a theory to explain how general ideas are possible even though there are no general entities to which they refer. This is the doctrine of *apoha*, elimination or exclusion (*sel ba*), according to which, on the basis of former experiences in which the similarities between concrete objects have been observed, the mind identifies objects, not by evoking a general entity that they are supposed to instantiate but by isolating them through an exclusion of everything that they are not. When I say, "This is a house," the only real object referred to in this statement is the actual physical thing in front of me, which is indicated by the word *this*. And I am able to identify "this" as a house, not because of some real, independent "houseness" but because I can identify features that isolate it from all other things that are not houses. I identify "house" by eliminating "nonhouse."

This is of course an elementary exposition of a highly technical and complicated matter. Suffice it to say that the doctrine of *apoha* was vigorously attacked by the Nyaya philosophers. It was defended and consolidated by Dharmakirti and is an essential feature of Buddhist epistemological theory.

In Mipham's commentary, the references to this subject, as to other aspects of the *pramana* tradition, are complicated by the fact that he is obliged to deal with conflicting interpretations of Dharmakirti's thought deriving from two different traditions of logic that existed in Tibet: the so-called earlier tradition of Chapa, upheld by the Gelugpas, and the later tradition of Sakya Pandita (Sapan for short), which contested it.

In the face of Dharmakirti's uncompromising rejection of real universals, and the perceived epistemological difficulties arising therefrom, there already existed, even in India, a minority Buddhist interpretation that had tried to attenuate Dignaga and Dharmakirti's thought in the direction of a moderate realism, thus granting a certain existence to universals. Owing to what may have been no more than a historical accident, it was this interpretation that Chapa encountered and adopted.⁴⁹ Subsequently inherited by Tsongkhapa, it molded the general philosophical outlook of the Gelugpa school, fitting well with Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Madhyamaka and his strong assertion of the reality of conventional phenomena (as distinct from truly existent phenomena).

Chapa's interpretation of Dharmakirti was attacked by Sapan, who, in his celebrated masterpiece the *Tshad ma rigs gter*, strongly reaffirmed Dharmakirti's antirealism. Sapan's approach, powerfully sustained (with minor differences) by Gorampa and Shakya Chokden, was accepted as normative by Sakyapas and the other non-Gelugpa traditions. On several occasions in Mipham's commentary, the reader will be able to detect the underlying tension between these rival interpretations of Dharmakirti's thought, and Mipham's preference for the antirealist interpretation of Sapan.

Before leaving this topic, it is worth pointing out that while the *pramana* tradition exerted an enormous influence in Tibet, its acceptance was not universal, and there has always been a current of distrust in its regard. It will be remembered that Chandrakirti had been critical of the use of Buddhist logic and epistemology in the Madhyamaka context. But although in Tibet the Prasangika interpretation of Chandrakirti came to be regarded as the supreme view, Tibetans in general have not shared his distrust of *pramana*. This is even more remarkable given that Atisha (982–1054) also discounted

logic and epistemology as being in any way necessary for a genuine understanding and practice of the Dharma. A Prasangka *avant la lettre* in the sense that although he advocated this view, he had been dead more than a century before Patsap translated Chandrakirti, Atisha had refused to teach logic and epistemology, saying that the doctrines of Dignaga and Dharmakīrti were elaborated in order to defend Buddhism against its Hindu opponents. In India, they had been relevant and (in his view) successful, but there was little purpose in expounding them in Tibet.⁵⁰ Although, for reasons that we have already seen, this dismissive attitude toward pramana may seem natural on the part of avowed Prasangikas (pace the paradoxical trajectory of Tsongkhapa), the same cannot be said of the Svatantrikas. The philosophical expositions of Bhavya and Shantarakshita are perfectly in line with their provisional presentation of the ultimate truth, as well as with their pedagogical concerns in regard to the conventional. The intense interest in pramana evinced by Chapa, for example, harmonized well with his Svatantrika leanings.

Mipham in his turn valued the study of logic and epistemology. This was certainly not because he attached particular value to the practice of debate per se, or to the endless, hair-splitting refinement of scholastic categories, about which, if anything, he appears to have been rather skeptical. Nevertheless, he had no doubt that certainty of understanding is of vital importance in the establishment of the view. It is not enough to accept authoritative statements of the teaching merely on faith. The practice of the Dharma must be grounded in an absolute conviction, and this can only come through the exercise of reasoning, which finds its proper place in the examination of phenomena on the conventional level. Whereas Mipham clearly disapproves of what he considers the inappropriate use of reasoning evinced perhaps by his Gelugpa contemporaries, he is equally trenchant in his criticism of a tendency (more visible in his own Nyingma tradition) to reject the use of reasoning even on the occasions when it is appropriate and necessary.

The Buddha's doctrine, from the exposition of the two truths onward, unerringly sets forth the mode of being of things as it is.

And the followers of the Buddha must establish this accordingly, through the use of reasoning. Such is the unerring tradition of Shakyamuni. On the other hand, to claim that analytical investigation in general and the inner science of pramana, or logic, in partic-

ular are unnecessary is a terrible and evil spell, the aim of which is to prevent the perfect assimilation, through valid reasoning, of the Buddha's words.⁵¹

The Argument of Neither One nor Many

The *Madhyamakalankara* invokes the argument of "neither one nor many" more intensively (throughout sixty-two of its ninety-seven stanzas) than any other text in Buddhist literature. This argument is one of a series of proofs used to demonstrate that phenomena are without real existence. Different authorities give slightly varying lists of these arguments, but on the whole, their accounts coincide. Khenpo Yönten Gyamtso enumerates them as follows.⁵² (1) The "diamond splinters" argument (*rdo rje gzebs ma'i gtan tshigs*), which is an investigation of causes; (2) the refutation of production of existent and nonexistent effects (*vod med skye 'gog gi gtan tshigs*); (3) the refutation of production related to four possible alternatives (*mu bzhi skye ba'i gtan tshigs*), which is an investigation of the causal process; (4) the argument of dependent arising (*rten 'brel gyi gtan tshigs*); and (5) the argument of neither one nor many (*gcig du 'bral ba'i gtan tshigs*).⁵³

There were of course precedents for Shantarakshita's use of the neither one nor many argument, perhaps most notably in stanza 334 of Aryadeva's *Four Hundred*, which is repeated almost verbatim in stanza 61 of the *Madhyamakalankara*.⁵⁴ Interestingly enough, the argument was not unknown in Western philosophy, and a striking example of it can be found in the refutation of existence by the Greek skeptic Gorgias.⁵⁵

Mipham mentions that the argument of neither one nor many is "easy to understand," and it is true that the oral transmission explains it in quite uncomplicated terms. Western scholarship, on the other hand, has discovered some rather troublesome complexities in the argument, which it is important to mention here since they have a bearing on our translation of the first stanza of the root text and of all subsequent references to the argument in both Shantarakshita and Mipham.

Essential to the force of the argument is the fact that it is based upon a dichotomy. A dichotomy consists of two mutually exclusive terms that between them are understood to cover all possible cases. There is nothing that is not one or other of these terms, and there is nothing that is both of them. For example, I may contrast an apple with an orange. The two fruits are mutually exclusive in the sense that whatever is an apple is not an orange

and vice versa, and there is nothing that is both an apple and an orange. They do not, however, constitute a dichotomy, since apples and oranges do not exhaust the range of phenomenal possibilities. The world contains other things that are neither apples nor oranges. By contrast, a pairing between "apple" and "nonapple" is a dichotomy, since the world is certainly divided between apples on the one hand and everything that is not an apple on the other. All phenomena are contained in such a distinction. And if I am able to prove that something is neither an apple nor a nonapple, I shall have succeeded in proving that it does not exist.

Within the terms of the present argument, the pairing of "one" and "many"—or, as we shall see, "singular" and "plural"—is understood to form a dichotomy of mutually exclusive terms (*phan tshun spang ba*). The phenomena asserted "by our and other schools" are shown to fall into neither category. Therefore they do not exist.

The peculiarity of the argument stems from the fact that there is an ambivalence in the terms "one" and "many," and this has given rise to a difference of opinion as to what the pairing "one and many" actually means. Speaking numerically, when something is said to be "one," it is understood to be singular. Contrasted with this, "many" means plural. For example, we might say that there is one tree in the garden but that there are many trees in the park. When we come to grips with the notion of oneness, however, it becomes clear that "one" indicates, perhaps more fundamentally, the notion of individual and indivisible wholeness. In that sense, when we say, "The tree is one," we mean that it is, or is considered to be, a single entity. Now, it is evident that this notion of "single entity" is a prerequisite for an understanding of "one" in the numerical sense, since if things are to be accounted singular or plural, it is evident that they must first be regarded, at least provisionally, as integral, indivisible units. Of course, we all know that things are made up of parts, but the necessities of life demand that we deal with what we consider, on a more or less provisional basis, to be entire wholes. Consequently, because we accept that the tree is one, we can go on to say that there is one tree or that there are many trees in the garden.

Turning now to the word "many," we find the situation is complicated by the constraints of language. "Many" can be contrasted with "one" in a straightforwardly numerical sense, as when we say that there is one person on the bus or that there are many people. And here the contrast between singularity and plurality is well indicated (in English) by grammatical number. If, on the other hand, "many" is contrasted with "one" in the sense of

integral wholeness, a different linguistic structure is required. We say "This is one," meaning that it is a "whole thing." But if we say "This is many," the use of the singular verb indicates that the thing referred to is to be understood as a manifold composed of several elements. The point to notice is that whereas "one" in the sense of integral whole is intrinsic to a numerical use of the word, the notion of composition is not relevant to the idea of simple plurality. If I say that there is one person on the bus, I must first accept that the person is a single entity. On the other hand, if I say that there are many people on the bus, I am not implying that they are composite entities but that they constitute a group of individuals.

To bring this complicated discussion to a close, the point we wish to make is that the notion of "one and many," as used in the famous argument, is to be understood in the *numerical* sense. The argument means that things are unreal because they are neither singular nor plural (meaning truly existent singular and truly existent plural).⁵⁶ It does not mean that things are nonexistent because they have neither a single nor a plural nature—if the resulting dichotomy is understood in terms of uncompoundedness (one) and compoundedness (many).⁵⁷

The mistake just referred to becomes evident when one reflects on the nature of the dichotomy itself. The use of a dichotomy to prove the nonexistence of something requires a demonstration that the thing in question is not found within the two poles of the dichotomy. If the dichotomy is constructed in terms of uncompoundedness (one) or compoundedness (many), arguments must be adduced to show (1) that the assumption that the thing is uncompounded is false and (2) that the assumption that it is compounded is also false. The first stage of the demonstration (that there are no single uncompounded entities) is comparatively straightforward. When it comes to the demonstration that things are not compounded, however, the situation is less clear.

When things are said to be unreal because they are neither uncompounded nor compounded, it is assumed that their compounded nature is disproved by the fact that, since no individual entities can be found, the constituents of the supposedly compounded entity are themselves compounded. They themselves do not exist because they too can be broken down indefinitely into smaller and smaller parts. Composite entities do not exist, therefore, because their parts do not exist. It is concluded that the second part of the argument (that there are no compounded entities) is shown by the fact that there are no uncompounded entities to serve as

their parts. This, however, is irrelevant to the kind of demonstration demanded by the dichotomy. For the task at hand is not to prove the *nonexistence* of compounded entities but to prove that entities are *not compounded*. Instead of doing this, however, the demonstration just described shows not that entities are not compounded but that they are compounded to an infinite degree.

In the *Commentary on Difficult Points*, whereas Kamalashila defines “one” in terms of partlessness (*cha med*),⁵⁸ he does not conclude that “many” means “part possessing” (*cha bcas*). He says simply that “many means diversity.”⁵⁹ At no time during the oral exposition of the *Madhyamakalankara*, on which this translation was based, was the argument of neither one nor many explained in terms of a contrast between uncompoundedness and compoundedness. Moreover, on the several occasions that we consulted our Tibetan teachers on this question, they invariably insisted that the uncompounded-compounded dichotomy was a needless complication. It could perhaps be understood as an application of the argument of neither one nor many, but this is not the latter’s primary meaning. On the contrary, they said, the argument simply means that phenomena have no real existence because it can be shown that there is not one truly existent thing and there are not many truly existent things. Truly existent phenomena are neither singular nor plural. The dichotomy is a linguistic one—a matter of grammatical number. Everything must be either singular or plural; there is nothing that can be neither. This is perhaps a surprising conclusion, but it is worth noting that, in contrast with Western logic, which from the time of the Greeks was constructed on a mathematical model, Indian logic was profoundly influenced by the study of grammar, which in ancient India was highly advanced.⁶⁰ The disquieting feature of this interpretation (it must be admitted) is that although the concepts of singularity and plurality do seem to form a dichotomy, it is a dichotomy of a special sort in which the law of the excluded middle does not operate. Normally speaking, the disproving of one side of a dichotomy automatically proves the other. In demonstrating that the object in front of me is not an apple, I am proving that it is a nonapple. This is not so with the argument of neither one nor many, for in this case both sides of the dichotomy are proved or disproved together at a single stroke, and it is difficult to see how it could be otherwise. The demonstration that there is no “one” is the proof also that there is no “many.”⁶¹ Having spent sixty stanzas showing that there are no single entities, Shantarakshita dispenses with the problem of plural entities in two. Since nothing is truly singular, nothing is truly plural.

Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka

A Philosophical Introduction

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2

Interpretations of *Svabhāva*

The notion of *svabhāva* provides the central conceptual point around which the greatest part of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka revolves. Although it is never used in the sūtras and is rare in the Pali canon, the term *svabhāva*, often translated as "inherent existence" or "own-being," acquired a dominating role in the thought of the Mādhyamika. Despite its centrality, its status is fundamentally negative: one, if not indeed *the* central concern of Madhyamaka argumentation is to demonstrate that, despite our intuitions to the contrary, *svabhāva* does not exist. The notion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) denotes precisely the absence of *svabhāva*.

There are various difficulties to be faced when one is trying to get a clear idea of what *svabhāva* as a philosophical concept entails. First of all, like many philosophically central terms, *svabhāva* is used in a variety of ways in different philosophical traditions. The early Buddhist Abhidharma metaphysics uses *svabhāva* in a different way than do the later Mādhyamikas; their use is in turn different from Dharmakīrti's use of the concept, as well as from the Yogācāra notion of the "three natures" (*trisvabhāva*).

A second problem consists in presenting a clear explication of a concept which is taken to be vacuous and in fact, if clearly examined, inconsistent. When one is looking at the Madhyamaka arguments, it is often quite hard to attribute anything like a defensible

philosophical theory to the proponents of *svabhāva* at all, since these often appear to be conveniently set up straw men.¹

A final difficulty is the fact that the concept of *svabhāva* does not have any straightforward equivalent among the concepts discussed in the history of Western philosophy. This is not to say that it is a fundamentally alien concept, but merely that it combines a number of features which we do not see thus combined in the Western context. In order to get a clear conception of *svabhāva*, it is essential to appreciate that it incorporates three important conceptual dimensions: an ontological dimension, a cognitive dimension, and a semantic dimension. This chapter will spell out the first two of these three aspects of *svabhāva*. The semantic dimension will be taken up in the discussion of Nāgārjuna's view of language in chapter 9. Our focus will be on Nāgārjuna's use of the term *svabhāva*, though we will sometimes refer to later Madhyamaka authors; I do not claim that the above analysis will be adequate for the understanding of *svabhāva* in other Buddhist schools of thought. By explaining how the three aspects of *svabhāva* hang together, I also hope to be able to address the second difficulty, that is, give a clear account of what a proponent of *svabhāva* asserts and why this position might be a philosophical one to be taken seriously.

2.1. The Ontological Dimension

Conceiving of *svabhāva* as an ontological concept is no doubt the interpretation most commonly found in the contemporary commentarial literature, and one that gave rise to translations using such metaphysical terms as essence,² nature,³ substance,⁴ or aseity.⁵ In the Madhyamaka literature after Nāgārjuna we find a useful distinction between three different senses of *svabhāva* in Candrakīrti's commentary on the MMK,⁶ a distinction that is already partly present in earlier Abhidharma literature. We will refer to the three senses distinguished by Candrakīrti by the terms essence-*svabhāva*, substance-*svabhāva*, and absolute *svabhāva*.⁷

1. See Robinson (1972: 326).

2. Garfield (1995: 89), Komito (1987: 69).

3. Napper (1989: 65).

4. Lopez (1987: 445–446).

5. Ruegg (1981: 9).

6. This distinction is still alive in contemporary dGe lugs commentarial textbook literature. See the annotated translation of dKon mchogs 'jigs med dbang po's *Grub pa'i mthai' niam par bzheg pa rin po che'i phreng ba* given in Sopa and Hopkins (1976: 122).

7. Sopa and Hopkins (1976: 122) refer to these as phenomena's "conventionally existent nature," their "true or independent existence," and their "real and final nature." Further attempts at differentiating the different

2.1.1. Essence-*svabhāva*

Already in the early Buddhist literature we encounter an understanding of *svabhāva* as a specific characterizing property of an object. One characteristic passage from the *Milindapañha* (composed between 150 B.C.E. and 200 A.D.) asserts:⁸

Death, great king, is a condition which causes fear amongst those who have not seen the truth. . . . This, o king, is the power of the specific quality (*sarasa-sabhāva*) of death, because of which beings with defilements tremble at death and are afraid of it.

Although at this early stage *svabhāva* does not yet constitute a clearly defined piece of philosophical terminology, it is apparent that it denotes a feature by which a particular phenomenon is to be individuated, thereby rendering it knowable and nameable. This understanding of *svabhāva* is made more precise by the Sarvāstivādins' identification of *svabhāva* and *svalakṣaṇa*,⁹ the specific quality that is unique to the object characterized and therefore allows us to distinguish it from other objects. Objects have specific qualities as their own (*svabhāva*) because they are distinguished from the qualities of other objects (*parabhāva*).¹⁰ In this context *svabhāva* is understood as an antonym to the common characteristics (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) which are instantiated by all phenomena.¹¹

This understanding of *svabhāva* as the specific quality of objects is further restricted by Candrakīrti's identification of *svabhāva* with the essential property of an object.¹² Every essential property will be part of the specific quality of

usages of *svabhāva* in Candrakīrti can be found in Schayer (1931: xix, 35, n. 41), who distinguishes four different senses, as well as in de Jong (1972: 3) and May (1959: 124, n. 328), who distinguish two. Although there are obvious connections with the senses distinguished here, the relations between the different senses discussed by the three authors and, in Schayer's case, the distinctness of the four senses given by him, are too unclear to make an attempt at comparison worthwhile.

8. *marañan ti kho mahārāja evaṃ aditthasaccānaṃ tāsaniyaṃ jñānam . . . maraṇass' eso mahārāja sarasabhāvatejo tassā sarasabhāvatejena sakileśa satta maraṇassa izananti bhāyanti*. Trenckner (1928: 149). For a translation see Davids (1890: 211).

9. "*Svabhāva* is precisely their own characteristic, a common characteristic, on the other hand, is the impermanence of compounded phenomena." *svabhāva evaśaṃ svalakṣaṇam sāmānyalakṣaṇam tu anityatā saṃskṛtānām*. *Bhāṣya* on Vasubandhu (1970–1973: 6:14). For further references see Williams (1981: 243).

10. *Svabhāvena parabhāvaviyogataḥ* (Vasubandhu 1970–1973: 1:18).

11. According to the Buddhist interpretation, these characteristics are being impermanent, unsatisfactory, and devoid of self (Ronkin 2005: 114–115).

12. Note that this sense of *svabhāva* is not to be equated with that of a haeceity or quiddity. A haeceity or "individual essence" is a property only a single individual can have (the socrateness of Socrates is a stock example). But *svabhāva* in the sense discussed here is shareable. The *svabhāva* of fire is heat: a characteristic that cannot be instantiated just by fire, but also, for example, by water (even though heat does not constitute the *svabhāva* of water).

an object, but a specific quality need not be an essential property. The specific quality of an object is the unique combination of properties which distinguishes the object from all others. An essential property is something an object cannot lose without ceasing to be that very object. Nāgārjuna observes that “*svabhāva* [in the sense of essence] cannot be removed, like the heat of fire, the fluidity of water, the openness of space.”¹³

To consider a different example: assume that for some reason all existing samples of gold weighed more than 10 grams. In this case “weighing more than 10 grams” is a part of the specific quality of gold, since we use this property together with others to distinguish samples of gold from other things. But even though we never come across a lighter piece of gold in this world, “weighing more than 10 grams” is a property any particular sample of gold could lose without ceasing to be gold—cutting a piece of 10 grams in half does not transform it into another kind of metal. Therefore “weighing more than 10 grams” would be part of the specific quality of gold but not part of its essential nature.

In interpreting *svabhāva* as essence, Candrakīrti notes:¹⁴

For, in common usage, heat is called the *svabhāva* of fire, because it is invariable in it. The same heat, when it is apprehended in water, is not *svabhāva*, because it is contingent, since it has arisen from other causal conditions.

Heat is a property that is always instantiated by fire (and, for Candrakīrti at least, every instantiation of fire is also an instantiation of heat).¹⁵ Water, on the other hand, can be either hot or cold and requires some special conditions (apart from just being water) to heat it up. Although not stated explicitly, the notion of essence-*svabhāva* also appears to include a modal element: if fire lost the property of heat, it would no longer be fire. Water, however, can cool down and still remain water. This conception of *svabhāva* therefore agrees very well with a common understanding of an essence or essential property in contemporary metaphysics, which conceives of them as the properties an object cannot lose without ceasing to be that very object.

13. *na hi svabhāvah śakyo viniyartayitum yathāgner upātum apāṇ draṇtām ākāśasya nīrāvaramatvam.* VV(S) 82:14–15.

14. *agner usṇyam hi loke tad anyabhidhīrvati svabhāva ity ucyate | tad evaṣṇyam apāṇpalabhyamānaṃ para-pratyayaśāṃbhūtanāt kṛtrmatān na svabhāva iti.* PP 24:18–9. A similar characterization of solidity (*dhara*) as the invariable specific quality and thus *svabhāva* of earth is given in Śhtramatī's *Madhyāntaribhāgavṛkā* (Williams 1981: 242–243).

15. Ames (1982: 170).

The notion of essence-*svabhāva* is not one Nāgārjuna frequently employs in his arguments concerning *svabhāva*.¹⁶ One of his rare references to this conception can be found in the *Ekaslokaśāstra* where he states:¹⁷

[B]ecause one, two and many each have its own *bhāva*, therefore we call it *svabhāva*. For example, earth, water, fire, and air are respectively hard, moist, hot, and moveable. Each has its own *svabhāva*. And because the nature of every one of the things has its own specific quality (*svalakṣaṇa*) it is said that each has its *svabhāva*.

Here *svabhāva* appears to be identified with a quality that each of the four elements cannot lose without ceasing to be what it is. It furthermore plays the role of an object's specific quality (*svalakṣaṇa*)¹⁸ which allows the observer to individuate the elements and therefore reflects their essential qualities, that is, their *svabhāva*.¹⁹

2.1.2. Substance-*svabhāva*

The notion of essence-*svabhāva*, which equates *svabhāva* with the specific qualities of an object and contrasts them with those qualities it shares with other objects, serves mainly *epistemological* purposes. It provides a procedure for drawing a line between a variety of objects with shared qualities and thereby allows us to tell them apart.

There is, however, a second understanding of *svabhāva* which is of much greater importance in the Madhyamaka debate; it considers *svabhāva* to be a primarily *ontological* notion. Rather than *svabhāva*'s being seen as the opposite of shared qualities (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*), it is contrasted with conceptually constructed or secondary (*prajñaptisat*) existents and equated with the mark of the primary ones (*dravyasat*). The distinction between primary and secondary

16. Buddhapālita, on the other hand, clearly has the notion of essence-*svabhāva* in mind when he claims that the aim of Nāgārjuna was to teach the *svabhāva* (*ngo bo nyid*) of dependent origination. Walleiser (1913–1914: 4:16–17). Since dependent origination identified with emptiness is the exact opposite of *svabhāva*, this expression would constitute a *contradictio in adiecto* unless we realize that Buddhapālita wants to say that Nāgārjuna teaches the *specific quality* of dependent origination.

17. Iyengar (1927: 160). Another translation of this passage of the *śāstra* can be found in Edkins (1893: 307–307). We might want to note, however, that Lindner (1982: 16) classifies this text as “most probably not genuine.”

18. Some information on the conceptual relationship between *svabhāva* and *svalakṣaṇa* can be found in Ronkin (2005: 110).

19. Nāgārjuna might here have in mind the Vaiśeṣika conception of the five elements (*bhūta*), all of which are substances (*dravya*) and are taken to have peculiar qualities which distinguish them from the other elements. See Sharma (1960: 177).

existents constitutes the most fundamental ontological distinction drawn by the Sarvāstivādins.²⁰

Primary existents constitute the irreducible constituents of the empirical world; secondary existents, on the other hand, depend on linguistic and mental construction for their existence. For the Sarvāstivādin, primary existents encompass primarily partless moments of consciousness out of which would be constructed secondary existents, as for example medium-sized dry goods such as tables and chairs. Although both classes of objects were taken as existents (*sat*), only the primary ones were assumed to possess *svabhāva*.

On this understanding *svabhāva* no longer denotes an individuating property of objects by which they can be told apart from other objects (as it did when conceived in terms of essence), but rather is an indication of ontological status.²¹ To have *svabhāva* means to exist in a primary manner, unconstructed and independent of anything else.²²

This notion of *svabhāva*, which we are going to call substance-*svabhāva*, is also the sense of *svabhāva* that is most prominent in Nāgārjuna's arguments.²³ The fifteenth chapter of the MMK, investigating the notion of *svabhāva*, begins by saying:

Svabhāva cannot result from causes and conditions, because if it was produced from conditions and causes it would be something artificially created. But how could *svabhāva* be artificially created, as it is not artificially created and not dependent on anything else?²⁴

Substance-*svabhāva* is therefore taken to be something that does not depend on anything else. Candrakīrti in fact takes MMK 15:2b to constitute the definition of *svabhāva*:

20. Williams (1981: 236–237).

21. Ronkin (2005: chapter 3) argues that there was a gradual move away from a basically epistemological understanding of *svabhāva* as a characteristic mark to individuate different aspects of experience to an ontological understanding, where *svabhāva* subsumes objects with a particular ontological status.

22. In the contemporary commentarial literature we find occasional reference to the notion of an *intrinsic property* to spell out the notion of *svabhāva* (Tillemans [2001: 14, n. 24]; Siderits [2004: 117]). Intrinsic properties are those that “things have in virtue of the way they themselves are,” while extrinsic properties are had “in virtue of their relations or lack of relations to other things” (Lewis [1986b: 61]). While it is clear that all properties constitutive of a primary existent must be intrinsic, not all intrinsic properties characterize a primary existent. For example, the property of being the tallest man in the room is extrinsic (since a man can have it only in relation to the other men in the room), while that of being a man is intrinsic. However, a man does not exist by *svabhāva*, since he is causally, mereologically, and conceptually dependent on a variety of factors.

23. Hayes (1994: 311) distinguishes two senses of *svabhāva*: *svabhāva* in the sense of identity and *svabhāva* in the sense of independence. The former expresses the understanding as *svakṣepa*, the latter as *dharmya*. Hayes then goes on to argue that Nāgārjuna equivocates between these different readings, thereby rendering his arguments invalid (316). For some comments on this point, see Taber (1998); Tillemans (2001); Siderits (2004: 135, n. 1).

24. *na sarvabhāvaḥ svabhāvasya yuktatāḥ pratyayahetubhiḥ / hetupratyayasambhūtaḥ svabhāvaḥ kṛtako bhāvet // svabhāvaḥ kṛtako nāma bhaviṣyati punaḥ katham / akṛtrimaḥ svabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥ paratra ca.* MMK 15:1–2.

This is the definition of it: *Svabhāva* is not artificially created and not dependent on anything else.²⁵

The notion of substance-*svabhāva* as “something which does not depend on anything else” is stronger than the one found in the Abhidharma literature. For the Abhidharmikas, some objects that have primary existence (*dravyasat*) can be dependently originated. A conditioned object (*samskṛta dharma*) will have *svabhāva* but is still dependent on causes and conditions. It would be wrong, however, to assert²⁶ that the Abhidharmika's only criterion for absence of *svabhāva* is having parts, so that all other forms of dependence would be compatible with an object's being a primary existent. Walser²⁷ cites a passage from the Theravādin *Puggalapaññatti Aṭṭhakathā* in which one example of objects existing through dependent designation (*upādāya prajñapti*, i.e., objects that do not exist in a primary way [*dravyasat*]) is the measuring of time and space through the revolution of the sun and the moon.²⁸ Now the division of time into days depending on the rising and setting of the sun is certainly no example of mereological dependence: the latter is not part of the former. It is rather the case that the concepts of day and night owe their existence to the rising and setting of the sun. This is why they are not primary existents but dependently designated, or, as we may also want to put it, conceptual constructs. For the Abhidharmika, an object existing with *svabhāva* does therefore not have to be independent of *everything* (in particular it can depend on its causes and conditions); on the other hand, there are reasons distinct from having parts which explain why a thing is merely a secondary existent (*prajñaptisat*) and therefore lacking *svabhāva*.

A view of *svabhāva* that is not explicitly formulated by Nāgārjuna but is nevertheless prominent in the Indian and Tibetan commentarial literature is that of *findability under analysis*.²⁹ Candrakīrti observes:

Worldly things exist without being analysed. When analysed, [however], there is no self different from form and the other [four constituents].³⁰

25. *tasya cādām lakṣaṇam akṛtrimaḥ svabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥ paratra ca.* PP 26:55–6. See also Candrakīrti's commentary on Āryadeva's CS 12:13: “Here ‘self’ is a self-existent object which does not depend on other objects. The non-existence [of such an object] is selflessness.” *de la bāg cce bya ba ni gang zhig dgos po nams kyī gzhān la rag ma las pa'i ngo bo rang bzhiḥ ste | de myed pa ni bdagag myed pa ō.* Candrakīrti (1999: 321:1–2). See also Tillemans (1990: 126).

26. As done by Burton (1999: 90–92).

27. (2005: 242–243).

28. For a discussion of the variety of ways in which the notion of *prajñapti* is understood in Abhidharma literature, see Priestley (1999: chapter 9).

29. See Tillemans (2001: 5–6).

30. [...] *avīcārataśca laukikapadarthānam astivāt | yathāiva hi rūpādīvyatirekeṇa vicāryamāṇa ātmā na sarvabhāvatī.* PP 6:77–8; see Ruegg (2002: 117).

The underlying idea is that whatever is not ultimately real disappears under analysis so that what we are left with must be an ultimately real object existing by its own nature. The reason why composite objects such as a chariot or the self (*ātman*) are not ultimately real is that they do not withstand logical analysis (*rigs pas dpyad bzod pa*). Once the chariot or the self is conceptually dissolved into the parts that constitute it, the objects have disappeared and all we are left with are parts collectively conceptualized as a chariot or a self.³¹

Findability under analysis and independence of other objects imply one another. Assume that some objects *x* have been determined by analysis to be the ultimate constituents of some thing. If the existence of these *xs* in turn depended on the existence of some *y*, then only *y*, but not *x*, could be a candidate for an ultimately real object. Conversely, if no ultimate constituent can be found under analysis (and if this is not due to practical limitations), that is so because every potential candidate is again dependent on something else.

There are some conceptions of substance in Western philosophy which exhibit a certain amount of similarity with the notion of substance-*svabhāva* just described. Descartes's view of substance as something that does not require another thing for its existence³² springs to mind, as well as Wittgenstein's theory of logically simple objects presented in the *Tractatus*.³³ These objects, which are supposed to constitute the substance of the world, are simple, are unchanging, and exist independently of one another and constitute a notion which shares at least some important properties with the Sarvāstivādin's primary objects.

DEPENDENCE RELATIONS. In order for us to understand this ontological conception of substance-*svabhāva*, it is important to get a clear idea of what precisely is meant by the dependence of an object on another one. First of all it is important to distinguish two notions of "dependence" which should not be confused. These are

- *existential dependence*: An object *a* existentially depends on objects falling under the property *F* iff necessarily, if *a* exists there exists something falling under *F*.
- *notional dependence*: Objects falling under the property *F* are notionally dependent on objects falling under the property *G* iff necessarily, if some object *x* falls under *F* there will be a distinct object *y* falling under *G*.

Saying that a sprout depends existentially on its cause means that necessarily, if a sprout exists there will be some objects falling under the property "causes

of the sprout," such as a seed, soil, water, sunlight, and so on. Similarly, if a complex physical object exists, so will all its parts; therefore the object existentially depends on its parts. Necessarily, if a book exists, so will each of its pages.

Notional dependence, on the other hand, is a quite different case. Northern England depends on Southern England, but we would hardly want to say that this dependence is existential. If because of some geological disaster all of Southern England were destroyed, this circumstance would not affect the *existence* of the stretch of land now called Northern England. But it affects its *description* as Northern England, since now there would be nothing south of it which was also England. The concept Northern England therefore depends notionally on the concept Southern England, but the object in the world that the concept "Northern England" picks out does not depend existentially on the object that "Southern England" picks out.³⁴

It is interesting to note that in the later dGe lugs commentarial tradition, three varieties of existential dependence are distinguished: *causal* dependence, when an object depends for its existence on its causes and conditions; *mereological* dependence, when an object depends on its parts; and *conceptual* dependence, postulating the dependence of an object on a basis of designation, a designating mind and a term used to designate the object.³⁵ These dependence relations are supposed to stand in a qualitative and doxographical hierarchy. Causal dependence is seen as the coarsest understanding of dependent arising and is associated with the Vaibhāṣikas or Sarvāstivādins, the Sautrāntikas, and the Cittamātrins; mereological dependence is a bit more subtle; the Svātantrika Mādhyamikas are assumed to understand emptiness in terms of both causal and mereological dependence. The most subtle understanding which incorporates all three forms of dependence is associated with the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas.³⁶

There are a variety of examples from Nāgārjuna's works which show that both the notions of existential and notional dependence are employed in his arguments. Verse 13 of the ŚS asserts:³⁷

The father is not the son, the son is not the father,
those two cannot exist one without the other,

34. A detailed discussion of different kinds of dependence relations can be found in Simons (1987: chapter 8). Our notion of existential dependence is there called "generic dependence."

35. Ngag dbang dpal ldan (1797–?) refers to these three kinds of dependence (1964: 154, 6–155:1) (which constitutes commentary on the *Grub mtha' chen mo* of Jamis dbyangs bzhad pa [1648–1721]) as *'phrad ba (prāpya)*, *los ba (apekṣya)*, and *bren pa (pratītya)*, respectively. See Magee (1999: 56–57); Hopkins (1983: 166–177); Komito (1987: 190); Gyatso (2005: 20–21).

36. Ngag dbang dpal ldan (1964: 154, 6–155:1); Gyatso (2005: 33, 43–44, 59–62).

37. *pha bu ma yin bu pha min / de gnyis phan tshun med min la / de gnyis cig car yang min ltar / yan lag bu gnyis de bzhin no. ŚS 13.*

31. Trendelenburg (1928: 27); Davids (1890: 44).

32. Principles I, 51.

33. Keyf (1963); Proops (2004).

those two cannot be simultaneous, likewise the twelve links of dependent origination.³⁸

When saying that the son cannot exist without the father, Nāgārjuna obviously means that the son is existentially dependent on the father: if some person *a* exists, there exists something falling under the property “father of *a*.” But claiming that the father cannot exist without the son cannot be a case of existential dependence as well. Abelard (that very man) could have existed without having ever fathered Astrolabius. But Abelard as a father depends notionally on Astrolabius: if nobody was subsumed by the concept “son of Abelard,” Abelard would not fall under the concept “father.”

It is therefore evident that the “mutual dependence” of father and son that Nāgārjuna postulates is based on two different dependence relations, the son depending existentially on the father, the father notionally on the son. For Nāgārjuna’s argument, however, it is necessary that the two entities be related by a symmetric dependence relation.³⁹

The difficulty disappears if we take into account that if some object *x* is essentially *F*, and if it also depends notionally on some *y* being *G*, then *x* will also depend existentially on *y*’s being *G*, since *x* has to have *F* to exist at all (this is just what *F* being an essential property of *x* means). Therefore if we assumed that Abelard was the father of Astrolabius essentially, Abelard would indeed depend existentially on his son, since having Astrolabius as a son would be a property Abelard could not lose without being that very man.

Of course we might wonder now why we should assume that Abelard was essentially the father of Astrolabius. Even if we do not think that this is reasonable (because we think that a childless Abelard would have been the very same man), it is important to note that Nāgārjuna intends the father–son example as an argumentative pattern in which different predicates can be substituted. For example, we might think (as Nāgārjuna’s opponent does) that cause and effect have their respective natures essentially. In this case it is then evident that the existential dependence between the two must be symmetric: the effect depends existentially on the cause, but the cause also depends existentially on the effect.

I hope this small example has convinced the reader of the importance of keeping the two different kinds of dependence relation apart when analyzing

Nāgārjuna’s thought.⁴⁰ A more detailed discussion of how this distinction is put to work in his arguments will be found in chapters 5 to 9.

Returning to the understanding of *svabhāva* in terms of substance, we should note that for Candrakīrti such substance-*svabhāva* is qualified by its non-dependence on other objects, *either existentially or notionally*. This fact is evident from the examples Candrakīrti gives for objects that are dependent on causes and conditions: the heat of water, the farther and nearer shore, long and short.⁴¹ While the heat of fire depends existentially on the causes that heat up the water, the concepts “farther shore” and “long” depend only notionally on the concepts “nearer shore” and “short.” The farther shore would not cease to exist if the nearer shore did, nor would long objects decrease in length if short objects disappeared, but their descriptions as “farther shore” or “long” could no longer be employed.

It is evident that the notion of substance-*svabhāva* is much stronger than that of essence-*svabhāva*. In particular we can assert the existence of the second without affirming that of the first. It could be the case that every object had some properties it could not lose without ceasing to be that very object (although in some cases it may be more difficult than in others to determine what these properties are) and therefore be endowed with essence-*svabhāva*. But at the same time everything could in some way (either existentially or notionally) be dependent on something else so that substance-*svabhāva* did not exist at all.

THE REJECTION OF SUBSTANCE-SVABHĀVA. It is important to note that the elaborate Mādhyamika criticism of the notion of *svabhāva* is directed against this stronger notion of substance-*svabhāva* rather than against essence-*svabhāva*. Since the common conception of *svabhāva* was in terms of essential properties (a conception “well known,” as Candrakīrti charmingly puts it, “to people, including cowherds and women”),⁴² Candrakīrti explicitly distinguishes it from

40. The failure to distinguish between existential and notional dependence has resulted in considerable confusion in the contemporary commentarial literature, primarily in connection with the so-called *principle of co-existing counterparts*. Taber (1998: 216); Ruegg [1977] calls it “the principle of the complementarity of binary concepts and terms”, which is supposed to say that “a thing cannot be a certain type unless its counterpart exists simultaneously with it”. Far from being “a blatant contradiction of common sense” (Taber [1998: 238]), it expresses an obvious truth about notional dependencies: something cannot be Northern England unless Southern England exists at the same time. It is only if we think that notional dependence is the very same thing as existential dependence that we can accuse Nāgārjuna of being unable to distinguish “between saying that a thing exists at all and saying that it exists under a given description.” Hayes (1994: 315). For more (unfortunately not very clear) discussion of this matter, see Taber (1998).

41. PP 264r.

42. *gopālāṅganīyaprasiddham*. PP 260r14.

38. The father–son example is also used in VV 49–50. See also MMK 8:12, 10:10.

39. Oetke (1989: 11) claims that “the assumption of isomorphism or identity of logical and causal dependence relations [which correspond to our notional and existential dependence relations] explains a significant part of Nāgārjuna’s arguments and simultaneously elucidates numerous apparent difficulties.”

this notion of substance-*svabhāva*: even though it is an essential property, the heat of fire is no more the *svabhāva* of fire than it is the *svabhāva* of water.

Let it be recognized that heat, also, is not the *svabhāva* of fire, because of its artificiality. Here one apprehends that fire, which arises from the conjunction of a gem and fuel and the sun or from the friction of two sticks, etc., is purely dependent on causes and conditions, but heat does not occur apart from fire. Therefore, heat, too, is produced by causes and conditions and therefore is artificial; and because of its being artificial, like the heat of water, it is clearly ascertained that it is not *svabhāva*.⁴³

Candrakīrti does not attempt to refute the notion of essence-*svabhāva* but asserts its existence in conventional terms (*vyavahāra*). If something lacked the property of heat, we would not call it fire.⁴⁴ Candrakīrti's emphasis is on establishing that essence-*svabhāva* "does not deserve to be called *svabhāva*"⁴⁵ and is distinct from the notion of substance-*svabhāva* that Nāgārjuna deals with. Unlike the case with substance-*svabhāva*, however, Candrakīrti has no difficulties in agreeing with the usefulness of essence-*svabhāva* as a concept for everyday usage.⁴⁶

For the Ābhidharmikas, substance-*svabhāva* does exist; it is the intrinsic and essential quality of ultimately real objects (*dharma*). The justification for the assumption of such objects is evident if we consider the case of objects consisting of parts.⁴⁷ A partite object cannot exist by *svabhāva*, since it exists only in dependence on its parts. For the same reason, its parts cannot exist by *svabhāva* either, as long as they have parts in turn. For the defender of substances this regress must stop somewhere, because even though it might be possible to have a chain of explanations stretching back infinitely (if we explain the properties of the whole by the properties of the parts and then in turn provide an explanation of their properties in terms of their parts), a chain of dependency relations must terminate ultimately; that is, the hierarchy of dependency relation must

be well founded.⁴⁸ The Ābhidharmikas consider the entities that are the foundation of the mereological dependency relation to be ultimately real objects which have their properties essentially and intrinsically. These objects exist by substance-*svabhāva*.

The Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka literature contains a variety of ways for classifying arguments against the existence of substance-*svabhāva*.⁴⁹ A five-fold classification distinguishes the following kinds:

1. The diamond slivers⁵⁰
2. The refutation of the production from existent or nonexistent⁵¹
3. The refutation of the four kinds of production⁵²
4. The argument from dependent origination⁵³
5. The "neither one nor many" argument⁵⁴

1. The diamond slivers, so called because of the power ascribed to this argument in refuting substance-*svabhāva*, analyzes four ways in which an object could be causally produced: by itself, by another object, by both, or without a cause.⁵⁵ This argument will be discussed in detail in section 5.3 of chapter 5.

2. The refutation of the production from the existent or nonexistent concerns the temporal relation between cause and effect.⁵⁶ It will be discussed in section 5.4 of chapter 5.

3. The refutation of the four kinds of production is generally taken to refer to an argument that considers the numerical relations between cause and effect: many causes creating one effect, many causes creating many effects, one cause creating many effects, one cause creating one effect. It is the only one of the five arguments that does not have a textual basis in Nāgārjuna's works; we therefore do not discuss it here any further.⁵⁷

48. See Burton (1999: 109–111); Walser (2005: 243–244).

49. Most classifications distinguish either four or five kinds of arguments: there are also slight variations concerning which arguments are subsumed under which heading. For details see Tillemans (1984: 371–372, n. 16).

50. *vajrakāṇa, rdo rje gzegs*.

51. *saddasatūpādāpratīśedha, yod med skye 'gog*.

52. *catuskoṭyutpādāpratīśedha, mu bzhi skye 'gog*.

53. *pratyayasamutpādaheṭu, rten cing 'brel ba'i gyan tshigs*.

54. *ekānekaviyogheṭu, gog du bral gyi gyan tshigs*.

55. Hopkins (1983: 132–150, 639–650).

56. Tillemans (1984: 361). The temporal reading of this argument is not always so clear. Sometimes (1984: 361) it is argued that the diamond slivers and the refutation of the production from the existent or nonexistent are to be distinguished by the fact that the first analyzes the cause, the second the effect. This analysis then investigates whether a cause produces an existent, a nonexistent, a both existent and nonexistent, or a neither existent nor nonexistent effect. See Hopkins (1983: 151–154).

57. Some discussion is in Hopkins (1983: 155–160).

43. *yod etat ausnyam tad apy agrihe svabhāva na bhavattī grhyatām kṛtakarāt | iha manindhanādātyasamāgamād anarindhanāṅgādās cāgrier hetupratyayasāpekṣa tānvopalabhyate | na cāgriyayātrikīam ausnyam sarvabhavarāt | tasmād ausnyam api hetupratyayaśāntam | tataśca kṛtakam | kṛtakavāc cāpāmausnyavat svabhāvo na bhavattī sphūṭam avasīyate*. PP 260:9–13.

44. Schayer (1931: xix) argues that the Mādhyamika denies the existence of essence-*svabhāva*. Since everything is causally produced, "there is no property which could never be missing from a particular object" (55, n. 41). While the Mādhyamika will accept this view, the important point is that saying some property is part of the essence-*svabhāva* of an object of type X does not mean it could never be missing from that object, but that if it was missing we would not consider it to be of type X.

45. *nāyam svabhāvo bhāvium arhati*. PP 260:15.

46. Ames (1982: 170).

47. Siderits (2004: 118–119).

4. The argument from dependent origination considers the compatibility of substance-*svabhāva* with a variety of dependence relations such as those I discussed in the previous section.⁵⁸

5. The “neither one nor many argument” will be discussed below.⁵⁹ I will also examine two arguments against the existence of substance-*svabhāva* which we find in Nāgārjuna’s works but which are not included in the classification given above: the property argument and the argument from change.

THE PROPERTY ARGUMENT. One problem with the assumption of primary existents endowed with substance-*svabhāva* becomes evident once we analyze them in terms of the familiar distinction between individuals and properties. According to classical Buddhist ontology there are different kinds of primary existents (*mahābhūtas*: earth, water, fire, wind), which are distinguished by different qualities.⁶⁰ This list is sometimes enlarged to a list of six elements or *dhātus* by adding space and consciousness.⁶¹ It is this list of six upon which Nāgārjuna’s account in chapter 5 of the MMK is based.⁶² The problem he discusses, however, is independent of our willingness to assume the existence of primary “fire-atoms” and so forth. It arises whenever we assume that there are different categories of primary existents distinguished by different properties.⁶³

We can easily conceive of ordinary individuals as lacking some qualities which they in fact possess; for example we can conceive of a red apple as lacking the property of redness and being green instead. In the case of primary existents, however, this is not possible. If we abstract the property of heat from a fire-atom, there is nothing left, unless we believe in a propertyless “bare particular” which could act as the individual instantiating the property of heat.

Nāgārjuna considers this possibility in the case of space:⁶⁴

No space is evident prior to the characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) of space. If it existed prior to the characteristic, it would follow that it was without the characteristic.⁶⁵

58. See Hopkins (1983: 161–173).

59. See Hopkins (1983: 176–196).

60. La Vallée Poussin (1988–1990: 68–70); Dhammajoti (2004: 147–148).

61. La Vallée Poussin (1988–1990: 88).

62. MMK 57.

63. See Siderits (2003: 120–123).

64. The ontological status of space is a controversial issue in the Buddhist philosophical literature. Although it is not one of the four *mahābhūtas* (Dhammajoti [2004: 148–149]) the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* nevertheless includes it together with these in a list of six elements (*dhātus*) (La Vallée Poussin [1988–1990: 88]). Moreover, the **Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣāśāstra* argues that space can be a dominant condition (*adhipati-pratyaya*) for the *mahābhūtas* and therefore possesses *svabhāva* (Dhammajoti 2004: 384). Problems with properties of the *mahābhūtas* will therefore equally apply to space.

65. *nālakṣaṇe vidyate kintu pārvaṃ ākāśalakṣaṇāt / alakṣaṇaṃ prasajyeta syāt pārvaṃ yadi lakṣaṇāt*. MMK 51.

Thus assuming that space existed first without its characteristic and only later acquired it, in the way in which an apple can exist without the property of redness which is acquired only once the apple is ripe, commits us to the existence of a propertyless bare particular. This is due to the fact that unlike ordinary objects such as apples, primary existents have all their properties essentially. Since the only essential characteristic of space is its particular space-nature, space without this characteristic is like a knife without a handle which has lost its blade: there is nothing left. For Nāgārjuna, introducing bare particulars at this point is not an option; he claims that “an object without characteristics is not to be found anywhere.”⁶⁶

Why does Nāgārjuna reject the notion of a bare particular? Bare particulars do not appear to be straightforwardly contradictory entities; in fact their existence is postulated by metaphysicians claiming that individuals must be more than just bundles of properties.⁶⁷

The problem seems to be this. Let us assume that there was indeed a bare particular left over once we abstracted the property of heat from a fire-atom. Assume furthermore that this particular would have its nature (its bare-particularness) intrinsically and essentially. In this case heat could not be its *svabhāva* as well, since something cannot have two different *svabhāvas*. Its further characterization by heat would therefore be superfluous for establishing its status as a primary existent.

Alternatively we could assume that the bare particular did not have its nature intrinsically and essentially but was dependent on something else. We could then ask again whether this something else has its property essentially, and so on.⁶⁸ In this case we get into a regress which the opponent of Nāgārjuna has to terminate somewhere, since he wants to establish that *some* objects (i.e., the true primary existents) exist by *svabhāva* and are therefore not dependent on anything else. We therefore end up with the first possibility again, as the various properties that make up the supposed *svabhāva* of the primary elements fire, water, and so forth are superfluous in characterizing these foundational objects as primary existents, since these objects are already existent as such.

This is what Nāgārjuna means when he says:

The occurrence of a characteristic is neither in the uncharacterized nor in the characterized. It does not proceed from something other than those with or without characteristics.⁶⁹

66. *alakṣaṇo na kāścī ca bhāvaḥ samvidyate kvacit*. MMK 5:2a.

67. Armstrong (1997: 109–110, 123–126).

68. PP 130:5–13; Siderits (2003: 121).

69. *nālakṣaṇe lakṣaṇasya pravṛtīr na salakṣaṇe / salakṣaṇālakṣaṇābhyām nāpy anyatra pravartate*. MMK 5:3.

If we regard the bare particular as characterized by its bare-particular-ness intrinsically and essentially, any further characteristic is superfluous for bestowing the status of a primary existent. If we do not regard it as so characterized, however, we end up in an infinite regress without establishing any primary existents at all. Since these possibilities are mutually exclusive, the notion of a bare particular seems to be facing a problem.

The proponent of bare particulars might now be inclined to say that all this shows is that the pluralist theory of the six primary elements was mistaken and that we have to assume that there is only one kind of primary existent, namely bare particulars having their nature intrinsically and essentially. They constitute the “pure stuff” of the world which is then “flavoured” by such properties as heat, wetness, etc. in order to form fire-, water- and other atoms.

Bracketing the difficulty of how these different bare particulars are to be told apart, the most important problem with this is that Nāgārjuna's opponent also wants to argue that the primary existents are mind-independent, that they exist whether or not any conscious beings are around. But while this has a certain plausibility for objects that can be distinguished by their properties (such as the four *mahābhūtas* or the fundamental particles of contemporary physics), a bare particular from which all characteristics have been abstracted away bears the mark of the mind's handiwork. Bare particulars are nothing we are immediately (or even mediately) acquainted with—they are conceptual fictions, theoretical entities introduced in the course of constructing an ontological theory, but hardly anything we would suppose exists “from its own side,” independent of conscious minds.

If Nāgārjuna's opponent does not want to postulate the existence of bare particulars, he might try to solve the problem of properties of primary existents by arguing that primary existents *are* property-particulars rather than things characterized by properties. This is the dual of the bare-particular view, for we now assume properties without bearers rather than bearers without properties. As a matter of fact, ontological theories based on property-particulars (also called tropes) have become relatively popular in the recent metaphysical discussion.⁷⁰ The fundamental idea here is that the redness of an apple is not regarded as *one* thing inhering in different red objects. The redness of the apple, that of a tomato, and that of a postbox are rather regarded as three distinct property-particulars which are sufficiently similar to be classified under the common name “red.”

Nāgārjuna is clear on his rejecting property-particulars⁷¹ but unfortunately not very explicit on his reasons for doing so. A plausible reason for Nāgārjuna's rejection is provided by Marks Siderits.⁷² If we assume that the different primary existents, such as fire- and water-atoms are just property particulars of heat, wetness, and so forth, we face the problem of how the different atoms are to be individuated.⁷³ We obviously cannot say that two fire-atoms are different because the property of heat is instantiated in different bearers, because this stance would get us back to the scenario discussed earlier. It seems that the best we can do is individuate clusters of property-particulars, as in saying that in one cluster heat is associated with wetness (as in hot water), in another with solidity (as in a red-hot iron ball), and that in this way the two property-particulars of heat are individuated. However, now the problem is that the independence of primary existents is compromised, as we now have to rely on distinct property-particulars to tell them apart. Therefore their existence as distinct primary existents is not any quality they possess from their own side, but only something they have dependent on occurring in clusters with other property-particulars.

It now becomes evident that whatever analysis of primary existents in terms of individuals and properties we propose seems to face fundamental difficulties. If we treat the primary existents and their properties as distinct and independent entities (as we do in the case of ordinary objects), we realize that the two cannot be independent at all, since we cannot conceive of a primary existent without its characteristic property. If, on the other hand, we subsume primary existents under one side of the individual-property divide, that is, if we assume that they are either bare particulars (individuals without properties) or tropes (properties without individuals), it becomes evident that neither of these can play the desired role of mind-independent foundational objects existing from their own side.

Given that Nāgārjuna regards these options as exhaustive,⁷⁴ he considers the above difficulties as a *reductio* of the notion of a primary existent. For him the primary existents and the properties they instantiate have to be regarded as existentially dependent on one another. If the properties did not exist, there would be no particulars to characterize, and in the absence of the particulars there would be no characterizing properties. But in this case a fundamental property of primary existents is no longer fulfilled: namely that these existents

71. In the absence of the characterized, the characteristic does also not exist. *lakṣyaśyānuvartatā ca lakṣyaśyāpy asaṃbhavāḥ*. MMK 5:4b.

72. (2003: 122–123).

73. A discussion of different ways of individuating tropes is in Schaffer (2001).

74. MMK 5:3, 5.

70. See Williams (1993) for an early example, Bacon (1995) for a more recent discussion.

should be independent of all other objects.⁷⁵ Depending for their existence on the properties characterizing them, the supposed primary existents cannot produce the foundation for a hierarchy of dependence relations. It therefore turns out that the only satisfactory way of understanding the relation between primary existents and their properties has to deny that there are primary existents in the first place.

THE MERELOGICAL ARGUMENT. In the same way in which applying the framework of individual and property to primary existents leads to problems, Nāgārjuna argues, conceiving of them in terms of parts and wholes entails difficulties. Ordinary objects are either mereologically complex (i.e., they have proper parts) or they are mereologically simple, that is, they are atomic, partless things. Primary existents, however, the Mādhyamika argues, are neither complex nor simple. Since everything must be either complex or simple, the notion of a primary existent is thereby reduced to absurdity.

While this “neither one nor many argument”⁷⁶ is mentioned by Nāgārjuna at several places,⁷⁷ it does not play a prominent role in his arguments and is not spelled out in great detail. The later Tibetan commentarial literature, on the other hand, contains quite an extensive development of this argument for refuting substance-*svabhāva*.⁷⁸ We will use some of these materials in order to formulate the details of the argument, which can at best be said to be implicitly present in Nāgārjuna’s texts.

It seems to be clear that we do not want to say that primary existents are partite phenomena. This is so because partite phenomena depend for their existence on their parts, and primary existents are not supposed to be existentially dependent on anything. For any object with parts it is at best possible that its parts are primary existents, but the composite object itself cannot be. This denial of the primary nature of partite entities is a well-entrenched Buddhist position which can be traced back to some of the earliest textual material⁷⁹ and provides the reason for Nāgārjuna’s denial that any candidate for a primary existent, whether causally produced or not, can be regarded as having parts.⁸⁰

75. MMK 5:4–5.

76. *ekānekaviyogahetu, geig du bral gyi gan tshigs*.

77. SS 32ab; RĀ 1:71. VP 33–39 also contains a mereological discussion which is of relevance in this context. Unfortunately this material is relatively opaque and also set in the specific context of the rejection of the notion of the parts of a syllogism. Its usefulness in explicating Nāgārjuna’s understanding of the “neither one nor many argument” is therefore limited.

78. Tillemans (1983; 1984).

79. See Siderits (2003; chapter 1) for a discussion of this “Buddhist reductionism.”

80. *’dus byas dang ni ’dus ma byas / du ma yin geig ma yin*. SS 32ab.

The other alternative, that primary existents could be atomic, is also denied by Nāgārjuna. In RĀ 1:71 he claims:

Because of having many parts it is not simple; there is nothing which is partless.⁸¹

Unfortunately Nāgārjuna does not give us an argument here for why he thinks that nothing is partless. Considering the secondary literature, we can come up with at least two accounts of what the argument might have been. Their difference is due mainly to different understandings of the word *pradeśa* (*phyogs*), here translated as “part.”

Tucci⁸² reads *pradeśa* as denoting a straightforward mereological part or side of an object and assumes that Nāgārjuna here refers to the well-known Yogācāra argument against the existence of atoms.⁸³ In a nutshell the idea is that if we assume that atoms can conglomerate to form macroscopic objects, then individual atoms must touch one another, like neighboring mustard seeds in a heap. But if we now regard the side (*pradeśa*) of an atom where it touches its right neighbor as spatially coinciding with the side where it touches its left neighbor, the entire conglomeration of atoms will collapse to a single spatial point. If we regard them as spatially distinct, on the other hand, the atom must be seen as spatially extended and therefore it cannot be atomic.

A more comprehensive understanding of the notion of part in the “neither one nor many argument” which we find, for example, in Tsong kha pa assumes under it not just mereological parts but also temporal stages and aspects (*nam pu*).⁸⁴ This approach allows us to run a more general argument than is possible on the purely mereological interpretation.

The question investigated in this case is the relationship between the parts, stages, or aspects of a primary existent and the primary existent itself.⁸⁵ For the sake of simplicity, consider the case of a supposed primary existent, say an earth-atom, and two of its properties (say “being solid” and “being heavy”). Now obviously the earth-atom cannot be identical with both these “parts,” because one thing cannot be identical with two. So it must be distinct from them and should be conceived of as an individual which constitutes the bearer of the two properties. But this understanding of primary existents then leads us straight

81. *na’i’o ’unekapradeśātūn nāpradeśā ca kācāna*. rGyal tshab dar ma rin chen in his commentary explicitly regards this verse as a statement of the “neither one nor many argument.” See Hopkins (1998: 103).

82. (1934–1936: 324).

83. The argument is described in verses 11–14 of Vasubandhu’s *Vinśatikā* (Tōla and Dragonetti 2004: 127–129, 142–145). See also Kapstein (2001), Hopkins (1983; 373).

84. Tillemans (1983: 308).

85. Thurman (1984: 97).

back to the problems we encountered when discussing the property argument: we either end up with a bare particular (which is difficult to consider as existent in a mind-independent way) or with a trope (which cause problems with individuation). The view that primary existents exist without parts, stages, or aspects should therefore be given up. The conclusion Nāgārjuna wants to draw from this is that since everything either has parts or does not, and since neither option is possible for primary existents, our difficulties stem from assuming such a notion in the first place. From a mereological point of view no consistent account of primary existents can be given. It is a notion we should do without.

THE ARGUMENT FROM CHANGE. Nāgārjuna considers the existence of substance-*svabhāva* to be incompatible with change:⁸⁶

If *svabhāva* existed, the world would be without origination or cessation, it would be static and devoid of its manifold states.

But given that we do perceive change in the world, this provides us with an argument against substance-*svabhāva*:

By the observation of change [we can infer] the lack of *svabhāva* of things. . . . If *svabhāva* was found, what would change? Neither the change of a thing itself nor of something different is suitable: as a young man does not become old, so an old man does not become old either.⁸⁷

No thing which we perceive to be changing can exist by substance-*svabhāva*. This is so because an object existing by substance-*svabhāva*, that is, a primary existent, constitutes an independent, irreducible, and unconstructed fundamental constituent of reality. If the young man had its age as an essential and intrinsic property (i.e., if he was young by *svabhāva*), he could never grow old.

The obvious reply the advocate of substance-*svabhāva* should make at this point is to say that both change and substance-*svabhāva* exist, though not at the same level. Things that we perceive as changing do not possess substance-*svabhāva*, while those that do possess it do not change.

There are at least two different ways in which we could spell this idea out. According to the *annihilationist* view, an *x*-atom existing by *svabhāva* can never change into a *y*-atom. What can happen, however, is that the *x*-atom ceases to

exist and is replaced by a *y*-atom. What we perceive as macroscopic change in the nature of entities (hot water cooling down, green leaves turning brown) is in fact nothing but the microscopic arising and ceasing of entities the natures of which do not change.⁸⁸

According to the *permutationist* view, no entities existing by *svabhāva* ever pass out of existence. The change we observe is merely a difference in arrangement of the eternally existing objects. When hot water cools down, it does so not because the fire-atoms in the water pass out of existence, but rather because the set of permanently existent atoms changes its arrangement so that fewer fire-atoms are now mixed among the water-atoms.

There are two main difficulties for the annihilationist view. First of all it is not obvious to which extent the cessation of entities existing by *svabhāva* is theoretically less problematic than a change in their nature. The annihilationist view is based on the assumption that if some object passes out of existence, its *svabhāva* is not changed, since the object does not exist anymore. It did not lose one nature and acquire another one, since there is nothing left that could possibly acquire such a nature. Whether this theory in fact works depends on the interaction of the conception of *svabhāva* with that of momentarily existent objects. This is an intricate issue⁸⁹ which we fortunately do not have to settle here. There remains a second problem: namely answering the question of what is responsible for the cessation and production of entities existing by *svabhāva*. If they are dependent on causes and conditions for their production and annihilation, then they cannot be ultimately real entities after all, since the whole point of postulating entities existing by *svabhāva* was to have some objects that are not existentially dependent on any others.⁹⁰

The permutationist does not have this problem. He still has to assume that the ultimately real objects congregate in certain ways dependent on causes and conditions. But all this means is that the complex objects thus constituted will existentially depend on each other, as well as on the ultimate reals. The complex objects, however, were never supposed to exist by *svabhāva* in the first place. The ultimately real objects themselves do not depend on causes and conditions. While the permutationist view thus seems more attractive than the annihilationist one, it has the curious consequence that the supposedly ultimately real objects existing by *svabhāva* recede more and more.

The idea of fire-atoms as ultimately real objects is obviously only of historical interest. It is far from clear, however, whether the conception of elementary

86. *ajñātam aniruddham ca kīṭasthaṃ ca bhāṣiyati / vicārābhīr avasthābhūṭ svabhāve rohitam jagat. MMK 24:38.* Other passages dealing with the permanence of *svabhāva* include 13:4, 21:17, 23:24, and 24:22–26.

87. *bhāṣyānām nīḥśvabhāvatum anyathābhāvadarsanāt / [...] kasya syād anyathābhāṇṇī svabhāvo yadi vidyate // iṣṭyaiva nānyathābhāvo nāpy anyasyaiva yujyate / yuvā na jīryate yasmat jīrṇo na jīryate. MMK 13:34, 4b–5.*

88. See Siderits (2003: 124–125) for a description of this view.

89. See von Rospatt (1995).

90. Siderits (2003: 125).

particles of contemporary physics is much more attractive to the permutationist. While the *mahābhūtas* had the advantage of being relatively close to objects of ordinary experience, such as fire, water, and so forth, various subatomic particles, quarks, or strings are purely theoretical posits very different from anything we usually observe. Nobody has ever seen a string and nobody ever will, since these are not accessible to sensory perceptions. Moreover, their assumed properties are very different from what we observe in the macroscopic world. As with all theoretical posits, claims for their existence are based on the explanatory work this concept can do in a particular theory. It is therefore quite ironic that our best candidates for ultimately real entities existing independent of human conceptualization turn out to be objects that are so highly theory-dependent and the existence of which seems to be considerably less secure than that of the medium-sized dry goods with which we interact daily.

It appears that neither the annihilationist nor the permutationist view manage to give a satisfactory explanation of the existence of change in the presence of substance-*svabhāva*. In the absence of any other explanations, Nāgārjuna thus concludes that our experience of change constitutes an argument against the existence of substance-*svabhāva*.

Considering the previous discussion, it is evident that most of Nāgārjuna's arguments, as well as those found in the work of his commentators such as Candrakīrti, are concerned with the rejection of substance-*svabhāva*, while the examination of essence-*svabhāva* appears to play at best a minor role. From certain passages in Candrakīrti's works, however, we get the impression that a third conception of *svabhāva* is in play in the Madhyamaka arguments as well. This third notion does not seem to share the marginal status of essence-*svabhāva* and is also not the aim of attempted refutations. We will call this conception *absolute svabhāva*.

2.1.3. Absolute Svabhāva

Candrakīrti describes absolute *svabhāva* in the following way:⁹¹

Ultimate reality for the Buddhas is *svabhāva* itself. That, moreover, because it is itself nondeceptive is the truth of ultimate reality. It must be known by each one for himself.

While he stresses that substance-*svabhāva* is a notion erroneously ascribed to objects that in fact lack it,⁹² he also asserts that *svabhāva* does not in any

91. *sangs rgyas mams kyi don dam pa ni rang bzhiñ nyid yin zhiñg [de yang bāu ba med pa nyid byis don dam pa'i bden pa yin la] de ni de mams kyi so sor rang gis rig par bya ba yin no*. MAB 108:16–19.

92. PP 2613–4.

way appear to those having misknowledge.⁹³ It therefore appears that *svabhāva* is both a mistaken ascription made by beings with deficient cognitive capacities as well as something that does not appear to such beings. To make sense of this notion, we have to assume that there are two different conceptions of *svabhāva* in play here: substance-*svabhāva*, which the Madhyamaka arguments attempt to show to be nonexistent on the one hand, and, on the other hand, another kind of *svabhāva*, which I call absolute *svabhāva*, which constitutes the true and intrinsic nature of phenomena.⁹⁴

Candrakīrti explicitly characterizes this *svabhāva* as changeless (*avikarīva*), not originated (*sarvādānupāda*) and not dependent on something else (*paranirapekṣa*).⁹⁵ On the basis of this idea, the later Tibetan commentarial literature conceives of *svabhāva* as “triplely characterized.”⁹⁶ Tsong kha pa describes it as

1. Not produced by causes and conditions⁹⁷
2. Unchangeable⁹⁸
3. Set forth without depending on another object⁹⁹

The interesting problem arising at this point is that both Candrakīrti's attributes as well as Tsong kha pa's triple characterization are supposed to be applicable *both* to substance-*svabhāva* as well as to emptiness, that is, the absence of substance-*svabhāva*.¹⁰⁰ But taking into account that substance-*svabhāva* is argued not to exist while emptiness does exist, this view faces an obvious difficulty. The lack of *svabhāva* seems to have exactly the properties of substance-*svabhāva*, so the absence of *svabhāva* should both exist (since *svabhāva* does not) and not exist (since it has the same properties as the non-existing *svabhāva*).

93. MAB 107:15. See also 306.

94. Some of the synonyms for absolute *svabhāva* Candrakīrti gives include “objecthood of objects” (*dharmañām dharma*), “intrinsic nature” (*tatsvarūpam*), “original nature” (*prakṛti*), “emptiness” (*ānyatā*), “lack of *svabhāva*” (*naishvabhāvya*), “thusness” (*tathatā*), “complete non-origination” (*sarvādā anupāda*), and “being thus, changelessness, ever-abidingness” (*tathābhāva vikarīvam sadāiva sthāyitā*) PP 264.11–265.1.

95. PP 265:1–2.

96. *khyad par gsum dang ldan pa* (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 1985; 643:12); (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 2000–2004: 3:194). This characterization follows Nāgārjuna's discussion of *svabhāva* in MMK 15:2 and 8. See also Magee (1999: 87–88).

97. *rgyu dang rkyen gyis ma bskyed pa*. (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 1985; 643:12–13). (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 2000–2004: 3:194).

98. *gnas skabs gzhan du mi gyur ba* (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 1985; 643:13). (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 2000–2004: 3:194).

99. *mum 'jog gzhan la mi ltos pa* (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 1985; 643:13). (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 2000–2004: 3:194).

100. This is the reason why Tsong kha pa does not regard the three characteristics as sufficient for identifying the object of negation (*dag bya*). 'Jam dbyangs bshad pa asks in the *mChen bu bzhi: ḍi stong nyid kyi khyad par yin pa dag byar ga la rung*. “These [three characteristics] being characteristics of emptiness, how could they be the object of negation?” (Jam dbyangs bshad pa et al. 1972: 387:6).

Emptiness (that is, the absence of *svabhāva*) appears to be a contradictory concept.¹⁰¹

AMES'S SOLUTION. William Ames, in his analysis of Candrakīrti's use of the concept *svabhāva*, tries to resolve this problem by arguing that substance-*svabhāva* and lack of *svabhāva* or emptiness do not collapse into one another, since the latter differs from the former in two important ways.¹⁰²

- (1) Being purely negative, it does not satisfy the implicit condition that *svabhāva* be a positive quality. (2) It is not a quality of things, but a fact about qualities of things, namely, that none of them are *svabhāva*.

It appears to me that neither of these supposed differences can be made to carry much weight. The difference between "positive" and "negative" qualities seems to be purely an artifact of language. If our language did not contain the word "blunt," we might describe a blunt knife as "not sharp" and conclude that sharpness is a positive quality while bluntness is not. If we did not have the word "sharp," the reverse would be the case. But we would not have to assume that this indicates any difference between the *properties* we refer to.

Concerning the second point, it does not seem to help much to observe that there is a fact about qualities of things which holds continuously, causelessly, and necessarily. All we have done is push up the location of *svabhāva* to the level of second-order properties: it is now not the property of heat (or any other first-order property) which qualifies as the *svabhāva* of fire, but one of its second-order properties, that is, the property that none of its first-order properties is the object's *svabhāva*. But it is hardly satisfactory for the Mādhyamika to avoid the above problem by saying that when he claims that no objects have *svabhāva* what he really means is that none of an object's first-order properties are its *svabhāva*.

TSONG KHA PA'S SOLUTION. Another solution to this difficulty is suggested by Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357–1419). Though this Tibetan scholar is separated from Nāgārjuna by a considerable temporal, geographical, and linguistic distance, both the ingenuity of his solution as well as the considerable influence of his thought on the later interpretation of Madhyamaka justify its

101. Most philosophers would regard this contradiction as a problem with the notion of emptiness. An exception is Graham Priest (2002: 249–270) who regards it as an indication of the fundamentally contradictory nature of reality.

102. Ames (1982: 174).

inclusion in this discussion. Tsong kha pa attempts to solve the difficulty by arguing that substance-*svabhāva* (i.e., the Mādhyamika's "object of negation") is to be distinguished from emptiness by its having additional characteristics. Apart from being triply characterized, substance-*svabhāva* is also

4. established from its own side¹⁰³
5. a natural, not a learned notion.¹⁰⁴

Concerning the first, Tsong kha pa states: that

Ultimate truth is established in this way as positing the nature of things (*chos nyid*) by *svabhāva* (*rang bzhin du*), but what establishes it as *svabhāva* is the fact that it is not fabricated and does not depend on other objects. It does not in the slightest exist by *svabhāva* which is established from its own side.¹⁰⁵

Here Tsong kha pa regards "establishment from its own side" (*rang gi ngo bos grub pa*) as distinct from "independence from other objects" (*gzhan la mi ltos pa*) in order to drive a wedge between the characterizations of substance-*svabhāva* and emptiness or absolute *svabhāva*. It should be noted, however, that this interpretation is not shared by all dGe lugs commentators; some of which read Candrakīrti's *nirapekṣaḥ* as meaning "the establishment of an object from the perspective of its own entity."¹⁰⁶

Concerning the second point it should be noted that Tsong kha pa draws a distinction between conceptions of *svabhāva* that are acquired misconceptions (*kun brtags*) and those that are innate (*lhan skyes*). Given the fundamental cognitive change the understanding of emptiness is supposed to bring about, he regards the removal of the latter as considerably more important than the former.¹⁰⁷ Later commentaries¹⁰⁸ classify the triply characterized *svabhāva* as such an acquired misconception. The triply characterized *svabhāva* is too wide

103. *rang gi ngo bos grub pa* (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 1985: 648:5). (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 2000–2004: 3:199).

104. *kun brtags* (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 1985: 644:20). (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 2000–2004: 3:196).

105. *don dam pa'i bden pa ni chos nyid la rang bzhin du bzhag pa der grub kyang rang rang bzhin der 'jog byed hcos ma min pa dang | gzhan la mi ltos pa ni rang gi ngo bos grub pa'i rang bzhin der cung zad kyang med pa* (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 1985: 648:3–5). (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 2000–2004: 3:199). An alternative translation of this passage is in Magee (1999: 92–93).

106. *rang gi ngo bo'i ngo nas yul gyi steng du grub pa*. The relevant passage from Ngag dbang dpal ldan is cited in Magee (1999: 94–95).

107. (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 1985: 644:18–645:1). (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa 2000–2004: 3:196).

108. See Magee (1999: 96).

a notion to capture the object of negation, which is therefore further specified as an innate rather than an acquired misconception.¹⁰⁹

ABSOLUTE SVABHĀVA AS ESSENCE-SVABHĀVA Let us conclude by considering one final way of distinguishing substance-*svabhāva* from absolute *svabhāva* in order to solve the apparent contradiction inherent in this understanding of emptiness.¹¹⁰ The basic idea is that, while agreeing that both substance-*svabhāva* and absolute *svabhāva* are characterized as (a) not fabricated (*akṛtrimaḥ*), (b) immutable (*na anyathābhāvah*), and (c) not dependent (*nirapekṣaḥ*), we assume that (b) and (c) are understood in very different ways for the two different notions of *svabhāva*. But let us consider these three characterizations in turn.

Absolute *svabhāva* is described as not fabricated (*akṛtrimaḥ*) or as “complete nonorigination” (*sarvaśa anutpāda*) to make clear that it is not in any way produced together with an empty object and does not cease once the object is destroyed. It is therefore unlike the hole in a cup or a vase, which is dependent on the cup or vase for its existence and is destroyed if the cup or vase is broken.

This point can be clarified by considering Candrakīrti's assertion that *svabhāva* “neither exists, nor does not exist, by intrinsic nature.”¹¹¹ It is evident that since *svabhāva* does not exist, it also does not exist by intrinsic nature. But why does it not fail to exist by intrinsic nature? In other words, why does emptiness not exist by substance-*svabhāva*? After all, for Nāgārjuna phenomena do not just happen to lack *svabhāva*, but could not have possibly had *svabhāva* no matter what.

What Candrakīrti wants to say here is that the property of lacking *svabhāva* is dependent as well, since it depends on the erroneous ascription of *svabhāva* in the first place. It is not a property that phenomena have independently of everything else. If someone hallucinates white mice running across his desk, then part of what it means that this is a hallucination is that there are in fact no white mice on his desk. But even someone with a rather promiscuous attitude toward existence-claims concerning properties would hesitate to say that besides being brown, rectangular, and more than two feet high, the table also has the property of being free of white mice. If there is any distinction to be made

between the properties an object has in itself and those that are merely ascribed to it by an observer, purely negative properties such as being not round or being free of white mice seem to be the best candidates for being included in the latter category.

Candrakīrti stresses this point in a passage dealing with a person suffering from vitreous floaters¹¹² which cause the illusory appearance of hairlike objects in the visual field.¹¹³ An ordinary observer would not generally ascribe the property “free of hairs” to an empty pot, since this is one of the countless things the empty pot is empty of. But in order to correct the impression of the patient with the eye disease, the pot might indeed be described in this way. The property of hairlessness (like that of the absence of *svabhāva*) is something ascribed to an object to correct a mistaken attribution of the property of being filled with hairs. It is not a property an object would have independently of such an attempt to rectify a mistake.

Emptiness as a correction of a mistaken belief in *svabhāva* is therefore not anything objects have from their own side, nor is it something that is causally produced together with the object, like the empty space in a cup. It is also not something that is a necessary part of conceptualizing objects, since its only purpose is to dispel a certain erroneous conception of objects. In the same way as it is not necessary to conceive of tables as free of white mice in order to conceive of them at all, in the same way a mind not prone to ascribing substance-*svabhāva* to objects does not need to conceive of objects as empty in order to conceive of them correctly.

When absolute *svabhāva* is interpreted as immutable (*na anyathābhāvah*), as changelessness (*avikarīva*) and ever-abidingness (*sadāiva sthāyitā*), this interpretation does not mean the same as, for example, the Sarvāstivādin's primary existents (*dṛavya*) being described in this way. Emptiness is not to be regarded as some unchanging, permanent, absolute reality. Candrakīrti does not mean that if some empty object like a pot or a flower is destroyed the pot's or flower's emptiness somehow stays behind, as it is changeless and ever-abiding. If the pot or flower is destroyed, there is no use in referring to its emptiness. The point is rather that *whatever* phenomenon is conceptualized by ordinary beings will turn out to be empty, since they will ascribe substance-*svabhāva* to this phenomenon, and it is empty of such *svabhāva*. In this sense emptiness is unchanging, since it is a property to be ascribed to all things ever considered, once they have been correctly analyzed.

112. *rab rñib, himira*.
113. MA 6:29, MAB 106:10–110:3.

109. The problem of the differentiation between substance-*svabhāva* and absolute *svabhāva* was later further elaborated in the Tibetan tradition in the context of the debate over self-emptiness (*rang stong*) and other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*). For further details see Hookham (1991); Magee (1999: 103–115).

110. I thank Mattia Salvini for a helpful discussion of this point.

111. *na tadasti na cāpi nāsti svatīpatāḥ*, pp. 264:3. The terms *svatīpatā* and *svabhāva* are generally used interchangeably by Candrakīrti.

Finally, when we say that something is not dependent (*nirapekṣaḥ*), there are two different things we can mean. We might want to say that it does not depend on *any object whatsoever* or that it does not depend on *some specific object*. For example, when saying that a mathematical theorem is independent we might make the claim that it does not depend on anything (human beings, minds, the world) for its existence, or we might mean something much weaker, namely that it does not depend on some particular thing (the person who proved the theorem, its inscription on a blackboard), that is, that it would exist if someone else had proved it or if some inscription or other existed on some blackboard or other.

These two meanings can also be employed when one is speaking about *svabhāva*. We could say that if something exists by *svabhāva*, it does not depend on anything whatsoever. This is the meaning of *svabhāva* that is usually identified with substance-*svabhāva* and that corresponds to the Sarvāstivādin's primary existent. But we could also say some property exists by *svabhāva* if *as long as any objects are around* they have that property. This, I would want to argue, is the best way to understand the assertion of emptiness being not dependent. It does not mean that emptiness is some sort of primordial reality *ante rem* but rather that as long as objects exist, and are conceived of by beings with deluded minds more or less like ours, then these objects will be empty.

The bottom line of this way of resolving the difficulty is the claim that for Nāgārjuna there are not three different senses of *svabhāva*, but only two. Absolute *svabhāva* is equated with the essence-*svabhāva* of all objects. In the same way as the property of heat constitutes the essence-*svabhāva* of fire, emptiness, that is, the absence of substance-*svabhāva*, constitutes the essence-*svabhāva* of all things. There are therefore only two different senses of *svabhāva* to be distinguished, namely essence-*svabhāva* and substance-*svabhāva*; what I have called "absolute *svabhāva*" turns out to be an instance of the former. Apart from resolving the above contradiction, this view also allows us to make sense of such characterizations of emptiness as the "objecthood of objects" (*dharmaṇāṃ dharmatā*), "thusness" (*taḥatā*), "intrinsic nature" (*tatsvarūpaṃ*), or "original nature" (*prakṛti*). These epithets do not equate emptiness with some objectively existent noumenal reality but simply indicate that emptiness is a property all objects could not lose without ceasing to be those very objects.

2.2. The Cognitive Dimension

If we conceive of the Mādhyamika arguments about *svabhāva* solely in ontological and semantic terms, we are likely to miss one important dimension of the

concept which occupies a central place in the Buddhist understanding of emptiness. This is the idea that the purpose of determining the existence or nonexistence of substance-*svabhāva* is not just to arrive at a theoretically satisfactory understanding of the fundamental objects that make up the world, or of the relation between words and their referents, but is supposed to have far more comprehensive implications for how we interact with the world. Nāgārjuna notes in the final verses of chapter 26 of the MMK:¹¹⁴

[W]ith the cessation of ignorance, formations will not arise. Moreover, the cessation of ignorance occurs through right understanding (*jñāna*). Through the cessation of this and that [link of dependent origination] this and that [other link] will not come about. The entire mass of suffering thereby completely ceases.

Nāgārjuna claims here that with the realization of the nonexistence of substance-*svabhāva*, the first link (ignorance) of the twelve links of dependent origination, which constitutes the fundamental Buddhist theory of the generation of the cognitive constitution of the human mind,¹¹⁵ will cease to exist. The first link being cut off, all consecutive links, beginning with formations, will no longer arise. With the cessation of the entire chain, Nāgārjuna argues, suffering, which is the distinguishing mark of human existence, will cease as well.

How exactly the twelve links of origination are to be interpreted, and how the cessation of ignorance brings them to a halt, is a complex and much debated question within Buddhist philosophy. It is not one I want to focus on in this context, however. The main idea I want to highlight here is that the cessation of suffering is supposed to be brought about by a cognitive shift, which is constituted by the realization of the absence of *svabhāva*.

Candrakīrti remarks in his commentary on the above passage that "the one who sees dependent origination correctly does not perceive a substance (*svarūpa*) even in subtle things."¹¹⁶ Note that *svabhāva* is here not regarded as a theoretical posit, as something an ontologist or semanticist might postulate when investigating the world or its representation in language. The underlying idea here is rather that seeing objects in terms of *svabhāva* is a kind of cognitive default which is criticized by Mādhyamaka arguments against *svabhāva*, such as ones described above. It is important to realize that *svabhāva* is seen here as playing a fundamental cognitive role insofar as objects are usually conceptualized in terms

114. *avidyāyām niruddhayaṃ saṃskārāṇām asaṃbhavaḥ / avidyāya nirodhas tu jñānasyāya bhāvanāt // tasya tasya nirodhen tat tan nābhīpravartate / duḥkhaścaṇḍaḥ kevalo 'yam evaṃ samyag nirudhyate*. MMK 26:11–12.

115. See Williams and Tribe (2000: 62–72) for an overview.

116. *yo hi pratyakṣamutpādaṃ samyak paśyati sa śūnyasyāpi bhāvasya na svarūpam upalabhati*. PP 559:3–4.

of *svabhāva*. This conceptualization (which the Mādhyamika tries to argue is also theoretically deficient) is taken to be the ultimate cause of suffering.

According to this cognitive understanding, *svabhāva* is here regarded as a superimposition (*samāropa*) which the mind naturally projects onto objects when attempting to conceptualize the world. The term *samāropa* is mentioned only once by Nāgārjuna in the MMK¹¹⁷ but acquires a more prominent rôle in Candrakīrti's commentary. I think that agreeing with Candrakīrti about the presence of a notion of *svabhāva* as superimposition in Nāgārjuna's arguments allows us to give a theoretically coherent account of his view of *svabhāva*, while it also helps us to understand why the establishment of the absence of substance-*svabhāva* occupies such a central place in Mādhyamaka thinking.

Candrakīrti argues that the understanding of *svabhāva* in terms of a superimposition is of central importance for understanding the entire intellectual enterprise of the MMK:

Thus, when it is said that entities do not arise in this way, first of all the initial chapter was written to counter the mistaken attribution (*adhyāropa*) of false intrinsic natures; the remaining chapters were written to eliminate whatever distinctions are superimposed anywhere.¹¹⁸

It is important to note that Candrakīrti is concerned not merely with the refutation of a theory he assumes to be mistaken, but with something more fundamental:

For one on the road of cyclic existence who pursues an inverted [view] due to ignorance, a mistaken object such as the superimposition (*samāropa*) on the aggregates appears as real, but it does not appear to one who is close to the view of the real nature of things.¹¹⁹

Independent of one's particular theoretical position concerning the existence or nonexistence of *svabhāva*, *svabhāva* is something which is superimposed on ordinary objects in the process of conceptualization. The five aggregates, for example, are seen as a single, permanent, independent self, because of the superimposition of *svabhāva* on such a basis. The same happens when ordinary

partite and causally produced material objects, linguistic items, and so forth are apprehended.

It is because this cognitive default of the superimposition of *svabhāva* is seen as the primary cause of suffering that the Mādhyamika draws a distinction between the *understanding* of arguments establishing emptiness and its *realization*. Being convinced by some Mādhyamaka argument that an object does not exist with *svabhāva* does usually not entail that the object will not still appear to us as having *svabhāva*. The elimination of this appearance is achieved only by the realization of emptiness. The ultimate aim of the Mādhyamika project is therefore not just the establishment of a particular ontological or semantic theory, but the achievement of a *cognitive change*. The elimination of *svabhāva* as a theoretical posit by means of arguments such as those presented above has to be followed by its elimination as an automatic cognitive superimposition by means of specific practices.

But what kind of evidence is there that *svabhāva* constitutes an automatic cognitive superimposition? I agree with Tillemans that for anyone trying to establish this point "the Indian Mādhyamika literature would offer very little evidence, apart from a number of quotations from scriptures and a lot of doctrinal talk about people being ignorant, under the influence of karma, etc."¹²⁰

However, it might be possible to adduce some evidence from other sources which make this assumption at least plausible. Buddhist philosophy generally assumes that the superimposition of *svabhāva* applies to two things: to the self and to other phenomena we encounter. This superimposition at least entails conceiving of the self as *unitary* and *permanent*, and also viewing objects as *external* or *observer-independent* as well as *permanent*. We will have more to say on the former when considering Nāgārjuna's analysis of the self later on, so let us at the moment just consider our perception of objects. I would like to suggest that there is a cognitive default which (a) determines that, other things being equal, we conceive of a sequence of stimuli as corresponding to a single enduring (though changing) object rather than to a sequence of different, momentary ones, and (b) makes it more likely that we assume an external rather than internal object as being the source of the stimulus. Let me call these the *principle of permanence* and the *principle of externality*.

The principle of permanence ensures that we generally conceive of objects as enduring phenomena which may change over time but still remain fundamentally the same object, rather than as unrelated momentarily arising and ceasing phenomena, each of which lasts only for an instant. It should be noted that this

117. MMK 16:10. See Tanji (2000: 352, 355).

118. *kaśānād anuppannā bhāvā ity evam tāvān vipartitasvaripādhyāropapratipaksena prathamaparakarānārambhān | idānīm kvacid yuḥ kaścid viśeṣo 'dhyāropitas tad viśeṣāpākarmātharṥam śeṣaparakarānārabhyah.* PP 58:10–11.

119. *samsārādāhvani vartamānānām avidyāviparyāśānugamān mīśārtha eva skandhasamāropah saṃyatalaḥ pratibhāsamānāḥ padārthatatvadarśanasamīpashānān na pratibhāsat.* PP 34:71–3.

latter way of interpreting the information we get through the senses is not in any way logically deficient, it is just not the way we see the world. There are good reasons why we do not do so, primarily that such a representation is vastly too complex to use in practice. Any mind who lived in such a world of kaleidoscopically flashing phenomena would presumably be at an evolutionary disadvantage when compared with one that represented a world of stable, enduring objects.

The principle of externality makes us assume that the causes of sensory stimuli are objects lying outside of us rather than the product of our own perceptive mechanism. We generally assume that our perception is evidence for things lying outside of ourselves and that we do not live in a hallucinatory world of our own devising. Again, such a principle makes evolutionary sense: running away from an imaginary tiger is not as detrimental to our chances of passing on our genes as is declaring a real tiger rushing toward us to be a figment of our imagination.

Whether the principles of permanence and externality really determine our conceptualization of the world is of course an empirical question which can hardly be decided in a philosophical discussion such as this. What we can do, however, is to acquaint the reader with two simple empirical results which could serve as evidence that something like these two principles might play an important role in our cognitive access to the world.

The first is the so-called beta phenomenon, which has been known to experimental psychologists for a long time.¹²¹ The subject of the experiment is shown two slides, the first of which contains a dot in the top left-hand corner, the other a dot in the bottom right-hand corner. What the subject perceives if these slides are shown in quick succession is not two stationary dots, but a *single* dot moving diagonally from the top left to the bottom right across the slides. What has happened here is that our brain has interpreted the sequence of two stationary dots as a single moving object which is seen first on the left and then on the right. Rather than interpreting this particular stimulus as one object appearing at one spot and immediately disappearing, followed by another object appearing at a different spot, the principle of permanence causes us to see the two dots as indications of a single object changing its position in space. When offered the choice of regarding some sequence of stimuli either as corresponding to a series of momentarily arising and ceasing objects or as an enduring object changing its attributes, our brain seems to opt automatically for the latter.¹²²

Some evidence for the principle of externality can be drawn from the psychological investigation of dreaming, in particular of the phenomenon of lucid dreaming.¹²³ A lucid dream is a dream in which the dreamer is consciously dreaming without waking up. Although lucid dreams happen spontaneously to some people, there are also a variety of techniques for inducing them.¹²⁴ But the fact that some special effort is required to have a lucid dream points to the fact that our natural reaction to perceptions in dreams is to regard them as caused by external objects rather than by our own mind. So it seems that our view of sensory information both in the waking state and in the dream state is generally determined by the principle of externality: in both cases we regard the source of the information to be something that is both external to us and existing independently of us. It requires a particular cognitive effort to question in a dream whether the things one sees are indeed caused by external sources, an effort which appears to be essential in inducing lucid dreaming.

If it is plausible to understand the Mādhyamika's notion of superimposition (*samāropa*) of substance-*svabhāva* in terms of certain cognitive defaults (such as the principles of permanence and externality)¹²⁵ which govern our representation of the world, then it becomes clear why the Mādhyamika draws a sharp line between intellectual understanding and realization. As familiarity with any optical illusion attests, neither merely understanding *that* it is an illusion, nor even understanding *how* it works, will make the illusion go away. Now if there was a way of training oneself out of perceiving a particular illusion, we would have an apt example of the relation between understanding and insight as seen by the Mādhyamika. First of all we have to gain an understanding of how the illusion (in this case the superimposition of substance-*svabhāva*) works, and in a second step we have to follow some training which eventually makes even the appearance of the illusion go away.

But now this point also indicates the limitations of appealing to results from cognitive science for gaining a better understanding of *svabhāva*. Even though such references are useful in giving us an idea of why the Mādhyamika's view of superimposition could be plausible, they give us very little insight into how the removal of such superimpositions could be possible and what it would entail. The reason is obvious: according to the traditional Buddhist view, those who have realized (as opposed to merely understood) the absence of *svabhāva*

psychology. See Piaget (1937) and Spelke (1990) for two now classical discussions. An interesting related experiment is described in Subbotskii (1991).

123. LaBerge et al. (1986).

124. LaBerge and Rheingold.

125. Further investigation of our perceptions of the self, of causality, or of mereological relations might provide other aspects which cohere with the view of *svabhāva* as a superimposition.

121. The earliest description of the beta phenomenon is in Wertheimer (1912); further results and interpretations are given by Dennett (1991) (who erroneously refers to it as the phi phenomenon) and Hoffman (1998).

122. The problem of "object permanence," i.e., of the question when two distinct perceptions of an object are regarded as being caused by a single thing, has been investigated extensively in developmental

and thereby emptiness are few and far between. Empirical research into the way such persons perceive the world is therefore naturally difficult. Fortunately this is not a task the present discussion has to achieve. For our purposes it is sufficient to point out that a mere understanding of *svabhāva* as a theoretical posit (arrived at within an ontological or semantic theory) is not sufficient for understanding the central role it occupies in Buddhist thought. The notion of *svabhāva* must also be something that plays a much larger part in the mental life of the majority of people who are after all neither ontologists nor semanticists. The cognitive understanding of *svabhāva* provides us with an interpretation that achieves this goal.

Introduction to the Middle Way

Chandrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara*
With commentary by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

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*How to count the eighth
aryan level*

Hinayana people say that Mahayana does not have that, because as soon as you are on the path of seeing, you instantly become a foe-destroyer.

So, the purpose of this line is to tell Hinayana people that the first bhumi bodhisattva is like the eighth aryan level. So how do we count to the eighth? There has been a lot of debate in Tibet about which is the eighth level.

Let me remind you that Chandrakirti is a Prasangika Madhyamika scholar, a consequentialist. Members of this school always use an analogy that is already accepted within their opponent's view. So, here he is using the view of his Hinayana opponent. At this point, you should write a big question mark in your notebook, because I spent two hours yesterday listening to teachings of khenpos and reading many commentaries, but I am still not clear as to how they count the eighth level. They definitely do not count downwards. There are two kinds of stream-winner: the enterer and the abiders. Then we have the enterer once-returner, the abider once-returner and so on. We will count upwards, in reverse order, which means that the eighth is the enterer stream-winner. But I am still not sure whether the eighth level is the enterer stream-winner or the abider stream-winner.

The *Five Paths* is more a Mahayana term. These are the path of accumulation, path of application, path of seeing, path of meditation, and path of no more learning. The first bhumi bodhisattva is on the path of seeing, so the borderline between samsara and nirvana is just before the path of seeing. According to Chandrakirti, the stream-winner is the same as the path of seeing. It is just a difference of language between Hinayana and Mahayana. All these are the fruit; they are already nirvana.

It is a big thing to be a stream-winner, because it means you have become a non-samsaric being. Those who are stream-winners receive great respect and devotion from other people. During the Buddha's time, some naughty monks wanted to impress the lay people. They were not stream-winners, and could not really lie about that. So as lay disciples were passing by, they went into a river and shouted, "Hey, I've just entered the stream", hoping that the onlookers would misunderstand!

[H8]

(d) The quality of outshining others, 1:8

*1:8 Striving for enlightenment, even when remaining on the first level,
 He defeats those born from the speech of the Sage King, including solitary
 realisers.
 And, through ever-increasing merit,
 On "Far Gone", his understanding also becomes greater.*

We have seen how one obtains the name and the four kinds of qualities of a bodhisattva. We have just finished talking about how the first bhumi bodhisattva is equal to the stream-winner, by using an analogy. Now we will look at another of his qualities, the quality of outshining others, which is the subject of the 8th sloka.

All the shedras and khenpos spend a lot of time on this sloka, because here we need to talk about the Hinayana, the Mahayana and many other things. The last line in particular is very famous, and people like Khenpo Rinchen would spend two or three weeks just on that line!

You need to underline the word 'even' in the first line, and 'also' in the fourth line. Just this word 'also' has been the subject of much discussion, as there is so much meaning behind it. Sometimes institutes like shedras would invite khenpos just to talk about this!

*The importance of the 8th
sloka, and the last line in
particular*

[H9]

*The image of the newly
born crown prince,
ministers, and generals*

*The image of the baby
garuda*

(i) Outshining others by the strength of merit on this bhumi, 1:8.1-3

Imagine that there is a king sitting on his throne, surrounded by majestic generals, ministers, members of parliament, representatives of the citizens, and so on. Then suddenly the queen comes in, holding the newly born prince. Although he is tiny, the prince already outshines the ministers with his merit, as he is going to become king. No matter how great or clever the ministers, how long their beards, how much knowledge they have, or how majestic they are, they will never become king. They will only ever be ministers and generals.

The first bhumi bodhisattva is like a baby crown prince, very small in front of these wise, majestic and mature shravakas and pratyekabuddhas. But it does not matter, because just as the prince is going to become king, the bodhisattva will become a Buddha, and not these others. Another example is given in the *Biography of Lord Maitreya Sutra*. There is a big tree with a garuda's nest, which is surrounded by vultures, owls, hawks, eagles and so on. There is a small recently born baby garuda, that does not even have hair on its wings, but it can still outshine the others. Hawks can fly better than the baby garuda, but the garuda is still the king of the birds.

The word 'even' in the first line tells us that if the first bhumi bodhisattva outshines the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, then bodhisattvas from the second bhumi onwards will definitely outshine them. Why can bodhisattvas outshine the others? They do so because of their compassion, and because of the merit that they have accumulated over countless aeons.

[Q]: You said yesterday that the shravakas also have compassion?

[A]: Yes, but a shravaka's compassion is like a drop of water, whereas a bodhisattva's compassion is like the four oceans combined. But our compassion is like dew in the grass, and compared to us, the compassion of the shravakas is like the four oceans.

[Q]: You said that the bodhisattva is free from three fetters of clinging to a view, or ethics, or having doubt. Is it that they never have even a temporary stage of doubt, meaning the thought does not arise in their mind, or is it that it cannot affect them?

[A]: They do not have any doubt. It does not exist for them any more.

[Q]: The analogy says that the bodhisattva outshines others because he will be king in future, but we are all potential Buddhas.

[A]: Your answer is on the first line of 6th sloka. The bodhisattva is born into the family of the Tathagatas, so he is sure to become a Buddha. The shravakas and pratyekabuddhas are still in England, but he is already at the border of France.

[Q]: But what is important is where he is today, rather than that he will be in Paris next year. Perhaps the one who is in England today might reach Paris before the person at the French border?

[A]: When all the conditions are there, and there is no antidote or obstacle, then you can be sure the result will follow. The person in England does not have this. It's a bit like when someone says, "I want that", and another person says, "You've got it!" You do not actually have it, but you are sure it will be given.

[H9]

(ii) Outshining others by the strength of understanding on later bhumis, 1:8.4

[H10]

(a) Outshining as implicitly stated in the sutra (539)

The last line of the 8th sloka says, "*On 'Far Gone', his understanding also becomes greater*". In the *Dashabhumika Sutra*, which is our main supporting sutra, the Buddha says that a newly born prince will outshine all the mature and learned ministers and generals with his merit. When this prince grows up and is old enough to actually rule the country, then he will also outshine the ministers with his intelligence. The sutra continues, "Likewise, sons and daughters of the

Indirect praise for
shravakas and
pratyekabuddhas

[H10]

[H11]

The shravakas’
realisation of emptiness:
the analogy of the space
inside the mustard seed

Two types of defilement:
dendzin and tsendzin

victorious ones, as soon as a bodhisattva obtains ultimate bodhicitta, he will outshine the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas with the power of his noble aspiration”. In fact, ‘noble aspiration’ is a good phrase for compassion.

The Buddha goes on to say that when the bodhisattva reaches “Far Gone”, which is the name of the seventh bhumi, he will outshine the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas even with the ‘superior understanding of his own object’, *rangi yül shepé chewa (rang gi yul shes pa’i che ba)*. It says the same thing here on this line: not only his merit, but also his understanding – his superior understanding of his own object – is greater. We will talk about what this means in more detail.

As you read this, you can sometimes almost feel that Chandrakirti is so taken with the Mahayana path that he just keeps praising bodhisattvas. In the first three lines, he says that a first bhumi bodhisattva can outshine shravakas and pratyekabuddhas with his merit, and in the last line, he says that a seventh bhumi bodhisattva can outshine them with his wisdom. There are no negative words here, like “he can *only* outshine them with his merit”. He is always praising the bodhisattva, and a Hinayana reader might interpret this as sarcasm.

Chandrakirti could have said that the first bhumi bodhisattva is only able to outshine shravakas and pratyekabuddhas with merit, but not with wisdom. But instead of saying that, he immediately goes on to say that when this bodhisattva reaches the seventh bhumi, he will also outshine them with wisdom. But Khenpo Rinchen, one of my teachers, says the word “*also*” is actually one of Chandrakirti’s greatest praises of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas. Chandrakirti is very clever. While he praises the bodhisattvas, he also praises the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, by saying “*also*”. This is indirect praise, because it tells us that shravakas and pratyekabuddhas have a lot of intelligence – so much that even the sixth bhumi bodhisattva cannot outshine them.

(b) The actual meaning stated in that quote (540)

(i) The sutra’s statement that shravakas and pratyekabuddhas understand phenomena to have no true nature

Generally, the view that needs to be realised by the shravakas, pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas is identical. But their realisation is not the same, as is illustrated by an image. Sometimes a tiny insect eats away the inside of a mustard seed, and creates a space inside the seed. The realisation of emptiness of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas is as big as that space inside the mustard seed. Notice that I did not say ‘as small as’ – it is a big place! By contrast, the bodhisattva’s understanding of emptiness is as big as the sky, or perhaps I should say as small as the sky. Here we are talking about the intelligence of the bodhisattva. Even the first bhumi bodhisattva’s understanding of emptiness is greater than that of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, so the question is, why does he not outshine them even on the first bhumi?

From the first to the sixth bhumis, a bodhisattva cannot irreversibly remove his *tsendzin (mtshan ’dzin)*, what we are calling ‘fixation towards characteristics’. It continues to grow, and he cannot block it so that it will not return. Here we need to distinguish two types of defilement:

- *Dendzin (bden ’dzin)*: When you look at this pen, you cling to it as a truly existent pen. If someone says it is spaghetti, you will say, “No, it is a pen”. This is *dendzin*.
- *Tsendzin (mtshan ’dzin)* is fixation towards characteristics. As long as there is an object and a subject, there is *tsendzin*. There are no details like whether it is truly existing or not. But this is a very rough explanation.

Why the first bhumi bodhisattva cannot outshine the shravakas

The two ways in which a bodhisattva outshines shravakas and pratyekabuddhas

Let me give you a bad example. If you are dreaming about a cup of coffee, and in the dream, somebody asks you if you are drinking coffee, then if you do not know that you are dreaming, you will say, “Yes, I am drinking coffee”. If they ask if you are sure, you will say, “Yes, definitely, I’m sure”. And if they ask whether your coffee is satisfying you, you will say that it is. Then when you wake up and someone asks whether the coffee you drank really existed, you will say, “No, it was just a dream”. It was not a truly existent cup of coffee.

For now, for simplicity, you can say that *dendzin*, the belief in things being truly existent, is the cause of samsara. Shravakas, pratyekabuddhas and first bhumi bodhisattvas have already abandoned this belief. And, as I just said, the understanding of emptiness of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas is as big as the space inside a mustard seed, whereas the bodhisattvas’ understanding is like the sky. So, why can’t the first bhumi bodhisattva outshine the shravakas, given that he has a greater understanding? It is because none of the shravakas, pratyekabuddhas or bodhisattvas has managed to make their fixation towards characteristics irreversible. Here we are talking about their progress in term of *dreldré*, the result of absence.

Let us say that Gérard and I are both looking at that mountain. Gérard is a few feet closer, so he has a better view; but both Gérard and I have a problem with our eyes, so we are equal to each other in that sense. Likewise, shravakas, pratyekabuddhas and first to sixth bhumi bodhisattvas are all equal. One equal cannot outshine another equal, as you have to be greater than another person in order to outshine them. Therefore, the bodhisattvas cannot outshine the shravakas with their understanding.

As we have seen, the two ways in which a bodhisattva can outshine shravakas and pratyekabuddhas are his noble aspiration and his superior understanding of his own object. The noble aspiration is compassion, which creates merit and makes the first bhumi bodhisattva outshine the shravakas, whereas the superior understanding of his own object is what the bodhisattva has on the seventh bhumi ‘Far Gone’.

[H11]

(ii) What the other traditions state about this quote

[Editor’s note: Rinpoche did not teach anything under this heading]

[H11]

(iii) Introducing the Master Nagarjuna’s understanding of this point (542)

When we talk about the ‘superior understanding of his own object’, *rangi yül shepé chewa*, there are three subjects to discuss:

1. Superior
2. Understanding
3. His own object

We will start with the third, ‘his own object’. We need to start by introducing the four extremes, which are illustrated in the box below. According to Nagarjuna, all phenomena can be included within these four zones. If you come up with a fifth, I will give you a Manjushri pill! When we talk about existence, we are not differentiating between inherent or non-inherent or conventional, we are just talking about everyday existence in the world. For example, do you have a car? Yes, I have a car – this is existence. The example of neither existence nor non-existence is the sharpness of the horn on Gérard’s nose – because the horn does not even exist, you cannot talk about its sharpness.

The four extremes

<p style="text-align: center;">Existence</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Example: a spoon</i> Cf. Christianity and some types of Hinduism</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Non-existence</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Example: a rabbit's horn, or the horn on Gérard's nose</i> Cf. existentialism</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Both Existence and Non-existence</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Example: the reflection of your face in a mirror</i> Cf. New Age</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Neither Existence nor Non-existence</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Example: the sharpness of the horn on Gérard's nose</i> Cf. Taoism</p>

Examples of how various religious views fall into the four extremes

The great emptiness is not the same as non-existence

These are the four extremes. If you fall into one or more of these, you are an extremist, and you do not have the right view of the middle way. Then you do not have 'the view that is free from the extremes'. In the first zone, 'existence', we can find Christianity. I feel that when buddhists meditate on emptiness, many of them just delete the first one, 'existence', and dwell on the second, 'non-existence'. The third one is New Age, where everything is all right, existence or non-existence. The fourth is Taoism. It is very close to buddhism, and many people think that 'neither existence nor non-existence' must be the Middle Way. But this is not so, according to Chandrakirti. We will come to this in the sixth chapter.

Roughly, one can say that if you just wish to destroy the root of samsara, you can destroy the first of the four extremes, existence. However, the view that a bodhisattva tries to meditate on is beyond all four of these zones. That is what we call 'great emptiness'. So, emptiness is not the same as non-existence. Many people say that emptiness is something like a void, blank space or non-existence of this and that – but that is not true. Many people's emptiness falls into the second extreme, the second trap.

Shravakas and pratyekabuddhas care more about the first extreme, existence. They emphasise the understanding of the non-existence of existence. However, a bodhisattva has to understand the non-existence of existence and the non-existence of non-existence. When you think, "I am", that is clinging to existence. Then with some meditation, you can realise the emptiness of self, but sometimes a person can also have clinging or attachment to this non-existence. From the Mahayana point of view, that is also a type of defilement.

When the Mahayana says a flower does not exist, it actually means that the flower is free from the four extremes: it is not existent, nor is it non-existent, nor both existent and non-existent, and not neither existent nor non-existent. If you understand this, you will not ask questions like "how can the Mahayana say this tent does not exist? I can see it". Chandrakirti will say it is not existent but also not non-existent. To our normal mind, 'not non-existent' means that it is sort of existent, but then Chandrakirti tells us that's not it either. Whichever side you go to, Chandrakirti is there, saying, "No, this isn't it!" That is why it is called the Middle Way. And after all this, Nagarjuna says that a learned one should not even remain in the Middle Way!

[Q]: When one visualises a *yidam*, for example, first you make it existent, then you dissolve it so then it is non-existent.

[A]: Yes that is true. In the sixth chapter, Chandrakirti says that all meditations and visualisations are part of relative truth. Chandrakirti is not saying that you cannot have existence and non-existence in the relative truth. Remember, as I said on the first day, here we are establishing the ultimate truth, the view of emptiness.

I cannot talk much about freedom from all these extremes. If you really want to understand this, understanding only comes from contemplation and meditation. Talking about it just makes it worse and worse. The more we talk, the worse it gets! But just from hearing the teaching and

*The 7th bhumi
bodhisattva's superior
understanding of his own
object*

*Why shravakas and
pratyekabuddhas have
some understanding of
selflessness of phenomena*

*Why do bodhisattvas not
completely outshine
shravakas and
pratyekabuddhas?*

*Shravakas must also
understand emptiness of
phenomena*

studying it, a general idea of the view can occur during the Path of Accumulation. It could happen to us!

And then you meditate on this general idea of the view, and during the Path of Application, a *nyam* (*nyams*) or experience, of freedom from the extremes can occur. The actual understanding starts at the first bhumi. This explains the analogy of the space inside the mustard seed and the sky. Even on the first bhumi, a bodhisattva has the beginning of actual understanding of freedom from all four of the extremes. This is a greater understanding than that of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, who only understand the first extreme, and part of the second.

Returning to 'superior understanding of his own object', we will now explain the word 'superior', and discuss what makes a 7th bhumi bodhisattva superior to shravakas and pratyekabuddhas. When a bodhisattva reaches the 7th bhumi, during his post-meditation time, he can make his freedom from *tse dzin*, fixation towards characteristics, irreversible. This means that until the 7th bhumi, a bodhisattva still cannot manage to make his fixation towards characteristics irreversible, which is also the case with shravakas and pratyekabuddhas. This is why the first bhumi bodhisattva cannot outshine them with his intelligence.

It does not mean that a 7th bhumi bodhisattva is totally free from fixation towards characteristics from that point on. He still has *tse dzin*, but does not generate any more *tse dzin*. The seed has been planted and the flower is grown, but he is not planting any more seeds. We could say that he has made the seed sterile, as he no longer accumulates further causes of fixation towards characteristics. But that does not mean that he no longer has fixation towards characteristics, because then he would jump to the 10th bhumi or buddhahood! There is still more to purify on the 8th and 9th bhumis! This tells us that shravakas and pratyekabuddhas still have fixation towards characteristics, which is why they are equal to bodhisattvas on the first to sixth bhumis.

Now the real problem starts, because our quotations from the *Dashabhumika Sutra* and the *Biography of Lord Maitreya Sutra* give rise to another question. From both quotations, we now know that shravakas and pratyekabuddhas do have a realisation of the selflessness of phenomena, and not just the selflessness of the person. If this were not so, a bodhisattva on the first bhumi could easily outshine them even with his intelligence. However, because shravakas and pratyekabuddhas have an understanding of the emptiness of phenomena, the bodhisattva does not outshine them until the 7th bhumi.

We are talking about two things here: realisation, and purification of defilements. The superiority of a bodhisattva does not relate to things like his physical size or his colour, but lies in these two aspects: his noble aspiration, and his understanding of emptiness, which is much vaster than that of the shravakas. We used the example of the space inside the mustard seed to compare their realisation of emptiness. So, why doesn't Chandrakirti say that the bodhisattvas have totally outshone the shravakas? Because although they have superiority in terms of their realisation of the view, the way they perceive phenomena, they are not superior in terms of their purification of defilements. To use an analogy, if a shravaka and a bodhisattva are both washing dirty clothes, neither has reached the point where their clothes will never get dirty again

The quotation from the *Dashabhumika Sutra* tells us that the baby prince does not outshine the ministers with his knowledge, which means that the ministers also have some knowledge. We also know that shravakas, pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas have all understood the selflessness of the person, as they are all non-samsaric beings. So, this quotation tells us that a first bhumi bodhisattva will not outshine shravakas with his intelligence, which means that shravakas must have some understanding of selflessness of phenomena.

[H10]

(c) Disposing of disputes on that question (542)

*Bhavaviveka's objection:
shravakas only
understand the
selflessness of a person*

We now have to talk about the understanding of the selflessness of phenomena by shravakas and pratyekabuddhas. You may wonder why I am emphasising this so much. The reason is that if we make even a slight mistake, we could end up with the consequence that shravakas are already practising the selflessness of phenomena, and so there is no point even teaching the Mahayana.

In particular, Bhavaviveka said that shravakas and pratyekabuddhas only understand the selflessness of a person, not of phenomena. Here he is raising an objection, and Chandrakirti responds by explaining the consequences that Bhavaviveka will have because of saying this. Be patient here, because we need to go through this. If we have even a small problem here, it will lead to big problems with the rest of the Madhyamika.

If we look at the framework for the whole of the Madhyamika, there are two things to be realised:

- Absence of existence of the individual self: *gang zag gi bdag med*
- Absence of existence of phenomena: *chos kyi bdag med*

And there are two defilements to be eliminated:

- Clinging to/belief in the individual self *bdag 'dzin*
- Clinging to/belief in existence of phenomena *chos kyi bdag 'dzin*

If you want to talk about ignorance, defilements and obstructions to enlightenment, all these are included in the bottom two. The top two, understanding the absence of existence of the individual self and of phenomena, are wisdom. When we talk in terms of what has to be eliminated, we talk about the two types of clinging, and when we talk of what is to be realised, we talk about the two types of wisdom.

*How can the two
defilements be separate?*

You might ask how these two defilements could be separate. This is a good question. It depends on your interest. If you want enlightenment, *moksha*, liberation, then you should get rid of the first. Once you have done that, that's it – you are in *moksha*! That is what shravakas and pratyekabuddhas want, so that is what they do. As we saw in the homage, in the 3rd sloka, this defilement is “initially fixating on this so-called ‘I’ as an existing self, ‘Mine’ gives rise to grasping”. Here we are talking about the ego. It is the first defilement, and it is the cause of the other eleven links of interdependent origination. But how can these two defilements be separate things? After all, there can be no notion of ‘I’ or self without the five aggregates. And the five aggregates belong to the second defilement. This is the problem.

According to Bhavaviveka, shravakas are only interested in getting enlightenment, so they are only interested in getting rid of the first obscuration, which is ego. That is fine. But then Bhavaviveka says that the method of realising the emptiness of phenomena is exclusive to the Mahayana. This is his mistake, according to Chandrakirti. This tells us that shravakas and pratyekabuddhas must also have knowledge of the emptiness of phenomena. If they did not, they would not understand the emptiness aspect of the five aggregates. Now, when the causes and conditions are there, and there is no antidote, the result will follow. Here, the result would be clinging to ‘I’. If they did not understand the emptiness aspect of the five aggregates, ego could come automatically. There have been many different ways of thinking about this, not only in India but also in Tibet. For example, Mipham Rinpoche, Gorampa and Tsong Khapa all had their own ideas, but I am not going to explain them here.

Now we will talk about *bdag 'dzin* (*chos kyi bdag 'dzin*) and *bden 'dzin*.

*Dagdzin: Clinging to the
self*

Dagdzin (*bdag 'dzin*) means clinging to the self, which also includes clinging to the self of phenomena. The characteristics of a phenomenon are the things that can be perceived by the six senses. The self is also included there. *Chos* means phenomena, and *bdag* means something like

identity or true self, the thing that identifies something, or makes something what it is. For example, when we identify something, as in “this is a glass of water” or “this is a piece of apple”, that is *bdag*.

[Q]: In western philosophy, we make a distinction between what is perceived, and the underlying thing that causes those sensations to happen. We do not perceive what is underlying. We only perceive the sensations. But people believe that there is something underlying that causes those sensations. That is what we call substance. Is *bdag* that substance?

[A]: When I say ‘I’ or ‘me’, it is a name, identification, a certain habitual pattern and a confirmation. Similarly, saying that this is a tent – this is also identification, a hallucination, a concept and a self. *Bdag* is ‘true self’, as when English people say ‘itself’, as in ‘by itself’.

[Q]: When you talk of the thing ‘in itself’ are you talking about something completely separate from us, which exists in its own right, and which causes our sensations of that thing? If there is no perceiver, does that thing still have a self?

[A]: No, because then it does not become a *chos* (dharma), or phenomenon. If none of the six senses are there to perceive it, then there is no phenomenon.

[Q]: You cannot perceive the underlying substance of something directly, but only through your senses. You can perceive things like its colour, its hardness or its shape, but you cannot get beyond your senses. Someone who was not a buddhist would say, “Yes, it’s really there”.

[A]: When we say “this is a cup”, you are asking whether beyond ‘cup’ there is something that we can then refer to as a cup. According to Chandrakirti, that is *zhi mé* (*gzhi med*), there is no such thing. It is a complete hallucination. There is no base, but you take it as a base and think ‘this is me’. Here we come to the seven-point analysis of the chariot, in which Chandrakirti tells us that there is no base, but we hallucinate that there is a base and say, “this is a chariot”. Similarly, when we say, “this is a tent”, what are we referring to? Is it this iron beam, or this piece of fabric? If we cut one piece and then another, we will not find the tent. There is no base, but we still have an idea that this is a tent, and we cling to it. That is *dagdzin*.

Similarly, when Jakob thinks his girlfriend is beautiful, that is also *dagdzin*. When he is very much in love, he thinks her smell is good, her looks are good, her taste is good – all of that. But this is baseless, because if there were a truly existent base, then he should always think she smells good and so on. But one day, when he hates her, her smell is bad and she is no longer beautiful! This shows that there is no base to her beauty – it is a ‘baseless assumption’.

Then we come to *dendzin* (*bden ’dzin*), thinking that something is truly existent. This is a more gross defilement, because something can be *dagdzin* without necessarily also being *dendzin*. This is because *tendzin*, fixation towards characteristics, is *chos kyi bdag ’dzin*, but it is not *dendzin*.

We have seen that, in order to understand the selflessness of the person, shravakas and pratyekabuddhas must understand the selflessness, or non-substantiality, of the five aggregates. Indeed, the Buddha taught them about the second selflessness, the selflessness of phenomena, as we can see from the following quotation. He said that “form is like a bubble and feeling is like a bubble”, meaning they are essenceless, that they have no substantial existence. There is no true existence, no reality in there. The Buddha also said that “perception is like a mirage, and karmic formation is like a banana tree”. A banana tree has many layers, and when you look at it from outside, it looks very solid. But it is all just layers of skin. As you peel layer after layer of skin, you end up finding that there is nothing inside. There is no real solid substance, as it is all made out of skin. This quotation also says that consciousness is like a magical illusion.

So, why is the Mahayana taught, and what makes the Mahayana special? This challenge comes from Bhavaviveka, who thinks that the teachings on the selflessness of phenomena are exclusive to the Mahayana. He says that if this subject were also taught to the shravakas, then there would

*Dendzin: thinking
something is truly existent*

*Bhavaviveka’s challenge:
Why is the Mahayana
taught?*

[H10]

The three reasons why the Mahayana teaching on the selflessness of phenomena is greater

be nothing special about the Mahayana, so there would be no reason or benefit in teaching it again.

Chandrakirti says that the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas must understand the selflessness of phenomena, because if they did not understand that, they could not understand the selflessness of the person. And if you do not understand the selflessness of the person, then you are in samsara. So, in response to Bhavaviveka, Chandrakirti asks him two questions. Is Bhavaviveka saying that the teachings of the Mahayana in general are irrelevant? Or is it just that the Mahayana teachings on the selflessness of phenomena are irrelevant?

The first objection is definitely invalid, since the Mahayana not only has teachings about the selflessness of a person and of phenomena, but it also has teachings on the paramitas, prayers, compassion, dedication, and so on. And the aim of the Mahayana is not just to go beyond one extreme, but also to go beyond all four extremes.

Now we will respond to the second objection, that the Mahayana teachings on the selflessness of phenomena are irrelevant. Here we are still talking about the ‘superior understanding of one’s own object’, and we have already discussed ‘superior’ and ‘one’s own object’, so now we come to ‘understanding’.

(d) Negating Explanations Based on Conceptual Analysis (545)

Although shravakas and pratyekabuddhas do practise the selflessness of phenomena, there are three reasons why the Mahayana teaching on this subject is greater:

1. It is clearer
2. It is vaster
3. It is complete

How is it clearer? To the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, the Buddha only said that form is like a bubble, perception is like a mirage, and so on. He did not clarify this. But in the Mahayana, he said that form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. This is much more clear and direct. Although the Buddha said this to Shariputra, as in the *Heart Sutra*, Shariputra does not practice it. He just repeats it, which is why he is *nyentō* (shravaka).

How is it vaster? When the Buddha teaches shravakas and pratyekabuddhas the selflessness of phenomena and of the person, he only negates one aspect: existence. But in the Mahayana, he not only negates the first aspect, existence, but also the other three: non-existence, existence and non-existence, and neither existence nor non-existence. There is a classification of either 16 or 20 types of emptiness, which we will come to when we discuss the 6th bhumi. When we say ‘vaster’, it refers to the quantity of emptiness. For shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, only one type is taught, but in the Mahayana, all 20 types are taught.

Why is it complete? Shravakas and pratyekabuddhas only understand the first of the four extremes and a little of the second. In the Mahayana, all four extremes are taught – it is complete.

There are several different explanations here. Although I will skip over the debates here, they are good. Nobody is wrong; all are great. The debates are not about winning. If there is anything to gain, it is wisdom.

In particular, Tsong Khapa says that from the first to the seventh bhumis, a bodhisattva still has to purify the first defilement, which is *tse dzin* (fixation towards characteristics), although his purification of *dag dzin* (clinging to the self) is finished. Remember that we were talking about

two kinds of defilements – clinging to the self and clinging to phenomena. The bodhisattva needs to purify clinging to the existence of phenomena, not just for enlightenment, but also for omniscience. The selflessness of phenomena is divided into nine parts, and these nine are the obstacles that need to be purified by the nine stages of the bodhisattva.

When a bodhisattva manages to destroy clinging to the self of the person, he attains the first bhumi. One can almost say that this first stage of the buddha is just an instant. The *tonglam*, the path of seeing, occurs as soon as you see the emptiness. That’s it! But as Tulku Jigme Rinpoche was saying, for them one minute and one hundred years are identical.

So today, we have completed the line “*On ‘Far Gone’, his understanding also becomes greater*”. This usually takes ten or twenty days to teach. Do not tell Tibetans that I taught it in one day. They would never believe it! I would become an outcast!

[Q]: Is the path of seeing free from the four extremes?

[A]: Not completely. This is why bodhisattvas on the path of seeing are still on the path.

[Q]: Isn’t it true that if shravakas and pratyekabuddhas understand the selflessness of phenomena, compassion will arise out of this understanding, and they will then become Mahayana?

[A]: Yes, they certainly have a lot of compassion, but it is tiny when compared to the Mahayana.

[Q]: Why are selflessness of phenomena and the person treated separately?

[A]: It is a question of what different people are interested in. Some only want enlightenment, so they need to abandon clinging to the self of the person, which is what binds them to samsara. Others want to go further, and gain omniscience, so they need to abandon clinging to the self of phenomena, which is what binds them to nirvana.

[Q]: The ‘I’ can only perceive phenomena through itself, so I cannot see any real difference. It also seems that the ‘I’ can perceive itself through phenomena.

[A]: You still have that, even if you have abandoned clinging to the self of the person. You only abandon the clinging to the person; you do not abandon the person.

[Q]: So can we say that the ego transforms during this journey?

[A]: Yes, it looks like that. But strictly, you should say speak in terms of the *dag*, the baseless assumption towards something that does not have any base. We will come to this in detail later. For example, although there is no basis for thinking so, you think this is a tent. That is similar to clinging to the self of a phenomenon. On top of that, you think that this is a truly existent tent, which bodhisattvas do not. It is stupid to try to speak on behalf of the bodhisattvas, but I am guessing that they have an idea of a tent, and the one that perceives the tent – subject and object – but not the clinging. These two are not truly separate. It is like a large staircase that goes up to the first and second floors of a house. You can leave the stairs at the first floor if you are happy with that. But if you want to go further, you continue on the same staircase until the second floor. It is the same staircase, but you could divide it into two by saying that one set of stairs goes to the first floor, and another set of stairs goes to the second floor. In summary, although there is no basis to the idea of a tent, an ordinary person will think this is a tent, and believe that it is truly existent. Bodhisattvas do not believe it is truly existent, but they still have the idea of subject and object, although without clinging.

We talked earlier of *dreldré*, the result of absence. In fact, the word *buddha*, or in Tibetan *sangyé* (*sang rgyas*) especially *sang* (which means ‘purified’) is very much this *dreldré*, this result of absence. When we praise the Buddha, we say, ‘awakened one’. That is the supreme praise, rather than ‘great one’, ‘powerful one’, or ‘beautiful one’. His greatest quality, being awakened, is a result of absence: the absence of sleep, the absence of ignorance, and so on. We should take the meaning for granted, as there is a lot to think about here. In Sanskrit, ‘ignorance’ is *avidya*, and in Tibetan, it is *marigpa*.

The problem is that in English, ignorance means ‘not knowing’. This implies that there is something to know that you do not know, but that is not good here, because the word *avidya*

Ignorance is not a misunderstanding or evil. It is a mirage, a hallucination.

Ignorance is classified into two: clinging to the self of a person and the self of phenomena

The Four Great Seals

connotes just the opposite. It is not that you do not know something that you should know, it is that you know something where there is nothing to know! There is no base; there is nothing there in reality. But you create something and then ‘know’ that. That is *avidya*, that is the not knowing – not knowing the reality. Of course, misunderstanding is also included within ignorance. If somebody thinks this teabag is a fish, it is also ignorance. But here we are talking about the situation where there is nothing solidly existent in reality, but your mind thinks there is something. That is *avidya*. And that something is *dag*, and clinging to it is *dzin*. *Dag* is almost like a self. For example, Jakob thinks his girlfriend is beautiful. Here, ‘beautiful’ is the *dag*. And when others are near her, Jakob is jealous: this attachment, this clinging, is the *dzin*.

So, in buddhism, ignorance has nothing to do with evil or misunderstanding. It is a hallucination, a mirage. People think that dualism refers to bad/good, ugly/beautiful and so on. Yes, these are also dualism. But there are no separate solid entities such as subject and object – they are one. When you do not know that, and you divorce subject and object, then it becomes dualism. Dualism is also ignorance. When we look at this teabag, our habitual mind thinks that this is a solidly existent external phenomenon. We think there really is a teabag there, which is separate from my mind that thinks, “This is a teabag”. But according to buddhism, especially the Mahayana, there is no teabag if there is no knower, one who gives this type of label. So this is why, if I ask you whether you see the cup of tea that I see, you would normally say yes, but in fact you never see my idea of this cup of tea – you only see your idea of this cup of tea.

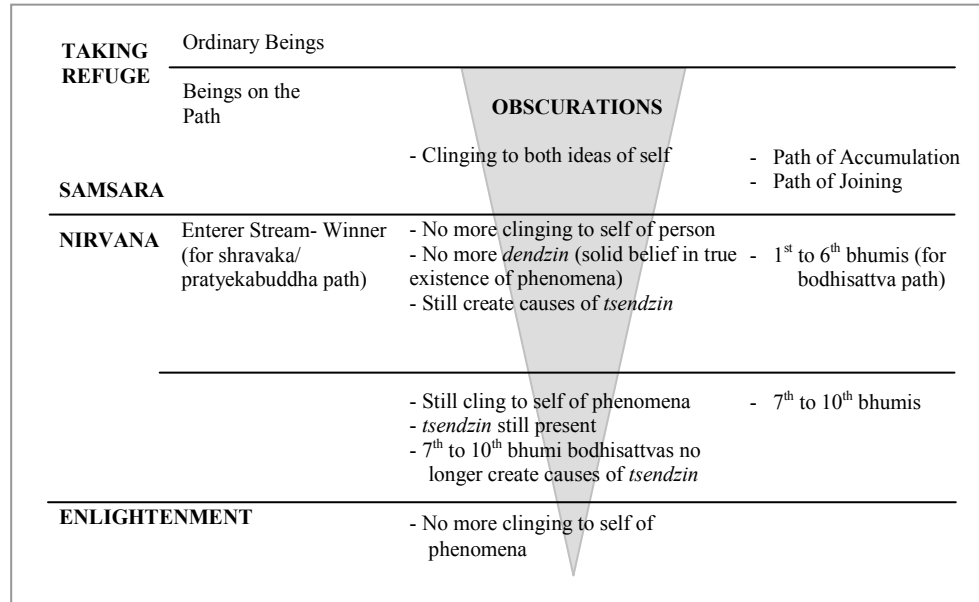
Although there is just one type of ignorance, it is classified into two types according to its object of focus: clinging to the self of the person, and clinging to the self of phenomena. The second one includes the first, but the first is focussed mainly on the self, such as when you think, ‘I am’. When you think, ‘he is’, that is a phenomenon. The self of a person refers to your own person, whereas a phenomenon, like a tent, is something that is not you. You can abandon the first type of clinging and still be stuck with the second. Let us suppose you are washing clothes because you see them as dirty. It takes half an hour to remove all the dirt, but some people just want to wash the clothes for fifteen minutes, and then they’re happy. They do not see the rest of the dirt as dirt, whereas true hygiene fanatics really wash it properly. The way that ignorance works, the way it obscures, is also categorised into two:

- Apprehending things as truly existent
- Apprehending things as mere appearance

The first is thinking things like “I think I am truly existent”. Do not worry about whether you have the second kind of ignorance, because for us this dirt would be an attainment rather than an obscuration! To show these ideas, we can draw a diagram (see illustration on next page). The triangle in the diagram above represents ignorance. It is drawn without a break to represent that there is just a single continuity. The beginning of the path is the point at which you take refuge, or when you accept the four mudras or the four seals, which are:

1. *All compounded things are impermanent.*
2. *All emotions are suffering.*
3. *All phenomena are without truly existing characteristics, without a truly existing ‘self’.*
4. *Nirvana is beyond the extremes (nirvana is peace).*

If you have taken refuge, then these four mudras are included when you take refuge in the Dharma.



The 1st bhumi bodhisattva has crossed the border between samsara and nirvana

The 10th bhumi is the borderline between path and no more path

The 7th bhumi bodhisattva no longer creates the causes of *trendzin*

Shravakas and pratyekabuddhas as "island enlightenment"

When you cross the border between samsara and nirvana, you become a first bhumi bodhisattva. According to the Hinayana, you would be called an *Enterer Stream-Winner*. Upon reaching the first bhumi, the bodhisattva has abandoned clinging to the self of the person and *dendzin*, the type of clinging that we have called 'apprehending things as truly existent'.

The tenth bhumi is the borderline between the path and no more path. Enlightenment has two meanings: no more returning to samsara, and omniscience. You could also call the 1st bhumi enlightenment, since there is no more returning to samsara. But at the bottom of the diagram, is complete omniscience, *dzokpe sangye* (*rdzogs pa'i sang rgyas*).

There is another borderline at the 7th bhumi. As we discussed earlier, the first bhumi bodhisattva can outshine shravakas and pratyekabuddhas with his merit, but not with his intelligence. Bodhisattvas have a greater view, a superior understanding of their own object, because they are looking at all four extremes, whereas shravakas and pratyekabuddhas are only looking at one and a half. But 1st to 6th bhumi bodhisattvas cannot outshine them with intelligence, because they still create the causes of *trendzin*, 'apprehending things as mere appearance'. The 7th bhumi bodhisattva outshines shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, as he no longer creates the causes of apprehension of mere appearance. But until he has omniscience, he is still suffering because of his apprehension of mere appearance, so he is still an object of compassion. This is the third type of compassion that we talked about earlier (on p. 19).

This is why Chandrakirti refers to the shravaka and pratyekabuddha states as 'island enlightenment'. In ancient times, Indian adventurers made voyages to the middle of the ocean to look for jewels. Sometimes, after months of seeing only the sky and the ocean, they would get tired. And if they came across a small island, they felt happy and wanted to settle down there for a while. But according to the Mahayana point of view, eventually they will all have to continue on their journey.

[H7]

(2) Expressing the Qualities of the Paramita emphasised (558)

The Treasury of Knowledge

Book Six, Part Three:

Frameworks of Buddhist Philosophy

*A Systematic Presentation of
the Cause-Based Philosophical Vehicles*

Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé

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8. RANGTONG-MADHYAMAKA

• • • •

b" An Extensive Explanation: The Characteristics [of Madhyamaka Schools] [II.B.2.a.ii.bb.2'.b'.vi'.bb'.1".b"]
i" Rangtong

aa" A Brief Account of the Divisions [of Rangtong]

bb" A Detailed Explanation of the Systematic Presentation
[of Rangtong]

(1) The System Common to Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas

(a) The Twofold Absence of Self-Entity

(b) The Mode of Reasonings

(2) The Explanation of Their Differences

• • • •

[This chapter, a continuation of the common Madhyamaka of the Sūtra system, presents] the second part, an extensive explanation of the characteristics [of Madhyamaka schools]. This has two divisions: Rangtong; and Shentong.

Rangtong [i"]

This has two parts: a brief account of the divisions [of Rangtong]; and a detailed explanation of the systematic presentation [of Rangtong].

A Brief Account of the Divisions [of Rangtong] [aa"]

The first has two [subschoools:] the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika.

The first of the aforementioned [divisions of Sūtra-Madhyamaka], the Mādhyamika Proponents of the Absence of a Nature (Niḥsvabhāvavādin), are said to contain the two [subschoools of Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika]⁶³¹ for the following [reasons].

The followers of Bhāvaviveka are called Svātantrikas because they assert, as a convention that is part of their own system, that all phenomena are without arising, are empty, and so forth. As proofs [of those assertions], they primarily use independently [verifiable] reasons⁶³² in which the three modes⁶³³ are established through the power of [their relationship to real] things.⁶³⁴

The followers of Chandrakīrti are called Prāsaṅgikas, because they accept that [phenomena] are without arising, are empty, and so forth only from the perspective of others, which means that they commit to this only to refute others' mistaken ideas. [For Prāsaṅgikas] there are no independently [verifiable] reasons in which the three modes are established through the power of [their relationship to real] things. Therefore, they primarily just use consequences (*prasaṅga*, *thal 'gyur*) to demonstrate to Realists⁶³⁵ their internal contradictions.⁶³⁶

A Detailed Explanation of the Systematic Presentation [of Rangtong] [bb"]

This is discussed in three sections: the system common to Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas; the explanation of their differences; and the explanation of the individual [Rangtong] systems.

The System Common to Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas [(1)]

This has two topics: the twofold absence of self-entity; and the mode of reasonings.

The Twofold Absence of Self-Entity [(a)]

Their common [approach] is to use reasonings to refute the two self-entities: of persons (the source of views) and of phenomena (the root of obscurations).

The common approach of both Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas and Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas is to use many references to scriptures and a variety of reasonings (1) to refute a self of persons (*pudgalātman*, *gang zag gi bdag*), that is, the views concerning a self [of persons], as they are the source of all views and mental afflictions,⁶³⁷ and (2) to refute a self-entity of phenomena (*dharmātman*, *chos kyi bdag*), that is, the taking of all outer and inner phenomena to be objectively real,⁶³⁸ as that is the root of the two obscurations.⁶³⁹ They then rest evenly in the absence of the two types of self-entity. These modes [of refutation and meditation] are discussed in some detail in the sections on reflection and meditation.⁶⁴⁰

The Mode of Reasonings [(b)]

The object to be negated is something imputed to a subject.
 Probanda are either facts or conventions.
 Reasons analyze four points: cause, result, both of those, and nature.

These four forms of analysis eliminate the Realists' extreme of existence.

The reason of dependant origination, [used in] the analysis of mere appearances, eliminates both extremes.
 Thus [Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas] do not disagree about the ultimate.

SUBJECT

First, the subject (*dharmīn*, *chos can*) is the basis for debate.⁶⁴¹ It is not something established by the valid cognitions⁶⁴² of both the challenger and the opponent, and it can be something coarse, such as an entity, or something small, such as a sprout. In these systems, the subject belongs to the set heterogeneous⁶⁴³ to the probandum (*sādhyā*, *bsgrub bya*), [and as such] is that which gives rise to reification.

OBJECT OF NEGATION

When a subject is analyzed, the object to be negated (*pratishedhya*, *dgag bya*) is determined to be either an appearance or something imagined (*brtags pa*). It is not logical, [however,] to negate momentary appearances (*re zhig snang ba*), because reasonings cannot negate them. To take an example: for people with eye diseases, the appearances of floaters,⁶⁴⁴ double moons, and the like do not stop as long as their eyesight is impaired. Similarly, as long as beings are not free from unaffected ignorance,⁶⁴⁵ illusionlike appearances [manifesting] to the six modes of consciousness do not stop.

It is not necessary to negate [appearances], because our mistakes⁶⁴⁶ do not come from appearances: they arise from fixating on those [appearances]. This is the case because if we do not fixate on appearances, we are not bound—we are like a magician who, having conjured up a young woman, has no attachment towards her. [On the other hand, if,] like naïve beings attached to an illusory young woman, we fixate intensely [on appearances], our karma and mental afflictions will increase.

To intentionally negate appearances would be wrong because, if they were negated, emptiness would come to mean the [absolute] nonexistence of things. Another reason this would be a mistake is that yogins and yoginis meditating on emptiness would fall into the extreme of nihilism since they would be applying their minds to a negation that [equals] the [absolute] nonexistence of everything.

Thus, [Mādhyamikas] set out to negate only what is imagined (*parikalpita*, *kun brtags pa*), because that is what can be negated. Like a rope [mistaken] for a snake, what is imagined does not conform to facts: it is simply the mind's fixations. [Dharmakīrti's] *Commentary on Valid Cognition* provides a further reason:⁶⁴⁷

This [attachment] cannot be relinquished without the object's being invalidated.

The characteristic of things is that the perceiving mind cannot be negated unless its object is negated; therefore, we will not be able to negate the intense fixation of our perceiving mind unless its imagined object is negated. Without negating that intense fixation, we will not reverse afflictive phenomena,⁶⁴⁸ because that [fixation] is their root.

Therefore, the object of negation for Mādhyamikas is only something imagined. It is of two types:

- (1) objects whose existence even as a convention (*tha snyad tsam du grub pa*) is negated; and
- (2) objects whose existence as ultimate (*don la grub pa*) is negated but whose existence as a convention is not.

The first type of object negated is a self either [of persons] or phenomena as imagined by proponents of our own [Buddhist] philosophical tenet systems or by proponents of other philosophical tenet systems. These do not exist even in terms of conventional reality (as was explained above).⁶⁴⁹

The second type of objects negated are the conventions of worldly consensus (*jig rten grags pa'i tha snyad*), which are simply dependently originated according to their causes and conditions. These include things of immediate common consensus (such as [saying,] “I am going,” “I am staying,” or “I am eating”); and conventions that are suitable for common consensus, even though they may not be of things of immediate common consensus [now]. [The latter] are things about which there is common consensus in the [Buddhist] scriptures: causes and their results, the bhūmis and paths, factors to be abandoned and their remedies, and so forth.

Things commonly accepted as worldly conventions are not to be refuted as mere conventions. The reason this is not done is the same as what was said above about eliminating [or refuting] appearances.⁶⁵⁰

PROBANDA

There are two kinds of probanda (*sādhya*, *bsgrub bya*):

- (1) proofs of facts (*don sgrub pa*); and
- (2) proofs of conventions (*tha snyad sgrub pa*).⁶⁵¹

Proofs of facts are of two types since debaters have different issues in question:

- (a) nonimplicative negations⁶⁵² that [demonstrate that] the nature of a thing does not exist; and
- (b) nonimplicative negations that [demonstrate that] the object of negation, just a nature, does not exist.⁶⁵³

In these systems, the probandum is a nonimplicative negation that is simply the refutation that a subject inherently exists, is real, and the like. It includes such nonimplicative negations as, “These appearances do not exist with a true nature,” or “They do not exist in the way that they are imag-

ined to be.” [For Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas, the probandum] is only an exclusion (*viccheda*, *man gcod*), merely the elimination of the object to be negated, and simply free from conceptual elaborations; they have no probandum that is something [positively] determined.⁶⁵⁴

Since they do not set forth any [affirmative probanda], there is also nothing that others could object to. In his *Rebuttal of Objections*, [Nāgārjuna] says:⁶⁵⁵

If I were to have a proposition,
I would have that fault.

Since I have no proposition,
I am without fault.

If [I] were to observe something through
direct perception or any other [means of valid cognition],
[I] would either affirm it or deny it.
Since there are no such things, I am beyond censure.

For these [systems,] the import of a nonimplicative negation is that it refers to nothing at all. It is said in the sūtras:

Whoever understands that phenomena do not exist at all
will not be attached to phenomena.

This shows that once the power of terms and concepts has been exhausted, [one's experience] will be like that of someone feeling rested after their hard work is over.

The point of negations and affirmations is summed up by the following [example]: When sound is proven to be impermanent by [the reason that] it is something produced, the actual object negated is the consciousness that ascribes (*sgrö* 'dogs pa) permanence to sounds, and the actual object affirmed is the consciousness that ascribes impermanence to sound. This is the intention of Nāgārjuna's statement:⁶⁵⁶

[Such statements] make us understand that no nature exists; they do not, however, eliminate arising.

REASONS

The means of proof are the reasons (*hetu*, *gtan tshigs*). In *Madhyamaka* reasonings, generally speaking, the evidence (*linga*, *rtags*) is presented in two ways:

- (1) by setting up negations (*pratisheda*, *dgag pa*), or
- (2) by setting up affirmations (*viddhi*, *sgrub pa*).

First: Negations

- (1) Negation through the analysis of causes is called the “vajra sliver [reasoning].”⁶⁵⁷
- (2) Negation by means of analyzing results refutes the arising of [a result] existent [at the time of its cause] and the arising of [a result that is] nonexistent [at the time of its cause].⁶⁵⁸
- (3) Negation that employs the analysis of both causes and their results refutes arising from the four possibilities.⁶⁵⁹
- (4) Negation that analyzes a nature [demonstrates that a phenomenon] is neither a single unit nor a plurality.⁶⁶⁰

The first type of negation is taught in the *Rice Seedling Sūtra*⁶⁶¹ and the last kind is presented in the *Descent into Larikā Sūtra*. The two middle ones appear in certain sūtras.⁶⁶² These four eliminate the Realists' ⁶⁶³ inflated ascription of inherent existence to things, thereby removing [their belief in] the extreme of existence.

Now we will look at these four in order.⁶⁶⁴

(1) The analysis of causes

When a sprout comes into being (*skye ba*), does it arise from itself? From something other than itself? From both? Or from no cause at all? This kind of analysis proves that, from a rational perspective, a sprout has no arising since it does not arise from anything at all.⁶⁶⁵

(2) The analysis of results

When a sprout arises, is this the arising of something that exists at the time of the seed? Or is this the arising of something that did not exist [at the time of its cause]?

If it were the arising of something that existed at the time of the seed, a sprout would not arise from the seed: its cause would serve no purpose,

since the sprout already exists without depending on a cause. If it were the arising of something that did not exist [at the time of its cause], then it would be like the horns of a rabbit and its cause would have no potency (*nus pa*) at all.⁶⁶⁶

These reasonings refute [the possibility] that a combination of both is the case. It also is impossible [that a sprout arises] from neither being the case. [This analysis], therefore, proves that, in actuality, a sprout does not come into being.

(3) *The analysis of both causes and results*

From a mistaken perspective, it is not contradictory to make statements such as the following: “One sprout develops from one seed.” “A single eye consciousness arises from the three conditions.”⁶⁶⁷ “One father produces many children.” “A variety of crops grow from the combination of seeds, water, and manure.” Nevertheless, from a rational perspective, the following four possibilities [for arising] are not feasible:

- (a) that only one result manifests from just a single cause;
- (b) that numerous results are produced by only one cause;
- (c) that a single result comes from many causes; and
- (d) that many results could arise from many causes.

Thus, from a rational perspective, a unity is untenable, and that also negates that a plurality could truly exist; thus it is proven that there is no arising.

(4) *The analysis of a nature*

Reasons stating that a sprout and other things are devoid of both real unity and real plurality prove that such things have no reality (*bden med*). This reasoning that something is neither a single unit nor a plurality is the root of all reasonings that negate true existence, which all four Buddhist philosophical systems [consider] to be the object of negation. It is taught that the *Fundamental Treatise on the Middle Way* is summarized by its refutation of eight points: arising and cessation, permanence and annihilation, going and coming, sameness and discreteness. The negations of the first six points depend upon the negation of sameness and discreteness (*gcig dang tha dad*), and the refutation of sameness and discreteness is simply [the argument] that no thing is a single unit or a plurality.⁶⁶⁸

[Second: Affirmations]

Affirmations are set up as evidence in the following way. The reasoning of dependent origination⁶⁶⁹ is an analysis of mere appearances, and it is found in the *Questions of the Nāga King Anavatapta Sūtra*.⁶⁷⁰ The reasoning that something is dependently originated proves that [the thing in question,] such as a sprout, has no reality. Its manner of presentation causes it to be categorized as an affirming reason; but, in fact, since it refutes reality, which is the object to be negated, it is a negating reason. This is the king of the reasonings used by Mādhyamikas to prove that things are empty of reality (*bden stong*), because it eliminates both the extreme of permanence and that of nihilism.

Since [phenomena] are dependently originated, they are not nonexistent as conventions; and thus the extreme of nihilism is avoided. [Phenomena also] are not objects that are permanent nor do they exist in terms of their own essence, because they depend on other causes and conditions. This establishes that [phenomena] have no nature and eliminates the extreme of permanence.

Questions of the Nāga King Anavatapta Sūtra says:

The wise realize that all phenomena are dependently originated.
They do not adhere to views involving extremes.

In the context of these [reasonings], it is impossible that a nature of things is a knowable object; and, therefore, there is no negative entailment,⁶⁷¹ since there is no link between what is to be pervaded and a pervader.⁶⁷² Nevertheless, in general, [Mādhyamikas may make statements] such as, “If a pot were to exist, it would follow that it must be either a unitary pot or a plurality.” They also may use illusions, reflections, and so forth as concordant examples (*mthun dpe*). The object of comprehension (*prameya*, *gzhal bya*) for an inferential [cognition] based on such reasons is the probandum of these reasons [i.e., that all things have no nature].

Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas do not disagree about these modes or the state of ultimate reality.

The Explanation of Their Differences [(2)]

They differ over many issues: conventional [reality], statements in debate, and other points.

Both Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas discuss the two truths. They do not disagree in the slightest way about ultimate reality (as was just mentioned), because if they were to, it would follow that one of them would not be Mādhyamikas, since the abiding nature of things is not multiple.

DIFFERENCES CONCERNING CONVENTIONAL REALITY

They do disagree, however, about the presentation of conventional reality. Svātantrikas think that this should not be done according to the conventions of worldly people, because that would involve the possibility of error, as worldly people use conventions in a casual way without any rational analysis. Instead, they posit conventional [reality] in keeping with those who know how to apply reasonings, such as Proponents of Cognition (Vijñaptivādins) or Sautrāntikas. They maintain that even though Proponents of Cognition and the others have deviated from [a correct understanding of] ultimate reality, they have not done so with conventional reality.

Prāsaṅgikas say that someone who lacks the natural ability to climb trees and yet persists in doing so in a peculiar way—by letting go of a lower branch before grabbing hold of a higher one—will get nowhere, but will instead fall into the space between the branches. Similarly, Realists who, in their quest for suchness, put aside worldly conventions when they have not yet realized the true reality (*yang dag pa'i don*), will fall in between: into either the extreme of permanence or that of nihilism. Prāsaṅgikas state that Realists have deviated from [a correct understanding of] both truths, citing as their reason [Chandrakīrti's] statement in his *Entrance to the Middle Way*:⁶⁷³

Those outside the path of the master Nāgārjuna
lack the means for [achieving] peace.

They have strayed from the conventional truth and that of suchness.
Having strayed from those two truths, they will not attain liberation.

Prāsaṅgika masters, therefore, think that conventional reality should be posited according to the conventions of worldly people, not according to the proponents of other philosophical systems. This is because, in the same way that noble beings are the only valid authorities (*pramāṇa*, *tshad ma*) for ultimate reality, worldly people are the only valid authorities for the positing of conventional reality.

In sum, worldly people say, “A result comes from a cause,” and understand it in just those [terms], without trying to analyze [whether the result arises] from itself, something other than itself, and so forth. Prāsaṅgikas’ presentation of conventional [reality] accords with that [kind of general worldly understanding].

DIFFERENCES CONCERNING THE ACCEPTANCE OF CONVENTIONS

Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas differ regarding the acceptance of conventions (*vyavahāra*, *tha snyad*). Svātantrikas accept conventional reality as a [pragmatic] convention within their own system. Prāsaṅgikas, however, do not present anything as their own system either on the ultimate level or as a convention. Nevertheless, if it is called for, they will accept conventional reality—but only on the terms of worldly people. They do not accept it as part of their own system even as a mere [pragmatic] convention, citing the same text as their reason:⁶⁷⁴

We do not accept conventional [reality]

in the way you [Chittamātras] assert dependent entities.

Nevertheless, we say, “Things exist,” even though they do not,
[deferring] to the world’s perspective for the sake of the results.

DIFFERENCES IN DEBATE

When engaged in debate, Svātantrika masters assert that not presenting a system of one’s own and only refuting others’ systems is [sheer] sophistry⁶⁷⁵ and, therefore, unacceptable. They say that if one does not establish one’s own positions—emptiness, nonarising, and so forth—through valid forms of cognition,⁶⁷⁶ one will be unable, simply by setting up consequences, to refute others’ assertions that entities inherently arise. For these two reasons, they say that, as a convention, one should assert some points of one’s own system that are established through valid forms of cognition; and such points would include the reasons and examples that prove one’s own thesis (*pratiñā*, *dam*

bca') that there is no arising. This must be done because one cannot prove the thesis of one's own system using the reasons asserted by others.

Prāsaṅgikas say, "Those who have a thesis but do not posit it out of the fear that they will be subjected to others' criticism, and those who refute another's system with aggressive intentions using only [absurd] consequences are involved in a deceptive practice of sophistry. However, given that the Madhyamaka [system] does not have even the smallest position of its own to posit, what would be the point of troubling ourselves to search for a means to prove it? Actually, [the Madhyamaka approach] is not about refuting things. If we could observe a phenomenon to be negated, no matter how insignificant, it would be reasonable to refute it; but if we cannot observe a thing to be negated—not even the fragment left from splitting a hair's end a hundred times—how can we talk about negating it?" This accords with the opening statement in the *Entrance to the Wisdom [of the Middle Way]*.⁶⁷⁷

It is only negation and affirmation that are negated.

In fact, there is nothing to be negated or affirmed.

Prāsaṅgikas say that they present others' assertions in their treatises and analyze them rationally in numerous ways, not because they despise these other systems or take pleasure in debating, but for the sake of others: to overturn the reification of people trapped in conceptual nets. The *Entrance to the Middle Way* says:⁶⁷⁸

The analyses in the *Treatise* are not presented out of fondness for debate.

Suchness is taught for the sake of liberation.

If others' scriptural systems collapse

when suchness is presented, we are not to blame.

Each and every rational analysis found in the Madhyamaka treatises has the same objective: to overturn the concepts of superimposition or denial held by other parties.⁶⁷⁹ But once their superimpositions and denials are eliminated, realization of the reality of the abiding nature will not arise through the force of analysis, because the abiding nature is not an object that can be analyzed by means of study or reflection. The same text states:⁶⁸⁰

Ordinary beings are bound by their concepts.

Yogins and yoginis without concepts are liberated.

The wise, therefore, teach that the overturning of concepts is the fruit of analysis.

Not only is there nothing for others to challenge in the Prāsaṅgika system, this system can invalidate everyone else's positions (*prākṣha, phyogs*), because, in their attempts to dispel their faults, all the answers they give to the Prāsaṅgika's reasonings are ineffective since [their answers are proofs that] are equivalent to their probandum.⁶⁸¹

In brief, Prāsaṅgikas do not assert that there are independently verifiable reasons that function by virtue of [their relationship to real] things, because [for them] there are no forms of valid cognition that function by virtue of [their relationship to real] things that could prove such [reasons]. When, for the sake of others, they engage in negations and affirmations as one of two parties in debate, they employ four types of reasons and four valid means of cognition that are commonly acknowledged in the world.⁶⁸² Svātantrikas accept that there are reasons and forms of valid cognition that function by virtue of [their relationship to real] things, which [means that they are] independently verifiable.⁶⁸³ Thus, the former [i.e., Prāsaṅgikas] have no probandum that is something [positively] determined;⁶⁸⁴ they simply refute what others assert. Svātantrikas refute others' assertions by employing reasonings capable of cutting through conceptual elaborations, which are reasonings whose three modes are established by valid forms of cognition.

FURTHER DIFFERENCES

The phrase "other points" in this root verse refers to the numerous minor differences between these two systems.

- In the context of the ground, some points of difference are that Prāsaṅgikas do not assert that conventional [reality] is classified as either correct or mistaken, true or false, whereas Svātantrikas do.⁶⁸⁵ Prāsaṅgikas assert that all objects are false and all states of minds (*blo*) are deluded, whereas Svātantrikas do not.
- In terms of the path, some of their minor differences include that during periods of study or reflection, Prāsaṅgikas do not prove a probandum that remains after an object of negation has been refuted, whereas

Svātantrikas do. Prāsaṅgikas do not state that they accept a view, Svātantrikas do.

- As for the result, some Svātantrikas believe that tathāgatas possess an illusionlike primordial wisdom that is a complete transformation (*gyur pa*), and that conventional [reality] appears to them as illusionlike, but they are not deluded because they do not take [such appearances] to be real. Thus they say that impure karmic appearances exist for buddhas. Prāsaṅgikas assert that since appearances manifest from the habitual tendencies of unafflicted ignorance, they are delusive. Since tathāgatas have completely abandoned all delusions, all interactions with appearances have subsided; thus, no karmic appearances exist for buddhas.

The Center of the Sunlit Sky
By Karl Brunnholzl

The Middle from Beginning to End

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Ground Madhyamaka

The Emptiness of Emptiness

[69] Madhyamaka is most generally classified as the actual Madhyamaka (that which is to be communicated) and the verbal Madhyamaka (the means to communicate this actuality). The actual Madhyamaka is presented as threefold:

1) Madhyamaka ground: the unity of the two realities. The two realities are seeming reality and ultimate reality. On the level of seeming reality, conventionally speaking, all phenomena are nothing but mere collections of causes and conditions. Our labels that emerge based on these phenomena are just superimposed, conventional designations that are coined in an interdependent way. Ultimately, however, phenomena are not to be found as any of the extremes of our mental reference points, such as existing, not existing, arising, or ceasing. They are also free from abiding in a so-called middle. Thus, it is the nature of all these fleeting phenomena to appear while not having any identifiable nature of their own, very much like rainbows or reflections in a mirror. This is the unity of the two realities.

2) Madhyamaka path: the unity of the seeming mind of enlightenment and the ultimate mind of enlightenment, or the unity of means and knowledge. Through understanding the modes of being of the two realities in this way, bodhisattvas realize that seeming reality consists of phenomena that are merely nominal. Since all phenomena are free from arising and so on, they are realized to be free from all mistaken superimpositions. The unity of the seeming mind of enlightenment and the ultimate mind of enlightenment is to train in the illusionlike means to accomplish the benefit of oneself and others while constantly being immersed in the knowledge that realizes the nature of all phenomena. This means developing dependently originating and illusionlike great compassion for countless dependently originating and illusionlike sentient beings who have all been our loving mothers at some point in the infinite round of cyclic existence. Motivated by this compassion, bodhisattvas train in the illusionlike and spacelike two accumulations of merit and wisdom that are comprised by the six or ten perfections.¹

3) Madhyamaka [70] fruition: the unity of the Dharma Body and the Form Bodies. The fruition of this training is as follows: Through having reached the culmination of the most lucid appearance of the ultimate mind of enlightenment, all afflictive, cognitive, and meditational obscurations including their latent tendencies are eliminated and all mental reference points have vanished. This is the perfect accomplishment of one's own welfare: the Dharma Body. Through having arrived at the culmination of the most lucid appearance of the seeming mind of enlightenment, the perfect accomplishment of the welfare of others—the Form Bodies—is attained. This accomplishment for others means complete mastery of enlightened activity that manifests from the perspective of all countless sentient beings to be trained until the end of

time and space. The unity of these two kinds of enlightened bodies means that, while the Dharma Body never moves away from its natural state of luminous spaciousness, the Form Bodies manifest as the effortless and spontaneous activities of enlightened body, speech, and mind (such as turning the wheel of dharma) that are naturally in perfect harmony with every single sentient being.

What Is Reality?

[72] The ground of the Madhyamaka system is the correct view on the two realities. As *The Sutra of the Meeting of Father and Son* says:

Without having learned this from others,
The Knower of the World distinguished these two realities.
The one is the seeming and the other the ultimate—
There is no other third reality.

[73] In general, the Sanskrit word *satya* can mean both “truth” and “reality.” In the context of the two “realities” in Centrism, this term refers to realities in the sense that what is experienced in some way by someone is that person’s individual reality, no matter how delusive this experience might be from the perspective of others. It is like when we say that someone “lives in a different reality.” We do not mean that this person does not live on this planet but that her or his view or perception of things is not the same as ours. This is even more obvious in people who go insane and live completely in their own world, not because they went to some “Crazy Disney World” located somewhere else but because the entire experiential framework of their minds has changed. In Centrism, reality is understood in an experiential or perceptual sense and not ontologically as some hard-and-fast “real existence” in a substantial, independent, or absolute manner. Rather, this notion of real existence is precisely what Centrists keep denying. So for them, “realities” refer to different types of experiences of individual beings, without there being some independent reality somewhere. In other words, Centrists would not say, “The truth is out there.” This means that seeming reality does not exist apart from the minds of the ordinary sentient beings whose experience it is. Likewise, ultimate reality is not some absolute or transcendent given. It does not exist anywhere other than in the minds of noble ones who rest in meditative equipoise within the nature of phenomena. The manifold expressions of seeming reality in different beings are usually compared to the various dream experiences of different sleepers. None of the episodes in their dreams has any correlate in any real outer reality, but at the time of dreaming, everything that is experienced is subjectively completely real. Ultimate reality is compared to waking up from the dream and realizing that none of the events in one’s dream ever happened as anything other than a mere appearance in one’s own mind. As Candrakirti says in his *Entrance into Centrism*:

It is through the perfect and the false seeing of all entities
That the entities that are thus found bear two natures.
The object of perfect seeing is true reality,

And false seeing is seeming reality.²

As a simplified analogy, consider the well-known computerized pictures with three-dimensional effects (called “Magic Eye” and the like). If we look at one of these two-dimensional pictures and do not focus on any of its details but basically look through it, the picture appears as a completely different three-dimensional image. Nothing new is added to the two-dimensional picture itself when the three-dimensional image is seen, and there is also no other spatial reality behind this flat sheet of paper. The only thing that has changed is the way of looking at it. However, this is precisely what makes all the difference. Since we can experience [74] substantial changes in our perception in such a simple way, how can we rule out even more dramatic expansions of our minds, if we work in a systematic and all-encompassing manner on our way of seeing the world?

Since the two realities refer to experiences or perceptions, they are not just some abstract conceptual or formal truths (such as “one plus one equals two”). Also, when we see a table or hear a sound, we would not think of this as seeing or hearing a “truth,” nor would we conceive the perceiving consciousness itself as a “truth.” Rather, we refer to both the objects and the perceiving subject as some kind of reality that we perceive or experience. As Broido rightly says:

Truth is a property of sentences (relativized to contexts) or, philosophically, a property of propositions, but in any case not a property of cognitions or cognitive states or appearances or experiences or “things”. It is only with a very great sense of strain that an English-speaker can say of a visual object or experience that it is true or false. . . . Given this strain and the resulting confusion it is not surprising that many Western accounts of the satyas are unintelligible.³

Moreover, in terms of the Buddhist path, mere “truths” do not have any liberating power per se; only realizations that have been fully integrated into one’s mind as experiential realities have such power. For example, it is widely accepted that smoking is hazardous to one’s health, but all smokers who have tried to quit know equally well that it takes much more than just this truth to actually change addictive patterns.

Thus, the two realities are not understood merely as general truths (of course, they are also formally true) but as the individual realities that are experienced by either the mistaken minds of sentient beings or the unmitigated wisdom minds of noble ones.⁴ These realities encompass both the objective and the subjective sides of experience. The objects that we see, hear, and so forth, including the various kinds of consciousness that perceive these objects, are our reality; and what the noble ones perceive is “their” reality.

Therefore, in Centrism, the distinction of the two realities is not an ontological one but primarily epistemological. This means that we are not talking about two separate sets of reality that independently and objectively exist in two different realms called samsara and nirvana. Rather, the two realities refer to just what is experienced by two different types of beings with different types and scopes of perception. More important still, since the overall purport of the

teachings of the Buddha is liberation from cyclic existence, the presentation of the two realities and their relation is nothing but a means to this end. Since this presentation is used as a pedagogical tool for accomplishing liberation, the actual contrast between the two realities is soteriological in nature. The dividing line is drawn between what [75] is delusive or seeming in the sense of being unreliable when seeking for liberation from cyclic existence and what is genuine or ultimate in the sense of being reliable as the appropriate basis for such liberation. As Pawo Rinpoche says:

[The seeming] is not a stable reality, because it does not withstand analysis and because it does not appear as an object of the meditative equipoise of the noble ones. . . . [The ultimate] is “genuine,” because it is essential for those who wish for liberation and undeceiving with respect to the result, which is Buddhahood.⁵

The presentation of the difference between seeming and ultimate reality together with the ensuing activities on a seeming path are regarded as the means to achieve the direct realization of what is called ultimate reality. Nagarjuna says in his *Fundamental Verses*:

Without reliance on conventions,
The ultimate cannot be taught.
Without realization of the ultimate,
Nirvana cannot be attained.⁶

Thus, the presentation of the two realities is in itself an aspect of the bodhisattvas’ skill in means, but within this educational approach, neither of these two realities is “better” or more real than the other. The reason for this is that all presentations and practical applications of these two can only happen within the framework of seeming reality itself, since they only need to be taught to those who have an essentially dualistic state of mind. As such, these two cannot but be mutually dependent and dualistic, since it is impossible to talk about, reflect on, or meditate on the one without the other. Likewise, there is no way to proceed on the path to “the ultimate” without using and eventually letting go of seeming reality. On the other hand, within the meditative equipoise of those who directly perceive what is called ultimate reality, all reference points of a dualistic mind have completely subsided. Thus, any arguments about what is seeming, ultimate, real, or false are by definition simply irrelevant to this perceptual perspective. *The Sutra That Teaches the Unity of the Nature of the Expanse of Dharmas*⁷ says:

O Mañjushri, when the expanse of dharmas is taken as the source of valid cognition, there is neither seeming reality nor ultimate reality.

Pawo Rinpoche states:

[76] It is for the native nature of all phenomena, the very expanse of dharmas just as it is, . . . that the conventional term “ultimate reality” is used. . . . This is what abides as the actual nature of all phenomena. It is the object of the profound meditative equipoise of noble ones. Therefore, it is presented as a stable reality in dependence on

the seeming. [However,] it is not [such a stable reality] independently through its nature, because the Buddhas themselves behold neither real nor delusive phenomena.⁸

It is definitely stated that all phenomena have one single reality and that just this that is called “real” or “delusive” is not observed. Nevertheless, in order for naïve beings⁹ to be able to leave their fear behind, the provisional presentation of subject and object is [given as] something that leaves the status quo of mere common worldly consensus as it is. Thus, naïve beings are guided by using the conventional term “seeming reality.”¹⁰

Candrakirti says in his *Lucid Words*:

What is taught as arising and such in terms of dependent origination does not concern the nature of the objects of the uncontaminated wisdom of those free from the blurred vision¹¹ of basic ignorance. Rather, it is [taught] with respect to the objects of the consciousnesses of those whose eyes of intelligent insight are affected by the blurred vision of basic ignorance.¹²

We teach the delusiveness of entities with regard to seeming reality as a remedy against [the beliefs of] worldly people who cling to this [delusiveness] as being real. However, the noble ones who have accomplished what is to be accomplished do not see anything that is delusive or not delusive. Moreover, for those who have realized the delusiveness of all phenomena, do karma and cyclic existence exist? They do not observe any phenomenon as either existent or non-existent.¹³

From the perspective of the meditative equipoise of noble ones who realize the ultimate, experientially there is only “one reality.” However, it may be conceived or designated in various ways when these noble ones engage in their activities in order to help others so that they too may realize this reality. *The Sixty Stanzas on Reasoning* states:

That nirvana is the sole reality
[77] Is what the Victors have declared.¹⁴

Atisha’s *Entrance into the Two Realities* declares:

The ultimate is just a single one.
Others assert it to be twofold.
The nature of phenomena is not established as anything whatsoever,
So how could it be two or three and such?¹⁵

Freedom Is the Nature of Not Having a Nature

[110] By now, we should be familiar with the standard Centrist phrase “all phenomena lack a nature.” On the other hand, it is said that “emptiness is the nature of all phenomena.” Surely, this is not meant to be left standing as an outright contradiction, nor should it allow for emptiness to be misconceived as a “real core” of things.¹⁶ Therefore, it is obvious that Centrists use the terms “nature” and “entity” in two different ways.¹⁷ To epitomize this distinction, one could say, “The nature of phenomena is that they do not have a nature.” Buddhists in general and Centrists in particular reject essentialism, but once this is made clear, they seem to have no problem with employing essentialist terms. Thus, to say that “phenomena lack a nature” refers to their lack of a nature in the sense of some real, identifiable, intrinsic “own-being” that exists independently. Such a nature is the primary target that is refuted in Centrism. On the other hand, when emptiness is called “the nature of all phenomena,” this designation is only justified on the mere conventional level in light of the following three aspects: the nature of phenomena is not produced newly through any of these phenomena, it is always unmistakable, and it does not change into something else when it finally is fully realized. Thus, it is only from such a conventional perspective that this “nature” is said to be unfabricated and not dependent on anything else. As *The Fundamental Verses* states:

It is not reasonable that a nature
Originates from causes and conditions.
A nature that originates from causes and conditions
Would be a nature that is produced.

How could a “produced nature”
Be suitable as a nature?
Natures are unfabricated
And not dependent on anything else.¹⁸

Taking the five aggregates (such as form) as examples, *The Sutra of Vimalakirti’s Instructions* states:

Form itself is empty. Form does not become empty through being destroyed, but it is the nature of form to be empty. . .¹⁹

As “the emptiness of emptiness” and “the emptiness of the nature” among the twenty emptinesses described below explicitly teach, emptiness is no exception to [111] being empty. In other words, emptiness as “the nature of all phenomena” just indicates the lack of nature of all phenomena, including emptiness itself. Thus, what is called ultimate reality is just the fact that seeming reality does not exist by its nature. In this way, the very lack of any nature is the unmistakable nature of both realities. However, a nature that is established in any way—be it by a nature of its own or the lack thereof—is not suitable as the nature of either of the two realities.

In brief, all phenomena are empty of a nature of their own, which is conventionally called their nature. As Nagarjuna’s *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness* declares:

The eye is empty of an identity of its own.
It is also empty of any other identity.
[Visible] form is empty in the same way.
Also the remaining sources are alike.²⁰

The Entrance into Centrism says:

Since it is its nature,
The eye is empty of an eye.
In the same way ears, nose, tongue,
Body, and also mind are to be interpreted.

Since it is its nature,
[Visible] form is empty of [visible] form.
Sound, smell, taste, tangible objects,
And also phenomena are just like that.²¹

What is said here is that the eye and all other phenomena lack a nature in the sense that they are empty of a nature of their own and that this is their nature. That the eye is empty of a nature of its own does not mean that the eye is empty of a nature that is something other than the very eye itself, as Candrakīrti's autocommentary explicitly clarifies:

Here, one speaks about emptiness [as the fact] that the eyes and so on [are empty] of these very eyes and so on. This makes it completely clear that [this is] the emptiness of a nature, whereas it is not an emptiness of one not existing in an other, [such as] "the eye is empty, since it lacks an inner agent" or "it is empty of the nature of apprehender and apprehended."²²

As usual, however, such formulations of phenomena being empty of themselves or lacking a nature are not presented as the results of reasoned analysis that [112] are established in any way through the Centrists' own system. It is only in order to accord with the kind of analysis that is common consensus for others that emptiness is said to be the nature of all phenomena in the above sense of being unfabricated and not dependent on anything else. Thus, this "nature" that is expressed in such a way does not have any nature itself, nor is it established as any nature. This is the intention that is contained in the above verses. They are formulated by superimposing this notion of "nature" onto the lack of a nature for the sake of counteracting the common notion of an independent, intrinsic, and real nature that ordinary beings entertain. In actual fact, there is no nature of the two realities that is established in any way at all. Therefore, the Buddha said that all phenomena are neither empty nor nonempty, neither existent nor nonexistent, neither unarisen nor not unarisen. It is just with the intention to counteract specific wrong views of different beings that some Centrists have taught that there is a nature of phenomena, while others said that there is no such nature. Some explained that this nature is emptiness and some that it is not emptiness. Others said that entities exist, and

still others stated that entities do not exist. However, in the Centrists' own presentation of the two realities, such reference points as to whether a nature of anything exists or not are never put forward on any level.

Some people interpret this term "nature" in a mistaken way, saying, "Since the seeming nature of fire, for example, is dependently originated, it is not suitable as its nature. On the other hand, since its ultimate nature is not dependently originated, it is suitable as its nature." However, neither of the two realities is something static, but they are both presented in a way that is based on the process of dependent origination. The nature of seeming reality is delusive dependent origination, and it is in comparison to this that the nature of ultimate reality—undelusive dependent origination—is justified as its nature. *The Treasury of Knowledge* explains emptiness as signifying the unity of identitylessness and dependent origination. In the word "emptiness," "empty" means nonexistence, and what does not exist is any identity of persons or phenomena; *-ness* stands for dependent origination, or the apparent conditioning of phenomena. One might wonder then, "Does emptiness as the nature of phenomena exist?" From the perspective of the noble ones, since it is beyond speech, thought, and expression, what could be said about it? However, from the perspective of the seeming, that is, the world of dependent origination, one cannot say that it does not exist. If one took the position that emptiness does not exist, it would be pointless for bodhisattvas to train in the path of the six perfections in order to realize this emptiness.

This is explained by using three technical terms: the basis of emptiness, the object of negation, and the basis of negation:

- a) [113] The basis of emptiness (all that bears the nature of being empty) is all phenomena.
- b) The object of negation (that of which phenomena are empty) is any personal and phenomenal identity.
- c) The basis of negation (that which is empty of these objects of negation) is all phenomena.

This formulation implies that the basis of emptiness, the object of negation, and the basis of negation are identical. Thus, the way in which phenomena are empty is that all phenomena are empty of themselves; they are empty of any real nature or identity of their own. For example, let's take the appearance of a table as the basis of emptiness, that is, as that which has the nature of being empty. When analyzed, this seemingly real appearance of a table has no findable real identity as a table (the object of negation). For, "the table" exists only as a conceptual construct through our having lumped together the distinct data of our five sense perceptions into some imaginary whole. Apart from what we perceive through our senses, there is no table. And these sensory data themselves are not a table either, since they are nothing but color, shape, texture, and so on. Moreover, they also lack any real or inherent existence, since they are merely a series of ephemeral, flickering appearances without any identifiable core. In this way, the basis of negation is the mere appearance of a table. In summary, the table is empty of (being) a table.

This is why it is said that all phenomena are empty of themselves: When analyzed through reasonings that analyze for the ultimate, there is no phenomenon that is established as this given phenomenon itself. However, emptiness does not mean that phenomena are not empty when not analyzed and then become empty when analyzed with reasoning. Emptiness is not some kind of spiritual atom bomb that evaporates our world. Nor do we meditate on phenomena that are actually nonempty as being empty, thus producing some conceptually fabricated emptiness. Likewise, it is not the case that phenomena are nonempty as long as the wisdom of the noble ones has not arisen and then become empty once it has arisen. Nor does emptiness refer to something that existed before and then becomes nonexistent later, such as a candle flame that later dies out. Also, emptiness does not mean that phenomena are empty of an object of negation that is something other than these very phenomena, such as a vase being empty of water. Nor does emptiness mean that something is utterly nonexistent, like the horns of a rabbit. All of these notions are mistaken emptinesses, since they are not empty of their own nature and thus represent various kinds of mentally contrived emptiness, emptiness in the sense of extinction, or limited emptiness. Therefore, they are not suitable as the foundation for the path to liberation nor as the remedy for the two obscurations.

[114] In the midst of all the technicalities, reasonings, and concepts related to emptiness, it is important not to lose sight of the essential point of all this. The fundamental concern of Centrists is liberation from cyclic existence and attainment of Buddhahood. Thus, emptiness is not some sophisticated philosophical or metaphysical concept, nor is it just some kind of metalanguage. Rather, its real and only significance is that the realization of what it actually refers to is the single suitable foundation for achieving these goals of liberation and omniscience. Primordially, all phenomena—from the everyday objects of our senses up to the most subtle level of Buddha wisdom—are not established as any kind of reference point, such as existent, nonexistent, real, delusive, empty, or nonempty. It is just this fact that is conventionally labeled as “emptiness,” “true reality,” “suchness,” and so on. In terms of labeling, there is nothing more to it. However, the direct realization of the actuality to which the label “emptiness” points is precisely what serves as the path to liberation and the remedy for the two obscurations. As *The Fundamental Verses* says:

What is dependent origination
Is explained as emptiness.
It is a dependent designation
And in itself the middle path.²³

Since both afflictive and cognitive obscurations originate from clinging to really existing things, yogic practitioners put an end to all such clinging once they realize that all phenomena are primordially free from all discursiveness and reference points. To rest in meditative equipoise within the actual native state of all phenomena—all phenomena being empty of a nature of their own—is the remedy for all obscurations. It is the sun that outshines the darkness of mistaken views and the cure that eliminates the poison of reification. Emptiness is the quintessence of the Buddha’s teaching and the supreme cause for gaining mastery over the five

inexhaustible spheres of adornment of all Blissfully Gone Ones: enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activity.

.....

[123] Through the realization that cyclic existence is just an illusion, a bodhisattva's [124] own experiences and perceptions are completely unaffected by all samsaric defects, just as a lotus has its roots in the muddy ground of a pond but rises above the water as an immaculate flower. However, emotionally, bodhisattvas are not at all unaffected by seeing the states of sentient beings who—unlike themselves—still take this illusion of cyclic existence to be real and thus are under its sway. In a way, this is the same as when we watch the usual bad news on television and are aware that none of it is really happening on our screen. Still, what we see might very well trigger compassion in us for those who are going through the actual experiences that we are seeing. So in itself, what we see there is not our own experience, and—unlike the people whose actual experience it is—we are not under its control. Rather, it is still we who have the remote control and can flip through the channels (unfortunately, this does not mean that we are in full control of that process . . .). Likewise, since bodhisattvas are not under the control of what happens to others in cyclic existence, they have no problem in staying and working within what appears to others as samsaric reality. However, realizing emptiness is not at all a dull, numb, or undifferentiated blank state of mind in which nothing goes on anymore. In fact, in terms of bodhisattvas' own experience, it is said that it is their greatest joy to help other beings who suffer, so they enter cyclic existence with the same delight as when we plunge into the refreshing waters of a cool lake on a hot summer day.

Lost Identity

The Two Types of Identitylessness

[126] The contemporary Tibetan master Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche said in one of his talks, "Some people are afraid that, in Buddhism, they would lose their ego. That is true, but you can tell them that they don't have to worry, it will come back." This statement is surely good for a laugh, but—as we will soon see—at the same time it profoundly illuminates the basic problem.

On a slightly more serious note, I am afraid a few words on the translation of the Sanskrit term *nairatmya* (Tib. bdag med) as "identitylessness" are unavoidable. Nowadays, in English translations, a persistent, common worldly consensus of rendering this term as "selflessness" or "egolessness" has developed. If one disregards the relatively superficial flaw that the word "selflessness" usually refers to something completely different (an altruistic attitude or behavior) from what *nairatmya* means, the above renderings may be acceptable as common worldly consensus when used in a more casual context. Such translations not only entail a number of major problems when used in a more strict philosophical sense, but are in fact obstacles to a correct and deeper understanding of the meaning of *nairatmya* as one of the most central topics in Centrism.

Originally, the Sanskrit word *atman* meant “breath.”²⁴ In non-Buddhist Indian philosophy, it came to primarily indicate the ultimate true essence of each individual sentient being—one’s “true self,” “soul,” or “pure spirit.” Notwithstanding other varying features, all schools that assert this atman agree that it is permanent, singular, independent, and really existent. It is what has to be liberated from the illusions of cyclic existence. In Buddhist philosophy, the term is not limited to an eternal individual soul but refers to the general notion of a singular, permanent, and independent entity or identity that really exists by its own nature.

This notion is precisely what Centrists negate. They distinguish two types of the lack of such an atman: the lack of a personal atman and the lack of an atman of all other inner and outer phenomena. For example, Centrists speak of the nonexistence or the lack of an atman of a table. Now, the English terms “self” and “ego” refer solely to a person’s being or individuality; they are never used in relation to inanimate things. Thus—except in modern-day “Buddhist hybrid English”—one would normally never speak of the “self of a table,” much less the “ego of a table.” Both linguistically and in terms of meaning, it is more appropriate to speak of analytically seeking and not finding any real identity of a table. The same goes for a real identity of a person. This is clearly expressed in Candrakirti’s commentary on Aryadeva’s *Four Hundred Verses*:

“Identity” (*atman*) refers to a nature (*svabhava*) of entities that does not [127] depend on anything other. The nonexistence of this is identitylessness (*nairatmya*). Through classifying it in terms of phenomena and persons, it is understood as twofold: “phenomenal identitylessness” and “personal identitylessness.” The “person” is what is imputed in dependence on the five aggregates. . . . “Phenomena” are the entities that are called “aggregates,” “sources,” and “constituents.”²⁵

Thus, in order to cover this meaning of *nairatmya*, the terms “personal identitylessness” and “phenomenal identitylessness” were chosen.²⁶ From this explanation, it should also be clear that “identitylessness” in general is an equivalent of emptiness. The lack of a real identity and the lack of a real nature refer to the same basic fact. Hence, what is explicitly described in detail through the various presentations of emptiness above refers mainly to phenomenal identitylessness, while personal identitylessness is implicitly included in these emptinesses.

Specifically, as for “personal identitylessness,” there is no clear distinction in ordinary Western thinking between “self,” “ego,” and “person.” In addition, various psychological and philosophical schools use a great many different definitions for each of these terms. Hence, by using expressions such as “the self of a person,” “the ego of a person,” or “personal self,” it is very difficult, if not impossible, to understand the striking difference between the two terms “identity” and “person” as they are used in Buddhist philosophy. As a consequence, the crucial point of precisely identifying the actual target of the Buddhist refutation of a real personal identity is likely to be missed. For, the conventional notion of a person who performs various functions on the seeming level is never questioned. *The Entrance into Centrism* says:

Although he is free from the views about a real personality,²⁷
The Buddha taught “me” and “mine.”
In the same way, all entities are certainly without nature,
But he taught the expedient meaning that they “exist.”²⁸

Thus, in terms of personal identitylessness, the object of negation through Centrist reasoning is the idea that a person really exists in an independent way through his or her own nature. This notion is precisely what the deeply ingrained instinctive impulse of believing in ourselves as single individuals holds on to. That this impulse is largely unconscious just makes it all the more effective and powerful.

According to Centrists, the clinging to a personal identity is in turn based on the even more fundamental grasping for a real identity of phenomena in general. This means that as long as we take things in general to be real, we will always pick out one or more among them and cling to it as something real, taking it either [128] in itself to be our imagined personal identity or as something that supports or reinforces this sense of identity. Thus, the two kinds of identity are very closely interconnected.²⁹ Nagarjuna’s *Precious Garland* says:

As long as the clinging to the aggregates exists
For that long there is also [the clinging to] “me.”
Through this identification with “me,”
Again, there is karma and thus, again, rebirth.³⁰

So how is the term “identity” used here? On the one hand, “personal identity” is a mere imputation on the basis of the five aggregates that lacks any nature. Through beginningless fundamental ignorance and in dependence on the five aggregates, we presume a nature of a person that serves as the particular foundation or continuity for our actions and experiences. In more technical terms, such a person is seen as the underlying basis for karmic actions and their results. This is the imaginary referent object of the clinging to “I” and “me,” which is continuously present in all sentient beings who possess basic ignorance. In other words, it is just what we fancy when we think, “This is me.” It may also be called “the experienter,” “the individual,” and so on.

“Phenomenal identity” refers to the assumed real existence of all phenomena on the basis of which such a personal identity is ascribed or that seem to be under its control (such as one’s own body and mind) as well as to all other objects, such as other beings or inanimate forms. In dependence on the material elements and our mind, we cling to a real nature of phenomena such as visible forms and the various consciousnesses experiencing them. We take some phenomena to exist as the objective entities that give rise to others—our subjective consciousnesses—which apprehend them. In brief, to cling to phenomenal identity means to cling to the real existence of all material and mental phenomena that are other than what we regard as our personal identity.

This description of the two types of identity may give rise to a number of questions. We might think that we do not really see ourselves or phenomena as having such hard-and-fast identities.

And even if we did, what is wrong with experiencing ourselves as “me” and phenomena as real and different from this “me”? Why did the Buddha teach identitylessness? And why should we try to get rid of some identity that we obviously never had in the first place? In other words, why is it such a big issue in Buddhism to negate the two identities?

When we look a bit closer into our habitual ways of referring to ourselves, such as in ordinary language and thinking, we discover a number of obvious inconsistencies and contradictions that show the underlying fundamental confusion. Sometimes we label and treat some or all aspects of our individual five aggregates as constituting an “I,” while at other times we rather regard them as [129] something related to this “I.” The funny thing is that usually nobody seems to be aware of this, let alone bothered by it. For example, we tend to say such things as “my legs,” thus making—and experiencing—a clear distinction between “me” and these legs that are “mine.” We do not think, “I am my legs.” We clearly feel that “me” is something more than just legs. Still, we say, “I am walking,” though what actually moves are the legs or maybe the whole body. However, we wouldn’t say, “My legs walk” or “My body walks.” Now, if it is really “me” and not just my legs walking, does that mean that my mind or my feelings walk too? Similarly, we say, “I am sick,” “I have a headache,” and also “My head aches.” So who or what aches here or is sick, the head or me? Usually, we consider our head and ourselves as different, so what harm does it do to “me” if my head aches? And how is this different from anybody else’s head aching, which is equally different from “me”? Another typical example is to say both “my mind” and “I think” or “I feel.” So, again, is it my mind that thinks and feels, or is it “me”? If the mind were “me” or the self, it would be a contradiction to call it “mine”; this would be as impossible as something being both me and my car. To take yet another instance, what do we really mean when we say, “I wash myself”? Does the “I” wash the “I,” does the mind wash the body, or does just one hand wash the other parts of the body? So sometimes we regard our mind as “me” and the body as “mine,” and sometimes it is the other way around. We might think of “myself” being located somewhere in the upper body or in the head and then consider the feet as “my feet.” Or, we see the head as “mine” and the rest of the body as “me.” Usually, the “I” feels to be inside “my skin” and sees this skin as something outer that still belongs to this “I.” Occasionally, we even feel “out of our minds” altogether.

No doubt, we can easily come up with a zillion more examples of such highly inconsistent talking and thinking. So how does all this nonsense come about? The main reason for such inconsistencies is that we are constantly shifting the object or basis to which we are referring when we say “I,” “me,” and “mine.” In fact, this very shifting of what we regard as “me” and “mine” points in itself to the fact that there is no such thing as a stable and unchanging “me.” As long as we do not question all of this, it seems to be a completely natural and convenient way of dealing with ourselves and our world, and it usually works just fine. However, faced with the simple question “Who am I?,” we all have a very hard time coming up with a clear answer or definition of exactly who or what we are. The more we think about this, the more difficult it is to pinpoint something. In fact, it is not at all clear what this “I” or “me” really is, evidently not even to “ourselves.” So, if we do not question it, our self seems to be the most obvious and close thing we can imagine. However, as soon as we search for it, other than running into further inconsistencies, there is nothing to be found. It is like trying to catch a rainbow in space.

Of course, one might say, “Well, all of this is just conventional talk, so why make it into a problem?” From one point of view, nothing could be truer, and if [130] we were to leave it as nothing but conventional discourse, also from the Centrist point of view, there would in fact be no problem whatsoever. But the crucial point here is that it is not really this notion of “me” or some personal identity as such that is considered the root of cyclic existence. Rather, the problem lies with our instinctive subjective clinging to such a vague personal identity, which is in turn based on the even more fundamental clinging to phenomenal identity. This basic impulse of experiencing everything from the perspective of “I” and “me” seems to be the most natural thing in the world and usually goes completely unquestioned.

For example, we may go to a shopping mall and look at some nice, expensive watches. If the shop owner drops one of these watches and it breaks, we are not really too worried. We might even be relieved and think, “I’m glad it wasn’t mine.” However, if we receive this very watch as a birthday present and it breaks, our reaction is surely not that detached. Yet it is the same watch and the same thing that happened to it. We might watch a multicar crash on the news and not waste many thoughts on all those wrecked cars (though one would hope we would on the people who drove them). But how do we feel if we detect a small scratch on our own car? Where is this “mine” that seems to make all the difference and causes us suffering? Is “mine” the same as the Swiss watch? Or is “mine” different from it? Is “mine” inside the watch or outside of it? When searched for, it is nowhere to be found. However, according to the Buddha, it is precisely this tendency to experience everything in terms of “me” and “mine” that makes us feel distinct from others, develop attraction and aversion, and act these emotions out, which in turn causes all our well-known miseries.

As Dharmakirti’s *Commentary on Valid Cognition* says:

If there is a self, consciousness about others [arises].
From the aspects of self and others, clinging and aversion [result].
Then, through our close connection with these,
All flaws come forth.³¹

To be sure, there is no problem in just thinking or saying, “I am Kim,” “I walk,” “This is my car,” and so on. As good Buddhists, we might even have tried to go through all these painful Madhyamaka reasonings to disprove a single and unchanging self and understand that there is no such thing. However—and now we come back to Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche’s words—our actual hang-up is that we constantly keep thinking and acting *as if* we really were independent and single individuals with our own case history or personal file. This shows in our impulses to protect this somebody from what he or she does not like and chase after what he or she feels attracted to. This is how we find ourselves in the middle of the rat race of cyclic existence. The spontaneous, natural ease with which this functions is illuminated by an anecdote about a great siddha who remained [131] in advanced meditative equipoise for many years. During all this time, he stayed in the hut that belonged to him and his wife. When he finally rose from his meditation, the first thing he asked his wife was, “Where is my dinner?” She just answered, “If

this is all that came out of your meditative equipoise, you'd better go right back and practice some more."

In general, when asked, most of us would agree that we are not permanent or completely independent. However, when we are directly reminded of our impermanence in ways that we cannot ignore, such as getting gray hairs, falling ill, being in a car accident, or facing death, we usually become very upset. Likewise, if asked, we would surely say that our left big toe is not our personal self, but when it hurts or when we even lose it, we do not at all regard ourselves as separate from this toe. Thus, one very effective meditation on personal identitylessness is to consider how it affects our individual sense of identity to imagine losing, one by one, all our body parts. In addition, we can ask ourselves, at what point in this process of losing our limbs do we still feel like the same person whom we believe we are now, in full possession of all our body parts? Do we change in our existence as John or Mary when we lose one finger, or does that take several limbs? What if just our torso and head were left? And when do we cease to exist as a person altogether? The same contemplation can be applied to losing our relatives, our friends, our possessions, and certain features of our mind, as with senility. Such meditations might sound strange, but in practice they are excellent and powerful tools for learning something about ourselves and our attachments in a personal way that is quite different from mere theoretical speculations about a hypothetical self. At the same time, they also work on our concepts of regarding our body and mind as well as all other phenomena as real and distinct entities, such as seeing the collection of many body parts as a single "body"; taking the diversity of our momentarily changing feelings, thoughts, and perceptions to be one "mind"; or regarding an assemblage of various wooden or metal parts as a "chair" or a "car."

Thus, the fundamental reason that the precise identification of these two kinds of clinging to an identity—personal and phenomenal—is considered so important is again soteriological. Through first uncovering our clinging and then working on it, we become able to finally let go of this sole cause for all our afflictions and sufferings. Thus, the actual object of negation of reasoning in the context of knowledge through study and reflection is nothing more than this instinctive mistaken mode of cognition that takes the two kinds of identity to be really existent. This very same tendency to reify where there is nothing to be reified is also what must be let go of in meditation practice. In more technical terms, it is the object of negation of the path of yogic valid perception that arises from meditation. In this way, such innate clinging is the actual object of negation of both reasoning and the path.

The Entrance into Centrism says:

[132] First, we cling to our self, saying "me,"
Then we develop attachment to things, saying "this is mine."

Through mentally seeing that afflictions and mistakes without exception
Originate from the views about a real personality
And realizing that the self is the object of these [views],
Yogic practitioners negate a self.³²

When we analyze the object of negation in Centrist reasoning, it should be clear that the two kinds of identity have no possible existence as actual objects that are to be negated. It is impossible for any phenomenon to exist as a permanent, singular, and independent personal identity. Likewise, a phenomenon that is really established through an intrinsic nature of its own is not possible either. However—and this cannot be repeated too often—the actual target in the context of negating the two kinds of identity is the clinging to these identities on the subject side. In other words, the object of negation is a mistaken cognition, a wrong conception that apprehends something nonexistent as existent. Since there is no actual object of negation on the objective side, there never was anything objective to be relinquished. So “negating an identity” is just another expression for the process of letting go of our subjective clinging to imaginary identities. Of course, from the Centrist point of view, this clinging itself is not something real either. However, as long as there is an individual mistaken notion of an object, there is also the notion of a subject. Consequently, with the realization that an object is illusory, the subject that held on to it dissolves naturally. On the other hand, if there were an object of negation that was established as an actual object, we would not be able to relinquish it anyway, no matter how hard we tried. For no one can successfully negate something that actually exists or, for that matter, prove the existence of something that does not actually exist.

Thus, for Buddhist reasoning and meditation to be soteriologically efficient, it is crucial to acknowledge that their actual target lies not at the level of the apprehended objects—the notions of a real personal or phenomenal identity—but at the level of the apprehending subject—the largely unconscious and instinctive clinging to such identities. Again, the reason that this clinging needs to be tackled is that it is the initial spark that triggers the blaze of desire for some phenomena and aversion to others, eventually spreading into the wildfire of samsaric distress. For example, desire arises from thinking that “I” need something or someone. Hatred arises when people harm us and we think that they harmed “me.” Pride is based on the thought that “I” am better than others. We experience jealousy or envy because we think that some persons, possessions, qualities, or honors should be “mine.” As for unawareness or ignorance, it is often a hazy state of mind. However, it also shows clearly and most fundamentally in this [133] very sense of “me” and “mine,” which in turn is the basis for the arising of “my” other mental afflictions. Further, more active expressions of ignorance are the thought “I don’t care” and the refusal to look at how things really are.

Fundamentally speaking, it is impossible to tackle our subjective experiences and our clinging right away. We cannot stop this initial impulse of grasping by simply telling ourselves, “Just don’t cling.” Nor does it help to think, “I will not give rise to mental afflictions anymore.” Yet, whenever we think “me” or “mine,” this always refers to some object, sometimes our body and sometimes our mind, that we mistakenly call “me” and “mine.” That is why Madhyamaka works via the demonstration and realization that there are no such identities to be grasped in the first place. There is nothing that could serve as a reference point for our clinging and our afflictions. It is only upon clearly seeing this that we can finally relax and let go of holding on to what is not there.

This is similar to what happens if someone mistakes a water hose with a zig-zag pattern in the garden for a snake. There never was a snake in this hose in the first place, but due to the misconception of a snake this person will panic, start to tremble and sweat, and run away. So there is a whole chain reaction of mistaken—and completely unnecessary—cognitive, emotional, physical, and verbal actions and reactions, but they are all due to the initial mistaken notion of a snake. What would somebody else do to help that person calm down? Surely there is no point in administering tranquilizers, doing psychotherapy against fear of snakes, or merely trying to soothe the person by saying, “Don’t be afraid. Just relax, take it easy.” And even if these methods were to help for a while, the next time the person would encounter that hose (or a similar one), the same drama would unfold again. So other people would point out that there never was a snake, but just a hose. Still, just having this pointed out by somebody else is also not sufficient. The person who is afraid has to arrive at her own certainty that there was no snake, is no snake, and will be no snake in that hose. Such certainty can only be gained through this person’s own examination of the hose, thus seeing that it lacks any characteristics of an actual snake. Only then can the person finally relax and maybe even laugh about the whole event.

Thus, it is only through the personal realization that there is no object to justify the fear which is experienced that the experiencer—the perceiving subject—can let go of the clinging to the existence of a snake and be relieved of the ensuing suffering. Another example for this kind of misconception are patients who wander from one doctor’s office to another, deeply convinced that they have a tumor, despite the evidence from countless tests and examinations that they do not.

As The Commentary on Valid Cognition says:

Without invalidating its object,
One is not able to relinquish this [clinging to identity].³³

[134] To return once more to the initial statement that people are afraid to lose their ego in Buddhism, is it really frightening or maybe just boring to realize identitylessness? Do we have to give up all of our individuality or personality and become some lifeless enlightened clone or zombie? As was shown, we don’t lose anything, since we realize that we never had any real identity in the first place. Rather, there is only a lot to gain—freedom from suffering—by letting go of what ties us down and makes us suffer: our clinging and grasping to something that does not exist anyway. When we realize that there is nothing to lose and nobody to be harmed, we can relax and let go of the idea that we have something to lose, and let go of our attempts to hold on to or protecting this something. Usually, we are afraid that without our sense of “me” and real things we would not be able to live our lives in an organized way. In fact, however, such grasping to real things and a real “me” makes everything quite heavy, complicated, and clumsy. In addition, it uses up a lot of our energy that could be spent in more joyful and beneficial ways. So when we stop this misguided use of our mental potential, we have free access to the whole scope of its dynamic vitality. The true qualities of the nature of our mind can shine forth unimpededly, and life may become a playful dance of appearances. And we

don't have to wait until enlightenment for this to happen, since such effects show during all phases of the path in accordance with how much we loosen our tight grip on "us" and our solid world.

There actually are situations in ordinary life that might give us a glimpse that not apprehending a personal or phenomenal identity is a joyful state of mind. Imagine you start to play a musical instrument. At the beginning, everything is very clumsy; you have to think a lot and coordinate your mind, your fingers, the instrument, and the notes, and they all seem separate and disconnected. But once you are trained to a certain degree, you might become completely absorbed in the process of making music, "losing yourself" in your playing. You don't think of or experience yourself as a particular person or a player; there is not even a sense of "me" anymore. Likewise, you don't perceive the instrument, the fingers, and your mind as different or separate things. Still, or—from the Buddhist point of view—because of that, this does not mean that there is nothing going on or that this situation is depressing. On the contrary, it is an alive and joyful state of mind. Everything flows together in a playful and lighthearted dance. In fact, the less you think about yourself—or anything else, for that matter—the better you can play and the more the instrument, the melody, and the player become one.

Technically speaking, personal identitylessness and phenomenal identitylessness are taught in order to liberate all beings from both afflictive and cognitive obscurations. Personal identitylessness is taught mainly to liberate hearers and solitary realizers. In addition, phenomenal identitylessness is taught for the sake of bodhisattvas attaining omniscience. One might wonder, "If there is no self, does that mean that there is also nothing that is 'mine'?" Obviously, if there is [135] no agent, there is nothing to be acted upon either, just as there is no vase if there is no potter to produce it. Thus, without "me," there is nothing that is "mine" or "other." And if visible forms and so on are not observed, there are also no thoughts of attachment and aversion. Therefore, when the aggregates are seen as being empty of a self and what is related to such a self, nobody sees anything that could be cyclic existence. This is called liberation.

The Precious Garland says:

The aggregates that originate from the clinging to "me"
And the clinging to "me" are actually delusive.
How could there be a real arising
Of something whose seed is delusive?

When one sees that the aggregates are thus not real,
The clinging to "me" will be relinquished.
Once this clinging to "me" has been relinquished,
The aggregates will not originate anymore.³⁴

Aryadeva's Four Hundred Verses on the Yogic Practice of Bodhisattvas says:

If one sees that objects are without identity,
The seed of existence ceases.³⁵

The Entrance into Centrism says:

Because there is no object without agent,
Therefore, what is mine does not exist without a self.
Consequently, yogins regard a self and what is mine as empty
And thus are completely released.³⁶

Therefore, by not grasping at cyclic existence, hearers and solitary realizers pass into nirvana. As for bodhisattvas, they realize both identitylessnesses completely, but because of their great compassion they continue to assume various forms of seeming existence that merely appear for the benefit of others.

Phenomenal Identitylessness

Two types of phenomenal identitylessness may be distinguished:

- 1) the innate type, which comes from the instinctive clinging to phenomenal identity
- 2) the imaginary type, which is superimposed through philosophical systems

[136] The innate phenomenal identity refers to the object of the instinctive misconception of ordinary worldly beings who naturally see each phenomenon as having a real and specific nature of its own. “Phenomena” includes everything from form up to omniscience. In other words, this term encompasses the entirety of the five aggregates, the twelve sources, and the eighteen constituents, including all phenomena of nirvana.

The imaginary phenomenal identity is based on the innate clinging to the real existence of phenomena in general. It refers to all kinds of speculative superimpositions of phenomenal entities that are described by different philosophical and scientific schools, such as that it is the nature of phenomena to be permanent or impermanent, that they consist of infinitesimal atomic particles, or, that they are made up of smallest moments of mind.

The Eighth Karmapa says that most expressions of the general clinging to a real nature of all phenomena exist merely from the perspective of ordinary worldly mistakenness and its conventions. This category includes most of the words in the Buddha’s teachings, which are employed as mere conventions from the perspectives of particular disciples. The terminology of these teachings is either expressed in terms of common worldly consensus or is suitable to become some sort of common consensus. In addition, there are the conventions of those who cling to some particular identity of phenomena. These are the conceptual imputations by Buddhists and non-Buddhists that are neither common worldly consensus nor something spoken by the Buddha. They do not exist even on the conventional level and include non-

Buddhist notions such as all knowable objects being included in six, sixteen, or twenty-five categories;³⁷ notions common to some Buddhists and non-Buddhists, such as infinitesimal atomic particles; and Buddhist notions, such as hidden but real outer referents, a real, nondual, and self-aware other-dependent nature, a ground consciousness, a permanent and unconditioned Buddha nature that is adorned with all the major and minor marks, or an imaginary personal self that is established through conventional valid cognition.

Of course, most people will object here that the Buddha indeed spoke about a ground consciousness and the other Buddhist notions above. Karmapa Mikyö Dorje's answer is that, in general, when the Buddha spoke on the level of no analysis, conventionally, one can distinguish between an expedient meaning and a definitive meaning in his words.³⁸ On this conventional level, such terms as "ground consciousness" are of expedient meaning that entails a certain intention and is meant to guide disciples toward liberation. Still, some Buddhists might cling to these expressions as presenting something real, since they were spoken by the Buddha. However, the Buddha's intention was to communicate something on the conventional level, and it is precisely on this conventional level that such terms do not carry any definitive meaning. The main reason for this is that they [137] do not even represent common worldly consensus but just imputations arrived at through philosophical speculation.

For example, the notion of a ground consciousness was mainly introduced to explain how karmic actions are stored and ripen into their results, even over many lifetimes. Centrists question the necessity of such a storehouse consciousness as the basis for karma, but not the mere dependently originating operation of karmic cause and effect on the seeming level. As such, this operation definitely is a part of common worldly consensus. Likewise, it is said that self-awareness is necessary for having a memory. Again, the mere fact of remembering is common worldly consensus and thus not disputed in Centrism, but it is denied that there is some further really existent basis for memory, be it self-awareness or anything else.

On the other hand, everything that the Buddha said on the level of analysis—all the presentations within the setting of the two realities—is solely of definitive meaning. Nothing of what he taught on the level of analysis is of expedient meaning. In brief, both on the level of the seeming and the ultimate reality, any hypothetical, real nature of any phenomenon from form up through omniscience in general as well as all superimpositions of such a nature are natural emptiness. This is the supreme essential pith of the Centrist teachings.

In the general context of explaining the view, among the two types of identitylessness, phenomenal identitylessness is usually ascertained first for the following reasons:³⁹

First, the coarse form of phenomenal identitylessness is the negation of real existence (its object of negation). Certain degrees of understanding coarse phenomenal identitylessness are common to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Thus, in general, it is easier for everybody to start with phenomenal identitylessness than personal identitylessness, which is extraneous to non-Buddhist systems.

Second, after one has determined that all phenomena are empty of a nature of their own, it is implicitly established that a so-called personal identity that we impute through innate ignorance onto our five aggregates is also empty of a nature of its own. For it is realized that all possible bases for the mistaken view of a personal identity are without nature.

In this way, the realization of phenomenal identitylessness relinquishes the two obscurations. Therefore, phenomenal identitylessness is said to be the primary one among the two types of identitylessness.

Personal Identitylessness

Personal identitylessness is the unique, distinctive feature of the followers of Buddhist philosophical systems. Obviously, there are also many non-Buddhists who possess various degrees of realizing coarse phenomenal identitylessness as well as [138] those whose beliefs entail following a course of positive ethical conduct. Therefore, the actual difference between non-Buddhist and Buddhist views lies in the acceptance versus the denial of a real identity of the person.

As with phenomenal identity, there are two types of a hypothetical personal identity:

- 1) the subtle, innate personal identity, which is the object of the innate clinging to it
- 2) the coarse, imaginary personal identity, which is imputed through philosophical systems

The so-called innate personal identity or self refers to the object of “the innate views about a real personality.” Here, “a real personality” refers to a really existing self that is somehow related to the five aggregates, which are in themselves momentarily impermanent and collections of many parts. “The views about it” may simply be classified as two: the clinging to “me” and to “mine.” Usually, however, they are explained as twenty in number. These consist of four different possible ways of relating each of the five aggregates to a personal self. To take the aggregate of form⁴⁰ as an example, these four are as follows:

- a) the view that form is the self
- b) the view that the self by nature possesses form
- c) the view that the self by nature exists in form
- d) the view that form by nature exists in the self

The same applies to the remaining four aggregates, thus resulting in a total of twenty such misconceptions. These misconceptions are called views, but in the context of the innate clinging to a personal identity, they are to be understood more as the various natural expressions of our instinctive, gut-level impulse of experiencing ourselves as distinct beings. This originates from the beginningless habituation of taking the five aggregates as reference points for thinking “I,” “me,” and “mine.” This habituation naturally exists in all sentient beings, and in a sense one could call it a kind of survival instinct, since it leads to our efforts of sustaining what we see as

“me” and protecting it from harm. Thus, neither this clinging nor its object—“I” or “me”—depends on any imputation through philosophical or other belief systems. When not analyzed, the personal identity or “self” that is the object of the innate views about a real personality can be said to nominally exist on the mere conventional level, because the clinging to “I” and “mine” is experientially present in all sentient beings and shows through their verbal expressions and behaviors.

The so-called “imaginary personal identity” or self is based on the innate clinging [139] to a personal identity, but it is not naturally present in all beings. Rather, it is what is newly imputed in various ways through studying, reflecting on, or meditating on the conceptual superimpositions in different views or philosophical systems. This may be seen as a real self, an individual true identity or the core of the person, such as a permanent, self-sufficient, and single atman or the various theories about an “ego” in Western psychology. The clinging to such imaginary personal identities is called “the imaginary views about a real personality.” The objects of these views are nothing but labels by certain people and schools. They are not common worldly consensus. Therefore, they do not exist either as conventions that appear in common for everybody or as parts of seeming reality. Karmapa Mikyö Dorje lists three general types of an imaginary personal identity:

- a) imputations of a personal identity that is either something other than or the same as the five aggregates, such as an eternal, single, and autonomous self as advocated by most non-Buddhist Indian schools, or the position of some of the Highly Venerated Ones⁴¹ who say that the aggregates or the mind itself are the self
- b) the imputation that the self is neither the same as nor different from the aggregates, as it is upheld by the followers of Vatsiputra⁴²
- c) Tsongkhapa’s assertion of a personal self that is established through conventional valid cognition and serves as the support for the continuity of karmic actions and their results, that is, the personal self that is imputed onto the aggregates and not mingled with the personal self that is understood as the object of negation of reasoning.

When expressed on the conventional level, the assumed, innate personal identity that is the object of our innate clinging is just a label applied in dependence on the five aggregates, such as saying, “I am Ben.” This is not different from calling a collection of different parts a “car.” Centrism does not at all negate that this plain convention exists on the seeming level without analysis. On the level of analysis, however, what Centrism does negate on the level of both seeming and ultimate reality is that there is something really existing by its own nature to which this label “I” refers. The reasons for this object of our innate clinging to a personal identity being negated are as follows: All afflictions and problems originate on the basis of the views about a real personality, which constitute the subjective mental states of clinging to an innate personal identity. In addition, the wisdom in the meditative equipoise of noble ones does not see any such innate identity even on the conventional level.

On the other hand, any “imaginary personal identity” is categorically negated on both the level of no analysis and the level with analysis, as well as on both levels of reality. For, let alone

ultimate reality, such an imaginary personal identity [140] does not even fall under seeming reality, since it does not accord with any of the common conventions of either worldly people or noble ones. As for the impact of the imaginary views about a personal identity (which take imaginary personal identities as their objects), in addition to being mistaken in themselves, they intensify and solidify the innate views about a personal identity as well. Furthermore, if one clings to any kind of imaginary personal identity or self, one will not travel the path to liberation and omniscience through the middle way that relinquishes the two extremes.

When considering the many imputations and technicalities in the views that are refuted in Centrist texts, one might come up with the following objection: “As was said, the fundamental cause of cyclic existence is the innate clinging to a personal identity or self. However, Centrist texts do not state any reasonings to negate the self that is the object of this innate clinging. Is it not unreasonable to exclusively reason against all kinds of imaginary types of self, when the actual cause of samsaric suffering is the innate clinging to a self?” There is no problem here, since the object of the innate clinging to a personal identity—whether this is considered to be a self, a real personality, an individual, or a sentient being—is not the object of negation as long as it is just accepted as a mere convention on the level of no analysis, such as saying, “I walk” or “I meditate.” Such a mere conventional label “I” as it is used in our everyday transactions is not negated in Centrism, because—just as with all other conventions—it is neither possible nor necessary to negate it. All conventions are mere agreements to put certain tags or symbols on certain appearances, so what is there to negate? In other words, there is no reason for not calling a house a house. This name is as good as any other name, such as *maison* in French or *casa* in Italian, but since English-speaking people have agreed on *house*, there is no reason for them not to communicate with this label. Otherwise, one would have to negate all naming altogether. Thus, there is no need to negate such conventional labels as “I” and “house,” since—as bare labels—they do no harm and in fact assist us in accomplishing our worldly transactions.

On the other hand, in the context of negation through analysis, the reasonings that negate the first three types of an imaginary personal identity also function as reasonings to negate any innate personal identity. For, any notion of an innate self does not lie beyond the three ways of analysis through reasoning that cover these three types of imaginary self. Moreover, these reasonings negate the entirety of all objects onto which both the innate and imaginary views about a real personality can possibly grasp. Therefore, it is not the case that Centrist texts fail to negate the innate type of a personal identity.

In general, if one does not realize that all kinds of personal identity are empty of a nature of their own, one is not able to realize phenomenal identitylessness in an exhaustive way. In other words, if personal identitylessness is not fully realized, there is no complete realization of phenomenal identitylessness either.

Are the Two Identitylessnesses One or Different?

[141] In general, all phenomena lack both a personal and a phenomenal identity. More specifically, the question of the existence of a personal identity primarily applies to such phenomena as our body and mind, as it is pretty obvious for most people that such inanimate things as tables and houses do not have a personal self. Thus, in Centrism, inanimate things are addressed primarily in terms of their lack of real existence, or phenomenal identitylessness. As was said earlier, holding on to a personal identity with respect to body and mind is based on regarding body and mind as really existent. In the same way, other phenomena may also serve as additional reference points for sustaining our clinging to a personal self that per se primarily focuses on our psychophysical continuum. Therefore, both types of identitylessness apply to all phenomena. They just differ in their specific objects of negation. Since the object of negation in the case of personal identitylessness is an “I” or “self,” this identitylessness is formulated as the inverse of its particular object of negation, that is, “personal identity.” In terms of phenomenal identitylessness, what is to be negated is “real existence,” or a real “phenomenal identity.” Consequently, this identitylessness is also presented from the perspective of reversing its specific object of negation. In this way, both identitylessnesses are conceptual specifications that are the inverses of their respective objects of negation.

Thus, technically speaking and on the mere conventional level, the two identitylessnesses can be said to be one in nature and different isolates. The reasons for this are as follows: Since all phenomena are equally without identity, they cannot be differentiated in the slightest through their entities. Consequently, any kind of assumed personal identity is just a specific instance among hypothetical identities of phenomena in general. For example, a phenomenon such as a book may serve as a basis for attributing certain features to it, yet there is nothing in it that can be apprehended as a really existing thing. However, if the appearance of this book is identified as such a basis for attribution in the context of mere temporary designation, the “personal identitylessness” of this book may be understood as its lack of an identity of its own. The book’s phenomenal identitylessness means that there is no book that is really established. These two facts—that an own identity of the book is not established and that the book is not established as something that really exists—are undifferentiable in nature. They can only be separated in a conceptual way by referring to different objects of negation.

The Purpose of Teaching Two Identitylessnesses

Here, one may wonder, “If the two identitylessnesses are undifferentiable in nature, why is it necessary to distinguish between them? Moreover, if personal identitylessness is an instance of phenomenal identitylessness, it should be sufficient [142] to teach only phenomenal identitylessness. Also, if the purpose to be accomplished—liberation and omniscience through the elimination of the two obscurations—is already fulfilled through one’s realizing the teaching on phenomenal identitylessness, it seems pointless to speak as well about personal identitylessness.”

The reasons for explaining both identitylessnesses are as follows: The Buddha taught personal identitylessness primarily in order to take care of those with the disposition of the lesser

vehicle. Thus, this identitylessness serves to gradually introduce those of lesser capacities to the teachings. Furthermore, it is the stepping-stone for the liberation of those who have the dispositions of hearers and solitary realizers. There is a definite necessity to teach personal identitylessness to those with these dispositions, because release from cyclic existence is not possible if this identitylessness is not taught and cultivated accordingly. However, hearers and solitary realizers are not suitable vessels for the extensive teachings on the identitylessness of all phenomena in the continua of infinite sentient beings. For their goal of personal liberation from cyclic existence, it is sufficient to explicitly teach them only personal identitylessness (which is, however, based on and implicit in phenomenal identitylessness). Thus, even if phenomenal identitylessness were explicitly and fully taught to them, for the time being, they would neither need it nor benefit from it. Therefore, they are taught only personal identitylessness, they meditate on it, and they realize it completely. On the other hand, phenomenal identitylessness is taught extensively in order to take care of bodhisattvas as those who have the disposition of the great vehicle. Since it is the goal of bodhisattvas to attain omniscience and work for the welfare of all other beings, it is for this purpose that they are mainly taught phenomenal identitylessness. As Candrakirti's *Entrance into Centrism* says:

In order to liberate beings, this identitylessness
Was taught in two aspects, classified in terms of phenomena and persons.⁴³

Path Madhyamaka

The Madhyamaka Path

[153] Traditionally, the paths in all Buddhist schools or vehicles are presented as threefold—study, reflection, and meditation—or fourfold if we add conduct to the list. The relation between study, reflection, and meditation was highlighted in the [154] introduction, so an example by The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche of how they represent an interconnected process may suffice here. He compares this process to baking chocolate chip cookies. First, we have to read a recipe for such cookies in a cookbook to see what the ingredients are and get an overview of the procedure. This obviously corresponds to the phase of study on the Buddhist path. Next, we make a shopping list and buy all the necessary ingredients. Now we can begin actually preparing the dough, heating up the oven, and so on. Depending on how well we have studied the recipe, we can do this from memory or we might have to consult our book from time to time. Once the cookies are in the oven, we will soon start to smell their appetizing scent. Thus, we arrive at the first direct experience that results from our efforts. At this point, the cookies are no longer just some letters in a book but are about to become delicious food that is a part of our immediate experience.

All of this corresponds to the phase of reflection, in which we actively process the things that we have studied and gain some personal experience of them. Finally, the cookies are finished

and we can eat them. To relish and assimilate this product means that the actual cookies are directly experienced and become a part of our body. This is the phase of meditation, during which we gradually experience and integrate our studies and reflections into our whole being. This analogy is quite fitting, as the original meaning of the Sanskrit term for meditation—*bhavana*—is one of scent fully pervading something like a cloth and actually becoming inseparable from it. In the same way, one might say that we “perfume” our mind stream with liberating insights.

Obviously, the baking process and the resultant quality of the cookies will depend on how well we have followed the recipe. We will be able to enjoy the result of this process—the cookies—only by doing everything properly. Likewise, the efficacy of our reflection depends on how extensively and well we have studied the relevant materials. Consequently, our meditation practice is subject to the certainty that we have gained through systematic reflection. This does not mean that we should exclusively study for many years, then only reflect on all this for even longer, and then finally—if we are still alive—meditate. Rather, Gampopa said that the best way to practice is to do all three steps in an integrated manner: to study a topic, reflect and meditate on it, and then go on to the next topic. Also, Buddhist study should not be approached like a school curriculum in which various topics are studied just so they can be crossed off the list and are never looked at again. Since Buddhist study and practice are meant to change some of our most ingrained habits, they need to be personally worked on and integrated into our whole being. Thus, they are necessarily processes that involve repetition and training until these things become natural and effortless, much as one learns to play an instrument. Processing the same issues again and again enables us to discover new and larger perspectives and understandings each time. This is also the point where conduct comes into play, since conduct in Buddhism [155] basically means taking the insights and experiences that we gained during the more formal phases of studying, reflecting, and meditating and applying them to our daily lives. In summary, such Buddhist rehearsal has the effect of bringing us to increasingly deep levels of experience and realization.

Especially in Centrism, the path also means gradually letting go of both the problems and their respective remedies. As stated earlier, the many volumes of the *Prajñāparamita sutras* and Centrist texts can be epitomized by the following two points: (1) Motivated by the altruistic attitude of the mind of enlightenment for the sake of all beings, bodhisattvas make every effort to attain the omniscience of a Buddha that is accomplished through practicing the six perfections. (2) There are no such things as bodhisattvas, omniscience, Buddhas, beings, the six perfections, or any attainment. To integrate these two aspects in Buddhist practice is called the unity of means and knowledge, or the unity of the seeming and the ultimate mind of enlightenment. The training in the illusionlike means to accomplish the benefit of oneself and others is constantly informed by the knowledge that realizes the empty nature of all phenomena. Thus, motivated by great compassion, the dreamlike accumulations of merit and wisdom that are contained in the perfections are gathered.

Overview of The Path

The framework for the actual practice on the Centrist path is threefold: preparation, main practice, and conclusion. Every practice starts with bringing to mind our basic motivation for engaging in this path. First, we take refuge in the three jewels: the Buddha, his teachings, and the community of those who practice these teachings. To take refuge in the Buddha does not mean to supplicate some other person for help. Rather, we appreciate the qualities of Buddhahood as the supreme state of liberation and omniscience that is the true nature of our mind and thus strengthen our resolve to accomplish this state ourselves. Taking refuge in the dharma indicates our determination to actually apply the means that enable us to attain Buddhahood. To take refuge in the community of the practitioners of these methods means to open up to our spiritual friends who help us during this journey and to be ready ourselves to help others who travel with us. Next, we affirm our aspiring mind of enlightenment, our wish to perform all our Buddhist practices not just for our own liberation but for the sake of accomplishing perfect Buddhahood for the welfare of all sentient beings. Seen in this way, Buddhahood becomes a sort of by-product of gradually “forgetting” ourselves on the path of a bodhisattva by increasingly focusing on the needs of others. In fact, it is impossible and a contradiction in terms to attain Buddhahood for oneself or by oneself.

All of the main practices are contained in the applied mind of enlightenment, that is, the actual engagement in the six perfections. In general, the first five perfections—generosity up through meditative stability—are considered the means, also called the accumulation of merit. The sixth perfection—knowledge—represents the accumulation of wisdom. However, the crucial point on the Centrist [156] path is to practice wisdom and means as a unity, since this is the only way to attain the great “nonabiding nirvana.” Through supreme knowledge, Buddhas and bodhisattvas are not stuck in the extreme of cyclic existence. Through compassion, they are also not just resting in—or limited to—the one-sided nirvanic peace of arhats merely for their own benefit. Thus, through uniting compassion and knowledge, bodhisattvas appear in the world without being in the world. As for such unified practice, it is solely through being inseparably linked with the wisdom of realizing the nature of phenomena—emptiness—that all the perfections become truly supramundane perfections. Only then can they serve as the genuine means for liberation and perfect Buddhahood. Strictly speaking, this is possible only for practitioners on the ten bodhisattva grounds, since they have directly realized the nature of phenomena. However, to some extent, ordinary beings also can—and actually are supposed to—train in the methods to make the perfections supramundane. There are three steps or means to “perfect the perfections”:

- 1) They are enhanced through wisdom.
- 2) They are expanded through knowledge.
- 3) They are made limitless through dedication.

Enhancing the perfections through wisdom refers to not fixating on the three spheres, that is, an agent, its object, and the action itself. To take the perfection of generosity as an example,

this means that we practice it with the constant awareness that the giver, the recipient, and the act of giving are all illusionlike and empty of a real nature.

The positive impact, or the meritorious power, of the perfections is expanded through knowledge. This is again threefold: First, as for generosity, we practice it not just for the sake of some temporary, limited benefit or relief but—no matter how modest our act of giving may be—always with the supreme motivation that this generosity may be a cause for all beings to attain enlightenment. Second, we do not cling in any way to what we give, which is again based on not taking it to be real in any way. Finally, we do not entertain any hopes or expectations about the personal karmic rewards of our generosity.

Dedication is the third means to perfect the perfections, and it is also the conclusion of every practice. When all positive activities on the path are dedicated for the welfare and enlightenment of all sentient beings, these activities become inexhaustible, just as a drop of water that falls into the ocean does not get lost or exhausted. The supreme way of dedicating does not refer to any dedicator, any beings to whom we dedicate, or any act of dedicating. Since true bodhisattvas perform all their practices exclusively for the sake of all other beings, they have no problem in passing on the benefit of whatever positive actions they commit. For [157] them, dedication is an expression of their all-encompassing activity for others. Moreover, not keeping anything for ourselves directly works on our clinging to “I” and “mine,” and by letting go of all our accomplishments, we avoid making them into just another—more sophisticated—hang-up, such as making them a source of pride.

How Can Madhyamaka Be a Personal Practice?

Before we get into the excruciating intricacies of Centrist reasoning, a short sketch may be useful to convey an idea of how Centrist practice, which includes reasoning, may serve as a practical and transformative path that is very relevant to our personal issues and problems, which often may seem so different from what Centrists address. One of the main problems that arise when we encounter Centrist reasonings is that the classical texts mostly presented them in terms of “how” rather than “why.” They may appear as a kind of extremely sophisticated tool kit that we can use to pulverize all kinds of views, if we are so interested, but often there is little background information on why we should ever dive into such complicated argumentations to accomplish this. If any explanations are offered about what the point of this logical overkill may be, they are usually very brief and/or highly technical. Moreover, as for our own worldview, often we do not think we hold any of the views that the Centrists are refuting. Nor do we feel any relation to these ancient people and schools that supposedly maintained such positions many hundreds of years ago in India or Tibet. So why even start to pursue endless chains of complicated reasonings that deal with problems that are not ours and address people whom we do not know?

Now, when we go to a pharmacy, we usually know what our problem is and then select the appropriate medicine for it; we do not consume the entire assortment of drugs. Likewise, we

do not go to our physician for help when we have no specific health problem, nor do we want the doctor to put us through every available high-tech diagnostic procedure or prescribe many different pills that we do not need. We definitely prefer to have just our present problem treated. In a similar way, Centrist texts are like well-stocked pharmacies and Centrist masters are like well-equipped physicians, so the issues described equally apply to the treatment of the Madhyamaka type.

First—and this is so self-evident that we usually do not even consider it—we have to decide that we have a problem that needs treatment. If such is the case, we must then identify our individual problem as clearly as possible. There is no point in using any medical or Madhyamaka treatment, if we have no problem or in just applying the treatment to some pseudo-problem. Finally, we have to treat our problem with the specifically appropriate methods. In principle, Centrist texts can help us with all three points, since they keep telling us that we do have [158] a problem, even if we are not aware of it (whether this message rings true for us is of course entirely up to us). The scriptures also clearly identify the basic problem of existence and its ramifications and present a rich variety of remedies. Thus, rather than just plunging into the middle of all kinds of treatments for all kinds of problems, we should be aware of these issues in order to find out which treatment really addresses our own problem.

In general, there are many reasons for engaging in philosophy, but to my knowledge—at least in the West—no philosophers have ever expressed that the fundamental reason for presenting their system is to liberate all sentient beings from their suffering.⁴⁴ To some degree, Plato in his final statement in the famous cave dialogue may be an exception. To be sure, I do not intend to present an overview of Western philosophy here, nor do I deny its value. I am just trying to contrast the Madhyamaka approach with the overall approach of classical Western philosophy. If this is too generalized or oversimplified, may the educated philosophers forgive me. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) defined philosophy as the teaching about the first cause and reason. In this sense, philosophy is the search for the initial cause of, or reasons for, what is. It is an attempt to describe or explain the world and our own place in it as coherently as possible and in a way that is assumed to be the way that the world—and what lies beyond it—really is. In this process, such disciplines as logic, ontology, epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics are employed as means to establish one's own worldview and question those of others. On the subjective level, this involves solidifying and reifying one's notions by trying to establish—or just taking for granted—that there is a connection between these notions and something to which they refer. In particular contrast to Buddhism, the issue of a personal self is usually tacitly considered a given (one of the very few exceptions is in the writings of David Hume). As exemplified by Descartes's famous sentence "I think, therefore I am," exactly what this "I" might be is hardly ever questioned. Moreover, as the familiar phrase of "the ivory tower of philosophy" indicates, Western philosophies often remain quite theoretical edifices that offer little practical instruction in how to apply them to our daily problems. Or, as in some modern deconstructive philosophies, we may be left with some kind of "sophisticated" nihilism after having rejected all positivistic philosophical engagement. Some "edifying" philosophers like Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Dewey seem to have turned away from these tendencies and, as Rorty says, aim "to help their readers, or society as a whole, break free from outworn vocabularies and

attitudes, rather than to provide ‘grounding’ for the intuitions and the customs of the present.”⁴⁵

As was stated before, Centrist masters like Nagarjuna, Candrakirti, and Santideva all clearly agree on their “mission.” Their purpose in working with others lies at the heart of what Buddhism is. It is not some theoretical philosophy or metaphysical speculation but a practical system of gradual mind training in order to release sentient beings from suffering. Its intention is to fully realize [159] the true nature of mind, which in itself is beyond the problem of suffering and any of its remedies. Thus, for these masters, their teachings are just tools that they employ out of compassion to help others realize what they realized themselves. Centrists simply do not care about philosophy in the usual sense, or about such things as logic, reasoning, ontology, epistemology, phenomenology, and metaphysics per se. If one of these topics comes into play at some point in their teachings, it is only insofar as it may be suitable to serve the purpose of a provisional device for their liberating activity. As Centrist analysis shows, it is exclusively within the essentially mistaken perspective of deluded beings and their conventional communications that logic, reasoning, and such can be applied as tools to go beyond this framework.

Therefore, the point of engaging in Madhyamaka is not at all to create just another system of philosophy that claims to accurately describe the final picture of the world. We have more than enough ideas about all kinds of things, which, from the Madhyamaka point of view, is precisely the problem. Rather, it is a matter of letting go of our solidifying notions of the world and not building up even more sophisticated ones. In Madhyamaka, no effort is made to establish any ontology. As was explained earlier, the two realities are not ontological categories, since seeming reality is just the illusion that appears to the mistaken minds of ordinary sentient beings. Ultimate reality is explicitly said to defy any description or accessibility through samsaric mental states and thus also any ontological ascertainment. The two realities are not presented in order to establish an ultimate mode of existence (how reality “really” is) as opposed to a conventional mode of existence (how things seem to be). There is also no attempt to justify or establish anything within seeming reality, such as precisely how it is that karma—cause and effect—works. The thrust of talking about the two realities is soteriological. Seeming reality is identified as the problem, that is, cyclic existence and its cause, which is basic unawareness. Ultimate reality is just the solution to this problem, not a new problem. Thus, to realize ultimate reality does not mean to substitute one thing with another, such as samsara with nirvana. This is very much like when an illness is cured. It is not that the thing “illness” is replaced by the thing “health.” Rather, it is just the removal of the causes of the illness that makes its symptoms disappear, and this absence of symptoms is what is called health. So when Centrists address seeming reality, it is only for pedagogical purposes in order to cure samsaric illusion.

In this way, Centrists use their tools quite dispassionately, as if they were merely crutches offered to provide support until the patients—sentient beings—can finally walk alone. Nobody whose broken leg has healed would continue to walk on crutches, and nobody would bother to carry a boat forever once it has reached the other shore of a river. In the same way, those who follow the Centrist approach have no use for their methods once they arrive on the other side

[160] of cyclic existence. Instead, the Centrists' rigorous deconstructive analysis of any philosophy or thought system points beyond all of these systems, including Centrism itself. One could say that the Centrist approach has a built-in mechanism of self-destruction, since it not only eliminates other systems but eventually dissolves itself by itself.

In brief, if Madhyamaka were explained as a coherent philosophical, ontological, or logical system, it might appeal much more to our clinging to some neatly organized, all-explanatory picture of the world and our perception of it. We just want to have something that makes good sense, in which all the parts fit together, something on which we can build our belief system. However, any attempt to force Madhyamaka into any system at all must necessarily fail because of the very nature of what Madhyamaka is: the deconstruction of any system and conceptualization whatsoever, including itself. If one were to reintroduce into Madhyamaka any notion of an explanatory or justifying approach, one would simply reestablish the very traps that this specific approach is designed to take apart.

However, Centrists certainly do not go to such great lengths to deconstruct our complex and mistaken mental processes merely to arrive at a big black hole of nothing whatsoever.

Nagarjuna's *Commentary on the Mind of Enlightenment* says:

The mind is arrayed by latent tendencies.
Freedom from latent tendencies is bliss.

This blissful mind is peacefulness.
A peaceful mind will not be ignorant.
Not to be ignorant is the realization of true reality.
The realization of true reality is the attainment of liberation.⁴⁶

The contemporary Kagyü meditation master and scholar Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche often gives the following example:

In terms of the sky alone, there is no difference between the sky at night and at day. But in order for rainbows to appear within the sky, there needs to be the quality of light or illumination. If there is just mere empty space with no illuminating quality, rainbows cannot appear. In the same way, blank emptiness cannot give rise to the appearances of samsara and nirvana. Here, space refers to the empty essence of the mind, the light stands for mind's luminous nature, and the rainbows indicate its unimpeded way of manifestation.

If we misunderstand emptiness as mere empty space without awareness, how could this be a liberating realization or even Buddhahood with all its qualities? [161] Furthermore, it would be very difficult to inspire anybody to embark on a path of hard work for all sentient beings for countless eons just to end up in something like a vacuum. The path to arhathood—to be accomplished within a maximum of seven lifetimes—would certainly be the quicker and better option in that case. Thus, what is stripped away on the path is deluded superficial mental

activity, but we are surely not trying to get rid of the nature of our mind. The absence of subject and object, of dualistic clinging, and of any reference point whatsoever does not mean that there is no awareness at all. Pawo Rinpoche comments:

You might ask, “What kind of result comes from meditating on this?” All aspects of discrimination and observation as such and such are reversed. So one knows that there is no phenomenon whatsoever to be attained through anything, which extinguishes [all] hopes for nirvana. Just like knowing that a dream is a dream, one knows that suffering is not observable through its nature. Thus, there is no fear of cyclic existence. Apart from all phenomena just being mere imputations, they neither abide as any nature whatsoever nor do they abide as anything at all. Just that is what is seen as precisely this empty and luminous expanse of mind. This puts you in the position where you have complete power over everything you could possibly wish for, just as if all phenomena were resting in the palm of your hand.⁴⁷

Making the Practice Personal

Practically speaking, Centrism tries to bring the dialogue that we have both with ourselves and others as far as a conceptual or verbal dialogue can possibly go and then has us look for ourselves. The crucial issue here is this: Other than just being intellectual gymnastics, how could this dialogue affect our minds, our subjective experience? From the point of view of personal Buddhist practice, the Centrist approach is not primarily about simply negating all kinds of objects. In terms of mental focus, negating objects is still a somewhat externally oriented conceptual mental activity, even when the object that is negated is one’s own mind, that is, the perceiving subject. Negating should also not be understood as a kind of destruction, in the sense that what exists initially is later blown up by emptiness or reasoning. Rather, this approach is an increasingly refined process of just pointing out that none of these objects of negation—our fixed ideas—ever existed at all. Centrism is about facilitating the insight that there is nothing to all that which we assume to exist in the first place.

At the point of having negated everything in this way—even the negation and the negator themselves—we are taught to cautiously shift our focus to the “inside.” Of course, strictly speaking, there is no focusing going on at this time and also no reference points of “inside” or “outside.” What this means is that our mind directly looks at its own nature in that open space, at the experience of being stripped bare [162] of all clinging and conceptual constructions. What is seen then? Centrists do not give us something to hold on to here—which is their whole point—but as the statements above show, it is certainly not utterly blank nothingness or some kind of coma. It is nothing other than the perfection of knowledge, or prajñāparamita. This is called “personally experienced wisdom realizing the nature of phenomena.” It is also said to be the “Great Madhyamaka.”

In functioning thus as a pointing-out method, Madhyamaka is not really different from the pointing-out instructions in the Mahamudra or Dzogchen approach and is indeed very similar to

certain Zen methods. Of course, technically speaking, the methods of pointing out might appear rather different in these systems, but what is pointed out is not different in terms of experience. This is amply documented by realized beings in these traditions as well as in such texts as the Eighth Karmapa's *Chariot of the Tagbo Siddhas*, Mipham Rinpoche's *Lamp of Certainty*,⁴⁸ and Dödjom Rinpoche's *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*. Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche commented on verse IX.34 of *The Entrance to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

At this point, no other aspects except for the genuine object—the nature of phenomena free from discursiveness—appear for the mind. Therefore, also the perceiving subject—the knowledge that realizes emptiness—abides without any observing or apprehending, in a way that is free from discursiveness. Within the natural state of the object (the nature of phenomena free from discursiveness), also the mind that perceives this is nothing but the complete peace of all discursiveness. This situation is then conventionally called “realizing emptiness.” “Realizing” is just a conventional term, since here, there is nothing to be realized and nothing that realizes, just like water poured into water. Sometimes one also speaks of emptiness as spaciousness, or openness, because it is free from discursiveness.

On the experience of the expanse of dharmas, he explains:

The expanse of dharmas in which the aggregates, the sources, and the constituents display is open, spacious, and relaxed. Here, the conventional term “emptiness” is not used. What is described instead is their natural openness and spaciousness, the expanse of dharmadhatu. In order to reverse our clinging to things as being real, we are taught in terms of emptiness. In order to reverse our clinging to things as being empty, we are taught in terms of the expanse of dharmas, the openness, spaciousness, and relaxedness of the dharmadhatu.

[163] Surely, emptiness understood as the free openness of mind's own true space was at least one aspect that Candrakirti had in mind when he said in his *Entrance into Centrism*:

Those in whom, even as ordinary beings, upon hearing of emptiness,
Great joy wells up from within again and again,
Whose eyes become moistened with tears born from that great joy,
And whose hairs on the body stand on end—

These persons bear the seed of a perfect Buddha's insight.
They are the vessels for the teaching on true reality,
They should be taught ultimate reality,
And it is they who possess the qualities associated with such.⁴⁹

In terms of our own experience, we can easily compare how we feel when we hear the word “empty” and when we hear “open, spacious, and relaxed.” Thus, we have to distinguish between the context of reasoned analysis and looking at our minds in a very direct way. In

order to cut through our reference points and superimpositions through reasoning, it is helpful to talk about things being empty of inherent nature, characteristics, or existence. In this context, “empty” refers to a negation, the absence of real existence or properties. As was said, actual ultimate reality is beyond existence and nonexistence or affirmation and negation. We might wonder then why Centrists always talk in negative terms, such as there being no arising and no ceasing. The reason is that we have a much stronger clinging to existence than to nonexistence. And even if we are nihilists and think that nothing exists, there is still the more or less subtle, reifying notion that “nothing exists.” Hence, the danger of actually clinging to utter nonexistence is very minor in comparison to the deeply ingrained tendency to take everything to be existent. So it is in order to overcome this strong habit of clinging to existence that Centrists keep pounding us with its opposite, the negation of existence. Once this fundamental grasping at existence is overcome, then all other kinds of clinging to certain attributes of what we assume to exist will collapse naturally, just as it is pointless to ponder the color and shape of the horns of a rabbit or how to best construct a ladder out of them.

However, in the context of practicing meditation on emptiness—when emptiness is fundamentally understood as the richness of the nature of our mind—it is also crucial to not reinforce our habitual poverty mentality when we hear the word “empty.” Particularly in experiential terms, it is important to see that when we talk about emptiness, we are surely not talking about it in the negative sense of an empty room or an empty bottle but in the sense of spaciousness, openness, relaxation, and letting go. This means no longer being confined by our own narrow, [164] rigid mental framework. There is another traditional analogy for how to relieve ourselves of fixation and grasping. How can we relieve the pain that is caused by clenching our own fist as hard as possible? Here, leading doctors do not recommend taking painkillers or amputating the hand. We just have to relax our fingers.

In the same way, realizing emptiness has a lot to do with relaxing our clinging mind. It is not merely a matter of following a dry routine of technically negating all the objects of clinging without ever being aware of what this does to the mind that holds on to all these objects. It is crucial to be aware that the actual target of Centrist analysis is not the objects that are refuted but this grasping mind, which—through its clinging to mistaken notions—is the cause of all suffering. However, it is extremely difficult to directly stop it from grasping and make it relax. We cannot simply tell ourselves, “Well, just don’t cling.” This is why Centrism works at inducing certainty that there are no objects whatsoever that would justify any of our clinging. When we realize that there are no objects for our grasping, we can finally relax and let go of self-inflicted pain.

When Centrists say that everything is like a dream or an illusion, the point is not just to establish the objective side of our experience to be illusory or dreamlike but to see what effect this has on our mind as the subjective experiencer. Again, this is not at all to make an ontological statement about how things exist. Centrists do not really care whether things as such actually exist like illusions or in any other way. However, they are very interested in how we feel about and behave toward illusionlike things as opposed to how we feel about and

behave toward solid, really existing phenomena. In his *Treasury of Knowledge*, Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Taye says:

This is like the following example: The realization that it is the nature of space to be accommodating means that space itself has become inseparable from the mental state [that realizes this].⁵⁰

Usually, if we recognize that something is just a dream or an illusion, we do not take it so seriously or fixate on it. It is easier to let go of a bad dream when we recognize that it was just a dream. Being convinced about this makes us relax, which is the aim of Centrist analysis. We learn to relax by becoming convinced that the snake is merely a hose and, apart from our holding on to it, there never was any snake out there, and there is no one in here who could be afraid of it either.

This is also how we evaluate whether our own Centrist analysis has actually become a mind-transforming practice or remains merely intellectual gymnastics. If our mind and the Centrist approach have mixed, we find ourselves more relaxed in encountering the different situations of “real life.” If there is more space in the way we experience and react to these situations, we do not immediately look at people and things from our usual narrow, fixed perspectives, which [165] habitually lead to equally rigid patterns of behavior. At the same time, we see that approaching the realization of emptiness does not mean that we become careless, indifferent, or depressed. Rather, such a development widens our perspective and our awareness of people and situations. It enriches our range of possible actions and reactions in the direction of being more mindful, skillful, and compassionate, since we are less caught up in our own fixation and more free to see other people’s situations. This can surely be regarded as a first step on the path of realizing emptiness or complete openness. On the other hand, it is a serious error simply to say, “Oh, it’s all just an illusion and empty” and not care about anything, especially the suffering of others. This is certainly not the result to be attained through Centrist analysis. So if our genuine interest in other people and our compassion decrease, it is a sure sign that the dharma in general—and Madhyamaka as a personal practice in particular—has not blended with our experience, to say nothing of getting any closer to realizing emptiness.

The process of personally working with Madhyamaka reasoning involves both our wisdom and our ignorance. This can be very interesting and illuminating and at the same time deeply disturbing. It may cause inner resistance to a degree that is hardly expected. On the one hand, when properly applied, the Madhyamaka approach will sharpen and refine our discriminative awareness in a noticeable and broad way, enabling it to function in an increasingly encompassing manner on various levels. This does not refer to just the intellectual realm but also extends into the fields of psychological, emotional, and meditative fine-tuning, which is to say that it is not just a matter of becoming more clever or witty. This process enables us to see more clearly through our fixations and hang-ups in many respects and, as a result, gradually let go of them.

On the other hand, engaging in such analysis exposes our basic and specific ignorance in a very immediate and personal way, which at first might seem to be an unwanted side effect. Sometimes, one's initial reaction to Madhyamaka is to feel stupid or bewildered to the point of utter speechlessness. This shows the deep impact that such an approach may have on our minds. More important, it provides us with otherwise unknown opportunities to have access to the most direct and vivid experiences of the one mental affliction that we usually do not consciously experience: our ignorance or unawareness. We all have plenty of chances to clearly experience all the other afflictions—such as anger, desire, or pride—and are very familiar with them. Although Buddhists always speak of ignorance or basic unawareness as the root of cyclic existence, experientially, we often do not really know what we are talking about here. Of course, we can be aware of our ignorance in the sense of not knowing how to fix our car or where exactly New Guinea is. However, the powerful and profound ignorance that is at the heart of cyclic existence is not just a matter of being ignorant about some facts. It is more the general tendency—on many levels—to be fundamentally [166] unclear about the true nature of one's mind, which leads to becoming caught up in all kinds of beliefs about ourselves and others. Such ignorance contains two aspects: We may be passively ignorant in the sense of not being *able* to look at ourselves and what is going on in our minds, but we may also be actively ignoring things by not *wanting* to look at them and turning away.

One of the characteristics of basic unawareness is that we are literally unaware of our unawareness. Of course, when we think about what unawareness is, it appears obvious that unawareness includes unawareness of itself. However, in terms of our experience, it is precisely because we are unaware of our instinctive and habitual blind spots that we have no idea that we have them; much less do we face them and work on them. So when do we normally get a glimpse of this?

Centrism provides us with the opportunity to gain firsthand insight into how deeply rooted and pervasive our basic unawareness is. Moreover, it lays bare the various intricate layers of this unawareness. Often Centrist reasonings and texts seem overly complex, ramified, and repetitive. However, this is not at all the fault of this system. Centrism is complicated and repetitive only in response to our many layers of complicated concepts, unfounded beliefs, and convoluted trains of thought, most of which are deeply ingrained. Therefore, Centrist texts cannot but go into every little detail we could think of, and even into those that we would not think of. If the targets for Centrist reasoning were just simple issues that are located on the easily accessible surface level of our minds, their discussion could likewise be very simple and straightforward. Obviously, our ability to differentiate and conceptually eliminate what is wrong is not strained when we are only talking about distinguishing tables from chairs. However, we must certainly exercise our discriminative capacity more powerfully when we try to understand subatomic particles and their interactions in quantum physics.

Such discrimination is even more essential when we approach the ultimate nature of phenomena, which is beyond our usual range of cognitions. As was said, this is not an object of any of our present perceptions, such as seeing or hearing, and is also not an object of conceptual mind. So the approach here is basically to refine our initially vague mental image of

emptiness into an increasingly vivid notion by gradually eliminating everything that it is not. Emptiness is so subtle and elusive that the whole range of what needs to be negated in order to define it clearly is not immediately apparent, and the process of conceptually refining our understanding naturally requires many details. This conceptual refinement is of course different from the final point of nonconceptual realization of emptiness, but we cannot reach the latter by simply trying to get rid of thoughts. The Centrist approach enables us to strip away mistaken notions by first creating more “correct” ones and then gradually letting go of the correct ones too, including the vivid notion of emptiness itself. We may also compare our thoughts and our intellect to an axe that has to be sharpened before we can use [167] it to cut down a tree obscuring the view from our window. Afterward, we can let go of this axe, but if we throw it away right at the start and just wish for the tree to fall down by itself—or pretend it isn’t there at all—we get nowhere. Moreover, the process of refining our insight is not based on mere superficial reflection; it must be deeply and repeatedly cultivated through meditation, that is, the unity of calm abiding and superior insight. There is no question that conceptual mind can be a stepping-stone toward an immediate awareness that simply sees what is, without any conceptual distortion. Thus, we use our intellect in a systematic way that eventually leads to its own exhaustion (which is surely also meant in a literal sense!) and gives way to a different perspective altogether: the natural outlook of the nature of our mind, which is neither tied up in thinking nor caught up in ordinary sense perception.

When we look at the seemingly endless and pointless repetitions of the same reasonings in Centrism, we may also understand them as remedies that poke at our awareness, which tends to fall asleep again and again, since our ingrained tendencies instantly cover up much of what we might have detected about our fixations the first or the second time. Centrists would surely prefer to make all of this much easier, but our discursive mental framework, with its billions of reference points, forces them to relate to at least the main principles of mistakenness therein. Many of our clings and delusions are unconscious or so subtle that we do not even know we have them. However, they are to a large extent what determines our thinking and our actions. Centrism brings all of our hang-ups to light and at the same time provides the means to face and dissolve them. However, we usually do not want to give in that quickly but desperately try to hold on to our beliefs, however unreasonable they might be. Thus, the reason Centrist texts are often wordy lies mainly in our multiple defense strategies, be they emotional or argumentative. In fact, if just once in a while we could remember to be aware of our unawareness—to look at some of our clinging instead of letting its underground work continue unnoticed—then that alone could remove a tremendous amount of mental dullness. Looking at this unawareness lifts some of the veils that this unawareness casts over the true nature of our mind but also over itself, which means that unawareness itself usually makes sure that we do not want to look at it. And if we are forced to look at it, with unequalled skill it makes us swiftly turn away and escape.

In this process, there is a definite chance for sudden openness, insight, and gap experiences in the midst of reasoning, in the midst of a tornado of whirling thoughts, and in the midst of the dullest states of mind. The crucial point here is again what this analysis does to our minds and

how we relate to the experiences it brings up. Do we see more clearly? Do we experience more space? Are we becoming more relaxed?

Another striking feature of Madhyamaka analysis is how much emotional resistance [168] it can produce in us. Normally, we do not really want to get into all these reasonings and deconstructions of concepts, and we find all kinds of wonderful rationales for why this is pointless, counterproductive, too intellectual, and so on. The main reason we do this is that the more active part of our ignorance doesn't want us to look at ourselves. We do not really wish to have our belief systems questioned, probably because we have some feeling that they might not be in such perfect touch with reality as we like them to be. We like our little world as intact and secure as we can possibly make it, or at least pretend so. We actually enjoy our tendency to lump together all kinds of—sometimes contradictory—ideas and beliefs and call that sophisticated. Here, the Madhyamaka approach is actually quite down to earth. Centrists basically say, "Sure, in your mind you can think of and define all kinds of things, but that does not turn any of them into something real. So if you think that certain things really exist, you have to either directly show them to us or come up with some good proof for them. If you cannot do either, then where are these things, other than just in your imagination?"

We do not like other people poking around in our private little thoughts and our treasured ideas about ourselves and the world. Everybody or everything that questions them is immediately registered as a hostile threat to "Planet Ego," and all our defense systems gear up. In this sense, the Madhyamaka system is Public Enemy Number One in Ego-land. It does precisely all of this repellent prying into our supposedly private business in a most unnerving and relentless way. It messes up the whole planet—nothing is like before. It even wipes out the defense systems. It does not care about all these signs everywhere that clearly say "off limits—private property—ego-clinging territory." But Madhyamaka just walks straight in and does not go along with our self-cherishing at all. It is as if there is a jumbled storage room in the basement of our mind in which we keep stashing our emotional and conceptual garbage. We try really hard not to look at this mess, let alone clean it up, but Madhyamaka picks up every single piece and holds it under our nose and says, "This thing goes out, and that does too, and all the rest as well. Let's get some space and fresh air in here." It operates with a kind of merciless compassion that does not give up on us, no matter what kind of clever excuses, tricky defenses, or outright escape techniques we might come up with. Somehow it has this tendency to get under our skin and get us at some point, often in unexpected ways. It is like the worst self-unfolding computer virus that sneaks onto our well-protected hard drive of reification and, no matter what we do, wrecks both the software and hardware that run our ego programs, including all firewalls, before it dissolves itself. It affects us even—and maybe most effectively—in the midst of our enormous efforts to ward it off.

Conclusion

It can be overwhelming when we discover this and realize that Madhyamaka analysis and reasoning is not just an intellectual game but can deeply affect us at the basic level of our

personal and emotional existence. Suddenly, we may find [169] ourselves not only working with our various ways of clinging to ourselves and our world but also—and maybe even worse—facing our aversion and resistance to the very remedy for that clinging. However, it is important to regard this not as an additional difficulty but as an intrinsic and crucial constituent of the process of applying the Madhyamaka approach as a practice of personal transformation. It is part of the game, so to speak, to acknowledge, look at, and work with our inner resistance to Madhyamaka analysis at the very time we are engaged in it. There are, of course, other topics that we might be more willing to subject to analysis and mindful introspection, but it is very effective to regard whatever comes up in our mind during that process as an immediate and most suitable object to look into. Our direct experience is our mind in action, which displays the whole range of our habitual patterns right there on the spot, so there is plenty of material to work on. We do not have to look very far beyond ourselves, nor for lofty philosophical concepts or at other people, to find proper objects for Madhyamaka analysis. It is meant personally, and if we allow it to be, it gets as personal as anything could get.

When we read Madhyamaka texts, we might think, “I have nothing to do with all these ancient Indian non-Buddhist schools that are the opponents of Centrists. Why should I bother with what these people said and how they were refuted?” Of course, the point is not just to replay ancient debates as if they were famous historical chess games, without being personally concerned with their content. Moreover, it would be an endless enterprise to precisely identify all the opponents in the Madhyamaka texts and their exact views. However, in terms of applying what is said in the Madhyamaka texts, it is of secondary importance who exactly said what—and often this is impossible to ascertain anyway. Rather, it is helpful to take a closer look at the principles reflected in the various positions under debate. When it comes to the fundamental questions of life, human thought in its principal workings is not so different over time and across cultures as we might think. Who knows, at some point some people might bother to write “modern” Madhyamaka texts that address the whole range of Western philosophy, religion, and science, though this would certainly be a monumental task. In the meantime, if we just compare the “ancient” Eastern views with Western ideas, we will find a lot of concepts that are used in Western philosophy, metaphysics, and science too. The old Indian schools will not, of course, use exactly the same words, but if we understand what their terms refer to, we will recognize many of the same things in Western thought, whether the debate revolves around a primal cosmic substance, a creator god, a final cause of the universe, a permanent personal soul, or issues such as universals versus particulars. And even if we do not find our own specific ideas—or anything of modern Western philosophy or science—in Centrist texts, we still can apply Madhyamaka techniques to look into such ideas, once we have understood the principles of [170] these techniques. After all, they are just tools that can be applied to any view or concept. For example, we could approach what these texts present by asking ourselves whether we entertain similar views. Do they provide some guidelines for looking into our own belief systems? Can they stimulate our reflection and understanding? Madhyamaka texts cannot address every detail of any possible view in the past, present, and future and thus provide everything in a predigested manner. Rather, the debates and refutations in these texts are just exemplary models that are to be applied to our individual mental frameworks and views. The parole is “do-it-yourself.”

The primary prerequisite for this to work—and it is in fact a significant requirement—is to develop the courage and honesty to really let the Madhyamaka approach illustrated in these texts into our world and our private ideas. Some genuine inquisitiveness and willingness to question our own reference systems is necessary here. This is quite different from keeping our private defense strategies intact while we just go through the motions of some impersonal technical reasonings or merely repeat what we read and hear from others about emptiness. Our ego and our various clings could not be happier with this latter approach, since it will leave them completely untouched and might even reinforce them. Then, ego rejoices in security and waves smilingly from the far side of any effort we might make. In such a case, our “practice” and our experience or way of life are two different roads that do not meet.

As with any truly transformative process, when taken to heart, this approach can be—and often has to be—quite disillusioning from the standpoint of clinging to our ego and our world. The word “disillusion” usually has quite negative associations. It indicates that we have lost something dear to us, which is, of course, true for our cherished clings. Actually, however, it refers to something very positive: We see through our illusions and let go of hanging on to them, and thus we realize what is actually there and worthy of being cherished. These different ways of looking at dis-illusionment are reflected in people’s various reactions to the Madhyamaka approach. Depending on what it does to their minds, they may be angry and frustrated or utterly thrilled. Following their usual lighthearted way of putting things, Centrists might well epitomize the path by saying, “Buddhism is one disappointment after another, but, fortunately, enlightenment is the last.”

As was said earlier, Buddhism in general can be understood as a system of increasingly subtle concepts that counteract relatively coarser concepts. This is especially true of the Madhyamaka teachings. The coarser concepts of reality and true existence are remedied by the more subtle concepts that things are like illusions and dreams and do not really exist. However, these remedial concepts also must be remedied by putting them through all four positions of the typical four-cornered analysis and finally letting go of all of them. So the way Madhyamaka [171] works can be compared to a kind of homeopathic remedy: The disease—mistaken conceptualization—is remedied by this same disease in a more refined form; that is, essentially mistaken conceptions perform the provisional function of canceling the coarser symptoms of the disease of confused conceptuality. Just as homeopathy allows the body to regain its natural healthy condition through its own balancing power, Madhyamaka assists our mind in finding its way back to its natural, primordial ease by seeing its own fundamental being. And like a homeopathic medicine, the remedy of Madhyamaka dissolves itself in the healing process that it triggers, since it finally has no ground within the resulting healthy state of realizing ultimate reality.

Some may approach reading Madhyamaka as they would a guidebook, and then follow the path it describes. However, it is a very odd guidebook, in that it only tells us where *not* to go. We are instructed to take neither the path of existence, nor the path of nonexistence, nor the path of both, nor the path of neither. Still, the very process of not entering these paths is walking on a

path. In more positive terms, this is called the five paths or the ten grounds of bodhisattvas. However, it is up to us to figure out exactly how and where to step. There isn't really any broad highway that stretches out straight ahead of us for miles on which we can just blindly stumble along. This path has more of a sudden, instantaneously emerging quality. There is just a tiny new section appearing each moment, and no trodden path or even any traces when we try to look back at the way we came. As though out of nowhere, each inch of this path reveals itself just in the very immediate and intimate moments when we realize why it is pointless to follow one of the other paths that our guidebook identified as wrong. When we clearly see where not to go to the left, the right, uphill, downhill, and so on, we naturally make our mental steps into just the space in between—or around—all these nonoptions. Yet, even one second before our next step, we actually had not the slightest idea where to go or even whether there was a path at all. Thus, we are led up to the point where we have left behind each of the paths that could have led us astray.

At this moment, we realize that we no longer have to watch out for dead ends and misleading routes. Now we just take our nose out of the guidebook for a moment, relax, and look around, and without any warning we happen on this incredible view. We might have completely forgotten about any kind of view while we were busy following this nowhere path. This view comes as completely unexpected, and it is all the more breathtaking, heart-warming, and completely beyond anything we might have imagined. Other than stand and stare, there is nothing left to do—OM. We might wonder why our guidebook never said anything about it and want to check—it's GONE. We might want to look at ourselves who walked on the path and arrived now—GONE. We look around and cannot even see the slightest indication of how we got here—GONE BEYOND. But we know for sure now that there is no further path to be searched [172] for or to be avoided either—COMPLETELY GONE BEYOND. Without anybody looking anywhere, the view is astounding and the panorama enjoys itself—BODHI SVAHA.

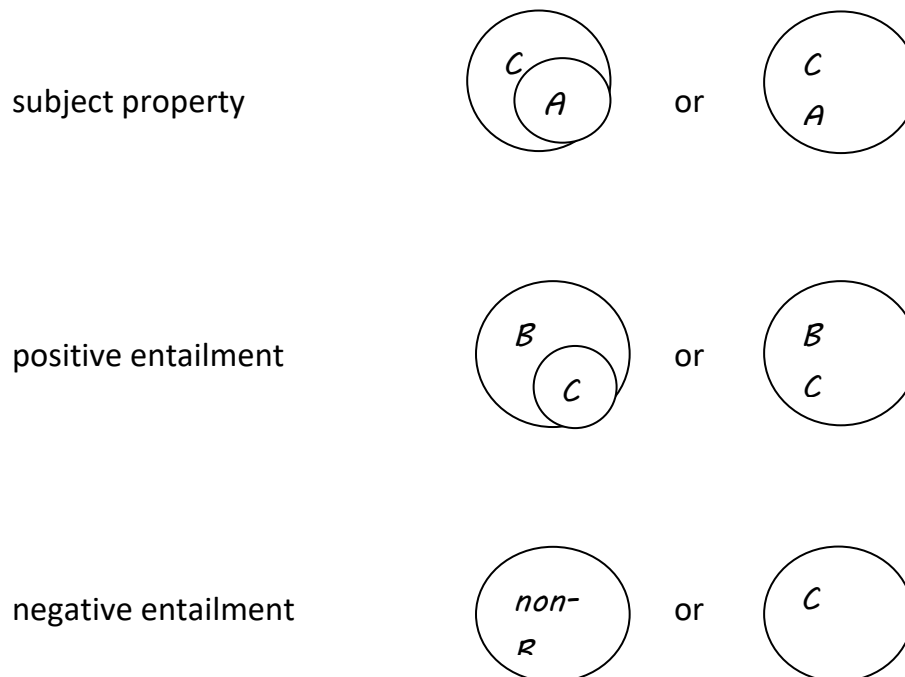
Reasons and Negations

The Three Modes of a Correct Reason

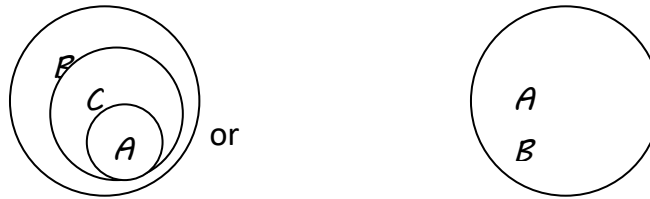
[177] The standard form of a reasoning consists of three parts: the subject, the predicate, and the reason. For example, in the sentence “Sound is an impermanent phenomenon, because it is produced by causes and conditions,” the subject is “sound,” the predicate is “an impermanent phenomenon,” and the reason is “being produced by causes and conditions.” Whether such a reasoning is valid or not mainly depends on the reason. In Buddhist logic, the three criteria to determine a valid reason are called the three modes. The reason in a formal probative argument⁵¹ is a valid means to establish what is to be proven only if the subject, the predicate, and the reason are in correct relationship to each other. The definitions of the three modes are as follows:

- 1) The *subject property* is a reason that has been determined to be present in all instances of the flawless subject in question in a corresponding formulation.
- 2) The *positive entailment* is a reason that has been determined to be present only in the homologous set.
- 3) The *negative entailment* is a reason that has been determined not to be present in a single instance of the heterologous set.

To explain this in a simple way,⁵² let’s call the subject A, the predicate B, and the reason C. The three modes correspond then to the following diagrams:



[178] What is the purpose of these three modes? In terms of set theory, if the reason C includes all of the subject A, and the predicate B includes all of the reason C, then automatically the predicate B includes all of the subject A, which is exactly the thesis (A is B) that one wants to prove: If $C \subseteq A$ and $B \subseteq C \Rightarrow B \subseteq A$.



As should be obvious from the diagrams, the subject, the predicate, and the reason refer to sets of phenomena, not just names or abstract features. For example, “sound” means the set of all possible sounds, and “produced by causes and conditions” stands for all phenomena that are so produced. To give an example, we may say, “Sound is an impermanent phenomenon, because it is produced by causes and conditions.” Here, the reason “produced by causes and conditions” must include the subject “sound,” and the predicate “impermanent phenomenon” must include the reason. In other words, the set of sounds is included in the set of what is produced by causes and conditions, and this latter set is included in—here coextensive with—the set of impermanent phenomena. As a result, the set of sounds is automatically included in the set of impermanent phenomena, which is what is to be proven.

As can be seen from the diagrams, the subject and the reason on the one side and the predicate and the reason on the other side do not necessarily have to be mutually inclusive or coextensive. It is sufficient, if the subject is a subset of the reason and the reason is a subset of the predicate, for example, as in “The sound of a flute played by a musician is an impermanent phenomenon, because it is produced by effort.” Here, whatever is a sound of a flute played by a musician is necessarily something that is produced by effort, but whatever is produced by effort is not necessarily the sound of a flute played by a musician. Likewise, whatever is produced by effort is necessarily impermanent, but whatever is impermanent is not necessarily produced by effort, such as a tree or a river.

In Buddhist reasoning in general, these three modes can be formulated in two ways. One is called “inference for oneself” and the other “inference for others.”⁵³ The first one serves to allow one to understand by oneself what is to be proven, while the second is employed to assist others in understanding what oneself has already understood. An example of a three-membered inference for oneself is:

(1) My own five aggregates as the subject are (2) impermanent, (3) because they are produced by causes and conditions.

[179] The same formulated as an inference for others reads:

(1) Whatever is produced by causes and conditions is (2) impermanent;

- (3) for example, the five aggregates of someone who is dying.
- (4) My own five aggregates too are (5) produced by causes and conditions.

Obviously, the meaning and what is to be proven are the same in both formats. The latter format just adds an example (3) and explicitly states the first mode (4 and 5) and the second mode (1 and 2).⁵⁴

Types of Reasons

Regarding the characteristics of the reasons themselves, in Buddhist logic, one distinguishes three basic types of reasons:

- 1) nature reasons
- 2) result reasons
- 3) reasons of nonobservation

1) The first is a reason that has the same conventional or relative nature as the predicate. To be sure, here, “nature” does not refer to the ultimate nature of phenomena, emptiness, or the like. It is rather a matter of two sets of things being of the same conventional type or the same category. For example, all vegetables have the nature of being or belonging to the category of plants. Thus, one can say, “Carrots are plants, because they are vegetables.” Or, as in the example above, “impermanent phenomena” and “what is produced by causes and conditions” have the same nature in that whatever is the one is necessarily the other. In other words, all impermanent phenomena have the nature of being produced by causes and conditions, and all that is produced by causes and conditions has the nature of being impermanent.

2) Result reasons are reasons that are a result of the predicate and thus prove hidden causal phenomena. For example, when one says, “Behind this hill, there is fire, because there is smoke,” smoke is a result of the existence of fire. Thus, from the direct perception of a result (smoke), one can infer the prior existence of its cause (fire).

3) The definition of a correct reason of nonobservation is “a reason with the three modes in the proof of a probandum that is the negation of a phenomenon, or, completeness of the three modes in the negation of that which is to be negated.” In general, reasons of nonobservation prove the nonexistence of something [180] through the fact that this something is not perceptible or observable through any kind of valid cognition. There are two types of reasons of nonobservation:

- a) reasons of the nonobservation of something that does not appear⁵⁵
- b) reasons of the nonobservation of something that is suitable to appear⁵⁶

a) The definition of a correct reason of the nonobservation of something that does not appear is “a reason with the three modes that negates the conventional expression of ‘definite

existence' by negating the cognizing subject of something that is not suitable to appear." An example is the reason "because there is no valid cognition that could observe a ghost," which proves that the conventional expression "the definite existence of a ghost" does not apply to the area in front of someone who does not have any propensity to perceive ghosts. In brief, this negation serves to clarify that one cannot claim the general existence of private, delusive appearances such as ghosts for everyone just because they may appear from the perspective of certain people. Otherwise, all things such as hallucinations or appearances in the minds of insane people would have the status of general existence for everyone.

b) The definition of a correct reason of the nonobservation of something suitable to appear is "a reason with the three modes that proves both the fact and the conventional expression of 'nonexistence' by negating the cognizing subject of something suitable to appear." This is the sole type of reason that is employed in the Centrist reasonings that analyze the ultimate nature of phenomena or emptiness. The most straightforward way to put this is to say, for example, "In this room, there is no elephant, because none is observable in it through any kind of valid cognition." Usually, if there is an elephant somewhere, given sufficient light and nothing obscuring it, it is clearly observable to the people present whose sense faculties are intact. Thus, the inverse of this—that is, if an elephant is not observable in this place—means that it does not exist there.

There are many more of these kinds of reasoning that indirectly negate the thing in question. In technical terms, these can be summarized into two:

1. reasons of the nonobservation of something connected⁵⁷ (to the predicate of what is to be negated)⁵⁸
2. reasons of the observation of something contradictory⁵⁹ (to the predicate of what is to be negated)

i) Something that is connected to the predicate of what is to be negated can be (1) its conventional nature, (2) any of its results, (3) any of its causes, or (4) a larger category to which it belongs. An example of an unobserved cause is the [181] proof "On this lake, there is no smoke, because fire cannot be observed there." Here, the predicate of what is to be negated is "there *is* smoke." Thus, the fact that the cause (fire) of the phenomenon in question (smoke) cannot be observed at a certain place serves as the reason to negate the existence of this phenomenon (smoke) itself, since smoke is the result that is invariably connected to this cause (fire). In other words, if a certain cause does not exist, its result cannot exist either.

ii) Something that is contradictory to the predicate of what is to be negated may be (1) its nature, (2) its result, or (3) a subset of it. An example of the first is the proof "Right at the location of this blazing fire, there is no coldness, because a blazing fire is observed there." Here, the predicate of that which is to be negated is "there *is* coldness." The opposite of this is that "there is heat, such as a blazing fire." First, the existence of heat somewhere is established through the observation of a blazing fire there. Second, observing a blazing fire and its heat is contradictory to and excludes observing coldness in this very same location. Thus, what is *not*

observed there is coldness, which directly negates the existence of coldness. In this way, the observation of fire indirectly serves as the reason to disprove the existence of coldness. Of course, the examples given here consist of mundane trivialities, but when these reasons of nonobservation are applied to such objects of negation as real existence, an intrinsic nature, or the two types of identity, they get right to the heart of the matter of Centrist analysis.

In general, the first two basic types of reasons—nature reasons and result reasons—are called affirming reasons, since they either affirm a common conventional nature of different things or the conventional existence of something. The third type—reasons of nonobservation—is called a negating reason, since it does not affirm anything but merely negates the existence of something.

Pseudoreasons

Pseudoreasons are reasons in which one or more of the three modes are not established. There are three main types of such mistaken reasons:

- 1) nonapplying reasons (reasons that do not apply to the subject as a means of proof)
- 2) contradictory reasons (reasons that negate their own probandum)
- 3) uncertain reasons (reasons that create doubt about their own probandum)

1) Nonapplying reasons are of five types:

- a) nonapplication for the proponent
- b) nonapplication for the opponent
- c) [182] nonapplication for both (“Sound is permanent, because it is an object of the eye consciousness.”)⁶⁰
- d) nonapplication due to its basis being unestablished, that is, the subject in question being nonexistent (“The present king of France has difficulty wearing his crown, because he is bald.”)
- e) nonapplication because the connection of the subject to the reason is doubtful (“On the middle one of three mountain ridges in front of me, there is a peacock, because I hear the sound of peacock cries.”)

2) Contradictory reasons are of four types:

- a) contradictory reasons that negate the nature of the predicate (“Sound is permanent, because it is produced.”)
- b) contradictory reasons that negate the nature of the subject (“Space can hurt, because it is obstructive.”)
- c) contradictory reasons that negate an attribute of the predicate
- d) contradictory reasons that negate an attribute of the subject

3) Uncertain reasons are of three types:

- a) uncertain reasons in which the negative entailment is most obviously doubtful (“This man has attachment, because he speaks.”)
- b) uncertain reasons in which the positive entailment is most obviously doubtful (“This woman is free from attachment, because she does not speak.”)
- c) uncertain reasons in which both are doubtful (“Living bodies have a self, because they possess a life force.”)

Specific Applications of These Reasons in Buddhism

The particular topics to which nature reasons, result reasons, and reasons of nonobservation are mainly applied on the Buddhist path are respectively the following:

- 1) impermanence
- 2) cause and result
- 3) the two identitylessnesses and emptiness

1) Nature reasons are mainly employed to prove the impermanence of all conditioned phenomena. To be a conditioned phenomenon means first to be produced by certain causes and conditions. Then, the phenomenon’s continuum is sustained by further causes and conditions. Finally, when these specific causes and conditions end at some point, the conditioned phenomenon that was supported [183] by them must necessarily cease too. Thus, it has the nature of being impermanent, since the definition of being impermanent is to arise, abide, and cease. Reflecting on this coarse aspect of impermanence serves as the primary means to reverse our attachment to the things of this life. Reflecting on the notion of subtle impermanence—the impermanence of all conditioned phenomena changing in every moment—leads us to understand emptiness. It is said that whoever understands arising and ceasing will understand impermanence, and whoever realizes impermanence will realize the unity of dependent origination and emptiness. With respect to dependent origination, Nagarjuna’s *Sixty Stanzas on Reasoning* says:

Through understanding arising, one understands ceasing.
Through understanding ceasing, one understands impermanence.
When one understands how to penetrate impermanence,
Also this genuine dharma will be realized.⁶¹

2) Result reasons are used to establish the functioning of cause and result in general. This refers not only to outer or material causes but, more important, to the inner level of causality, which is the operation of karmic causes and results. Karma means that all our physical, verbal, and mental actions or impulses are causes that have effects in the same way any other causes do. In Buddhism, this principle of causality is also employed to establish the continuity of former and later lifetimes. In any case, result reasons infer prior material or mental causes from the

observation of certain material or mental conditioned phenomena in the present that are the results of these causes. Basically, Buddhism says that the functioning of cause and effect means both that something cannot come from nothing and that something cannot become nothing. Otherwise, anything could randomly happen at any time or nothing would ever happen. Moreover, without cause and effect, all intentional actions, such as farming to produce the result of a harvest, would be completely unpredictable or pointless.

Therefore, in Buddhism, it is not really a question of just believing or not believing in the law of karma or former and later lifetimes. Rather, if we generally accept the process of cause and effect, we must acknowledge that it does not make sense to arbitrarily exclude some causal phenomena—that is, certain or all of our physical, verbal, and mental actions—from this general principle. This holds true even if we do not see an immediate result of these actions and hope to have avoided their consequences. In fact, we generally do experience the effects of our impulses, emotions, and thoughts, since our physical and verbal actions are constantly driven by them. When we plan a project or do our work, we do not think at all that our mental activities have no results; we take it for granted that our thoughts and imagination will result in visible actions and products. Also, we know very well the strong and possibly devastating effects of certain mental [184] impulses, such as falling in love or declaring war. That it might take a long time for the effect of some action to ripen cannot be a basis for claiming that this action has no effect. Otherwise, it would equally follow that the movements of the original continents on earth are not the causes for the location and shape of the present continents, since the beings at that time did not experience the effect at present, nor do we at present observe these causes.

It would be highly inconsistent to say that some things or experiences have causes while others do not. This would also imply that there are some causes that have results and others that have no results. How could we reasonably define and distinguish between such phenomena? (In addition, for those phenomena that do not have causes, all the above absurd consequences would apply.) Whenever someone discovers the cause of something that was previously considered a random event—as has happened and continues to happen in science—the entire notion of causelessness or randomness is fundamentally questioned. Moreover, how could uncaused phenomena interact with phenomena that do have causes? If they interacted in a purely random way, even phenomena within an established causal continuum would become random phenomena. And if they interacted in a way that is determined by causes, random phenomena would enter the realm of causality. If there were, however, two entirely separate realms of phenomena, they could not interact at all.

As for the classical proof for the existence of past and future lives, we must first realize that if we accept the principle of causality as functioning in an all-encompassing way, then there have to be infinite chains of specific causes and results. For example, a tree that we see now has a beginningless “case history” of causes and conditions, each of which again entails its own causes and conditions. Likewise, according to Buddhism, the present moment of our mind does not come out of nowhere but arises from the immediately preceding moment of this mind. In other words, mind does not depend on anything other than mind as its specific substantial

cause.⁶² By extending this backward and ahead in time, we naturally arrive at a mental continuum without beginning or end, which manifests as what is called the different lifetimes of cyclic existence. To arbitrarily postulate any starting point or a total extinction of this continuum—such as the beginning or the end of this life—amounts to nothing more than saying that something can come from nothing or something can become nothing. Yet this openly contradicts the notion of cause and result as such in the first place.

Further indications that are adduced for the existence of other lifetimes include facts such as newborn mammals immediately knowing without learning where and how to drink milk from their mothers.⁶³ Furthermore, what would account for the immense range of differences just among human beings even at birth, such as being born healthy or with a severe disease, being intelligent or dumb, being born rich or in a slum, in a loving family or a violent one? How else could [185] one explain that some people “have success” or get rich almost without any effort and others always “have bad luck” or stay poor even if they work hard? Why is it that some children can play complex pieces of classical music at an early age without training or excel at sports, while others are never able to do nearly as well even with a lot of training? Even conventionally, none of these facts can be sufficiently explained by causes that can be found in this present life, but this usually just leads to subsuming them under rubrics such as “fortune,” “fate,” or “talent.” The most fashionable category these days seems to be that “it’s all in the genes.” This is not the place to discuss this issue in detail, but if we just consider how little the genetic code of human beings differs from that of chimpanzees and some primitive worms—by just 1 percent and about 30 percent respectively—it is quite amazing to assume that the genes alone can serve as an explanation for all the differences between humans and other beings. To be sure, these differences do not consist of only physical features but include the entire range of the human mind and its expressions, such as culture, science, philosophy, and religion, not to mention all the mental and behavioral diversity of human beings themselves, who have even less genetic variance from one another.

3) Reasons of nonobservation specifically serve to negate all kinds of imaginary things and mental reference points—such as real outer objects or a self—that are imagined to exist by ordinary worldly persons as well as people who are influenced by certain philosophical systems. Hence, particularly in Centrism, these reasons are not just used to prove the nonexistence of an otherwise existing thing in a certain spot, as in the example of an elephant given earlier. Rather, they are primarily employed to demonstrate the nonexistence of all such hypothetical things that never existed as knowable objects in the first place and thus can neither be directly perceived nor inferred through any means of valid cognition. The general thrust here is that if something that is merely assumed to exist—such as purple rabbits or a real personal self—cannot be observed through any kind of valid cognition, then the only conclusion can be that there is no such thing altogether and that it is just a figment of the imagination.

It is important to distinguish between our concept of, for example, a pink rabbit with wheels and an actual phenomenon that would correspond to this idea. For the mental image of such a pink rabbit has some degree of conventional existence in that it can appear as an object of our thinking mind. Apart from this mere fantasy, though, an actual such animal does not exist and

will never appear to us. As was said before, we can think about anything and create all kinds of imaginary things in our conceptual consciousness. However, the mere fact that we can think of or imagine something that does not actually exist does not make it any more real or existent. Thus, what are “refuted” in Centrism are not actually existing, real things or an actual real self. Rather, since we construct all kinds [186] of imaginary notions about such nonexistents (real things and a self), Centrist reasoning only serves to deconstruct our mistaken ideas. For example, the existence of a lasting, independent, and singular personal self within an individual’s five aggregates is refuted by observing among them only what is contradictory to such a self. This means that the five aggregates consist only of phenomena that are momentarily impermanent, dependent on various causes and conditions, and do not have an identifiable single core, since all of them can be taken apart infinitely. Thus, all that we can observe among them is dependent, not lasting, and not single. This then excludes the existence of anything in these aggregates that is lasting, independent, and singular, such as this hypothetical self.

Within the specific approach of Centrist reasonings, the two kinds of affirming reasons are used to some extent, but solely with respect to seeming reality and by just employing the conventional notions of others, such as in the context of cause and result. When investigating for ultimate reality—that is, when dealing with emptiness or the two types of identitylessness—Centrists solely employ negating reasons of nonobservation. As was explained at length, in emptiness, there is nothing to be affirmed in terms of either nature or existence nor in terms of nonexistence. Thus, when reasoning is applied in the Centrist search for the ultimate, its only purpose is to eliminate wrong ideas and clinging to real existence. Therefore, affirming reasons—as they are used in accordance with conventional dialectics—are impossible and useless here.

Negations

Obviously, the conceptual result of negating reasons is a negation. The general definition of a negation is “a phenomenon to be cognized by the cognition that directly cognizes it through excluding its specific object of negation.” In Indo-Tibetan logic, there are two kinds of negations:

- 1) implicative negations and
- 2) nonimplicative negations.

The definition of an implicative negation is “the implication of another phenomenon as a remainder after the negation of the object of negation by a cognition that directly cognizes the negation itself.” Thus, an implicative negation—which may also be called predicative negation—implies or affirms something else as a remainder after having negated certain features with regard to the subject in question. An example would be to say, “Heaven is not impermanent,” which implies that it is permanent.⁶⁴ The classic example is the statement “Fat Devadatta does not eat during the day.” Being fat shows that he does eat, and what is implied

as a remainder of the negation of eating during the day [187] is another phenomenon: that he eats during the night.

The definition of a nonimplicative negation is “something that is to be cognized by a cognition that directly cognizes it through merely excluding its specific object of negation.” This may also be called “negation of existence,” since it means that the existence of something is negated without affirming or implying anything about it instead. Thus, the cognition that directly cognizes a nonimplicative negation cognizes that part of the sentence that represents the mere exclusion—or the mere negation—of its specific object of negation. It does not, however, cognize or imply any other phenomenon, be it directly or indirectly. Examples of this kind of negation are “the nonexistence of heaven,” “space,”⁶⁵ “emptiness,” and “identitylessness.” In terms of formulating a nonimplicative negation, it does not matter whether there is a grammatical negative in the formulation that represents the mere exclusion of the specific object of negation (as in “the nonexistence of heaven” or “identitylessness”) or whether there is no negative in the actual term (as in “space” or “emptiness”). The point is that, in one way or another, the formulation must indicate the absence of something and not imply anything else in its place.

All Centrist reasonings arrive at nonimplicative negations. There is nothing that is conceptually implied in their analysis of ultimate reality. Therefore, implicative negations are not used in Centrist reasoning for the ultimate. In fact, their use would be counterproductive to the Centrist approach altogether, since they would just supply new reference points by implying something.

In terms of the path, ultimate reality or emptiness has to be realized in two stages: first conceptually and finally within nondual and nonconceptual meditative equipoise. Thus, first one cultivates the particular conceptual consciousness that is based on Centrist reasoning and results from inferential reflection. This is called an “inferential valid cognition.” It is the first type of valid cognition to ascertain ultimate reality, and thus it precedes the second and final type of such valid cognition, which is the direct, nonconceptual realization of emptiness from the path of seeing onward.

The cultivation of an inferential valid cognition of emptiness involves again two steps. First, in order to counteract our habitual strong clinging to the real existence of all phenomena, we have to initially cultivate a number of inferential valid cognitions for which various nonimplicative negations clearly appear, such as the nonimplicative negation that “there is no arising, no abiding, and no ceasing” or that “an intrinsic nature of phenomena does not exist.” Even on the conceptual level, it is very difficult to immediately gain a correct realization of the actual emptiness that is free from the four extremes and the eight reference points,⁶⁶ which means nothing other than the complete lack of reference points. To conceptually arrive at this kind of emptiness is the second stage and at the same time the final result of analytical reasoning.

[188] The negations in both steps are called “nominal ultimate reality,” since they more or less accord with actual ultimate reality on the conceptual level. The most subtle conceptual object “freedom from all reference points” is the mental image that appears to an increasingly refined reasoning consciousness and concords with ultimate reality to the highest degree that is possible for conceptual objects. It is the result of prolonged familiarization with the major Centrist reasonings that are all tailored to tackle our clinging to reference points from various angles. Still, no matter how subtle a concept this final step of nominal ultimate reality may be, whether it is “freedom from all reference points” or “no reference point whatsoever, not even the freedom from reference points,” it cannot in itself go beyond being a subtle conceptual object.

Thus, to approach the direct realization of actual emptiness in a gradual manner, one first familiarizes oneself with a number of nonimplicative negations that progressively negate each extreme and all reference points. Generally speaking, this is the cultivation of inferential valid cognition as the initial direct remedy for the clinging to real existence. It is a series of conceptual cognitions that progress from eliminating more coarse superimpositions to negating very subtle ones. Finally, the nonimplicative negation of “nothing whatsoever” or “emptiness”—that is, no reference point at all—appears. Here, we have to distinguish clearly between the plain fact of there being no reference point whatsoever and how this fact appears to our conceptual reasoning consciousness. When we reflect on the absence of any reference points, the very appearance of the concept that “there are no reference points whatsoever” is not just nothing at all, but it is an object that appears and thus exists for a conceptual consciousness. As such, it is clearly still a reference point in itself.

Second, once there is familiarity with this conceptual remedy, one needs to go beyond it, which means that this subtle reference point of “no reference point whatsoever” has to be abandoned too at some point. As Nagarjuna’s *Sixty Stanzas on Reasoning* says:

Those whose minds are not moved,
Not even by a flicker of a thought about “complete voidness,”
Have crossed the horrifying ocean of existence
That is agitated by the snakes of the afflictions.⁶⁷

In other words, negations that merely negate an actual arising, real existence, and such are conceptual and nominal ultimates. These negations are not free from the more subtle reference points of “nonarising,” “the lack of real existence,” or “the freedom from reference points.” The actual direct experience of there being no reference points—including the reference point of there being no reference points—is the actual or nonnominal ultimate.

[189] If one approaches ultimate reality through this twofold process, it is said that it becomes very accessible even for ordinary beings. In this way, it is definitely possible to develop not only the correct conceptual view of nominal ultimate reality but also the immediate experience and direct realization of genuine emptiness or nonnominal ultimate reality. Santideva describes this process in three crucial verses:

Through familiarity with the latent tendencies of emptiness,
The latent tendencies of entities will be relinquished.
Through familiarity with “utter nonexistence,”
These too will be relinquished later on.

Once this “utter nonexistence” —
The entity to be determined—cannot be observed,
How should a nonentity without a basis
Remain before the mind?

Once neither entities nor nonentities
Remain before the mind,
There is no other mental flux [either].
Therefore, it is utter nonreferential peace.⁶⁸

The commentary of the early Sakya master Sönam Tsemo⁶⁹ (1142–1182) explains:

Proving that the realization of everything as an illusion is the path has three parts:

- 1) Relinquishing clinging to existence
- 2) Relinquishing clinging to nonexistence
- 3) The justification for this

The first refers to “Through familiarity . . .” [lines 32ab above]. When meditating on an object generality⁷⁰ of emptiness, through the power of [this] being mutually exclusive with reification, reification is stopped.

The second refers to “Through familiarity with . . .” [lines 32cd]. “These too” refers to [such] positive [conceptual] determinations [of an object generality] of emptiness. They are relinquished later on. If you wonder why, this is through familiarity [with actual emptiness], without there being any negative or positive determinations whatsoever. “So what is the reason for relinquishing the superimposition of a positive determination of emptiness?”

[190] The justification for this refers to “Once this . . .” [verse 33]. How should nonentities, [such as the negation of entities,] remain before the mind as objects of reasoning? . . . They are without basis, because, through the superimposition that is the negation [of something], the basis [for this negation]—the superimposition of an object of negation—does not exist [anymore]. And if no object of negation is conceived, its negation cannot be conceived [either]. . . . Without a [specific] object of negation being identified, negation would be performed in a [completely] indiscriminate way. Therefore, prior to one’s being certain that a [specific] object of negation is negated, [this object] has to be identified, since otherwise there is no

focusing on this object of negation as the basis [of its negation]. “How can it be that there is no [such focusing]?” [Such happens] once this “utter nonexistence”—the entity to be determined—cannot be observed.

The way in which supreme knowledge without appearance arises refers to “Once neither . . .” [verse 34]. Once entities do not remain before the mind, this means that they are not established on the path of reasoning. Once nonentities do not remain before the mind, this means that a positive determination of nonexistence is not established as the object of reasoning [either]. Then, the object generalities of existence and nonexistence do not appear and there is [also] no clinging to what is outside. Therefore, this is utter nonreferential peace. It is the arising of supreme knowledge that is without appearance in that there is no focus for superimpositions and the continuum of thoughts has stopped. “However, there may be other superimpositions that represent some mental flux [different from] the object generalities of existence and nonexistence. Therefore, it is not necessarily established that [this knowledge] is without any appearances at all.” There is no other mental flux, because there is no [possibility] other than existence and nonexistence.⁷¹

Thus, it is explained that, after exhausting the power of terms, conceptions, and objects of negation as well as their remedies, the ensuing mental peace is similar to having finally recovered from some serious hardship or struggle.

Centrist treatises set up the positions of others and then analyze them by using a great number of reasonings. However, none of this happens out of hatred of other systems or a mere enjoyment of dispute. Rather, it is done solely from the perspective of others and their benefit, that is, in order to put an end to their intense clinging, bound as they are through the web of their conceptions. As *The Entrance into Centrism* says:

[191] The analyses in [Nagarjuna’s] treatise were not performed out of attachment to debate.

[Rather,] true reality has been taught for the sake of complete release.

It may well be that while explaining true reality

The scriptures of others become ruined, but there is no fault in this.⁷²

Therefore, the whole spectrum of reasoned analysis that is employed in Centrist treatises is nothing but an approach that aims at putting an end to the other party’s conceptions that are engaged in superimposition and denial. However, once superimposition and denial have been eliminated, the bare and direct realization of the actual nature of phenomena does not arise through the force of thorough analysis, because this true nature is not an object that can be analyzed or grasped through study, reflection, or conceptual meditation. Thus, *The Entrance into Centrism* says:

Ordinary beings are bound by conceptions.

Nonconceptual yogins will find release.

Hence, the learned state that the result of analysis
Is that conceptions are at peace.⁷³

Here, three things about every nonimplicative negation, no matter how subtle or all-encompassing, should be very clear. First, a negation is by definition exclusively an object of a conceptual consciousness, that is, an inferential valid cognition. It can never be an object of a direct and nonconceptual valid cognition, since the process of negating and its object are of a conceptual nature. Second, since it appears as a conceptual object, in terms of the categories of existents and nonexistents, this negation itself is still considered an existent phenomenon for the conceptual mind. It is the subtle form or way in which “nonexistence” or “the freedom from reference points and extremes” appears to the reasoning consciousness. Therefore, this conceptual object “nonexistence” is not in itself nonexistent, nor is it in itself the actual freedom from all reference points and extremes. Third, one must eventually let go of both this conceptually appearing object—the negation—and the dualistic cognition for which such an object appears, in order for it to give way to the nonconceptual wisdom that directly realizes the actual emptiness free from all reference points.

As Pawo Rinpoche states, a negation is nothing but an imputation by a mind that clings to nonexistence, and an affirmation is just an imputation by a mind that clings to existence. In light of the true nature of phenomena, all clinging—no matter to what—is simply mistaken. Nonimplicative negation is just a technical term whose meaning refers to nothing other than what is normally understood by “nonexistence.” Thus, in this context of Centrist reasoning, the [192] meaning of the nonimplicative negation “being nothing whatsoever” refers to the complete nonexistence of reference points. A sutra states:

Those who understand this dharma of “being nothing whatsoever”
Will be without attachment toward all phenomena.

In this way, it is clear that such a nonimplicative negation is just a step toward the direct realization of actual ultimate reality. Otherwise, if ultimate reality itself were nothing but a nonimplicative negation, then it would just be some conceptual kind of nonexistence in the sense of nothing whatsoever. On the other hand, if ultimate reality were an implicative negation or something affirmative, then it would be something actually existent. Obviously, none of these categories applies to the actual or nonnominal ultimate, and there is no third possibility.

The Eighth Karmapa denies both the position that ultimate reality is a nonimplicative negation (or even one that is supposed to withstand analysis) and the position that ultimate reality is completely inexpressible. It seems that the first scholar to explicitly identify the ultimate as a nonimplicative negation was Chaba Chökyi Senge.⁷⁴ Later, Tsongkhapa and his followers also adopted this position and held that actual emptiness is a nonimplicative negation that withstands analysis. However, if it were possible to arrive at something that withstands analysis, such as the nonimplicative negation “the lack of real existence,” this would turn the whole project of Centrism—the demonstration that there is nothing that withstands analysis—

upside down. As was explained above, this point is expressed many times in numerous Centrist texts as well as in the *Prajñaparamita sutras*:

I declare that all phenomena including nirvana—and even if there were any phenomenon more supreme than that—are illusionlike and dreamlike.⁷⁵

The point that there is nothing that can withstand analysis is also the major reason for the detailed presentation of the twenty emptinesses, for each of them serves to eliminate specific and increasingly subtle aspects of holding on to something real. Moreover, since such a nonimplicative negation is supposed to withstand analysis while at the same time being exclusively a conceptual object, there would be no way to ever abandon it in order to directly realize genuine ultimate reality (as described by Santideva above). There would not even be a need to abandon this nonimplicative negation and proceed to a direct realization of ultimate reality, since such a negation already *is* the actual ultimate reality.

An exemplary proponent of the view that ultimate reality is absolutely inexpressible was Tsang Nagpa Dsöndrö Senge.⁷⁶ From this position, it would absurdly follow that—just from the perspective of how Centrists appear to others—[193]those Centrists who, through their skill in means, teach or say anything about true reality would not be Centrists. This would mean that Centrists who negate real existence would not be Centrists. Also, if ultimate reality could not be expressed at all, it would be utterly pointless that the Buddha taught the *Prajñaparamita sutras* and that so many Centrists have composed voluminous texts.

In brief, nonnominal ultimate emptiness—the actual object of the wisdom in the meditative equipoise of noble ones—is beyond either withstanding or not withstanding analysis. In itself, it is inexpressible. On the other hand, the nominal emptiness in the form of a nonimplicative negation that is the object of the worldly valid cognition of a reasoning consciousness⁷⁷ definitely cannot withstand analysis. This is also clearly indicated by Santideva’s third verse above. Nevertheless, there is no problem in Centrists’ skillfully using such names as “ultimate reality” or “emptiness” for that which is essentially without name. Thus, since they employ such illustrative designations to point to the ultimately inexpressible true reality, it cannot be said that they are unable to conventionally express it. The Eighth Karmapa emphasizes that this is a very subtle and essential point in the Centrist approach.

What Is the Object of Negation in Centrist Reasonings?

What is refuted through Centrist reasonings? Technically speaking, it is the notion of some real and intrinsic existence or nature of phenomena. This refers to the concept that phenomena exist in an independent way, in and by themselves. If something does not depend on any other factors extrinsic to it—causes, conditions, time, or circumstances—for its existence but stays the same no matter what happens, then it is real in the sense of being unchanging and independent. If some phenomenon really were independently existent in its own right, such independent existence should become even more obvious when it is analyzed. However, in

fact, the opposite is the case. The more we look for an inherently existing thing, the less we find it. This unfindable real or independent existence is the direct object of negation that is refuted throughout Centrist texts, whether it applies to the true existence of a personal self or the inherent existence of any other phenomenon. On the other hand, whatever is under the influence of something else and thus originates in interdependence with various conditions is not ultimately real in the above sense but is just something that appears and functions on the level of seeming reality. Thus, from the perspective of their mere appearance and dynamic fluctuation, the entire display of seemingly “outer” objects, “inner” minds that perceive them, and so on is not the target of Centrist refutations. Mere illusionlike appearances as such are not the Centrist objects of negation. As Jñanagarbha’s *Distinction between the Two Realities* says:

[194] What has the character of appearance
Is definitely not negated.
It is not appropriate to negate
That which is experienced.

Such aspects as “arising”
Are not what appears.
We negate what is imputed by others,
Such as that [these imputations] are knowable objects in actuality.

Therefore, here it is appropriate
To negate solely such imputations.
Negating what is not an imputation
Is only to harm oneself.⁷⁸

First, it makes no sense to negate what are merely temporary appearances, since there is no way that we could just reason them away. For example, as long as the eyes of someone with blurred vision are not freed from their defects, mistaken visual objects such as floating hairs or double moons will continue to appear for this person. Likewise, the illusionlike appearances of the six consciousnesses will not subside as long as the cognitive obscurations and their latent tendencies that trigger such appearances have not been relinquished, no matter how many reasonings are flung at these appearances.

Nor is there any need to negate mere appearances, because our afflictions and sufferings do not originate from them; they originate from our clinging to them as being real. Just as an illusionist does not cling to the appearance of a handsome young man that was created by her own power, we will not be bound in cyclic existence if we are not attached to its appearances despite their seemingly real existence. On the other hand, just as a naïve audience develops desire for this illusory young man, we cling to the reality of fleeting appearances, and our afflictions increase. If it would work to deliberately negate these mere appearances, then emptiness would be nothing but utter blank nonexistence. Also, if training in meditation on emptiness just meant cultivating a total negation in the sense that nothing exists at all, it would be equivalent to falling into the extreme of extinction or nihilism.

Thus, it is said that mere appearances as such are not what is refuted in Centrism. However, that it is not possible to negate them has to be taken with a grain of salt. Initially, through Centrist reasonings in the context of studying and reflecting, the coarser portion of our clinging that takes these illusionlike mere appearances to be real things is eliminated. This stops the manifest clinging to their real existence. Later, through combining the power of the knowledge gained from [195] studying and reflection with the meditative equipoise that is the unity of calm abiding and superior insight, the undefiled knowledge or “reasoning” that springs from meditation arises. Once even the latent tendencies for real appearances have been eradicated in this way, also the subtle portion of the clinging to reality—which manifests as the appearance of illusionlike mere appearances—becomes pure like space without any reference points. For example, for someone who suffers from blurred vision and mistakenly clings to the appearance of some black dots against the background of a white cup, a skilled physician first clarifies that these dots do not exist by saying, “They only appear because of your disease.” By understanding that these dots do not exist, the sick person puts an end to her misconception of there really being such dots in this cup. Nevertheless, since the cause for the plain appearance of these dots has not yet been removed, they still appear. Hence, in order to stop their appearance, the physician has this person take a potent medicine that eliminates blurred vision altogether. Once the disease has been removed, the “dots” are just like space without any reference points.

Therefore, as long as seeming appearances have not been put to an end, it is reasonable to make efforts to eliminate them, such as being heedful with regard to cause and result while meditating on the emptiness of all phenomena. On the other hand, within the meditative equipoise of yogic practitioners who see that all phenomena are free from reference points, there is nothing to be eliminated. However, without these considerations, to say that it is neither possible nor necessary to negate mere appearances through reasoning may become rather absurd. For, if one is not able to negate mere appearances, they would then be ultimate reality, because they are something that withstands analysis and cannot be invalidated through reasoning. It would furthermore follow that worldly people cannot realize true reality, because it is impossible to negate the really existing phenomena of seeming reality. For, if they cannot be negated through reasoning, they also cannot be negated or stopped through the path of meditation. And if they cannot be negated or stopped through either reasoning or the path, there is no other means to put an end to them.

Thus, Centrist reasonings address the basic tendency of mistaking appearances as really existing phenomena and a really existing self, including all the ramifications and implications of such misconceptions. However, when Centrists speak about “real existence,” this does not mean that “real existence” is some factor or element that is extrinsic to the phenomena that appear to us. For example, that visible form lacks real existence does not mean that visible form is empty of some real existence that is something other than this visible form itself. As *The Entrance into Centrism* says:

Since it is its nature,

[Visible] form is empty of [visible] form.
[196] Sound, smell, taste, tangible objects,
And also phenomena are just like that.⁷⁹

Candrakirti's autocommentary explicitly explains this point:

Here, one speaks about emptiness [as the fact] that the eyes and so on [are empty] of these very eyes and so on. This makes it completely clear that [this is] the emptiness of a nature, whereas it is not an emptiness of one not existing in an other, [such as] "the eye is empty, since it lacks an inner agent" or "it is empty of the nature of apprehender and apprehended."⁸⁰

In brief, to say that form lacks or is empty of real existence means exactly the same as to say that it lacks a nature or characteristics of its own, that form is empty of form, or, that form is not different from its emptiness. As *The Prajñāparamita Sutra in Hundred Thousand Lines* says:

Subhuti asked: "How should bodhisattvas train to understand that all phenomena are empty of their own specific characteristics?"

The Blessed One said: "Form should be seen as empty of form, feeling empty of feeling, and so on."

Subhuti asked: "If everything is empty of itself, how does the bodhisattvas' engagement in the perfection of knowledge take place?"

The Blessed One answered: "Such engagement in the perfection of knowledge is non-engagement."⁸¹

The Heart Sutra states:

Form is emptiness; emptiness is also form. Emptiness is no other than form, and form is no other than emptiness.

So what exactly is this notion of real existence? On the objective side, it is nothing but a vague idea or mental image. When we think or say "I" or "chair," these are just terms, but at the same time we seem to sense a more or less vague something that floats around in our conceptual mind and to which these terms supposedly correspond.⁸² Depending on how much we are influenced by certain views or philosophical systems, these vague conceptual objects may be elaborated into a more or less sophisticated conceptual construct, such as an eternal soul or [197] a real cosmic substance with all its features. However, what is the stuff that these mental images themselves are made of? As long as we do not look too closely at our notions, such as "I" and "chair," they seem to exist and function in a way that feels very natural and real. We might just say, "Of course, I know who I am and what a chair is, and now I will sit down on one." However, as soon as we try to pinpoint—or even analyze—these notions, they become

extremely elusive. In fact, the more we look at the ideas that seem to drift through our mind and try to identify them, the less we can find them. This is not because we are not searching properly but simply due to them being the imaginary phantoms that they are.

So we might wonder what good it will do us to refute such phantom ideas. In fact, these figments of our imagination are not the actual problem to be remedied. They are just the objects of negation as they are identified and set up in the formulations of Centrist reasonings. The actual problem that causes us suffering—and the real target of Centrist reasoning—is the subjective side of these imaginations: the fact that we take them to be real, cling to them, and behave as if we and the world around us existed in a way that exactly corresponds to their appearance. Therefore, the way in which Centrist reasonings touch upon our experience is that they indirectly undermine our subjective clinging to the fixed ideas of a real self and real phenomena by directly demonstrating that there is nothing to which these really refer and nothing that corresponds to them. Therefore, it is crucial to see that Centrist reasoning does not mean just shooting at some dead concepts while leaving our direct, living experience of ourselves and others completely untouched. When they are investigated, it becomes clear that our mistaken notions are rootless and baseless. Thus, none of them has ever existed as an object in the first place. However, as long as we take them for granted as real objects, our subjective holding on to them will lead to all the well-known consequences. The only way to let go of them from the side of the experiencer is to realize that there is nothing on the object side that would justify our grasping, just like realizing that a tree in the dark is not a monster.

When we analyze the term “object of negation” in Centrist reasoning, it is obvious that the two types of identity or “real existence” do not exist as actual objects to be negated. They are mere imputations or fictions, since the existence of a permanent, singular, and independent personal identity within the range of all phenomena is impossible. Any other entity that is really established through an intrinsic nature of its own is equally impossible. Since there is thus no actual object of negation on the objective side, there never was or will be anything to be relinquished there. Hence, on the objective side, the object of negation of reasoning is just something that is conceptually imagined by a mistaken cognition, while it does not exist as an object of any unmistaken cognition. For example, from the perspective of a conceptual consciousness that misapprehends a twisted tree in the dark as a monster, a mere imagination of a monster appears. This [198] imagined conceptual object does not itself exist as a monster, nor does it refer to an actual monster out there. However, without our thoughts erroneously setting up this wrong conceptual object of a monster, subjectively, the ensuing mental states of clinging to the existence of this imagined monster and becoming afraid of it would never arise. This is something that is established for everyone in the world by direct experience.

The same relation between conceptual objects and subjects applies to reasoning. On the conventional level, one may set up the proof that “sound is impermanent, because it is produced by causes and conditions.” Here, the opposite of what is to be affirmed or proven—“sound is impermanent”—is the object of negation of reasoning, that is, “sound is permanent.” This wrong concept “sound is permanent” exists as a phenomenon that is imputed by the corresponding mistaken conceptual consciousness that takes it as its object. However, this

concept does not exist as an object of any unmistaken cognition. Therefore, Nagarjuna said that, on the level of no analysis, all elements of the triad of the object of negation, the means of negation, and the act of negating are presented in mutual dependence. When analyzed, however, there is utter freedom from these three mental reference points. Thus, in the Centrist system, all objects of both negation and affirmation are merely imputedly existent and not substantially existent,⁸³ nor are they existent in any other real way. If the object of negation of reasoning were not something that is merely imputed, this would contradict the fact that it cannot be found when searched for.

On the subjective side, when it is said that the actual object of negation of the two identitylessnesses is the clinging to these identities, this does not literally mean that this mistaken cognition itself can be negated or annihilated. Rather, when the term “object of negation” is used with regard to the subjective side of our wrong notions, it is just a technical term that indicates that it is nothing but our habitual grasping to reference points that we have to let go. Of course, from the Centrist point of view, this grasping itself is not something real either. However, in a dualistic mind, as long as there is the mistaken notion of a certain object, there will also be the notion of its subject. Only by realizing that the object is illusory can the subject that holds on to it dissolve naturally. On the other hand, if there were any object of negation that is not just an imputation but is established as a really existing entity, we would not be able to negate or relinquish it, no matter how we tried. For it is impossible to negate or eliminate something that actually exists or, for that matter, prove the existence of something that does not exist in the slightest.

Thus, for Buddhist reasoning and meditation to be soteriologically efficient, we must understand that their actual target is not found on the objective level in the form of a real personal or phenomenal identity. Rather, the actual impact of study, reflection, and meditation always lies on the subjective level. This means [199] that we first uncover and then undermine all the largely unconscious and instinctive forms of grasping at the two identities in order to let go of them and enable our mind to rest relaxed in its own natural ease.

In more technical terms, in the context of the knowledge gained through study and reflection, the actual object of negation of reasoning is the instinctive mistaken mode of cognition that, based on our fundamental unawareness, imagines the two kinds of identity (personal and phenomenal) and takes them to be really existent. This very tendency to reify where there is nothing to be reified is also what we have to release in our meditation practice. Thus, it is also the object of negation of the path of yogic valid perception that arises from meditation. In this way, our innate clinging to personal and phenomenal identities is the actual object of negation through both reasoning and the path. *The Entrance into Centrism* says:

First, we cling to our self, saying “me,”
Then we develop attachment to things, saying “this is mine.”

Through mentally seeing that afflictions and mistakes without exception
Originate from the views about a real personality

And realizing that the self is the object of these [views],
Yogic practitioners negate a self.⁸⁴

Thus, Centrist reasonings primarily work on the experiencing and clinging mind. Consequently, the way to evaluate their effectiveness is to look at what happens to this mind in terms of becoming more flexible and relaxed both during the reasoning process up through gaining incontrovertible certainty and while familiarizing oneself with this certainty in meditation.

The Status of Valid Cognition in Centrism

The Emptiness of Valid Cognition

In general, the Buddhist teachings on valid cognition as systematized by Dignaga and Dharmakirti assert two types of valid cognition: perceptual valid cognition and inferential valid cognition. These are commonly accepted as undeceiving and reliable means of knowledge. To Centrists, though, just like any other phenomena, they are not exceptions to being empty of a nature of their own. Consequently, all epistemological means and logical techniques are denied the status of true validity or reality. They only serve as illusory remedies for illusory delusions and in fact are not any different in nature from the delusions that they help to overcome. As Atisa's *Entrance into the Two Realities* clearly says:

Perceptual and inferential cognition—
These two are accepted by Buddhists.
[200] Only narrow-minded fools say
That emptiness is realized by these two.

and

Perceptual and inferential cognition are useless.
It is just for the sake of refuting non-Buddhist opponents
That the learned ones have promoted them.

The learned master Bhavya said
That the scriptures are clear about
[The ultimate] being realized neither through
Conceptual nor nonconceptual consciousnesses.⁸⁵

In his *Rebuttal of Objections*, Nagarjuna invalidates the standard objections to the Centrist approach and elucidates the nature of its dialectic approach. He denies the notion of valid cognition altogether:

If your objects
Are well established through valid cognitions,
Tell us how you establish
These valid cognitions.

If you think they are established through other valid cognitions,
There is an infinite regress.
Then, the first one is not established,
Nor are the middle ones, nor the last.

If these [valid cognitions] are established even without valid cognition,
What you say is ruined.
In that case, there is an inconsistency,
And you ought to provide an argument for this distinction.⁸⁶

His autocommentary on these verses first describes the position of others: “The objects to be validated are established through valid cognitions. Just like these objects to be validated, the validating cognitions themselves are established through other valid cognitions.” Nagarjuna argues that such a process of validating these validating cognitions would never be finished, since each one that is supposed to validate the preceding one in turn needs another one to validate itself. Thus, one would never even get close to validating the actual objects to be validated. On the other hand, someone might think, “These valid cognitions are established even without other valid cognitions, since they establish the objects to be validated.” [201] This statement, however, contradicts and thus ruins the claim that “valid cognitions establish their objects.” For there is the internal inconsistency that certain objects would be established through valid cognition, while others—the valid cognitions themselves—would not. To account for such inconsistency, a further argument would have to be provided; that is, there would need to be a reason that only some objects are established through valid cognition. Since nobody is able to come up with such a reason, this latter position is untenable too.⁸⁷

Nagarjuna further argues that if valid cognition were established as valid cognition through itself alone, it would not be dependent on anything else, not even on its own object to be validated. So, of what would it be a valid cognition? It basically would be a consciousness that is not conscious of anything, which by definition is impossible. On the other hand, if valid cognition is established through its object to be validated, how is this object established in the first place? If it is already established before and without valid cognition, what need is there for any further cognition to validate it? Furthermore, if valid cognition establishes the object to be validated and the object in turn establishes what valid cognition is, then neither of them is really established as such. They are just mutually dependent. One might think that this is just like a child being produced by its father and the father being made into a father through his child. In that case, though, what is produced by what? It is not possible that the same thing is both the cause and the result of something else.

Thus, valid cognitions are neither really established through themselves alone, nor through other valid cognitions, nor through their objects to be validated, nor through mutual production, and also not without any cause at all.⁸⁸

Some opponents try to turn the tables on Nagarjuna:

“If a nature of all entities
Does not exist in any of them,
Your words are also without nature
And cannot refute a nature.

However, if these words have a nature,
Your earlier claim is ruined.
As there is such inconsistency,
You should provide an argument for this distinction.”

and

“Arguments are not established,
Because they are without nature, so where is your argument?
Once the absence of a reason is established,
Your point cannot be proven.

[202] If, however, the rejection of a nature were established
Even without your having an argument [for this],
Then it is also established that there is a nature
Even though we do not have an argument [for it].

However, if arguments exist, it is unjustified
That entities are without nature.
Nowhere is there any entity to be found
That is without nature.”⁸⁹

Nagarjuna’s ultimate answer is as follows:

My words are without nature.
Therefore, my thesis is not ruined.
Since there is no inconsistency,
I do not have to state an argument for a distinction.⁹⁰

Nagarjuna readily agrees that his words—just like all other things—are also empty, without a nature of their own. Therefore, his own “thesis” that “all entities are without nature” is not ruined, since it is also empty and there are no nonempty—that is, really existing—words to establish it.⁹¹ He never said that his words are not empty while all other things are empty. So

there is no difference between theses or words and any other things in that they all lack any intrinsic nature. Therefore, Nagarjuna does not have to distinguish between empty things on the one hand and “real” words to prove a “true” thesis on the other. However, this categorical answer seems to render Centrism itself completely obsolete, since it eliminates any possible ground for engaging in the process of reasoning altogether. If everything is empty—including the means to come to this conclusion—any use of arguments seems to be utterly pointless, since there is nothing to be affirmed or negated and nothing that could affirm or negate anything.

Natureless Reasonings to counter Natureless Ignorance

So is this the final word in Centrism? Ultimately speaking, yes, but in terms of the path, Centrists indeed bother to employ natureless reasonings to take care of our natureless ignorance that otherwise would result in natureless suffering for natureless sentient beings. The only reason they do so is to help us realize that things have no nature. Usually, logic and reasoning are employed to establish and defend certain positions or reference points to which a certain reality is ascribed. However, Centrist reasonings are not refutations in the sense of rejecting an opponent’s view and promoting one’s own view instead. The Centrists’ whole point is to dissolve our already existent reference points and the clinging to them. They definitely do not try to provide new views or reference points to which to cling. This is precisely what they are very careful to avoid. [203] Thus, their use of logic and reasoning is a critique of reasoning through reasoning itself.

To be consequent in eliminating all views without exception, this same principle must be applied equally to all types of mistakenness and clinging that are entertained by both oneself and others. However, it is not only a matter of being consequent. More important, the main purpose in dissolving all systems and reference points, including one’s own, is to bring about liberation from clinging to really existing things, which is what ties beings down in cyclic existence. For how could the deconstruction of all views be helpful in any other way than to eradicate and prevent this same basic mistake of reification that we all constantly make and that causes us to suffer?

If both what is refuted and what refutes are without a nature, this naturally begs the question of how such empty reasonings could be effective in any way. Nagarjuna answers:

Just as one magical creation may be annihilated by an[other] magical creation
And one illusory person by another person
Produced by an illusionist,
This negation is the same.⁹²

The audience watching a magic show or a movie may experience one illusory being killing another. However, both the being that appears to be the killer and the one that is killed are empty; they are not really existent. Likewise, in the context of seeming reality, it is justified that

the empty and illusory words of Nagarjuna's negations can negate or cancel out an illusory assumed nature of all things, thus arriving at the conclusion that all things are empty. Therefore, Centrists employ reasoning and such as expedient tools in their discourses only inasmuch as these tools have a certain effectiveness as illusory remedies against illusory fixed ideas. In other words, an illusionlike thesis may be deconstructed by an illusionlike refutation, since the latter has some conventional remedial power within the framework of seeming reality that appears due to fundamental ignorance. Santideva sets up the question and then addresses this issue:

"If valid cognition is not valid cognition,
Isn't what is validated by it delusive?
In actuality, the emptiness of entities
Is therefore unjustified."

Without referring to an imputed entity,
One cannot apprehend the lack of this entity.
[204] Therefore, the lack of a delusive entity
Is clearly delusive [too].

Thus, when one's son dies in a dream,
The conception "He does not exist"
Removes the thought that he does exist,
But it is also delusive.⁹³

Here an opponent objects that if there is no valid cognition, there can also be no object that is validated or found by it. Since all Centrist reasonings are supposed to point to emptiness, emptiness—as the outcome of such invalid reasonings—equally cannot be established as valid. Ultimately, Santideva and all Centrists simply agree with this, since there is nothing to be found, established, or negated and also nothing to be validated or invalidated. It is precisely this actuality that is called emptiness. As for the term "emptiness" itself, it is part of the means that assist in the realization of this actuality on the seeming level. One reason is that the negation of something has to depend on a preceding notion of the existence of this given something. For example, one cannot speak or think about the nonexistence of a table without having the notion of a table in the first place. Another reason is that communication and conceptual understanding have to rely on conventional notions or terms—which are always imputations—in order to be capable of pointing out what they refer to. For example, if one does not rely on the conventional term or notion of "space," one is not able to understand what it refers to, that is, the absence of things. Thus, without employing the mere imputation of "emptiness" (nominal emptiness), one is not able to apprehend what it points to (nonnominal emptiness): the actual experience that all imputations (including the one of emptiness) do not exist.

Here, Santideva's point is that existence and nonexistence can negate each other even if they are both dreamlike. For example, in a dream in which one's child has been born and then dies, there is definitely no difference between the child's birth and its death inasmuch as both are

unreal dream appearances. Still, because of the experience in the dream that the child is born, the thought “My child exists” arises. When it then appears to die, the dreamer thinks, “My child has died and does not exist anymore.” In the context of such a dream, this latter thought has the capacity to remove the earlier notion that “my child exists.” However, since both the existence and the nonexistence of this child are equal in being dream appearances, they are alike in being delusive. Likewise, the lack of a nature applies to both what negates and what is negated.

In order to counteract the clinging to existence, the approach of negating existence with nonexistence is useful despite the temporary danger of clinging to emptiness as being mere nonexistence. Sentient beings wander in cyclic existence [205] because they cling to the reality of delusive things that are mere appearances. Therefore, the understanding that these very appearances are unreal and illusionlike may surely serve as a provisional remedy for their clinging to real things. However, the imputation of the nonexistence of such delusive appearances—“emptiness”—is clearly delusive too. Hence, applying the notion of emptiness is nothing more than engaging in a particular (more subtle) reification, that is, apprehending emptiness, as the remedy for another (coarser) reification: conceiving of things as real. Still, the overall result of this process is an increase in wisdom. Thus, in his *Entrance into Centrism*, Candrakirti also illustrates it through a positive example:

Though [the reflection of one’s face in a mirror] is not real, it is there for the purpose of beautifying this face.

Likewise, also here, our arguments are seen

To have the capacity of cleansing the face of knowledge.

It is to be understood that what is to be proven is realized even through [arguments] that lack justification.⁹⁴

The Eighth Karmapa comments that the reflection of one’s face that appears in a mirror is not real in the sense of actually being one’s face. Still, on the level of no analysis, this reflection appears and may serve as a support for beautifying one’s face, by shaving or putting on makeup. The same applies in the context of negating the assertions of the world through reasons that are acknowledged by others. It becomes evident to other disputants that Centrist arguments have the capacity of cleansing the stains of ignorance from the face of knowledge. This means that, from the perspective of these people, Centrist invalidations, such as “being empty by nature,” possess the power to invalidate what is to be invalidated and to prove what is to be proven. One should understand that what is to be proven is realized even through arguments that are just acknowledged by others, while lacking any justification through the three modes of a reason that are established by their nature.

In his *Rebuttal of Objections*, Nagarjuna presents a counterargument and then refutes it:

“If what lacks a nature

Could stop what lacks a nature,

Then what lacks a nature would cease

And a nature become established.”

If [you say that only] existents can be negated,
Is emptiness then not well established?
[206] For you negate the nonexistence
Of a nature of entities.

As for the emptiness that you negate,
If this emptiness is nonexistent,
Does that not ruin your statement
That [only] “existents can be negated?”⁹⁵

His autocommentary says that, in Centrism, what is negated through words that lack a nature is a *nature of entities*. If it were *the lack of a nature of entities* that is negated through words that lack a nature, then entities would indeed become something that has a nature, because what lacks a nature has been negated. Since they thus became something that has a nature, they would not be empty. However, this is not what Nagarjuna says: He states that entities *are* empty—that is, they lack a nature—and does not claim that they are *nonempty*.⁹⁶

Furthermore, what the above counterargument by some opponents implies is that one can only negate something that exists and not something that does not exist—that lacks a nature. However, at the same time, these very people try to negate emptiness, stating that a nature of all entities does not exist. In other words, they say that emptiness does not exist. However, if emptiness—their object of negation—does not exist, then their statement that one can only negate what exists and not what does not exist is wrong. Or, if this statement is correct, since they negate a nonexistent—emptiness—this nonexistent emptiness must then be something existent, because negating a nonexistent results in an existent. And if emptiness exists, this amounts to establishing that a nature of all entities does not exist. At first glance quite impenetrable, these verses just show the stringency with which Nagarjuna evaporates all possibilities of grasping at a reference point. On top of that, he demonstrates that any attempt at finding a flaw in emptiness is inevitably flung back onto one’s own grasping for something really existent, just like a boomerang.

Finally, Nagarjuna says that, actually, there is neither something to be negated nor any words or persons to negate it, since all things are equally unreal and empty. Thus, in Centrist reasoning, there is never any negation happening. It is only from the perspective of others who cling to the real existence of things that it seems as if these things were negated. Consequently, Centrist reasonings do not annihilate previously existing things; they just elucidate that these things did not really exist in the first place.

I do not negate anything
And there is also nothing to be negated.
Therefore, it is you who slander me
By saying, “You negate.”

[207] To say that the words of a negation
Work even without existing words
Makes one understand that words do not exist,
But it does not serve to eradicate them.⁹⁷

The words “all entities lack a nature” are not the cause that makes things lack a nature. Rather, they serve as a means to help those who do not know that entities lack a nature realize this fact. For example, this is comparable to when someone says, “Devadatta is at home,” while Devadatta is in fact not at home. Others who know better might then correct this person by saying, “No, Devadatta is not at home.” Obviously, these words do not cause Devadatta to be not at home; all they do is to point to his absence.⁹⁸

Since words, concepts, logic, and reasoning are mere imaginary imputations and do not represent any real world apart from such imputations either, ultimately what is there to be refuted and what to be implied? Words and reasonings neither really exist in themselves nor relate to anything real as their referent objects. Thus, Centrists do not feel obliged to believe in the real existence of the reasonings and methods that they use, nor in their intrinsic power and validity. In terms of the view, Centrists use seeming reality in general and reasoning, words, and concepts in particular in a way that is completely noncommittal.⁹⁹ Consequently, in his *Lucid Words*, Candrakirti says that, unlike some people with sticks and lassos, words do not overpower their speaker. Also, the refutation of something through a nonimplicative negation does not imply its opposite (or anything else, for that matter). So if nothing is implied in a nonimplicative negation and others still insist that it must imply the opposite of what was negated, it is like when a shopkeeper says that there is nothing to be sold and a customer requests, “Then please sell me this nothing.” Thus, to negate that things arise from themselves does not imply that they arise from something other, both, or neither, for they simply do not really arise at all. Negations as they are used by Centrists have to be understood in the practical context of removing errors and wrong ideas. They function as “disillusionment” in the most literal sense. Thus, Centrist negations are negations of judgment altogether and not just another judgment. It is as when we say, “I clean up the dirt on the floor.” By this statement, we mean nothing but the removal of dirt from the floor. It does not imply that we afterward find a thing called “dirtlessness” on the floor instead.

The Process of Reasoning

What is our starting point to evaluate phenomena when using Centrist reasonings in order to realize emptiness? Are phenomena declared to be emptiness because they do not measure up to an ultimate and given true reality? Or do we just examine phenomena from their own side to realize that they are inconsistent, fluctuating, and without a true core, which may open our eyes to discovering their emptiness? From the Centrist point of view, the only way to truly go beyond [208] delusive appearances is to start by taking a closer look at the very appearances of everyday seeming reality that are right in front of our noses, and not to try to compare them

with some more or less speculative ultimate reality. Such a comparison must necessarily fail, because any “ultimate reality” that we could conjure up within the limits of our essentially dualistic mental framework could only be just another reference point within this very framework. In other words, there is no way that we could transcend the net of duality by adding another sophisticated knot to it. This is the main reason Centrists are so adamant about not giving us anything to hold on to in terms of ultimate reality. As they keep saying, ultimate reality can only be realized through seeing that seeming phenomena are not what we take them to be. Thus, when we employ Centrist reasoning on the path, we have to proceed from how things seem to be to how they actually are and not the other way around, that is, by trying to look at things from the perspective of some imputed ultimate reality. In other words, the Centrist approach starts with what is right in front of our eyes and not with some ultimate castle in the sky.

As mentioned earlier, this approach necessarily implies that at the end of the process of analysis and deconstruction, our wrong ideas and their remedies must both dissolve naturally, without our having to apply further remedies for the remedies. From the perspective of the ultimate true nature of phenomena, problems and antidotes are both expressions of the fundamental ignorance that obscures this nature. Only when both afflictive and remedial ignorance have subsided is there the possibility of an unobstructed view of what is pointed to through Centrist analysis. Santideva explains this by excluding an infinite regress of analysis:

If what has been analyzed
Is analyzed through further analysis,
There is no end to it,
Because that analysis would be analyzed too.

Once what had to be analyzed has been analyzed,
The analysis has no basis left.
Since there is no basis, it does not continue.
This is expressed as nirvana.¹⁰⁰

If one Centrist analysis had to be analyzed by another analysis, it would follow that there is no end to analysis, because the analysis of the first analysis would have to be analyzed again by a third one and so on. However, this is not how Centrist reasoning works. Rather, prajña is the means that analyzes the mistaken ideas that have to be analyzed, and it does so in such a way that gradually they are all addressed. Once these wrong ideas have been thoroughly analyzed by [209] prajña and are incontrovertibly seen to be mistaken, they dissolve. As soon as they disappear, the purpose of the analysis is fulfilled, and thus the analysis itself will also subside on its own. Therefore, it is nothing more than a specific analysis for a specific purpose. Apart from that, neither mistaken ideas nor their analysis has any special basis or nature. Since there is no purpose left for such analysis, once its specific task has been accomplished, it does not continue after the mistaken idea in question has been put to an end. The analysis stops on its own, just as a fire dies down as soon as the firewood has burned up. Once all clinging in terms of superimposition and denial has come to an end in this way, nothing but the empty and

luminous nature of the mind in which there is nothing to be removed or to be added is laid bare as the fundamental state of all phenomena. This is said to be primordial nirvana.

However, if one were to continue with remedial analysis even at the point when its specific target has already dissolved, then the remedy itself would become the problem. For example, once we have overcome an infection through the help of antibiotics, we do not continue to apply this remedy. Not only would it be useless, but it would cause further health problems. In his *Fundamental Verses*, Nagarjuna explicitly warns against wrong views about emptiness and clinging to it, be it in terms of existence, nonexistence, permanence, or extinction:

By the flaw of having views about emptiness,
Those of little understanding are ruined,
Just as when incorrectly seizing a snake
Or mistakenly practicing an awareness-mantra.¹⁰¹

In his *Lucid Words*, Candrakirti comments on this:

If one thinks, “Everything is empty, which means that everything does not exist,” this is a wrong view. . . . On the other hand, one may wish not to deny all [phenomena]. Then, however, no matter in which way one may have focused on these entities, how should they become emptiness? Hence, to say that “the meaning of emptiness is not the meaning of lacking a nature”¹⁰² is definitely a rejection of emptiness. Having rejected it in this way, due to the [ensuing] karmic [result] of being deprived of the dharma, one will go to the lower realms.¹⁰³

Refuting Nihilism

The most common charge against Centrism and its way of using reasoning was and is the accusation of outright nihilism. In *The Sutra of the Arrival in Lanka*, the Buddha himself prophesied that, in the future, those who cling to speaking in terms of existence or nonexistence will deprecate as nihilists those who say that all phenomena lack arising. However, such a charge completely disregards [210] the fact that Centrism as a spiritual path is a comprehensive set of methods with a soteriological purpose. It is clearly intended as a means to attain perfect Buddhahood for the welfare of all sentient beings through the compassionate motivation and practice of a bodhisattva. Obviously, nothing is farther from nihilism. Nagarjuna’s *Commentary on the Mind of Enlightenment* emphasizes not only the ultimate type of the mind of enlightenment but equally the importance of the conventional kind:

Support [sentient beings] with all things
And protect them like your own body.
Make all efforts to avoid
Lack of affection for sentient beings.¹⁰⁴

Even when not taking this motivation into account, in terms of the correct view, Centrist masters always make sure to negate the nihilistic position that nothing at all exists. Also, they explicitly and repeatedly explain why the charge of nihilism does not apply to them. This is evident from Candrakirti's above comment and also from further verses from *The Commentary on the Mind of Enlightenment*:

To express emptiness as the nature [of entities]
Is not to say that anything becomes extinguished.

Those who know that entities are empty
And then rely on karma and its results
Are more wonderful than wonderful,
More amazing than amazing.

In this way, through body, speech, and mind,
They always promote the welfare of sentient beings.
What they advocate is emptiness,
But not the contentions of extinction.¹⁰⁵

In his *Fundamental Verses*, Nagarjuna presents other Buddhists' attacks against him for denying the Buddha's own teachings on causality, karma, and the four realities of the noble ones:

"If all of this is empty,
There is no origination and no cessation.
Then it follows that the four realities of the noble ones
Do not exist for you."¹⁰⁶

[211] He answers by turning the tables on them:

If you entertain the view
That entities exist due to their nature,
Then you view entities
As lacking causes and conditions.

Then cause and result,
Agents, actions, and their objects,
Arising and ceasing,
As well as any effect are invalidated.

If all of this were nonempty,
There would be no origination and no cessation.
It would follow that the four realities of the noble ones
Do not exist for you.¹⁰⁷

Thus, it is precisely this notion of real and independently existent things that excludes the existence of any causes that could give rise to such things as well as any results that these things could produce. For, by definition, independently existent phenomena cannot be affected by anything, nor can they themselves affect anything. Thus, it is rather for those people who grasp at a real nature of phenomena that the four realities of the noble ones and the interdependent flow of causality are impossible. Candrakirti's *Lucid Words* concords:

Here, it is said, "If you thus present entities as being without nature, this would eliminate all such statements by the Blessed One as 'The ripening of the actions that one has performed will be experienced by oneself.' It would also deny actions and their results. Therefore, you are the chief of nihilists." We are not nihilists. By refuting both the proponents of existence and of nonexistence, we illuminate the path that is without these two [extremes] and leads to the city of nirvana. We also do not say that actions, agents, and results and such do not exist. "So what do you say then?" We say that they are without nature. One might think, "This is fallacious, since actions and agents are not justified with respect to what is without nature." This is not the case either, because it is only among [phenomena] that have a nature that actions are not seen. [In fact,] actions are only seen among what is without nature.¹⁰⁸

As we have seen, also Santideva excludes the notion of utter nonexistence:

[212] Once this "utter nonexistence"—
The entity to be determined—cannot be observed,
How should a nonentity without a basis
Remain before the mind?¹⁰⁹

Moreover, Centrists do not deny conventionalities, seeming reality, or mere appearances, since the only target of their reasonings is the cause for suffering. As Santideva says:

How something is seen, heard, or known
Is not what is negated here.
Rather, the object of refutation
Is the cause for suffering, which is the conception of reality.¹¹⁰

Nagarjuna's *Commentary on the Mind of Enlightenment* states:

Through explaining true reality as it is,
The seeming does not become disrupted.
Unlike the seeming,
True reality is not observable.¹¹¹

The Rebuttal of Objections adds:

However, we do not say

That we do not accept conventions.¹¹²

His autocommentary states that Centrists do not just explain “all entities are empty” without accepting and relying on conventional reality.¹¹³ Candrakirti’s *Lucid Words* agrees:

Since some people are not skilled in seeming and ultimate reality, by engaging in justifications that end up being unreasonable, they destroy [seeming reality]. Since we are skilled in presenting seeming reality, we stay within worldly positions. In order to eliminate certain worldly positions, we just negate certain justifications that are set up [by our opponents] through other justifications. Like the elders of the world, we only refute those of you who deviate from worldly standards, but not the seeming [itself].¹¹⁴

Just like someone who wishes [to drink] water [needs] a container, first one should doubtlessly accept the seeming as it is.¹¹⁵

[213] The main reason for needing such a container is that without relying on and using conventional reality, dharma cannot be taught. *The Fundamental Verses* says:

Without reliance on conventions,
The ultimate cannot be taught.
Without realization of the ultimate,
Nirvana will not be attained.¹¹⁶

The Necessity of Conventions to Root Out Reference Points

Nagarjuna indeed relied on conventions and seeming reality to a great degree in order to teach people, as is amply proven by many of his other texts in which he describes the path of bodhisattvas or gives practical advice to various persons, ranging from ordinary people to kings.¹¹⁷ The same goes for Santideva: chapters one to eight of his *Entrance to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* are a guidebook for the seeming reality of practitioners of the great vehicle, and his other main text—*The Compendium of Training*—goes into many practical details of applying the teachings.

In his *Jewel Lamp of Centrism*, Bhavaviveka quotes Aryadeva with the pragmatic advice to avoid nihilism in any case in order to be on the safe side in terms of potential negative karmic results:

Even if they doubt that there are lifetimes beyond this one,
Wise people avoid evil actions.
If there are no [future lifetimes], there is simply nothing,
But in case there are, give up nihilism!¹¹⁸

Bhavaviveka continues by saying that the chain of the appearances of seeming reality is illusionlike. None of it exists for nonconceptual wisdom or the knowledge that realizes ultimate reality. Trying to validate seeming appearances is like asking whether space is broad or narrow, big or small, fragrant or stinking, sweet or sour, soft or rough. Or it is like pondering the shape and color of the horns of a rabbit. As far as true Centrists are concerned, such “things” cannot be experienced, cognized, or validated.¹¹⁹ Centrists merely point to the fact that all these seeming appearances lack any real existence. So how could they be called nihilists? This is like calling someone a nihilist who points to an empty room and says, “There is no furniture here.”

In his *Lucid Words*, Candrakirti explains that to see emptiness as nonexistence means not to understand Centrism:

What you apprehend [as emptiness] is not what we state as the meaning of emptiness in this treatise. Since you do not understand the meaning of emptiness, you neither understand emptiness itself nor the [214] purpose of emptiness. Therefore, through not understanding the actual mode of entities’ own nature, you say a lot of unreasonable things that are not related to our explanations. So what is the purpose of emptiness? It is explained in the examination of identity [in *The Fundamental Verses*]:

Liberation [is attained] through the exhaustion of karma and afflictions.
Karma and afflictions [come] from conceptions,
And these [result] from discursiveness.
Discursiveness is halted through emptiness.¹²⁰

Therefore, emptiness is taught in order to completely pacify all discursiveness without exception. So if the purpose of emptiness is the complete peace of all discursiveness and you just increase the web of discursiveness by thinking that the meaning of emptiness is nonexistence, you do not realize the purpose of emptiness [at all].¹²¹

Nagarjuna finishes his *Rebuttal of Objections* by saying:

For those for whom emptiness is possible,
Everything is possible.
For those for whom emptiness is not possible,
Nothing is possible.

I prostrate to the incomparable Buddha
Who has perfectly declared
That emptiness, dependent origination,
And the middle path are one in meaning.¹²²

Equating emptiness, dependent origination, and the middle path refers to the unity of seeming reality and ultimate reality. All seeming phenomena appear as dependent origination through various causes and conditions, while all of them are empty of any real and independent

existence. This is nothing other than the middle path of not falling into the extremes of permanence and extinction.

In general, it may be an appropriate and fruitful approach to use epistemology, logic, and reasoning in order to accomplish certain goals in everyday life and the sciences. However, all of this happens only from the perspective of ordinary beings whose worldviews and experiences are distorted by fundamental ignorance about the true nature of phenomena. The Centrist approach is to eventually step out of this playground altogether; it is a completely different ball game, [215] so to speak. This means that the typical four-cornered logical analysis of Centrism is the deliberate stepping-stone to go beyond the square playground drawn by the limitations of dualistic mind. In this way, thoroughgoing negations from many angles lead to the utter collapse of our conceptual efforts to keep our world together. At some point, conceptual grasping becomes literally exhausted and another dimension of seeing the world may open up. To realize emptiness is not only the negation of thought or grasping, but it is the experience of prajña or nondual wisdom beholding the universe outside of our dualistic playground.

Usually, we like to think of ourselves as critical, modern persons who do not just believe in things unquestioningly. However, when it comes to “the facts of life,” experientially, what we really believe in is what we are used to: our sense perceptions, our thoughts, and our feelings. This clearly shows in how we behave toward the world. From this point of view, we actually are very conservative in that we just rely on our limited, dualistic outlook. The only other source of information about the world that we tend to take for granted is modern science. Although we have never seen things such as subatomic particles or complicated biochemical processes, if scientific experts tell us about them, we think they must be true. On the other hand, if the Buddha and other enlightened masters—as the experts in mind science—tell us about karma, past and future lives, buddha realms or emptiness, we are rather skeptical.

Why do we so easily believe in what modern science says but find it so difficult to believe in the much older science of mind? Why do we listen to modern experts and have a hard time listening to the Buddha or Centrists? We usually just follow the habitual tendencies of our minds, which are mainly oriented toward the outside world and hardly ever look inside. Maybe we do not want to grant that the Buddhist experts in mental science know their job as well as modern scientists know theirs. However, we might at least try to muster a bit more openness to consider what they say and not dismiss their findings right away as “unrealistic,” “soft evidence,” and the like. This alone would loosen up our rigid view of the world and ourselves tremendously. Let’s call it “training in openness to the unexpected and unfamiliar.”

As for the issues of valid cognition and reasoning, all of them only make sense as long as they are displayed in a framework whose foundation is the notion of really existing things that actually perform functions according to certain accepted principles. In particular, logical rules solely apply for those who buy into such notions. These rules can be considered as structures or laws to organize and focus our thoughts, but in themselves they say nothing about the relation of these thoughts to reality. In addition, various philosophers, scientists, and ordinary people do not even agree on a single set of rules or principles that determine such things as valid

cognition or valid reasoning and agree even less on the definition of reality. More important, however, there is no way to establish the validity of [216] knowledge through any criteria that are either intrinsic or extrinsic to this very knowledge itself. As said before, if valid cognition were justified through itself or through other valid cognitions, there is an infinite regress. And if it were justified through something other than valid cognition, how is this other thing validated?

Thus, we have to distinguish clearly between the investigation of objects (whether in everyday life or in science) on the one hand and the scrutiny of the fundamental principles or presuppositions of how we know and what we know on the other. From the Centrist point of view, the first is expedient and the latter is the key to liberation. All empirical knowledge in the world works through these presuppositions of knowing that derive from ignorance about the actual nature of phenomena. It is in this sense that such knowledge as well as the ways in which it cognizes its objects are only a seeming reality.

On the other hand, the critical dialectics of Centrism is not at all a knowledge about seeming reality. Rather, it uncovers and invalidates the very presuppositions of seeming knowledge by getting at their root: our fundamental clinging to reference points. Therefore, the value of the Centrist critique can never lie in its consistency as a system of thought or in any kind of secular utility. Rather, it is geared toward a clear awareness of mind's nature and a spiritual freedom that precisely consists in dropping all these presuppositions and reference points that function as our bondage in cyclic existence. It is a process of unveiling what is primordially unveiled. Thus, it does not at all deny true reality but serves to free it from all the restrictions of our dualistic grasping at reference points.

The crux of Centrism is that it is only possible to get to such freedom by initially employing these very reference points in order to go beyond them. At least to some degree, this approach inevitably involves language and concepts, which by definition cannot go beyond being merely instruments for expressing seeming reality. So the Centrist approach has no choice but to work with language and concepts in order to point to something that is inexpressible through either of them. As Culler puts it:

[D]econstruction's procedure is called "sawing off the branch on which one is sitting." . . . One can and may continue to sit on a branch while sawing it. There is no physical or moral obstacle if one is willing to risk the consequences. The question then becomes whether one will succeed in sawing it clear through, and where and how one might land. . . . If "sawing off the branch on which one is sitting" seems foolhardy to men of common sense, it is not so for Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Derrida; for they suspect that if they fall there is no "ground" to hit and that the most clear-sighted act may be a certain reckless sawing, [217] a calculated dismemberment or deconstruction of the great cathedral-like trees in which Man has taken shelter for millennia.¹²³

It should be obvious by now that Centrists belong to the small club of those who are not afraid to hit *no* ground.

The final question here is this: How can we ever validate the Centrist path or true reality, if this path includes a denial of valid cognition? The “ultimate test” lies in our own experience. In order to come to a final clarity about whether all of this is “true” in the sense of functioning as a reliable means leading to the realization of ultimate reality and the irreversible liberation from suffering, we have no choice other than to put it into practice and see whether we actually attain Buddhahood through it. Strictly speaking, to gain an incontrovertible experience of being—and staying—free from all suffering and to manifest omniscient wisdom in our own mind stream is the only way to personally verify that the Centrist approach works all the way to the end. As physicians would say, “Whoever heals is right.” As is well known, a disease cannot be overcome by just looking at the medicine and pondering the treatment. Obviously, one has to actually swallow the medicine and undergo therapy. Likewise, without actively engaging in Centrist practice on all three levels of study, reflection, and meditation, we will never solve the question of whether it yields the promised result or not. All speculations, theories, and reasonings alone will not do. As in the example of chocolate chip cookies, we will not experience their taste by just studying recipes.

In other words, Centrism does not bother about some universal truth or abstract validity. Rather, true reality or validity always has to be experienced by a mind. If the Centrist approach is helpful for individual beings to end the delusion in their minds, in terms of the individual experiences of these beings, this is all that is needed and all that counts. Even if there might be more sophisticated views or theories, if they fail to remove our suffering, what are they good for? In this way, the Centrist approach is very pragmatic and hinges entirely on personal experience. This also implies that we do not have to wait until perfect Buddhahood to experience any effect of this approach in our lives. When we actively engage in it, Centrism *is* a way of life whose validity is constantly put to the test in our everyday existence. It is not just some spiritual crossword puzzle that is to be solved somewhere up in the clouds. When we apply the Centrist outlook down here on earth, such experiences as every little bit of relaxing our rigid ways of behaving toward the world and ourselves, every little bit of developing more insight into what actually is going on in the situations that we encounter, and every tiny little flower of compassion that starts blossoming in our mind can be seen as a result of being on this path. Thus, there are both immediate and final benefits.

Do Centrists Have a Thesis or Position?

[218] The attitude of Centrists toward valid cognition leads to the much-debated question of whether they have any thesis or position at all. Nagarjuna’s famous statement on this issue in his *Rebuttal of Objections* says:

If I had any position,
I thereby would be at fault.
Since I have no position,

I am not at fault at all.

If there were anything to be observed
Through direct perception and the other instances [of valid cognition],
It would be something to be established or rejected.
However, since no such thing exists, I cannot be criticized.¹²⁴

His *Sixty Stanzas on Reasoning* agrees:

Great beings do not have
Any thesis or dispute.
And for those who have no thesis,
How should there be any thesis of others?¹²⁵

Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses* declares:

Against someone who has no thesis
Of "existence, nonexistence, or [both] existence and nonexistence,"
It is not possible to level a charge,
Even if [this is tried] for a long time.¹²⁶

Santaraksita's *Ornament of Centrism* says almost literally the same thing:

Against someone who does not claim
"Existence, nonexistence, or [both] existence and nonexistence,"
It is in no way possible to raise a charge,
Even if [this is tried] with serious effort.¹²⁷

Candrakirti's *Lucid Words* quotes the above verses by Nagarjuna and Aryadeva and adds:

For Centrists, it is inappropriate to make any autonomous inferences on their own
account, because they do not accept any other theses.¹²⁸

[219] and

because there is no thesis of our own.¹²⁹

Thus, it is often categorically said that Centrists do not have any thesis or claim at all. On the other hand, in his *Fundamental Verses*, Nagarjuna does not merely negate; he also makes a number of positive statements even about emptiness and the ultimate, such as providing the characteristics of true reality:

Not known from something other, peaceful,
Not discursive through discursiveness,

Without conceptions, and without distinctions:
These are the characteristics of true reality.¹³⁰

In *The Rebuttal of Objections*, he even speaks about his thesis:

My words are without nature.
Therefore, my thesis is not ruined.¹³¹

Also Santideva mentions a thesis:

Thus, one cannot uphold any faultfinding
In the thesis of emptiness.¹³²

Bhavaviveka's *Blaze of Reasoning* says:

As for our thesis, it is the emptiness of nature, because this is the nature of
phenomena. Therefore, we are not guilty of caviling.¹³³

The explanation for such seeming contradictions is found in Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Verses*:

When something is questioned through emptiness,
Everything that someone may express as a reply
Does thereby not constitute a reply,
[For] it would presuppose what is to be proven.

When something is explained through emptiness,
Everything that someone may express as faultfinding
Does thereby not constitute any faultfinding,
[For] it would presuppose what is to be proven.¹³⁴

The Problem With Inherent Existence

[220] Any objection to emptiness or the lack of inherent existence of phenomena would be intended to establish that something is not empty, that is, that it has inherent existence. If something is to be proven as inherently existent, it may be assumed to be established in one of two ways. On the one hand, it could be assumed to be inherently existent by itself, that is, to be completely independent of causes and conditions. The problem here is that this presupposes what has to be proven in the first place: inherent self-existence. Alternatively, if this something is claimed to have arisen from something else that is inherently existent, then the inherent existence of this something else would have to be established, which entails the same problem as above and moreover leads to an infinite regress. In the same way, anything that could serve as a reason to establish inherent existence or refute the lack thereof can only be either inherently existent or lack such existence and thus be empty. If it lacks inherent existence in

itself, how could it prove something else to be inherently existent? And if it is assumed to inherently exist, this is again just presupposing what has to be proven.

Thus, what is called emptiness refers to just the pointing out that all things lack inherent existence. In the context of explaining or debating this, it may conventionally be called “the thesis of emptiness.” However, as was made clear above, neither the means to point this out, nor its result, nor the process as such is really existent. Thus, they all concord with this “thesis” that all things lack inherent existence. Since both the means to point out emptiness and any hypothetical objections lack inherent existence, whatever one may say or think always just points back to this very same actuality that everything lacks an intrinsic nature and that there are no reference points whatsoever. In this way, inevitably, the very attempt to prove or disprove anything in the sense of “that’s how it really is” is self-invalidating and self-contradictory. It is just a further entanglement in the web of dualistic thinking instead of a means to step out of it.¹³⁵ Candrakirti’s *Entrance into Centrism* says:

“Does the means to invalidate invalidate what is to be invalidated without encountering it,
Or does it do so by encountering it?” This flaw that you already mentioned
Would certainly apply to someone who has a thesis, but we do not have this thesis.
Hence, it is impossible that this consequence [applies to us].¹³⁶

His autocommentary specifies this: As far as Centrist “theses” in the above sense of lacking real existence are concerned, the means to invalidate does not invalidate what is to be invalidated either by connecting with it or by not connecting with it, because both the means to invalidate and what is to be invalidated [221] are not established by their nature. Therefore, the above question would apply only to someone who has a thesis that involves the inherent existence of both the means to invalidate and what is to be invalidated. However, since Centrists do not have such theses, they do not conceive of this process of invalidation in terms of an encounter or no encounter between the means to invalidate and what is to be invalidated.¹³⁷ Thus, it seems that Candrakirti does not disclaim that Centrists express “theses” in the sense of just pointing out emptiness or making pedagogic statements merely from the perspective of others. In fact, in all Centrist texts, one finds not only absurd consequences or negations of other positions but also numerous statements of a conventionally propositional nature, such as “The nature of cyclic existence is the nature of nirvana” or “Without seeming reality the ultimate cannot be realized.” However, what Candrakirti and all other Centrists definitely deny is that they have any thesis that involves real existence or reference points or any thesis that is to be defended from their own point of view.

The Eighth Karmapa gives the example that the appearance of floating hairs for a person with blurred vision in no way affects the sight of someone without such a visual impairment. Likewise, when Centrists give a conventional, expedient presentation of seeming causes and results on the level of no analysis, how could any critique that is based on causes and results that are regarded as having a nature of their own ever affect the actual lack of such a nature? Therefore, the Eighth Karmapa says, all objections to emptiness by realists are only prompted

by their own limited outlook. They cannot help thinking that Centrists definitely must claim the opposite of what they themselves assert. They enter the dispute by assuming that, just like themselves, the Centrists too hold on to things such as theses of their own and others, something to be proven and the means to prove it, something that is to be invalidated and the means to invalidate it. Thus, all attempts by realists to refute Centrists only mean that they did not at all understand the meaning of emptiness in the way that Centrists try to convey it. In this way, realists basically just debate with their own thoughts as opponents.

The crucial point here and in Centrism in general is that inherent existence is simply an incoherent notion altogether that does not withstand analysis. What is called emptiness is just the result of pointing out this fact. In other words, whether one conventionally speaks of “the thesis of emptiness” or says, “I have no thesis,” both expressions just announce and highlight the Centrist procedure of demonstrating that all things lack inherent existence—that there are no reference points. Needless to say, such a “thesis of emptiness” is nothing to hold on to either. The Karmapa quotes his guru, the great siddha Sangye Nyenba Rinpoche:

All you people who assert scriptures and reasonings
That prove a real identity
[222] Are very much afraid of the notion that there is no real identity
And thus perform all kinds of pointless negations and proofs.

Once you do not cling to either of these two theses
Of a real identity or the lack of a real identity,
All disputes of negation and proof will subside.
Then there is no harm even through billions of scriptures and reasonings.¹³⁸

The Second Shamarpa Kachö Wangbo says:

No matter how excellent a view in a scriptural tradition might be,
It is mistaken when compared to the actual basic nature.¹³⁹

The same applies to reasoning: No matter how excellent reasonings or theses that are established through valid cognition might be, ultimately, they conflict with the basic nature and thus are just a road to perdition.

Two Kinds of Centrists

Moreover, in terms of Centrists merely pronouncing what conventionally looks like a thesis, one must differentiate between Centrists in different situations. The most fundamental distinction here is twofold:

- 1) those Centrists who rest in the meditative equipoise of directly seeing the nature of phenomena

- 2) all other Centrists (those in meditative equipoise who do not directly realize this nature, as well as all those who are in the phase of subsequent attainment).

With regard to those who directly realize emptiness, the question of having a thesis or not simply does not apply, since all mental reference points are completely at peace in such a realization. As for the others, as mentioned earlier, the Eighth Karmapa distinguishes four possibilities in terms of persons who uphold the Centrist view and persons who have realized it. There are the following:

- a) people who uphold the Centrist view and in whose continua its realization has not arisen
- b) those in whose continua its realization has arisen and who do not uphold the Centrist view
- c) those for whom both is the case
- d) those for whom neither is the case

It is clear that persons (b) and (d) are not relevant here, since the former do not profess to be Centrists and the latter are not Centrists in any way. This leaves [223] persons (a) and (c) as the ones who may point out to appropriate people in appropriate situations that all things lack a nature of their own, which may be called “the thesis of emptiness.” As the First Sangye Nyenba Rinpoche says:

As for the presentation of the two realities that are set up in dependence,
We pronounce it merely from the perspective of the worldly consensus of others.
Now, once you are free from mundane discursiveness,
All negations and affirmations of existence, nonexistence, being, and not being
In terms of all characteristics of arising and ceasing
Through such [criteria] as reality and falsity of dependent phenomena
Are at peace in the sense that they are not observable.
In this state, how could there be any view or meditation of our own system?
Once a philosophical system that is our own system has vanished,
It is meaningless to refute other systems.
Therefore, do not even use the label of Madhyamaka.¹⁴⁰

Freedom from Reference Points

Karmapa Mikyö Dorje summarizes this issue by saying that, on both the seeming and the ultimate level, Centrists do not have any thesis of their own in the sense of something to defend in debate or something that would represent their own standpoint or the position in which they themselves believe. For, if someone claims something or clings to it, that person is not a Centrist in the first place but inevitably has fallen into some extreme through still having a reference point. Furthermore, even on the conventional or seeming level, Centrists refer to such expressions as “emptiness” or “all phenomena are mere dependent origination” in a way that is free from all reference points and clinging to reference points. Such pronouncements are in no way meant to increase any kind of clinging, since whatever is not free from clinging or

even increases it is not suitable as the Centrist path. And if something is not the Centrist path, it is not appropriate as the means to pacify all reference points.

Thus, although Centrists have no thesis or position, from the perspective of others, they still talk about mere names, mere designations, and mere conventions (such as existence, nonexistence, both, and neither; dependent origination; or emptiness). To do so does not contradict having no thesis, since this very way of speaking is the means to make others comprehend the profound actuality that is without any positions or clinging to reference points. For example, people with blurred vision see various delusive appearances and take them to be really existent. In order to put an end to the clinging that these appearances are real, other people with clear vision may say to them, “You surely see such appearances as [224] floating hairs, but none of them exists in the way they appear to you.” Clearly, in order for those with clear vision to make such a statement, it is not necessary that floating hairs and such appear to them on the conventional level.

So when Centrists like Nagarjuna and Santideva conventionally speak about “my thesis,” “the thesis of emptiness,” or a “position,”¹⁴¹ they do not at all refer to any principle, doctrine, or proposition of their own. Such words are just used as nominal expressions that conform with debate terminology and reasoning as these are agreed upon by others. Thus, such expressions as “the thesis of emptiness” can be understood as a kind of metalanguage that just recalls and epitomizes the whole process of demonstrating that things lack inherent existence. This is similar to when Centrists use the term “nature” in a twofold sense, meaning “an intrinsic and independent nature of entities” as opposed to “the actual or ultimate nature of entities,” which is that they have no nature in the first sense.¹⁴² In the same way, “the thesis of emptiness” in the sense of just pointing out that there are no reference points per se excludes any notion of thesis in the usual sense, that of a statement that is based on and expresses one’s own reference points. This accords with what Patsab Lotsawa reportedly said on this issue:

In the declaration that [Centrists] do not have a position, there is no contradiction, since it [means the following]: They do not have a position that is proven through positive determination, but it is not the case that they do not even have a mere position [in the sense] of negating through negative determination.¹⁴³

As was illustrated by the example of the unblurred vision of one person being unaffected by the blurred vision of someone else, all conventional “theses” such as “positive actions lead to pleasant results and negative actions cause unpleasant results” are made exclusively on the level of no analysis and just from the perspective of others whose wrong ideas are to be dissolved. Thus, they do not affect the vision of those who have realized emptiness, that is, the true nature of all phenomena, including such conventional explanations. As Padma Karpo’s *Illumination of Three Centrist Scriptural Systems* says:

From the perspective of various individual persons, to give various teachings for those who are to be guided through various individual [means], everything may be suitable to be asserted, be it existence, nonexistence, or whatever. From the perspective of a

Buddha, there is nothing whatsoever to be asserted. These two [perspectives] are not contradictory.¹⁴⁴

Lindtner summarizes the whole issue nicely:

[225] Thus on the *samvrti*-level [the level of the seeming] we find him [Nagarjuna] engaged either in demonstrating his own standpoint (i.e. *sadhana*), or in refuting that of his opponents (i.e. *dusana*). While on this level he willingly complies with the conventional, more or less common-sense, rules of debate current in his days. But sometimes we see him shifting to a hypothetical mode of argument which is quite his own. Now the *svatantrika*, so to speak, becomes a *prasangika*.

First he hypothetically assumes—*argumenti causa*—that there is such a thing as *svabhava* (nature/attribute) in order, then, to point out the absurd implications (*prasanga*) inherent in this assumption when faced with the stern demands of logic and experience. Here on the *samvrti*-level he has only one thesis to defend, namely that all dharmas are empty of *svabhava*.

On the *paramartha*-level, however, he is beyond the ifs and the musts of logic. In his own words, he no longer defends the thesis he took so great pains to defend on the *samvrti*-level: that things lack *svabhava*. . . .

We may now be tempted to ask whether there is a consistency behind the paradox that Nagarjuna at the same defends a thesis and also does not defend a thesis.

. . . In both cases he is concerned with one and the same thing, namely lack of *svabhava*. But a difference remains, it is one of outlook, one might say. On the *samvrti*-level he speaks and argues about lack of *svabhava* as a truth (an ultimate truth). On the *paramartha*-level he is still concerned with the same thing (or rather nothing) but here one cannot speak about it. Here it has become reality, as it were.

The distinction (*bheda*) between *truth* and *reality* is solely a question of whether the medium of language is present or not. One can speak the truth, but one cannot possibly speak the reality. At the best one can, as Nagarjuna points out, “suggest,” or “allude” to reality by means of *prajñapti*, or indications.

The final problem, then, is to get “beyond” language—beyond *prapañca* [discursiveness] as Nagarjuna would say.

There is no theoretical solution to this problem. Theoretical solutions can, at best, offer us truth, not reality. . . .

Of *paramartha* one cannot speak; it is a matter of belief and personal experience (*aparapratyaya*). Much less can one speak of its relationship to anything, viz. *samvrti*. One must learn to remain satisfied with mere indications—*prajñapti*.¹⁴⁵

It is important to clearly note that having no thesis or reference point is not just a clever or elusive move in debate. Rather, its main significance lies again in [226] its soteriological effect of liberation from any clinging and the ensuing afflictions. As Nagarjuna's *Sixty Stanzas on Reasoning* emphasizes:

By taking any standpoint whatsoever,
You will be snatched by the cunning snakes of the afflictions.
Those whose minds have no standpoint
Will not be caught.

Those whose minds are not moved,
Not even by a flicker of a thought about "complete voidness,"
Have crossed the horrifying ocean of existence
That is agitated by the snakes of the afflictions.¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, as for the proper approach of pointing out to others that all things are empty and without reference point, there is some disagreement among Centrists. For example, Bhavaviveka says that it is inappropriate to not present one's own system and only negate the systems of others, since such a style of disputation amounts to nothing but sophistry and mere deceitful destructiveness. Also, if one's own positions—emptiness, nonarising, and so on—are not established through valid cognition, then one cannot negate the views of others merely by flinging consequences at their positions (such as their claim of inherently arising and existing things). Moreover, one cannot prove the view of one's own system through reasons that are asserted only by others and not by oneself. For these three reasons, certain positions must be asserted that represent one's own system and are established through valid cognition, such as the Centrist arguments and examples that prove nonarising in a conventional context.

Consequentialists answer: It may well be that some people have their own claims and then do not present their own system out of fear of other people's critique or that they negate the systems of others with hostile intentions through merely setting up absurd consequences. In such cases one can rightfully speak of a style of debating that involves hypocrisy and deceit and ends up being mere sophistry and unfair destructiveness. However, we cannot be accused of such, since we neither set up anything in the sense that there exists something to be set up as our own thesis, nor do we negate anything in the sense that there exists something to be negated as the theses of others. If we do not have the slightest thesis of our own that is to be set up, then what is the point of all this toil to search for a means to prove it?

Actually, as explained above, the Centrist approach is not even a negation of something. If one could observe even the minutest existent phenomenon to be negated, it would certainly be appropriate to negate it. However, if one cannot observe anything to be negated, who would want to speak of negation here? As Nagarjuna says in his *Precious Garland*:

[227] Through destruction or a remedy,
Being existent would become nonexistence.

[However,] since [real] existence is impossible,
How could there be [its] destruction or remedy?¹⁴⁷

In his *Entrance Gate for the Learned*,¹⁴⁸ Sakya Pandita gives the following example: Just negating while not asserting anything as a kind of deceitful tactic may be compared to not acknowledging that a theft that has been committed. On the other hand, Consequentialist negation and nonassertion is like nonacknowledgment of a theft when no theft has been committed in the first place. Thus, there is a great difference between these two approaches.

Nevertheless, conventionally speaking, from the point of view of delusive appearances, or from the perspective of the subsequent attainment that is informed by preceding meditative equipoise, Centrists not only follow ordinary common consensus but also employ specific Buddhist conventions, such as the two realities, karma, and the stages of the path. For these are the conventional means to transcend the root cause of suffering: the clinging to mere delusive appearances as real. On the other hand, that Consequentialists do not defend such conventions in debate by trying to actually establish or affirm something—not even emptiness—is the expression of the core of their approach, that is, leading others to freedom from reference points and not creating more. Thus, all that Centrists say and teach in their communications with others is always applied as a pedagogic tool that is adapted to the individual perspectives of other people. None of this is apprehended or put forward by Centrists as any system of their own in any way.

In this context, it has to be clearly understood that the above objections by Bhavaviveka refer only to the situation of communicating emptiness or ultimate reality to others. In actuality, Autonomists such as Bhavaviveka also aim at nothing but freedom from discursiveness and reference points. Some people say that there is a slight remainder of discursiveness or affirmation in the ultimate view of Autonomists. The Eighth Karmapa argues that this is not the case, because the texts of Autonomists are even clearer than the texts of Candrakirti in their way of teaching freedom from discursiveness. He quotes Santaraksita's *Ornament of Centrism*:

Because ["nonarising"] concords with the ultimate,
It is called the ultimate.
In actuality, it is the release
From all complexes of discursiveness.

Since arising and so forth do not exist,
Nonarising and so on are impossible.
[228] Since their nature has been negated,
Their verbal terms are impossible.

There is no good formula
To negate nonexistent objects.
[Nonarising and such] depend on conceptions
And thus are seeming, not actual.¹⁴⁹

and Jñānagarbha's *Distinction between the Two Realities*:

Since the negation of arising and so on
Concords with actuality, we accept it.
Since there is nothing to be negated,
It is clear that, actually, there is no negation.

How should the negation of an imputation's
Own nature not be an imputation?
Hence, seemingly, this is
The meaning of actuality, but not actuality [itself].

In actuality, neither exists.
This is the lack of discursiveness:
Mañjusri asked about actuality,
And the son of the Victors remained silent.¹⁵⁰

Further examples of this stance include Bhāvaviveka's *Summary of the Meaning of Centrism*:

The ultimate is freedom from discursiveness.

Being empty of all discursiveness
Is to be understood
As the nonnominal ultimate.¹⁵¹

His *Heart of Centrism* agrees:

Its character is neither existent, nor nonexistent,
Nor [both] existent and nonexistent, nor neither.
Centrists should know true reality
That is free from these four possibilities.¹⁵²

[229] His *Lamp of Knowledge* says:

This negation "[entities do] not [arise] from themselves" is to be regarded as having the meaning of a non-implicative negation. [This is so], because it is primarily a negation and because [Nagarjuna's] intention is to thus arrive at nonconceptual wisdom that is endowed with the entirety of knowable objects through negating the web of all conceptions without exception. If it were taken to be an implicative negation, since that is primarily an affirmation, it would teach non-arising by affirming that "phenomena are non-arisen." Hence, it would be distinct from [our] conclusion, since the scriptures say, "If one engages in the non-arising of form, one does not engage in the perfection of knowledge."¹⁵³

and

Here, the purpose of emptiness is its characteristic of all discursiveness being at utter peace. The characteristic that emptiness is free from all clinging represents the wisdom that observes emptiness. The actuality of emptiness is its characteristic of suchness.¹⁵⁴

Kamalasila's *Establishing That All Phenomena Are without Nature* explains:

Since this lack of arising is concordant with realizing the ultimate, it is called "the ultimate." Since there is no object of negation, such as arising, that is established, [its] lack [cannot really] be related to this nonexistent object. Therefore, to apprehend the lack of arising and such is nothing but a reference point. . . . Ultimately, true reality cannot be expressed as the lack of arising and such. Therefore, Noble Mañjusri asked about true reality and Noble Vimalakirti said nothing.¹⁵⁵

And his *Stages of Meditation* says:

Thus, at the time when yogic practitioners examine through their supreme knowledge and do not observe any nature of entities whatsoever, thoughts about entities do not originate in them. They do not have any thoughts about nonentities either. If there were any entity to be seen, then, by negating [this entity], the thought of "nonentity" would come up. However, when yogic practitioners examine with their eyes of supreme knowledge, they do not observe any entity within the three times. At this point, through negating what [entity] would they entertain a thought of "nonentity"? Likewise, no other thoughts arise [230] in them at this time. The reasons for this are as follows: The two [kinds of] thoughts about existents and nonexistents include all [possible] thoughts. Also, since [actually] there is nothing that includes anything, there is also nothing to be included. This is the genuine yoga of nonconceptuality. Since in yogic practitioners dwelling in it all thoughts have vanished, they perfectly relinquish afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations.¹⁵⁶

Thus, Karmapa Mikyö Dorje says that there is actually only one single difference between Autonomists and Consequentialists. In general, it is just on the conventional level that both refute wrong ideas through explaining the words of the Buddha, composing treatises on them, and debating with others. In this conventional context, Consequentialists say that the scriptures and reasonings used to refute wrong views do not even conventionally have the nature of valid cognition or the like and thus lack any real nature that could refute their opposite, which is to say nonvalid cognition. Nevertheless, they simply follow and repeat the verbal consensus on valid cognition that is agreed upon by others. Based on this approach, they negate phenomena that are not even established on the level of correct seeming worldly reality, let alone ultimately. Autonomists agree that, ultimately, the arguments and such that refute wrong ideas do not have a nature that is ultimately established as valid cognition. However, they argue that, when refuting wrong ideas on the conventional level, if one does not conventionally accept that

arguments and such are established through valid cognition, the wrong ideas of realists cannot be refuted.

The Karmapa emphasizes that it is merely this difference that led to the distinction between Autonomists and Consequentialists. However, this does not mean that there are any differences in terms of one of these views being more profound or better than the other, since both equally accept the complete freedom from discursiveness and reference points. Moreover, not even the omniscience of a Buddha could see any difference in terms of better or worse between the approaches that they employ in order to put an end to discursiveness and reference points. The Karmapa is very explicit that certain other minor divergences between the approaches of Autonomists and Consequentialists are just of expedient meaning. They in no way justify making a difference in terms of the profundity of their view in terms of the ultimate. In particular, there are no grounds for basing elaborate outlines of two distinct Centrist systems—as they are found in some (mostly later) Tibetan doxographies—on such an assumed difference in profundity.¹⁵⁷

Result Madhyamaka

Illusory Lions Killing Illusory Elephants

Empty Reasonings for Liberation: Some Essential Points of Centrist Reasoning

[231] The root of all Centrist arguments is the praise to the Buddha that Nagarjuna proclaims at the very beginning of his *Fundamental Verses on Centrism*:

I bow down to the perfect Buddha,
The supreme orator, who taught
That dependent origination
Is without ceasing and without arising,
Without extinction and without permanence,
Without coming and without going,
Not different and not one.
It is the peace in which discursiveness is at complete peace.

Accordingly, there are four root arguments:

- 1) Outer and inner entities are without ceasing in the end and without abiding in the middle, because they do not arise in the first place.

- 2) Outer and inner entities are without extinction, because there is no permanence.
- 3) Outer and inner entities are without coming, because going is not established.
- 4) Outer and inner entities are not established as different, because there is no entity that is one.

All other Madhyamaka arguments, such as the five great Centrist reasonings, derive from these four basic arguments. It is said that the negation of the eight reference points—arising, ceasing, permanence, extinction, going, coming, oneness, and difference—in the opening verses of *The Fundamental Verses* represents a brief synopsis of both this treatise and Centrist reasoning in general. For the negation of oneness and difference is nothing other than the reasoning of the freedom from unity and multiplicity, while the six other negations of arising and so on primarily depend on the negation of oneness and difference. There are three essential steps in all these reasonings that analyze for the ultimate:

- 1) One picks a certain phenomenon, such as a book, as one's basis of attribution or analysis.
- 2) One searches for a nature of this phenomenon that is not self-contradictory.
- 3) Within this basis of attribution, one looks for something, such as its attributes, that is contradictory to its nature.

[232] Hence, from among all Centrist arguments, the following two are the main reasonings in that they respectively correspond to steps (2) and (3):

- a) the reasoning of the freedom from unity and multiplicity in order to analyze a nature
- b) the vajra sliver reasoning in order to analyze the attributes

The many other enumerations of arguments that are explained in Centrist texts are merely branches of these two reasonings. In particular, the reasoning of the freedom from unity and multiplicity is the root of all reasonings that negate real existence.

These reasonings are explained in detail below, but to briefly illustrate the above three essential points, we may start, for example, by taking a book as the object of our analysis. When searching for the book's nature, initially, we might think that it really exists and that it is its nature to be a real unity. However, such an assumed nature of being a unity is self-contradictory, since a book can be broken down into infinitely many parts. If we then think that the book must be a real multiplicity, this is also self-contradictory, since we cannot find any real unities in it that could serve as building blocks for a real multiplicity. And since there is no third possibility for the book to really exist, we have to admit that the only nature of this book that is not self-contradictory is that it does not exist either as a real unity or as a real multiplicity. In other words, the book does not really exist altogether. Finally, we look for possible attributes of this book—such as that it really arises—that are contradictory to its nature of lacking real existence. This means that if we were to find some real arising of the book, this would obviously contradict its nature of lacking real existence. However, under analysis, we will find that the book does not really arise from itself, nor from something other, nor from both itself and something other, and also not without any cause. In summary, the book does not really arise at

all, which perfectly well accords with its nature of lacking real existence. In this way, the nature of this book (its lack of real existence) and its attribute (its lack of real arising) are found neither to be self-contradictory nor to contradict each other.

Although the actual Centrist reasonings always negate, their point is not to negate away something that really exists, since something really existent cannot be negated anyway. They also do not remove or negate something nonexistent. Since a nonexistent cannot be an object, there is no object to which to refer in the first place. “Negating” just means to demonstrate that things do not exist in the real and solid way that we think they do. Thus, the object of negation of reasoning is not something that does not exist anyway (such as a truly existing nature of things). Technically, the object of negation is merely the mental image that appears for the reifying conceptions of people who mistakenly believe in the existence [233] of what does not exist. Therefore, as far as Centrists are concerned, “real existence” is just something that occurs in a psychological or subjective sense but certainly does not exist in any ontological or objective sense. Consequently, the force of Centrist negation strikes only the realm of our fixed ideas and not something that would appear on any hypothetical level of real or substantial existence. Moreover, as was elaborated above, the words and concepts in Centrist reasonings are as unreal as the words and concepts that they negate. However, from our mental perspective, they still serve their purpose of making us let go of our rigid ideas. Centrist reasonings do not negate mere seeming arising or existence in a categorical way, nor do they take away the possibility of conventionally experiencing both single and many things in our everyday lives. Instead, these reasonings tackle the wrong notions of real arising, real existence, real unity, and real multiplicity.

As for the actual techniques of reasoned analysis, the standard framework of formulating Centrist reasonings is to present dilemmas or even tetralemmas of mutually exclusive and exhaustive possibilities for something, such as existence or arising, which then are refuted one by one. For example, the reasoning of the freedom from unity and multiplicity is presented as a dilemma, that is, really existing things can only exist as a real unity or as a real multiplicity. There is no third possibility, since all existing phenomena are included in these two mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories of existence.

From among the five Centrist reasonings, the three reasonings that negate real arising go even further and investigate four possible ways of arising, such as whether things arise from themselves, from something other, from both, or from neither, which is to say, without any cause. These four possibilities are mutually exclusive and cover all theoretically imaginable ways in which things might arise.¹⁵⁸ Thus, through the refutation of each one of these possibilities, it is shown that things do not really arise at all. The same principle is applied to other issues, such as whether a cause produces a result that is already existent, nonexistent, both, or neither; whether an object exists before, after, or simultaneously with the consciousness that perceives it; and whether some assumed productive potential in a cause is identical to the cause or different from it. On the not so serious side of things, probably the shortest summary of this approach is to say that the classic Madhyamaka statement to which all others can be reduced is “neither nor, nor neither.”

Within this framework of analysis, its actual result—elimination of reification—can be achieved either through using formal probative arguments with the three modes of a correct reason (also called “autonomous reasoning”) or through drawing unwanted consequences from other people’s positions. Somewhat simplified, one could say that autonomous reasoning in this sense refers to any probative argument with the correct three modes that says “how things are” (either conventionally or ultimately). On the other hand, absurd consequences do not have all three—or even none—of the correct modes, whether they include a reason [234] or not. This means that they are just consequences that follow from another position that is already wrong in the first place. Thus, they are logically correct, but their explicit meaning must be false, since it is just an absurd result of a previous false statement.

For example, if someone holds that a vase is permanent, this wrong notion may be dispelled by stating what is correct and giving a proper reason for it, such as “A vase is *not* permanent, because it arises from causes and conditions and thus must disintegrate at some point (such as now when I let it drop).” Here, the three modes are established. Alternatively, one may draw absurd consequences from the position that a vase is permanent, such as saying, “Then it follows that a vase neither arises in the first place nor ceases to exist later.” Obviously, in this consequence, the question of the three modes does not apply, since there is no reason. Sometimes the opponent’s position is added as the reason to such a consequence, such as by saying, “It follows that a vase does not arise and cease, because—according to your claim—it is permanent.” In that case, from the perspective of the opponent, all three modes are established, since a vase is claimed to be permanent and whatever is permanent necessarily does not arise and cease. Therefore, the opponent must accept this unwanted consequence of his or her position. From the perspective of correct worldly conventions, when regarding a vase as an impermanent phenomenon, only the second and third modes are established (which is precisely the correct but, in relation to such an impermanent phenomenon, absurd consequence that whatever is permanent necessarily does not arise and cease). From the perspective of Centrists, ultimately also this is not established, since neither a vase nor something permanent exists and thus cannot be said either to arise and cease or not to. There are also many consequences in which all three modes are not even conventionally established, for example, the consequence “It follows that things do not arise from themselves, since their arising would be pointless and endless” that is drawn from the assertion that things arise from themselves.¹⁵⁹

All Centrists agree and emphasize that their formulations of negations or absurd consequences in no way imply their reverses or anything else, for that matter. Thus, they are all exclusively nonimplicative negations. For example, to state, “Things do not arise from something other, since then everything could arise from everything”¹⁶⁰ does not imply that things either arise from themselves, from both themselves and others, or without a cause. This is further evidenced by the fact that Centrists explicitly negate all of these possibilities one by one, and there is no fifth possibility.

Another characteristic feature of Centrist reasonings is that they often analyze things in terms of infinitesimal parts and moments in time. For example, in the reasoning of the freedom from unity and multiplicity, one seeks for the final, smallest parts of things that could represent a hypothetical indivisible unity. Most of the arguments and consequences in the context of the three great Centrist reasonings [235] that negate arising are formulated in terms of the individual moments of the process of causality, such as considering the relationship between the last moment of the cause that immediately precedes the first moment of its specific result or whether there exists any simultaneous moment of cause and result during which there is some causal interaction between them.

As for the interaction of this approach of negating mutually exclusive and exhaustive alternatives with the subjective side of our mind that grapples with such reasonings, Centrists just utilize the natural structure of our black-and-white thinking, since this is precisely the way in which dualistic clinging operates. Usually, when we find that something does not exist or is not permanent, we immediately think that it then must be nonexistent or impermanent. On the checkerboard of our dualistic mind that is grounded in really existing things, this may make sense in that the exclusion of one of these possibilities necessarily implies the presence of the other. However, from the perspective of the Centrist view of all appearances' fundamental lack of any real existence, all such possibilities as permanent, impermanent, existent, and nonexistent are just vain attempts by our dualistic fixation to hold on to something within the infinite openness of mind's natural expanse, which cannot be boxed in in any way. In other words, Centrist reasonings beat our fixating mind with its own weapons. When dualistic mind progressively analyzes its own dualistic structure and function, this inevitably leads to its own collapse altogether. When it sees all its reference points dwindle, including itself as that which creates these reference points, it simply goes out of business. Thus, the radical and relentless use of Centrist dilemmas and tetralemmas is a deliberate, systematic, and—in a sense—therapeutic technique to pull each piece of the patchwork of our two-dimensional referential carpet from under our feet and explore the nondimensional, boundless space of mind's true nature.

Disillusionment with Phenomenal Identity: The Five Great Madhyamaka Reasonings

In general, various Centrist masters present many different arguments that determine phenomenal identitylessness. In the system of Nagarjuna and his spiritual heirs, these are mainly “the five great Centrist reasonings”:

- 1) the negation through the analysis of an intrinsic nature: the reasoning of freedom from unity and multiplicity
- 2) the negation through the analysis of causes: the vajra sliver reasoning¹⁶¹
- 3) the negation through the analysis of results: the reasoning that negates an arising of existents and nonexistents

- 4) the negation through the analysis of both causes and results: the reasoning that negates arising from the four possibilities
- 5) [236] the analysis of mere appearances: the reasoning of dependent origination

Scriptural Sources for the Five Great Reasonings

As for their scriptural references in the sutras, the first of these reasonings is, for example, found in *The Sutra of the Arrival in Lanka*,¹⁶² the second in *The Rice Seedling Sutra*,¹⁶³ and the fifth in *The Sutra Requested by the Naga King “The Cool One”*¹⁶⁴ as well as in *The Sutra on Dependent Origination*.¹⁶⁵ The third and fourth reasonings are found in various other sutras.

In Centrist treatises, the reasoning of the freedom from unity and multiplicity is extensively explained in both Santaraksita’s *Ornament of Centrism*¹⁶⁶ and Srigupta’s (seventh century) *Commentary on Entering True Reality*. It is also used in Nagarjuna’s *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*,¹⁶⁷ Aryadeva’s *Four Hundred Verses*,¹⁶⁸ and the first volume of Kamalasila’s *Stages of Meditation*.¹⁶⁹

The explanation of the vajra sliver reasoning is one of the main themes in Nagarjuna’s *Fundamental Verses* and also forms the major portion of the sixth chapter of Candrakirti’s *Entrance into Centrism*. It is taught in detail in the ninth chapter of Santideva’s *Entrance to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*¹⁷⁰ and also presented in Kamalasila’s *Stages of Meditation*.¹⁷¹

As for the negation of the arising of existents and nonexistents, it is taught in the three just-mentioned texts by Nagarjuna,¹⁷² Candrakirti,¹⁷³ and Santideva.¹⁷⁴ It is also mentioned in *The Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*.¹⁷⁵

The negation of arising from the four possibilities is found in Jñānagarbha’s *Distinction between the Two Realities*¹⁷⁶ and explained in detail in its autocommentary¹⁷⁷ and the subcommentary by Santaraksita¹⁷⁸ as well as in Haribhadra’s *Illumination of The Ornament of Clear Realization*.¹⁷⁹ It is also used in Kamalasila’s *Illumination of Centrism*¹⁸⁰ and his *Establishing that all Phenomena are Without Nature*.¹⁸¹

The reasoning of dependent origination is the major theme of Nagarjuna’s *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*. It also appears in his *Rebuttal of Objections*,¹⁸² in *Sixty Stanzas on Reasoning*,¹⁸³ in several chapters of his *Fundamental Verses*,¹⁸⁴ and in Candrakirti’s *Entrance into Centrism*.¹⁸⁵

The first known summary of four of these five reasonings (excepting the fourth) is found in Bhavaviveka’s *Summary of the Meaning of Centrism* (lines 14–17). Later, Atisa gave a more detailed overview of the same four reasonings in his autocommentary on verses 48–52 of *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*.¹⁸⁶ Kamalasila explains all five in his *Illumination of Centrism*.¹⁸⁷

The Detailed Explanation of the Five Great Reasonings

Together, these reasonings refute the extremes of existence and nonexistence. Since our clinging to real existence is far stronger than our clinging to nonexistence, the first four reasonings eliminate the imputation that things exist by their [237] own nature. Therefore, they all serve to relinquish the first extreme of existence. The fifth reasoning simultaneously eliminates the extremes of existence and nonexistence. Moreover, it induces certainty about the unity of emptiness and dependent origination.

In what follows, these five reasonings are explained through a three-part reasoning (inference for oneself) and the three modes of a correct reason that were explained above. To reiterate, each such reasoning has a subject, a predicate, and a reason. Its validity is tested by checking the three modes of subject property, positive entailment, and negative entailment.

I. The Analysis of a Nature: The Reasoning of Freedom from Unity and Multiplicity

A. The formulation of the reasoning

All phenomena—such as sprouts—do not really exist, because they lack unity and multiplicity, just as a reflection in a mirror.

B. The three modes of the reason

The subject of this reasoning is just mere appearances without examination and analysis. The *subject property* that applies to this subject is as follows: These mere appearances are not a real unity, because they possess many parts. Each of these parts can in turn be broken down into many subparts. Since this process can be infinitely repeated, there is not a single smallest particle that is a really existent and indivisible unity. Without even one real building block, how could you put together many so as to create a really existent thing? Consequently, there can be nothing that is a real multiplicity, because there is no real unity to begin with that could build up such a multiplicity. To be sure, this reasoning does not negate the mere conventionality that one thing has many parts. The point here is that neither the thing in question nor its parts really exist by themselves. Thus, what is denied is not the mere appearance of unity and multiplicity on the level of seeming reality but the existence of any unity or multiplicity that is really established and findable as such.

For example, our body consists of its head, torso, and limbs. The legs can be further broken down into the thighs, knees, calves, ankles, and feet. The feet can be divided into the heel, the toes, and so on. The toes are just an assembly of single knuckles consisting of bone, cartilage, blood vessels, and so forth. Examining the microscopic level of each of these constituents, one arrives at their molecular, atomic, and subatomic structures.

At various points in this process, different Buddhists and non-Buddhists claim that there are smallest (sub)atomic particles that cannot be broken down further. Thus, what is particularly refuted through this reasoning is the existence of such infinitesimal particles, which often are regarded as partless and dimensionless, [238] similar to a mathematical point. In addition, they are said to be the building blocks of all coarse material phenomena. However, if these particles do not have any parts or spatial extensions, they cannot aggregate with others of their kind, since there are no surfaces or sides to contact anything else. Also, even many such dimensionless particles could never add up to some larger phenomenon that is perceptible by our senses, since even a million times zero spatial extension is still zero spatial extension. On the other hand, if these particles could align with others in order to build up larger three-dimensional things, they would have to have at least six sides—front, rear, left, right, top, and bottom—to allow for any form of contact with other particles in order to create a three-dimensional object. This, however, contradicts the claim that these particles are partless and extensionless. Thus, since no indivisible units or smallest possible particles can be found, there are no real multiplicities of phenomena that are built by them.¹⁸⁸

The *positive entailment* here means that the reason (whatever lacks real unity and multiplicity) may only be found in the homologous set of the predicate (everything that does not really exist). In other words, whatever is neither a real unity nor a real multiplicity must necessarily not really exist. The reverse of this—the *negative entailment*—is that if something really exists,¹⁸⁹ then it must necessarily be either a real unity or a real multiplicity, because unity and multiplicity are mutually exclusive and there is no third possibility. This is the law of the excluded middle that is accepted by all realists.

From among the three doors to liberation, this reasoning teaches the door of emptiness.

II. The Analysis of Causes: The Vajra Sliver Reasoning

The vajra sliver reasoning bears this name because—just as a vajra is indestructible and at the same time capable of destroying everything else—it is able to shatter the huge rock mountain of wrong views that cling to real existence, while being completely unassailable itself. It is explained as it is found in *The Fundamental Verses on Centrism*:

Not from themselves, not from something other,
Not from both, and not without a cause—
At any place and any time,
All entities lack arising.¹⁹⁰

Three of these four possibilities of arising are refuted by all Buddhist texts that deal with Centrism or valid cognition in general.¹⁹¹ These positions are exemplified by the Indian non-Buddhist schools of the Enumerators, who assert that things arise from themselves; the Jinas, who assert that things arise from both themselves and something other; and the Mundanely

Minded, who assert that [239] there is no cause. The fourth possibility of things arising from something other—the position of most other Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools—is refuted through Centrist texts alone.

The vajra sliver reasoning analyzes arising by taking the example of a seed (the cause) growing into a sprout (the result) and investigating their exact relationship. For example, we will search for the precise time when the seed is no longer a seed and becomes a sprout instead.

A. The formulation of the reasoning

A sprout is without arising, because it is without arising from itself, from others, from both, and from neither, just like an appearance in a dream.

B. The three modes of the reason

The *positive* and *negative entailment* cannot go beyond these four extremes of arising: Whatever does not arise from itself, from something other, from both, or from neither (that is, without any cause) necessarily does not arise at all. On the other hand, if things were to arise, they necessarily would have to arise either from themselves, from something other, from both, or from neither. There are no other possibilities. This is the case whether one looks at it from the perspective of analyzing for real existence or just in terms of mere arising. It should be clear, however, that this reasoning does not deny the mere appearance of something arising on the bare experiential level, where, because of ignorance, it seems as though things arise.

Here, establishing the *subject property* has four parts, since there are four possibilities of arising to be negated.

1. Establishing the reason that entities do not arise from themselves

The classic example in Centrist texts for people who assert that things arise from themselves are the Enumerators. They claim, “A sprout is merely a manifestation of the sole cosmic cause, which is the permanent primal substance. This really existing primal substance is the sprout’s nature. Therefore, this sprout arises from its own nature, which is a permanent entity.” By this, they mean that cause and result are one and the same in terms of their nature, substance, and time.

This position, however, leads to absurd consequences. For example, the same thing would be both the phenomenon that is produced and the phenomenon that produces it. This means that the sprout would be identical to both the primal substance and the seed (the latter being just an expression of this primal substance). Furthermore, it would not be justified that the seed from which the sprout has arisen ceases to exist, since this seed is nothing but an expression of the permanent primal substance. Consequently, the seed would either permanently exist or arise all the time. However, if the seed as the cause of the sprout does not [240] cease, then one would not find its result—the sprout—since results can only appear after their causes. In

addition, if cause and result—seed and sprout—are the same and if the one arises from the other, the sprout should look exactly the same as the seed. If the seed, however, loses its own nature and turns into something else—a sprout different in color and shape—it cannot have a real and unchangeable nature of its own.

In general, in the context of causality, the result of a specific cause can only be perceived once this cause has ceased. However, if seed and sprout are not different, once the seed ceases, the sprout should also disappear. Or, once the sprout is visible, the seed too should be visible at the same time. Both possibilities contradict the notion of causality altogether. In addition, if things were to arise from themselves, all the distinct things that are agents and the objects upon which these agents act would be one and the same. Thus, that things arise from themselves is neither reasonable on the ultimate level nor accepted on the level of conventional worldly reality.

The Enumerators also say, “In general, only such things that exist already at the time of their causes arise, whereas previously nonexistent things can never arise. For example, sesame oil comes forth from sesame seeds when they are ground, because it already existed before in the seeds. The reason that sesame oil does not appear from grinding sand is that it does not exist in sand.” The basic assumption behind this statement is the impossibility of something arising from nothing. Hence, a result cannot arise later without existing at the time of its specific cause. Moreover, there are no other causes apart from its specific cause either that could transform a result that does not exist in the first place into an existent result later. Thus, the Enumerators say, the result must preexist at the time of the cause.

However, if things—that is to say, results—arise from themselves alone, it implicitly follows that they need no other factors for their arising. So why does one have to struggle to grind sesame seeds or farm, since the harvest already exists when the seeds are present? In addition, if the result is the same as its cause, why should the result arise again, since it exists already? In general, if a thing is not yet present, it does not exist as a result. If it is already present, it is pointless for it to arise again. And if the result would still arise even though it exists already, then it would have to arise endlessly. As Buddhapaṇita’s commentary on *Fundamental Verses* I.1 says:

Entities do not arise from their own intrinsic nature, because their arising would be pointless and because they would arise endlessly. For entities that [already] exist as their own intrinsic nature, there is no need to arise again. If they were to arise despite existing [already], there would be no time when they do not arise; [but] that is also not asserted [by the Enumerators].¹⁹²

[241] The Enumerators may continue, “There are two different phases in the process of arising. If a vase is made out of clay, it is the unmanifest vase in its state of being a lump of clay—the cause—that arises as a manifest vase—the result—later. Of course, we do not think that the vase that is already clearly manifest as the result arises again. Therefore, there is a difference between these two phases of the vase in that it is either clearly manifest or not.”

However, if the vase already existed as an entity, it would be utterly pointless for it to arise again. On the other hand, if “it” arose from its state of not being clearly manifest, then it would be nothing other than a nonexistent that newly arises. Here, the Enumerators do not explicitly assert that the clearly manifest result as such does not exist at the time of the cause, but this is what follows from their claim that it becomes clearly manifest only later. In fact, they deny that the result is entirely nonexistent at the time of the cause and that it arises completely anew. However, implicitly, this is exactly what their position boils down to, because by claiming that the result exists as a potential, they just obscure the distinction between the nonexistence of the result at the time of the cause and its later existence. Saying that it is not manifest at the time of the cause amounts to saying that it does not exist. Through talking about “the unmanifest vase in its state of being a lump of clay,” the Enumerators simply blend two different things into one, for a lump of clay is clearly not a vase. For one, a lump of clay cannot be said to be a vase, because it does not manifest as a vase. Nor does an “unmanifest vase” make sense, because then it would equally follow that it is an unmanifest cup, an unmanifest statue, or whatever else could be made from that clay. This would lead to the consequence that not only a vase but all these other unmanifest things too should arise from this one lump of clay.

Moreover, if the result existed at the time of the cause, it would have to be observable at this point. However, from that, it would follow that an apple tree can be perceived in an apple seed or milk in the grass eaten by a cow. One of the classic consequences is that an ant should carry around an elephant, the elephant being the karmic result of the existence as an ant to become manifest in one of the ant’s future rebirths. In fact, the entirety of all infinite results of a given cause over time should then be observable at the same time in this cause. On the other hand, if the result is not observable at all at the time of the cause, how can it be said to exist?

There is no third alternative of saying that the result is partially existent, although this is precisely what the Enumerators (and many others) try to do by their formulation of an “unmanifest vase.” However, even if there were such a partial existence of a vase, what would it look like? Even a partial existence should be observable at the time of the cause, but this is not the case. And if the result were partially existent at the time of the cause, where would the lacking portions of its complete existence come from? In general, it is impossible to identify a [242] distinct point in time at which the result turns from nonexistence into existence. It is also impossible to identify distinct points in time that are related to a gradual increase in the result’s existence, such as “Up to here it exists at about 30 percent or 50 percent, and from here onward it exists at 100 percent.” Nor does it make any sense that the result would leap from some degree of partial existence to full existence in the next moment. In addition, the most fundamental problem in that respect lies in the Enumerators’ own claim that the primal substance as the single and final cosmic cause is not something perceptible in the first place.

In a very general sense, when it is said that all manifestations are potentially present in and as the primal substance and just become manifest at certain times, this would lead to the conclusion that all possible future results exist right from the very beginning. Furthermore,

since all causes and results are said to be identical, at any given point in time, all possible results within the past, present, and future of the universe as well as all their causes would have to exist simultaneously.

2. Establishing the reason that entities do not arise from something other (the second part of establishing the subject property of the vajra sliver reasoning)

Our usual idea about causes and results is that things arise from something other than themselves. On the level of worldly seeming reality, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist realists¹⁹³ say, “We agree that entities do not arise from themselves, but their arising from something other is established through valid cognition. There are reasons for this. Factually concordant types of consciousness arise from the four conditions,¹⁹⁴ and in general most things arise from causal and dominant conditions. Both causes and results are not just mere mental imputations, but they are established from the object’s own side. The fact that they arise withstands analysis. You cannot simply reason them away.”

There are many reasonings to negate this position, but they are all contained in two:

- a. Arising from something other is impossible.
- b. In the context of arising, something other is in itself impossible.

a. Arising from something other is impossible.

Much confusion regarding what is “same” or “other” comes from our very loose and vague use of these notions, such as saying, “other but still similar or same” or “a little bit other” as opposed to “completely other.” For example, we may think that, compared to ice, fire is “more other” than water. In the context of Centrist reasoning, the notion of “other” is as strict and literal as can be: Things are either the same or different. Either cause and result are assumed to be identical (as the Enumerators state) or they have to be different, that is, other. There [243] is no third possibility. Thus, being other is not a question of degree: Things are other whether they differ in all or in just one of their many features. Thus, all similar things must necessarily be different from each other, since what is identical is not similar. In other words, the categories of same and different are mutually exclusive and exhaustive.

One of the consequences of this clear delineation is that if things could arise from causes that are other than themselves, it would absurdly follow that anything could arise from anything. For example, deep darkness could originate even from bright light. As *The Entrance into Centrism* says:

If something were to originate in dependence on something other than it,
Well, then utter darkness could spring from flames
And everything could arise from everything,
Because everything that does not produce [a specific result] is the same in being other
[than it].¹⁹⁵

The reasons for this consequence are as follows: If we consider a wheat seed and a rose seed, they are equal in that they are both something other than a rose sprout, and, in terms of real things, their being other than the rose sprout is something that is established through their own specific natures. Thus, since a wheat seed and a rose seed are equally other than a rose sprout, either both or neither of them should be able to produce the rose sprout.

We usually think that such phenomena as a rose seed and a rose sprout have a close connection, such as sharing some similarities or being in the same continuum, or that the seed as the specific cause has some causal efficacy or potential to produce the sprout as its specific result. On the other hand, we think that there is no such connection between a wheat seed and a rose sprout and even less so between fire and water or light and darkness. However, none of these notions of a relation between certain phenomena that we consider as causes and results solves the issue of arising from something other. They just perpetuate the mere assumption that things arise from something other: Even if causes and results are similar and in the same continuum, or if there were a certain productive potential in some things—the specific causes—and not in others, this does not change the basic fact that causes are still other than their results. Thus, the same consequences as above apply.

Moreover, when analyzed, there is just as much “causal connection” between a rose seed and a rose sprout as between fire and water: none whatsoever. For there is never any time in the process of arising when the cause actually meets the result so that the cause or its productive potential could have any effect on the result. As long as the cause exists, the result is not yet present, and as soon as the result appears, the cause has necessarily ceased. So when would the cause unfold [244] its productive potential? The cause can obviously not unfold it when the cause itself does not exist. If it were an existent cause that displays this productive potential, this would still not make the result appear. It cannot appear during the existence of the cause, since cause and result cannot exist simultaneously. Otherwise, they could not function as cause and result in the first place. In order to speak of causality, the cause has to precede the result.¹⁹⁶ So if the cause must be first and cannot exist simultaneously with the result, there is no connection between cause and result and also no chance for a hypothetical productive potential of the cause to bring about or interact with the result, since they never meet. Therefore, eventually, this position of realists that things arise from something other entails the self-contradictory consequence that a sprout *cannot* arise from a seed, because—according to them—seed and sprout are something other through their respective specific natures.

b. In the context of arising, something other is impossible.

In the context of a result arising from a cause, the notion of “otherness” is altogether inappropriate. The reason for this is that in order to speak of two things as being other, they must exist at the same time. To elaborate, in terms of otherness that is based on really existing and substantial things and does not just refer to a mental image of something that is not present, there have to be two distinct things in the first place that can be contrasted as being “other.” These can only be two phenomena that are simultaneously observable as existing in

the present, such as the left and the right horn of a cow or two persons in the same room. This then excludes the possibility of cause and result being other, since they are by definition never simultaneous.

Saying it in reverse, nonsimultaneous things cannot be other. Thus, since the result is not present at the time when the cause exists, at the time of the cause, there is just one phenomenon (the cause itself) and not two, that is, no result that could be identified or perceived as other than this cause. The same principle applies to the time when the result exists and the cause has ceased. Consequently, if cause and result were other, they would have to be simultaneous, but this contradicts the process of causality. The simultaneity of cause and result is also refuted through the examination of whether the result that is produced already exists or does not exist at the time of the cause.¹⁹⁷ Thus, *The Lucid Words* says:

Entities also do not arise from something other, because there is nothing other.¹⁹⁸

Looking at this issue from the perspective of the reasoning of the freedom from unity and multiplicity, if all things do not really exist and even lack an identifiable nature of their own, what in them should determine one thing to be other [245] than another one? Also, if there is no thing that is really established in itself in any way, how could there be something other whose otherness depends on this first nonexistent thing? As *The Fundamental Verses* says:

If an entity in itself does not exist,
An entity other [than it] does not exist either.¹⁹⁹

The refutation of things arising from something other is likewise accomplished by analyzing the four conditions. They include all possibilities of arising from something that is other than the result. The result, however, is found in none of the four. As *The Fundamental Verses* says:

Conditions are fourfold:
Causal, objective,
Immediate, and dominant.
There is no fifth condition.

The nature of entities
Does not exist in conditions and such.²⁰⁰

Thus, the nature of a rice sprout does not exist in any of its conditions. It does not exist in its causal conditions (water and manure), nor in its object condition (the harvest), nor in its immediate condition (the last moment of the rice seed), nor in its dominant condition (the person who planted the seed).

Causal Conditions: If causal conditions, such as water and manure, intrinsically have functions or productive capacities—such as giving rise to a sprout—they would have to produce sprouts all the time. And if they do not have any such functions or capacities, there could never be any

production from them. In this case, however, why would they be presented as conditions for a result at all? Moreover, Nagarjuna says, the relationship between conditions and their assumed functions cannot be settled:

Function is not something that entails conditions.
[Conventionally, however,] there is no function that does not entail conditions.
[Thus,] what does not entail a function is not a condition,
And there is none that entails a function.²⁰¹

Further absurd consequences can be drawn when the result and its conditions are placed on a time line. Most people think that water, manure, and such are [246] the conditions of a sprout, since the latter arises in dependence on the former. However, in terms of each moment of the sprout's arising, as long as its respective moments have not arisen and thus are nonexistent, any preceding moments of water and so on cannot be its conditions. And once the sprout's respective moments have arisen, there is no more need for any conditions. Hence, when would they be the conditions of the sprout?

This is consensus: "Since something arises in dependence on these,
Therefore, they are its conditions."
As long as this [something] does not arise,
How could these not be things that are not its conditions?

For [both] nonexistents and existents,
Conditions are not reasonable:
If something does not exist, the conditions of what would they be?
If something exists [already], what are conditions good for?²⁰²

In general, upon analysis, any existing or nonexistent phenomenon disintegrates and thus is not established. If no phenomenon can be established, then how could its causes or conditions be established?

Once phenomena are not established
As existent, nonexistent, or [both] existent and nonexistent,
How could one speak of "productive causes"?
It would be unreasonable, if such applied.²⁰³

Object Conditions: Likewise, the object condition is not established either. In the context of perception, an object is regarded as a condition for the arising of the consciousness that perceives this object. But if they are placed on a time line, we can see that this cannot work. If the object existed before the specific consciousness that is supposedly caused by it, what would this later consciousness perceive? The same applies if the object existed after the consciousness that is its perceiver. And if the object existed simultaneously with it, it could not be the cause of this consciousness.

Immediate Conditions: In general Buddhist epistemology, it is consensus that the previous moment of consciousness that has just ceased is the “immediate condition,” or the immediately preceding condition of the next moment of consciousness. However, since it has already been refuted that there is anything that arises, something that has ceased cannot be justified. Moreover, since something that has ceased does not [247] exist anymore, it is also not suitable to serve as a condition. Hence, an immediate condition is also not established.

If phenomena have not arisen,
Cessation is not justified.
Therefore, the immediate condition is not reasonable.
If it has ceased, what would be such a condition?²⁰⁴

Dominant Conditions: The notion of dominant conditions is mostly used in the process of perception. It refers to the respective sense faculties based on which specific consciousnesses arise, such as the eye consciousness arising on the basis of the eye sense faculty. Since all of the above (and the following) refutations equally apply to dominant conditions, Nagarjuna does not treat them separately.

Still, Buddhists might argue, “This contradicts the Buddha’s teaching. In terms of dependent origination, he said, ‘Since this exists, that originates. Since this has arisen, that arises. Due to the condition of basic unawareness, there is formation and so on.’” *The Lucid Words* states:

These teachings of arising in the sense of dependent origination and so on are not meant in terms of the nature of the object of the uncontaminated wisdom of those who are free from the blurred vision of basic ignorance. “To what do they refer then?” They are meant in terms of the objects of the consciousnesses of those whose eyes of insight are impaired by the blurred vision of basic ignorance.²⁰⁵

Hence, a result does not dwell in any of its diverse conditions. Thus, if the result is nonexistent at the time of its causes and conditions, how could such a nonexistent arise as an existent later? If it were to arise despite its nonexistence, then it could arise even from things that are not its causes, or it could arise without any cause at all. As *The Fundamental Verses* says:

The result does not exist at all
In any of its diverse conditions or their assembly.
How could what does not exist in its conditions
Arise from such conditions?

However, if it does not exist
And were still to arise from these conditions,
Why would it not also arise
From what are not its conditions?²⁰⁶

[248] Some people might still argue, “Because the result depends on its conditions, the result is something that has the nature of its conditions.” If none of these conditions exists as something that even bears its own nature, how could any of them be the nature of the result? On the other hand, conventionally, there is also no result that does not depend on conditions. Therefore, causes and conditions are nothing but superimpositions.

You might say, “The result is of the nature of its conditions.”
[However,] conditions do not have a nature of their own.
What is the result of something that is not an entity in itself?
How could it be of the nature of [such] conditions?

Therefore, it is not of the nature of its conditions.
[However,] there is [also] no result with a nature of what are not its conditions.
Since results do not exist,
How could nonconditions be conditions?²⁰⁷

3. Establishing the reason that entities do not arise from both themselves and others (the third part of establishing the subject property of the vajra sliver reasoning)

Some people, such as the followers of Visnu and the Jainas,²⁰⁸ say, “That a clay vase arises from itself means that it is made out of clay and still has this nature of clay, thus not being something other than it. That the vase arises from something other means that it arises through the activity of a potter, a potter’s wheel, water, and so on. Hence, things do not arise exclusively from themselves nor exclusively from others. Rather they arise from a combination of these two ways of arising.”

This third possibility of arising from both is already implicitly refuted through the above negations of things arising from themselves or from something other respectively. Therefore, the negation of the combination of the first two possibilities of arising is usually only touched upon very briefly in Centrist texts. For example, *The Lucid Words* explains:

Nor do entities arise from both [themselves and others], because this would entail [all] the flaws that were stated for both of these theses and because none of these [disproved possibilities] have the capacity to produce [entities].²⁰⁹

Thus, if neither things themselves nor something other than these things have the power to give rise to anything, the combination of two such powerless factors [249] can in no way result in any power that causes things to arise. For example, if a single grain of sand has no power to produce olive oil, many such powerless grains are still equally powerless to produce oil. Or, in mathematical terms, many times zero is still zero.

4. Establishing that entities do not arise without any cause (the fourth part of establishing the subject property of the vajra sliver reasoning)

Most Indian hedonists or materialists claim that things arise without any causes; that is, that they just arise naturally and spontaneously come into being as they are. One of their scriptures says:

The roundness of peas, the long sharp tips of thorns,
The colorful patterns of the feathers of a peacock's wings,
The rising of the sun, and the downhill flow of rivers—
All these were created by nobody. Their cause is their very nature.

However, this position has completely absurd consequences, such as that things in general would either arise all the time or never arise. Furthermore, it clearly contradicts our everyday perception of results appearing at certain times in dependence on certain things or actions that are their causes, such as a harvest appearing only due to farming. We generally see that results do not occur just by accident or without a cause. If things could indeed appear without any causes, anything nonexistent or impossible could manifest, such as a lotus growing in the sky. A further consequence would be that we could not perceive anything in the world, because there would be no objects that could serve as causes for our perceptions. On the level of common worldly experience, if we see a blue flower, this is due to there being a blue flower to be perceived. If there is no such blue flower, a perception of it does not arise. As *The Lucid Words* says:

If these beings were empty of being causes, they could not be apprehended,
Just like the smell and the color of an utpala flower in the sky.²¹⁰

If things arose without causes, no effort would be required to produce or accomplish anything, since things would either arise anyway or not arise even despite such efforts. For example, meals could appear without any ingredients or cooking, or they would not appear at all no matter how diligently we prepared them. In fact, any goal-oriented activity, such as assembling a car, would be completely pointless, since all these activities would never be the causes of a desired result, such as a car that could actually be driven. If we are lucky, though, it might [250] pop up out of nowhere and work anyway. Thus, anything could arise at any time in a completely haphazard way, such as a blazing fire in the depths of the ocean or darkness in the middle of a bright lamp. Or, it would follow that an apple tree could arise not only from an apple seed but also from a rose seed, because—according to the position that things arise without a cause—both seeds are equal in not being the cause for the apple tree. Also, any fruits should be fully ripened all the time or never, because their ripeness does not depend on any other factors, such as chemical processes or time. And since a peacock is not the cause of the colors of its feathers, a crow should also have such beautiful feathers.

One might object, “There is a difference in the case of a flower growing in the sky and such things as a harvest, since the former does not have an existent nature, whereas the latter have.” However, even such a difference does not remove the above absurd consequences, since—according to the position that things arise without causes—a result that is assumed to

have an existent nature would still be something that arises without a cause and thus is equally subject to the same inconsistencies.

Moreover, the very fact of making any statement or even giving a reason contradicts the original thesis that there are no causes, since making a statement or giving a reason is a cause that makes other persons understand something. If things arise without causes, other persons should understand everything without anybody ever saying anything. Or, nobody would ever understand anything, despite being given the most sophisticated explanations and reasons.

Other hedonists say, “The only kind of valid cognition is direct perception. Thus, only those things that can be directly perceived exist. Their causes are the four great material elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—but not such things as positive or negative actions, whether they happen in this lifetime or in any past or future ones that may be assumed. The same goes for the mind: It is merely something that evolves from the four elements in our body. Just as the mixture of barley and yeast gives rise to the force that inebriates the mind, the ripening of the union of sperm and egg gives rise to the mind.”²¹¹

The first counterargument here is that the elements themselves do not exist. The three preceding possibilities for an arising of things—from themselves, something other, or both—have already been refuted through the corresponding parts of the vajra sliver reasoning. Thus, all phenomena—including the four great elements—do not really arise or exist in the first place. Therefore, the question of whether these elements can be the causes of anything does not apply.

Second, even in the relative world, this position makes no sense. There are a number of inconsistencies and counterarguments, even if the above statements on valid cognition, existence, and the body-mind problem are addressed on the mere conventional level. For example, if only directly perceptible things exist and can serve as causes, it would follow that our own inner organs, such as the [251] heart, do not exist and cannot be the causes for our staying alive, since we never directly perceive them (seeing them in a corpse or on an x-ray can only lead to an inference that we have these organs).

In terms of past and future lives, the hedonists’ justification that these do not exist is again that if they existed, they would have to exist in a directly manifest way for our perception. However, since they are not directly perceptible, they are said to be nonexistent. If these people are asked whether their knowledge that such lifetimes are not directly perceptible comes from direct perception or something that is not direct perception, their answer naturally is, “It comes from direct perception.” However, then it absurdly follows that the nonexistence of past and future lives as things is something directly perceptible, because they say that the lack of direct perceptibility of these lifetimes is directly perceptible. If this is accepted, it follows that this lack of perceptibility—which is nothing but the nonexistence of things—would nevertheless be an existing thing for the hedonists, since it is directly perceptible, just as existing things are. Then it further follows that also things do not exist, since there is no such thing as the total “lack of things” as a counterpart for things. In other words, “things” cannot be established without “the

lack of things” and vice versa. If even this is accepted, it follows that both the elements’ existence as things and the nonexistence of past and future lives as things are not justified, because neither things nor the lack of things exist.

At this point, these people might object, “Well, it is very easy to know that something is not directly perceptible, since this is known from the sign or reason that consists in its lack of direct perceptibility.” However, from their above position that direct perception is the only kind of valid cognition, it then follows that one is not able to infer the nonexistence of past and future lives, because if the lack of direct perceptibility of these lifetimes is not directly perceived, one is not able to apprehend this lack in any other way at all. If they say, “It is apprehended through inference,” this disqualifies their standard statements about inference not being a type of valid cognition, such as, “Since inferring past lives from the sign or reason of varying individual degrees of happiness and suffering in this life is as unjustified as the story of the wolf’s footprints,²¹² inference is impossible” and “All that exists is limited to the spheres of the five senses.” Thus, there is no proof that past and future lifetimes do not exist, while there are many reasons that suggest their existence.²¹³

As for the claim that the material elements are the causes of mind, this also cannot be justified. In general, phenomena whose characteristics are contradictory cannot function as the cause and result of each other. For example, fire does not arise from water, and permanent things do not arise from impermanent things. Likewise, on the conventional level, the main characteristics of matter are to have certain shapes and colors, to have extensions in space and time, to obstruct other [252] things, to consist of particles, and to not be conscious. On the other hand, mind has neither shape nor color nor any spatial or durational extension. Mind does not obstruct anything, is not made of particles, and is conscious. Moreover, if the elements in the body were the causes of mind, any changes in these causes would always have to affect the mind as their result in a strictly corresponding way. For example, if the body is healthy or deteriorates, the mind would have to be equally healthy or deteriorating. However, there are numerous counterexamples, such as a very sharp and flexible mind in a frail or handicapped body or a completely deranged mind in a perfectly healthy body. In addition, since outer material things also consist of the four elements, there is no reason that stones and the like should not also exhibit some manifestations of consciousness as well as some other features that are found only in animate bodies, such as respiration, metabolism, movement, and reproduction.²¹⁴

In brief, the appearances of this world do not arise without any causes, because these appearances arise only sometimes. This reason might seem odd at first. However, as was explained above, if things arise without causes, all of them would have to arise all the time or never. Thus, the fact that certain things only arise at certain times and not at others is the most powerful indication that there must be something that accounts for this difference. This “something” is the completeness of all the specific causes and conditions that lead to a certain result. Conversely, if these causes and conditions are incomplete, their specific result does not arise.

To summarize the vajra sliver reasoning, it is clear that there is not the slightest arising through any of the four possibilities described. However, since it is worldly consensus that there is arising, such arising is just presented according to this usual way of thinking. Thus, it is not refuted here that, from the perspective of mere worldly consensus without analysis, it appears as if things arise. Also, the vajra sliver reasoning is definitely not meant to negate the principle of causality altogether. For, when not analyzed, causality clearly performs its function on the level of seeming reality. However, even on this level, people do not claim that results arise from themselves or something other and so on. Rather, they just say that a sprout arises from a seed, but they do not determine whether the seed is identical to or other than the sprout. As *The Entrance into Centrism* says:

After worldly people have merely implanted a seed,
They say, "I engendered this child"
And think, "I planted a tree."
Therefore, even on the worldly level, there is no arising from something other.²¹⁵

Thus, in general, according to Centrists, any attempt to justify everyday experience through something other than just mere conventional consensus must [253] inevitably lead to logical and—more important—spiritual problems. Thus, in its own terms, seeming reality with all its conventional appearances is not to be analyzed, since then one already moves away from this very seeming reality. It functions as such only as long as it is not questioned.

From among the three doors to liberation, the vajra sliver reasoning teaches the door of signlessness.

III. The Analysis of Results: The Negation of an Arising of Existents and Nonexistents

This reasoning is basically an elaboration of the negation of arising from something other as found in the context of the vajra sliver reasoning.

A. The formulation of the reasoning

Mere appearances do not exist by their nature, because neither existents nor nonexistents arise, just like an illusion.

B. The three modes of the reason

Here, the *subject property* is that mere appearances do not arise either as existents or as nonexistents. So the question is: "If a sprout arises, does it then arise as something that existed already at the time of the seed, or does it arise as something that did not exist at that time? Can it possibly arise as something that is both existent and nonexistent or as something that is neither?"

As explained above, any phenomenon that exists will not arise, since it has already arisen before. Nonexistents will not arise either, because there is nothing that could arise and because there is no cause whatsoever that could turn a nonexistent into something existent. In addition, if the sprout were to arise as something that already existed at the time of the seed, then it would have arisen either from something other than the seed or without any cause, but obviously not from this seed itself. Moreover, there would be no need for the seed as the sprout's cause, since the latter is already present without having to arise in dependence on this seed. If the sprout has already arisen in dependence on something other than the seed, what would be the point of a seed as yet another cause? And if it had arisen without any cause, the seed would be equally superfluous. On the other hand, if the sprout arose as something that did not exist at the time of the seed, then there would not be the slightest influence or effect that the cause (the seed) could have on such a nonexistent. That the sprout could arise from the combination of both possibilities—existence and nonexistence—is self-contradictory. It is also implicitly refuted through the negations of the first two possibilities, since their inconsistencies just multiply. As for the fourth possibility, there is nothing that is neither existent nor nonexistent, so what would arise?

The *positive entailment* of the reason here is that whatever does not arise either [254] as an existent or as a nonexistent does not exist by its nature, since these two possibilities are mutually exclusive and there is no third. The same reason applies to the *negative entailment*, since anything that is assumed to exist by its nature would necessarily have to arise either as an existent or as a nonexistent.

Exemplary proponents of the first possibility—arising as an existent—include the Enumerators, whose position of the arising of a result that exists already at the time of the cause has been refuted in detail above. The Buddhist school of the Followers of The Great Exposition claims the arising of a result that already exists in the future.²¹⁶ This position is refuted as follows: If a thing that has not yet arisen here and now were to exist in some unknown other place at present, it might be reasonable for it to arise here in the future. However, since there is no such place where all future things exist right now, what could arise from this place later? And even if there were such a place with already existing future things, they would have to be perceptible right now. Otherwise, how could one claim that they exist at present? *The Fundamental Verses* says:

If some nonarisen entity
Existed somewhere,
It might arise.
However, since such does not exist, what would arise?²¹⁷

As for the second possibility—arising as a nonexistent—there are many Buddhists and non-Buddhists who assert the new arising of a result that previously did not exist. However, it is impossible for nonexistents to depend on any causes. Consequently, if something that has not

existed before can still arise, it would follow that just about anything can arise, even impossibilities such as a hairy frog.

If something that lacks arising could arise,
Just about anything could arise in this way.²¹⁸

From among the doors to complete liberation, this reasoning teaches the door of wishlessness.

IV. The Analysis of Both Causes and Results: The Negation of Arising from the Four Possibilities

A. The formulation of the reasoning

Mere appearances lack arising, because a single result does not arise from a single cause; many results do not arise from a single cause; a single result does not arise from many causes; and many results also do not arise from many causes.

B. The three modes of the reason

[255] As for the *subject property*, when considered just from the perspective of our mistakenness, the following statements are rather unproblematic: “One sprout arises from one seed,” “One eye consciousness arises from three conditions,” “Many children are born from one mother,” and “Many harvests come from many causes, such as seeds, water, and manure.” However, from the perspective of reasoning, an arising from any of these four possibilities is impossible, since, briefly put, the reasoning at hand is just an elaboration of the reasoning of the freedom from unity and multiplicity. As was explained above, there is no phenomenon that is a real unity or a real multiplicity in the first place. From this, it naturally follows that there are no real single or multiple causes that could give rise to any single or multiple results.

A more detailed way to look at these four possibilities is found in Jñanagarbha’s autocommentary on verse 14 of his *Distinction between the Two Realities*:²¹⁹

1. A single result does not arise from a single cause

For example, if the eye sense faculty only produced the single result that is the next moment of its own continuum, it could not also produce a visual consciousness in this next moment. In that case, everybody would be blind. On the other hand, if the eye sense faculty produced the single result that is a visual consciousness, its own continuum as an eye sense faculty would have to stop at that moment. Naturally, the same goes for the remaining sense faculties as well as for other phenomena, such as a candle flame: Either it produces its own next moment, and thus no visual perception of itself, or it causes a visual consciousness in someone but then becomes extinguished in that very moment.

2. Many results do not arise from a single cause

If a single cause all by itself were to produce a second or more results, cause and result would lack a causal relationship, since the cause would be single while the result would be multiple. In other words, the singularity of the cause does not produce a corresponding singularity of the result. However, if a further factor within or in addition to that single cause is assumed to produce the second result, clearly one is no longer speaking about a single cause.

3. A single result does not arise from many causes

This entails the reverse of the problem in (2), that is, that the multiplicity of the cause does not produce a corresponding multiplicity of the result. Conversely, the absence of multiplicity in the cause would not cause the absence of multiplicity in the result either. For, in this case of a single result arising from many causes, the result lacks multiplicity, while the cause does not. Consequently, neither the multiplicity of the result nor its lack thereof would have a cause, since there is no [256] third category beyond causes and results being either multiple or nonmultiple. Hence, nothing would have a cause. In that case, everything would either exist permanently or not exist at all or would just arise at random.

4. Many results do not arise from many causes

The basic problem of the lack of invariable congruence between cause and result in terms of both being either single or multiple applies here too. Take the example of visual perception: If the cause is multiple (for example, an eye sense faculty, a visual form, and an immediately preceding moment of consciousness), then the result (the single resultant moment of a visual consciousness) should invariably be multiple too, but this is obviously not the case. Likewise, in being a result, a clay vase should be multiple due to the multiplicity of its cause (clay, water, a potter, and a potter's wheel).

As for the *positive entailment* here, it means that whatever does not arise from these four possibilities must necessarily lack arising altogether. The *negative entailment* means that anything that arises must necessarily arise from one of these possibilities.

V. The Analysis of Mere Appearances: The Reasoning of Dependent Origination

The Precious Garland says:

Due to the existence of this, that comes to be,
Just as something short, when there is something long.
Due to the arising of this, that arises,
Just as light due to the appearance of a butter lamp.²²⁰

Accordingly, there are two types of dependence:

- A. dependence in terms of dependent imputation, such as being short in dependence on being long
- B. dependence in terms of dependent origination, such as the arising of smoke due to the arising of fire

A. Dependence in terms of imputation

1. The formulation of the reasoning

For example, it may be said, “All things are neither really big nor small, because being big and small depend on each other.”

2. The three modes of the reason

[257] The *subject property* says that all things depend on each other in terms of being big or small. In other words, anything that is big in comparison to something smaller than itself is at the same time small when compared to some third thing that is even bigger and vice versa. The *positive entailment* means that whatever depends on something else in terms of being big or small is necessarily not really or independently big or small. The *negative entailment* means that if there were something intrinsically big or small, it would have to be independent of everything other in terms of being big or small. The same applies for all other mutually dependent characteristics, such as existent and nonexistent, good and bad, or beautiful and ugly.

B. Dependence in terms of origination

1. The formulation of the reasoning

This reasoning is called “the king of reasonings” through which Centrists demonstrate that phenomena are empty of any true reality, since it eliminates the extremes of both permanence and extinction. Since phenomena originate in dependence on various causes and conditions, on the conventional level of seeming reality, they are not as utterly nonexistent as a long-haired turtle.²²¹ This eliminates the extreme of extinction. At the same time, phenomena do not exist as permanent things that are established through a nature of their own precisely because they depend on other causes and conditions and thus lack any real and independent nature. As *The Sutra Requested by the Naga King* “*The Cool One*” says:

The learned ones realize phenomena that originate in dependence.
In no way do they rely on views about extremes.

The Fundamental Verses states:

What is dependent origination
Is explained as emptiness.
It is a dependent designation
And in itself the middle path.

Since there is no phenomenon
That is not dependently originating,
There is no phenomenon
That is not empty.²²²

In order to explicitly eliminate the two extremes of permanence and extinction, the reasoning of dependent origination can be formulated in two main ways:

- a) [258] To exclude the first extreme, the reasoning may be formulated in a negative way:
“Mere appearances do not exist by their nature, because they dependently originate, just like a dream.”
- b) To eliminate the extreme of extinction and to account for seeming reality, the reasoning may also be stated in an affirmative way: “All phenomena are not nonexistent like the horns of a rabbit, because they dependently originate.” Another way to say this would be:
“Phenomena are illusionlike, because they dependently originate.”

2. The three modes of the reason

At first, the reason “dependently originating” may look like an affirming reason. The *subject property* says that all phenomena necessarily originate in dependence. In terms of its phrasing, this appears to be an affirmative statement. The *positive entailment* is that whatever originates in dependence necessarily does not exist by its nature, is illusionlike, and is also not utterly nonexistent. The *negative entailment* means that if there were anything that existed by its nature, was not illusionlike, or was utterly nonexistent, it would necessarily not originate in dependence. In particular, the explicit words of the reasonings under (B) seem to affirm something about phenomena, that is, their “existence” or “illusionlike being.” However, the meaning that is pointed out by the reason “dependently originating” is nothing other than that things are empty of real existence or real arising. Thus, in whatever way this reasoning of dependent origination may be formulated, it never becomes a means to ascertain some really existent things, be they seeming or ultimate, nor does it suggest some really existent kind of dependent origination. Since this is clearly a case of relying not on mere words but on the meaning, the reasoning of dependent origination is a negating reasoning in effect, since “arising from dependently originating conditions” means nothing other than “lack of real arising.” Obviously, the word “arising” is used here in two different ways: In the first phrase, it refers to the mere illusionlike display of causes and conditions due to ignorance, from which we gain the wrong impression that things really arise. The second phrase means the denial of any real arising in this illusory display, without denying its mere appearance. As the sutras say:

What arises from conditions does not arise.

It does not have the nature of arising.
What depends on conditions is explained to be empty.
Those who understand emptiness are heedful.

Candrakirti's *Commentary on The Four Hundred Verses* says:

[259] I do not say that entities do not exist, because I say that they originate in dependence. "So are you a realist then?" I am not, because I am just a proponent of dependent origination. "What sort of nature is it then that you [propound]?" I propound dependent origination. "What is the meaning of dependent origination?" It has the meaning of the lack of a nature and the meaning of nonarising through a nature [of its own]. It has the meaning of the origination of results with a nature similar to that of illusions, mirages, reflections, cities of scent-eaters,²²³ magical creations, and dreams. It has the meaning of emptiness and identitylessness.²²⁴

Thus, this reasoning shows that, just like the two sides of a single coin, dependent origination and emptiness—or appearance and emptiness—are not at all contradictory but an inseparable unity. This means that although dependently originating phenomena lack any ultimately real existence, on the conventional level they are not just completely nonexistent, since—unlike sky-flowers and such—they represent the experiential consensus of our everyday lives. *The Entrance into Centrism* says:

Just like a vase and such do not exist in true reality
And at the same time exist as common worldly consensus,
All entities originate in this very same way.
Hence, it does not follow that they are the same as the son of a barren woman.

Since both these [causes and results] are illusionlike,
We are not at fault and the entities of the world do exist [as such].²²⁵

The Fundamental Verses declares:

Whatever might be used to invalidate emptiness,
That is, dependent origination,
Just serves to invalidate
The entirety of worldly conventions.²²⁶

If things were not empty of independent and real existence, the interdependent origination of causes and results in the world would be impossible, since nothing could be affected by anything. Thus, none of the appearances and conventions that we constantly deal with would ever come about. However, again, this seeming dependent origination is not something that is presented as part of a Centrist system of its own. All that Centrists say is that, just from the perspective [260] of ordinary worldly experiences, certain appearances seem to appear in dependence on the appearance of certain others, which are called their conditions. Moreover,

the presentation of seeming phenomena as dependent origination serves as a proper support to conveniently approach their ultimate reality, which is that causes and results are empty of any nature. All dualistic phenomena (such as cause and result, subject and object, cyclic existence and nirvana, or seeming and ultimate reality) are just set up in mutual dependence, but none of them exists independently through a nature of its own. In this way, the Centrist view is free from the two extremes of permanence and extinction.

The gist of this is as follows: When Centrists present the arising and ceasing of dependently originating causes and results on the level of no analysis, they neither superimpose nor deprecate anything with regard to the seeming worldly reality of mere appearances. Therefore, when Centrists engage in the conventional interactions of adopting certain things and rejecting others, they do not deviate from the ways of seeming reality, since they express things in a way that does not add or remove anything from how people deal with these things in the context of common worldly consensus. While it definitely makes sense to maintain this approach on the level of no analysis, if Centrists were to assert arising and ceasing in terms of dependent origination on the level of analysis, such would only amount to superimposition and deprecation with regard to both realities. Therefore, if Centrists were to approach the ultimate in this way, they would deviate from both realities. From the perspective of analysis, there would be the superimposition of establishing the dependently originating phenomena of seeming reality in some sense, while in fact they are not established. To imagine that these phenomena are somehow established would negate the ultimate freedom from arising and ceasing and thus deprecate ultimate reality.

In a broader sense, the reasoning of mere dependent origination is said to be the king of Centrist reasonings, since it not only dispels the extremes of permanence and extinction but also eradicates all kinds of wrong views. For example, it refutes that things arise without any cause, since this would mean that things do not depend on anything at all, while dependent origination shows the opposite: that things depend on collections of their specific causes and conditions. This reasoning also negates all notions of a permanent, single, and nonconcordant cause, such as a primal substance or a creator god. For, if things arose from a single cause, this would contradict our experience that they in fact depend on vast numbers of conditions. Nor can things depend on a permanent cause, since something permanent is by definition devoid of performing any function or activity, because such already entails a process of change. If things could arise from nonconcordant causes, it would be unreasonable that they have to depend on their own specific causes.

Likewise, the reasoning of dependent origination equally refutes that things arise from themselves, from something other, or from both. In terms of arising [261] from itself, a thing can neither depend on itself nor act upon itself. Furthermore, if a thing is not established in itself, it can be neither something that depends on something else nor something on which something else depends. On the other hand, if a thing were established in itself, it would not have to depend on anything.

As for arising from something other, if things are not established in themselves in the first place, the question of what depends on what as well as the whole notion of “other” is pointless. Even if it is assumed that things are established in themselves, this would mean that they do not have to depend on anything other. However, being established by themselves yet still having to depend on something else (such as causes and conditions) is self-contradictory. As for arising from both themselves and something other, obviously, all these flaws would just multiply. *The Entrance into Centrism* summarizes:

Since entities originate in dependence,
All these thoughts cannot withstand examination.
Therefore, this reasoning of dependent origination
Cuts through the entire web of erroneous views.²²⁷

Conclusion

Each of the five great Centrist reasonings is in itself fully sufficient to produce an understanding that things lack any real or independent existence. However, as was shown for the vajra sliver reasoning and the reasoning of the freedom from unity and multiplicity, they supplement each other in generating incontrovertible certainty and an all-encompassing realization of this lack of real existence. Moreover, in order to approach such a realization, the various reasonings provide a range of different avenues that may be more or less convenient or convincing for individual people with varying capacities, propensities, or particular misconceptions.

In this context of the five great Centrist reasonings, it should be clear that a real and intrinsic nature of things is impossible among knowable objects. Therefore, strictly speaking, from among the three modes of a correct reason, the negative entailment cannot be established here. As was explained, the negative entailment means that the reason may never apply to the heterologous set. In terms of the above five reasonings, the general meaning of the predicate in all of them is “what lacks a real nature.” Thus, “what has a real nature” would be the heterologous set. Since it is precisely such a real nature of things that does not exist, it does not make sense to say that the respective reason—such as “being free from unity and multiplicity” or “originating in dependence”—may not apply to a heterologous set (that is, something that has a real nature) that is nonexistent. In other words, the question as to whether something can apply to, entail, or include a nonexistent or not is per se irrelevant.

However, that the third mode cannot be established in no way invalidates the above reasonings. As was explained, there is no doubt that if there were such a thing as a really existing cup, it would necessarily have to be established either as a cup that is a unity or as a cup that is a multiplicity. The same goes for hypothetical, really arising entities. Furthermore, there are many concordant examples for the nonexistence of a real nature—such as illusions, reflections, and dreams—that can be appropriately employed in these reasonings. Finally, what is to be comprehended through the inferential cognitions that are based on such arguments is

nothing but the probandum of these arguments—that all things lack a real nature—and never its opposite.

As was explained, there are two types of negating reasons: those that are based on the nonobservation of something connected and those that are based on the observation of something contradictory. The first four Centrist reasonings fall under the first category, and the reason of dependent origination falls under the latter.

In general, there is no disagreement between Autonomists and Consequentialists about either these conventional issues or the essential point of how they understand ultimate reality. Thus, the five great reasonings of Centrism are common to Autonomists and Consequentialists. Both use these arguments to point out phenomenal identitylessness. Their difference is that Consequentialists say that these five reasonings merely follow the conventions of logic as acknowledged by others. On the mere conventional level, Autonomists understand them as autonomous arguments that are acknowledged by both parties.

Other Reasonings

Apart from the five great Centrist reasonings, there are two further major arguments that are used to determine phenomenal identitylessness.

In the first reasoning, any real existence of the mind as the apprehender is negated through the preceding negation of something apprehended. Thus, through using an appropriate reasoning of one's choice, one starts by refuting the notion of really and independently existent objects. Once no such objects are to be found, there can be no real subject—the apprehending mind—that cognizes them, since the subject has to depend on the existence of its object. If neither subject nor object really exists, all phenomena do not really exist, since phenomena are either subjects or objects. As *The Entrance into Centrism* says:

In brief, understand this meaning:

Just as knowable objects do not exist, mind does not exist either.

The Buddhas said, "If there are no knowable objects,

One easily finds that a knower is excluded."

[263] If knowable objects do not exist, the negation of a knower is established.

Therefore, they first negated knowable objects.²²⁸

The second reasoning inductively applies the realization of the emptiness of one phenomenon to all phenomena. This is described in Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses*:

That which is the observer of one single entity

Is explained to be the observer of everything.

That which is the emptiness of one [entity]

Is the emptiness of everything.²²⁹

Here, “the observer” refers to the supreme knowledge that realizes emptiness. All things, such as form, appear in different ways, but they are not different in that they do not arise through a real nature of their own. Therefore, if it is understood that one phenomenon does not arise through a nature of its own, then it is also realized that all other phenomena equally do not arise through a nature of their own. This is like every drop of the ocean having the same taste. The experience of the taste of a single drop of ocean water is the same experience as the taste of every drop of the ocean. Likewise, when a single conditioned phenomenon is realized to be empty, the emptiness of all conditioned phenomena is realized, since all phenomena share this basic feature of being conditioned. As *The Sutra Requested by Sky Treasure* says:

Those who meditate on a single phenomenon and thus understand
That all phenomena are like an illusion and a mirage,
Ungraspable, hollow, false, and not solid,
Will soon proceed to the heart of enlightenment.

The Sutra of the King of Meditative Concentration agrees:

Through one, you will know all.
Through one, you will see all.

It is said that, strictly speaking, the latter reasoning is only suitable for people whose minds are not affected by any Buddhist or non-Buddhist philosophical systems, so that they, from their unquestioning worldly perspective, can directly enter the middle path beyond extremes. Thus, this reasoning is not intended for those who already follow certain philosophical systems. Such people may have determined through their systems that such things as coarse outer objects lack real and independent existence, but it is precisely their adherence to these philosophical [264] systems that prevents them from extending their analysis and realization to other, more subtle things that nevertheless bear this same nature of lacking real existence.

Unmasking Personal Identity

In general, all the reasonings that negate phenomenal identity can also be used to negate personal identity and vice versa, since the latter is just a special instance of the former. However, the clinging to a personal identity of our own is singled out to be tackled through additional specific reasonings, since it governs all levels of our thinking and behavior in a very immediate way and is thus directly responsible for the arising of mental afflictions and the ensuing suffering. Moreover, the realization of personal identitylessness that is achieved through these reasonings is the cause for liberation from cyclic existence.

The conceptions of clinging to a personal self focus on the five aggregates that constitute our psychophysical continua. Even if these aggregates themselves are not taken to be our self, any self that is assumed to be something other than the aggregates is always regarded as being related to these aggregates—that is, our immediate personal appearances and experiences—in one way or the other. We think in this way by regarding certain aspects of these aggregates either as being our self or as being connected to or controlled by such a self. Therefore, our grasping at a self constantly engages one or several of the five aggregates. In certain situations, we extend our thoughts of a self even to our friends, relatives, and possessions: If someone else benefits or harms them, we think that this person has helped or harmed us.

Technically speaking, this conceptual object of a “self” that is apprehended through the clinging to the aggregates as being or relating to a self is considered a nonentity;²³⁰ more specifically, it is a term generality²³¹ that does not correspond to any real object. Obviously, from the perspective of reasonings that analyze for the ultimate, there is no need to talk about the existence of a real personal identity. However, even from the perspective of reasonings that analyze conventional expressions, a real personal identity does not exist.²³² Still, in adaptation to the perspective of worldly consensus without examination and analysis, the Buddha never denied the mere notions of a person or an individual. However, these notions never correspond to any actual object that exists in a substantial way. They are always understood to exist in a purely nominal way in the context of the mere correct seeming. As the sutras say:

Just as a collection of [certain] parts
Is described by the name “chariot,”
Likewise, in dependence on the aggregates,
One speaks about “sentient beings” on the seeming level.

[265] The negations of the object of our clinging to a self are usually presented in the framework of the twenty views about a real personality that were explained earlier.²³³ In brief, the sutras describe these twenty views as follows:

- (1–5) the five notions that one of the five aggregates is the self
- (6–10) the five notions that the self possesses one of the aggregates as a companion or retinue
- (11–15) the five notions that one of the aggregates dwells in or is based on the self in such a way that it is supported by the self
- (16–20) the five notions that the self dwells in or is based on one of the aggregates in such a way that this aggregate is its support

That none of these notions applies is expressed in Nagarjuna’s *Letter to a Friend*:

It is said that form is not the self,
That the self does not possess form, that the self does not dwell on form,
And that form does not dwell on the self.
Please realize that the remaining four aggregates are empty in the same way.²³⁴

Accordingly, none of the five aggregates is the self, the self does not possess any of the aggregates, nor do they support each other; that is, neither do the aggregates support the self, nor does the self support the aggregates. Thus, refuting these twenty views excludes that there is a self that exists in any relation to the five aggregates. Kamalasila's second volume of his *Stages of Meditation* summarizes the negation of such a real person or self:

[First,] the person is not observed outside of the aggregates, constituents, and sources. The person is also not the nature of the aggregates and such, because the aggregates and such have the nature of being impermanent and multiple and because the person is that which is imputed by others as a permanent and singular entity. A person that is not suitable to be expressed as either the same as or as something other [than the aggregates] is not suitable as an existent entity, because there are no other possibilities of how entities exist.²³⁵

Thus, the starting point of analyzing whether this self as the hypothetical referent of our clinging to "I" and "me" really exists is the basic question of whether such a self is the same as or different from the aggregates.

The self is not the same as the aggregates, because their respective characteristics do not match. The aggregates are (1) impermanent, (2) a formation of multiple [266] factors, and (3) dependent on others, whereas the self is generally apprehended as something lasting, singular, and independent. In detail, this is as follows:

- 1) It is established through reasoning that the aggregates are brought about through causes and conditions and are impermanent from moment to moment. On the other hand, it is established through our own experience that we apprehend our self as something lasting, such as when we fancy that we recognize the same self in us that we saw yesterday.
- 2) The aggregates are clearly a multiplicity; that is, they consist of forms, feelings, and so on, each one in turn having many subdivisions. On the other hand, our experience tells us that we apprehend our self as something singular, such as when we think, "I am an individual, a single person."
- 3) Analysis shows us that each one of the aggregates is something that arises and ceases in dependence on various causes and conditions. On the other hand, experientially, we apprehend our self as something intrinsic and independent, such as when we focus inwardly and think, "This is me" or "It is only me who decides what I do."

If we then look for a self that is different from our aggregates, we do not find anything either. The reasons for this are as follows:

- 1) Experientially, our clinging to "I" and "me" does not engage in or relate to anything other than just our aggregates.
- 2) If there were a self other than our body and mind, it would have to appear to us, because it is impossible for our own self to be a phenomenon that is hidden from ourselves.

- 3) Something that is free from the characteristics of the aggregates thereby becomes a nonentity, since the aggregates contain only entities, that is, phenomena that perform a function. However, if something is a nonentity, this contradicts its being able to perform a function, such as that the self thinks or is in control of “its” body and mind.

As *The Fundamental Verses* says:

If the aggregates were the self,
It would possess arising and ceasing.
If it were something other than the aggregates,
It would not possess the characteristics of the aggregates.²³⁶

Furthermore, things in their entirety are contained in just these five aggregates [267] of form, feeling, discrimination, formation, and consciousness. A self that would be altogether different from these is not observable through any kind of perceptual valid cognition even for a short while. Let alone yogic valid perception, all that the five sense consciousnesses perceive are outer objects such as visible form,²³⁷ while self-awareness by definition is only aware of consciousness itself. Therefore, none of these cognitions can have a self as its object. Furthermore, since neither a nature nor a result of a self that is not contained in the aggregates is observable, there is also no reason that produces a correct inference about such a self. Thus, it cannot be established through inferential valid cognition either.

At this point, one might just say, “This very mental state that thinks, ‘This is me’ is the subject that validly cognizes the self.” However, since this mental state is nothing but a thought whose essential character is clinging, it is not a perceptual valid cognition. Nor is it an inferential valid cognition, because it is a mere assumption that does not rely on any correct arguments. Rather, this thought or impulse is nothing but mere unfounded imagination that emerges under the influence of our beginningless habituation to entertain it. As for the operational mode of this thought, it exactly corresponds to mistaking a rope for a snake. Mistaking the aggregates for a self is just a much more deeply ingrained and solidified habitual mental tendency.

Some people even say that the self exists but that it cannot be determined to be either identical to or different from the aggregates. They also say that it is neither permanent nor impermanent, nor any third possibility.²³⁸ However, such a phenomenon does not exist, since there is nothing that can be observed through any valid cognition as existing either within or outside of the aggregates. Also, it is impossible to observe any existent that is neither permanent nor impermanent nor any third possibility. To postulate such a “self” is nothing but a convoluted way of saying that it simply does not exist at all.

If a self that is established through its own nature is refuted through such an analysis, then what is “mine” is implicitly negated too. This is like the example of the daughter of a barren woman. Since she is not observable in the first place, nothing that would be hers—such as her body or her dress—is observable either. As *The Fundamental Verses* says:

If there is no self,
Where should there be what is mine?²³⁹

The main formal way in which Centrism negates a personal self is *the sevenfold reasoning through the analogy of a chariot*. The analogy of a chariot was taught by the Buddha.²⁴⁰ Later, Nagarjuna and his spiritual heirs put it into a systematic format. *The Entrance into Centrism* reads:

[268] It is not asserted that a chariot is something other than its parts.
It is not something that is not other, nor does it possess them.
It does not exist in the parts, nor do the parts exist in it.
It is neither their mere collection nor the shape—thus is the analogy.²⁴¹

The first five points of this analysis were already presented by Nagarjuna. In addition, Candrakirti taught the analysis of the collection of the parts and of the shape of the chariot. When one searches for a really existing chariot through these seven points of examination, it neither exists as its parts (such as the wheels) nor as something other than these parts. The collection of the parts and the shape of the chariot are refuted in passing, since one does not find either the collection or the shape as anything other than or above the parts that make up their collection and the particular shape of a chariot. If these seven points are applied in an analogous way to the analysis of a personal self, this self is not found as something other than the aggregates nor as the aggregates themselves. In fact, these two possibilities implicitly cover all seven parts of the analysis, the remaining five being merely their elaborations. For if the self is neither the same as nor different from the aggregates, there is no self at all. Consequently, there is no self to possess or control the aggregates. There is likewise no self that exists in the aggregates, nor can the latter exist in a nonexistent self.²⁴²

1) The formulation of the reasoning

A personal self does not exist, because it is neither the same as the aggregates nor something other; because it does not possess them; because the self does not exist in the aggregates nor do these aggregates exist in the self; and because it is neither their mere collection nor their shape.

2) The three modes of the reason

The *subject property* means that a hypothetical self does not conform to any of the seven possibilities just mentioned, such as being the same as the aggregates. There is also no other possibility for the existence of such a self. In detail:

- a. **The self is not something other than the aggregates.** As explained above, our experiences and our clinging in relation to a self do not refer to anything outside of the five aggregates or outside of our body and mind. Otherwise, our self would be totally

unrelated to our body and mind and at best some nonentity unable to perform any function at all.

- b. **If the self were the same as the aggregates**, there are several possibilities as to how this could be the case. If the self were the same as all the aggregates together, we would have at least five different selves, since there are five aggregates, not to [269] mention their subdivisions. Moreover, since the aggregates momentarily arise and cease, the self would do so too. Thus, we would have a new and different self in every moment. In addition, this would make any memory of actions or experiences impossible, since the self that does or experiences something in a certain moment ceases in the next moment. The new self would have no connection to the old one.

If the self is held to be just one of these aggregates or a certain part of it, which one would it be? As for the aggregate of form, we do not consider outer material things to be our personal self. Experientially, it is also obvious that we do not take just our body to be our self. Moreover, what would then be the difference between me and my corpse? And when we look at all the changes in terms of size, weight, shape, and so on that our body has undergone since we were born, this clearly does not correspond to our sense of a lasting “me.” On the other hand, if we think that our mind is our self, we still have four mental aggregates to choose from. In addition, each one of them is itself a collection of many different factors, such as the whole range of all our constantly changing feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. As explained above, nothing in this unceasing and manifold flux corresponds to the features of a lasting, single, and independent self. Certainly, nobody would identify just a single, fleeting emotion, perception, or thought as one’s personal self. Also, our minds change tremendously over the span of a lifetime. As babies, we did not even know how to eat and drink properly, and now we might construct spaceships or even read books on Madhyamaka . . . So how does this correspond to our seeming experience of a lasting self? Moreover, such drastic changes of body and mind are not seen merely over the period of a whole life but can happen any moment. For example, consider how “we” feel—or how we experience our self—when we are depressed, lonely, unsuccessful, poor, or ill in contrast to being happy, loved, successful, rich, and healthy.

If the mere continuum of the aggregates is considered to be the self, then the above flaws in terms of it being momentarily impermanent equally apply here, since it is the very nature of a continuum to change moment by moment. Any continuum is not established in itself, since it is just a label that is applied to a series of different moments, such as calling a stream of many drops of water that follow one after the other and are continuously exchanged a “river.” If we think that the self is that which holds the moments of our psychophysical continua together, there is nothing that could perform such a function. There is no force or energy that fastens these moments together or underlies them, since all there are in a continuum are these single moments. A hypothetical such force is also not necessary, since any subsequent moment in a continuum arises only in dependence on its previous moment. Since the previous

moment has already ceased when the following one arises, they can never be simultaneous. Thus, how could they be joined in any way by anything?

- c. [270] **The self cannot possess the aggregates**, because it has already been refuted that it is the same as or different from the aggregates. So what else could there be to possess them? Moreover, even if the self were all or just one of the aggregates, which would possess which? All aggregates together cannot possess themselves. Nor can the body possess the mind or vice versa, for how should something with form possess something without form or be possessed by it? Also, the mental aggregates cannot possess each other, for they are all formless. In addition, since all aggregates are momentary, which moment exactly could possess which other moments? There is certainly no question of possessing any past or future moments. And as for present moments, how could any one of them influence, control, or possess any other, since not even the smallest indivisible moment can be found?
- d. **The self neither exists in nor is supported by the aggregates**. Otherwise, it would again just be a part of these aggregates or the aggregates would support themselves. Then the same inconsistencies as under (c) would apply. And if the self were something different from the aggregates—a nonentity—how could it exist among them or be supported by them? A nonentity cannot be supported by entities, since there is no possible connection or contact between such mutually exclusive phenomena as entities and nonentities. Moreover, nonentities indicate the absence of entities, so how could an absence, such as the lack of a table, be supported by anything?
- e. **The aggregates do not exist in the self**. If the self were one or all of the aggregates, then the aggregates would have to exist in all or in one of themselves. And if the self were different from the aggregates—if the self were not an entity—how could entities (the aggregates) exist within the absence of entities? Even if the aggregates existed within a self that is the absence of entities (such as space), there could not be the slightest relation or interaction between the aggregates and such a self. The aggregates are also not supported by the self, since the same consequences as under (c) would follow. For if the self were the same as the aggregates, they would have to support themselves; and if it were different, a nonentity would have to support entities.
- f. **The self is not the mere collection of the aggregates**, since it would then still exist even if one's five aggregates were complete but disassembled, for example, when various parts of one's body are cut off and piled up around it. Moreover, if one or several parts of one's aggregates are missing, such as a finger or certain features of one's personality due to Alzheimer's disease, the self would be defective too. In addition, if we just refer to the mere collection of the aggregates as the self and thus give up the notion of a self as something that controls or owns [271] these aggregates, whose aggregates would they then be? Their mere collection does not control or own itself.

- g. **The self is also not the shape of all the aggregates**, since the four mental aggregates do not have any shape and since, experientially, we do not consider the self to be just the shape of our body. Moreover, if this very shape were the self, whose shape would it then be? Also, the shape of each body part cannot be the self, since it then would follow that we have as many selves as we have body parts. In addition, the shapes of the body parts do not change whether the body is a whole or its parts are separated. Thus, if the shapes of the individual parts were the self, it would not make any difference for the self if the body parts were severed from the body.

As for the *positive entailment* of the sevenfold reasoning using the analogy of a chariot, whether we refer to a self or anything else, if something does not exist as any of the above seven possibilities, it cannot exist at all. The *negative entailment* means that if it existed, it would necessarily have to exist as one of these possibilities.²⁴³

To summarize, from the perspective of mistakenness and without analysis, the self seems to exist just like persons, sentient beings, and so on seem to exist. However, when analyzed, just as a self does not exist, also persons and such do not exist. Likewise, just as cars, tables, forests, and so on exist on the mere conventional level, also the self may be said to exist on this level. Under analysis, just as the self does not exist, all phenomena should be understood to be free from all reference points, such as existence and nonexistence.

The Result of Centrist Reasoned Analysis

Right from the beginning, dependently originating phenomena, persons, and so on are not really established, but non-Buddhists and Buddhist realists still fall into the various extremes of superimposing or denying such phenomena and persons. Therefore, Centrist reasonings serve to put an end to these reifications, be they in terms of existence or nonexistence. Accordingly, everybody in the tradition of Nagarjuna and his spiritual heirs insists that, in Centrism, it is impossible to attain any realization that bears even the faintest resemblance to entertaining any reference points. The only possible result of properly employed Centrist reasoning is to pass into the peace of nonarising that is free from all reference points. Thus, when phenomena are analyzed with Centrist reasonings, all conceptions of superimposition and denial—such as clinging to identity, identitylessness, existence, nonexistence, arising, ceasing, causes, the lack of causes, and so on—gradually come to an end. This is precisely the purpose of the Centrist approach to reasoning. As *The Entrance into Centrism* says:

[272] Ordinary beings are bound by conceptions.
Nonconceptual yogins will find release.
Hence, the learned state that the result of analysis
Is that conceptions are at peace.

The analyses in [Nagarjuna's] treatise were not performed out of attachment to debate.

[Rather,] he taught true reality for the sake of complete release.

and

Attachment to one's own view and quarreling about others' views
Are in themselves nothing but [expressions of reifying] thinking.
Therefore, setting aside attachment and anger,
Analysis will swiftly lead to release.²⁴⁴

Santideva agrees:

Once neither entities nor nonentities
Remain before the mind,
There is no other mental flux [either].
Therefore, it is utter nonreferential peace.²⁴⁵

By relying on extensive Centrist scriptures and reasonings, one starts out with negating all views on existence and nonexistence. Through the discriminating knowledge that arises in this process, one arrives at a conceptual understanding that all phenomena lack an intrinsic nature of their own. Then, based on the meditation of calm abiding in which one rests one-pointedly in this actuality, the increasingly pure meditation of superior insight into the true nature of phenomena is developed. In this way, the accumulations are completed and the mind is purified of both afflictive and cognitive obscurations, which finally leads to attaining the state of perfect Buddhahood. This is why it is said that the supreme cause for attaining liberation and omniscience is the supreme knowledge through study, reflection, and meditation that clearly realizes—in a way in which there is nothing to be realized—that all phenomena are without nature. In other words, the success of the relentless Centrist raid on all objects of reification, including reification and the reifier, is measured by diminishing the clinging to the various layers of fixed ideas that obscure mind's clarity of seeing the nature of things as it is.

Endnotes

¹ The ten perfections are the usual six of generosity, ethics, patience, vigor, meditative stability, and knowledge plus the four of means, aspiration prayers, power, and wisdom. Each of these ten perfections corresponds to one of the ten grounds of bodhisattvas and represents the main practice on its respective ground.

² VI.23.

³ 1988, p. 54.

⁴ In the same vein, "the four realities of the noble ones"—usually translated as "the four noble truths"—do not really indicate some truths that are in themselves noble. Rather, they are described as the ways in which suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path are clearly seen from the perspective of noble ones. From the perspective of ordinary deluded beings, these are neither true nor real. And even when ordinary beings gain some understanding that they are true, they do not at all experience the full scope of these four as their reality (see also *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985, pp. 1371, 1777).

⁵ Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba, n.d., p. 644.

⁶ XXIV.10.

⁷ Skt. Dharmadhatuprakrtisambhedanirdesasutra, Tib. chos kyi dbyings kyi rang bzhin dbyer med par bstan pa'i mdo.

⁸ Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba, n.d., pp. 645–46.

⁹ Lit. "children." This is an expression for ordinary beings who do not look beyond the immediate experiences of this life.

¹⁰ Dp' bo gtsug lag phreng ba, n.d., pp. 646–47.

¹¹ Skt. timira, Tib. rab rib. There is usually a wide range of translations of this term (such as "cataract" or "ophthalmia"). Judging by the symptoms of this visual impairment that are described in Tibetan texts, it must primarily refer to what—in Western terms—is called "floaters" or "mouches volantes." These are congealed proteins in the gel of the vitreous body of the eye that appear as floating, out-of-focus threads in the visual field. They are set into motion through eye movements, and when the eyes are kept still, they pass through one's visual field or sink down slowly, which can give the impression of slowly sinking hairs or a hair-net (Skt. kesa/kesonduka, Tib. skra shad). Sometimes they also appear as little dark dots. Such appearances can also just show as hazy spots in the visual field etc. They usually increase with age and can be seen best against bright backgrounds. All of this is not really considered as a disease in the West, since—to a varying degree—the same process happens in everybody's eyes. Some Tibetan texts mention also the symptom of double vision—such as seeing two moons—which can be a symptom of cataracts (degeneration of the eye-lens). Double vision does not appear though due to the above changes in the vitreous body, whereas patients with cataracts do not report "floating hairs" or the like. However, the analogy of the example that is given here—the scalpel that removes a membrane—would typically refer to operating cataracts (the changes in the vitreous body cannot be operated). Thus, one could describe "rab rib" as a general term for "blurred vision" due to turbidities in the eyes, be it in the vitreous body or the lens.

¹² ACIP TD3860@13A.

¹³ *ibid.*, @14A

¹⁴ Lines 35ab.

¹⁵ Verse 4.

¹⁶ Etymologically, the Sanskrit word *sunyata* stems from the root *svi-/su-* ("to swell"), which implies the notion of hollowness. In this way, the phenomena of seeming reality outwardly appear to be real and solid, while actually resembling empty balloons, only inflated by ignorance.

¹⁷ In both cases, "nature" translates the Sanskrit term *svabhava* (Tib. rang bzhin/ngo bo nyid), which literally means "own-being," "self-existence," or "intrinsic state of being."

¹⁸ XV.1–2.

¹⁹ ACIP KL0176@341B.

²⁰ Verse 53.

²¹ XXXXVI.181 and VI.183.

²² ACIP TD3862@315A.

²³ XXIV.18.

²⁴ Compare, for example, with Latin *anima* and German *Atem*.

²⁵ ACIP TD3865@190B.

²⁶ When it is clear from the context that the single term *atman* indeed *is* of a personal nature, for the sake of convenience, I still mostly use the word "self."

²⁷ Often translated as "the views about the transitory collection." For an explanation of this term, see the section below entitled "Personal Identitylessness."

²⁸ VI.44.

²⁹ Actually, personal identitylessness is just an instance of phenomenal identitylessness. As will be explained below, it is nevertheless taught separately for a specific purpose.

³⁰ I.35.

³¹ II.219cd–220ab.

³² I.3ab and VI.120.

³³ II.223ab.

³⁴ I.29–30.

³⁵ XIV.25cd.

³⁶ VI.165.

³⁷ For details, see appendix II.

³⁸ For more details, see chapter 5.

³⁹ However, as will be explained below, when actually practicing the progressive stages of meditation on emptiness, one begins with personal identitylessness, since it is the object of the coarser form of the general clinging to identity.

⁴⁰ Originally, the first aggregate just referred to one's body. Later, it became an equivalent for matter in general.

⁴¹ Skt. Sammitiya, Tib. mang pos bkur ba. This is one of the eighteen subschools of the Followers of the Great Exposition.

⁴² Skt. Vatsiputriya, Tib. gnas ma bu pa. Vatsiputra was a disciple of Sariputra, and his followers represent another one of the eighteen subschools.

⁴³ VI.179ab. For further explanations on the relation between personal and phenomenal identitylessness and how this pertains to the realizations of hearers, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas, see the section in chapter 3 entitled "Do Hearers and Solitary Realizers Realize Emptiness?"

⁴⁴ Soteriological questions are surely relevant in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic ideologies or mysticism. However, usually, these systems only talk about liberating human beings. Also, they are considered religious systems more than philosophies.

⁴⁵ 1979, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Verses 69cd–70. There is dispute among Western scholars about Nagarjuna's authorship. For positive evidence, see Lindtner (1982a, 1992), who is criticized by Dragonetti (WZKS 1986).

⁴⁷ Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba, n.d., p. 831.

⁴⁸ Tib. nges shes sgron me; translated by W. Pettit (1999) as *Mipham's Beacon of Certainty*.

⁴⁹ VI.4–5. These verses are also found in the *Subhasitasamgraha*, an anonymous compilation of extracts from Buddhist texts (Sanskrit edition by C. Bendall 1903–4, p. 387).

⁵⁰ Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1982, vol. III, p. 37.

⁵¹ In order to avoid confusing formal Indo-Tibetan rhetorical reasonings (Skt. prayogavakya, Tib. sbyor ba'i ngag) with Aristotelian syllogistics, I do not use the Western term "syllogism." Specifically, Dharmakirti-type formal inferences for one's own benefit and for the benefit of others both have different formats from Aristotelian syllogisms. Moreover, the arguments for the benefit of others are not primarily deductive formats (they do not include the thesis), while Aristotelian syllogisms definitely are (one of their three members is the thesis). For the differences, see the comparison of the formats of these two inferences with the well-known three-part Aristotelian syllogism below.

⁵² In this limited context, I deliberately do not touch upon the many technicalities, such as specific terms, logical fallacies, and the issues of deduction and induction, that are related to the presentation of the three modes. Rather, I choose a simplified description in terms of set theory in order to facilitate a basic understanding of Centrist reasonings. Thus, instead of speaking of logical "entailment" (Skt. vyapti, Tib. khyab pa), I explain the three modes here in terms of "inclusion" of one set in another. (May great logicians bear with me!) If one lacks a basic understanding of the three modes, the intricacies of Centrist reasonings are very often difficult to penetrate. Readers who wish to go into detail may refer to the vast specific literature on Buddhist reasoning and logic. See, for example, Dreyfus 1997 and Perdue 1993.

⁵³ This is also called a formal probative argument (Skt. prayogavakya, Tib. sbyor ba'i ngag).

⁵⁴ Compare the above two formats of reasoning with the classical Aristotelian syllogism:

All men are mortal.

Socrates is a man.

Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

The format of the inference for others is not to be confused with the classical five-membered Indian probative argument developed by the non-Buddhist school of the Logicians (see chapter 3).

⁵⁵ Skt. adrsyanupalabdhihetu, Tib. mi snang ma dmigs pa'i gtan tshigs.

⁵⁶ Skt. drsyanupalabdhihetu, Tib. snang rung ma dmigs pa'i gtan tshigs.

⁵⁷ Skt. sambhandhanupalabdhihetu, Tib. 'brel zla ma dmigs pa'i gtan tshigs.

⁵⁸ For example, in "At this restaurant, there is no elephant," what is to be negated is that there *is* an elephant at the restaurant. The predicate of what is to be negated is just the phrase "there is an elephant." ("At this restaurant" is the subject in question, i.e., the specific place of the nonexistence of an elephant.)

⁵⁹ Skt. viruddhopalabdhihetu, Tib. 'gal zla dmigs pa'i gtan tshigs.

⁶⁰ Examples are provided only for the obvious ones of the various types of pseudoreasons, because the others would require too much explanation as to exactly how they do not apply or are contradictory or uncertain. For details, see Dreyfus 1997 and Perdue 1993.

⁶¹ Verse 22.

⁶² There is no room here to elaborate on this greatly relevant issue. A detailed presentation can be found in, for example, the second chapter of Dharmakirti's *Commentary on Valid Cognition* that establishes the Buddha as the ultimate source of valid cognition (translated in R. Jackson 1993). It includes an account of the mind-body problem, i.e., that in Buddhism, mind is not just a "self-emerging quality" or an epiphenomenon of the body or the brain. For this, see also the explanation of the last part

of the vajra sliver reasoning that negates arising without any cause, in the section below entitled "The Five Great Madhyamaka Reasonings."

⁶³ Western science refers to this and many other kinds of behavior as "instinct," which is a very convenient category to subsume any behavior that is inexplicable through learning or other conditions in this life, without, however, explaining much. In Buddhism, "instinct" is explained as the ripening of habitual tendencies from past lifetimes.

⁶⁴ In addition, it does not deny the existence of heaven in the first place.

⁶⁵ Space is defined as the mere absence of anything that has the capacity to obstruct.

⁶⁶ The four extremes are existence, nonexistence, both, and neither. The eight reference points are four pairs that are listed in the opening verse of *The Fundamental Verses on Centrism*: arising and ceasing, permanence and extinction, coming and going, and unity and multiplicity.

⁶⁷ Verse 59.

⁶⁸ IX.32–34.

⁶⁹ Tib. bsod nams rtse mo.

⁷⁰ This is a technical term for a mental image as the object of a conceptual consciousness.

⁷¹ Bsod nams rtse mo 1994, p. 1143.

⁷² VI.118.

⁷³ VI.117.

⁷⁴ Ngog Lotsawa seems to have tended in that direction too.

⁷⁵ ACIP KD0012@23A and KL0009-2@11B.

⁷⁶ Tib. gtsang nag pa brtson 'grus seng ge, a disciple of Chaba Chökyi Senge.

⁷⁷ Here, "worldly" refers to the conceptual inferential cognitions of practitioners on the paths of accumulation and junction before they attain a direct realization of ultimate reality on the path of seeing, which is the first supramundane path.

⁷⁸ Verses 28–30.

⁷⁹ VI.185.

⁸⁰ ACIP TD3862@315A.

⁸¹ LIII, fol. 279.

⁸² Technically speaking, these conceptual mental images are called "object generalities" or "term generalities," depending on whether they are triggered by the perception of their referent object or by just hearing or reading a term. For example, we may give rise to the mental image "chair" upon seeing the shape and color of what we consider a chair. Such an image may also appear in our mind when reading the word "chair" in a book or hearing it from someone else.

⁸³ In Buddhism, the term "substance" can refer to either material or mental substance.

⁸⁴ I.3ab and VI.120.

⁸⁵ Verses 10, 13b–d, 14.

⁸⁶ Verses 31–33 (Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotations in this section are from this text.)

⁸⁷ ACIP TD3832@129A–129B.

⁸⁸ This is a summary of verses 40–51. It is to be noted that especially this part of *The Rebuttal of Objections* about the rejection of valid cognition is almost never quoted or dealt with in Gelugpa texts. Obviously, this text by Nagarjuna does not really support the Gelugpa emphasis on entities being established through conventional valid cognition. Usually, mainly verse 29 on "no thesis" is quoted and then interpreted as just referring to Centrists' having no "autonomous or really existing thesis" (Tsongkhapa's *Essence of Good Explanations* quotes verse 41 on valid cognition not being established through itself but interprets it as just refuting self-aware consciousness; see Thurman 1989, p. 321).

⁸⁹ Verses 1–2, 17–19.

⁹⁰ Verse 24.

⁹¹ Ruegg (2002) quotes *The Sutra of the Arrival in Lanka* to the same effect: "that the statement 'all entities/dharmas are unoriginated' should not be made a thesis (*pratijñā*) because the deconstruction of the thesis thus ensues (*pratijñahaniy prasajyate*)." (p. 113).

⁹² Verse 23.

⁹³ IX.138–140.

⁹⁴ VI.175.

⁹⁵ Verses 26, 61–62.

⁹⁶ ACIP TD3832@127B–128A.

⁹⁷ Verses 63–64.

⁹⁸ ACIP TD3832@135A–135B.

⁹⁹ To be sure, in terms of ethics, conduct, karmic causes and results, and such on the level of seeming reality, their words are clearly not noncommittal.

¹⁰⁰ IX.109–110.

¹⁰¹ XXIV.11. Awareness-mantras (Skt. vidyamantra, Tib. rig sngags) can be used to propitiate mundane and supramundane deities in order to partake of their activity. If these mantras are used improperly, however, these deities might turn against the person who supplicates them.

¹⁰² This statement represents claims of a partial kind of emptiness (such as that there must exist some basis for appearances) and attempts to establish seeming reality in its own right.

¹⁰³ ACIP TD3860@164B.

¹⁰⁴ Verse 82.

¹⁰⁵ Verses 58ab, 88, 101.

¹⁰⁶ XXIV.1.

¹⁰⁷ XXIV.16–17, 20.

¹⁰⁸ ACIP TD3860@109A–109B.

¹⁰⁹ IX.33.

¹¹⁰ IX.25.

¹¹¹ Verse 67.

¹¹² Lines 28cd.

¹¹³ ACIP TD3832@128A.

¹¹⁴ ACIP TD3860@023B.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., @164A.

¹¹⁶ XXIV.10.

¹¹⁷ These texts include his *Commentary on the Mind of Enlightenment, The Precious Garland, and A Letter to a Friend*.

¹¹⁸ I could not locate this quote in Aryadeva's texts.

¹¹⁹ ACIP TD3854@261B–262A.

¹²⁰ XVIII.5.

¹²¹ ACIP TD3860@162A–162B.

¹²² Verses 70–71.

¹²³ 1983, pp. 150–51.

¹²⁴ Verses 29–30.

¹²⁵ Verse 50.

¹²⁶ XVI.25. This verse mentions only three of the four extreme positions. However, implicitly, it also includes the fourth possibility of being neither existent nor nonexistent, as can be seen in such verses as XIII.20 and XIV.21.

¹²⁷ Verse 68. In his autocommentary, Santaraksita makes it clear that this verse also includes the fourth possibility of neither existence nor nonexistence (ACIP TD3885@072A).

¹²⁸ ACIP TD3860@05B. Often, autonomous inferences are explained as entailing the three modes of a correct reason, which must be established through valid cognition. There is, however, a wide range of different understandings of what exactly "autonomous reasoning" means. For details, see chapter 3.

¹²⁹ Ibid., @08A.

¹³⁰ XVIII.9, see also XXIV.8–10, 18.

¹³¹ Lines 24ab.

¹³² IX.53ab.

¹³³ ACIP TD3856@60B. Technically, in Indian debate language, plain destructive caviling for the mere sake of arguing, without having and trying to prove a thesis of one's own, is called *vitanda* (Tib. khyad gsod byed pa). Almost all Indian schools of thought regard such an approach as a fallacy in debate.

¹³⁴ IV.8–9.

¹³⁵ Interestingly, the same issue is treated in detail in *The Sutra of the Arrival in Lanka* (ACIP KL0107@193B-194B).

¹³⁶ VI.173.

¹³⁷ ACIP TD3862@311A.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Mi bskyod rdo rje 1996, p. 569.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 569–70.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 469–70.

¹⁴¹ For example, both in the first chapter of his *Lucid Words* (ACIP TD3860@05A) and in his autocommentary on *The Entrance into Centrism* (ACIP TD3862@247A) Candrakirti uses the term "position" (Skt. pratijñā, Tib. dam bca') for the four negative statements in verse I.1 of Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Verses* (i.e., that entities do not arise from themselves, nor from others, and so on). *The Lucid Words* also applies this term to what Nagarjuna says in other verses, such as VIII.1 (ACIP TD3860@061A) and XX.19 (@131B). However, he makes it clear that all of these are just "mere positions" in the sense of what conforms with reasoning. None of them involves any ontological or other commitment on the part of Centrists.

¹⁴² See the section above entitled "Freedom Is the Nature of Not Having a Nature."

¹⁴³ As Ruegg 2000 (p. 159-60) points out, this statement is found in both Gorampa's (1429–1489) and Majaba Jangchub Dsöndrū's commentaries on *The Fundamental Verses*, with the first explicitly presenting it as Patsab's view. The same is expressed in Rongtön Sheja Künrig's commentary on *The Entrance into Centrism*.

¹⁴⁴ Padma dkar po, n.d., p. 114.

¹⁴⁵ 1983, pp. 157–59.

¹⁴⁶ Verses 51, 59.

¹⁴⁷ I.72.

¹⁴⁸ Tib. mkhas pa rnams 'jug pa'i sgo.

¹⁴⁹ Verses 70–72.

¹⁵⁰ Verses 9–11. The last two lines of the quote refer to Vimalakirti's famous silence in the *Vimalakirtinirdesasutra*, when Mañjusri had a dialogue with him about ultimate reality.

¹⁵¹ Lines 7, 18–20.

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¹⁵² ACIP TD3853@48B-49A.

¹⁵³ ACIP TD3853@48B-49A.

¹⁵⁴ ibid., @227B.

¹⁵⁵ ACIP TD3889@286A.

¹⁵⁶ ACIP TD3915@35A.

¹⁵⁷ In particular, the issues of whether Centrists have a philosophical system and thesis of their own and in what sense, in the light of their treatment by Tsongkhapa and his followers, assume a dimension that goes far beyond methodology or reasoning. The Gelugpa school presents these points as being of fundamental ontological and epistemological significance. For more details, see chapter 3.

¹⁵⁸ Theoretically, one could add the last two possibilities to the reasoning of the freedom from unity and multiplicity too, and investigate whether really existing things can be both a unity and a multiplicity or neither. The main reason these options are not explicitly investigated in this reasoning is that the impossibility of something being both a unity and a multiplicity or neither is just so much more obvious than the impossibility of things arising from both themselves and others or neither.

¹⁵⁹ For details, see the explanation of the vajra sliver reasoning in the section below entitled "The Detailed Explanation of the Five Great Reasonings."

¹⁶⁰ See the explanation of the vajra sliver reasoning in the section below entitled "The Detailed Explanation of the Five Great Reasonings."

¹⁶¹ This is also called "the argument that negates arising from the four extremes" (Skt. *caturantotpadapratisedhahetu, Tib. mtha' bzhi skye 'gog gi gtan tshig).

¹⁶² ACIP KL0107, for example @284A.

¹⁶³ Skt. Salistamebhavasutra, Tib. sa lu ljangs pa'i mdo.

¹⁶⁴ Skt. Anavataptanagarajaparicchasutra, Tib. klu'i rgyal po ma dros pas zhus pa'i mdo.

¹⁶⁵ Skt. Pratityasamutpadasutra, Tib. rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i mdo.

¹⁶⁶ For example, in verses 1, 61–62.

¹⁶⁷ Verses 7, 32.

¹⁶⁸ In chapter XIV, particularly XIV.19.

¹⁶⁹ ACIP TD3915@30A.

¹⁷⁰ IX.116–142.

¹⁷¹ ACIP TD3915@28B–29B.

¹⁷² XX.21–22.

¹⁷³ It is taught in the context of refuting the second extreme of the vajra sliver reasoning, i.e., arising from something other.

¹⁷⁴ IX.143–150.

¹⁷⁵ Verse 4.

¹⁷⁶ Verse 14.

¹⁷⁷ ACIP TD3882@07A–09A.

¹⁷⁸ ACIP TD3883@29A–35A.

¹⁷⁹ 1932–35, pp. 970–76.

¹⁸⁰ ACIP TD3887@138A.

¹⁸¹ ACIP TD3889@280Bf.

¹⁸² Verses 22, 66.

¹⁸³ Verses 18–19, 45, 48.

¹⁸⁴ For example, it is used in verses VII.17, XII.2, XVIII.10, XXIV.18–19, 21, and 36.

¹⁸⁵ It appears in the sixth chapter at the end of the refutation of phenomenal identity (VI.107–116).

¹⁸⁶ ACIP TD3948@279A–280A. (Atisa refers to what is called above "the reasoning that negates an arising of existents and non-existents" as "the reasoning that negates arising from the four possibilities.")

¹⁸⁷ ACIP TD3887@136B–138B.

¹⁸⁸ As we know, this conclusion through mental analysis accords very well with the experimental findings of modern physics.

¹⁸⁹ This highlights the fact that Centrist reasonings do not usually present "the heterologous set," i.e., the opposite of what is equivalent to the predicate (not really existing, not arising, lacking a nature, and so on), because there is nothing that really exists, arises, or has a nature of its own. Thus, the third mode—the absence of the reason in the heterologous set—does not have a basis to be established. Nevertheless, as formulated above, if there *were* something really existent, it would have to exist as either one or many. Thus, this is not considered a flaw in such reasonings.

¹⁹⁰ I.1.

¹⁹¹ The latter are mainly the texts of Dignaga and Dharmakirti and their commentaries.

¹⁹² Easy to remember, Buddhapalita's commentary bears the same name as its author (ACIP TD3842@161B).

¹⁹³ In particular, the position of arising from something other has traditionally been connected with the Logicians (*arambhavada*) and certain Abhidharmikas.

¹⁹⁴ These are the causal condition, the object condition, the dominant condition, and the immediate condition. Chapter I of *The Fundamental Verses* explains in detail that things in general do not really arise from these four conditions.

¹⁹⁵ VI.14.

¹⁹⁶ This obviously does not refer to certain findings of modern physics where the result is said to precede the cause, but to our ordinary experience of the relation between cause and effect.

¹⁹⁷ This refers to the third of the five Centrist reasonings—the negation of an arising of existents and nonexistents—which is explained below.

¹⁹⁸ ACIP TD3860@011B.

¹⁹⁹ I.3cd.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., I.2–3ab.

²⁰¹ Ibid., I.4.

²⁰² Ibid., I.5–6.

²⁰³ Ibid., I.7.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., I.9.

²⁰⁵ ACIP TD3860@013A.

²⁰⁶ I.11–12.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., I.13–14.

²⁰⁸ The following is a rather simplified description of the more complex position (*nyavavada*) of the Jainas.

²⁰⁹ ACIP TD3860@012A.

²¹⁰ Ibid., @012A–012B. These two lines are a quote from *The Entrance into Centrism* (VI.100ab).

²¹¹ This view originated with Ajita Kesakambala, an elder contemporary of Buddha Sakyamuni. This shows that the modern idea of mind as an epiphenomenon is not really so new.

²¹² This refers to a story from ancient India that illustrates that there is often much ado about nothing: In the dusty roads of a town, a man produced some fake footprints that looked like those of a wolf and then proclaimed everywhere that there was a dangerous wolf in town, thus terrifying everybody.

²¹³ See the section above entitled "Reasons and Negations."

²¹⁴ This is just a very brief sketch of some major arguments for the existence of past and future lives and for matter or the body not being the cause for the mind. Buddhist texts present detailed explanations of many more reasons that relate to these issues. Obviously, the latter topic corresponds to the current popular scientific claim that mind is just an epiphenomenon of the body or matter in general. However, from the Centrist point of view, since all these questions of other lifetimes and the body-mind issue only

pertain to seeming reality, they are not dealt with in the context of the five great Centrist reasonings. These reasonings exclusively pertain to the ultimate nonexistence of body, mind, and other lifetimes. Obviously, the function of such reasonings is not to give reasons for the real existence of anything, nor to address the question of whether body and mind have a causal relationship. Hence, this is not the place to elaborate on these issues, which are greatly disputed in both the East and the West. For their detailed presentation, see the chapter of Dharmakirti's *Commentary on Valid Cognition* that establishes the Buddha as the ultimate source of valid cognition (translated in R. Jackson 1993).

²¹⁵ VI.32.

²¹⁶ The name of this school comes from its main scripture, called *The Great Detailed Exposition* (Skt. Mahavibhasa, Tib. bye brag tu bshad pa chen mo). The school asserts that all things in the three times exist as distinct, substantial entities right now. Thus, it proposes a kind of backwards chronology of cause and result: All things that are to come already exist in a substantial way in the future. They just transit into the present, while those things that exist in the present pass into the past, all of them maintaining their substantial existence throughout this process.

²¹⁷ VII.17.

²¹⁸ Ibid., VII.19cd.

²¹⁹ ACIP TD3882@07A–09A.

²²⁰ I.48.

²²¹ Of course, about these causes and conditions, Centrists say neither that they really exist nor that they are the same as or other than their results.

²²² XXIV.18–19.

²²³ Skt. gandharva, Tib. dri za. These are the celestial musicians of Indra who live in the air and the heavenly waters.

²²⁴ ACIP TD3865@220B.

²²⁵ VI.113, 170cd.

²²⁶ XXIV.36.

²²⁷ VI.115.

²²⁸ VI.71cd, 96.

²²⁹ VIII.16.

²³⁰ Here this term specifically refers to the opposite of real entities. Such an entity is defined as that which is able to perform a function. For example, water from a spring performs the function of quenching our thirst, but the mere concept of water does not.

²³¹ "Term generality" is a technical term for a purely conceptual mental image that is triggered by a word or term and is not in itself an outer object; for example, the conceptual image that is triggered by the term "chair" does not perform the functions of an actual chair on which one can sit. A term generality may refer to an actual object, as in this example, or it may not correspond to any object at all, such as the mental image that is triggered by the expression "purple flying tigers" or "my self."

²³² See the section above entitled "The Two Types of Identitylessness."

²³³ See the section above entitled "Personal Identitylessness."

²³⁴ Verse 49.

²³⁵ ACIP TD3916@048B.

²³⁶ XVIII.1.

²³⁷ The same applies for nonconceptual mental perception (Skt. manasapratyaksa, Tib. yid kyi mngon sum).

²³⁸ This is, for example, the position of the Buddhist school of the Vatsiputriyas (Tib. gnas ma bu pa).

²³⁹ XVIII.2ab.

²⁴⁰ For example, *Samyutta Nikaya* I.135. It is also found in *The Questions of King Milinda (Milindapañha)*. (Ed. Trenckner. London: Pali Text Society, 1962, pp. 26–28).

²⁴¹ VI.151.

²⁴² Points 2–5 of this sevenfold analysis correspond to the above negation of the twenty views about a real personality.

²⁴³ There are many other reasonings to negate a self, such as the ten ways of competence (Tib. mkhas pa bcu) as the remedy for the tenfold view about a personal self that are described in Maitreya's *Distinction between the Middle and Extremes* (III.15–23). This is a very detailed description as to how various imputed features of a hypothetical self are contradictory to the features of the aggregates and such. (1) The competence in knowing the aggregates serves as the remedy for regarding the self as something singular, since it is the nature of the aggregates to contain a great variety of many things. (2) The competence in the eighteen constituents is the remedy for regarding the self as a cause, since the constituents exhaustively contain all possible causes. (3) The competence in the twelve sources serves as the remedy for thinking that the self is the experiencer, since all objects are experienced through the interdependence of the twelve sources. (4) The competence in interdependence serves as the remedy for seeing the self as a creator, because things are not created by a self but originate in dependence on various causes and conditions. (5) The competence in what is the case and what is not the case serves as the remedy for thinking that the self wields some power, since the self has no power over things, which are solely under the power of specific causes and results. (6) The competence in the faculties serves as the remedy for regarding the self as a ruler, since there are only the twenty-two faculties that dominate all things. (7) The competence in time serves as the remedy for holding the self to be permanent, since arising and ceasing happen within the context of the three times. (8) The competence in the four realities of the noble ones functions as the remedy for assuming the self as the matrix or support for afflicted phenomena and purified phenomena, because the first two realities are the matrix of afflicted phenomena and the latter two are the matrix of purified phenomena. (9) The competence in the vehicles serves as the remedy for the belief that the self is that which practices yoga, since the qualities of the respective vehicles appear only through the consciousnesses that cultivate them. (10) The competence in conditioned and unconditioned phenomena serves as the remedy for conceiving of the self as that which is first bound and later liberated, since bondage comes from conditioned and afflicted causes and results, while unconditioned liberation means being free from such causes and results.

²⁴⁴ VI.117, 118ab, 119.

²⁴⁵ IX.34.