

*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* I-X

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*Mūlamadhyamakakārikās* (MMK) by Nāgārjuna (ca. 150 CE) is the foundational text of the Madhyamaka school. In it, Nāgārjuna seeks to establish the chief tenet of Madhyamaka, that all things are empty (*śūnya*) or devoid of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). As is usual in texts of this nature, the arguments are presented in extremely compressed form, and are difficult to comprehend without a commentary. Here we provide a running commentary to our translation of the first ten chapters of MMK. Our commentary is based on a reading of MMK informed by four Indian commentaries: *Akutoḥbhayā* (author unknown), *Madhyamakavṛtti* by Buddhapālita, *Prajñāpradīpa* by Bhāvaviveka, and *Prasannapadā* by Candrakīrti. We have tried to keep our interpretive remarks to a minimum. Seldom do our elucidations go beyond anything stated by at least one of these authors. It is our hope that the arguments will speak for themselves once the larger context has been properly spelled out. But perhaps some introductory remarks concerning Nāgārjuna's goals and strategies might not be amiss.

In MMK Nāgārjuna is addressing an audience of fellow Buddhists. (In *Vigrahavyāvartanī* his interlocutors also include members of the Nyāya school.) Of particular importance is the fact that his audience holds views that are based on the fundamental presuppositions behind the Abhidharma enterprise. These presuppositions may be roughly sketched as follows:

1. There are two ways in which a statement may be true, conventionally and ultimately.
  - a. To say of a statement that it is conventionally true is to say that action based on its acceptance reliably leads to successful practice. Our common-sense convictions concerning ourselves and the world are all conventionally true, since they reflect conventions that have been found to be useful in everyday practice.
  - b. To say of a statement that it is ultimately true is to say that it corresponds to the nature of reality and neither asserts nor presupposes the existence of any mere conceptual fiction. A conceptual fiction is something that is thought to exist only because of facts about us and the concepts that we happen to employ. For instance, a chariot is a conceptual fiction: when a set of parts is assembled in the right way, we only believe there is a chariot in addition to the parts because of facts about our interests and our limitations. The ultimate truth is absolutely objective, it reflects the way the world is independently of what happens to be useful for us. No statement about a chariot could be ultimately true (or ultimately false).
2. Only *dharmas* are ultimately real.
  - a. To say of something that it is ultimately real is to say that it is the sort of thing about which ultimately true (or false) statements may be made. An ultimately real entity is unlike a mere conceptual fiction in that it may be said to exist independently of facts about us.
  - b. The ultimately real *dharmas* are simple or impartite. They are not products of the mind's tendency to aggregate for purposes of conceptual economy. They are what remain when all products of such activity have been analytically resolved into their basic constituents. They may include such things as indivisible material particles, spatio-temporally discrete occurrences of color and shape, pain sensations, particular occurrences of basic desires such as hunger and thirst, and individual moments of consciousness. (Different Abhidharma schools give somewhat different accounts of what *dharmas* there are.)
  - c. All the facts about our common-sense world of people, towns, forests, chariots and the like can be explained entirely in terms of facts about the *dharmas* and their relations with one another. The conventional truth can be explained entirely in terms of the ultimate truth.

3. *Dharmas* originate in dependence on causes and conditions. While not all Abhidharma schools hold that all *dharmas* are subject to dependent origination (*pratītya samutpāda*), all agree that most *dharmas* are. And since anything subject to origination is also subject to cessation, most (or all) *dharmas* are also impermanent.
4. *Dharmas* have intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*).
  - a. An intrinsic nature is a property that is intrinsic to its bearer, i.e., the fact that the property characterizes that entity is independent of facts about anything else.
  - b. Only *dharmas* have intrinsic nature. The size and shape of a chariot are not intrinsic natures of the chariot, since the chariot's having its size and shape depends on the size, shape and arrangement of its parts. The size and shape of the chariot are instead extrinsic natures (*parabhāva*) since they are not the 'its own' of the chariot but are rather borrowed.
  - c. *Dharmas* have only intrinsic natures. A characteristic that a thing can have only by virtue of its relation to another thing (such as the characteristic of being taller than Mont Blanc) is not intrinsic to the thing that has it. To suppose that the thing nonetheless has that characteristic is to allow mental construction to play a role in our conception of that which is real. For it requires us to suppose that a thing can have a complex nature: an intrinsic nature—what it itself is like apart from everything else—plus those properties it gets by virtue of its relations to other things. To the extent that this nature is complex, it is conceptually constructed by the mind's aggregative tendencies.
  - d. A given *dharma* has only one intrinsic nature. Since *dharmas* are what remain at the end of analysis, and analysis dissolves the aggregating that is contributed by mental construction, a given *dharma* can have only one intrinsic nature.
5. Suffering is overcome by coming to realize the ultimate truth about ourselves and the world.
  - a. Suffering results from the false belief that there is an enduring 'I', the subject of experience and agent of actions, for which events in a life can have meaning.
  - b. This false belief results from failure to see that the person is a mere conceptual fiction, something lacking intrinsic nature. What is ultimately real is just a causal series of *dharmas*. Suffering is overcome by coming to see reality in a genuinely objective way, a

way that does not project any conceptual fictions onto the world.

Nāgārjuna does not dispute any of the above claims. Instead he seeks to show that nothing could be ultimately real in the way that Ābhidharmikas maintain. His position is that if there were ultimately real things, they would be *dharmas*, things with intrinsic nature; but there cannot be. Not only are the person and other partite things devoid of intrinsic nature and so mere conceptual fictions, the same holds for *dharmas* as well. This is what it means to say that all things are empty. Given the nature of this claim, there can be no single argument that could establish it. Nāgārjuna's strategy is instead to examine a variety of claims made by those who take there to be ultimately real entities, and seek to show of each such claim that it cannot be true. The expectation is that once the opponent has seen sufficiently many of their central theses refuted, they will acknowledge that further attempts at finding the ultimate truth are likely to prove fruitless.

This expectation is based in part on the fact that Nāgārjuna employs a number of common patterns of reasoning in his refutations. Once one has seen how a particular reasoning strategy may be used to refute several quite distinct hypotheses, it becomes easier to see how it might apply as well to one's own preferred view concerning some metaphysical issue. Some patterns that occur particularly often in MMK are the following. It is important to note that in each case the hypothesis that is being refuted is meant by the opponent to be ultimately true.

**Infinite Regress:** This is meant to show that hypothesis H cannot be true, since the same reasoning that leads to H would, when applied to H itself, lead to a further hypothesis H', a similar process would lead to hypothesis H'', etc. But H was introduced in order to explain some phenomenon P. And a good explanation must end somewhere. So H cannot be the correct explanation of P. For examples of this style of reasoning see I.4, II.6, V.3, VII.1, VII.3, VII.6, VII.19.

**Neither Identical Nor Distinct:** This is meant to refute a hypothesis to the effect that *x* and *y* are related in some way R. If they were, then *x* and *y* would have to be either two distinct things or else really just one and the same thing (under two different descriptions). But if *x* and *y* were distinct, then *x* exists apart from *y*. And if *x*

exists apart from  $y$ ,  $x$  is not characterized by  $R$ . So it cannot be ultimately true that  $x$  bears  $R$  to  $y$ . If, on the other hand,  $x$  and  $y$  were identical, then  $x$  would bear relation  $R$  to itself, which is absurd. For examples of this style of reasoning see II.18, VI.3, X.2.

The Three Times: This is meant to refute a hypothesis to the effect that  $x$  has some property  $P$ . For the hypothesis to be true,  $x$  must have  $P$  at one of the three times: past, future and present. But, it is argued, for various reasons it cannot be true that  $x$  has  $P$  at any of the three times. Quite often the third possibility—that of the present moment—is eliminated on the grounds that there is no such thing as a present moment distinct from past and future. The present is, in other words, a mere durationless point; what we think of as an extended present is conceptually constructed out of past and future. But in some cases the third possibility is ruled out on the grounds that the ultimately real *dharmas* must be impartite simples. For examples of this style of reasoning see I.6, II.1, II.12, II.25, III.3, VII.14, X.13.

Irreflexivity: This is usually deployed when the opponent seeks to head off an infinite regress by claiming that an entity  $x$  bears relation  $R$  to itself. The principle of irreflexivity says that an entity cannot operate on itself. Commonly cited supportive instances include the knife that cannot cut itself and the finger that cannot point at itself. Nāgārjuna utilizes and supports this principle at III.2, VII.1, VII.8, VII.28.

Non-Reciprocity: This is meant to refute a hypothesis to the effect that  $x$  and  $y$  are in a relation of mutual reciprocal dependence—that  $x$  is dependent on  $y$ , and  $y$  is dependent in the same way on  $x$ . Instances of this may be found at VII.6, X.10.

We have used the de la Vallée Poussin edition of MMK for our translation of the verses. Likewise all references to Candrakīrti's commentary are given with the pagination of this edition (V). Citations from the other three commentaries are from the Pandeya edition (P).

de la Vallée Poussin, Louis, ed., *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*  
(*Mādhyamikasūtras*) de Nāgārjuna avec la *Prasannapadā*

*Commentaire de Candrakīrti*. Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1970.

Pandeya, Raghunath, ed., *The Madhyamakaśāstram of Nāgārjuna*, with the Commentaries *Akutobhayā* by Nāgārjuna, *Madhyamakavṛtti* by Buddhapālita, *Prajñāpradīpavṛtti* by Bhāvaviveka, and *Prasannapadā* by Candrakīrti, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988.

*Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, ed. Prahlad Pradhan, Patna: Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975.

## I. AN ANALYSIS OF CONDITIONS

1. Not from itself, not from another, not from both, nor without cause,  
Never in any way is there any existing thing that has arisen.

This is the overall conclusion for which Nāgārjuna will argue in this chapter: that existents do not come into existence as the result of causes and conditions. There are four possible ways in which this might be thought to happen, and he rejects all of them. The argument against the first is given in v.3, while the argument against the second takes up the rest of the chapter. There is no separate argument against the third or fourth possibilities. But since the third (that an existing thing arises from both itself and something else) combines the first and second, it must be rejected if each of those is. As for the fourth, the commentators explain that existents do not arise without cause, since then it would follow that anything could be produced from anything at any time.

2. There are four conditions: the primary cause, the objective support,  
and the proximate condition,  
And of course the dominant condition; there is no fifth condition.

This classification of four kinds of condition represents the view of the Ābhidharmika opponent. (See *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* II.64a.) (1) The primary cause is that from which the effect is thought to have been produced, e.g., the seed in the case of a sprout. (2) Only a cognition has an objective support, namely its intentional object, that of which it is conscious. A visual cognition has a color-and-shape as its objective support, an auditory cognition has a sound, etc. (3) The proximate condition is that entity or event that immediately precedes the effect and that cedes its place to the effect. (4) The dominant condition is that without which the effect would not arise. After criticizing the basic notion of causation, Nāgārjuna will take up each of these four types in turn: primary cause in v.7, objective support in v.8, proximate condition in v.9, and dominant condition in v.10.

3. The intrinsic nature [*svabhāva*] of existents is not found in the  
conditions etc.  
The intrinsic nature not occurring, neither is the extrinsic nature  
[*parabhāva*] found.

3ab gives the basic argument against production from itself, the first of the four possibilities mentioned in v.1. If the effect is produced from itself (the view known as *satkāryavāda*), then its intrinsic nature is already present in its cause (perhaps in unmanifest form). As Candrakīrti explains the argument, ‘It would not be possible [for the effect to exist] before that arising in this way. If it were, then it would be grasped, and arising would be pointless. Thus the intrinsic nature of existents is not in the conditions, etc.’ (V p.78) We want to know the cause of fire because we want something with its intrinsic nature, heat. If that nature were already present among its causes, then it would be pointless to produce fire.

3cd begins the argument against production from another (the view known as *asatkāryavāda*, which is the Abhidharma view). To say that the effect is produced from another is to say that it derives its nature from something else. We just saw that the natures of cause and effect must be distinct. So on this view cause and effect are distinct things with distinct natures, such as milk (liquid) and curds (solid). But now the question is why it should be milk and not clay or a seed that gives rise to curds. For clay and seeds are equally distinct from curds, with equally distinct natures.

Candrakīrti sets the stage for v.4 by having the opponent answer 3cd as follows: ‘Then, they having been refuted who claim that origination is by means of conditions, it is said that origination is by means of an action (*kriyā*). The conditions such as vision and color-and-shape do not directly cause consciousness [as effect]. But conditions are so-called because they result in a consciousness-producing action. And this action produces consciousness. Thus consciousness is produced by a condition-possessing, consciousness-producing action, not by conditions, as rice [is produced] by the action of cooking.’ (V p.79)

4. An action does not possess conditions, nor is it devoid of conditions. Conditions are not devoid of an action, neither are they provided with an action.

This ‘action’ is supposed to be the causal power that makes the causes and conditions produce the right kind of effect. It is supposed to explain why only when a seed is planted in warm moist soil does a sprout appear (and why a sprout doesn’t arise from a stone). But why does just this kind of



action result from the seed in warm moist soil? What explains the production of the right kind of action from the causes? By the logic of the opponent's response to 3cd, the only possible answer is that there is another action that comes between the causes and conditions and this action. And this leads to an infinite regress.

5. They are said to be conditions when something arises dependent on them.  
When something has not originated, why then are they not non-conditions?
6. Something cannot be called a condition whether the object [which is supposedly the effect] is [already] existent or not [yet] existent.  
If non-existent, what is it the condition of? And if existent, what is the point of the condition?

Here is a new problem for those who maintain that the effect arises from distinct causes and conditions. Why are these said to be the causal conditions of the effect? Presumably this is because they produce the effect. But now it is asked just when this production takes place: after the effect has already come into existence, before it has come into existence, or at some third time? Obviously not the first, since production then would be superfluous. Nor the second, since if the effect were produced before it came into existence then it would exist before it came into existence, which is absurd. And there is no third time between the time before the effect exists and the time when it does exist; if the effect is ultimately real (if it is a *dharma*), then either it does exist or it does not. This pattern of argumentation, which we might call the 'argument of the three times', will figure prominently in Chapter II.

7. Since a *dharma* does not operate when existent, non-existent, both existent and non-existent,  
How in that case can there be an operative cause?

The argument here is the same as in v.6-7. A *dharma* is an ultimately real entity, something with intrinsic nature. Candrakīrti explains that by 'operative cause' is meant primary cause, the first of the four kinds of conditions identified in v.2.

8. A *dharma*, being existent, is indeed said to be without objective support.  
Then why again an objective support in the case of a *dharma* without an objective support?

The object of a mental state such as a visual cognition is said to be the objective support of that cognition. To call this a kind of condition is to say that the cognition cannot arise without its object. The argument against there being such a condition is once again like that of v.6-7. At the time when a cognition exists, its supposed objective support cannot be said to produce it. Only something that does not yet exist can be produced.

9. No destruction obtains when *dharmas* have not yet originated.  
Thus no proximate condition is established; if it is destroyed, how can it be a condition?

The argument here is also similar to that of v.6-7, only this time directed against the idea of a proximate condition. The proximate condition can perform its function neither before nor after the arising of the effect. A proximate condition must undergo destruction in order to bring about its effect: it would not be the immediately preceding condition unless it went out of existence before the effect arose. But before the effect has arisen it has not yet undergone destruction. And once it has undergone destruction, since it no longer exists it cannot be said to be productive of an effect.

10. Since things devoid of intrinsic nature are not existent,  
'This existing, that comes to be' can never obtain.

'This existing, that comes to be' is one standard formulation of dependent origination, the Buddha's doctrine of causation. The 'this' in the formula is identified as the dominant condition. The claim here is that there can be no dominant condition for things that are ultimately real. The argument is that anything that did originate in accordance with the formula would lack intrinsic nature. We saw it claimed in v.5-6 that there is no third time when an ultimately real effect is undergoing production. This is because for something to be ultimately real it must bear its own intrinsic nature, and not borrow that nature from other things, in the way in which a chariot borrows its nature from its parts. And this in turn means that something

that is ultimately real must be simple in nature. Something simple in nature either does exist or does not exist; there is no third intermediate state when it is coming into existence. Only things that are not ultimately real, such as a chariot, could be said to undergo production. Hence the formula ‘This existing, that comes to be’ cannot apply to things that are ultimately existent.

11. That result does not exist in the conditions either separately or together.  
What does not exist in the conditions, how can that come from the conditions?
12. If that which does not exist [in them] is produced from those conditions,  
How is it that the product does not also come forth from non-conditions?

The argument so far has focused on the conditions. Now it turns to the effect, but makes similar points. Here the view in question is that the effect is distinct from its cause and conditions. In v.11 the difficulty is raised that there is then no explanation as to why this particular effect arises from these conditions. In v.12 it is pointed out that it would then be equally sensible to expect the effect to arise from anything at all. (Cf. v.3cd.)

13. The product consists of the conditions, but the conditions do not consist of themselves.  
How can that which is the product of conditions that do not consist of themselves consist of conditions?

Here the view in question is that the effect is identical with the cause in the sense that it already exists among the causes and conditions, that it really just consists in those conditions in the way that a chariot consists of its parts. (Cf. v.3ab.) The difficulty for this view is that then the causes and conditions should have the nature of the effect, which they clearly do not. As Candrakīrti points out, threads are different in nature than the piece of cloth that they constitute.

14. Therefore neither a product consisting of conditions, nor one not consisting of conditions

Is recognized; if the product does not exist, how can there be a condition or non-condition?

Summarizing the results of v.11-13, the effect cannot be said to be something already existing in the causes and conditions, nor something utterly distinct from the causes and conditions. Since there is no remaining way to explain how something could be an effect, it follows that nothing could be said to be a condition either.

## II. AN ANALYSIS OF THE GONE OVER, THE NOT YET GONE OVER, AND THE PRESENTLY BEING GONE OVER

1. In the first place the [path] gone over is not [now] being gone over; neither is the [path] not yet gone over being gone over. The [path] presently being gone over that is distinct from the [portions of path] gone over and not yet gone over is not being gone over.

If motion is possible, then it should be possible to say where the activity of going is taking place. It is not taking place in that portion of the path that is already traversed, since the activity of going has already occurred there. Nor is it taking place in the portion not yet traversed, since such activity still lies in the future. And there is no third place, the presently being gone over, where it could take place. As *Akutobhayā* explains, there is no present going apart from the gone over and the not yet gone over, just like the flame of a lamp. At *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX (Pradhan p.404), the example of the moving lamp is explained as follows. When we say that a lamp moves, it is actually a continuous series of flames we are referring to, each flame lasting just an instant and so none moving. But because each flame arises in a different place from where its predecessor was, it appears as if one enduring thing is moving. Since only the momentary flames are real, strictly speaking there is no motion. It is only when we run together past, present and future flames that there is the illusion of motion. It is important to keep this example in mind throughout the rest of the chapter. Many of the arguments depend on the assumption that nothing lasts longer than an instant.

This is an instance of the argument of the three times, in this case to the effect that going cannot take place in past, future or present. Similar

reasoning was also used in I.5-6. The argument here is the same as that of Zeno's paradox of the arrow. Like that paradox, it relies on the assumption that space and time are both infinitely divisible.

2. [The opponent:] Where there is movement there is the act of going.  
And since movement occurs in the [path] presently being gone over,  
Not in the gone over nor the not yet gone over, the act of going occurs in the presently being gone over [path].
3. [Response:] How could it be right to say that the act of going is in the [path] being gone over,  
When it is not at all right to say there is presently being gone over without the act of going?

For something to be the locus of present going there has to be an act of going. And something *x* can't be the locus of something else *y* unless *x* and *y* are distinct things. In the ensuing v.4-6 Nāgārjuna will use this point to show that it cannot be correct to locate going in the present.

4. If you say the act of going is in the [path] presently being gone over, it follows  
That the [path] being gone over is without the act of going, since [for you] the [path] presently being gone over is being gone over.

Since the locus of present going and the going are distinct (v.3), the locus itself must be devoid of any activity of going.

5. If the act of going is in the [path] presently being gone over, then two acts of going will follow:  
That by which the [path] presently being gone over [is said to be such], and moreover that which [supposedly exists] in the act of going.

For the locus to serve as locus of the act, it must itself be something whose nature is to be presently being gone over. But this requires an act of going, since something can't be being gone over without there being an act of going. So we now have two acts of going: the one for which we are

seeking a locus, and the one that makes this the right locus for the first.

6. If two acts of going are supplied, then it will follow that there are two goers,  
For there cannot be an act of going without a goer.

Since this is an absurd consequence, the opponent's hypothesis of v.2 that led to it must be rejected. Note that there is no reason to stop at two goers; the logic of the argument leads to an infinite regress of goers. (See v.3 for another example of this.)

7. If it is true that there is no act of going without a goer,  
How will there be a goer when the act of going does not exist?

The hypothesis that there is an act of going having been refuted, it follows that there can be no goer. Notice, though, that for this to follow what is required is that there be no goer without an act of going, and not (as is said here) that there can be no act of going without a goer.

8. Just as a goer does not go, neither does a non-goer go,  
And what third person is there, apart from the goer and the non-goer, who goes?

The reasoning here is parallel to that in v.1.

9. How will it be right to say that a goer goes  
When it is not at all correct to say that there is a goer in the absence of the act of going?
10. If you hold the thesis that a goer goes, it follows that  
The goer is without the act of going, [for] you wish to ascribe the act of going to the goer.

Candrakīrti sees the reasoning here as parallel to that of v.5. He comments, 'As for the thesis that someone is a goer precisely because they are provided with an act of going, since such a theorist wishes to say that the goer goes, it would have to be said that the goer goes without the going, because they designated the goer by means of going. For there is no second act of going. Hence it would not be correct to say that the goer

goes.' (V p.99)

11. If a goer does indeed go, then it will follow that there are two acts of going:  
That by which the goer is said to be a goer, and that by which the goer really goes.
12. A goer does not begin [the act of going] in [the path] gone over, neither does a goer begin [the act of going] in [the path] not yet gone over;  
A goer does not begin [the act of going] in [the path] presently being gone over. Then where does the goer begin [to go]?

A new problem is raised for those who think there is such a thing as a goer: when does that going whereby someone comes to be a goer commence? The reasoning is spelled out in the next two verses.

13. Before the act of going begins, there is no [path] presently being gone over, nor one [already] gone over  
Where the act of going could begin. [And] how could the act of going [begin] in the [path] not yet gone over?
14. How can [the path] already gone over, presently being gone over, or not yet gone over be imagined  
When the beginning of the act of going is not in any way to be found?

At this point we can imagine an opponent objecting that since there is such a thing as standing still, there must be such a thing as going. For, they would claim, standing still happens when going stops, so there must first be going for there to be standing still. Nāgārjuna replies in v.15-17.

15. It is not, first, a goer who stops, nor indeed is it a non-goer who stops,  
And who could be the third person distinct from goer and non-goer who stops?
16. How could it ever be right to say that a goer stops,  
When no goer obtains without an act of going?

It could not be the goer who stops, since the goer is defined as the agent of the act of going, and that act is incompatible with stopping, which is its cessation. But neither can it be the non-goer who stops. Since the non-goer is not characterized by the act of going, the non-goer cannot be characterized by its cessation. And there is no third possibility, since something could not be both a goer and a non-goer.

17. [The goer] is not [said to] stop when [on the path] presently being gone over, the already gone over, or the not yet gone over. The same [analysis] that applies to the case of the act of going also [applies] to the commencing and ceasing of the act of going.

Nāgārjuna points out that the same reasoning that refuted the act of going (v.3-6) also refutes the beginning (v.12-14) and the ending (v.15-17) of going.

18. It is not right to say that the goer is identical with the act of going, Nor, again, can goer and act of going be said to be distinct.

A new question for the opponent is now brought up: is the goer identical with the act of going, or are these two distinct things? Nāgārjuna will give arguments against each possibility in the next two verses.

19. If act of going and goer were to be identical  
Then it would also follow that agent and action were one.

The commentators use the example of a cutter and the action of cutting: it is considered obvious to all that an agent such as a cutter cannot be identical with the action of cutting that they perform. By the same token, then, the goer and the act of going cannot be identical.

20. If, on the other hand, the goer were thought to be distinct from the act of going,  
Then there would be the act of going without a goer, and a goer without an act of going.

If they are not identical, must they not then be distinct? Not according to Nāgārjuna. For to say that they are distinct is to say that each has its nature



independently of the other. And then the act of going would exist without its being the act of any goer, and the goer would be a goer without an act of going. The underlying logic of this argument is spelled out more carefully in V.1-4.

21. If two things are not found to be established as either identical or distinct, then how will they be established at all?

To say something is not established is to say there is no reason to believe it exists. The claim here is that if goer and going were real then they would have to be either identical or distinct. Since they can be neither, there is no reason to think they are real.

22. A goer does not obtain that going through which it is called a goer, Since the goer does not exist before the going; [indeed] someone goes somewhere.

The argument here is similar to that of v.10. It spells out in more detail the reasoning behind the denial in v.20 that goer and going are distinct. The idea is that in order to obtain going as an attribute, and thereby become a goer, the goer must exist distinct from the going. But something that existed distinct from going would not be a goer; to be a goer is to go somewhere, which requires the act of going.

23. A goer does not obtain going by means of something other than that going through which it is called a goer; There cannot be two goings when [just] one goes.

The second going is the one that would be needed to make the goer be a goer before it obtains the act of going. Once again there is an infinite regress threatening.

24. One who is [already] a real goer does not perform a going of [any of] the three kinds [i.e., past, future, or present]; Neither does one who is not [yet] a real goer perform a going of [any of] the three kinds.
25. One who is a both-real-and-unreal goer does not perform a going of [any of] the three kinds.

Thus there is no going, no goer, and no destination.

The reasoning here is another instance of the argument from the three times. The question concerns the relation between goer and going, each of which might be thought of as occurring in past, future, or present. The same considerations that were brought up in v.1, v.8, v.12, and v.17 will apply here as well. The upshot is that a goer cannot be said to go.

### III. AN ANALYSIS OF THE *ĀYATANAS*

1. Vision, hearing, taste, smell, touch and the inner sense (*manas*)  
Are the six faculties; the visible etc. are their fields.

This is the doctrine of the twelve *āyatanas*, which divides reality up into six sense faculties and their respective fields. Abhidharma takes these to be ultimately real. Nāgārjuna will examine the sense faculty of vision and try to show that it cannot be ultimately real. In v.11 he will claim that the same argument can be used to refute the rest of the *āyatanas*.

2. Not at all does vision see itself.  
If vision does not see itself, how will it see what is other?

It is generally acknowledged that an entity cannot operate on itself: a knife cannot cut itself, a finger cannot point at itself, etc. Hence vision does not see itself. The argument here is that because this is true, it follows that vision does not see things other than itself either (i.e., vision does not see anything at all). This argument seems puzzling. Why should it follow from the fact that vision does not see itself that it sees nothing else? There are two possible ways of interpreting the argument. The first represents how Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti understand it. The second is not attested to by any commentator, but seems plausible nonetheless.

(1) The scent of jasmine first pervades the flower, and then pervades what comes in contact with the flower. The general principle to be inferred from this is that a property of something can come to pervade something else only if that property first pervades the thing itself. For an object to be seen is for it to be pervaded by the property of being seen. By the general principle just mentioned, this can be so only if vision itself is first pervaded by the property of being seen. But since vision does not see itself, this is not so. It

follows that no distinct object can be seen by vision either.

(2) If seeing is the intrinsic nature of vision, then vision must manifest this intrinsic nature independently of other things. This means that vision should be able to see even in the absence of any visible object. For otherwise its manifesting vision would be dependent on the existence of the visible object. But seeing requires that there be something that is seen, and in the absence of any visible object, only vision itself could be what vision sees. But vision does not see itself. Hence seeing could not be the intrinsic nature of vision, so it could not be ultimately true that vision sees visible objects.

To this argument we are to imagine the opponent raises an objection: the principle of irreflexivity (that an entity cannot operate on itself) does not hold, since there are counter-examples. A fire, while burning its fuel, also burns itself. Hence it has not been proven that vision does not see itself.

3. [Reply:] The example of fire is not adequate for the explanation of vision.

Indeed that, together with vision, is refuted by [the analysis of] ‘present-being-gone-over, gone-over, and not-yet-gone-over’ [in Ch.II].

The commentary *Akutobhayā* explains, ‘Just as the act of going is not found in the gone-over, the not-yet-gone-over, or in the present-being-gone-over, so the act of burning is not to be found in the burnt, the not-yet-burnt, or the present-being-burnt.’ The reply is thus that since no account may be given of how an ultimately real fire could burn anything, fire cannot be said to burn itself. Consequently it does not work as a counter-example to the irreflexivity principle. The relation between fire and fuel is examined systematically in Ch.X.

This commentary also suggests that this might be the missing argument for the conclusion in v.2. If vision cannot be said to see anything in any of the three times, then it cannot be said to see. The difficulty with this interpretation is that it is unclear what work is then left for the premise—that vision does not see itself—to do. If the argument of the three times shows that vision never sees anything, then one does not need to point out that vision does not see itself in order to prove that vision does not see.

4. When there is no vision whatever in the absence of seeing,  
How can it be right to say 'Vision sees'?

This is the idea behind interpretation (2) of the argument in v.2. If vision were ultimately real, its intrinsic nature would be seeing. So it makes no sense to suppose that vision might exist in the absence of any seeing. Note that to attribute the *capacity* for seeing to a vision that is not actually seeing is to make vision's nature of seeing dependent on something else. In that case seeing would not be its *intrinsic* nature.

5. Vision does not see, nor does non-vision see.  
The seer is also to be understood in the same way as vision.
6. There is no seer with vision or without.  
If the seer is non-existent, how will there be what is to be seen and vision?

Something is a seer through possessing vision. But vision can make something a seer only if vision sees. Since (by the result of v.1-4) vision does not see, and non-vision obviously does not see, there appears to be no acceptable analysis of how something could be a seer. If we then define the visible as what can be seen by a seer, it is unclear how the visible could be ultimately real. The same reasoning applies to vision.

At this point Candrakīrti quotes the following verse (iv.55) from Nāgārjuna's work *Ratnāvalī*:

Just as the production of the son is said to depend on the mother  
and father,  
Just so the production of consciousness is said to depend on vision  
and *rūpa*.

*Rūpa* here refers to what is visible (color-and-shape), and not to the category of the physical in the doctrine of the five *skandhas*. According to the doctrine of dependent origination, consciousness arises in dependence on sense faculty and sense-object (see *Samyutta-Nikāya* XII. 62). Given this doctrine, the consequences of the denial of vision can now be spelled out.

7. Due to the non-existence of vision and what is to be seen, the four, consisting of consciousness etc.,  
Do not exist. How, then, will appropriation, etc., come to be?

‘The four’ are consciousness, contact, feeling, and desire. In the formula of dependent origination these are identified as successive steps leading to appropriation (*upādāna*), which is the affective stance of taking the elements of the causal series as one’s own. So the argument is that in the absence of vision there cannot be, with respect to all visual experience, the sense of ownership that is relevant to the origination of suffering.

8. One should know that hearing, smelling, tasting, touch, and the inner sense are explained  
By means of vision, as well as indeed the hearer and what is heard, etc.

The same reasoning may be applied to the other five sense faculties. The result will be that the conclusion of v.8 extends to all possible experience. Nāgārjuna will follow the same strategy elsewhere: focusing on one example and then claiming that the argument generalizes to an entire class. See, e.g., Chapters IV, V and XIX.

#### IV. AN ANALYSIS OF THE *SKANDHAS*

The *skandha* classification is the second of three major systems for classifying existing things that the Buddha employed in presenting his teachings about the nature of reality. This doctrine divides all existents up into five basic kinds: *rūpa* (the corporeal), feeling, perception, volition and consciousness. Since the Buddha used this classificatory scheme (along with those of the *āyatana*s and *dhātu*s) in his instructions for more advanced disciples, Abhidharma thinkers took the *skandhas* to be ultimately real. Nāgārjuna will argue that the *skandhas* cannot be ultimately real entities. His argument will use the example of *rūpa*, and then in v.7 will generalize the conclusion.

1. *Rūpa* is not found separate from the cause of *rūpa*.  
Nor is the cause of *rūpa* seen without *rūpa*.

According to Abhidharma doctrine, *rūpa skandha* is made up of the five external sense-field *āyatana*s: the visible (*rūpa* in the narrow sense, color-and-shape), the audible, the tangible, tastes and smells. These are said to have as their cause the four elements of earth, water, fire and air (the *mahābhūta*). The four elements occur in the form of atoms, and an atom of one sort is always accompanied by an atom of each of the other three sorts. They are said to be the cause of *rūpa* in the sense that the visible, etc. never occur apart from occurrences of the four elements. The four elements thus serve as the support of the occurrence of the sensible phenomena that make up *rūpa*; their causal role is to be a kind of material cause. As Candrakīrti explains the claim of 1ab, if *rūpa* is distinct from the four elements, it is no more their effect than a piece of cloth is the effect of a pot. On the other hand, 1cd asserts, if there is no *rūpa*, then nothing can be said to be the cause of *rūpa*. The two claims of this verse are defended in the next five verses.

2. If *rūpa* is separate from the cause of *rūpa*, then *rūpa* is Uncaused; but no object whatever is without any cause.

If *rūpa* were distinct from its cause, the four elements, then it would be possible for *rūpa* to exist separately from them. But then it would exist independently of the four elements, just as the cloth exists separately from the pot. But the fact that the pot and the cloth exist separately is what makes it true that the cloth is not the effect of the pot. So *rūpa* would be without cause. Buddhapālita explains that this would have two absurd consequences: (1) It would be possible for anything to come into existence at any time; (2) all effort at producing something would be futile.

3. Moreover, if the cause of *rūpa* were separate from *rūpa*, The cause would be without effect; and a cause is not without effect.

There are likewise absurd consequences if the cause, the four elements, were distinct from *rūpa*. To say they are separate is to say they exist independently of one another, as a bowl exists independently of a pot. But if they exist independently, then the elements do not cause *rūpa* as effect. And an effectless cause is absurd, because by definition a cause must have an effect.

4. If *rūpa* exists, a cause of *rūpa* is not possible.

If *rūpa* does not exist, a cause of *rūpa* is not possible.

If the four elements are the cause of *rūpa*, they must be its cause either when *rūpa* already exists or else when it does not yet exist. But something *x* cannot be a cause of something else *y* when *y* already exists. As Buddhapālita asks, what would be the point of a cause in that case? If, on the other hand, the effect does not exist, how can something be said to be its cause? An existing thing cannot bear any sort of real relation, including the relation of being a cause, to something unreal. The reasoning here is just like that of Chapter I verses 5-6.

5. But also *rūpa* does not at all exist without a cause--not at all. Thus one should not impose any concepts on *rūpa*.

Given what was said in v.4, it would be natural to think Nāgārjuna wants us to conclude that *rūpa* is without cause. But that would be incorrect. We have good reason to deny that *rūpa* is uncaused. If it were, then as *Akutobhayā* points out, all undertakings would be pointless. Here Nāgārjuna points out that one can deny that *rūpa* has a cause without affirming that *rūpa* is causeless. If there are good reasons to deny both that *rūpa* has a cause and that *rūpa* is causeless, then perhaps we should affirm neither ('not impose any concepts on *rūpa*'), and instead look for some hidden assumption that leads to the paradoxical situation. One possibility is the assumption that *rūpa* is ultimately real, something with intrinsic nature.

6. One cannot say that the effect resembles the cause.  
One cannot say that the effect does not resemble the cause.

The question of whether effect resembles cause was widely discussed among Indian philosophers. For those who maintained that the effect is something new, existing distinct from the cause, there is the difficulty of explaining why we can only produce pots from clay and not from milk (which is just as distinct from a pot as is a lump of clay). If they could claim the effect always resembles the cause, this might help them answer the question. But there are cases where effect does not resemble cause, as when we produce solid curds from liquid milk. Suppose we were to ask this question concerning *rūpa* and its cause. Nāgārjuna would call this a case of 'imposing concepts on *rūpa*', something he has just said we should not do. *Rūpa* and the four elements do not resemble one another. For

instance, as Candrakīrti points out, *rūpa* is cognized by vision, hearing, smell and taste, while the four elements are cognized by touch. So one could not say this is a case where the effect resembles the cause. But even if they did resemble one another, this would not be sufficient to establish causality. There is no reciprocal cause-effect relation between similar grains of rice. On the other hand, the cause-effect relation is not the relation of dissimilarity. A grain of rice and nirvana are dissimilar, but neither is the cause of the other.

7. Feeling, consciousness, perceptions, and the volitions, collectively,  
Indeed all existents [should be considered] in the same way as *rūpa*.

The argument of the chapter so far generalizes to all the *skandhas*. As Candrakīrti puts it, ‘Indeed, when the Mādhyamika seeks to prove the emptiness of one *dharma*, that of all *dharma*s [is proven].’ (V p.127) The argument against *rūpa* has depended on there being something that is held to be the cause of *rūpa*. At *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* II.20 it is claimed that this holds for the other four *skandhas* as well.

8. There being a refutation based on emptiness, were one to utter an  
objection,  
For them all becomes a question-begging non-objection.
9. There being an explanation based on emptiness, were one to utter a  
criticism,  
For them all becomes a question-begging non-criticism.

According to Candrakīrti, the opponent here is someone who thinks the argument against *rūpa skandha* can be answered by asserting the ultimate reality of feeling *skandha*, etc. The difficulty in this opponent’s strategy is precisely that they ignore the lesson of v.7, that the same reasoning that undermines the ultimate reality of *rūpa* applies equally well to the other four *skandhas*. Since the reasoning that undermines the ultimate reality of *rūpa* applies equally to the other *skandhas*, it is up to the opponent to show how they might be real; this cannot merely be assumed. To do so is to commit the logical fallacy known as begging the question—merely assuming the point that is in question and so needs to be proven.



V. AN ANALYSIS OF THE *DHĀTUS*

The *dhātu* classification is the last of the three major ways of analyzing reality accepted in Abhidharma. It is commonly given as a list of 18 kinds: the twelve *āyatana*s plus the six resulting forms of consciousness. But here it is the variant list of six that is investigated: earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness. Nāgārjuna discusses space *dhātu*, but in v.7cd he will claim that the argument generalizes to the other *dhātus* as well.

1. Space does not at all exist prior to the defining characteristic of space.

If it existed prior to its defining characteristic, there would result the absurdity of something's being without defining characteristic.

As a *dhātu*, space is held by the Ābhidharmika to be ultimately real. This means it must have its own intrinsic nature, which is here called a defining characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*). The defining characteristic of space is said to be non-resistance: if there is space between the desk and the wall, then one may put something there without the space resisting. The subject of Nāgārjuna's examination will be the relation between space and its defining characteristic. Since these are said to be related (through the characterizing relation), the question arises how these two things come to be so related. Is it that space, as the bearer of the defining characteristic, is in itself a bare something that is devoid of defining characteristic? On this view the bearer would in itself be a characterless substrate, something that comes to be *space* (that which is non-resistant) through being characterized by the defining characteristic of non-resistance. Nāgārjuna rejects this view on the grounds that it would require there to be something that is devoid of defining characteristic.

2. Nowhere does there at all obtain an existent without defining characteristic.

An existent devoid of defining characteristic being unreal, where would a defining characteristic function?

None of the commentators provides an argument for the claim that there could be no existent devoid of defining characteristic. This is no doubt because it seemed to the Abhidharma opponent perfectly obvious that real

things must have their own distinctive natures. But it might seem to us that we can, after all, make sense of the idea of a bare stuff that then takes on the nature it is given by its defining characteristic. When we think this, though, we are covertly attributing a defining characteristic to this bearer: the defining characteristic of 'bare-stuffness'. This would suggest that the idea of a character-less bearer is actually incoherent.

3. There is no functioning of the defining characteristic where the bearer is without defining characteristic, and where it is with defining characteristic.  
And it does not function anywhere other than where there is or is not a defining characteristic.

The function of a defining characteristic is to characterize its bearer. In the case of space this would mean making it something whose nature is to be non-resistant. Now this function requires that there be a bearer, and either that bearer is (prior to the functioning of the defining characteristic) itself without defining characteristic, or else it is something with defining characteristic. Since there is no such thing as space that is devoid of defining characteristic, the first possibility is ruled out. Candrakīrti sees two problems with the second:

- (1) A defining characteristic would then be superfluous. Since space would already have a nature, why would it need something else to make it be the sort of thing it already is?
  - (2) An infinite regress results. To explain how non-resistance<sub>1</sub> functions to characterize space, we suppose that space already has a defining characteristic, non-resistance<sub>2</sub>. But now we can ask the same question about non-resistance<sub>2</sub> that we asked about non-resistance<sub>1</sub>: does it characterize a bearer that is without defining characteristic, or a bearer already with its own defining characteristic? The former has been ruled out. And the latter means we must supply a non-resistance<sub>3</sub>. And the regress shows no sign of stopping here.
4. And if there is no function of the defining characteristic, it makes no sense to speak of a bearer of defining characteristic. And if a bearer of defining characteristic cannot be asserted, a defining characteristic is likewise impossible.

5. Therefore neither a bearer of defining characteristic nor a defining characteristic exists.  
And certainly no existent whatever occurs devoid of both bearer of defining characteristic and defining characteristic.

Space cannot be an ultimately real existent, since we can make sense of neither space as bearer nor of non-resistance as defining characteristic.

6. When the existent is not real, with respect to what will there come to be non-existence?  
And who is there who, lacking the nature of either an existent or a non-existent, cognizes what is both existent and non-existent?

To deny that space is an existent is not to affirm that it is non-existent. To affirm the non-existence of space, one would need to be able to say what space is. As Buddhapālita puts it, ‘It would be the non-existence of what existent?’ (P p.93) And the argument so far has been to the effect that we cannot say what an ultimately real space would be. Moreover, there is no third possibility apart from saying that space is existent and saying that space is non-existent. So apparently no statement about space could be ultimately true.

Although the commentaries do not mention it, one implication of this is worth pointing out. Opponents of Madhyamaka often claim that its doctrine of emptiness leads to the absurd result that nothing whatever exists—‘metaphysical nihilism’. The argument of the present chapter has been that space is not ultimately real. If this argument can be generalized, then it would seem to lead to the conclusion that no supposed existent can be said to be ultimately real. The objection of metaphysical nihilism seems to be sustained. But metaphysical nihilism is the doctrine that all supposedly existing things are ultimately non-existent. If the argument of v.6 is correct, can this be true?

7. Therefore space is not an existent, not a non-existent, not a bearer of defining characteristic, nor indeed a defining characteristic.  
The other five *dhātus* are the same as space.

The argument generalizes to the other *dhātus* as well.

8. But those of little intellect who take there to be existence and non-existence with respect to things,  
They do not see that auspicious cessation that should be seen.

*Akutobhayā* explains that by ‘auspicious cessation’ is meant *nirvāna*. Apparently the conclusion to be drawn from this is that those who seek *nirvāna* should cease hankering after ultimate reality. Note that this is not because our deluded intellects are incapable of grasping the ultimate nature of reality. It seems instead to be because the very idea of an ultimate nature of reality is incoherent.

## VI. AN ANALYSIS OF DESIRE AND THE ONE WHO DESIRES

The subject of this chapter is the relation between a state, such as desire, and the subject or locus of that state, such as the one who desires. It is widely thought that a state cannot exist unless there also exists something that has that state—that there cannot, for instance, be desire unless there is a subject that is the locus of the desire. The question examined here is whether there is any coherent account of the relation between the state and the subject. By ‘the one who desires’ we ordinarily understand a person. But for the *Ābhidharmika*, persons are not ultimately real. In v.10 *Nāgārjuna* will generalize the argument concerning desire and the one who desires to all *dharmas* or ultimately real things. And *Bhāvaviveka* comments that this extends to external things in the natural world. So by ‘the one who desires’ we should understand whatever ultimately real entity it is that might be thought to be the locus of desire. The argument will not make use of any facts that are peculiar to persons or other sentient beings, such as the fact that desires are conscious states.

1. If the one who desires existed prior to and without desire,  
Then desire would be dependent on that; there being the one who desires, desire would then exist.

Either state and subject arise together or one precedes the other. If the subject preceded the state, then they would be distinct, and the state would be dependent on the subject. But it is absurd to suppose that desire could be dependent on something that is itself free of desire, for their natures are

contradictory. (Candrakīrti provides the example of an *arhat*, someone who is by nature free of craving.) To suppose there is a subject who goes from being without desire to being with desire, we must conceptually construct an enduring thing with distinct parts, for instance the part that exists before the occurrence of desire and the part that exists when the desire has arisen. So we would no longer be considering something that is ultimately real by Abhidharma standards.

2. But how will desire itself come to be if there is none who desires?  
Whether the desire exists or not, the analysis with respect to the one who desires will also go the same way.

To suppose, on the other hand, that desire, something whose occurrence is dependent on a locus of desire, could exist in the absence of a desiring subject is likewise absurd. So says 2ab. In 2cd, according to Candrakīrti, Nāgārjuna is replying to an opponent who points out that so far we've only had an argument against the existence of desire, not against the subject of desire. The argument was that whether or not the subject exists, desire cannot arise. This does not show that the subject does not exist. And if we can say there is a subject of desire, we will have to say there is desire as well, so the difficulty will be resolved. Nāgārjuna replies that the same kind of analysis he used against desire in 1-2ab can be turned on the subject; it can be shown that the subject cannot exist whether desire exists or not. For if desire existed prior to the subject of desire, then desire would occur without a locus, which is absurd. And if there were no desire, how could there come to be one who desires?

3. But moreover it cannot be that desire and the one who desires arise together;  
Desire and the one who desires would [then] be mutually independent.

So far we have considered the possibility that desire and the one who desires arise successively. Suppose on the other hand it were said that state and subject arise together. This might be thought to ground a relation of mutual or reciprocal causation, wherein each supports the other. But this will turn out to be problematic. The problems begin with the fact that if they are said to arise together, then they must be thought of as two distinct, independently existing things. The reason for this is spelled out in 4ab.

4. If there is unity [of state and subject] there is no co-occurrence,  
there is not that with which the thing comes together.  
If there is distinctness, how indeed will there be co-occurrence?

Co-occurrence (*sahabhāva*) is the existing simultaneously of two things. (It is an important constituent of the causal relation.) But now state and subject must be either identical or distinct. Suppose state and subject were really just one thing (perhaps one that was presented in two different ways). Then we could not say there is co-occurrence between them: it takes two to be concomitant. Nāgārjuna then asserts that co-occurrence is likewise incompatible with their being two distinct things. The reason for this will emerge in v.5-9.

5. If there were co-occurrence in the case of unity, then that would be possible without one of the relata.  
If there were co-occurrence in the case of distinctness, then too that would be possible without one of the relata.

Suppose there is the relation of co-occurrence between  $x$  and  $y$ . Then either  $x$  and  $y$  are really just one thing ('the case of unity') or they are distinct things. If they were one thing, then the co-occurrence of  $x$  and  $y$  would really be just the co-occurrence of the one thing  $x$ . But co-occurrence is a binary relation, a relation between two things. It would be absurd to say that this relation holds between a thing and itself. If on the other hand  $x$  and  $y$  were distinct, then it would be possible for each of them to occur separately from the other. And if co-occurrence-with- $y$  is really a property of  $x$ , then when  $x$  occurs separate from  $y$  it should have the property of co-occurrence-with- $y$ , which is absurd.

6. And in the case of distinctness, if there were co-occurrence, how would desire and the one who desires  
Be established as mutually distinct, on the basis of which there could be co-occurrence of the two?

Candrakīrti cites the case of a cow and a horse as an example of two things that may co-occur. But these are two distinct things precisely because each may occur independently of the other. Desire and the one who desires do not, he says, occur separately, so they may not be said to co-occur.

7. Alternatively if the distinctness of desire and the one who desires is established,  
What would be the point of this co-occurrence that you suppose between them?
8. Saying that [one] is not established distinct [from the other], you aim at co-occurrence,  
[Yet] you posit distinctness for the sake of establishing co-occurrence.

To say that the two are co-occurrent, one must first establish that they are separate, distinct existents. Having done so, however, one has thereby undermined their co-occurrence.

9. And if distinctness is not established, co-occurrence is not established.  
If there is distinctness of the two, in which do you posit co-occurrence?
10. Thus there is no establishing of desire together with the one who desires, nor apart from the one who desires.  
As with desire, so for all *dharmas*, there is no establishment either together or apart.

That is, no coherent account can be given of those features of reality that depend for their occurrence on the occurrence of something else in the way in which desire is thought to depend on the locus in which it occurs. Notice that this does not mean that state and locus are really one. It means instead that wherever we find this relation of dependence, neither of the relata can be thought of as ultimately real.

## VII. AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONDITIONED

All *dharmas* are said to be conditioned, that is dependent for their arising on factors other than themselves. As such they are characterized by origination, duration and cessation. (See *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* II.46, where it is discussed whether there is a fourth characteristic of aging.)

Moreover, their being conditioned is said to itself be an observable phenomenon, and as such to also be conditioned (cf. *Aṅguttara* I.152, *Saṃyutta* III.37). It was disputed among Ābhidharmikas how to interpret this, but some took it to mean that for each conditioned *dharmā* there are three more *dharmas* that represent the conditioned *dharmā*'s origination, duration and cessation. The question then arose whether for each of those *dharmas* there are three additional *dharmas*. This is the question with which Nāgārjuna will begin his examination. But this leads to the larger question of how we should take the claim that existing things are subject to dependent origination (*pratītya samutpāda*). Since the doctrine of dependent origination is central to the Buddha's teachings, it might seem problematic for a Buddhist to maintain anything that calls into question the reality of dependent arising.

1. If origination is conditioned then the three characteristics [origination, duration and cessation] apply [to it].  
But if origination is not conditioned then how [can it be] a characteristic of the conditioned?

Suppose that origination is something that is conditioned. If everything conditioned is characterized by the three characteristics, then origination must itself be subject to origination, duration and cessation. According to *Akutoḥhayā*, this must be rejected since it leads to an infinite regress: the origination of origination will likewise be subject to its own origination, duration and succession, and so on. Candrakīrti thinks the problem is instead that then what is supposed to be a characteristic of *dharmas* becomes itself another *dharmā* that is among the things to be characterized by the characteristics of origination, etc. And how can a characteristic characterize itself? (On Candrakīrti's interpretation, the problem of infinite regress will come later, as a result of the opponent's attempts to escape this difficulty.)

If, on the other hand, we suppose that origination is not conditioned, then it would have to be permanent. In that case it would be difficult to also claim that it characterizes those *dharmas* that are themselves conditioned and thus impermanent.

2. If the three consisting of origination etc. were separate, there would not be the capacity to function as characterizing what they condition.



If they were united, how could they be in the same place at the same time?

Do the three characteristics occur separately or together when they characterize a conditioned entity? If separately, then origination would occur apart from duration and cessation. So origination would not endure, and neither would it cease and thus make way for duration and cessation. Likewise duration would never originate, etc. Hence the three characteristics would not perform their function of making a conditioned thing impermanent. But if they occurred together then origination and cessation would exist simultaneously, which is absurd, since they have contradictory natures.

3. If origination, duration and cessation were characterized by another set of conditions,  
There would be an infinite regress; if not, then they would not be conditioned.

In order to avoid the problem of v.2, the opponent might introduce the idea that the origination of a conditioned thing itself has an origination (as well as a duration and a cessation). Suppose the origination of a conditioned thing were itself conditioned. As a conditioned thing it would require its own origination, duration and cessation. But the same would apply to these, etc. So there would be an infinite regress. Suppose on the other hand they were not conditioned. Then they should be eternal. It is precisely because space is unconditioned that it is thought (by some Ābhidharmikas) to be eternal. So the origination of a conditioned thing would go on forever, likewise its duration and its cessation. And it is difficult to see how something unconditioned and eternal could characterize things that are conditioned and impermanent.

4. [Opponent:] The origination of origination is only the origination of the primary origination.  
That origination in turn brings about the origination of origination.

The opponent introduces a distinction between the primary (*maula*) origination, which is the origination of a *dharma*, and the origination of origination, which is what originates the primary origination. In order to avoid the infinite regress that arises when we ask (as in v.3) what

originates the origination of the origination, the opponent claims this is originated by the primary origination.

- 5 [Reply:] If, according to you, origination is what originates the primary origination,  
Then how, on your account, will this, which is not produced by the primary origination, produce that [primary origination]?

How, in other words, does the origination of origination itself originate? If it is what originates the primary origination, then as a conditioned thing it must also originate. How does that come about? Suppose the opponent answers that the origination of origination is originated by the primary origination. Nāgārjuna responds:

6. If, as you say, that which is produced by the primary [origination] produces the primary,  
The primary is not produced by that [origination of origination];  
how will it [the primary] originate that?

The question here is how the origination of origination, which supposedly originates the primary origination, itself originates. Since the origination of origination originates the primary, it cannot be that the primary originates the origination of origination; that would be circular. Candrakīrti explains, ‘If the origination known as the origination of origination which is produced by the primary origination produces the primary origination, that primary origination which is produced by the origination of origination is [as yet] unreal, how will it produce the origination of origination? It is thus incorrect to say that an existing origination of origination produced by the primary origination produces the primary. And thus because there is no mutual reciprocal causation, there is indeed the absurd consequence of infinite regress, there is no origination.’ (V p.150)

7. Granted you may say that this [primary origination] while undergoing origination [and so not yet produced] would bring about the origination of that [origination of origination] on its own,  
If this, though unproduced, were capable of bringing about the origination of that.

Here the difficulty in mutual reciprocal causation is spelled out. If the primary origination originated the origination of origination while the origination of origination was originating the primary origination, then the primary origination would have to be able to originate something before it came into existence. And that is clearly impossible. The opponent will thus proceed to try a new tack.

8. As a light illuminates both itself and what is other,  
So origination brings about the origination of both itself and what is other.

The opponent now abandons the idea that there is an origination of origination in addition to the primary origination. In its place the opponent introduces the hypothesis that just as light illuminates itself as well as other things, so origination originates both itself and the distinct *dharmā* that is undergoing origination. Like the example of fire that supposedly burns itself, the example of the light is another alleged counter-example to the irreflexivity principle. The ensuing discussion of the hypothesis will be more thorough than the discussion, in Chapter III, v.3, of the example of fire. Nāgārjuna gives a similar treatment of the claim that light illuminates itself at *Vigrahavyāvartanī* v.34-9.

9. There is no darkness either in the light or in the place where it is set,  
What does the light illuminate? Illumination is in fact the destruction of darkness.

To illuminate is to destroy darkness. There is no darkness in the light itself or in the place it occupies. So a light cannot be said to be illuminated.

10. How is darkness destroyed by a light that is originating?  
When a light is originating, darkness does not obtain.

Perhaps it will be said that light destroys darkness when it originates. And when it originates there is darkness where the light is. So the problem pointed out in v.9 is overcome. Nāgārjuna responds that there is likewise no darkness when a light is originating. As Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti all explain, light and darkness are mutually contradictory qualities, so one cannot occur where the other is. But for one thing to destroy another, the two things must come in contact. And contact requires

that the two occur in the same place.

11. Or if darkness is destroyed by a light that has not yet come in contact with it,  
Then the [light] that is here will destroy darkness located throughout the world.

The only remaining option is that light need not come in contact with darkness to destroy it. This would explain how light could destroy darkness while it is originating. But it has the absurd consequence that a single light would illuminate the entire world. *Akutobhayā*: ‘For the non-contact is the same. What difference is there between destroying darkness situated where the light is and destroying darkness situated throughout the world?’ (P p.120)

12. If light illuminates both itself and what is other,  
Then as well darkness will certainly conceal both itself and what is other.

Does darkness conceal itself as well as other things? Then darkness could never be perceived. But if we say that light illuminates itself, we seem committed to saying this as well.

13. How could this origination which is not yet originated produce itself?  
If you say it produces [itself] having [already] been originated, how can it be produced for the second time?

In order for something to produce, it must already exist. But to exist it must already have been originated. So in order to originate itself, it would have to bring itself into existence after it has already been brought into existence. Hence ‘be produced for the second time’.

The focus now shifts to the claim that origination brings about the arising of what is distinct from itself. The question is raised whether origination does this to something already originated, something not yet originated, or something undergoing origination:

14. In no way whatever is the presently originating, the already originated, the not yet originated,

Originated, just as was said [in Chapter II] about the presently being gone over, the gone over, and the not yet gone over.

The argument of the three times, first introduced in Chapter II, will apply here as well. Origination cannot happen to what is already originated, nor to what is not yet originated, and there is no third state of presently originating.

According to Candrakīrti, the opponent's next move is to introduce an act of origination. (Cf. Chapter II, v.2, where the opponent made a similar move.) 'It is indeed the presently originating that is originated, not the originated and not the not yet originated. What you believe, that the presently originating is not originated because it is not possible for there to be a presently originating distinct from the originated and the not yet originated, that is wrong. Since the presently originating is designated in connection with the act of originating, where there is the act of origination, because the establishment of presently originating is dependent on the act of origination, it is the presently originating that is originated, and origination originates that presently originating.' (V p.158) Nāgārjuna replies:

15. As the presently originating does not proceed out of an act of origination,  
Why is presently originating nonetheless said to depend on an act of origination?

As Buddhapālita understands it, the argument is that for this strategy to work, it must be said how presently originating, e.g., of a cloth, is to be individuated when it is dependent on an act of origination. The difficulty is that there is no distinction to be drawn between the presently originating of the cloth and the act of origination. The one is never found without the other. So the presently originating of the cloth cannot be said to depend on the act of origination. And in that case we are back to the difficulty of v.14: the presently originating of the cloth cannot be found, so it cannot be said to be what is originated.

At this point, the commentators agree, the opponent raises a pointed objection: If you deny origination, you must deny dependent origination, the doctrine at the heart of the Buddha's teachings: 'When this exists, that exists; when this arises, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not exist; when this ceases, that ceases' (*Majjhima Nikāya III.63*). The

Mādhyamika is, in short, a nihilist. Nāgārjuna then replies:

16. Whatever exists in dependence, that is free of intrinsic nature.  
Hence the presently originating is free [of intrinsic nature], as is the act of origination itself as well.

Candrakīrti takes Nāgārjuna to be turning the tables on the opponent—showing that it is the opponent, not the Mādhyamika, whose views are at odds with the Buddha’s teaching of dependent origination. For it is agreed that what is ultimately real must have intrinsic nature: ‘A real entity has intrinsic nature, it invariably possesses its own intrinsic nature by means of its own essence. Because it is real, it depends on nothing else, nor is it originated.’ (V p.160) But this means that what is ultimately real cannot be dependently originated. And presently originating and an act of origination would have to originate in dependence on other things. So it is incompatible with the Buddha’s teaching of dependent origination to claim that presently originating and the act of origination are ultimately real.

The Mādhyamika holds that the teaching of dependent origination should be understood in two ways. Understood as a conventional truth, it applies to such things as the pot and the cloth, which arise in dependence on causes and conditions. Understood as an ultimate truth, however, it is the teaching that no ultimately real things ever arise. (See Chapter I, v.1; also Chapter XXIV, v.18, where it is asserted that anything dependently originated must be empty.) The opponent has grasped only the conventional meaning of dependent origination, and has failed to appreciate the deeper truth of emptiness, the truth that all things are ‘free of intrinsic nature’.

17. If some sort of unoriginated entity existed somewhere,  
Then it could be originated; but what is originated when that entity does not exist?

For some action to be done to some object, the object must already exist. So for the action of origination to be done to something like a pot, the pot must already exist. But if the pot already existed, what would be the point of origination? When we speak of origination, it is by virtue of anticipation of the originated product. And anticipation is an activity of the mind. To suppose origination is ultimately real is to project a mental construction onto the world.

18. And if this origination brought about the origination of the presently originating,  
Then which origination would in turn bring about the origination of that origination?
19. If another origination is what originates that [presently originating], there is an infinite regress.  
If on the other hand what is originated were without origination, then everything whatever would be originated.

If the presently originating requires another origination to explain it, then an infinite regress ensues. If on the other hand another origination is not required, then the presently occurring origination is without cause. This means that absolutely anything could be originated at any time.

20. It cannot be said that there is the act of origination of the existent or of the non-existent,  
Nor of what both exists and does not exist, this was shown earlier.

See the argument of Chapter I, v.6-7.

21. The act of origination of an entity that is undergoing cessation is not possible,  
But an entity that is not undergoing cessation is also not possible.

The act of origination cannot occur when the entity is undergoing cessation. Undergoing origination and undergoing cessation are, as *Akutobhayā* says, contradictory properties, so they cannot be properties of one and the same thing. Hence the act of origination would have to take place at a time when cessation is not occurring, i.e., a time when the entity is exempt from impermanence. And, says Candrakīrti, there is no such present time distinct from past and future.

The argument now shifts to the second of the three characteristics of conditioned things, duration. Then in v.26-32, cessation will be the subject of attack.

22. An entity that has not yet endured is not enduring, an entity that has [already] endured is not enduring,

That which is presently enduring is not enduring, and what  
unoriginated entity is there that is enduring?

An existing thing that, by virtue of existing, has endured is not what the characteristic of enduring characterizes, for what role could the characteristic play in something that is already enduring? As Buddhapālita says, to claim that it is through contact with enduring that the existing thing endures is to supply a second enduring (which threatens to lead to an infinite regress). Something that has not yet endured is likewise not what enduring characterizes, since enduring and not yet enduring are contradictory properties. As for the third possibility, there is no such thing as presently enduring: at any given moment either something has endured or it has not. And since every existing thing is impermanent, everything must originate at some time or other. Thus there could not be real things that are unoriginated, and so the unoriginated could not be what endures.

23. The enduring of an entity that is presently undergoing cessation is  
not possible,  
But the entity that is not undergoing cessation is also not possible.
24. From among all entities that are always characterized by aging and  
death,  
Which entities are they that endure without aging and death?

The argument of verses 23-24 parallels that of v. 21. Aging and death may be interpreted as just special cases of cessation.

25. And the enduring of enduring is not possible through a distinct  
enduring,  
Just as the origination of origination is not by means of itself or  
something else.

See verses 3-13 for the argument against the origination of origination.

26. What is not yet ceased is not undergoing cessation, what has  
already ceased is not undergoing cessation,  
Likewise what is currently undergoing cessation; and what  
uncreated thing is it that is undergoing cessation?



The argument here is exactly as in v.22.

27. On the one hand the cessation of an enduring entity is not possible,  
Nor is the cessation of an entity that does not endure.

The argument here parallels that of v.23. Cessation must characterize something that exists and so endures. But enduring and destruction are contradictory characteristics.

28. A given state is not itself made to cease by means of that very state,  
Nor is it the case that a given state is made to cease by some  
distinct state.

The first possibility is ruled out by the irreflexivity principle. It can also be seen to be impossible from the fact that it would require the entity in question both to exist (in order to bring something about) and to not exist (since the effect of cessation is non-existence). The second requires us to suppose that when milk ceases through turning into buttermilk, it is the buttermilk that brings about the cessation of the milk. The difficulty here is that since the milk no longer exists when the buttermilk exists, the latter cannot bring about the cessation of the former.

29. When there cannot be the origination of any *dharma*,  
Then there cannot be the cessation of any *dharma* either.

Since it was shown earlier that there can be no origination of an ultimately real thing, and a real thing would have to be originated, it follows that there can be no ultimately real thing for cessation to characterize.

30. On the one hand the cessation of an existing entity is not possible.  
For one thing cannot be both existent and non-existent.

31. On the other hand the cessation of an entity that does not exist is  
not possible,  
Just as there is no cutting off of a second head.

To say that an existent undergoes cessation is to say that an existing entity is non-existent. What is the entity that both exists and is non-existent? But it likewise cannot be the non-existent that ceases. Cessation renders

something non-existent, and it would be superfluous to render non-existent something that is already non-existent. To this it could be added that cessation cannot characterize something that is both existent and non-existent, nor something that is neither existent nor non-existent.

32. The cessation of cessation does not take place by means of itself, nor does it take place by means of another [cessation], Just as the origination of origination is not by means of itself or by means of another [origination].

Cessation must itself cease, lest it continue on forever. What makes it cease? The cessation of the milk cannot be what makes that very cessation cease. But if there is a distinct cessation that makes this cessation cease, we have the start of an infinite regress.

33. Since origination, duration and cessation are not established, there is nothing that is conditioned.  
And in the absence of the establishment of the conditioned what unconditioned thing will be established?

The conditioned would have to undergo origination, duration and cessation. Since none of these three characteristics can be made sense of, we must conclude that the conditioned does not exist. But according to Nāgārjuna, we should not conclude from this argument that what is ultimately real must be unconditioned. For we could say that something is unconditioned only if we could explain how something could be conditioned. And it has been the gist of this chapter that we cannot do that. The reasoning here parallels that of Chapter V, v.6.

34. Like an illusion, like a dream, like a mirage,  
So origination, duration and cessation are declared to be.

#### VIII. AN ANALYSIS OF ACTION (*KARMA*) AND AGENT (*KĀRAKA*)

By ‘agent’ is here meant that which performs an action. This is not confined to the case of persons. It includes anything that may be thought of as causally efficacious. (Cf. Chapter VI, where the concept of ‘the one who desires’ was likewise not restricted to persons.) The investigation will

concern the relation between the agent and the action that it is thought to produce.

1. A real agent does not perform a real action.  
Nor does an unreal agent set out to perform an unreal action.

Nāgārjuna's strategy will be to first show that agent and action cannot have the same ontological status (both are real, both are unreal, etc.). In this verse he asserts the conclusion he will argue for in v.2-6: that if both are real or both are unreal, the agent cannot be said to perform the action. In v.7 he will discuss the possibility that agent and action both have the status of being both real and unreal. This is the third case to be considered under the hypothesis that agent and action have the same ontological status. Then in v.8-11 he examines the possibility that agent and action have different ontological statuses: agent is real while action is unreal, agent is unreal while action is real, etc. There are altogether six cases to be examined under this hypothesis, and Nāgārjuna gives arguments against each. Thus the chapter as a whole looks at nine possible combinations with respect to agent and action. It is clearly crucial to Nāgārjuna's goal that the nine cases he considers are really all the possibilities.

2. There is no activity (*kriyā*) with respect to an agent that is [already] real, [so] the action would be without an agent.  
There is no activity with respect to an action that is [already] real, [so] too the agent would be without an action.

According to Candrakīrti, the arguments for both claims involve denying that there is a second activity (*kriyā*). So the arguments parallel those of Chapter II, verses 3-6. The argument for the first claim is that something that is a really existing agent may be called such only by virtue of there being an activity associated with it, namely the activity of its performing some action. If it is already an agent, this activity must already have occurred. But if the action is also really existing, there should be an activity that explains how the agent performs it. This would require a second activity, and it would be unwarranted to supply one in order to make up this deficiency. So the action cannot be really existing.

The argument for the second claim is that a really existing action may be designated as such only if it is associated with an activity, namely the activity consisting of the performing of that action. So if it is already an

action, that activity must already have occurred. There would then need to be a second activity that explains how the agent (which we are supposing is also presently existing) comes to be an agent. And no such second activity can be supplied. So the agent cannot be really existing.

3. If an unreal agent performed an unreal action,  
The action would be without cause and the agent would be without cause.

Suppose neither the agent nor the action were presently existent. The cause of the action is the productive activity of the agent. And a productive activity cannot exist in something unreal. So the action would then be without cause. And the agent would likewise be uncaused.

4. If there is no cause, then the effect and the causal condition are not found.  
In their absence, productive activity, doer, and instrument are not found.
5. Virtue and vice are not found if productive activity, etc., are not possible.  
Virtue and vice not existing, the fruit produced by them is not found.
6. The fruit not existing, there could be no paths to liberation and to heaven.  
And there follows the pointlessness of all productive activity.

The results of the argument of v.3 are applied to the case of karmic causation. According to the doctrine of karma, every action produces a fruit: morally good actions produce pleasurable fruits, morally bad actions produce painful fruits. But actions are not possible if there are no agents and productive activity. So if we accept the initial hypothesis, we must conclude that there is no karma. Notice, however, that Nāgārjuna does not accept this conclusion. Here, as in XXIV.33-37, he is treating the denial of karma as an unacceptable consequence of the opponent's theory.

7. An agent that is both real and unreal does not perform that [action] that is both real and unreal.

For how can the real and the unreal, which are mutually contradictory, be one?

To complete the consideration of the hypothesis that action and agent have the same ontological status, it is necessary to consider the possibility that each of them is both real and unreal. This can be taken to mean that agent and action are no longer non-existent (i.e., merely future), but not yet fully existent (i.e., presently existing) either. It is easy to rule out this hypothesis. There can be no such thing as what is both existing and non-existent, the two states are incompatible. So this possibility can be ruled out.

8. A non-existent [action] is not performed by an existent agent, nor is an existent [action] performed by a non-existent agent. In that case all the same difficulties follow that already [were indicated].

If it were said that some existing thing is the agent of an action that does not yet exist, there would be the difficulty pointed out in 2ab. If it were said that an existing action is produced by an agent that does not now exist, there would be the problem pointed out in 4ab.

9. A real agent does not perform an unreal action, nor does it produce an action that is both real and unreal, for the reasons given earlier.

When the agent exists but the action does not, the agent cannot be said to be acting. And the action cannot be said to be both existent and non-existent, since there is no third possibility besides existent and non-existent.

10. An unreal agent does not perform a real action, nor does it produce an action that is both real and unreal, for the reasons given earlier.
11. An agent that is both real and unreal does not perform an action that is real, nor one that is unreal, that should be understood for the reasons given earlier.

As was pointed out in v.3, an unreal agent can do nothing. Likewise, as we saw in v.2, a real action cannot be produced. And as was argued in v.7,

there can be no such thing as an agent that is both real and unreal. And so on for the rest of the possibilities under consideration here. This completes the treatment of the hypothesis that agent and action have different ontological status. All the logical possibilities have now been examined, and on none of them can it be said that an agent performs an action.

Candrakīrti summarizes the situation as follows:

There is no productive activity with respect to what is real, and the doer would be without action—this is why a real action is not produced. Also an unreal action would be causeless, it would not be produced for the reason given earlier, ‘If there is no cause, then the effect . . .’ Thus the establishment of agent and action through all possible theses of sameness being incorrect, what was said [by the opponent]—that compounded *dharmas* with compounded natures, such as consciousness and the like, are found due to the real relation of agent and action—that is incorrect.

He then introduces the next verse by having the opponent accuse the Mādhyamika of nihilism.

Here it is said [by the opponent], Is it believed by you that things do not exist? Not at all. But for you who believe that existents have intrinsic nature, the refutation of all existents is possible, due to the absence of intrinsic nature with respect to existents,. As for us, on the other hand, since all existents are dependently arisen, we do not perceive intrinsic nature, so what is there to be refuted? . . . How can it be established that all existents are, as you say, devoid of intrinsic nature? The worldly delusion being accepted, the establishment of conventionally real entities, that are imagined like the water of a mirage, is through agreement on the basis merely of dependence of this on that, and not in any other way. (V p.188)

12. The agent occurs in dependence on the action, and the action occurs in dependence on the agent; we see no other way to establish them.

It is the opponent who is the (unwitting) nihilist. For the Mādhyamika, on the other hand, agent and action are merely conventionally real, so there is no problem in recognizing their mutual dependence.

13. Appropriation [and the appropriator] should be known thus through the abandonment of action and agent;  
All remaining existents should be considered in accordance with action and agent.

The argument generalizes to all existing things. Appropriation is the activity through which constituents of a causal series come to consider other parts of the same causal series as their 'own'. Its correct analysis is thus of paramount importance for Buddhists. This is the subject of the next chapter.

#### IX. AN ANALYSIS OF WHAT IS PRIOR

1. Some say, 'Vision, hearing and the rest [of the sense faculties], as well as feeling and the rest [of the mental constituents]—  
Before these exist, there is that to which they belong.
2. 'How indeed will there come to be the vision, etc., of a non-existent entity?  
Hence before they occur there exists an established entity.'

These verses state the view of an opponent, identified by Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti as belonging to the Pudgalavāda school. These Buddhists claim that since appropriation requires an appropriator (just as action requires an agent), there must be some underlying thing to which the sense faculties and the mental constituents belong. This something they identify as the person (*pudgala*). Since they hold that it must exist prior to vision, feeling, etc., this chapter is called an analysis of 'what is prior'. The Pudgalavādin claims that the person (*pudgala*) differs from the self (*ātman*) in that (1) the person does not exist ultimately (those who believe in a self hold it to be ultimately real); and (2) the person is named and conceptualized in dependence on the five *skandhas* (a self would be named and conceptualized on the basis of its own intrinsic nature). For more on their view see *Sammitīya Nikāya Śāstra*, also *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX.

3. But this being who is established prior to vision, hearing, etc., and feeling, etc.,  
By means of what is it conceived?

If the person is real then it must have some nature on the basis of which it may be named and conceptualized. The first possibility that will be considered here is that its nature is independent of the senses and mental contents that it is said to underlie. This was not the view of the Pudgalavādins. It is being examined here just to make certain that all possibilities are considered.

4. If this established being exists without vision, etc.,  
Then no doubt they will exist without this as well.
5. Someone is made manifest by means of something [that manifests it], something [that manifests] is manifested by someone [underlying];  
How can someone [be made manifest] without something [that manifests], how can something be manifested without someone [whom it manifests]?

If the nature of the person is distinct from the natures of the senses and mental contents, then each can exist independently of the other. But the argument for the existence of the person was that vision and the rest cannot exist without an underlying being. They are said to manifest it, and manifestation requires that manifestor and manifested exist simultaneously.

6. [The opponent:] No one whatever exists prior to all of vision and the rest [taken together];  
By means of one or another of the faculties of vision and the rest [the person] is made manifest at different times.

For the reason given in v.4-5, the Pudgalavādin wants to claim that the person is named and conceptualized in dependence on the sense faculties and mental constituents ('vision and the rest'). The question they must then confront is why the person is not a mere conceptual fiction. To answer that they need to show that the person is in some sense independent of vision and the rest. Here they concede that a person could not exist prior to all of vision, etc. taken collectively. But, they point out, the person that exists prior to vision might be named and conceptualized in dependence on hearing, the one that exists prior to hearing might be named and conceptualized in dependence on smell, etc.



7. [Reply:] If [the person] does not exist prior to all of vision and the rest [taken together],  
How does [the person] exist prior to each of vision and the rest taken individually?

As Candrakīrti says, ‘If there is no forest prior to all the trees, then it likewise does not exist prior to each of them individually’ (V p.192). Suppose we plant a tree in a forest. We might then say that the tree is now one part of the forest, but that the forest existed before that tree. Candrakīrti is saying this cannot be ultimately true. If it were true, then we would have to say that the same forest existed before another of its trees, and so on. In the next two verses Nāgārjuna will pose the question whether it is the same forest that exists before and after we add a new tree.

8. If just that which is the seer is also the hearer and the feeler,  
Then it would exist prior to each individually, which is not possible.

It is not possible, says Buddhapālita, because it would then follow that the being that exists prior to seeing is the hearer and feeler, like someone who goes out through different (sensory) windows. And as Bhāvaviveka asks, how can something be both a hearer and a feeler in one and the same instant? To be a hearer, something must hear, to be a smeller, something must smell, etc. And these faculties cannot all be exercised simultaneously. But we can also see the difficulty by asking whether the being who exists prior to seeing is the same as the one that exists prior to hearing. If it could exist prior to one of the senses, then why couldn’t it exist prior to two? But this leads to the hypothesis that it could exist prior to *all* of vision and the rest, which has already been rejected in v.3-5.

9. But if the seer were itself distinct from the hearer and from the feeler,  
Then when there was a seer there would also be a hearer, there would be a multiplicity of subjects.

The alternative is to suppose that what exists prior to vision is a hearer, and a smeller, and a taster, etc., each one distinct from the rest. But this is clearly not what the opponent wants, since then it would be one person who sees, another who hears, and so on.

10. Those elements from which seeing, hearing and the rest, and feeling and the rest  
Come into existence, this being does not exist among them.

According to Candrakīrti, the opponent has pointed out that seeing and the rest arise on the basis of the five *skandhas*, which are in turn based on the four elements (see Chapter IV, v.1). So perhaps the prior being is named and conceptualized on the basis of the four elements. The difficulty with this proposal, says Bhāvaviveka, is that if all these things are real (and not just different ways of conceptualizing the four elements), then they must be thought of as existing in succession: first there are the four elements, then the five external sense-field *āyatana*s (see Chapter IV, v.1), then seeing and the rest. So the being who the opponent supposes to exist prior to seeing and the rest does not exist at the time there is seeing and the rest. The appropriator must exist not only prior to what is appropriated but also simultaneously with the appropriated.

11. Seeing, hearing, and the rest, and feeling and the rest--  
If that to which these belong does not exist, surely they too do not exist.

If on the other hand we say that there is nothing to which the senses and the mental contents belong, then it would make no sense to say that these exist either. We cannot, for instance, understand what it would mean for there to be vision without someone whose vision it was. But notice that this does not license an inference to the existence of a real subject of vision, etc. See the next verse.

12. What being is prior to seeing and the rest, what being is simultaneous, and what being comes after,  
That does not exist, the concepts of existence and non-existence no longer apply there.

We cannot say that there exists the prior being imagined by the opponent, but we also cannot say that it does not exist (see v.11). Nāgārjuna thinks it goes without saying that there is no third possibility here, that this prior being somehow both exists and does not exist. As for the possibility that they might be simultaneous, this is refuted by the fact that what is

simultaneous cannot be in a relation of dependency. (Recall that the opponent claims this being is named and conceptualized in dependence on seeing and the rest, and that they exist in dependence on it.) The same difficulty rules out the possibility that the being exists after vision and the rest do.

Notice the care with which Nāgārjuna states the conclusion of the chapter: ‘the concepts of existence and non-existence no longer apply there’. We think that either the subject of vision does exist or it does not. Nāgārjuna is telling us that neither thought is well-formed.

## X. AN ANALYSIS OF FIRE AND FUEL

The last two chapters have shown difficulties with the notion of an appropriator, a notion that the Pudgalavādin relies on to establish their theory that there is a person who appropriates the five *skandhas*, karma and the like. Here the opponent proposes a new analogy to explain how appropriator and what it appropriates can be in a relation of mutual dependence and yet both be ultimately real. The analogy is the example of fire and fuel. (See *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX for another discussion of this analogy.) As Candrakīrti explains the example, fire is dependent on fuel (since there is no fire without fuel), but fire is ultimately real (since it has the intrinsic nature of heat). Yet fuel, while also being real in its own right, is composed of the four elements, and so depends on fire.

1. If the fuel were identical with the fire, then agent and object would be one.  
If fire were distinct from fuel, then there would be fire without fuel.
2. [Fire] would be always alight, being without a cause of lighting.  
A second beginning is pointless, and if so it would be devoid of object.

If fire and fuel are ultimately real, then they must be either identical or distinct; either the fire is really nothing but fuel, or it is a separately existing thing. The first hypothesis must be rejected on the grounds that it makes the agent—that which does the burning—and the object—that which is burnt—one and the same thing. This is absurd, for there is a difference between the action of throwing a pot and a pot, between the action of

chopping wood and the wood that is chopped.

If fire were a separately existing thing, however, then it would be possible for fire to exist apart from any fuel. This would mean that fire could continue to exist after the fuel had been exhausted, so it would always stay alight. And this would make pointless any attempt to start a fire by finding fuel. So fire would be devoid of an object, something on which its activity is exercised. This point is made explicit in the next two verses.

3. Because it is not dependent on another, it is without a cause of lighting.  
It being permanently alight, the absurd consequence follows that restarting would be pointless.
4. Then if you were to say that existing fuel comes to be burning,  
By what is that fuel burnt when that [fuel] exists only to the extent that this [being burning] exists?

The opponent claims that fuel and fire can still be independent provided we define fuel as that which is burnt by fire. Presumably then fire can be said to be distinct from fuel and yet dependent on it. The point of this verse is that if fuel is by definition what is burnt by fire, then fuel can be said to exist only when there is fire. So fuel is not independent of fire after all, and the difficulty pointed out in v.1 will recur.

5. If [fire] is other than [fuel] it will not touch [fuel], not having touched it will not burn it up, and if it does not burn it up  
It will not go out, if it will not go out then it will endure precisely as something with its own mark.

‘With its own mark’ means having an intrinsic nature. The argument, according to Candrakīrti, is that just as light does not destroy darkness that it has not reached (see Chapter VII, verses 10-11), so fire that is distinct from fuel will not touch fuel, will not burn it, and so will not exhaust it. This in turn means that fire will not go out, since exhausting its fuel is the cause of a fire’s going out. It will endure as something whose nature it is to be alight. To this the opponent responds in the next verse.

6. [Objection:] Fire could touch fuel even though distinct from fuel,

Just as a woman obtains a man, and a man obtains a woman.

7. [Reply:] Fire, being distinct from fuel, would surely be able to reach fuel  
If fire and fuel were mutually independent.

The example of a woman and a man is put forward by the opponent to show that two distinct things can come into something like the relation of mutual interaction found in the case of fire and fuel. The difficulty with this example is that we know the man and the woman can exist separately. But we never see fire apart from fuel. And as for fuel, while it may seem to exist separately, it is called fuel only by virtue of its relation to fire; we see fuel as something that is potentially fire.

The opponent concedes that the case of fire and fuel is indeed different from that of woman and man. Fire and fuel are mutually dependent in the sense that each depends for its existence on that of the other. This is not true of the woman and man who enter into a relationship. But why, the opponent asks, can't fire and fuel still have their own intrinsic natures? After all, if they are in a relationship of mutual dependence they must exist, for there can be no relation of mutual dependence between unreal things like the son and daughter of a barren woman.

8. If fire depends on fuel and fuel depends on fire,  
Which of the two is arisen first, fuel [or] fire that is dependent on that?

We have already seen why fire could not exist before fuel. Suppose it is fuel that exists first. Candrakīrti says there would follow the absurd consequences that fuel could exist unlit, and things like grass would all count as fuel. These consequences might not strike us as absurd. Buddhapālita says we must understand the dependence of fuel on fire as conceptual. By this he seems to mean that we see something as fuel only because we anticipate the arising of fire. But this would seem to leave open the possibility that fuel might exist in the unlit state. What Buddhapālita's comment brings out, however, is that when we think of fuel as something that can exist both before the fire and also when there is fire, this 'fuel' is something we have conceptually constructed. Anything that could exist in either the unlit state or the lit state must be made of parts. So if by 'fuel'

we mean something ultimately real, and fuel is related to fire, fuel could only exist when there is fire.

9. If fire is dependent on fuel, then there is the establishing of an [already] established fire.  
If so then also fuel would come to be without relation to fire.

Candrakīrti explains the argument of 9ab as follows. Suppose that fuel exists before fire, and fire is dependent on fuel. But fire cannot be dependent on fuel if fire does not exist. So fire must already exist. But to say fire depends on fuel is to say that it is established by fuel. And if it already exists when fuel exists, then fuel's establishing fire would be the establishing of something that is already established, i.e., already exists. The argument of 9cd is that fuel must likewise exist in order to be dependent on fire. But a fuel that already exists when fire does cannot be dependent on that fire.

The opponent now agrees that mutual dependence is incompatible with one of the pair existing before the other. But why not say that the two things arise simultaneously, each in dependence on the other?

10. If an entity is established in dependence [on something else], and in dependence on that very entity that which is to be depended on is established, then what is dependent on what?

If fire truly depends on fuel, then fuel must first exist before there can be fire. But if fuel in turn depends on fire, it cannot exist prior to fire. The mutual dependence that the opponent claims to hold between fire and fuel (or between person and *skandhas*) appears to be incoherent.

11. That entity that is established in dependence, how does that, before being established, depend?  
But if it is something established that is dependent, its being called dependent is incorrect.

What is it that is established in dependence on something else? Before something is brought into existence it cannot be said to be dependent on something else. But if it already exists, how can it be called dependent? For it to be dependent is for it to stand in need of something else for its existence.

12. Fire is not dependent on fuel, fire is not independent of fuel.  
Fuel is not dependent on fire, fuel is not independent of fire.

A summary of the results of the reasoning so far. Bhāvaviveka is careful to point out that each of the four possibilities (fire is dependent on fuel, etc.) is negated. He thereby calls attention to the fact that nothing is being affirmed about fire, fuel and their relation. The point has just been to rule out all the statements we might think are ultimately true concerning the fire and fuel. This might also be expressed by saying, ‘We cannot say that fire is dependent on fuel, ...’

13. Fire does not come from another, fire is not found in fuel.  
As for fuel, the same can be said of it as was said of present being-gone-over, the gone-over and the not-yet-gone-over.

In 13ab, Nāgārjuna returns to the two views of causation discussed earlier, *asatkāryavāda*, the view that cause and effect are distinct things, and *satkāryavāda*, the view that the effect already exists in unmanifest form in the cause (see Chapter I, v.3). The difficulty with the first view as applied to the case of fire and fuel is that then fire would be uncaused. To say that fire exists distinct from fuel is to say that fire can exist without fuel.

But the second view, discussed in 13b, might seem more promising. The opponent claims there is fire already in the fuel, but in unmanifest form. But under the right circumstances, such as rubbing two pieces of fuel together, this fire can be made manifest. As Candrakīrti represents it, the argument against this hypothesis is simple. Manifestation is said to be an effect of the rubbing. As an effect, does it exist in its cause or not? If not, then the hypothesis of *satkāryavāda* has been abandoned. Moreover, the opponent now owes us an explanation of why the rubbing produces manifestation of fire, and not some other effect. If it does exist in its cause, then it must be in unmanifest form. What then makes this manifestation become manifest? This is the start of an infinite regress.

In 13cd, Nāgārjuna claims that the logic of the three-times argument against going (see Chapter II, v.1) also applies to the fuel considered as that which is burnt. Candrakīrti provides a verse to explain:

The burnt is not to be burnt, nor is the unburnt,  
The neither burnt nor unburnt present-being-burnt is not to be burnt.

14. Again, fire is not fuel, and fire is not elsewhere than where fuel is,  
Fire does not possess fuel, fuel is not in fire, fire is not in fuel.

This verse summarizes the results of the chapter using the device of the five-fold examination, which is elsewhere used to consider the relation between the person and the *skandhas* (e.g., at *Madhyamakāvātāra* v.150). Two things  $x$  and  $y$  might be (1) identical, (2) distinct, (3)  $x$  might possess  $y$ , (4)  $y$  might have  $x$  as its locus, or (5)  $x$  might have  $y$  as its locus. As the commentators explain, (1) fire is not fuel because this would lead to the problem of identifying agent and action discussed in v.1ab. Fire is not (2) distinct from fuel and located elsewhere, as this leads to the difficulty of fire's being independent that is discussed in v.1cd-4. If (3) fire possesses fuel, this is either (a) as two distinct things, like the cow and its owner or (b) as one and the same thing, like the chariot and its parts. (3a) is ruled out by the fact that fire never appears distinct from fuel. (3b) would mean that fire is not ultimately real. Theses (4) and (5) are both ruled out by the fact that they require fire and fuel to be distinct, which has been shown to be impossible.

15. All ways of explaining subject and appropriation without remainder  
are to be explained in accordance with fire and fuel.  
The pot, the cloth, etc., [are explained by this].

Recall that the Pudgalavādin introduced the fire-fuel example as a way of understanding their claim that the person (*pudgala*) is the subject that appropriates the *skandhas*. Nāgārjuna says that since the fire-fuel example has been refuted, the Pudgalavādin claim about the person as appropriator has likewise been refuted. The same analysis also applies to such examples as the relation between pot and clay, cloth and threads, etc.

16. They are not considered by us to be wise instructors in the  
teachings [of the Buddha] who describe the subject and  
existents in terms of identity and difference.

Just as fire and fuel cannot be said to be either identical or distinct, so the appropriating subject and the existing states such as vision and feeling cannot be described as identical or distinct either.



**Key words**

Nāgārjuna

Madhyamaka

emptiness

svabhāva/intrinsic nature

dharma