

Mūlamadhyamakakārikā XI-XXI

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XI. AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRIOR AND POSTERIOR PARTS (OF SAṂSĀRA)

1. The Great Sage declared that the prior part [of saṃsāra] cannot be discerned;
Saṃsāra is without first and last, it has no beginning and end.

Saṃsāra, the cycle of rebirth, is said by the Buddha to be without discernible beginning at *Saṃyutta* II. 178ff. It is unclear whether this means that the series of lives actually has no beginning (has gone on from all past eternity), or just that we could never tell of any past life that it is the first. Nāgārjuna seems to be operating with the first way of understanding this claim: whatever was posited as the beginning of the series would be posited as itself without cause, and it is assumed that everything conditioned (like birth) has a cause, so it makes no sense to suppose there could be a first life in the series of lives. This declaration of the Buddha's is generally taken to mean that saṃsāra is also without end, though of course there is said to be an end to rebirth for individuals who attain nirvāṇa.

Nāgārjuna will use this claim about the prior and posterior phases of rebirth as the basis for an attack on the notion that within each life there are real stages called birth, aging and death. This notion was developed by Ābhidharmikas as part of their account of rebirth and suffering. But it also came to be applied to the existence in time of all ultimately real things. Thus the three phases of origination, maintenance and cessation (see Chapter VII) are sometimes characterized as birth, old age and death. In v.7-8 Nāgārjuna will generalize the argument to all existing things.

According to Candrakīrti, however, the target of the present chapter is once again the Pudgalavādin, who takes the existence of saṃsāra to prove that there must be something that is reborn, namely the person. The point of the chapter is, he holds, to show that

saṃsāra cannot be ultimately real, that it could at best be conventionally real. In that case the inference from the occurrence of saṃsāra to the existence of a person undergoing rebirth can only be valid conventionally, not ultimately as the Puḍgalavādin wants. The argument begins in v.1 with the point that saṃsāra is said to be without beginning and end. It then continues:

2. How could there be a middle of that which lacks a beginning and an end?

Thus here there cannot be sequences of prior, posterior and present.

Something can be in the middle only if it comes between the beginning and the end in a series. Since the series of births is said to lack a first and last, it cannot contain a middle either. The reasoning might be put as follows: The middle is the mid-point in a series, equally distant from the end-points of the series. But if the series goes on indefinitely in each direction, each point could be said to be equally distant from the ends of the series (which are infinitely far from any point). And if every point in the series could equally be called the mid-point, then none of them really is. So if the series of lives has no prior and posterior limits, the present life cannot be called one life in the series of lives.

Candrakīrti takes this to show that saṃsāra can only be conventionally real. He compares it to the case of the whirling firebrand, where we see a circle of fire that doesn't really exist. Saṃsāra can only be conventionally real, something dependent on useful ways of conceptualizing the world. It might be thought that even if the series of lives had no beginning, middle or end, it could still be true that one life comes between two other lives. So it might seem as if there could still be a real saṃsāra. But this assumes that distinct lives occur earlier and later in time. In order for this to be ultimately true, there must be a real time in which lives can occur. This assumption will be discussed in Chapter XIX.

From this it is said to follow that there is no sequence of birth (prior), death (posterior) and aging (present) in a single life. The reasoning for this conclusion is given in v.3-6.

3. If birth were prior and old age and death were posterior,

Then there would be birth without old age and death, and one who had not died would be born.

If birth were seen as the first in the series, it would be uncaused. But according to the explanation of rebirth given in the doctrine of dependent origination, birth is caused by old age and death.

4. Suppose birth were later and old age and death came first;

How could there be a causeless old age and death of one who is not born?

If the series began with old age and death (as cause of rebirth), then since these would not themselves have birth as cause, they would be causeless. Since nothing is without cause, this must be ruled out.

5. And it is indeed not right that birth be simultaneous with old age and death.

That which is undergoing birth would [at the same time] die, and both would be without cause.

We cannot say that the two arise together in mutual reciprocal dependence. First, being born and dying are incompatible, like light and dark, so they cannot occur together. Second, if they arose simultaneously, some third thing would be needed to explain their origination. As Candrakīrti puts it, the two horns of a cow, which arise simultaneously, do not mutually cause one another. Since no such cause of both seems to be forthcoming, they would thus appear to originate without cause, which is impossible.

6. Where there is no prior, posterior and present to be found,

How could they hypostatize: 'This is birth, that is old age and death'?

The reasoning has been that by the laws of dependent origination (which the opponent Pudgalavādin must accept), no event can count as the absolute beginning of the life of a person. For any event in such a life must have as its cause another prior event in the life of the person. One way to avoid this conclusion is to suppose that there is a first moment in the life of a person that is caused by some prior event that is not an event in the life of a person. (This would be like solving the problem of 'the-chicken-or-the-egg' by saying that there was an egg that was not caused by a chicken.) But this would mean denying dependent origination as the correct account of saṃsāra. One might still want to claim that birth in this life came before death in this life, while aging in this life occurs in between the two. But this assumes that we can speak of this life as coming in the middle of a series of lives that includes past and future lives. And the argument of v.2 was that this cannot be ultimately true.

The verb that we here translate as 'hypostatize', *pra+√pañc*, literally means to be prolix, but in the Buddhist context it comes to have a specialized meaning. In the Nikāyas it is used to mean the tendency to develop a variety of names and concepts whereby one may think and speak about an object that one finds desirable or undesirable (see *Majjhimanikāya* I pp.111f). This tendency is said to play an important role in bondage to saṃsāra, insofar as it fuels the defilements of desire, aversion and delusion. Thus it comes to refer to the drawing of conceptual distinctions, but in a way that connotes that there is something problematic about the process in question. In the Madhyamaka context the problem is identified as one

of reification: taking what may be perfectly useful conceptual distinctions as though they pick out ultimately real entities and properties. For an especially clear instance of this usage see Chapter XVIII.

7. Effect and cause, as well as the thing characterized and the characteristic,
Feeling and that which feels, and whatever other things there are,
8. Not only is there no prior part of *saṃsāra*,
There is as well no prior part of any existent.

The analysis of this chapter applies not only to living things, but to anything the existence of which involves successive parts. So this supplements the earlier analyses of effect and cause (Chapter I), thing characterized and characteristic (Chapter v), feeling and that which feels (Chapter IX). These all involve succession in time, which cannot be accounted for without positing an absolute beginning, a posit which would be irrational. So there can be no account of how such things come to exist.

XII. AN ANALYSIS OF SUFFERING

1. Some say that suffering is self-made, some that it is made by another. Some that it is made by both, and some that it is without cause; but it is not correct to think of suffering as an effect.

The second of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths proclaims that suffering originates in dependence on causes. The question raised here is the following. How is suffering related to its cause: is it self-caused, is it caused by something distinct from itself, by both, or by neither? (These four alternatives are discussed by the Buddha at *Samyutta* 2.18-9.) Beginning in v.4 the opponent introduces the hypothesis that it is caused by a person. Then the hypothesis that it is self-caused becomes the view that it is caused by the person who experiences it in this life, while the alternative is that it is caused by someone else in a distinct life. Since all Ābhidharmikas save the Pudgalavādins claim that the person is only conventionally real (is a mere conceptual fiction), this opponent must be a Pudgalavādin. (Pudgalavāda claims it is absurd to hold that there could be suffering without someone who feels it.) The first and second hypotheses (that suffering is self-caused and other-caused) are discussed in v.2-8, and the third and fourth in v.9.

2. If it were self-made then it would not be dependent [which is absurd],
For these *skandhas* originate dependent on those [past] *skandhas*.

For the doctrine of the five *skandhas* see IV.1. The five *skandhas*, when taken as objects of appropriation (i.e., when considered as ‘me’ or ‘mine’), are said to all be of the nature of suffering. If it is the *skandhas* that are suffering, then to say that suffering is self-made would be to say that the *skandhas* are self-made, that they exist independently of all else. But the *skandhas* are all impermanent, they originate in dependence on causes and conditions, namely prior (equally impermanent) *skandhas*. So suffering cannot be self-made. If it were it would be eternal, and there would be no path to its cessation.

3. If these were distinct from those, or those were other than these,

Then suffering would be produced by another, [for] these [would be] made by those others.

The hypothesis here is that the suffering that is made up of the present *skandhas* is caused by distinct *skandhas* in the preceding life. This is a way of understanding what it would mean for suffering to be ‘made by another’, that is, caused by something distinct from that very suffering. According to Candrakīrti, the argument against this is that a causal relation between distinct things is never seen. In support of this he cites a later verse, XVIII.10. The argument will be that if cause and effect were distinct, then anything could be the cause of anything else, so that we could just as well make a pot from a pail of milk as from a lump of clay. Since there must be some relation between cause and effect, it follows that the suffering consisting in the present *skandhas* cannot be brought about by distinct earlier *skandhas*.

At this point the Pudgalavādin objects that by ‘suffering is self-made’ is not meant that a given occurrence of suffering is made by that very suffering itself. What is meant is instead that suffering is made by the very person who suffers; it is not inflicted on that person by some distinct person. Nāgārjuna replies:

4. If suffering is made by the person herself, then who is that person herself without suffering by whom suffering is self-made?

The difficulty is that the Pudgalavādin holds the person to be named and conceptualized in dependence on the *skandhas*. Since it is in these *skandhas* that suffering is found, this amounts to saying that the person is named and conceptualized in dependence on suffering. Now when the Pudgalavādin says the person is named and conceptualized in dependence on *x*, this means that the person is never found apart from the occurrence of *x*. And this would seem to mean that the person just consists in *x*. So the Pudgalavādin position is that the person just consists in suffering. If the person just consists in suffering, then the hypothesis that suffering is made by the person herself really means that suffering is self-caused. That

hypothesis was rejected in v.2. Since it is already agreed that suffering cannot be caused by that very suffering, the Pudgalavādin owes us an explanation as to who this person is by whom suffering could be said to be 'self-made'. Who is this 'the person herself' who exists apart from suffering?

The alternative for the Pudgalavādin is to say that suffering is 'made by another' in the sense of being made by a distinct person from the person whose suffering it is. This hypothesis is explored in the next four verses.

5. If suffering is made by a distinct person, then the suffering having been made by that other person, how would there be [the person] without suffering to whom that accrues?

The second alternative is that suffering is made by one person in one life and bestowed on another person in the next life. This would appear to make karma unfair. But the problem Nāgārjuna brings up is that suffering can't be bestowed on someone who doesn't exist. In order for it to be possible for A to give something to B, B must exist prior to the giving. And if they exist before the suffering is bestowed, then that person exists without suffering. This contradicts the Pudgalavāda position that the person is named and conceptualized in dependence on the *skandhas*, and hence on suffering.

6. If suffering is generated by a distinct person, who is this distinct person
Who, while without suffering, having made it, bestows it on another?

Moreover, who is the person who bestows the suffering? They cannot be without suffering. Was their suffering bestowed on them by another? The difficulty with this is taken up in the next two verses.

7. The self-made being unestablished, how can suffering be made by another?

For the suffering the other made would surely be self-made with respect to that [other person].

If it is a person in one life who makes the suffering responsible for the suffering of the person in a subsequent life, who makes the suffering responsible for the existence of the former person? If the person is named and conceptualized in dependence on *skandhas*, and these exist because of prior suffering, then we have the start of an infinite regress. The only way to avoid this infinite regress is to say that the suffering whereby the former person exists is self-made. And this has already been shown to be impossible.

8. Suffering is, first of all, not self-made, not at all is that made just by that.

If the other could not be self-made, how would suffering be made by the other?

This summarizes the argument against suffering's being either self-made or other-made. As Candrakīrti points out, it is contradictory to suppose that something could produce itself. But without something that is self-caused, how will we ever find that which produces something else?

9. Suffering might be made by both [self and other] if it were made by one or the other.

And how can there be a suffering not caused by self or other, that is causeless?

The third hypothesis, that suffering is made both by the sufferer themselves and by someone else, inherits the defects of the first and second hypotheses. It also has the difficulty that the terms 'self' and 'other' are mutually incompatible. The fourth hypothesis would have us believe that suffering arises for no reason whatever.. As *Akutobhayā* comments laconically, this would be 'a big mistake'.

10. Not only can suffering not be found under any of the four possibilities.

External objects also cannot be found under any of the four possibilities.

According to Buddhapālita the argument against external objects would go as follows: Matter is either caused by itself, or by something distinct, or by both, or else it is uncaused. But matter cannot be self-caused, since nothing is. Etc., etc.

XIII. AN ANALYSIS OF THE COMPOSITE

The subject of this chapter is what is *samskrta*. Literally this word means 'made through a coming together', i.e., composite or compounded, but there is an ambiguity here. This could mean something that is composite in the sense of being made of parts, like a chariot. Or it could mean something that is produced through the coming together of a set of causes and conditions. Buddhists all agree that anything that is composite in the first sense is not ultimately real, that it lacks intrinsic nature. But Ābhidharmikas hold that while *dharma*s are composite in the second sense, they are not composite in the first sense. And so, they claim, there is no difficulty holding that *dharma*s are ultimately real. Mādhyamikas disagree. They claim that anything that is composite in the second sense is just as empty as something composite in the first sense. And since everything thought of as real is the product of causes and conditions, this means that everything is without intrinsic nature. This dispute is examined here through the lens of competing interpretations of a remark of the Buddha's.

1. The Blessed One said that whatever is deceptive in nature is vain.

And since all composite things are deceptive in nature, they are vain.

The full quotation from the sūtra is: ‘Indeed the ultimate truth, O monks, is that nirvāṇa is not deceptive in nature. Whatever things are composite, those are deceptive in nature and vain.’ The Buddha’s point seems to have been that since anything composite is impermanent, to hanker after it would be vain. Composite things are deceptive in that they falsely appear as if they might endure. Only nirvāṇa, the one non-composite thing, is truly worth striving after.

2. If [the Buddha’s statement,] ‘Whatever is deceptive in nature is vain’ is true, then what is there about which one is deceived?

This was said by the Blessed One for the illumination of emptiness.

According to the commentary *Akutobhayā*, the question in 2ab is triggered by the fact that to say all composite things are deceptive in nature and vain is to say that they are not ultimately real. But in that case there is nothing that is genuinely deceptive, nothing about which we are genuinely mistaken. So the Buddha must have been getting at some deeper point in saying this. And according to the *Mādhyamika* this deeper point is that all composite things are empty or devoid of intrinsic nature.

Akutobhayā has the opponent then object that in this sūtra the Buddha is not teaching the emptiness of all *dharmas*, but rather just the emptiness of the person: the person is not ultimately real, something with intrinsic nature, because it is ‘composite’ in the first sense of being a whole made of parts. It is then vain because, being composite in this sense, it must be impermanent. This is an instance of a characteristic dispute between Abhidharma and Mahāyāna: both agree that things are empty, but they disagree as to what it is that things are empty of. The former teaches that all things are empty of the nature of the person (*pudgalanairātmya*), the latter teaches that all things are empty of intrinsic nature (*dharmānairātmya*). And as Candrakīrti points out, the opponent rejects the latter interpretation on the grounds that it leads to nihilism, the clearly false view that nothing whatever exists. The opponent gives an argument for their own interpretation of the sūtra in v.3-4ab.

3. For beings there is lack of intrinsic nature, as we see from alteration.

There is no [ultimately real] being that is without intrinsic nature, due to the emptiness of beings.

Akutobhayā explains that in 3ab and 3d the ‘beings’ are the person and other things that are composite in the first sense, while the ‘beings’ in 3c are *dharmas*, things that are only composite in the second sense. In 3ab the opponent is explaining why persons and other composite things must be said to be empty, while in 3c the opponent claims *dharmas* could

not be empty of intrinsic nature. Composite things can be said to be empty because they undergo alteration. Something can change only if one part of it remains the same while another changes. So anything that changes must have parts, and thus must be without its own intrinsic nature. But it could not be true that all things, including *dharmas*, are empty. For then there wouldn't be anything to be empty. The Mādhyamika and the opponent agree that anything that is empty in the sense of being devoid of intrinsic nature is not ultimately real. But the Mādhyamika claims that all things are empty in this sense. The opponent thinks this is incoherent. Candrakīrti represents the opponent as saying: 'What is a being devoid of intrinsic nature, that does not exist. Emptiness is regarded by you as the attribute of beings. But the bearer of the attribute being non-existent, there cannot be the attribute dependent on it. Indeed the son of a barren woman being non-existent, black color cannot be attributed to him. Therefore the intrinsic nature of existents does indeed exist.' (V p.240) If anything at all is empty, there must be ultimately real things, and these must be non-empty. The opponent continues with another objection in the first half of v.4.

4. Of what would there be alteration if intrinsic nature were not real?

[Reply:] Of what would there be alteration if intrinsic nature were real?

According to *Akutobhayā*, the opponent is arguing in 4ab that there must be *dharmas* with intrinsic nature in order for there to be the type of alteration known as 'change of situation'. The Vaibhāṣikas claimed that *dharmas* exist in all three times (past, present, and future), but a *dharma*'s functioning varies depending on its temporal situation: a *dharma* situated in the present is functioning, a *dharma* situated in the past has functioned, and a *dharma* situated in the future will function. The Vaibhāṣika holds that this must be true if we are to explain why composite entities like persons seem to undergo alteration. And, they argue in 4ab, there could not be change of situation unless there really were *dharmas* to undergo the change of situation. A real *dharma* must have an intrinsic nature throughout the three times, so it cannot be that all things are empty.

Nāgārjuna replies in v.4cd that there couldn't be any alteration if there were things with intrinsic nature. The argument for this will come in the next two verses. But Candrakīrti provides the useful example of the heat of fire: since there is no fire that is not hot, heat is the intrinsic nature of fire. He will later (in xv.2) give the heat of water as an example of a property that is not the intrinsic nature of that which has the property. And reflection on why this is will help us better understand the argument. We know that water need not be hot to exist. So we say that heat is an extrinsic property of water, because we think that the cause of water's being hot is distinct from the cause of water's existing. This means that water can undergo alteration from being cold to being hot. But now when water undergoes

this alteration, there must be something about it that makes it continue to be water—first cold water and then hot water. Suppose we were to call this something the intrinsic nature of water—say, wetness. Now we have given water two natures, an extrinsic nature (either being hot or being cold) and an intrinsic nature (wetness). But this in turn means that water cannot be an ultimately real thing. For something with two natures is something with parts, something composite in the first sense. We have arrived at our conception of water by bundling together two distinct properties, which shows that water is something that is conceptually constructed.

Now the Vaibhāṣika view described above purportedly concerns *dharmas*, things with natures that are simple. But the fact that these *dharmas* are said to undergo ‘change of situation’ shows that this cannot be true. For just as with the example of water, there must be one part that remains the same through time and another part that changes over time. In the case of fire, the first would be heat, while the second would be its functional status (not-yet-functioning, presently functioning, no-longer-functioning). But this would show that heat is not actually the intrinsic nature of fire. For only ultimately real things have intrinsic natures, and this would show that fire is not ultimately real. Alteration is only possible for things that are composite, not for the ultimately real things with intrinsic nature. ‘When something is thought to exist with an undeviating intrinsic nature, then due to its lack of deviation there could be no alteration of that; for cold is not found in fire. Thus if intrinsic nature of beings were accepted then there would be no alteration. And the alteration of these is found, so there is no intrinsic nature.’ (V p.241)

5. It is not correct to say that alteration pertains to it, nor to the other [i.e., the result of the alteration].

For a youth does not age, nor does the aged one age.

If a youth were ultimately real, its intrinsic nature would be youthfulness. Aging is the destruction of youthfulness, so a real youth could not be what ages. An old person lacks youthfulness, so it likewise cannot be what ages. If we say that it is the person who ages, first being a youth and then later being aged, we implicitly accept that a person is composite in the first sense, and so not ultimately real. For we would then be thinking of a person as something that always has the nature of person-ness, but sometimes has the property of being youthful, and at other times has the property of being aged. So at any given time the person has at least two natures, which would make the person something that is made up of parts.

The opponent now proposes a new example, milk changing into curds. We do, after all, say that milk becomes curds. This suggests that there is one thing that undergoes alteration

from one state to another.

6. If alteration pertained to it, then milk itself would be curds.

[If it pertained to something other than milk,] then the nature of curds would belong to something other than milk.

Suppose that milk and curds were ultimately real. Milk is liquid, while curds are solid. So if it were milk that underwent the alteration into curds, the solidity of curds would already be in milk. Since this is false, we can reject the hypothesis that it is milk that undergoes the alteration. But the alternative is to suppose that it is something other than milk that undergoes alteration. This is contrary to our experience: we can't produce curds from water, for instance.

The opponent now repeats the objection they first lodged in v.3, to the effect that denying intrinsic nature is tantamount to nihilism. But the objection is put in a new way. It is now put as the claim that it would be incoherent to claim that all things are empty. As Candrakīrti puts it, 'And there is said to be no existent that is without intrinsic nature, but you claim there is the emptiness of existents. Therefore there is intrinsic nature of existents that is the locus of emptiness.' (V p.245)

7. If the non-empty existed, then something that could be called the empty might somehow come to be.

Nothing whatever exists that is non-empty; then how will there be the empty?

While both sides agree that some things, such as chariots and persons, are empty of intrinsic nature, the opponent holds that for there to be emptiness there must be ultimately real things to serve as the ground or locus of emptiness. Here Nāgārjuna agrees with the opponent that emptiness could not ultimately exist without ultimately real things for it to characterize. But he does not withdraw his claim that all things are empty—that nothing whatever has intrinsic nature. How is this possible? As he hints in v.8, and says explicitly in XVIII.11 and XXIV.18, the Mādhyamika does not claim that the emptiness of things is ultimately real.

8. Emptiness is taught by the Conquerors as the expedient to get rid of all [metaphysical] views.

But those for whom emptiness is a [metaphysical] view have been called incurable.

The 'views' in question concern the ultimate nature of reality, or metaphysical theories. The word translated here as 'expedient' literally means something that expels or purges. So emptiness is here being called a sort of purgative or physic. Candrakīrti quotes the following

exchange between the Buddha and Kāśyapa in the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*:

‘It is as if, Kāśyapa, there were a sick person, and a doctor were to give that person a physic, and that physic which was gone to the gut, having eliminated all the person’s bad humours, was not itself expelled. What do you think, Kāśyapa, would that person then be free of disease?’

‘No, lord, the illness of the person would be more intense if the physic eliminated all the bad humors but was not expelled from the gut.’

So to the extent that emptiness gets rid of all metaphysical views, including itself interpreted as a metaphysical view, it might be called a meta-physic. The analogy of the purgative that purges itself was also used by the Pyrrhonian skeptics. See Diogenes Laertius: *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard U Press, 1931) p.76.

XIV. AN ANALYSIS OF CONJUNCTION

Conjunction (or contact) is the relation that occurs between a sense, like vision, and its object, such as color-and-shape, resulting in the arising of a consciousness, such as seeing a colored patch (see III.7). The commentators represent the opponent as objecting to the arguments presented in the preceding chapters, saying that since the Buddha taught the conjunction of the senses and their sense objects, there must be ultimately real things that come in contact with each other. And thus there must be things with intrinsic nature; it cannot be that all things are empty. Nāgārjuna then responds:

1. The visible object, vision, and the seer, these three, whether in pairs

Or all together, do not enter into conjunction with one another.

Candrakīrti explains that the visible object is color-and-shape, vision is the eye (understood as a power), and the seer is consciousness. On some interpretations of the doctrine of the twelve-fold chain of dependent origination, there is contact among all three, and this serves as the cause of first feeling and then desire. Nāgārjuna’s argument is meant to apply to all interpretations of the doctrine, hence the ‘whether in pairs or all together’.

2. So desire, the one who desires, and what is desirable should [also] be seen.

Likewise the remaining *kleśas* and the remaining *āyatana*s [are to be seen] by means of the threefold division [of action, agent and object].

The three *kleśas* are desire, aversion and delusion, so by ‘the remaining *kleśas*’ is meant the two besides desire. For the remaining *āyatanas* see III.1 In all these cases there are three things involved: an action (e.g., vision, desire), an agent (e.g., the seer, the one who desires), and an object (e.g., a visible object, a desirable object). Nāgārjuna will argue that in each case none of these three things can come into conjunction or contact with the others.

3. Conjunction is of one distinct thing with another distinct thing, and distinctness does not exist

With respect to what is to be seen and the rest, thus they do not enter into conjunction.

Contact or conjunction requires two or more distinct things. Bhāvaviveka gives the example that an entity does not come in contact with itself. And, Nāgārjuna will argue, there is ultimately no such thing as one thing’s being distinct from another. In that case there cannot be conjunction among the visible object, etc.

4. And not only is there not found distinctness of the object of vision, etc.,

So mutual distinctness of anything with something else is not found.

The argument, which begins in the next verse, will generalize to the cases of all the *āyatanas* and *kleśas*. Since in none of these cases can action, agent and object be ultimately distinct from one another, they cannot be ultimately in conjunction.

5. What is distinct is distinct in dependence on what it is distinct from, it is not distinct apart from that from which it is distinct.

When something is dependent on another, it is not found to be distinct from that.

6. If the distinct thing were different from the other, then it would be [distinct] even without the other.

[But] the distinct thing is not distinct without the other, so it cannot be.

7. Distinctness is not found in what is distinct, nor is it found in what is non-distinct.

And distinctness not being found, there can be neither the distinct nor the thing itself.

The argument is that the distinctness of something always involves reference to the other, that from which it is distinct. So something’s distinctness cannot be an intrinsic property of that thing. Its distinctness is dependent on the existence of the other. Candrakīrti gives the example of short and long: since something can be called short only in comparison with something else that is longer than it, something’s being short is not an intrinsic property, a property that a thing could have apart from how everything else is. Distinctness ‘is not

found under ultimate analysis', it is not ultimately true that there are distinct things. (Note that this does not mean it is ultimately true that everything is one.) Instead distinctness is 'established by worldly convention'. That is, distinctness is, like the chariot, something we find in the world only because of facts about the way we talk and think.

Another way to see why distinctness could not be a property of an ultimately real thing is to consider what it would mean to call distinctness an intrinsic property. An intrinsic property is a property that something might have even if it were the only thing existing in the universe. Could such a thing be said to be distinct? (For that matter, could it be said to be non-distinct?) What this suggests is that in order to think of something as distinct, we must set that thing alongside other things. It is the mind's imaginative power that does this. So distinctness is a property imposed on the world through the mind's imaginative power.

8. It is not correct that conjunction be of this with this [itself], nor that there be the conjunction of the one with another;

Present conjoining, the conjoined, and that which conjoins, none of these are found.

The argument of 8ab is, according to *Akutobhayā*, that conjunction would have to either involve a thing taken separately from all else, or else be between things that are mutually distinct. As was just argued, for two things to be mutually distinct from one another, they must be brought into a relation of mutual dependence: the pot is distinct from the cloth only in dependence on the cloth's being distinct from the pot. Since two things in a relation of mutual dependence cannot be ultimately distinct, and conjunction requires distinct things, conjunction is not possible on this hypothesis. The alternative is to consider the pot without reference to the cloth. But for there to be conjunction there must be two distinct things; conjunction cannot be between a thing and itself. Hence conjunction cannot be ultimately real.

Given this, it also follows that there cannot be the action of conjoining, the object of the action (that which has been conjoined), and the agent of conjoining. The argument for this parallels that of Chapter II against motion being found in any of the three times.

XV. AN ANALYSIS OF INTRINSIC NATURE

According to Abhidharma, to be ultimately real is to have intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). Something is ultimately real just to the extent that its being what it is does not depend on the natures of other things. The test for something's having intrinsic nature is to see if it retains its nature after being either divided up or analyzed. (See *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*

VI.4.) Thus the chariot is not ultimately real precisely because its nature is not to be found among its parts. In this chapter Nāgārjuna will argue that anything originating in dependence on causes and conditions must lack intrinsic nature, and thus be empty. Since most Buddhists believe that all things originate in dependence on causes and conditions, this is tantamount to an argument for the claim that all things that are accepted as real by Buddhists are empty.

1. It is not correct that intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) occurs by means of causes and conditions.

An intrinsic nature that was produced by causes and conditions would be a product.

Candrakīrti explains the argument as follows. The intrinsic nature of a newly arisen thing cannot have already been in the causes and conditions that produced that thing. For if it were, the production of that thing would have been pointless: if there is already heat in the fuel, why bother to start a fire to obtain heat? So if there is intrinsic nature, it would have to be a product of causes and conditions. But this cannot be, for it creates a difficulty that is discussed in the next verse.

2. But how could there ever be an intrinsic nature that is a product?

For intrinsic nature is not adventitious, nor is it dependent on something else.

The difficulty is that the two terms ‘product’ and ‘intrinsic nature’ are mutually contradictory. Candrakīrti explains that we ordinarily say the heat of hot water or the red color of quartz (something that is normally white) are not their intrinsic natures because these properties are products of distinct causes and conditions. Hot water is hot because of the proximity of fire; the quartz may be red because of excess iron. The water and the quartz get these properties in dependence on causes and conditions that are adventitious, or extraneous to their existence. But in v.1 it was argued that intrinsic nature would also have to be a product of causes and conditions. The fire would have to acquire its heat in dependence on the fuel, air and friction. So heat, as a product, could not be an intrinsic nature of fire.

We might step back from the text and the commentaries for a moment and reflect on this argument. Mādhyamikas often claim that the emptiness of something follows from its being dependently originated. Candrakīrti says as much, for instance, in his comments on I.10 (V p.87), XVIII.7 (V p.368), and XXII.9 (V p.440). And we shall see Nāgārjuna make an equivalent claim in XXIV.18. But the argument presented in this verse appears to be the only one that explicitly offers support for this claim. There might be other ways to support it; for instance if it is true that the causal relation is conceptually constructed (as Chapters I and XX seek to show), then one might argue that nothing that is thought to arise through

causes and conditions can be ultimately real. But the present argument appears to be the only one where Nāgārjuna seeks to show that an intrinsic nature cannot be caused. The question is whether the argument succeeds.

It might be thought that it does not, since there is an important difference between the case of the quartz and the case of fire. We would call red an extrinsic or adventitious property of quartz because the cause of its being red is distinct from the cause of its coming into existence. Quartz can (and normally does) come into existence without red color. This is not true, though, of the heat of fire. Whenever fire comes into existence, heat also occurs. So it looks like the cause of the heat is just the cause of the fire. And in that case it would seem odd to say that heat is extrinsic or adventitious with respect to the fire. The fact that heat is the product of causes and conditions seems irrelevant to the question of whether it is the intrinsic nature of fire.

But there may be a way to answer this objection. What Nāgārjuna might have had in mind is that the fire must be thought of as existing distinct from the property of heat because otherwise the heat could not be thought of as something the fire ‘owns’, something it receives from the causes and conditions and takes as its own. If the test of something’s being ultimately real is that it have intrinsic nature, then the thing and its nature must be conceptually distinguishable. This conception of a *dharma* is actually built into one account of the term that is commonly accepted among Ābhidharmikas: that a *dharma* is that which bears its intrinsic nature. (See, e.g., AKBh 1.2, also *Atthasālinī* p.39.) It would seem as if the consistent position for Abhidharma would be to identify a *dharma* with its nature (thus treating *dharmas* as equivalent to what are now called tropes). And there were Ābhidharmikas who did espouse this view. (This is Candrakīrti’s target when he discusses the example of the head of Rāhu; see V p.66.) But this may not have been widely held until well after Nāgārjuna.

3. Given the non-existence of intrinsic nature, how will there be extrinsic nature
(*parabhāva*)?

For extrinsic nature is said to be the intrinsic nature of an other-existent.

Extrinsic nature is nature that is borrowed from something distinct, such as the heat of water or the shape of the chariot. Nāgārjuna claims that having proven there is no intrinsic nature, he can also conclude there is no extrinsic nature. There are two ways to understand the argument. (1) In order to say that heat is the extrinsic nature of water we need to first establish what water is. We can’t say that heat is a merely adventitious property of water unless we know what water is essentially, what it has to be like to be water. And this requires that water have an intrinsic nature. (2) In order for the chariot to borrow its

shape from its parts, those parts must themselves exist. And for them to exist ultimately they must have intrinsic natures. Thus if nothing has intrinsic nature, nothing can be said to have extrinsic nature either. Nothing can borrow a nature unless there is something that owns a nature.

4. Further, without intrinsic nature and extrinsic nature how can there be being (*bhāva*)? For being is established given the existence of either intrinsic nature or extrinsic nature.

Something can be called a being or an existent only if it has some nature, either intrinsic or extrinsic. And since neither sort is coherent, it follows that there can ultimately be no beings. But there may be a play on words here as well: the Sanskrit word *bhāva* can mean either 'nature' or 'being'.

5. If the existent is unestablished, then the non-existent too is not established.

For people proclaim the non-existent to be the alteration of the existent.

It is tempting to take the conclusion of v.4 to mean that nothing whatever exists, that all is non-existent. But Nāgārjuna denies this. For an action of mine to be impolite, it must be possible that certain actions are polite. Without at least the possibility of politeness there can be no impoliteness. Likewise for existence and non-existence. For it to be ultimately true that all is non-existent, it must at least be possible for there to be ultimate existents. But that requires that we be able to make sense of intrinsic nature. The argument of this chapter so far has been that we cannot do that on terms acceptable to the Buddhist.

6. Intrinsic nature and extrinsic nature, existent and non-existent—

Who see these do not see the truth of the Buddha's teachings.

7. In 'The Instruction of Katyāyana', both 'it exists' and 'it does not exist'

Are denied by the Blessed One, who clearly perceives existence and non-existence.

The reference is to *Kaccāyanagotta-sutta* (*Samyutta* 2.17, 3.134f). There the Buddha claims that his is a middle path between the two extreme views of existence and non-existence. Ābhidharmikas interpret this text as rejecting two views about the person: that there is a self, so that persons exist permanently; and that since there is no self, the person is annihilated or becomes non-existent (at the end of a life, or even at the end of the present moment). The middle path is that while there is no self, there is a causal series of *skandhas* that is conveniently designated as a person.

Nāgārjuna holds that while the Abhidharma claim about persons is not incorrect, there is a deeper meaning to the Buddha's teaching in the sūtra. This is that there is a middle

path between the extremes of holding that there are ultimately existing things, and holding that ultimately nothing exists. And as all the commentators make clear, to call the doctrine of emptiness a middle path is to say that one can deny each extreme view without lapsing into the other. How one does this is a matter of some dispute. But Candrakīrti quotes the *Samādhirāja Sūtra*:

‘Exists’ and ‘does not exist’ are both extremes; ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ are both extremes;
The wise man, avoiding both extremes, likewise does not take a stand in the middle.
(V p.270)

This suggests that the Madhyamaka middle path is not a ‘moderate’ or compromise position lying on the same continuum as the two extremes. Instead it must involve rejecting some underlying presupposition that generates the continuum.

The disagreement over the interpretation of the sūtra is a variant on the dispute between Abhidharma and Mahāyāna over emptiness: is it of all *dharmas*, or only of persons? (See XIII.2.) The Ābhidharmika claims that if all *dharmas* were empty then the absurd consequence of nihilism (universal non-existence) would follow. Nāgārjuna may be seen as here responding to that charge.

8. If there were existenceness by essential nature, then there would not be the non-existence of such a thing.

For there is never found the alteration of essential nature.

9. [Objection:] If essential nature were unreal, of what would there be the fact of alteration?

[Reply:] If essential nature were real, of what would there be the fact of alteration?

By ‘essential nature’ (*prakṛti*) is here meant just intrinsic nature. A new argument: if there were things that ultimately existed because they had intrinsic nature, they could not cease to exist. If intrinsic nature is not dependent on causes and conditions, then something’s having that nature is not dependent on any other factor. But this should mean that there could be no reason for it to lose that nature—and thus cease to exist. So the doctrine that there are ultimately real things with intrinsic nature leads unwittingly to the conclusion that what exists is eternal.

10. ‘It exists’ is an eternalist view; ‘It does not exist’ is an annihilationist notion.

Therefore the wise one should not have recourse to either existence or non-existence.

11. For whatever exists by its intrinsic nature does not become non-existent, [from this] eternalism follows.

'It does not exist now [but] it existed previously'—[from this] annihilation follows.

The two extreme views the Buddha refers to in 'The Instruction of Katyāyana' are also called eternalism and annihilationism. Nāgārjuna interprets these to refer respectively to the view that things have intrinsic nature, and the view that the lack of intrinsic nature means things are utterly unreal.

XVI. AN ANALYSIS OF BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

The opponent retorts that there must be intrinsic nature, since there would be no bondage to the wheel of *saṃsāra*, and no liberation from *saṃsāra*, unless there were existing things undergoing transmigration. There are two possibilities as to what might undergo transmigration: the *saṃskāras*, those impermanent psychophysical elements that originate in dependence on prior causes and conditions (and are thus composite or *saṃskṛta* in the sense examined in Chapter XIII); and the person or living being that is thought of as consisting of the *saṃskāras*. In this chapter both possibilities are examined.

1. If it is the *saṃskāras* which transmigrate, they do not transmigrate as permanent entities,

Nor as impermanent entities; if it is the living being [which transmigrates], the argument is the same.

Suppose it were the composite psychophysical elements that transmigrated. They must be either permanent or else impermanent. If the psychophysical elements were permanent, then they would be changeless. And anything that is changeless does not perform any function; something does something only by changing in some way. But transmigration involves doing something: going from one life to another on the basis of one's actions in the one life. So permanent psychophysical elements do not transmigrate. But neither do impermanent psychophysical elements. To say these are impermanent would be to say they do not endure from one moment to the next. In that case they can neither undergo alteration nor be causally efficacious. (Compare the reasoning of 1.6-7.) And for the same reason that a changeless permanent thing cannot transmigrate, so an impermanent changeless thing could not be said to transmigrate.

This might make it seem as if it must be not the elements but the person who transmigrates. If the person or living being is what is made up of the psychophysical elements, then it might seem as if it is just the right sort of thing to transmigrate. For then it could serve as the enduring thing which has different collections of impermanent psychophysical elements as its constituents at different times. So it could both endure and undergo alteration. But

Nāgārjuna denies that this solution will work, since the same reasoning applies to it as to the hypothesis that the *saṃskāras* transmigrate. If the person is permanent, then it performs no function. And if it is impermanent, then it is likewise not causally efficacious. The argument against its being the person who transmigrates continues in the next two verses.

2. If it is said that the person transmigrates, then, investigating the five possibilities with respect to the *skandhas*, *āyatanas*, and *dhātus*, that [person] does not exist; who will transmigrate?

For the *skandhas* see Chapter IV, for the *āyatanas* see Chapter III, and for the *dhātus* see Chapter v. According to Candrakīrti, the five possibilities are: (1) the person has the intrinsic nature of the *skandhas* etc. (i.e., the person is identical with the psychophysical elements); (2) the person is distinct from them; (3) it exists possessing the *skandhas* etc.; (4) the person is in the *skandhas* etc.; (5) the *skandhas* etc. exist in the person. And he refers us to the analysis of fire and fuel for the reasoning involved in rejecting each. (See x.14)

3. Transmigrating between one appropriation [i.e., state of being] and another would mean being without any basis.

And being without basis is being without appropriation; who is it that will transmigrate to what?

According to *Akutoḥhayā*, the argument is that the person who is thought to transmigrate does so either with the basis of appropriated psychophysical elements, or else without this basis. Suppose the person who transmigrates has appropriated psychophysical elements as their basis. But it is different elements that the person would depend on in the prior life and in the present life. And transmigrating means going between lives. So the person would be without appropriated elements when undergoing transmigration, and thus without basis (*vibhava*). So there is no person who is transmigrating. The alternative is that the person who transmigrates is without a basis of appropriation. But there can be no such thing as a person without any basis in psychophysical elements. Hence the question of 3d: who is this person and where is it that they are going?

4. The nirvāṇa of the *saṃskāras* is not in any way possible.

Nor is the nirvāṇa of a living being in any way possible.

Buddhapālita explains that the same reasoning applies to the attainment of nirvāṇa as was just used in the case of transmigration. If it were the *saṃskāras* or the person that attained nirvāṇa, this would be either as permanent or as impermanent entities. But permanent things do not undergo change, while impermanent things perform no function.

5. The *saṃskāras*, whose nature it is to come to be and pass away, are neither bound nor released.

As before, a living being is neither bound nor released.

Neither bondage nor liberation can pertain to the *saṃskāras* because their transitory nature means that they do not abide in any state or condition. The living being or person is neither bound nor released because, as was said in v.2, it is not to be found in any of the five ways it might be related to the *saṃskāras*.

6. If bondage is appropriation, then what has appropriation is not bound.

What is without appropriation is not bound; in what state is one bound?

Suppose that bondage to *samsāra* comes about through appropriation—taking the psychophysical elements as ‘me’ and ‘mine’. Then what is it that is bound? It cannot be something that has appropriation as its nature, for such a thing has already been bound and so cannot be bound again. But neither can it be something that is without appropriation, for such a thing is by nature unbound, like the enlightened one.

7. If there were binding prior to what is to be bound, then it would assuredly bind..

But that does not exist; the rest [of the argument] is as was said in the analysis of present-going-to, the gone-to, and the not-yet-gone-to.

Binding requires an agent, something that, due to ignorance, desire and the like, engages in appropriation and thus brings about bondage to *samsāra*. The difficulty is that prior to binding there is no such agent; ignorance, desire and the like are devoid of locus.

Thus binding cannot occur before there is something that is bound. Nor, clearly, can binding occur after there is something bound, since this would be superfluous. And the third possibility—that binding occurs at some third time when there is neither what is bound nor what is not yet bound—is ruled out by the argument of the three times, as was worked out in the analysis of motion in Chapter II. Buddhapālita applies the logic of that chapter to the case of bondage thus: ‘What is bound is not bound. What is unbound is not bound. A present binding that is distinct from the bound and the unbound is not bound.’ (P vol.2 p.11)

8. The bound is not liberated; nor, obviously, is the unbound liberated.

If the bound were being liberated, there would be simultaneous binding and liberation.

Who or what is liberated? It cannot be something that is bound, for if it is its nature to be bound then it cannot be liberated without ceasing to exist. Nor can it be something that

is unbound, for in that case liberation would be pointless. We may then think that there must be a third possibility here, that what is bound undergoes a process of liberation. And Buddhapālita concedes that this is what people do say. But that fact should tell us that this can be true only conventionally, not ultimately. Since bondage and liberation are opposed states, something that is bound could undergo a process of becoming liberated only if there could be one portion of it that was still bound while another portion was now liberated. So the subject of this process of undergoing liberation is something with parts. And so it is a mere conceptual fiction, not something ultimately real. What is ultimately real is without parts. Hence it would have to be either bound or liberated.

9. 'Devoid of appropriation, I shall be released; nirvāṇa will be mine'.

For those who grasp things in this way, there is the supreme grasping of appropriation.

If release from saṃsāra comes about through the cessation of appropriation—through ceasing to have thoughts of 'I' and 'mine'—then the desire for one's own liberation constitutes an obstacle to its attainment. This is the Buddhist formulation of what is called the paradox of liberation. The paradox is recognized by virtually all schools of Indian philosophy concerned with release from suffering and rebirth. Here the paradox is put in terms of the notion that when one has the thought, 'I shall be released', one is identifying with and appropriating the psychophysical elements—which is just what causes bondage to saṃsāra.

10. Where nirvāṇa is not hypostatized, saṃsāra not removed,

What saṃsāra is there, what nirvāṇa is falsely imagined?

The argument of this chapter has shown that there can be no such thing as the overcoming of ignorance and attaining of nirvāṇa. Or to be more precise, it cannot be ultimately true that there is such a process. And in the absence of such a process, it is difficult to see how there could be the two states of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Hence the suggested conclusion: that we cease attempting to conceptualize the two. But this is ambiguous. It might be taken to mean that while saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are ultimately real, their nature is ungraspable. Or it might mean that the very idea of ultimately real things is incoherent. Nāgārjuna will have more to say on this question at xxv.19-20.

XVII. AN ANALYSIS OF ACTION AND FRUIT

This chapter examines the relation between an action and its consequence or fruit, as specified by the laws of karma. The first five verses lay out the common understanding of all the schools. In v.6 a question is raised concerning how this can be compatible with

impermanence. The following thirteen verses give solutions proposed by different schools. Then beginning in v.21 Nāgārjuna subjects these to critical examination.

1. Self-control, being thoughtful of others,

And friendliness, these right states of mind are the seeds of fruit both hereafter and here.

The laws of karma have to do with the relation between an action and its consequences for the agent. But by ‘action’ is meant more than a mere bodily movement such as breathing or blinking, which are typically done without thought. It is the state of mind behind an action that determines what sort of fruit the agent will reap. Here are detailed the states of mind that result in such good fruits as human rebirth. By implication, the opposed states of mind yield unpleasant consequences for the agent, both in this life and in future lives.

2. Action was said by the Supreme Sage to be volition and what is connected to volition.

He has proclaimed there to be many distinct varieties of action.

Bhāvaviveka explains ‘Supreme Sage’ to include not only the Buddha but also the ‘hearers’ (i.e., those who have become enlightened through hearing the Buddha’s teachings), pratyek-abuddhas and bodhisattvas. Candrakīrti takes the term to refer to just the Buddha. He explains ‘what is connected to volition’ is a bodily or verbal action that follows a volition.

3. Of these, that which is called volition is what is considered mental action.

And that which is called ‘what is connected to volition’ is bodily and verbal action.

The two varieties of action are described. Volitions are purely mental in nature; the disposition of friendliness would be an example of a volition. The second variety, ‘what is connected to volition’, includes what would count as actions in the normal sense of the term, namely bodily movements and speech. But as Bhāvaviveka makes clear, these count as actions only if they occur intentionally or upon reflection.

4. Speech, gesture, the unmanifest called non-abstention,

And that other unmanifest called abstention,

5. The meritorious followed by enjoyment, the demeritorious followed by enjoyment,

And volition, these seven states are declared to be the elucidation of action.

The ‘unmanifest’ mentioned in v.4 is of two kinds, non-abstention and abstention. By ‘abstention’ is meant a refraining from engaging in an unwholesome action, one that is not

conducive to nirvāṇa. Typically when one engages in an unwholesome action, this fact is manifest to others. But there are cases where such an action may not be manifest. Candrakīrti gives the example of someone who acknowledges that they have engaged in such unwholesome acts as harming living beings and lying, but resolves to do so no more. In that case their past unwholesome actions will continue to produce fruit until such time as they are exhausted, even though it will not be manifest that they have unwholesome karma, since they no longer practice such unwholesome acts as spreading fishing nets. The case of the unmanifest called abstention is the reverse of this.

Meritorious (*puṇya*) actions are those having pleasant fruits, while demeritorious (*apuṇya*) actions are those having unpleasant fruits. Note that these are distinct from the categories of wholesome (*kuśala*) and unwholesome (*akuśala*). An action that is karmically meritorious or leading to pleasant fruit may still lead one away from nirvāṇa and so be unwholesome.

6. If the action endures to the time of maturation, then it would be permanent.

If it is destroyed, then being destroyed, what fruit will it produce?

In this verse a difficulty is raised for anyone who accepts the account of karma outlined in v.1-5. According to the general law of karma, an action gives rise to a fruit. But the fruit typically occurs some time after the action—often in another lifetime. The question then is how an action that occurs at one time can bring about a fruit at a later time. One possibility is that the action endures from the time of its occurrence until its maturation, when the fruit arises. But if the action endures, then it is eternal. For if something does not perish at one moment, there can be no reason why it should perish at some other moment. So if it endures for some time, then it will endure for all time. And something eternal cannot produce anything. The alternative is to say that the action goes out of existence immediately upon its occurrence. But in this case it would seem impossible for it to produce a fruit that occurs later.

Different Abhidharma schools proposed various solutions to this problem. One such solution is that of the Vaibhāṣikas, who held that each *dharma* exists in all three times. (See XIII.4.) In that case the action is still existent in some sense when the fruit comes into existence. But their solution is not taken up here. Instead Nāgārjuna first presents the seeds hypothesis of the Sautrāntikas, and then the view of the Pudgalavādins.

7. A series starting with the sprout proceeds from a seed,

A fruit [proceeds] from that [series]; and without the seed the series does
not come forth.

8. Since the series is from the seed, and the fruit is produced from the series,
The fruit has the seed as its predecessor; thus it [the seed] is neither annihilated nor eternal.
9. Likewise a mental series proceeds from a volition,
A fruit [proceeds] from that [series]; and without the mental element the series does not come forth.
10. Since the series is from the mental element, and the fruit is produced from the series,
The fruit has the action as its predecessor; thus it [the action] is neither annihilated nor eternal.

The idea is that just as a mango seed can serve to bring a mango into existence even though the seed goes out of existence long before the mango appears, so an action can cause a karmic fruit to occur long after the action took place. In the case of the mango seed, there is a causal series of intermediary entities: the sprout, the sapling, the young tree, and the flowering tree. Under the right conditions, the last entity in this series gives rise to the mango fruit. But since this series was started by the seed, we can say that the fruit has the seed as its ultimate cause. By the same token, an action can cause a type of mental event called a karmic trace. Since every existing thing is momentary, this karmic trace will only exist for a moment. But it will cause a successor karmic trace of the same sort. And this in turn will cause another trace like itself. This causal series will continue until such time as conditions are appropriate for the ripening of the karmic trace, at which time the karmic fruit will appear. The proximate cause of this fruit is the immediately preceding karmic trace. But this trace owes its existence to its predecessor, and so on backwards along the series to the action. So the action may be called the ultimate cause of the karmic fruit.

The Buddha called his view a middle path between the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism. One thing this has been taken to mean is that a Buddhist account of the person reconciles the continued existence of a person over one or more lifetimes with the absence of any permanent or eternal constituent of the person. The dilemma posed in v.6 in effect asks how this reconciliation can take place. If no part of the person endures, how can an action in one life produce a fruit in another life? And if the action in this life is annihilated prior to the fruit that comes in the next life, then the one who enjoys that fruit does not deserve it, since they are not the one who acted. The Sautrāntika solution is to posit a causal series to mediate between action and karmic fruit. Since it is just such a series that is conveniently designated as a person, it is conventionally true that the person who acted in the one life enjoys the fruit of that action in another life. At the same time,

ultimately nothing endures; what we call a ‘person’ is just a series of momentary entities and events. The series endures, it is not annihilated; but its constituent elements are momentary, each going out of existence the moment after they were produced. For other examples of this strategy see *The Questions of King Milinda* II.2 (*Milindapañho* PTS edition pp.40–50.). See also Buddhaghosa’s *The Path of Purification*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, (Kandy, Sri Lanka : Buddhist Publication Society, 1991) xvii.162-72.

11. There are ten pure paths of action that are means for accomplishing what is right.

The fruit of what is right is the objects of the five senses, both hereafter and here.

12. [Objection:] There would be many gross errors on this hypothesis

Of yours; so this hypothesis [of a seed-generated series] does not hold here.

This objection is said to come not from Nāgārjuna but from another opponent. According to Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti, the difficulty being raised for the view just presented is that the example of the seed-fruit series is not sufficiently like the case of the action-fruit connection. For the seed of a mango will only produce a mango tree, never an oak tree. But a given action may in one case yield human rebirth, in another divine rebirth; in one case the fruit may be pleasant, in another case it may be painful; and so on.

13. I, however, shall propose a hypothesis that is suitable here,

And that has been expounded by Buddhas, pratyekabuddhas and śrāvakas.

14. The unperishing is like the pledge pen, the action is like the debt;

[The abiding] is fourfold with respect to sphere; and it is by nature indeterminate.

‘The unperishing’ is a *dharma* that is said to result from an action that has not yet born its karmic fruit. The analogy here is to the pen with which one pledges to repay a debt, and by extension to the written record of one’s debt. While the action of incurring the debt by signing the pledge is in the past, the record remains as long as the debt has not been repaid, and it serves as the immediate cause of the repayment. So by analogy there is an ‘unperishing’ that occurs following an action; it abides until such time as the fruit arises. One may thus think of it as a sort of karmic debt. *Akutobhayā* tells us that its four varieties have to do with the cosmic sphere in which it may be operative: that of desire (the mundane world), or one of the three transmundane spheres attained in meditation—those of form, formlessness, and the undefiled. It is indeterminate in nature insofar as it is not in and of itself conducive toward either pleasure or pain. As Candrakīrti explains this, if the karmic debt incurred by acts conducive to pain were itself conducive to pain, it could not

exist in those who have overcome desire. And if the karmic debt incurred by acts conducive to pleasure were itself conducive to pleasure, then it could not be found in those whose roots of good conduct have all been destroyed. Its indeterminacy thus reflects the complexity of the workings of karma—the complexity that this opponent used against the Sautrāntika seeds hypothesis in v.12.

15. It is not eliminated by abandonment, but only by meditation is it to be eliminated.

Thus the fruit of actions is produced by the unperishing.

16. If it were to be eliminated through abandonment, or by transference of the action,

Various difficulties would result, including the disappearance of the action.

One's karmic debt is not erased just by understanding the four noble truths, i.e., understanding how all acts of appropriation lead to suffering. Such understanding leads to the abandonment of those ways of being that generate new karmic debt. But it does not by itself eliminate the karmic debt that one has incurred in past lives and in the present life prior to one's attaining understanding. This karmic debt can only be eliminated through the path of meditation. To suppose that mere abandonment of the mundane way of life could eliminate one's karmic debt is to suggest that a past action that did occur could be made to not have occurred, which is impossible.

17. At the moment of rebirth there occurs a single [unperishing] of the same sphere for all actions, whether dissimilar or similar.

In the rebirth process there is a kind of 'karmic debt consolidator' for all past actions, whether karmically meritorious or demeritorious. It is this which determines where the new life will occur.

18. It arises for each action, in this world,

Of the two different sorts; and even though all fruit be ripened, [the unperishing] persists.

The idea seems to be that the record of one's debt may endure even after the debt has been repaid. The commentators are not sure whether the two different sorts of action referred to in this verse are: volition and what is connected to volition (see v.2); or that conducive to pleasure and that not conducive to pleasure; or the pure (leading to liberation) and the impure (not leading to liberation).

19. It is stopped either due to transference of the fruit or due to death;

In the latter case it would characterize [one's] allotment as either pure or impure.

Akutobhayā explains that the stopping of the unperishing due to transference of the fruit is done through meditation. *Bhāvaviveka* explains that, in the case of death, it is through the unperishing that one's various actions in this life result in one's entering into a certain birth of a certain caste with a certain body, sense faculties, strength, intelligence, etc. in the subsequent life.

20. There is emptiness, there is no annihilation, there is saṃsāra, and there is no eternal;
And the unperishing of an action was taught by the Buddha.

This hypothesis is here said (by the opponent) to represent an orthodox Buddhist position. First, it is compatible with the claim that the person is empty of a self, since it avoids supposing that the traces that carry the karmic debt require that there be a self. (This is the explanation given in *Akutobhayā*.) Second, it avoids the extreme view of annihilation in that the unperishing is quite firm. Third, through its providing a connection between action and fruit, it shows how saṃsāra is possible. Fourth, it avoids the extreme view of eternalism, since the unperishing stems from the cessation of actions. Finally, this hypothesis was taught by the Buddha.

At this point we are to imagine Nāgārjuna entering the discussion. The *Ābhidharmika* opponents have given their different accounts of the relation between action and fruit. These accounts presuppose the real existence of action and fruit and some sort of real connection between them. Nāgārjuna retorts that no action is to be found. The opponent then asks why this is. Nāgārjuna responds:

21. Why is an action not arisen? Because it is without intrinsic nature.

And since it is unarisen, it does not perish.

Ultimately no action is to be found because all actions are empty or devoid of intrinsic nature. The evidence for this claim will be developed in subsequent verses. But the opponent has a more immediate concern. In a verse cited by both *Bhāvaviveka* and *Candrakīrti* (P vol.2, pp.37-8) the Buddha is represented as saying,

Actions do not perish even after billions of cosmic epochs,

The right set of conditions and the right time having been attained, they assuredly
produce fruit for the beings.

If an action does not perish, then it must surely be real and so have intrinsic nature; hence Nāgārjuna's claim in 21b cannot be correct. To this Nāgārjuna then replies that an action is said not to perish because ultimately no actions arise. Something that never occurred in

the first place cannot be said to perish. The Buddha's claim about actions must be taken as a mere *façon de parler*, and not as a description of the ultimate truth about action and fruit.

22. If the action were something with intrinsic nature, then it would doubtless be eternal.

And the action would be undone, for the eternal is not something that is done.

Candrakīrti explains that the action would be eternal if it had intrinsic nature because anything with intrinsic nature cannot undergo alteration of nature. It then follows that the action would never be done or performed. This is so because in order for the action to be done, it must alter from the state of being undone to the state of being done. But the eternal is changeless, so it could not undergo this alteration.

23. If the action were undone [by the agent], then there is the concern that there would be a result of what was not done [by the agent];

And it then follows that the fault of an incontinent life accrues [to one who is continent].

To call an action 'undone' means, in this context, not done by the person currently reaping the fruit. Since every fruit is the product of some action, a fruit that was not done by the agent must have been done by someone else. If the fruit is produced by an action that is undone in this sense, and unwholesome acts are undone by the continent person, then it should be possible for the continent person to reap the fruit of something that is done by an incontinent person. This is obviously absurd.

24. Without doubt this would destroy all worldly conduct;

And the distinction between meritorious and wrong deeds would not hold.

If the fruit of an action could come from an undone action, then such worldly pursuits as farming and weaving would be undermined. For one would be as likely to get a crop by not sowing as by sowing. Likewise the karmic laws that specify which actions should be done and which should not would be undermined. For the assumption behind recommending certain actions as meritorious and others as wrong is that doing actions of the first sort brings about pleasant fruit while doing actions of the second sort brings about unpleasant fruit. If the fruit can arise from an undone action, then this assumption is undermined. *Akutobhayā* adds that this holds as well for the distinction between actions that are wholesome (conducive to *nirvāṇa*) and unwholesome (not conducive to *nirvāṇa*).

25. And that which has already ripened will produce a fruit yet again,

If it follows from the action's being determinate that it is endowed with an intrinsic nature.

The action-fruit connection depends on there being determinate kinds of actions: an action of this sort leads to this kind of fruit, an action of that sort leads to that kind of fruit, etc. The opponent takes the determinacy of an action to consist in its having its own nature. Nāgārjuna's point here is that in that case the action must always have that nature. And from this he claims it follows that even when the action has produced its fruit, it will continue to have the nature that led to its producing that fruit. So an action that has already produced its fruit will continue to produce more such fruit.

Our translation reflects the reading of 25cd given by three commentators. Candrakīrti understands it somewhat differently: 'If it follows from an action's having intrinsic nature that it is determinate'. But the underlying logic of the argument is not significantly affected, since 'being determinate' and 'having intrinsic nature' are virtually synonymous for the opponent.

26. If action is by nature defiled, and the defilements are not ultimately real,
Then why if the defilements are not real, would action be ultimately real?

The defilements are desire, aversion and delusion. All unwholesome actions are said to be conducive to remaining in saṃsāra by virtue of their being caused by one or another of these defilements. But as Nāgārjuna will argue in Chapter XXIII, the defilements cannot themselves be said to be ultimately real. One argument for this will be that the defilements are all themselves based on the mistaken view that there is an agent of actions. Since it is not ultimately true that there is a self (see XVIII.6), it cannot be ultimately true that there are defilements. The present argument is that, given this result about the defilements, it makes no sense to suppose that actions are ultimately real.

27. Action and the defilements are described as conditions for the arising of the body;
If action and the defilements are empty, then what is to be said of the body?

According to the twelve-linked chain of dependent origination, the occurrence of the body in a new life is dependent on the actions and their root defilements in the prior life. The argument so far has been that the defilements and action lack intrinsic nature, and thus are empty. This verse extends that result to the body that is said to be their product.

The opponent now seeks to defend their view by citing the teachings of the Buddha:

28. The person who is ensconced in ignorance and bound by thirst,
That person is the enjoyer; but that person is neither someone other than the agent nor
identical with the agent.

The Buddha said that beings are ‘ensconced in ignorance and bound by thirst’. (The passage quoted by both *Akutobhayā* and Candrakīrti, and identified by *Akutobhayā* as from the ‘Anavarāgra Sūtra’, is found at S II.178.) And as the context makes clear, such beings must be both agent of the action and enjoyer of the fruit of the action. But, replies Nāgārjuna, the agent and the enjoyer are neither identical nor distinct. This is so because, as the next verse claims, the agent does not exist. The enjoyer can have neither identity nor distinctness with something that does not exist.

29. Not arisen dependent on conditions, not sprung up without dependence on conditions,
The action not being either, the agent also cannot exist.

If actions are empty (v.27), it cannot be ultimately true that they arise—whether their arising is dependent on conditions or is unconditioned. But in the absence of ultimately real actions there cannot be an agent of those actions.

30. If there is neither action nor agent, how would there be the fruit born of the action?
Moreover if the fruit does not exist, how will there be its enjoyer?

Something is a karmic fruit only if it arises in dependence on an action. So if there ultimately are no actions, there likewise can be no ultimately real fruits. And something is the enjoyer of a fruit only if there are fruits to be enjoyed.

31. Just as the Teacher by his supernatural power fabricates a magical being
Which in turn fabricates yet another magical being,

32. So with regard to the agent, which has the form of a magical being, and the action
which is done by it,

It is like one magical being that is fabricated by another magical being.

33. Defilements, actions and bodies, agents and fruits,

Are like the city of the Gandharvas, they resemble a mirage, a dream.

For the city of the Gandharvas see VII.34. The guiding image of these three verses is that of a Buddha endowed with supernatural powers that are of use in teaching the Dharma. Among these powers is that of making the audience see a magician who then produces various magical illusions. These illusions are thus products of something that is itself a magical illusion. Applied to the subject matter of this chapter, the analogy gives the result that agent and enjoyer of fruit are mere appearances that merely appear to produce the apparent action and enjoy the apparent fruit respectively; and that all these appearances are useful for attaining the end of the Buddha’s teachings, *nirvāṇa*.

XVIII. AN ANALYSIS OF THE SELF

While this chapter is called an analysis of the self, the commentators introduce it as being concerned with the nature of reality. The connection between these two topics is as follows. Buddhists all agree that there is nothing in reality that is the basis of our sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. They agree that it is our mistaken belief in the existence of something behind this sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ that brings about suffering. So they should all agree that reality is characterized by the absence of self. The question is, what is this reality that falsely appears as if it included a self? For Abhidharma, the answer is that reality is just the impermanent, impersonal *dharmas*. Abhidharma holds that there must be such a reality on which the false belief in ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is superimposed. Madhyamaka agrees that belief in ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is false. But Madhyamaka disputes the claim that there must be *dharmas*, things with intrinsic nature, underlying this false belief. The argument proceeds by examining the common ground—rejection of a self—and then exploring the consequences of this for our conception of reality.

1. If the self were the *skandhas*, it would participate in coming to be and passing away.

If it were something other than the *skandhas*, it would be something having the defining characteristic of a non-*skandha*.

For the *skandha* classification see Chapter IV. Candrakīrti tells us that by ‘self’ (*ātman*) is meant the object of the sense of ‘I’. He also says that while elsewhere the relation between self and *skandhas* is examined using the five-fold schema that was used in looking at the relation between fire and fuel (see X.14, XVI.2), here the analysis will consider just the two possibilities of identity and distinctness. To say that the self is identical with the *skandhas* is to say that the self is nothing more than these psychophysical elements, in the same way in which a pile of bricks is just the individual bricks. The argument against the self being identical with the *skandhas* is simply that since they come into and go out of existence many times over the course of a single life (and likewise over the course of rebirth), one would have many selves over time. This clearly conflicts with our sense of an ‘I’, for we each take ourselves to be a single entity that endures over time. The argument against the self being distinct from the *skandhas* is that it should then be grasped as something with its own intrinsic nature, distinct from the intrinsic natures of the five *skandhas*. Yet no such thing is ever grasped in our experience of persons.

2. The self not existing, how will there be ‘what belongs to the self’?

There is no 'mine' and no 'I' because of the cessation of self and that which pertains to the self.

Our ordinary conception of the person involves the notion of an 'I' and also the notion of the 'mine'. The 'I' is conceptualized as the subject or owner, while the 'mine' is what this 'I' appropriates or takes as its own. The commentators explain that by 'mine' or 'what belongs to the self' is here meant specifically the five appropriation *skandhas*, i.e., those psychophysical elements that are the basis of identification.. The argument here is that if there is no self, there can likewise be no appropriation *skandhas*, which are by definition elements that the person appropriates. And, says *Akutobhayā*, the non-existence of the self and what belongs to the self is the defining characteristic of reality. Notice, however, that this need not be taken to mean that there are no *skandhas*. All this argument seems to show is that if there are *skandhas*, they do not have the property of being appropriated by the self.

3. And who is without 'mine' and 'I'-sense, he is not found.

One who sees that which is without 'mine' and 'I'-sense does not see.

This verse comes in response to an objection: if reality is devoid of 'I' and 'mine', then those who know reality are themselves devoid of 'I' and 'mine'. But in order for this to be true, there must be such beings who are lacking in all sense of 'I' and 'mine'. And for there to be such beings, there must be a self and the *skandhas* which that self appropriates. This objection in effect says that the Buddhist thesis of non-self cannot coherently be stated, for if it were true then it would be false.

The response to this objection is that only defective vision could make one see a person where there is no self and no appropriation *skandhas*. For the person is named and conceptualized in dependence on the *skandhas* that are thought of as its own. So without a self and without appropriation of *skandhas*, how could there be any conception of a person?

4. The senses of 'mine' and 'I' based on the outer and the inner being lost,

Appropriation is extinguished; because of losing that, there is the cessation of birth.

This is the standard account of *nirvāṇa* accepted by all Buddhists: one attains release from *saṃsāra* by ridding oneself of all sense of 'I' and 'mine'; this leads to an end of appropriation of the *skandhas*, hence to an end of the processes responsible for rebirth. 'Outer' is explained as whatever is thought of as distinct from the self and is thus a potential object of appropriation. 'Inner' is explained as whatever is taken as the core or essence of the person.

5. Liberation is attained through the destruction of actions and

defilements; actions and defilements arise because of falsifying conceptualizations;

Those arise from hypostatization; but hypostatization is extinguished in emptiness.

For the defilements see XIV.2. By ‘falsifying conceptualizations’ is here meant all thoughts involving the concepts of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. Actions cannot arise out of the defilements without these concepts. Action based on aversion, for instance, requires the concepts of the ‘I’ and the ‘not-I’. Such conceptualizations in turn require the occurrence of hypostatization (*prapañca*), which is the tendency to reify what are actually just useful ways of talking. (See XI.6.) But this tendency is undermined through coming to realize the emptiness of all *dharmas*.

The commentators explain ‘emptiness’ to mean the lack of intrinsic nature of all *dharmas*, and not just the emptiness of self that Ābhidharmikas agree characterizes the *skandhas*. This is the distinctively Mādhyamika use of ‘emptiness’, something that would not be readily accepted by Ābhidharmikas given their view that *dharmas* are ultimately real precisely because they bear intrinsic natures. Ābhidharmikas agree that liberation requires knowledge of emptiness, but only in the sense of emptiness of self. Mādhyamikas claim that liberation requires knowledge of the emptiness of all *dharmas*. As Candrakīrti explains, ‘These falsifying conceptions are aroused due to various hypostatizations stemming from repeated practice over the course of beginningless births of such dichotomies as cognition and the cognized, what is expressed and expression, agent and action, instrument and act, pot and cloth, crown and chariot, *rūpa* and feeling, woman and man, profit and loss, pleasure and pain, fame and infamy, blame and praise, etc.’ (V p.350) All such dichotomies, in other words, contribute to suffering when we take them to reflect the nature of reality and fail to see them as mere useful tools.

6. ‘The self’ is conveyed, ‘non-self’ is taught

By Buddhas, as well as that neither self nor non-self is the case.

That the Buddha sometimes explained his teachings in a way that could be taken to express belief in a self is generally acknowledged by Buddhists. But this is taken to be an example of the Buddha’s pedagogical skill (*upāya*). For the occasions of such teachings involve audiences who do not acknowledge karma and rebirth, and consequently believe that one’s good and evil deeds die with them. Since this belief led these people to conduct that bound them ever more firmly to *samsāra*, the Buddha judged it best that they first come to accept the existence of rebirth. Since rebirth is most easily understood in terms of the idea of a self that transmigrates, this led to discourses that appear to convey belief in a self. But the Buddha’s pedagogical strategy was to help these people achieve a less deluded view of reality, so that they would eventually be able to understand the teaching of non-self.

This orthodox understanding of the Buddha’s teachings seems to suggest that non-self

is the accepted view for all Buddhists. But this verse suggests otherwise. It suggests that when the Buddha taught non-self he was likewise employing his pedagogical skill, so that this too is not to be taken as the ultimately correct account of reality. Candrakīrti explains that to so take the teaching of non-self is to overlook the Buddha's insistence that his is a 'middle path'. According to Candrakīrti, 'self' and 'non-self' are counterpoised theses, each of which is required to give the other meaning. So if the doctrine of self does not accurately represent the nature of reality, then the doctrine of non-self likewise cannot.

7. The domain of objects of consciousness having ceased, what is to be named is ceased.

The nature of things is to be, like *nirvāṇa*, without origination or cessation.

Akutobhayā explains that once one has understood that *rūpa* and other *dharmas* are empty of intrinsic nature, one realizes that ultimately there are no objects of which to be aware. And when one is no longer aware of anything ultimately real, the temptation to employ dichotomous concepts and hypostatizing discourse concerning such things as pots and cloth, crowns and chariots, ceases. This seems intended to show that realization of emptiness (in the Madhyamaka sense) is connected to the meditational state of the 'signless' (*animitta*) that the Buddha says immediately precedes the attainment of *nirvāṇa*. (See D.ii.102)

8. All is real, or all is unreal, all is both real and unreal,

All is neither unreal nor real; this is the graded teaching of the Buddha.

The 'all' here refers to the *skandhas*, *āyatana*s, *dhātus* and the like, things that Abhidharma claims exist. Their being real would consist in their actually existing with the natures they are thought to possess (such as vision's having the power to apprehend color and shape). This verse appears to affirm at least one of the four possibilities that arise with respect to this thesis. But it does not rule out the possibility that all four might be true. And the third and fourth possibilities themselves seem to be contradictory. Moreover, the commentaries explain that all four possibilities may be affirmed. So it may seem as if Nāgārjuna is here asserting one or more contradictions.

The invocation of the notion of a 'graded teaching' is meant to forestall the objection that only one of these four possibilities could possibly be true. This notion is a variant on the idea of the Buddha's pedagogical skill that was invoked in v.6. It involves the idea that each of the Buddha's different (and seemingly conflicting) teachings on a given topic can be placed within a hierarchy, so that all can be reconciled as leading toward some single understanding or goal.

According to *Akutobhayā*, the hierarchy involved here is as follows: 'All is real' affirms the Abhidharma theses about the *skandhas*, etc., as conventionally true. (*Ābhidharmikas*

would obviously disagree; they claim that their accounts of these entities are ultimately true.) ‘All is unreal’ refers to the fact that none of these theses is ultimately true (since all these entities are empty and thus lack the intrinsic natures that they appear to possess). ‘All is both real and unreal’ asserts that the Abhidharma theses are both conventionally true and ultimately false. And ‘All is neither real nor unreal’ expresses the insight of the yogins, who, because they investigate reality in a way that does not involve superimposition of falsifying concepts, can find nothing to be said or thought concerning the nature of reality.

One might wonder whether the Mādhyamika is entitled to say that there is a hierarchy here. To say that there is, is to suggest that each position comes closer to accurately reflecting the nature of reality than its predecessor. And it is to suggest that the last position best represents how things ultimately are. If a Mādhyamika were to say this, they would seem to contradict their claim that nothing bears an intrinsic nature. For an account to accurately reflect how things ultimately are, it would seem that it must correctly describe their intrinsic natures. If nothing bears an intrinsic nature, then no account can be true to the intrinsic natures of things. (See XIII.7-8.) But perhaps the hierarchy here is not based on increasing accuracy, but on increasing usefulness for achieving our goal (in this case, the cessation of suffering).

9. Not to be attained by means of another, at peace, not populated by hypostatization,
Devoid of falsifying conceptualization, not having many separate meanings—this is the
nature of reality.

While in v.5 ‘falsifying conceptualization’ and ‘hypostatization’ may have referred to our tendency to construe experience in terms of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, in this verse they clearly refer to our tendency to suppose that things have intrinsic natures. In other words, while v.5 may be understood as concerned with the ‘emptiness of the person’ (the person’s being devoid of ‘I’ and ‘mine’), this verse is clearly concerned with the emptiness of *dharmas* (*dharmas*’ being devoid of intrinsic nature). For Mahāyāna Buddhists, this is the most important difference between the Mahāyāna and the Abhidharma understandings of reality.

To say that the nature of reality is not to be attained by means of another is to say that one must apprehend it directly for oneself. Candrakīrti provides the example of someone who sees hairs everywhere because of an eye disorder. While such a person can come to understand that the hairs are unreal through being told so by someone with normal vision, this will not prevent them from still seeing the hairs. Only through some sort of personal transformation can they come to no longer see hairs everywhere. By the same token, we can come to understand that nothing actually bears the nature that it presents to us in our experience, but this alone will not prevent our experiencing things as having their natures

intrinsically. It is possible to come to experience the emptiness of things directly, but this requires a kind of personal transformation.

To say that reality lacks many separate meanings is to say that all things are fundamentally of the same nature—namely empty of intrinsic nature. But the commentators all add that this is also a consequence of reality's being grasped without using falsifying conceptualization. For if nothing has an intrinsic nature, then a correct seeing of things cannot use the natures of things in order to draw conceptual distinctions. In order to discriminate between 'this' and 'that', one must be able to locate some difference in the natures of the 'this' and the 'that'. This will prove impossible if things lack their own natures.

10. When something exists dependent on something [as its cause], that is not on the one hand identical with that [cause],

But neither is it different; therefore that [cause] is neither destroyed nor eternal.

Nāgārjuna is here drawing several parallels between the Madhyamaka teaching of the emptiness of all *dharma*s and the Buddha's teachings concerning the person. For instance, the Buddha said that the reaper of the karmic fruit is neither identical with nor distinct from the sower of the karmic seed. And he claimed that through understanding this one could see how his account of persons avoids the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism. Nāgārjuna here claims that when one *dharma* causes another, the two can be neither identical nor distinct. And he says that for this reason the extremes of annihilationism and eternalism with respect to *dharma*s can be avoided.

The argument for the claim that the cause is neither identical with nor distinct from the effect is the one given at I.1-7, IV.1-3, X.1-7, and XII.2-3. If cause and effect were identical, producing the effect would be pointless. If they were distinct, then anything could be the cause of anything. That it follows from this that *dharma*s are neither annihilated nor eternal depends on the point that in order for something to be either eternal or subject to annihilation, it must be ultimately real. Any two ultimately real things must be either identical or else distinct. If cause and effect are neither, then it cannot be ultimately true that the cause is either eternal or subject to annihilation. The strategy here precisely parallels the Buddha's in presenting his claim that sower and reaper are neither identical nor distinct.

11. Not having a single goal, not having many goals, not destroyed, not eternal,

This is the nectar of the teachings of the Buddhas, lords of the world.

Typically, a classical Indian treatise on some subject begins with a statement of the goal or purpose (*artha*) of the inquiry contained in that treatise. Here the Buddha's teachings are said not to have just a single goal, nor to have many goals. *Akutobhayā* and *Buddhapālita*

give attaining heaven and attaining liberation as examples of goals that such a teaching might be thought to have. The thought is that if all things are empty, then such things as goals cannot be ultimately real.

Candrakīrti, though, understands the word we have translated as ‘goal’ (*artha*) differently. He takes it to here be used in its other sense of ‘meaning’. So he takes the first line of this verse to say that the Buddha’s teachings should be understood as being ‘free of both unity and diversity when analyzed, and beyond both eternalism and annihilationism’ (V p.377).

12. Though the completely enlightened ones do not arise, though the Hearers disappear,
The knowledge of the *pratyeka-buddhas* arises independently.

A *pratyeka-buddha* is someone who has attained nirvāṇa entirely on their own, without having learned the path to nirvāṇa through the teachings of a buddha. This is also true of buddhas (‘completely enlightened ones’). But buddhas share their realization with others, while *pratyeka-buddhas* do not. The ‘Hearers’ are those who attain liberation through following the teachings of a buddha. According to *Akutoḥbhayā*, Nāgārjuna brings up this trichotomy of enlightened figures in order to show that Buddhism has always recognized a kind of enlightening insight that is ‘not to be attained by means of another’ (v.9).

XIX. AN ANALYSIS OF TIME

Any account of the ultimate nature of reality must include something concerning the status of time. On the face of it there seem to be just two possibilities: that time is itself among the things that are ultimately real; and that time is a conceptual fiction constructed on the basis of facts about those things that are ultimately real. Nāgārjuna considers the first possibility in v.1-5, and the second in v.6.

Time consists of three phases: past, present and future. So if time is real, then these three must likewise be real. Do they exist independently of one another, or are they in relations of mutual dependence? Buddhapālita begins his commentary on this chapter by rejecting the thesis of independence. The grounds for this rejection are that if, say, the future existed by itself, then where it existed would always be the future and never the present or the past. The result would be that time would be static and unchanging: what exists in the future would never come to be anything but future. In this case, since the existence of time is supposed to explain the possibility of change, an inquiry into time’s nature would be futile. So if there is time, we must conclude that the three phases of time exist dependent on one another: something is, for instance, the present or future only by virtue of occurring

later than the past.

1. If the present and the future exist dependent on the past,
Then present and future would be at the past time.

The difficulty with the thesis of dependence is that then present and future must exist not only in the present and future respectively, but in the past as well. And the present cannot be what it is, namely the time in which what is now occurring takes place, if it exists not just now but also in the past. For if it existed in the past, then what is occurring would also be what has already occurred, which is absurd. Why, though, does the thesis of dependence require that present and future exist in the past? The next verse addresses this question.

2. If, moreover, present and future do not exist there,
Then how would present and future exist dependent on that?

The argument is simply that there cannot be dependence of one thing on another thing unless they both exist at the same time. The son is dependent for his being a son on the father, and this relation of dependence requires that the two exist together at some time.

3. There is no establishment of the two, moreover, if they are independent of the past.
Therefore neither present nor future time exists.

The argument for this would appear to be the one that Buddhapālita gave inframing the argument of v.1.

4. In this manner [one should regard] the remaining two cases obtained by substitution.
[Thus] one would regard best, worst, and middle etc., and singularity, etc.

The same reasoning can be used to show that past and future would have to exist in the present, and that past and present must exist in the future, thereby demonstrating the absurdity of supposing that the three times could exist in dependence on one another. Likewise one could develop an argument along the same lines in order to demonstrate a problem with such other triads as best, worst and middle, and singularity, duality and plurality. Buddhapālita adds that the same reasoning would undermine the real existence of such pairs as near and far, earlier and later, cause and effect, etc.

5. A non-abiding time cannot be apprehended; an abiding time that can be apprehended
does not exist. And how is a non-apprehended time conceived?

The opponent has objected to the preceding argument on the grounds that time must surely exist since it can be measured, in such units as instant, moment, hour, etc. Nāgārjuna

then responds with a dilemma: does this time that can be measured exist as something that abides or remains unchanging, or does it exist as something non-abiding, as something that undergoes change? As Buddhapālita explains, only that which is fixed or settled can be measured, so a non-abiding time could not be measured. But if we then suppose that time must abide since it can be measured, we run into the difficulty that then time becomes static, which is unacceptable. The only time that might exist and so be measured is one that cannot be apprehended, and consequently cannot be measured. So if it is a fact that time can be measured, it cannot follow from this that time is real.

Candrakīrti has the opponent concede at this point that time cannot be an independently existing ultimately real thing. But the opponent thinks there is still a way to acknowledge the reality of time, namely to have it be something that is named and conceptualized on the basis of things that are ultimately real (in the same way in which the person is said to be named and conceptualized on the basis of ultimately real psychophysical elements):

True, what is known as time does not in any sense exist as a permanent entity, distinct from rūpa etc., endowed with an intrinsic nature. What then? Time, which is designated by such words as ‘instant’ and the like, is conceptualized on the basis of conditioned entities such as *rūpa* and the like. Here there is no fault. (V p.387)

The idea is that time is a derivative notion, a useful way of conceptualizing the occurrence of compounded (and thus impermanent) entities. What exist are those entities; time is our way of understanding their relations. Nāgārjuna then responds:

6. If time exists dependent on an existent, how will time exist in the absence of an existent?
No existent whatever exists; how, then, will there be time?

The hypothesis in question requires that there be ultimately real entities. And as Candrakīrti laconically points out, this has already been refuted at some length.

XX. AN EXAMINATION OF THE ASSEMBLAGE

In this chapter Nāgārjuna returns to the relation between cause and effect. Here the focus is on the idea that the effect is produced by an assemblage of causes and conditions. The stock illustration of this idea is the case of the production of a sprout. While we might be tempted to call the seed the cause of the sprout, this would not be true if by ‘cause’ we

meant the necessary and sufficient conditions for the sprout's production (the 'total cause'). In addition to the seed, there must be such factors as soil, moisture and warmth before the sprout can arise. The assemblage is the set of all these factors occurring together. In Abhidharma the members of this set are called 'cause and conditions' (*hetu-pratyaya*). The 'cause' (*hetu*) usually corresponds to what Aristotle called the material cause (in this case the seed). The 'conditions' (*pratyaya*) are the other factors. But it is the aggregate and not any one member of the aggregate that is thought to actually do the producing.

Nāgārjuna will argue that there is no acceptable account of the causal relation that supposedly obtains between assemblage and effect. The argument will proceed by examining the two possibilities for such a relation's obtaining: that the effect exists in the assemblage, and that the effect is not to be found in the assemblage. These possibilities are reflected in the two theories of causation known as *satkāryavāda* and *asatkāryavāda*, which we encountered earlier (see 1.3, IV.6, X.13). But here the consequences of these two views are traced out in much greater detail than previously.

1. If the effect is produced by the assemblage of the cause and the conditions,

And the effect exists in the assemblage; how will it be produced by the assemblage?

To say that the effect exists in the assemblage is to affirm *satkāryavāda*, the view that the effect exists in unmanifest form in its cause. The argument here is that in that case we cannot say that the assemblage produces the effect. In order for something to be produced, it must come into existence at a particular time, the time of production. If the sprout already exists in the assemblage of seed, soil, moisture, warmth, etc., then we cannot say that these produce the sprout. For if the sprout already exists, then they cannot bring it into existence.

2. If the effect is produced by the assemblage of the cause and the conditions,

And the effect does not exist in the assemblage, how will it be produced by the assemblage?

If *satkāryavāda* must be denied, it would seem that we should then embrace *asatkāryavāda*. But this verse claims otherwise. The argument is that to say the effect is produced by the assemblage is to say that the one is produced from the other. And what is not existent in the assemblage cannot be produced from them, any more than sesame oil can be produced by pressing sand.

3. If the effect existed in the assemblage of the cause and the conditions,

It would surely be perceived in the assemblage, and it is not perceived in the assemblage.

No matter how closely we look, we shall never find a sprout among the seed, soil, moisture, warmth, etc. Thus there are no grounds for maintaining that the effect exists in the assemblage. Of course, as Candrakīrti points out, the supporter of *satkāryavāda* will maintain that there are inferential grounds, such as the fact that one cannot produce sesame oil from sand or curds from a water-pot. And as Bhāvaviveka recognizes, the Sāṅkhyan will also claim that the reason we do not perceive the effect in the assemblage is that it has not yet been made manifest. But, says Bhāvaviveka, the manifestation theory has already been refuted. (See x.13.) And, says Candrakīrti, the sesame seeds inference is an argument against *asatkāryavāda*; it is not directly an argument for *satkāryavāda*. It would be such an inferential ground for holding *satkāryavāda* only if the two theories exhausted the possibilities, so that one or the other had to be true. And this is just what the Mādhyamika denies.

4. If the effect did not exist in the assemblage of the cause and the conditions,

Then causes and conditions would be the same as non-causes and non-conditions.

The most fundamental difficulty for *asatkāryavāda* is to explain why we can produce a pot but not curds by throwing and firing clay. The assemblage of the clay, the throwing, and the firing counts as cause and conditions with respect to the pot, but counts as non-cause and non-conditions with respect to the curds. According to *asatkāryavāda*, neither the pot nor the curds exists in the assemblage. What then explains the difference?

5. If the cause, having given its causal character to the effect, were to cease,

There would be a double nature of the cause, what is given and what is ceased.

On the Buddhist formulation of *asatkāryavāda*, the cause goes out of existence when the effect is produced. (See 1.5-6.) The opponent might try to answer the difficulty raised in v.4 by claiming that the cause transfers its causal capacity to the effect when it goes out of existence. But to say this is to attribute to the cause two distinct natures: the nature whereby it is said to have gone out of existence, and the nature whereby it is said to have causal capacity. For if it only had a single nature, then that nature would cease when it went out of existence and would not continue on as the nature of the effect. The difficulty Candrakīrti sees with this hypothesis is that the two natures have contradictory characters: the nature that is transferred to the effect is enduring, while the nature that ceases with the cause is transitory. And one thing cannot have two contradictory natures.

6. And if the cause were to cease without having given its causal character to the effect,

The effect, being produced when the cause is extinguished, would be without cause.

If the opponent seeks to avoid the above difficulty by claiming that the cause has a single nature that perishes with it, then we are back to the problem of explaining why just these causes and conditions produced this effect. For then the *asatkāryavādin* can no longer explain this by claiming that the cause has a causal capacity that it gives to the effect. So on this formulation the effect could perfectly well arise from any aggregate of causes and conditions.

7. If the effect were to become manifest simultaneously with the assemblage,

It would follow that the producer and that which is produced are simultaneous.

If the opponent seeks to avoid the last-mentioned difficulty by having assemblage and effect occur simultaneously, then as Buddhapālita points out, it would be impossible to say which is the cause and which the effect. The father is said to cause the son precisely because the father exists prior to the son.

8. And if the effect were to become manifest before the assemblage,

Then the effect, being devoid of cause and conditions, would be without cause.

The third possibility, besides those of effect succeeding assemblage (v.5-6) and effect being simultaneous with assemblage (v.7), is that the effect occurs before the assemblage. This has the obvious defect that in that case the assemblage cannot possibly cause the effect, which must then be considered to arise causelessly. The argument of these four verses is another instance of the three-times schema applied to the case of causation, parallel to that of 1.5-6.

9. If it were held that, the cause having ceased, there were transference of the cause to the effect,

It would follow that there is another birth of a cause that had already been produced.

The hypothesis under scrutiny here is that when the cause ceases, its nature is transferred to the effect. But as Candrakīrti points out, this is just like saying that the cause has changed into the dress of an effect. It thus conflicts with the fundamental Buddhist tenet that nothing is permanent, for it is saying that something endures through the change of clothing from that of cause to that of effect. And since the opponent holds that the effect is produced or born, this birth will be its second, for the effect is just the cause in new clothing, and the cause was previously produced. This is likewise an absurd consequence. Buddhist philosophers agree with Locke, who said that a given thing can only have one beginning of existence. (See *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.XXVII.1)

10. How could what is ceased and ended produce an arisen effect?

How, on the other hand, could a cause that is connected with the effect, though enduring, produce [the effect]?

Suppose the opponent were to respond to the above difficulty by reverting to the view that the cause goes out of existence before the effect comes into existence. In that case the cause cannot be what is responsible for the nature of the effect. For an entity that no longer exists can do nothing. If, in order to remedy this defect, the opponent were to claim that cause and effect stand in some sort of relation that makes possible the cause's determining the nature of the effect, then they must exist together. And if they exist together while the cause brings about the determination of the effect's nature, then the effect must have already come into existence before the cause produced it. So once again the cause cannot be what produces the effect.

11. And if unconnected with the effect, what sort of effect will that produce?

The cause will not produce the effect whether it is seen or not seen.

11ab continues the line of argument of v.10. If the opponent agrees that the cause cannot have the appropriate sort of connection to the effect, then they must concede that the cause cannot determine the nature of the effect. Thus there is no reason why it should produce any one sort of effect rather than some other.

According to *Akutoḥayā* and *Bhāvaviveka*, 11cd introduces an example to make a related point. The example is the production of visual consciousness by the sense faculty of vision. The question is whether vision produces this effect having already itself seen what is visible, or not having seen it. If one says the former, then vision's production of visual consciousness will be production of what has already arisen, since its having seen the visible just is an instance of visual consciousness. As for the alternative that vision produces visual consciousness without having seen the visible object, in that case anything whatever might be seen, regardless of what it is that vision has come in contact with. Suppose my eyes come in contact with a patch of blue, and that this contact results in visual consciousness. If my vision produces this visual consciousness without having itself seen blue, why should the resulting visual consciousness be of blue, and not of magenta, which is equally unseen by my vision?

12. Never is there contact of a past effect with a past cause,

Nor with a future cause, nor a present cause.

13. Never is there contact of a present effect with a future cause,

Nor with a past cause, nor with a present cause.

14. Never is there contact of a future effect with a present cause,

Nor with a future cause, nor with a past cause.

For the cause to determine the effect, there must obtain some relation of contact between the two. And this requires that they exist together. Things that are past and things that are future do not exist: past things no longer exist, while future things do not yet exist. This explains why real contact is ruled out in all cases where one or both of the relata are either past or future. The one remaining case is where both are presently occurring. The difficulty with this, Candrakīrti explains, is that cause and effect are never simultaneous. So the overall argument is essentially the same as that of 1.5-6.

15. In the absence of contact, how could a cause produce an effect?

But then if there is contact, how could a cause produce an effect?

This verse summarizes the reasoning of the preceding three verses. The production relation that must hold between assemblage and effect requires that both exist together. Yet when they do exist together, the production of the effect becomes superfluous, since it already exists.

16. If the cause is empty of the effect, how will it produce the effect?

If the cause is not empty of the effect, how will it produce the effect?

To say that the cause is empty (or devoid) of the effect is to say that the intrinsic nature of the effect is not found in the cause. The reason for rejecting this hypothesis is the same as in v.4: in that case the alleged cause is no different from other factors that we agree are non-causes. The alternative is to say that the intrinsic nature of the effect is found in the cause. But in this case the effect already exists, since its existence just is the occurrence of its intrinsic nature. So in this case the cause cannot be said to produce the effect.

17. A non-empty effect will not arise, a non-empty effect will not cease.

Being non-empty it will be unceased and unarisen.

To say the effect is non-empty is to say it bears its own intrinsic nature. The argument for the claim that something with intrinsic nature can neither arise nor cease was given in Chapter XV.

18. How will what is empty arise? How will what is empty cease?

It follows that what is empty is also unceased and unarisen.

Since what is empty or devoid of intrinsic nature is not ultimately real, it cannot be ultimately true that an effect that is empty arises or ceases.

19. It can never hold that cause and effect are one.

It can never hold that cause and effect are distinct.

20. Given oneness of cause and effect, there would be unity of producer and product.

Given separateness of cause and effect, there would be equivalence of cause and non-cause.

Are cause and effect identical, or are they distinct? If they are identical, then father is identical with son, vision is identical with visual consciousness, seed is identical with sprout, etc. If, on the other hand, they are distinct, then once again the cause is no different from a non-cause, and the effect would be utterly independent of the cause.

21. How will a cause produce an intrinsically real effect?

How will a cause produce an intrinsically unreal effect?

The argument here is essentially the same as that of v.17-8.

22. And a causal nature makes no sense in that which is not producing.

There being no causal nature, what could an effect be [the effect] of?

Something has the nature of a cause only if it actively produces. No adequate account of production seems to be forthcoming. But something can be an effect only if it is produced by a cause. Hence there can likewise be no effects.

23. If an assemblage of cause and conditions does not produce itself by means of itself,

How could it produce an effect?

Should the opponent object that the argument has strayed from the original hypothesis—that the assemblage produces the effect—to the different view that a single cause produces the effect, the response is that the assemblage is not itself ultimately real, being a whole made of parts. As such it is incapable of performing any real function.

24. The effect is not made by the assemblage, nor is the effect made without the assemblage;

How indeed can there be an assemblage in the absence of an effect?

Since the assemblage is not itself a real entity, it cannot be what produced the effect. But to say that the effect is produced without the assemblage is to say that the effect is uncaused,

which is impossible. So one cannot say that there is an effect. And in this case one equally cannot say that there is an assemblage of causes and conditions. The existence of such an assemblage obviously depends on their together possessing the capacity to produce an effect, and we are unable to find an effect.

XXI. AN ANALYSIS OF ARISING AND DISSOLUTION (OF BEINGS)

According to all the commentators, the opponent now reverts to the topic of Chapter XIX, time, insisting that it must be real since there really occur the arising and dissolution of existents. Since arising and dissolution cannot take place without differences in time, and such differences cannot exist unless time exists, the opponent claims time must be ultimately real. What follows is an investigation of the notion that there can be such things as the arising (coming into existence) and dissolution (cessation or disappearance) of beings. Given impermanence, if there are beings then there must be arising and dissolution. What the chapter seeks to determine is what it would mean for beings to exist under conditions of impermanence.

1. Dissolution does not at all exist either with or without arising.

Arising does not at all exist either with or without dissolution.

Each member of the pair occurs either separately or else accompanied by the other. Nāgārjuna claims that none of the four resulting hypotheses holds. The reasons are given in the next four verses.

2. How could there ever be dissolution without arising?

There is no death without [prior] birth, [likewise] there is no dissolution without origination.

Dissolution or cessation can only occur to something that exists, and nothing exists that has not undergone arising, just as no one dies who was not first born.

3. How could there be dissolution together with arising?

For death and birth do not take place at the same time.

In v.3 it was argued that dissolution is dependent for its occurrence on arising, hence that dissolution cannot occur distinct from arising. It is now argued that it cannot occur together with arising either, since the two have opposed natures. Of course one might want to object that the dependence obtaining between arising and dissolution need not require that the two occur simultaneously. But the opponent wishes to establish the real existence of time

based on the existence of arising and dissolution. To claim that arising and dissolution may occur at distinct times is to presuppose the reality of time. So the opponent cannot object to the argument in this way.

4. How indeed will there be arising without dissolution?

For never is there not found impermanence among beings.

Having shown that dissolution cannot occur either together with or apart from dissolution, the argument now turns to the case of arising. To say that arising occurs without dissolution is to say that something that comes into existence never goes out of existence. This violates the fundamental fact about the world at the heart of the Buddha's teachings: that all is impermanent.

5. How indeed will there occur arising together with dissolution?

For death and birth do not take place at the same time.

Arising cannot occur without dissolution, but it also cannot occur together with dissolution. The reason is the same as in v.3.

6. Concerning these two things that are not established as mutually joined or as mutually distinct,

How will their establishment ever occur?

Since it is difficult to see what other possibility there might be besides arising and dissolution occurring conjointly or distinctly, it is reasonable to conclude that they cannot be ultimately real. Thus their occurrence cannot be used in support of the claim that time exists.

7. There is no arising of what is destroyed, nor is there the arising of what is not destroyed;

There is no dissolution of what is destroyed, nor again the dissolution of what is not destroyed.

Arising and dissolution would seem to be events that occur to existing things. And existing things are either characterized by destruction or not characterized by destruction. We may thus ask whether arising and dissolution are to be understood as belonging to an existent that is destroyed, or to an existent that is not destroyed. Neither possibility appears plausible. Arising is incompatible with destruction. And what is not destroyed is eternal and so unchanging. But arising is a change, so arising cannot belong to what is not destroyed. Again, dissolution cannot belong to what is destroyed, since what is destroyed does not exist and so cannot provide a locus for dissolution. Nor can dissolution pertain to what is not destroyed, due to incompatibility.

8. Arising and dissolution do not occur without a being.

A being does not occur without arising and dissolution.

Arising and dissolution are properties, and properties require a locus. In this case the locus must be a being or existent: only a being can be characterized by arising and dissolution. The difficulty is that if arising and dissolution are properties of a being, then a being cannot occur without them. There is a relation of mutual dependence between a being and its properties of arising and dissolution: neither can exist without the other.

9. Arising and dissolution make no sense with respect to that which is empty.

Arising and dissolution make no sense with respect to that which is non-empty.

That which is empty is devoid of intrinsic nature, and so is not ultimately real. So arising and dissolution cannot characterize a being that is empty. But neither can it characterize what is not empty, i.e., what has intrinsic nature. According to Candrakīrti, the reason is that since there is nothing that is not empty, arising and dissolution would then be without a locus. But *Akutoḥbhayā* explains the argument differently: what is non-empty has a fixed, determinate nature, and this is incompatible with arising and dissolution.

10. It makes no sense to say that arising and dissolution are one.

It makes no sense to say that arising and dissolution are distinct.

The two states must, if they are real, be either identical or distinct. They cannot be identical, since arising conflicts with the nature of dissolution. But neither can they be distinct. For there is invariable concomitance between arising and dissolution: wherever there is the one the other is also found. And if they were distinct it would be possible to find an occurrence of the one without the other.

11. If you maintained that arising and dissolution [of beings] are indeed seen,

Arising and dissolution are only seen because of delusion.

We observe the arising and dissolution of things in everyday life, so there seems to be some reason to think that they are real phenomena. But the *Mādhyamika* says this is a mere appearance generated by the delusion that fuels our bondage to *saṃsāra*. The reason this appearance is deceptive, the commentators suggest, is that arising and dissolution must pertain to a being, and a being could only be produced from a being or from a non-being. But neither possibility is tenable, as is argued in the next verse.

12. A being is not produced from a being, nor is a being produced from a non-being.

A non-being is not produced from a non-being, nor is a non-being produced from a being.

According to Candrakīrti, the first possibility is ruled out on the grounds that then cause and effect would be simultaneous, and production would be pointless since the being would already exist. The second possibility is ruled out on the grounds that then the daughter of a barren woman could produce a son. The third is ruled out on the grounds that the cause-effect relationship cannot hold between two unreal things. And since non-being is incompatible with being, the fourth possibility is equivalent to saying that there could be darkness in the light.

13. Not from itself is a being produced, nor from what is other,

It is not produced from both itself and what is other, from what, then, is it produced?

Akutobhayā gives as grounds for rejecting the first possibility that a ceaseless arising would be pointless. The idea is that if a thing produced itself, it would always be in the process of producing itself; but the arising of an entity should be something that only occurs at one time. This is also said to lead to an infinite regress. As for the second possibility, Buddhapālita explains that something can be other than a given being only if the being itself exists, in which case production is once again pointless. The third possibility must also be rejected since it inherits all the problems of both the first and the second.

14. One who acknowledges beings must hold either eternalism or annihilationism,

For a being would be either permanent or impermanent.

If one holds that there are ultimately real existents, then they must be either permanent or impermanent. But if they are permanent, then one holds that there are eternal existents. And if they are impermanent, then one holds that there is the annihilation of existents. And the views known as eternalism and annihilationism were said by the Buddha to be extremes which should be avoided.

Note, however, that on the Abhidharma interpretation of this warning, it applies only to such 'beings' as persons, and not to what Abhidharma holds to be ultimately real, namely the *dharmas*. On their understanding, eternalism is the view that the person exists eternally (in the form of a self), and annihilationism is the view that the person is annihilated at death (or upon the cessation of the present psychophysical elements). The middle path between these two extreme views is the position that there is a causal series of impermanent *dharmas*, all of which are empty of the nature of a self. Nāgārjuna claims instead that the middle path involves avoiding the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism with respect not just

to persons but to all things. In place of the Abhidharma doctrine of the essencelessness of persons (*puḍgalanairātmya*) he advocates the emptiness of *dharmas* (*dharmanairātmya*) as the true middle path.

15. For one who acknowledges beings there would be neither annihilation nor eternity,
For a life is a series consisting of the arising and passing away of effect and cause.

The opponent here proposes a way out of the dilemma posed by Nāgārjuna in v.14: in a causal series such as the life of a person, the effect arises upon the passing away or dissolution of its cause. Thus the fault of eternalism is avoided, since each element passes away, but the fault of annihilationism is also avoided, since something new is always being produced.

16. If a life is a series consisting of the arising and passing away of effect and cause,
Then annihilation of the cause follows, for there is no re-arising of what passes away.

Nāgārjuna responds that this strategy will not help the opponent avoid the fault of annihilationism, since the dissolution of the cause at each step in the series is precisely the annihilation of that existent. It cannot be claimed that the cause is not annihilated due to its giving birth to the effect. For the effect must be a distinct existent if it is to be the product of the cause. So the effect cannot be seen as the cause re-born.

17. The non-existence of what exists intrinsically makes no sense.
And at the time of nirvāṇa there would be annihilation, since the series of lives ceases.

Moreover, on the opponent's interpretation of the middle path, cause and effect are ultimately real entities, and thus have intrinsic nature. Such entities cannot cease to exist, since cessation would involve a change in their nature, which is ruled out for ultimately real entities. (See XIII.4cd-6.) Thus the fault of eternalism has not been avoided. In addition, when the *arhat* attains nirvāṇa or final cessation, the causal series of psychophysical elements ceases and there is no rebirth. In this case the opponent cannot say that the fault of annihilationism has been avoided, for there is no successor effect in the series.

18. It is not the case that the first [moment of the new] existence occurs when the last
[moment of the old] existence has ceased,
Nor is it the case that the first [moment of the new] existence occurs when the last
[moment of the old] existence has not ceased.

The final moment of one life is said to be the cause of the first moment of the new life. Does the first moment of the new life occur upon the cessation of the last moment of the old life,

or does it occur before the cessation of the last moment? It cannot be upon cessation, since then the last moment will be no more causally efficacious than the last moment in the life of an *arhat*. But neither can it be prior to cessation, for then the old life has not ceased, so this could not count as rebirth.

19. If the first were produced when the last were ceasing,

What was ceasing would be one [being], and what was being born would be another.

It is presumably one being that undergoes rebirth. But if the last moment of the old life were undergoing cessation at the same time that the first moment of the new life were being produced, there would be an overlap of the two lives. And there cannot be overlap between different periods in the life of a single being. So there would be two beings involved in rebirth, not one.

20. It is not correct to suppose that ceasing and being born are simultaneous;

Would one be born in just those *skandhas* in which one died?

The opponent might think to avoid the difficulty pointed out in v.19 by supposing that it is a single being who simultaneously undergoes death and rebirth. The difficulty with this hypothesis is that for it to be the same being, the same *skandhas* must be involved in both events. And if death and rebirth were simultaneous, then these *skandhas* would simultaneously undergo death and birth. Since the death and birth processes are quite the opposite of one another, this is impossible.

21. Thus in none of the three times can there be a series of lives.

How can it be a series of lives if it does not exist in the three times?

Verse 18ab rejects the possibility that the first moment occurs after the cessation of the last moment. Verse 18cd rejects the possibility that the first moment occurs before the cessation of the last moment. In v.19-20 the third possible time—simultaneous cessation and production—was considered and rejected. Thus the notion that existence involves a series of causes and effects cannot help the opponent avoid the faults of eternalism and annihilationism.

Keywords Nāgārjuna, Madhyamaka, emptiness