Mūlamadhyamakakārikā XXII-XXVII

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XXII. AN ANALYSIS OF THE TATHĀGATA

'Tathāgata' is an epithet for the Buddha (or a Buddha). Candrakīrti introduces this chapter by having the opponent object that the causal series of lives must be ultimately real, since otherwise there could be no Tathāgata. The argument for this is that without such a series there could be no rebirth, and without rebirth there could not be the countless lives of practice that are said to be necessary to attain the virtues and the skills of a Buddha.

1. The Tathāgata is neither identical with the *skandhas* nor distinct from the *skandhas*;
   the *skandhas* are not in him nor is he in them.
   He does not exist possessing the *skandhas*; what Tathāgata, then, is there?

Here the Tathāgata is subjected to the same five-fold examination that was applied to the person or living being earlier. (See x.14, xvi.2.) Candrakīrti's commentary quotes extensively from previous discussions in Chapters X and XVIII.

2. If the Buddha is dependent on the *skandhas*, then he does not exist intrinsically.
   But how can someone who does not exist intrinsically exist extrinsically?

Given the failure of the five-fold examination to turn up an ultimately real Buddha, one might suppose that the Tathāgata is named and conceptualized on the basis of the five *skandhas*. But to say this is to say that the Buddha lacks intrinsic nature, and so fails to exist ultimately. Given this, one cannot claim that the Tathāgata exists dependent on other things that do have intrinsic nature. The reason is given in the next verse.

3. It is possible that one who is dependent on an other-existent is without an essence.
   But how will one who is devoid of essence become the Tathāgata?

That which lacks its own nature and only exists by virtue of borrowing its nature from other entities is compared by the commentators to a magically created being and a reflection in a mirror. The term which we here translate as 'without an essence', namely *anātman*, also means 'without self'. But Candrakīrti explains that here it means being without intrinsic nature or essence. As he understands the argument, in order for the Tathāgata to derive its nature from other things (such as the *skandhas*), it must first exist. And in order for it to exist, it must have a nature of its own, an essence. So since it lacks its own nature, it cannot be in a position to borrow a nature from other entities.

4. And if there is no intrinsic nature, how will there be an extrinsic nature?
   Besides intrinsic nature and extrinsic nature, what Tathāgata is there?

Presumably a real entity must either have its own nature or else have a nature it borrows from other reals. Since neither possibility is tenable, it should follow that we cannot make out a sense in which there might be a real Tathāgata. But a new opponent, identified by Bhāvaviveka as a Vātsīputrīya (a Pudgalavādin), enters the discussion, claiming that the Tathāgata has an inexpressible status of being neither identical with nor distinct from the *skandhas*. The Tathāgata, though named and conceptualized in dependence on the *skandhas* (and so presumably having only conventional existence), is nonetheless ultimately real.

5. If there were some Tathāgata not dependent on the *skandhas*,
   Then he could attain dependence (on the *skandhas*); thus he would be dependent.

For this hypothesis to work, it must be the case that this indescribable Tathāgata exists prior to being conceived in dependence on the *skandhas*. For it is only if he exists independently of this relation that he can come into the relation of being named and conceptualized in dependence on the *skandhas*.

6. But there is no Tathāgata whatever without dependence on the *skandhas*.
   And how will one who does not exist without dependence come to depend [on them]?

Such a Tathāgata that is without any dependence on the *skandhas* for its being named and conceptualized does not exist. And since it does not exist, it is unable to come into a relation of dependence on the *skandhas*.

7. Something cannot be what is depended upon without having been depended upon [by someone].
   Nor can it be that the Tathāgata somehow exists devoid of what he depends on.

Akutobhayā and Buddhapālita explain the argument as being based on the beginninglessness of *saṃsāra*. For there to be the relation of dependence, there must be that which is dependent

and that on which it depends. In the present case what is dependent would be the Tathāgata, and what it is dependent on is the *skandhas*. But because the round of rebirths in *saṃsāra* is without beginning, there cannot be the relation of prior and posterior between the *skandhas* and the Tathāgata that is required for the relation to hold. There is no moment in the past about which we could say that before that moment there were the *skandhas* but no Tathāgata. For if *saṃsāra* is beginningless, then there is no first birth of the Tathāgata. And in order for the Tathāgata to be dependent on the *skandhas*, the *skandhas* must be prior to the Tathāgata.

8. Being something that does not exist as either identical with or distinct from [the *skandhas*] when investigated in any of the five ways [mentioned in v.1],
How is the Tathāgata conceptualized by means of what he depends on?

No real Tathāgata has been found by considering the five ways in which he might stand in relation to what is real, the *skandhas*. Nor is there any other way in which such a being might be found. Hence it makes no sense to speak of a real Tathāgata.

9. Moreover that on which he depends does not exist by virtue of intrinsic nature.
And how can what does not exist intrinsically exist extrinsically?

Candrakīrti explains that 'that on which he depends' is the five *skandhas*, that which the Tathāgata is said to be dependent on. These do not exist by virtue of intrinsic nature because, being dependently originated, they lack intrinsic nature. From this it is said to follow that the *skandhas* likewise do not exist extrinsically. The argument is the same as that given in v.2-3.

10. Thus both that on which he depends and the one who is dependent are altogether empty.
And how is an empty Tathāgata to be conceptualized by means of something empty?

Both the Tathāgata and that on which he supposedly depends for his being conceptualized (the *skandhas*) are empty or devoid of the nature required to be real. Thus the claim that the Tathāgata is named and conceptualized in dependence on the *skandhas* turns out to be utterly without meaning.

11. 'It is empty' is not to be said, nor 'It is non-empty',
Nor that it is both, nor that it is neither; ('empty') is said only for the sake of instruction.

When a Mādhyamika says that things are empty, this is not to be understood as stating the ultimate truth about the ultimate nature of reality. Instead this is just a useful pedagogical device, a way of instructing others who happen to believe there is such a thing as the ultimate

truth about the ultimate nature of reality. So the claim made here is in effect the same as the claim Nāgārjuna will make at XXIV.18, that emptiness is itself empty.

Here as elsewhere, Nāgārjuna employs the device known as the tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*) to express his point. He considers all four possible views concerning emptiness, only to reject them all. But as Bhāvaviveka reminds us, and as Candrakīrti pointed out in his comments on XVIII.6, when the Buddha rejects all four possibilities with respect to such questions as whether the world is eternal (e.g., at *Majjhima Nikāya* I.484-5, 431), this is because while each may prove useful for certain purposes under certain circumstances, all share a presupposition that is false (see *Majjhima Nikāya* I.486-7). Candrakīrti suggests that what we have here is another instance of a 'graded teaching', with each of the four possibilities representing a view held by certain philosophers. (See XVII.8.) Interestingly, he identifies the view that there are both empty and non-empty things with Sautrāntika (since they hold that only present things are ultimately real), and the view that things are neither empty nor non-empty with Yogācāra (since they hold that reality is inexpressible—cf. *Madhyanta Vibhāga Kārikā* I.3, which Candrakīrti quotes).

na śūnyam nāpi cāśūnyam tasmāt sarvam vidhīyate /

Bhāvaviveka considers the following objection: when Mādhyamikas assert that we should not make any of these four possible claims about the ultimate nature of reality, they are guilty of an inconsistency. For they appear to be saying that the ultimate nature of reality cannot be described in any of the four possible ways, and yet this would seem to be a claim about the ultimate nature of reality. Bhāvaviveka responds that there is no more fault here than there is in the case of someone who, wishing to prevent sound, utters the sound, 'Quiet!' Bhāvaviveka's reply might be interpreted in either of two different ways.

(1) While no statement about how things ultimately are can express their nature (since all conceptualization falsifies reality), some (strictly negative) statements come closer to adequately representing reality, namely those that reject various false superimpositions.

(2) Statements are to be judged true or false not on the basis of how adequately they express the ultimate nature of reality (there being no such thing), but on the basis of how effective they are at achieving the speaker's aim. The Mādhyamika's aim is to bring an end to our tendency to hypostatize–to suppose that there must be some ultimate reality that our statements are meant to depict. This aim is best achieved by making statements, but different statements will be effective in different contexts.

In *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, Nāgārjuna considers an objection that likens the Mādhyamika to someone who, wishing to prevent all sound, says 'Do not make a sound'. For his response to this objection see *Vigrahavyāvartanī* v.28.

12. How can 'It is eternal', 'It is non-eternal' and the rest of this tetralemma apply [to the

Tathāgata], who is free from hypostatization?
And how can 'It has an end', 'It does not have an end' and the rest of this tetralemma apply [to the Tathāgata] who is free from hypostatization?

The Tathāgata being ultimately empty of intrinsic nature, none of the four possibilities in the tetralemmas concerning being eternal and having an end can apply. (On these see the discussion below at xxv.17-18.) The Tathāgata could, for instance, be said to be eternal only if there were such an ultimately existing entity as the Tathāgata. And to say that the Tathāgata is empty is to say there is no such thing.

13. But one who has taken up a mass of beliefs, such as that the Tathāgata exists,
So conceptualizing, that person will also imagine that [the Tathāgata] does not exist when extinguished.

One who throughout countless past lives has employed various useful conceptual distinctions will be inclined to apply them to the case of the Tathāgata. The Tathāgata, having attained final *nirvāṇa*, is not available as an object to which conceptual distinctions might apply. But due to one's inveterate tendency to use concepts, one is likely to want to know whether, after final *nirvāṇa*, the Tathāgata continues to exist, does not exist, both exists and does not exist, or neither exists nor does not exist.

14. And the thought does not arise, with reference to this (Tathāgata) who is intrinsically empty,
That the Buddha either exists or does not exist after cessation.

Because the Buddha is extinguished in final *nirvāṇa*, there is no entity available concerning whose post-mortem status we might speculate.

15. Those who hypostatize the Buddha, who is beyond hypostatization and unwavering,
They all, deceived by hypostatization, fail to see the Tathāgata.

Candrakīrti explains that the Buddha is said to be unwavering in that, being by nature empty and so unarisen, the Buddha is not the sort of thing that could undergo change. Only an ultimately existing Buddha could be the sort of thing for which the question of change could arise (when that question is understood to concern ultimately real things).

16. What is the intrinsic nature of the Tathāgata, that is the intrinsic nature of this world.
The Tathāgata is devoid of intrinsic nature, this world is devoid of intrinsic nature.

By 'this world' is meant the realm of *saṃsāra*. (It can also mean the beings who inhabit it.) As Buddhapālita explains, both the Tathāgata and this world are conceptualized in

dependence on other things, and hence both are devoid of intrinsic nature. They are alike in being empty.

For many Buddhists, the expression 'the Tathāgata' is not just the name of a historical person but stands as well for the supposedly transcendent reality of *nirvāṇa*. Taken in this way, the equivalence stated here is the same as that asserted in XXV.19, which says explicitly that there is no difference between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*.

Buddhapālitavṛtti seems to end at this point. What is represented in some texts as the comments on Chapters XXIII—XXVII of *Buddhapālitavṛtti* appears to be a repetition or a paraphrase of the comments of *Akutobhayā* on those chapters.

XXIII. AN ANALYSIS OF FALSE IMAGINING

1. Desire, aversion and delusion are said to arise from dubious conviction;
   These arise in dependence on the good, the bad and false imagining.

Desire, aversion and delusion are the three defilements or *kleśas* (see XIV.2). They are said to arise from three sorts of cognitive mistake: desire arises in dependence on dubious conviction concerning what is good or pleasant in nature (*śubha*), aversion on dubious conviction concerning what is bad or unpleasant in nature, and delusion in dependence on false imagining.

2. What arise in dependence on the good, the bad and false imagining,
   Those things do not exist intrinsically, therefore the defilements (*kleśas*) are not ultimately real.

Because the three defilements arise in dependence on the three kinds of false imagining, and intrinsic nature cannot be contingent or dependent on another, it follows that they lack intrinsic nature and are thus not ultimately real.

3. Neither the existence nor the non-existence of the self is in any way established.
   Without that [establishment of the existence or non-existence of the self], how will there be the establishment of the existence or non-existence of the defilements?

The self is not found under ultimate analysis. It might be thought that this is equivalent to establishing the non-existence of the self. But Candrakīrti apparently takes 'establishing the non-existence of the self' to mean establishing that it is the many ultimately real, impermanent psychophysical elements such as consciousnesses that together perform the functions we mistakenly attribute to a single enduring self. And these things have likewise been shown not to ultimately exist. The bearing that this has on the existence of the defilements is discussed in the next verse.

4. So these defilements are something's, yet no such thing is established.
   Without something [to be their locus], the defilements are [defilements] of nothing whatever.

The defilements must have a locus, just as the color brought about by baking a brick has the brick as its locus. But the locus of the defilements cannot be the self, since it has been established that there is no such thing. Nor is it any of the psychophysical elements, such as consciousness, for they have likewise been shown to not ultimately exist. So the defilements lack a locus, and hence cannot be ultimately real.

5. As with the theory that [the 'I'] is one's own body [of elements], the defilements are not related to the defiled one in any of the five ways.
   As with the theory that [the 'I'] is one's own elements, the defiled one is also not related to the defilements in any of the five ways.

Candrakīrti explains that by the word *kāya*, which ordinarily means 'body', is here meant the five *skandhas* taken collectively. (For this usage see AKBh ad AK V.7, Pradhan p.281.) Thus the view known as *svakāya* is the view that the 'I' is just that collection of psychophysical elements that is one's own. Hence the 'five ways' are the five different manners in which a subject that is the source of the sense of 'I' and 'mine' could be related to the five *skandhas*. (See XXII.1-8) The 'defiled one' is the locus of the defilements, the subject that has them. The claim of verse 5ab is then that the defilements are not to be found, since they could not be identical with the subject of the defilements, they could not be distinct from it, it could not be in them, they could not be in it, and it could not be their possessor. In verse 5cd it is claimed in turn that the defiled one is likewise not to be found in any of the five ways it might be related to the defilements.

6. The good, the bad and false imagining do not occur intrinsically;
   In dependence on what good, bad and false imagining will there then be defilements?

The defilements of desire, aversion and delusion, it will be recalled, are said to arise in dependence on dubious convictions concerning the pleasant, the unpleasant, and false imaginings respectively. The argument that begins here will be that the defilements are not ultimately real because the factors on which they depend–the pleasant, the unpleasant and false imagining–are themselves not ultimately real.

7. Concerning desire, aversion and delusion, there is constructed an object of six kinds–color, sound, taste, touch, smell, and the object of inner sense (*dharma*).

Our experience of the world is, most fundamentally, the experience of colors, sounds, tastes, touches, smells, and the objects of inner sense. It is on the basis of our experience in these

six modalities that we construct objects–things that have color, taste, etc. And these objects are what we take to be pleasant or unpleasant, and about which we have false imaginings. Our taking some object to be pleasant is what gives rise to desire; our taking something to be unpleasant is what gives rise to aversion; our falsely imagining something is what gives rise to delusion. So the three defilements arise out of our experience of colors, tastes, etc.

8. They are only colors, sounds, tastes, touches, smells and objects of inner sense,
Of the form of the city of the Gandharvas, like a mirage and a dream.

For the city of the Gandharvas see VII.34. To say that the six sense objects are 'only' color, etc., is to say they are empty or devoid of intrinsic nature. They are thus things that only appear to be ultimately real, as an illusion only appears to be substantial.

9. How will their [determination] as either bad or good come to be,
When they [colors, etc.] are like the image of an illusory person and the same as a [mere] reflection?

The object that is taken to be pleasant or unpleasant cannot be constructed if the construction materials–the raw data of sense experience–are themselves not ultimately real.

10. Independent of the good there is no bad, [the bad being that] depending on which we conceive of the good; therefore the good itself cannot be.

The good and the bad are, Candrakīrti says, like the two banks of a river, the long and the short, etc.; the one exists only through relation to the other.

11. Independent of the bad there is no good, [the good being that] depending on which we conceive of the bad; therefore the bad itself cannot be.

12. And the good being unreal, how will desire come to be?
The bad also being unreal, how will aversion come to be?

We take things to be good and bad only by virtue of relations of mutual contrast. Hence nothing is intrinsically good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant. But desire is a volition to acquire that which is pleasant, while aversion is a volition to avoid that which is unpleasant. So in order for desire and aversion to be ultimately real, there must be those things that are intrinsically pleasant and unpleasant. Given the nature of the pleasant and unpleasant, neither desire nor aversion can ultimately arise.

13. If it would be a false conceiving to think that impermanent things are permanent,
Then, there being nothing that is impermanent with regard to what is empty, how can there be a false conceiving?

The false imaginings are those basic ways of thinking that lead to the wholesale delusion that keeps us in *saṃsāra*. These include, most importantly, the tendency to take what is in fact impermanent as permanent. In order for it to be ultimately true that such a belief is a false imagining, it would have to be the case that there are ultimately real things that are impermanent. For it could be ultimately true that it is a false imagining only if this way of conceiving of things failed to correspond to their real nature–only if it were ultimately false that things are permanent. But if all things are indeed empty or devoid of intrinsic nature, then there are no ultimately real things that could be impermanent. So the tendency to take things as permanent would not fail to conform to the nature of what is ultimately real. So it could not ultimately be a false imagining.

14. If it would be a false conceiving to think that impermanent things are permanent,
Then, things being empty, isn't conceiving that things are impermanent also false?

The tendency to take things as permanent is thought to be a false imagining because it is thought to be ultimately true that all things are impermanent. But given that all things are empty, the belief that all things are impermanent equally fails to correspond to the nature of things. So it too should count as a false imagining. But something can count as a false imagining only if there is something that would count as a correct account of how things are. And there is no third possibility here apart from things being permanent or impermanent. So there can ultimately be no false imagining.

15. That by means of which one conceives, the conceiving, the conceiver and what is conceived,
All those things have been extinguished, hence there is no conceiving.

The instrument, the action, the agent and the effect of conceiving are all empty or devoid of intrinsic nature. That is, these are revealed to be no more than concepts with no real referents. Once our tendency to think of instrument, action, etc., as ultimately real is extinguished, we come to see that there can likewise not ultimately be any such thing as conceiving.

16. And there being no conceiving, whether wrong or correct,
Who could have erroneous conceiving, who could have non-erroneous conceiving?

Since conceiving is not ultimately real, neither wrong conceiving nor correct conceiving is ultimately real. Moreover, both erroneous and non-erroneous thought are generally believed to require a thinker. Quite apart from the fact that we are unable to find a subject for the defilements (v.3-4), there is a new worry with respect to true and false beliefs: Is the subject of, for instance, a false belief someone who has already fallen into error, someone who has

not yet fallen into error, or someone presently falling into error? This is the topic of the next two verses.

17. False conceivings are not possible in the case of one who has already falsely conceived;
Nor are false conceivings possible in the case of someone who has not yet falsely conceived.

18. False conceivings are not possible in the case of one who is presently falsely conceiving;
Examine it yourself: false conceivings are possible for whom?

As *Akutobhayā* points out, the argument here parallels that of Chapter II concerning the gone-to, the not-yet-gone-to and present going. For the one who is already in error about impermanence, the error concerning impermanence cannot arise for the simple reason that it already exists. One who is not in error about the impermanent cannot be the one who makes the error, for then error would pertain to those who are enlightened and see things correctly. As for the third possibility, Candrakīrti points out that this asks us to imagine someone who is half wrong and half right. Leaving aside the fact that this could be true only of something with parts (and hence something that is not ultimately real), there is the difficulty that neither part could be the one that is in error, for the reasons just given.

19. How will unarisen false conceivings ever come to be?
False conceivings being unproduced, how can there be one who has arrived at a false conceiving?

20. An entity is not born from itself, not born from what is other,
Not born from both itself and the other; hence how can there be the one who has arrived at a false conceiving?

Here is yet another difficulty for the hypothesis that there ultimately exists such a thing as false imagining. The one who has gone wrong presumably did not always suffer from the particular error that they are now committing. This means their error must have been produced. But then the conclusion of Chapter I applies to this case: real things cannot be said to arise from themselves, from what is other, etc. So there can be no arising of error in the one who is thought to have gone wrong, which is absurd.

21. If the self, purity, permanence and happiness existed,
Then [belief in] the self, purity, permanence and happiness would not be false.

22. If the self, purity, permanence and happiness do not exist,
Then non-self, impurity, impermanence, and suffering do not exist.

What makes, for instance, the belief that there is a self erroneous, a case of false imagining, is that it is not the case that there is a self. If there were a self, then this belief would not be erroneous. Its being erroneous, however, is the consequence of the fact that all things are empty. Thus it does not follow that its being erroneous stems from its being ultimately true that there is no self. For if all things are empty, then 'There is no self' cannot be ultimately true. If all things are empty, then no statement about reality can be ultimately true.

23. Ignorance is thus ceased because of the cessation of false conceivings.
Ignorance having ceased, the volitions/dispositions [that cause rebirth] etc., are ceased.

One can escape *saṃsāra* without coming to take certain statements as giving the ultimate truth about the nature of reality. The ignorance that is said to be the principal cause of bondage to *saṃsāra* can be stopped through coming to see the emptiness of all things. For this insight undermines false imaginings without replacing them with beliefs that are held to be ultimately true (such as 'There is no self').

24. If someone had some defilements that were intrinsically real,
How would they be destroyed? Who destroys intrinsic essence?

25. If someone had some defilements that were intrinsically unreal,
How would they be destroyed? Who destroys the non-existent?

It is thought that one attains liberation from *saṃsāra* by uprooting and destroying the defilements. The claim here is that this cannot be ultimately true. For either the defilements are intrinsically real (i.e., have their intrinsic nature), or else they are intrinsically unreal (i.e., are unreal by failing to have their intrinsic nature). But intrinsic nature cannot be destroyed. Candrakīrti gives the example of space, whose nature of non-obstruction can never be lost. But it is likewise impossible to destroy that which is intrinsically unreal. The example here is fire: since a cold fire does not exist, it is impossible to destroy such a fire by removing the property of cold from it. Hence it cannot be ultimately true that the defilements are destroyed.

Note, however, that this does not mean the defilements cannot be made to cease. Recall that in v.23 it was said that ignorance can be stopped. This would seem to apply to the defilements as well. If so, then the Mādhyamika would be drawing a distinction between saying, 'Defilements are ultimately destroyed' and saying, 'Defilements are destroyed'. The distinction would be that the former statement requires that there be ultimately real defilements, while the latter does not. To put the point in a slightly different way, the Mādhyamika could claim that while the statement 'Defilements are destroyed' cannot be ultimately true (or ultimately false either), it is conventionally true.

XXIV. AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOBLE TRUTHS

The subject of this chapter is the Buddha's teaching known as the Four Noble Truths. In the first six verses the opponent objects that if, as Nāgārjuna claims, all is indeed empty, then this teaching, as well as all that follows from it, are put in jeopardy. In replying, Nāgārjuna first claims that the opponent has misunderstood the purport of the doctrine of emptiness. He then seeks to turn the tables on the opponent and show that what would actually jeopardize the Buddha's teachings is denying emptiness, or affirming that there are things with intrinsic nature.

1. [Objection:] If all this is empty, there is neither origination nor cessation.
   It follows for you that there is the non-existence of the four noble truths.

If all is empty, then there is nothing that is ultimately real. In that case it cannot be ultimately true that things such as suffering undergo origination and destruction. But the second noble truth claims that suffering arises in dependence on causes and conditions, while the third noble truth claims that suffering ceases when these causes and conditions are stopped. So if all things are empty, these claims cannot be ultimately true.

2. Comprehension [of the truth of suffering], abandonment [of attachment, the cause of suffering], practice [of the path to the cessation of suffering]
   and personal realization [of the cessation of suffering, i.e., *nirvāṇa*]–
   None of these is possible due to non-existence of the four noble truths.

The four activities mentioned here represent the basic constituents of the Buddha's Path or program leading to the cessation of suffering. The opponent is here claiming that these could lead to that result only if the four noble truths represent an accurate assessment of the fundamental nature of reality. So the doctrine of emptiness would entail that the Buddha's teachings are not effective.

3. And due to the non-existence of those, the four noble fruits [of stream-winner, once-returner, never-returner, and *arhat*] do not exist.
   If the fruits are non-existent, then there are neither the strivers for nor the attainers of those fruits.

If the Path does not lead to the cessation of suffering, then no one has ever strived for or attained any of the four states of stream-winner, etc. (These represent different degrees of proximity to final cessation or exhaustion of rebirth.)

4. The Saṃgha does not exist if the eight kinds of person do not exist.

And because of the non-existence of the noble truths, the true Dharma does not exist either.

The eight kinds of person are the four types of strivers for the fruits mentioned in v.3, and the four kinds of attainers of those fruits. The Saṃgha is the collective body made up of all eight kinds of persons. The Dharma is the teachings of the Buddha.

5. Dharma and Saṃgha being non-existent, how will a buddha come to be?
In this way you deny all three jewels when you proclaim

6. Emptiness; you deny the real existence of the [karmic] fruit, both good and bad [actions],
And all worldly modes of conduct.

The three jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṃgha. The existence of a buddha is dependent on the existence of Dharma and Saṃgha. A buddha is someone who, having discovered the Dharma (the causes of and cure for suffering), teaches it to others and thus forms the Saṃgha. So if, as verses 1-4 claim, Dharma and Saṃgha do not exist if all is empty, then a buddha likewise cannot exist if all things are empty.

Good and bad conduct are actions that lead to pleasant and painful fruits respectively. Worldly modes of conduct include such mundane activities as cooking, eating, coming and going. All are denied, claims the opponent, if it is held that all *dharmas* are empty. The reasoning is that since nothing whatever could exist if all is empty, there can be no good and bad conduct, etc.

7. [Reply:] Here we say that you do not understand the point of [teaching] emptiness,
Emptiness itself, and the meaning of emptiness; thus you are frustrated.

Candrakīrti comments that the opponent's objection is based on their mistakenly imposing on the doctrine of emptiness their own nihilist reading–that to say all things lack intrinsic nature is to say nothing whatever exists. He also states that the true purpose of teaching emptiness is that given in XVIII.5: the extinguishing of hypostatization.

8. The Dharma-teaching of the Buddha rests on two truths:
Conventional truth and ultimate truth.

The term we translate as 'conventional' is a compound made of the two words *loka* and *saṃvṛti*. Candrakīrti gives three distinct etymologies for *saṃvṛti*. On one etymology, the root meaning is that of concealing, so conventional truth would be all those ways of thinking and speaking that conceal the real state of affairs from ordinary people (*loka*). The second explains the term to mean mutual dependency. On the third etymology, the term refers to conventions involved in customary practices of the world, the customs governing the daily

conduct of ordinary people (*loka*). He adds that this *saṃvṛti* is of the nature of (the relation between) term and referent, cognition and the cognized, etc. So on this understanding, conventional truth is a set of beliefs that ordinary people (*loka*) use in their daily conduct, and it is conventional (*saṃvṛti*) because of its reliance on conventions concerning semantic and cognitive relations. It may be worth noting that when Indian commentators give multiple explanations of a term, it is often the last one given that they favor.

Akutobhayā explains that the ultimate truth is the faultless realization of the noble ones (*āryas*), namely that no dharmas whatever arise. There are two ways that this might be understood. The first is that according to Madhyamaka, reality is ultimately such as not to contain anything whatever that arises. (And since Buddhists generally agree that there are no eternal entities, this would mean that reality is such as to contain no entities whatever.) The realization of emptiness would then be insight into the true character of reality: that it is utterly devoid of existing entities. According to the second possible interpretation, the ultimate truth according to Madhyamaka is just that there is no such thing as the way that reality ultimately is. Or to put this in a somewhat paradoxical way, the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth. On this reading, what the *āryas* realize is that the very idea of how things really are, independently of our (useful) semantic and cognitive conventions, is incoherent.

9. Who do not know the distinction of the two truths,
   They do not understand the profound reality in the teachings of the Buddha.

Candrakīrti has the opponent raise an interesting question for the Mādhyamika at this point:

> Suppose that the ultimate truth is indeed without the hypostatization of intrinsic nature. Then what is the point of those other teachings concerning the *skandhas, dhātus*, *āyatanas*, noble truths, dependent origination and the rest, none of them ultimately true? What is not true should be rejected, so why was what should be rejected taught? (LVP p.494)

Candrakīrti replies that the opponent is right about the status of the Buddha's teachings, that they are not ultimately true. But the next verse answers the question.

10. The ultimate [truth] is not taught independently of customary practice.
    Not having acquired the ultimate [truth], *nirvāṇa* is not attained.

The 'customary practice' (*vyavahāra*) referred to here is the everyday practices of ordinary people, what we think of as 'common sense'. These represent ways of getting around in the world that have proven useful, in that they generally lead to success in meeting people's goals. As the basis of our common-sense beliefs, they can be equated with conventional

truth. So v.10ab is asserting that ultimate truth cannot be taught without reliance on conventional truth. Candrakīrti likens conventional truth to the cup that a thirsty person must use in order to satisfy their need for water.

The reply to the above objection is thus that ultimate truth cannot be realized without first having mastered the conventional truth that the person is a fiction constructed on the basis of *skandhas*, etc., in relations of dependent origination. The *skandhas*, etc., are themselves conceptual constructions, but they turn out to be useful for purposes of realizing the ultimate truth. And without such realization, *nirvāṇa* is not attained. In short, what Abhidharma takes to be the ultimate truth turns out, on the Madhyamaka understanding, to be merely conventionally true.

11. Emptiness misunderstood destroys the slow-witted,
Like a serpent wrongly held, or a spell wrongly executed.

As novice snake-handlers and apprentice sorcerers can attest, serpents and magic spells are dangerous instruments in the hands of those who lack the requisite knowledge. The same is said to be true of emptiness. Candrakīrti discusses two ways in which the 'slow-witted' can go astray. The first involves seeing emptiness as the non-existence of all conditioned things, while the second involves supposing that emptiness is a really existing thing with a real locus. Both errors stem from failing to understand the distinction between the two truths, and both can destroy one's chances of liberation.

12. Hence the Sage's intention to teach the Dharma was turned back,
Realizing the difficulty, for the slow, of penetration of this Dharma.

It is said that the Buddha, after attaining enlightenment, hesitated before embarking on the career of a buddha–teaching others the Dharma he had discovered so that they too could attain the cessation of suffering. His hesitation was due to his realization that the Dharma is complex and difficult to grasp. In the end, it is said, it was the intercession of the gods that convinced him to take up his teaching career.

13. Moreover, the objection which you make concerning emptiness
Cannot be a faulty consequence for us or for emptiness.

By 'the objection' is meant what was stated in v.1-6. The opponent is apparently among the 'slow-witted', for they are said to have failed to grasp emptiness, its meaning and its purpose. For this reason their objection goes wide of the mark.

14. All is possible when emptiness is possible.
Nothing is possible when emptiness is impossible.

By 'all' is here meant the central teachings of Buddhism, which the opponent claimed the Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness jeopardized. Candrakīrti explains that for instance when it is acknowledged that everything is devoid of intrinsic nature, then dependent origination becomes possible, and this in turn makes possible the Buddha's account of the origin and cessation of suffering. To deny that all things are empty, on the other hand, is tantamount to claiming that there are existing things that are not dependently originated, and this undermines Buddhism's core tenets.

15. You, throwing your own faults on us,
    Are like the person who, being mounted on a horse, forgets the horse.

It is the opponent, and not the Mādhyamika, whose view calls into question the Buddha's Dharma. The opponent is thus like someone who is desperately searching for a horse to ride, all the while forgetting that they are seated on a horse.

16. If you look upon existents as real intrinsically,
    In that case you regard existents as being without cause and conditions.

17. Effect and cause, as well as agent, instrument and act,
    Arising and ceasing, and fruit–all these you [thereby] deny.

If things have intrinsic nature, then they cannot originate in dependence on causes and conditions. This in turn means that none of the components of the causal relation–cause, effect, etc.–can exist. For the arguments meant to show that things with intrinsic nature could not undergo dependent origination see Chapters XII, XV and XX.

18. Dependent origination we declare to be emptiness.
    It is a dependent concept, just that is the middle path.

This is the most celebrated verse of the work, but some care is required in understanding it. Candrakīrti explains that when something like a sprout or a consciousness originates in dependence on causes and conditions (respectively the seed being in warm moist soil, and there being contact between sense faculty and object), its so doing means that it arises without intrinsic nature. And anything that arises without intrinsic nature is empty or devoid of intrinsic nature. On this understanding of 18ab, emptiness is not the same thing as dependent origination, it is rather something that follows from dependent origination. Anything that is dependently originated must be empty, but this leaves it open whether there are empty things that are not dependently originated.

To say of emptiness that it is a dependent concept is to say that it is like the chariot, a mere conceptual fiction. Since the chariot is a mere conceptual fiction because it lacks

intrinsic nature (it is only conceived of in dependence on its parts, so its nature is wholly borrowed from its parts), it would then follow that emptiness is likewise without intrinsic nature. That is, emptiness is itself empty. Emptiness is not an ultimately real entity, nor a property of ultimately real entities. Emptiness is no more than a useful way of conceptualizing experience. On this point see also XIII.7, XVIII.11.

For the notion of the Buddha's teachings as a middle path, see XV.7. To call emptiness the middle path is to say that it avoids the two extreme views of being and non-being. It avoids the extreme view of being by denying that there are ultimately real existents, things with intrinsic nature. But at the same time it avoids the extreme view of non-being by denying that ultimate reality is characterized by the absence of being. It is able to avoid both extremes because it denies that there is such a thing as the ultimate nature of reality.

19. There being no *dharma* whatever that is not dependently originated,
It follows that there is no *dharma* whatever that is non-empty.

Candrakīrti quotes Āryadeva to this effect:

> Never is there anywhere the existence of anything that is not dependently originated,
> Hence never is there anything anywhere that is eternal. (CŚ 9.2)
>
> Space and the like are thought to be permanent by ordinary people,
> But the clear-sighted do not see [external] objects in them even by their purified worldly cognition. (CŚ 9.3)

While common sense, as well as many non-Buddhist philosophers, holds that space is a real, eternal entity, most (though not all) Buddhists deny this. (See Candrakīrti's commentary on CŚ 9.5 for a representative argument against the reality of space.) But note that there is no argument given here to establish that all *dharmas* originate in dependence on causes and conditions. So the present argument for the conclusion that all things are empty seems to rely on our having already accepted the premise that everything ultimately real is dependently originated.

20. If all this is non-empty, there is neither coming into nor going out of existence.
It follows for you that there is the non-existence of the four noble truths.

Nāgārjuna here begins to make good on his claim in v.13-14 that it is the opponent's view and not the Mādhyamika's that undermines the basic teachings of Buddhism. In v.1 the opponent charged that emptiness falsified the four noble truths. The response here is that if things were non-empty or had intrinsic nature then they would be eternal. The next five verses spell out how this would falsify each of the four noble truths.

21. How will suffering come to be if it is not dependently originated?
    Indeed the impermanent was declared to be suffering, it does not exist if there is intrinsic nature.

The first noble truth is the claim that there is suffering. But the Buddha also said that suffering is due to impermanence. And that which has intrinsic nature, and so is not dependently originated, must be permanent. So if what is real has intrinsic nature, then suffering does not really exist.

22. How will something that exists intrinsically arise again?
    Therefore the arising [of suffering] does not exist for one who denies emptiness.

The second noble truth concerns how it is that suffering arises in dependence on causes and conditions. But if suffering were a real entity with intrinsic nature, then it would have existed from all past eternity. Hence causes and conditions could only bring about a second arising of suffering. And it is agreed by all that existing things do not undergo a second coming into existence. Thus the denial of emptiness entails the rejection of the second noble truth.

23. There is no cessation of a suffering that exists intrinsically.
    You deny cessation through your maintaining intrinsic nature.

The third noble truth claims that there is also such a thing as the cessation of suffering. But things with intrinsic nature do not undergo cessation. So this noble truth must also be rejected if emptiness is denied.

24. There is no practice of a path that exists intrinsically.
    But if this path is practiced, then there is none of your intrinsic nature.

The fourth noble truth claims there is a path to the cessation of suffering. This path consists in a variety of practices that are said to result in the attainment of *nirvāṇa*. But practices involve conduct, and conduct involves change: to practice meditation, for instance, one must begin meditating at a certain time and then cease at another time. If things existed with intrinsic nature, then those things could not change in such ways. So the view that things exist with intrinsic nature entails that there can be no path. If, on the other hand, there really is a path, then it cannot be true that things exist with intrinsic nature.

25. When there is neither suffering nor the arising and cessation [of suffering],
    Then because [*nirvāṇa*] is the cessation of suffering, what path will lead to it?

Moreover, a path cannot lead to a non-existent destination. And if suffering has intrinsic nature, it can neither arise nor cease. So no path could lead to the cessation of suffer-

ing. Hence the promise of the fourth noble truth is once again called into question by the opponent's thesis.

26. If the non-comprehension [of suffering] is intrinsic, how will there later be its Comprehension?
Isn't an intrinsic nature said to be immutable?

The opponent claimed in v.2 that the four constituent activities of the path would not exist if all things were empty. The first of those is comprehension of suffering and its causes. The present argument is that if the opponent were right that things have intrinsic natures, then the comprehension of suffering could not occur. To say that such comprehension takes place is to say that at one time suffering has the nature of not being comprehended, and at a later time it has the nature of being comprehended. But if the natures of things are intrinsic, then their natures cannot undergo change. So either suffering is never comprehended or else it is always comprehended. In either case there cannot be the activity of coming to comprehend its nature and causes.

27. In the same manner abandonment, personal realization and practice,
Like comprehension, are impossible for you; so too the four fruits.

Abandonment, personal realization and contemplative practice were the other three of the four activities mentioned by the opponent in v.2. The same considerations that ruled out an activity of comprehension also apply to these three, so all four components of the path turn out to be impossible under the opponent's supposition that real things have intrinsic nature. The four fruits are the results of these activities. In v.3 the opponent argued that in the absence of the four activities there cannot be the four fruits. Nāgārjuna agrees, but uses this as a reason to reject not emptiness but the view that there is intrinsic nature.

28. For those holding that there is intrinsic nature, if the lack of acquisition of the fruit is intrinsic, how would it be possible to acquire it later?

A fruit is something that one obtains at some particular time, not having had it at an earlier time. If there are intrinsic natures, then the nature of not having a certain fruit (such as being an *arhat*) would be intrinsic. But then whatever had that nature could not come to have the quite different nature of acquiring the fruit. So once again there could not be the four fruits.

29. If the fruits are non-existent, then there are neither the strivers after nor the attainers of those fruits.
The Saṃgha does not exist if the eight kinds of person do not exist.

30. And because of the non-existence of the noble truths, the true Dharma does not exist either.
    Dharma and Saṃgha being non-existent, how will a Buddha come to be?

Nāgārjuna here simply repeats the charges of the opponent in v.3cd-5ab. Only now of course the charges are directed not at the proponent of emptiness but at those who hold there are things with intrinsic nature.

31. And it follows for you that there can even be a buddha not dependent on enlightenment.
    It follows for you as well that there can even be enlightenment not dependent on a buddha.

If the state of being a buddha is intrinsic, then having that state cannot be dependent on other factors, such as attaining enlightenment. Likewise if being enlightened is an intrinsic nature, then its occurrence cannot depend on the existence of anything else, such as an enlightened being. Hence it should be possible for enlightenment to exist all by itself, without any locus.

32. One who is unenlightened by intrinsic nature, though they strive for enlightenment,
    Will not attain enlightenment in the course of the bodhisattva's practice.

The bodhisattva is someone who, while unenlightened, aspires to become a buddha and seeks to attain that status by engaging in the practices necessary to accumulate the requisite skills. Such conduct would be pointless if such natures as being unenlightened were intrinsic. Hence no one could ever become a buddha.

33. Moreover, no one will ever perform either good or bad [actions].
    What is there that is to be done with regard to the non-empty? For [what has] intrinsic nature is not done.

In v.6 the opponent accused the Mādhyamika of removing all reason to engage in any sort of conduct, whether good or bad. Here the response is that if there is intrinsic nature then there can be no reason to perform any action. To perform an action–to do something–is to bring about a state of affairs that did not obtain earlier. If things have intrinsic nature, then any state of affairs that does not obtain at one time must retain that nature through all time. So our conduct could not result in something being done (whether it be good or bad).

34. For you, indeed, there is fruit [even] without good or bad [actions],
    For you there is no fruit conditioned by good or bad [actions].

If things exist with intrinsic nature, then such karmic fruits as rebirth into pleasant and painful states cannot depend for their occurrence on performance of good and bad deeds. For anything that exists with intrinsic nature has its nature independently of other things. So although we may want to obtain pleasant fruits and avoid painful fruits, doing the right and shunning the evil will not be of any use in this regard.

35. Or if, for you, the fruit is conditioned by good or bad [actions],
    How is it that for you the fruit, being originated from good or bad [actions], is
        non-empty?

To say that fruit is determined by good or bad actions is to say that fruit originates in dependence on such conduct. And if everything dependently originated is devoid of intrinsic nature (as was claimed in v.18), it follows that fruit cannot be non-empty, be something that has intrinsic nature. So the opponent cannot maintain both that fruit is determined by good and bad actions and that fruit is non-empty.

36. You also deny all worldly modes of conduct
    When you deny emptiness as dependent origination.

By 'worldly modes of conduct' is meant just those basic activities that go to make up the behavior of our everyday lives. Candrakīrti lists coming, going, cooking, reading, and standing as examples. Since these are also dependently originated, their occurrence is incompatible with the claim that things are non-empty or have intrinsic nature.

37. There would be nothing whatever that was to be done, action would be uncommenced,
    The agent would not act, given the denial of emptiness.

To say of an action that it should be done is to say that it should be caused to occur. This can be true only if actions can originate in dependence on causes and conditions. If real things have intrinsic nature, then they do not originate in dependence on cause and conditions. Hence if real things are non-empty there can be nothing that is to be done. Similar reasoning leads to the conclusions that no action can commence or begin, and that nothing can be an agent of an action.

38. The world would be unproduced, unceased, and unchangeable,
    It would be devoid of its manifold appearances if there were intrinsic nature.

It is a fundamental fact about our experience that the world presents itself in a variety of different ways. The claim here is that this fact would be inexplicable if there were intrinsic nature. For then new states of the world could not come into existence, and old states could not go out of existence. The world could not undergo any change in how it appears to us.

39. The obtaining of that which is not yet obtained, activity to end suffering,
    The abandonment of all the defilements, none of these exists if all this is non-empty.

It is not only worldly conduct that is undermined by the view that things have intrinsic nature. Conduct meant to bring about the end of suffering is likewise threatened. The reasoning is the same as in v.36-8. If, for instance, the defilements (see XVII.26) are not abandoned at an earlier time, nothing one can do can bring it about that they are abandoned later.

40. He who sees dependent origination sees this:
    Suffering, arising, cessation and the path.

The four noble truths are referred to as the truths of (1) suffering, (2) arising (of suffering), (3) cessation (of suffering), and (4) the path (to the cessation of suffering). So the claim here is that one cannot understand the four noble truths without understanding dependent origination. Of course most Buddhists would agree with this claim. But in the present context, it means that one cannot grasp the four noble truths without recognizing that all things are empty.

XXV. AN ANALYSIS OF *NIRVĀṆA*

1. [Objection:] If all this is empty, there is neither coming into nor going out of existence.
    Due to abandonment or cessation of what is *nirvāṇa* then acknowledged?

The opponent raises another objection to the claim that everything is empty. If this were true, then there could ultimately be neither the arising nor the disappearance of phenomena. This much Nāgārjuna has already asserted in I.1. But in that case, it seems there could be no such thing as *nirvāṇa*. For *nirvāṇa* is said to be of two types, with and without remainder. The former involves abandonment of the defilements, so that cessation of rebirth is assured, but still involves psychophysical elements resulting from past karma, so one is still embodied. The latter comes about when one's karma is exhausted, so that the causal series of psychophysical elements is destroyed. Both involve cessation. The former involves the cessation of false views of an existing 'I', while the latter involves cessation of the psychophysical elements. If neither arising nor cessation ultimately occurs, then it seems one cannot attain either form of *nirvāṇa*, since both require the arising and cessation of really existing things. Consequently the claim that all is empty is incompatible with the teachings of the Buddha.

2. [Reply:] If all is non-empty, there is neither arising nor cessation.
    Due to abandonment or cessation of what is *nirvāṇa* then acknowledged?

To this Nāgārjuna replies that if we instead believe there are things that are non-empty then we shall be unable to explain how *nirvāṇa* is possible. For then arising and cessation are impossible. Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti both explain that this is because something that has intrinsic nature (and hence is non-empty) cannot undergo origination or destruction. This reply might appear to be a *tu quoque*. But Candrakīrti states that those who hold the doctrine of emptiness do not have this difficulty. And Bhāvaviveka says all sides agree to the conventional truth of the claim that *nirvāṇa* is attained. Since he thinks the only truths Mādhyamikas may assert (apart from the doctrine of emptiness) are conventional truths, this means he also believes they can escape the objection of the opponent. The reason for this will emerge in the remainder of the chapter.

3. Not abandoned, not acquired, not annihilated, not eternal,
   Not destroyed, unarisen, thus is *nirvāṇa* said to be.

In his comments, Candrakīrti quotes a verse attributed to the Buddha to the effect that when all phenomena have ceased, then the notions of 'exists' and 'does not exist' are impediments to the cessation of suffering. Related ideas are to be found in the *Nikāyas*. In the *Aggi-Vacchagotta Sutta* (*Majjima Nikāya* I.483), the Buddha says that since the enlightened person has cut off all roots of rebirth, one cannot say of the post-mortem enlightened person that they will be reborn, that they will not be reborn, etc. (There being no such person, the question simply does not arise.) And in the *Kaccāyanagotta-sutta* (*Samyutta Nikāya* 2.17, 3.134f) the Buddha says that 'exists' and 'does not exist' are equally inappropriate extreme views. (Nāgārjuna referred to this sūtra in XV.7.) Putting together the thoughts expressed in these two passages, one can perhaps say the following about 'final' *nirvāṇa* (cessation without remainder). Since the causes of further rebirth have ceased, the liberated one will not be reborn; the causal series of psychophysical elements that constitutes one's life-series will come to an end at death. So one cannot say that the liberated one exists after death. This is often taken to mean that 'final' *nirvāṇa* amounts to utter annihilation, that the liberated one does not exist after death. And of course this makes *nirvāṇa* sound distinctly unappealing to many. But on the view being presented in these sūtra passages, that response would be mistaken. Since there is no owner of the elements making up the causal series, it would be inappropriate to describe the ceasing of the causal series as 'I will not exist'. Hence neither 'exists' nor 'does not exist' can be said.

This much virtually all Buddhist schools would probably agree on. But Nāgārjuna has something deeper in mind. What that might be will emerge in the remainder of the chapter. Nāgārjuna conducts his examination by considering whether *nirvāṇa* might be an existent (i.e., a positive being, *bhāva*), an absence (a negative being, *abhāva*), both or neither. In this he is following the standard logical format of the *catuṣkoṭi* or tetralemma.

4. *Nirvāṇa* is not, on the one hand, an existent; [if it were,] its having the characteristics of old age and death
   Would follow, for there is no existent devoid of old age and death.

It is an orthodoxy for Buddhists that all existents are characterized by suffering, impermanence and non-self. These are said to be the three universal characteristics of existing things. Being subject to old age and death is the standard specification of what it means for something to be impermanent. This specification is also meant to bring out a connection between impermanence and suffering, since it is universally acknowledged that old age and death are unwelcome phenomena. Because *nirvāṇa* is supposed to be the cessation of suffering, it follows that it could not be characterized by old age and death.

5. And if *nirvāṇa* were an existent, *nirvāṇa* would be conditioned,
   For never is there found any existent that is not conditioned.

The argument here is that all existents are subject to origination, duration and cessation. So if *nirvāṇa* were an existent it would likewise be subject to origination, duration and cessation. This is obviously incompatible with the claim that *nirvāṇa* represents the permanent cessation of suffering. There were Abhidharma schools that included in their list of *dharmas* or ultimate reals certain unconditioned *dharmas*. The Vaibhāṣikas, for instance, held that space and the two types of cessation were ultimately real unconditioned entities. It can, however, be claimed that these are not to be thought of as existents but rather as absences, so their inclusion does not conflict with the claim that all existents are conditioned. Space, for instance, is defined as what lacks resistance. But see V.2 above, where the example of space is brought under a general rule that is said to hold for all existents (*bhāva*).

6. And if *nirvāṇa* were an existent, how could one say that *nirvāṇa* is non-dependent?
   For never is there found any existent that is non-dependent.

The motivation behind calling *nirvāṇa* non-dependent is presumably that this is the only way of insuring that it represents a permanent cessation of suffering. If it were said to depend on conditions, then its continuation would be contingent on those conditions continuing to obtain. The difficulty with calling *nirvāṇa* non-dependent, though, is that this conflicts with the Buddhist orthodoxy that every existing thing originates in dependence on causes and conditions.

7. If *nirvāṇa* is not a [positive] existent, how will *nirvāṇa* be an absence?
   Where there is no existent, there is no absence.

According to Bhāvaviveka, the argument here is directed at the Sautrāntikas, who held that *nirvāṇa* is a mere absence. Candrakīrti identifies the target as the view that *nirvāṇa* is the

absence of the defilements and birth. The argument against this is, according to Candrakīrti, that then *nirvāṇa* would be just as impermanent as defilements and birth are. To this it might be objected that *nirvāṇa* would still have the sort of permanence that is desired; while it would have a beginning in time, it would not have an end. But Candrakīrti claims the view leads to the absurd consequence that *nirvāṇa* could be attained effortlessly: since each occurrence of a defilement or of birth is impermanent (like everything else), it ceases regardless of effort. Thus the absence of each defilement and birth will occur regardless of whether or not one strives to attain *nirvāṇa*.

8. And if *nirvāṇa* is an absence, how can one say *nirvāṇa* is non-dependent?
   There is no absence which exists without dependence.

If we suppose there to be such a thing as an absence, then we must say that its occurrence is dependent on other things, namely those things of which it is the absence. The Nyāya school puts this in terms of their rule: no absence without an existing counter-positive. By this rule there cannot be such a thing as the absence of the horns of a hare, since the horns of a hare do not exist. (There can, though, be the absence of horns from the head of a hare.) But this makes the occurrence of an absence contingent on its counter-positive existing at some place or time. So if the opponent calls *nirvāṇa* an absence, this once again contradicts their claim that *nirvāṇa* is non-dependent.

9. That coming and going in and out of existence that is dependent or conditioned,
   Not being conditioned or dependent, is referred to as *nirvāṇa*.

Candrakīrti explains that by 'coming into and going out of existence' is meant the state of coming and going through a succession of births and deaths. Such a state arises on the basis of the conditions of ignorance, etc., as light arises in dependence on the lamp, and it is conceptualized in dependence on the psycho-physical elements, as the long is conceived in dependence on the short. *Nirvāṇa* is said not to be conditioned by ignorance, etc., or not to be conceptualized in dependence on the psycho-physical elements. In that case it, being the mere non-occurrence of conditioning through ignorance, or the mere non-occurrence of conceptual dependence on the psychophysical elements, cannot be said to be either an existent or an absence. The argument is apparently that if what arises dependent on ignorance and what is conceptualized in dependence on other things is not itself ultimately real, then the state resulting from non-occurrence of these factors can be thought of as neither an ultimately real existent nor an ultimately real absence.

10. And the teacher declared the abandonment of being and non-being.
    Thus it is not correct to call *nirvāṇa* an existent or an absence.

The Buddha taught that the cessation of suffering is not to be found through identifying with something that continues to exist forever, but neither is to be found in trying to bring about one's utter non-existence. The Buddha's 'middle path' between these two extremes of being and non-being, or eternalism and annihilationism, involves rejecting their common assumption: that there is an 'I' that might either continue to exist or else come to be non-existent, an 'I' that might either be or not-be. It is the rejection of this common assumption that is here described as 'the abandonment of being and non-being'. But to call *nirvāṇa* an existent is to think of it as the permanent state of someone, and thus to fall into the extreme view of being. To call *nirvāṇa* an absence is to think of it as the non-existence of someone, and thus to fall into the extreme view of non-being. So neither way of describing *nirvāṇa* is compatible with the Buddha's teaching.

11. If *nirvāṇa* were both an existent and an absence,
    Then liberation would be an absence and an existent, and that is not correct.

Akutobhayā points out that there is mutual incompatibility between the existence of something and its absence occurring at the same time. Candrakīrti adds that liberation would then be both the arising of composite things and their ending. The same thing cannot arise and end at the same time. So one cannot say that *nirvāṇa* is both an existent and an absence.

12. If *nirvāṇa* were both an existent and an absence,
    Then *nirvāṇa* would not be non-dependent, for it would depend on both.

If *nirvāṇa* is to be ultimately real, then it must be non-dependent, i.e., something that is not named and conceptualized in dependence on other things. But a *nirvāṇa* that was both an existent and an absence would be named and conceptualized in dependence on existent composite things and on their absence. And that is clearly impossible.

13. How can *nirvāṇa* be both an existent and an absence?
    For nirvāṇa is uncomposite, and existents and absences are both composite.

For the meaning of 'composite' (*saṃskṛta*) see Chapter XIII.

14. How could *nirvāṇa* be both an existent and an absence?
    For they do not occur in the same place, just as with light and darkness.

Since darkness is the absence of light, to say that *nirvāṇa* is both a positive existent and an absence is like saying that there can occur both light and darkness in the same place at

the same time. The commentators have already said in commenting on v.11 and v.12 that existence and absence are mutually incompatible. Nāgārjuna explicitly makes that point here with the example of light and darkness.

15. The assertion '*Nirvāṇa* is neither existent nor an absence'
Is established only if there were established both absence and existent.

Verses 11-14 sought to show that the statement '*Nirvāṇa* is both an existent and an absence' cannot be ultimately true. The claim here is that from the fact that '*Nirvāṇa* is both an existent and an absence' cannot be ultimately true, it follows that the statement '*Nirvāṇa* is neither existent nor an absence' also cannot be ultimately true. This might seem to involve a logical fallacy, for the following reason. The negation of 'both p and not p' is 'either not p or not not p', which is equivalent to 'either $p$or not$p$'. But 'neither p nor not p' is the negation of 'either p or not p'. So from the negation of '*Nirvāṇa* is both an existent and an absence' it seems to follow that '*Nirvāṇa* is neither existent nor an absence' is true. What the verse says though is just the opposite, that '*Nirvāṇa* is neither existent nor an absence' cannot be true. Did Nāgārjuna get confused by the logic of 'both ____ and ____' and 'neither ____ nor ____'?

According to Candrakīrti's explanation of the argument, Nāgārjuna did not commit a logical fallacy here. The reason is that there are two ways in which a statement can fail to be ultimately true. One way is for it to be ultimately false. If p fails to be ultimately true by being ultimately false, then *not* p is ultimately true. But the other way is for p to be about something that simply does not really exist. If p is actually not about anything at all, then it can be neither ultimately true nor ultimately false, because it really has no meaning at all (at least not from the perspective of ultimate truth). In other words, in order to say that *not* p is ultimately true, we have to be able to imagine how it would be possible for p to be ultimately true. The statement p must really be about something in order to be true or to be false. And what was presumably shown in verses 11-14 is that '*Nirvāṇa* is both an existent and an absence' cannot be ultimately true; it was not shown there that this statement is ultimately false. If '*Nirvāṇa* is both an existent and an absence' cannot be ultimately true, then its negation, '*Nirvāṇa* is neither existent nor an absence', likewise cannot be ultimately true.

16. If *nirvāṇa* were found to be neither an existent nor an absence,
Then by whom is it asserted that it is neither existent nor an absence?

Again, if sense cannot be made of the idea that *nirvāṇa* is an ultimately real existent, and sense likewise cannot be made of the idea that it is an ultimately real absence, then no one can meaningfully assert that *nirvāṇa* is neither existent nor an absence. The next two verses

show that there is a Buddhist precedent for this way of rejecting all four of the lemmas under consideration in verses 4-16.

17. It is not to be asserted that the Buddha exists beyond cessation.
    Nor 'does not exist' nor 'both [exists and does not exist]', nor 'neither [exists nor does not exist]'–none of these is to be asserted.

18. Indeed it is not to be asserted that 'The Buddha exists while remaining [in this world]',
    Nor 'does not exist' nor 'both [exists and does not exist]', nor 'neither [exists nor does not exist]'– none of these is to be asserted.

As Bhāvaviveka makes explicit, the reference here is to the indeterminate questions (*avyākṛta*) discussed at *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III.112, *Majjhima Nikāya* I.483-8, and *Saṃyutta Nikāya* IV.374-402. These are questions to which it was commonly assumed an enlightened person would know the answer. They include such questions as whether the liberated person continues to exist post-mortem, whether the world is eternal, whether the life-force is identical with the body, etc. Their consideration is usually put in the form of a tetralemma: Is it that p, not p, both p and not p, or neither p nor not p? The questions are called 'indeterminate' because for each such possibility, the Buddha rejects that thesis without embracing any other. This has led some modern scholars to suppose that the Buddha does not always obey the laws of classical logic. To reject p, for instance, would seem to commit one to not p, yet the Buddha rejects this as well. But the example of the fire that has gone out (*Majjhima Nikāya* I.487-8) shows that the Buddha takes each of the four possibilities to involve a false presupposition, e.g., that there ultimately is such a thing as the Buddha who might be said to exist, not exist, etc. after cessation. Since this presupposition is false, one can reject the claim that the Buddha exists post-mortem as well as the claim that the Buddha does not exist post-mortem without violating any law of classical logic. A similar treatment would allow Nāgārjuna to avoid the charge that he contradicts himself when he says (10cd) that *nirvāṇa* is not to be called either an existent or an absence, and also (15-6) that *nirvāṇa* is not to be said to be neither an existent nor an absence.

19. There is no distinction whatever between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.
    There is no distinction whatever between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*.

20. What is the limit of *nirvāṇa*, that is the limit of *saṃsāra*.
    There is not even the finest gap to be found between the two.

The same reasoning that leads to the rejection of the four lemmas with respect to *nirvāṇa* applies as well to *saṃsāra*. Since all things are, according to Nāgārjuna, empty of intrinsic nature, it follows that ultimately there is no such state as *saṃsāra*. For in order for *saṃsāra*

to be something about which ultimately true claims could be made, there would have to be ultimately real mental forces that could produce it. And if all things are empty, then there are no mental forces that are ultimately real. Consequently one cannot say that ultimately *saṃsāra* exists, does not exist, etc. Note, however, that this says nothing about the conventional status of *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*. A Mādhyamika can still hold it to be conventionally true that *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* are very different states, that the former should be sought while the latter should be stopped, etc.

21. The views concerning [what is] beyond cessation, the end [of the world], and the eternality [of the world]
Are dependent [respectively] on *nirvāṇa*, the future and the past.

Among the indeterminate questions the Buddha refused to answer are questions concerning whether there is a state of being following cessation of composite things, whether the world is limited in space, and whether the world has limits in time. These questions all presuppose one or another answer to the question whether *nirvāṇa* has a beginning and an end. The argument of Chapter XI was to the effect that there can be no prior and posterior parts of *saṃsāra*. And in that chapter it was claimed that the same analysis applies to all supposed existents. (See XI.8.) Here its application to the case of *nirvāṇa* is being utilized.

22. All dharmas being empty, what is without end, what has an end?
What is both with and without end, what is neither without end nor having an end?

23. What is identical with this, what is distinct? What is eternal, what non-eternal?
What is both eternal and non-eternal, and what is then neither?

To say of all *dharmas* that they are devoid of intrinsic nature is to say that there are no ultimately real entities. And since a statement can be ultimately true only by virtue of correctly describing an ultimately real entity, it follows that no possible view concerning *nirvāṇa* and the person who attains it can be ultimately true. Notice the inclusion here of a question that was not mentioned earlier–the question of identity and distinctness. One might, for instance, wonder whether the enlightened person is identical with the person who sought enlightenment, or is instead some distinct person. Given the present understanding of *nirvāṇa*, such a question cannot arise.

24. This halting of cognizing everything, the halting of hypostatizing, is blissful.
No Dharma whatever was ever taught by the Buddha to anyone.

Since it follows from the universal emptiness of all *dharmas* that there is ultimately nothing to be cognized, and suffering is said to result from hypostatization (see XI.6), it follows that

the realization of emptiness is 'blessed' or the cessation of suffering. Of course it also follows from this that the Dharma, the teachings of the Buddha, contains no single statement that is ultimately true. But this, says Candrakīrti, presents no difficulty for the Mādhyamika. For to the extent that the Buddhha's teachings are useful in helping us overcome suffering, they are conventionally true.

Some modern scholars take the text to end here; they claim that the remaining two chapters are later additions and not the work of Nāgārjuna. In support of this claim they point out that the earliest of the existing commentaries, *Akutobhayā*, might seem to have ended at this point. What are presented, in currently available editions of this commentary, as its last two chapters (i.e., commentary on XXVI-XXVII) are for the most part just the verses themselves, with no elucidatory comments. It might also be said in particular that Chapter XXVI presents no distinctively Madhyamaka views. Still, both Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti took the last two chapters as authentically Nāgārjuna's work. We take no stand on this controversy.

XXVI. AN ANALYSIS OF THE 12-FOLD CHAIN

1. One who is enveloped in ignorance forms three kinds of volitions [viz. toward the good, bad and neutral, or toward physical, verbal and mental actions] that lead to rebirth;
   And by means of these actions one goes to one's [next] mode of existence

Bhāvaviveka frames this chapter as Nāgārjuna's response to the opponent who objects to what was just said in the immediately preceding verse (XXV.26)–that the Buddha taught no Dharma. The opponent says that if this were so then the Buddha must not have taught the doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda* or dependent origination. More specifically, he must not have taught the application of dependent origination to the case of the person, the doctrine of the 12-fold chain of dependent origination. This doctrine is accepted as orthodox by all schools of Buddhism. It is generally understood to explain the mechanisms whereby one, having been born into this life due to factors present in the last life, generates factors that will bring about a future rebirth and thus perpetuate *saṃsāra*. It is thus taken to lay out the details underpinning the second of the Four Noble Truths, that suffering originates in dependence on causes and conditions. This makes it a core Buddhist teaching. So if Nāgārjuna's doctrine of emptiness has as a consequence that the Buddha taught no such thing, Nāgārjuna can be no Buddhist.

If Nāgārjuna's intention in the present chapter is to reply to this objection, then his response is the perfect model of orthodoxy. Verses 1-10 give the standard account of the 12-fold chain and how it leads to suffering. Verses 11-12 then give the gist of the third noble truth, that the cessation of suffering is also possible. What is not immediately apparent is

how all this is compatible with what Nāgārjuna said in XXV.26, or more generally with the doctrine of emptiness.

The first verse explains what it was in the past life that led to the present life. Ignorance–namely ignorance concerning the facts of suffering, impermanence and non-self–led one to form volitions (*saṃskāras*), the mental forces that bring about bodily, verbal and mental actions. Candrakīrti explains that the three kinds are wholesome, unwholesome and neutral. These then served as proximate cause of rebirth into the present life.

2. Having volitions as its conditions, consciousness enters into the [new] mode of existence.
   Consciousness having entered (into the new mode of existence), *nāmarūpa* [i.e., the five *skandhas*] becomes infused [with life].

The first line of this verse gives the standard account of the first moment of the present life. At conception the volitions of the prior life cause a moment of consciousness that comes to be associated with a particular embryo. This embryo will be in a particular state–divine, human, etc. If the volitions of the past life were predominantly wholesome, then the embryo in question might be in a divine mode (i.e., be the product of parents who are both gods) or in an especially fortunate human mode; if they were unwholesome, then the embryo might be in the mode of one of the hells; and so on. Candrakīrti adds that the relation between volitions and consciousness is like that between the moon and its reflection, or between a seal and a wax impression made from it. In both these cases the second item (the reflection, the impression) is numerically distinct from the first (the moon, the seal), and yet the nature of the second item is determined by the nature of the first. The point here is to guard against interpreting rebirth as a case of some entity traveling from the past life to the present life. On this see also *Visuddhimagga* XVII.165, where Buddhaghosa quotes a verse giving the example of an echo (*pratighoṣa*), a new sound that arises in dependence on an earlier noise.

The term *nāmarūpa* is sometimes (and somewhat misleadingly) translated as 'name and form'. The term is a collective name for the five *skandhas* (on which see Chapter IV). The claim here is that once a moment of consciousness has become associated with an embryo, this brings about the development of those physical (*rūpa*) and psychological (*nāma*) elements that make up the psychophysical complex, a sentient living organism.

3. But *nāmarūpa* having become infused [with life], the six sense organs occur.

   [The infused *nāmarūpa*] having attained the six sense organs, contact takes place.

The development of the full psychophysical complex yields a living organism with six sense organs, each having a distinctive sensory capacity: seeing, hearing, taste, smell, touch and the inner sense. Once they have arisen, they come into contact with objects in the environment: the eye touches color-and-shape, etc. The term we here translate as 'sense organ' is

āyatana. The *āyatanas* are usually numbered twelve, including both the six sense organs and their respective object-spheres.

4. Dependent on the eye, color-and-shape, and attention,
   Dependent thus on *nāmarūpa*, (eye-)consciousness occurs.

Consciousness is said to arise in dependence on a sense organ and its object, given the mental force of attentiveness. In the case of visual consciousness, the sense organ is the eye, and the eye's domain is occurrences of color-and-shape. It is noteworthy that on this account, visual consciousness is distinct from hearing consciousness, etc. There is no single consciousness that is directly produced by and apprehends something external through two different sense modalities.

Candrakīrti explains that since eye and color-and-shape are classified as *rūpa* skandha, while attention is classified as among the *nāma* skandhas, visual consciousness arises in dependence on both *rūpa* and *nāma.* In 2ab we were told that *nāmarūpa* originates in dependence on consciousness. Here we are told that consciousness originates in dependence on *nāmarūpa.* This makes it seem as if there is a reciprocal causal relation between *nāmarūpa* and consciousness. Some Abhidharma thinkers took this to mean that there can be reciprocal causal relations between simultaneously existing things, each being both cause and effect of the other. But there is no indication here that Nāgārjuna and his commentators subscribe to that view. The *nāmarūpa* mentioned in 2ab seems to be that of the developing embryo, while the *nāmarūpa* mentioned here appears to be that of a developed organism interacting with its environment. Likewise the consciousnesses mentioned in the two verses would seem to be distinct occurrences in the continuum of mental events.

5. The conjunction of three things–color-and-shape, consciousness and the eye–
   That is contact; and from that contact there occurs feeling.

Candrakīrti explains that contact is just the functioning through mutual interaction of the sense faculty, sense object and resulting consciousness. This in turn produces feeling, i.e., a sensation of pleasure, pain or indifference.

6. Dependent on feeling is desire, for one desires the object of feeling;
   Desiring, one takes up the four kinds of appropriation [viz. that connected with pleasure,
   with views, with rituals and vows and with belief in a self].

Desire is produced as a result of feeling: desire for something results from pleasurable feeling; aversion–desire to rid oneself of something–results from unpleasant feeling; etc. Appropriation is the process of identification–regarding some factor as 'I' or 'mine'. Insofar as one cannot wish for more or less of some stimulus without regarding it as in some way affecting

something that is thought of as an 'I', desire leads to appropriation. The four kinds of appropriation are said to be that connected with pleasure, that pertaining to (false) views, that pertaining to moral conduct and religious vows, and that pertaining to belief in a self.

7. There being appropriation, there is the existence of the appropriator,
   For if there were non-appropriation, one would be liberated, there would be no (further) existence.

Instances of appropriating have as their precondition the being of the agent who appropriates. That is, there cannot be the thought of some state as 'I' or 'mine' without the belief that there is that for which the state is an object of appropriation. On the Buddhist analysis, the mechanisms of karma operate through actions fueled by this belief. Thus in the absence of the belief in an appropriator, one would be liberated from *saṃsāra*.

8. And this existence is the five *skandhas*; from existence results birth;
   The suffering of old age, death, etc., grief accompanied by lamentations,

9. Frustration, despair, these result from birth;
   Thus is the arising of this entire mass of suffering.

The existence that sets the stage for the next life is actually just the five *skandhas* that arose due to the karma generated by past actions based on belief in an 'I'. All five are involved, according to Candrakīrti, because bodily and verbal actions involve *rūpa*, while mental actions involve the four *nāma* skandhas.

The result of all this is birth into the future life. So far we have seen how a sequence of two factors in the past life–ignorance and volition (verse 1)–brought about a sequence of eight factors in the present life–consciousness followed by *nāmarūpa* (verse 2), six sense organs and contact (verse 3), feeling (verse 5), desire and appropriation (verse 6), and being (verse 7). Now, in verses 8-9, we have entry into the future life, with birth inevitably leading to old age and death and thus existential suffering. This completes the 12-fold chain of dependent origination, which is the detailed explanation for the origination of suffering spoken of in the second noble truth.

10. Thus does the ignorant one form the volitions that are the roots of *saṃsāra*.
    The ignorant one is therefore the agent, not so the wise one, because of having seen reality.

By 'the agent' is here meant the person who, out of desire for pleasant feelings and aversion for painful feelings, performs actions and thus accumulates karmic seeds. Candrakīrti explains that the wise one is not an agent due to not perceiving anything whatever and thus

not seeing anything to be done. This opens up the possibility that knowledge of emptiness plays a role here: it might be that the wise one fails to perceive anything because they see that all things are empty.

11. Upon the cessation of ignorance there is the non-arising of volitions.
But the cessation of ignorance is due to meditation on just the knowledge of this.

Once one knows how *saṃsāra* is perpetuated, meditation on the twelve-fold chain of dependent origination leads to the cessation of those desires that fuel the cycle. This is the fourth of the noble truths, that of the path to the cessation of suffering. It is worth noting that nothing in the verses of this chapter is incompatible with the Abhidharma understanding of the teaching of the 12-fold chain. According to Abhidharma it is just knowledge of the essencelessness of persons (that the person is empty of a self) that is the relevant knowledge. And *Akutobhayā* (or, more cautiously, the commentary on this chapter that is represented as *Akutobhayā*—see our comments on XXV.24) says that all this may be studied more extensively in the sūtras and in Abhidharma. But Candrakīrti explicitly invokes knowledge of emptiness in his comments on this verse. According to him it is knowledge of the emptiness of intrinsic nature of all things that is the effective knowledge mentioned in the verse:

> Ignorance is destroyed by correct and non-deceptive meditation on this dependent origination. One who correctly sees dependent origination perceives no own-form [i.e., intrinsic nature] of even the most subtle entity. One enters into meditation on the emptiness of intrinsic nature of all entities, like a reflection, a dream, a fire-circle, an impression of a seal. One who has realized the emptiness of intrinsic nature of all entities perceives nothing whatever, be it external or internal. One who does not perceive is not confused about any *dharma*, and one who is not confused does not perform action. One perceives that this is so through meditation on dependent origination. The yogin who sees the truth has assuredly abandoned ignorance. Volitions of the one who has abandoned ignorance are suppressed. (LVP 559)

The mention of meditation, in the verse and in Candrakīrti's comments, is also significant. It is widely accepted that the path to the cessation of suffering discussed in the fourth of the noble truths involves not only the understanding or insight developed through philosophical practice (such as that of Mādhyamika philosophers like Nāgārjuna), but also the practice of meditation. Candrakīrti here hints at why that might be important: the *yogin* or meditator comes to directly see the emptiness of each thing presented in experience. This might be different from the sort of theoretical knowledge acquired through philosophical activity. If so, then this would explain why the karma-generating volitions of the *yogin* are all suppressed.

12. By reason of the cessation of one [link in the 12-fold chain], another [successor link] fails to arise;
    Thus does this entire mass of suffering completely cease.

Since the arising of each link in the chain is dependent on the occurrence of its predecessor, with the cessation of ignorance the production of suffering must come to an end. Bhāvaviveka feels compelled to add that all this is only true conventionally, not ultimately. Since according to Madhyamaka no elements in the 12-fold chain are ultimately real, it cannot be ultimately true that upon the cessation of ignorance there is the cessation of volition, etc.

XXVII. AN ANALYSIS OF VIEWS

1. The views, 'I existed in the past' and 'I did not exist',
   That the world is eternal, etc., are dependent on the past.

The 'views' discussed in this chapter are the ones the Buddha was asked about concerning the past and future existence of the person, the world, etc. (See *Saṃyutta Nikāya* II.25-7.) The orthodox Buddhist view concerning these questions is that they are ill-formed, in that they all involve false presuppositions. And because they are ill-formed, none of the four possible answers to a question should be affirmed. (See the discussion of the 'indeterminate questions' above at xxv.17-18.) In the present verse it is questions about the past that are under scrutiny. Here the 'etc.' indicates the third and fourth members of the tetralemma, e.g., 'I both existed and did not exist', 'I neither existed nor did not exist'. Such views concerning the 'I', the world, and the like all presuppose the existence of some past thing that might be: identical with the present 'I', world, etc.; distinct from the present 'I', world, etc.; both identical and distinct; or neither identical nor distinct.

2. The views 'Shall I not exist as someone else in the future?'
   'Shall I exist?' and that [the world] has an end, etc., are dependent on the future.

In this verse it is views about the future that are under examination. These are likewise all based on an assumption, namely that there will exist some future entity (an 'I', the world, etc.) that might be identical with, distinct from, both identical with and distinct from, or neither identical with nor distinct from the presently existing entity. Having thus classified the full range of views, Nāgārjuna now proceeds to examine first those that concern the past (verses 3-13), and then in verses 14-18, those that concern the future.

3. It is not the case that [the statement] 'I existed in the past' holds,
   For whoever existed in prior births is not this present person.

To entertain the first of the four possible views with respect to the 'I' and the past, the view that I existed in past lives, is to hold that the presently existing 'I' had prior existence in other lives. So for instance what is now a human being might have been an inhabitant of one of the hells in an earlier life. And this, we are told, cannot be. The reason is given in the following verses.

4. If it were that 'That is just myself', [then appropriation would not be distinct from the appropriator 'I', however] appropriation is distinct.
   How, on the other hand, can your self be utterly distinct from appropriation?

Concerning appropriation see XXVI.6-7. According to Candrakīrti, the argument of the first half of the verse is that if the present 'I' were identical with the being in the past life, then the act of appropriation would be identical with the appropriator, which is absurd, since agent and action are distinct. Here appropriation is understood, in accordance with the formula of the twelve-fold chain, as those factors in the past life that brought about the present, while the appropriator is the being in the present life that resulted from them and in turn brings about future birth, old age and death. The argument, in short, is that to think that I existed in the past life is to suppose that this present 'I' is at once a product and the producer of that very product.

The difficulty that results from this is that the self that is the appropriator cannot be found apart from acts of appropriation. It is the nature of the self, *qua* appropriator, to engage in acts of appropriation. While such acts can be discerned, the agent that performs them cannot. And what is wanted here is the agent, not its acts. The argument that is unfolding here is an instance of the 'neither identical nor distinct' variety that Nāgārjuna has used elsewhere.

5. It being agreed that there is no self utterly distinct from appropriation,
   Then the self would be nothing but the appropriation; in that case there is no self of yours.

If the opponent were to concede that the self that is distinct from the psychophysical elements is not to be found, and maintain instead that the self that appropriates is just the elements themselves, then there is a new difficulty, stated in the next verse.

6. It is not the case that the self is identical with the appropriation, for that [appropriation] ceases and arises;
   How indeed will the appropriation become the appropriator?

The difficulty with attempting to reduce the self *qua* appropriator to the appropriation (the psychophysical elements) is that the latter are radically impermanent, while the former

would have to endure. Hence appropriator and appropriation have incompatible properties, and thus cannot be identical. Moreover, there then results the identity of agent and object of action, which is absurd, as can be seen from the examples of fire and fuel, knife and object to be cut, potter and pot, etc.

7. Further, a self that is distinct from appropriation cannot at all obtain.
   If it were distinct then it would be perceived without appropriation, but it is not perceived.

Distinctness of appropriator and appropriation would also mean that the appropriator self can exist in complete independence from the elements, just as a pot, which is distinct from a cloth, can exist in the absence of any cloth. But something cannot be an appropriator apart from all acts of appropriation, and there can be no acts of appropriation without the appropriated elements. So a distinct appropriator cannot be grasped.

8. Thus it is not distinct from appropriation, nor is it identical with appropriation.
   The self is not without appropriation, but neither is it ascertained that this does not exist.

This summarizes the argument of the preceding five verses against the view that I existed in the past. The one new note is at the end of the verse: one should also not conclude that there is no 'I' that exists in both the past and the present. Candrakīrti explains that this 'I' is said to be conceptualized in dependence on the psychophysical elements. This makes it quite different from the case of the son of a barren woman, which is both utterly non-existent and also not conceptualized in dependence on any psychophysical elements. One can say of the son of a barren woman that he does not exist, but one cannot say this of the 'I'. Candrakīrti adds that since he has treated this topic of the self extensively in *Madhyamikāvatāra*, he will not repeat that discussion here. (See MA 6.120-165.)

It should be noted that this is a denial of non-self, and not the affirmation of an existent self. Moreover, there is precedent in the Buddha's teachings for the denial of non-self. On at least one occasion the Buddha expressed concern that those who did not fully understand his teachings would take the statement 'There is no self' to mean that one's death entails one's annihilation (and thus the end of one's liability to karmic reward and punishment; see *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 44.10.) This annihilationist view is not considered wrong on the grounds that there actually is a self. Rather it is considered a wrong view because it presupposes that there is a self, just one that is not eternal. It is for this reason, we are told, that the Buddha refrained on that occasion from accepting the statement, 'There is no self'. It is this consideration that also led the Abhidharma schools to maintain that the person is conventionally real: appropriating and thus identifying with past and future parts of the causal series of psychophysical elements can be useful (up to a point).

9. It is not the case that the statement] 'I did not exist in the past' holds; For this present person is not distinct from whoever existed in prior births.

10. For if this [present self] were indeed distinct [from the past], then it would exist even if the past were denied.
And [the past person] would abide just as it was, or it would be born here without having died.

If the present being is not the same person as the past being, then the present being cannot be caused by the past being. In particular it cannot be due to the cessation of the past being. Candrakīrti gives the example of the production of a pot and the destruction of cloth. Since pot and cloth are utterly distinct, the arising of the former cannot have the cessation of the latter as a causal condition. But this in turn suggests that the past self should endure. Alternatively it would mean that one is born without having died earlier. And to those who accept beginningless rebirth this is absurd.

11. There would be annihilation of the past self, and then destruction of [fruits of] action, then [the fruits] of actions done by one person,
Would be enjoyed by another, this and the like consequences would follow.

The absurdity of supposing that one who is born is not someone who died earlier stems from the fact that, in accordance with karmic causal laws, the situation of one's birth is the result of actions performed at some earlier time. If one's birth were not a rebirth, then the good or bad station of one's birth could not be explained as the fruits of one's own earlier actions. And in that case one's situation could not be deserved; inequality of birth would become a blatant injustice. Then those who accept the theory of karma would no longer see in it a reason to perform good actions and avoid evil actions, for then it would not be me who will reap the pleasant and painful fruits of actions I perform in this life.

12. Neither is it the case that it, having not existed, comes into existence, for this has an unwanted consequence:
The self would then either be produced or else it would be arisen uncaused.

To say that the self comes into existence from prior non-existence is to say that it is a product. But a product requires an effective producer. And if there is no prior existence of this self, then it is difficult to see what might have produced it. If on the other hand one were to deny that it was produced while still maintaining its prior non-existence, this would be tantamount to saying it came into existence completely spontaneously, with no cause whatever. And this sort of utter randomness we know never obtains.

13. Thus the views that in the past I did not exist, I did exist,
Both, and neither–none of these obtains.

This completes the examination of views concerning the relation of the present person to the past. Only the first and second lemmas–that I did exist in the past and that I did not–have been discussed, and not the third and fourth. But Candrakīrti comments that since the first and second have been ruled out, the third must likewise be rejected, since it is the conjunction of two rejected theses. And given that the third lemma is to be rejected, so must the fourth, which is just the negation of the third. (See the comments on XXV.14.) Next comes the examination of views concerning the relation of the present person to the future.

14. The view, 'Will I exist in the future?',
And the view, 'Will I not exist?', these are just like [the case of] the past.

The four lemmas concerning the relation of the present person to one in the future are subject to the same logic of identity and difference as are those regarding the past. Hence they are to be rejected just as the first four were.

15. 'This god is [the same person as] that human', if this were so then there would be eternalism.
And the god would be unarisen, for what is eternal is not born.

For this use of the term 'eternalism' see the comments on XVII.10. The example concerns a human who, having done exceptionally good deeds in this life, will be reborn as a god. On the hypothesis that that future god will be me, there must be a self that endures from one life to the next, and hence is eternal. Since eternalism was said by the Buddha to be fundamentally mistaken, it follows that identity of present and future persons must be rejected. Moreover, the eternality of the person leads to the absurd result that the god will exist without having been born. (This is absurd because, since gods are subject to rebirth, they must be born; they are said to live exceptionally long and happy lives, but they are born and they eventually die.) To be born is to come into existence, and an eternal entity never comes into existence.

The basic difficulty here is that if the present human and the future god are both to count as 'me', then it would seem they must be identical, and yet a human and a god seem to be utterly distinct beings. Each, for instance, comes into existence at a particular time, namely the time of its birth; and for the human and the god in this example those are distinct times. The only solution is to say that the present human and the future god share a single self, something that, being eternal, can go from one life to another. But then either that future god is identical with the eternal self, or else it is distinct. If it is identical, then we must say, absurdly, that a god is not born. If it is distinct, then I shall not be that god, so it is false that my good deeds will lead to my being reborn as a god.

16. If it is held that the [present] human is distinct from the [future] god, then non-eternalism would follow.
    If it is held that the [present] human is distinct from the [future] god, then there can be no continuum.

If we grant that the present human being and the future god are distinct entities, then the person is not eternal, is not the sort of thing that can go from one life to the next. It might be thought that these can still represent distinct stages in one continuous series. But distinctness of human and god makes it difficult to explain how they can make up such a series. For the presently existing lump of clay and the future cloth are equally distinct, yet they are not thought to make up a continuous series. One might try to explain the difference between the human-god case and the clay-cloth example by appealing to the causal connections that supposedly obtain in the case of the present human and the future god. But the results of Chapters I and XX, which showed that causal connections cannot be said to obtain between allegedly ultimately real entities, rule out all such appeals.

17. If it were one part divine and one part human,
    It would be both non-eternal and eternal, and that is not correct.

The thesis that human and god are identical leads to eternalism. The thesis that they are distinct leads to annihilationism (non-eternalism). Both having been rejected, we now turn to the consideration of the thesis that they are both identical and distinct. This is one of the rare cases where Nāgārjuna explicitly examines the third of the four lemmas possible with respect to some question. Here the claim is that there is one entity, the person, that has distinct temporal parts, the present human and the future god. In that case human and god can be said to be identical (*qua* person) and yet also distinct (*qua* kinds of living things). In that case I would be both eternal and non-eternal. Since that future god will be me, I am eternal. But since the present human who is now me will then no longer exist, I am subject to annihilation.

18. If moreover it were established that it is both non-eternal and eternal,
    This being established, then its being neither eternal nor non-eternal could accordingly [be established].

The fourth lemma–neither eternalism nor non-eternalism–relies on the third. And since the third lemma must be rejected, the fourth must likewise. Candrakīrti reasons that since the thesis of both eternalism and non-eternalism is unestablished, and the thesis of neither is the denial of the thesis of both, there being no object to be negated, the fourth thesis cannot hold. (See the comments on XXV.14.)

19. If it were the case that someone were to exist, having come here from somewhere and subsequently be going somewhere else,
Then *saṃsāra* would be beginningless, but that being does not exist.

It is commonly said by Buddhists that *saṃsāra* is beginningless. This thesis requires that there be a being who, for any given life in some determinate station (e.g., as a human or as a god), can have been born into that life from some prior life, and who will at the end of that life be reborn into yet another station (until such time as they attain liberation). But there is no such being, so it cannot be asserted that *saṃsāra* is beginningless. Candrakīrti explains that this holds whether the being is thought of as permanent or as impermanent. If it were permanent then it could not be subject to the change that occurs in going from one life to another. If it were impermanent then it could not be said to move from one life to the next. But this can also be seen as a straightforward result of the prior arguments against the person (*pudgala*) discussed in Chapters IX, X and XI.

20. If it is held that nothing whatever is eternal, then what will be non-eternal?
What will be both eternal and non-eternal, and also what will be distinct from these two?

If there is no eternal being, then there does not exist the right sort of thing for the thesis of non-eternality to hold. The subject of transmigration (the entity that undergoes the process of transmigration) would have to be eternal, and if transmigration lacks a subject, then we cannot entertain the hypothesis that its subject is transitory. The same holds for the third and fourth lemmas of the tetralemma concerning *saṃsāra*.

21. If this world had an end, how could there be the other world?
But if this world were without an end, how could there be the other world?

One set of questions the Buddha was asked and refused to answer concerned whether the *loka* has an end or limit. (See XXII.12.) The Sanskrit term *loka* can be translated as 'world' and this is how it is often translated when it occurs in the passages concerning that set of questions. But it also means 'inhabitant of the world', and that is how it is actually being used in that context. The question concerns whether the existence of the being who is currently living a particular life has an end or not. Both possibilities are to be rejected. The reason, according to the commentators, is that there in fact is another world, i.e., there is rebirth. The reasoning is spelled out in the next seven verses.

22. Since the series of *skandhas* proceeds like that of the flames of a lamp,
So it is not correct that it is endless nor that it has an end.

The analogy of the lamp-flame is commonly used to explain personal continuity in the absence of a self. (See, e.g., *The Questions of King Milinda* II.2.1.) The idea is that an individual flame only lasts a moment, yet a lamp may stay lit for a whole night. (A flame is momentary because it is just a collection of incandescent gas particles, and the individual particles making up that collection rapidly cool and dissipate.) It is possible for the lamp to stay lit for the night because each flame, as it goes out of existence, serves as the cause of a successor flame. So what we think of as one continuously existing light is actually a series of momentary lamp-flames.

23. If, the past ones having been broken up, these *skandhas* were not to arise
    That are dependent on those [past] *skandhas*, then it would be the case that this world has an end.

Rebirth, like the light of the lamp, involves one set of psychophysical elements ceasing but causing another set of psychophysical elements to arise. To say that the world (i.e., the person) has an end is to say that this causal series is interrupted. Just as when one flame is extinguished due to exhaustion of fuel oil, no successor flame can arise, so if the earlier set of elements were to be dissipated without being able to generate the subsequent set, then it would be the case that the person has an end. But this would be a case in which no rebirth takes place. For rebirth is precisely the continuation of the causal series.

24. If, the past ones not having been broken up, these *skandhas* were not to arise
    That are dependent on those [past] *skandhas*, then it would be the case that this world has no end.

To say the world (i.e., the person) has no end would be to say that the elements making up the present person do not go out of existence. In that case they could not give rise to successor elements in the series, and so once again there would be no rebirth. So for instance the elements making up a human could not give rise to the elements making up a god in the subsequent life.

25. If it were that it is one part with an end and one part without end,
    Then this world would have an end and be without end, and that is not correct.

The third lemma, that the world (i.e., the person) both has an end and is without end, might be thought to hold if there were one part of the person that did end, while another part continued to exist unceasingly. This is the view of those, for instance, who think that rebirth involves the transmigration of a self and the destruction of the other elements of the psychophysical complex. The difficulty for this view is spelled out in the next three verses. But *Akutobhayā* anticipates by pointing out that in this case the being would have two intrinsic natures.

26. How will it be that on the one hand, one part of the appropriator is destroyed,
And yet one part does not cease? This is not correct.

Here the 'appropriator' is that set of elements in the present life that gives rise to the elements in the subsequent life. On the present hypothesis, some of these elements are destroyed while others carry over into the future life. In the case of rebirth of a human as a god, this might mean that the human part of the appropriator is destroyed, while the divine part is not. But this would also mean that the human was already divine, which is absurd. To call the present being human is precisely to say that it has a human nature, which is quite different from a divine nature.

27. How will it be that one part of appropriation is destroyed,
And one part does not cease? This also cannot be.

Here the 'appropriation' is that set of elements in the subsequent life that originates in dependence on the earlier set called the 'appropriator'. Reasoning similar to that of the preceding verse demonstrates the absurdity here.

28. If moreover it were established that it is both with an end and without end,
This being established, it could accordingly [be established] that it is neither with an end nor without an end.

The fourth lemma relies for its intelligibility on the third, since it is said to be the negation of the third. Thus the fourth must be rejected if the third is. This verse parallels verse 18.

29. So since all existents are empty,
Where, for whom, which and for what reason will views such as eternalism and the like occur?

Since all things are empty, there can ultimately be neither a place nor a time where views like eternalism arise; there is no being who can entertain and hold such views; such views not themselves existing, there are none that could be held; and nothing could serve as the reason for holding such views.

30. I salute Gautama, who, based on compassion, taught the true Dharma for the abandonment of all views.

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