

NOT NEGATING ENOUGH

(2) Refuting an overly restricted identification of the object to be negated



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Opponent: The object to be negated is an intrinsic nature that has three attributes: (1) causes and conditions do not bring it into being, (2) its condition is immutable, and (3) it is posited without depending on some other phenomenon. For, Nāgārjuna's *Fundamental Treatise* says:⁴⁰⁰

It is not reasonable that a nature
Should arise from causes and conditions.
If it did arise from causes and conditions
Then a nature would be something that is made.

How could it be suitable
For a nature to be something that is made?
A nature is not fabricated
And does not depend on another.

Reply: In general, if someone claims that internal and external things—e.g., seedlings—have “intrinsic nature” in this sense, then Mādhyamikas indeed must refute such. However, here, identifying the object to be negated means identifying the fundamental object of negation. When you refute the fundamental object of

negation, then the Madhyamaka view—knowledge that phenomena lack intrinsic nature—develops in your mind-stream. [644]

Fallacies arise if we follow this opponent's interpretation. Since the partisans of non-Madhyamaka Buddhist schools have already established that compounded phenomena are produced by causes and conditions and are mutable, we should not have to demonstrate to them the absence of intrinsic nature. They also should have recognized that things lack intrinsic nature. So how can this be the unique Madhyamaka object of negation?

Many Madhyamaka texts adduce arguments such as: If things existed essentially, then they could not depend on causes and conditions, they would have to be immutable, and so forth. However, these statements indicate fallacies that would be entailed if things existed essentially; they do not identify the object of negation on its own terms.

It is the case that if something existed ultimately, existed in reality, or truly existed, then it could not depend on causes and conditions, and so forth; however, that is not what ultimate existence means. For example, even though being a pot entails being impermanent, impermanence is not the proper meaning of pot; rather you have to say that it means a "bulbous splay-based thing able to perform the function of holding water."

Likewise, if something existed ultimately, etc., it would have to be a partless thing; still, here in Madhyamaka we do not suggest that "partless thing" is the fundamental object of negation. Since partless things are merely imputed from the unique perspective of advocates of philosophical tenets, such notions are not the fundamental cause that binds embodied beings in cyclic existence. **Further, even if you determined that those partless things lack intrinsic nature and then meditated on that, this would not at all counter the ignorant conception which has operated from beginningless time.** Therefore, even optimal and direct knowledge of that would not overcome the innate afflictions.

Thus, when making philosophical determinations, make your principal task to determine that an object as conceived by innate ignorance does not exist. Ancillary to that, refute objects of acquired misconceptions. [645] If you do not understand this, and fail to eradicate the perspective of innate ignorance, then, when you refute a personal self, you will only refute a self that is permanent, unitary, and independent. When you refute an objective self, you will only refute things that are imputed by the advocates of philosophical

tenets—such as objects that are partless particles, partless moments of experience, or a natural substrate (*pradhāna*) with three *guṇas* (“strands”) asserted by the Sāṃkhyas. This is completely inappropriate. If you think otherwise, then when you make philosophical determinations, you will establish nothing more than this shallow selflessness. As philosophical determinations are made for the purposes of meditation, when you meditate you will have to meditate only on this. Therefore, even if you actualized such a selflessness in meditation and consummated your cultivation of it, nothing would come of it. It would be extremely absurd to claim that you can overcome innate afflictions by seeing as nonexistent the two selves imputed by acquired misconceptions.⁴⁰¹ Candrakīrti’s *Commentary on the “Middle Way”* says:⁴⁰²

When knowing selflessness, some eliminate a permanent self,
But we do not consider this the basis of the conception of “I.”
It is therefore astonishing to claim that knowing this selflessness
Expunges and uproots the view of self.

Also, Candrakīrti’s *Explanation of the “Middle Way” Commentary* says:⁴⁰³

To elucidate this very point, the irrelevance of such to innate afflictions, by way of an example:

Someone sees a snake living in the wall of his house.
To ease his concern, someone else says, “There is no
elephant here.”
Alas, to others it is ridiculous
To suppose that this would dispel the fear of the snake.

Candrakīrti refers to the selflessness of the person, but it is the same for the selflessness of objects; he could have added:

When knowing selflessness, some eliminate an acquired
conception of self,
But we do not consider this the basis of ignorance.
It is therefore astonishing to claim that knowing this selflessness
Expunges and uproots ignorance. [646]

Question: In the statement by Nāgārjuna set forth above,⁴⁰⁴ he says that the defining characteristics of a “nature” are not being fabricated and not depending upon something else. Was he speaking hypothetically or does such a nature exist?

Reply: The Buddha posits a “nature,” saying, “This is the reality of phenomena.”⁴⁰⁵ It is not fabricated and does not depend on something

else. Candrakīrti's *Explanation of the "Middle Way" Commentary* establishes that it exists, citing a sūtra source:⁴⁰⁶

Is there a nature that has such qualifications as the master Nāgārjuna claims? Yes, it is the "reality" of which the Bhagavan spoke extensively, saying, "Whether *tathāgatas* appear or not, the reality of phenomena remains."⁴⁰⁷ What is this "reality"? It is the nature of things such as these eyes. And, what is their nature? It is that in them which is neither fabricated nor dependent upon something else; it is their identity as known by knowledge free from the impairment of ignorance. Does it exist or not? If it did not exist, for what purpose would bodhisattvas cultivate the path of the perfections? Why would bodhisattvas undergo hundreds of hardships in order to know reality?

Question: Did you not previously argue that all phenomena lack intrinsic nature?

Reply: Even phenomena that are not internal mental constructs lack even a particle of essential or intrinsic nature. Have we not given this answer several times? Therefore, what need is there to speak of other phenomena in terms of such a nature? Even reality, the ultimate truth, has no intrinsic nature at all. For, Candrakīrti's *Clear Words* says:⁴⁰⁸

The "final nature" is the unfabricated fundamental entity which is ineluctably present in fire in the past, present, and future; [647] it is not the later occurrence of something that was not there before; it does not depend on causes and conditions like the heat of water, or here and there, or long and short. Does fire have such a nature? It neither essentially has it nor essentially lacks it. Nevertheless, to avoid frightening listeners, I reify it and say, "It exists conventionally."

Thus Candrakīrti refutes the view that this nature exists essentially; he says that it exists conventionally.

Objection: He does not assert that it exists, for he says that he reifies it in order to avoid frightening listeners.

Reply: That is not reasonable. He also spoke of other phenomena, having imputed them for that same reason. So if the final nature did not exist, those other phenomena also would not exist. As cited earlier, Candrakīrti proves that the final nature exists, making the argument that if it did not exist, then it would absurdly follow that pure conduct is senseless. Also, Candrakīrti's *Explanation of the "Middle Way" Commentary* says:⁴⁰⁹

Not only does the master Nāgārjuna assert this nature, others also can be made to accept it. Thus he posits this nature as established for both parties to the debate.

If it were otherwise, then you would have to hold that in Madhyamaka it is impossible to attain freedom. This is because (1) Candrakīrti says that to attain nirvāṇa means to perceive nirvāṇa, and he says that nirvāṇa is considered a true cessation and that true cessations are ultimate truths; and (2) ultimate truths would not exist. In his *Commentary on the Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning*, Candrakīrti takes pains to prove that when you attain nirvāṇa, you must perceive the ultimate truth of cessation. [648]

Accordingly, compounded phenomena such as eyes are not natures in the sense of being essentially existent, nor are they natures when reality is posited as the final nature. So they are neither sort of nature. Ultimate truths are natures when reality is posited as the final nature, but what establishes them as such natures is that they are non-fabricated and do not depend upon something else. They do not at all exist as natures in the sense of being essentially existent. Thus, they exist merely conventionally.

"Fabricated" means "produced" in the sense of a new occurrence of something that did not exist before; "to depend upon something else" means to depend on causes and conditions.

Since forms and so forth are neither type of nature, when you speak of cultivating the path in order to view the final nature, "nature" has the sense of reality. Therefore, Candrakīrti says that pure conduct is not senseless. Moreover, he explains that his utter lack of an assertion that phenomena have a nature in the sense of essential existence does not contradict his incidental assertion of a final nature.⁴¹⁰ Candrakīrti's *Explanation of the "Middle Way" Commentary* says:⁴¹¹

Objection: Alas, utterly wrong! You do not assert real things at all, but also incidentally assert a nature that is non-fabricated and does not depend upon something else. You are saying things that are blatantly contradictory.

Reply: In saying this, you miss the point of the *Fundamental Treatise*. This is what it means: If eyes and such—dependent-arising that are evident to ordinary childish beings—were their own nature, then pure conduct would be senseless because even inaccurate consciousnesses could know that nature. Because they are not their own nature, pure conduct for the sake of viewing that nature does have a purpose. Further, I say that this nature, as

compared to conventional truths, is non-fabricated and does not depend upon something else. [649] Only something that ordinary childish beings do not see is suitable to be the nature. Therefore, the ultimate is neither a thing nor a non-thing; by nature, it is simply peace.

Here “thing” and “non-thing” refer to essential existence and utter nonexistence, as explained above in the section on dualism.⁴¹²

Now when you as an ordinary being determine that phenomena lack even a particle of essential or intrinsic nature, you find that emptiness—emptiness of intrinsic nature—is an attribute of the phenomena, such as form, that serve as its substrata. Thus, it is not contradictory for both substrata and attribute to be objects of a single mind. Since you have not stopped dualistic appearance, that emptiness is a nominal rather than actual ultimate truth.

By accustoming yourself to that view which knows the absence of intrinsic nature, you will know it by perceiving it. For such a consciousness, all mistaken appearances stop. Mistaken appearance here means the appearance of intrinsic existence where there is no intrinsic existence. Therefore, since the consciousness directly perceiving that reality does not perceive substrata such as forms, neither that reality nor its substrata exist from the perspective of that mind. So emptiness and forms, etc. must be posited as reality and substrata from the perspective of some other mind, a conventional mind.

As this is so, an ultimate truth is posited where, in addition to the stilling of all elaborations of essential existence, there is also a sheer stoppage of all elaborations of mistaken appearances, appearances of intrinsic existence where there is none. Thus, while we assert a final nature, how could we be forced to accept an essentially existent nature? Candrakirti's *Clear Words* says:⁴¹³

Driven by the impairment of ignorance, ordinary beings perceive a certain aspect in things. As noble beings who are free from the impairment of ignorance do not see that mistaken aspect, there is something else that serves as their object. That very entity is posited as the final nature of those things.

Also:⁴¹⁴ [650]

Things' lack of intrinsically existent production is not anything. Thus, since it is just a non-thing, it has no essence. Therefore, it is not the intrinsic nature of things.

Some [Tibetans] do not posit ultimate truth as the sheer elimination of the elaborations of the objects of negation, e.g., the two selves. Instead they hold that, as the object of a mind that non-mistakenly knows how things exist, the ultimate appears to exist under its own power—just as things such as blue and yellow appear to an ordinary mind. Ascertaining that it does exist in that way is the view that knows the profound. They also claim that it is a misstep with regard to the correct view to regard external and internal phenomena—the bases with regard to which living beings cling to the two selves—as lacking intrinsic existence.

These assertions stand outside the sphere of all the scriptures, Hinayāna and Mahāyāna. They accept that it is necessary to stop the conception of self, the root that binds all living beings in cyclic existence. They then assert that you do not stop the conception of self by realizing that there is no intrinsic existence in the substrata it apprehends as a self; rather, you stop it by knowing as truly existent some other unrelated phenomenon. This is no different from the following scenario: Suppose that there is no snake in the east, but someone thinks that there is and is terrified. You say to the distressed person, “You cannot stop your idea that there is a snake by thinking, ‘In the east there is no snake at all.’ Rather you should think, ‘There is a tree in the west.’ That will stop your idea that there is a snake and will end your distress.”

Hence, you who wish the good for yourselves should stay far away from such wrong views. You should work on the method for eradicating the way that ignorance apprehends things, this ignorance being the root of all that binds you and degrades you in cyclic existence. Regarding this method, the texts of the father, the noble Nāgārjuna, and his spiritual son Āryadeva clearly set forth vast collections of arguments that build deep and certain knowledge of the definitive scriptures and how it is that the meaning of these scriptures cannot be otherwise interpreted.⁴¹⁵ [651] Relying on these texts by Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, cross to the other side of the ocean of cyclic existence.

To avoid missteps in reaching the Madhyamaka view, it is most crucial to refute wrong ideas about the object of negation. For that reason I have given an extended explanation.