CHAPTER VI
PROBLEM OF NON-SUBSTANTIALITY AND PHENOMENA

As mentioned earlier in the previous chapter that chapters III to XV of the Mulamadhyamakakarika deal with almost all the major Abhidharma (Buddhist Metaphysics) categories that are treated under general rubric “dharma.” Of these various categories, the most important are aggregates (skandha), faculties/spheres (indriya/ayatana), and elements (dhatu). This is the order in which these are normally enumerated. However, Nagarjuna was interested in epistemology, and therefore it is natural for him to take up the faculties (indriya) for examination at the very outset.

Metaphysical Analysis in the Section II of the Karika†

Analysis of the Senses in the chapter III of the Karika

In classical Indian philosophy, the mind is considered one of the senses, and its objects – ideas that the mind generates – thus are “sense-objects.” Hence, ideas are treated the same way that material objects are, and emptiness applies equally to them.

†The translation of the selected verses from the Mulamadhyamakakarika appeared in the analysis of this study is taken from the translation of David J. Kalupahana in “Mulamadhyamakakarika of Nagajuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way”
“Seeing does not perceive itself, its own form. How can that which does not perceive itself, see others?”

In verse 2, Nagarjuna starts to assert that seeing cannot see itself and that what cannot see itself cannot see anything else. It is the eyes that cannot see itself, the obvious objection, to use a modern example, is that scissors can cut something else even though they cannot cut themselves.

“When some form of seeing that is not perceiving does not exist, how pertinent is the view that seeing perceives?”

Nagarjuna criticizes a particular definition of “seeing” (darsana) and that definition involves “the perception of itself”. This undoubtedly is the Indian version of the Cartesian “cogito” which led to the belief in a permanent and eternal self during the period of the Upanisads and continued to flourish in the speculations of the later Indian philosophical schools. It is the definition that produced the most metaphysical of ideas, such as the conception of the “inner controller” that turns out to be the permanent and eternal self or soul (atman). Any form of perception, for them, involved self-awareness as a necessary pre-condition, after which every other form of activity follows.

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350 MMK, III. 2.
351 Austin J.L., How to do things with words, p. 44.
352 MMK, III. 4.
353 Chatterjee, A.K., Facets of Buddhist thought, p 34.
“If it is the view that the four factors, beginning with consciousness, do not exist, because of the absence of seeing and the object of seeing, how then can there be grasping?”

“What has been explained as hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mind, as well as the hearer, the sound, etc. should be known in the same way as seeing.”

In fact, later on Nagarjuna devotes an entire chapter to an examination of this notion of an antecedent self. Whether this view influenced the Yagocara conception of “self-perceiving consciousness” remain to be seen. For Nagarjuna, however, such a definition was not satisfactory, since it implies the conception of a substantial entity.

The argument does not turn on whether the senses or acts of sensing are self-existent or not. Nagarjuna’s only reply is to apply the analysis of motion and the mover from Chapter 2. He is not arguing that there are no senses, acts of sensing, or sense-objects, but only that none of these are self-existent – they, like “motion” and “the mover”, are interdependent, and we cannot dissect any sense-awareness into three unconnected, self-existent components.

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354 MMK, III. 8.
355 MMK, III. 9.
Analysis of the Aggregates in the chapter IV of the Karika

“Material form, distinct from the cause of material form, is not obtained. Similarly, a cause of material form, distinct from material form, is also not seen.”

Notice that the Buddhist term for matter – “rupa” – means “form.” It is a matter of what we experience things, rather than any “material object” existing independently of us. More generally, the Buddhist ontology is a matter of our experiences of the world, not the world independent of how we experience it. Its fundamental ontology is in terms of the factors of experiences not material particles or fields. Nagarjuna’s emptiness is applied to this ontology.

“When material form is distinct from the cause of material form; it follows that material form is without a cause. Nowhere is there any effect without a cause.”

“If there were to be a cause of material form distinct from material form, there would then be a cause without an effect. There certainly is no ineffective cause.”

357 MMK, IV. 1.
359 MMK, IV. 2.
360 MMK, IV. 3.
“When a material form exists, a cause of material form is not appropriate. When a material form does not exist, a cause of material form is also not appropriate.” \(^{361}\)

“The view that the effect is identical with the cause is not appropriate. The view that the effect is not identical with the cause is also not appropriate.” \(^{362}\)

The argument in this chapter connects the concepts of “cause” and “effect.” Something is a cause only in relation to an effect, and so if there is no cause, there is on effect, and vice versa. If something already exists, then it does not need a cause; and if something’s effect does not exist, then we cannot speak of it being a “cause”. Cause and effect are not the same, but the concepts are interconnected, and so we must identify them together.

“When an analysis is made in terms of emptiness, whosoever were to address a refutation, all that is left unrefuted by him will be equal to what is yet to be proved.” \(^{363}\)

In verse 8, Nagarjuna affirms the impossibility of a refutation of emptiness by anything: the alleged refutation cannot involve self-existence because self-existence does not exist; and any refutation

\(^{361}\) MMK, IV. 4.  
\(^{362}\) MMK, IV. 6.  
\(^{363}\) MMK, IV. 8.
involving emptiness only confirms emptiness.\textsuperscript{364} That is, the refutation will be of the same nature of what is allegedly being refuted – emptiness – and so will not be a refutation at all. Nagarjuna here also refers to emptiness as a means (upaya). This might suggest that emptiness is substantive, since it is used to refute an argument rather than simply being the conclusion reached when self-existence is refuted. But it could be an instance of the “skillful means” by which bodhisattvas use what is not in the final analysis real or true to help other.

**Analysis of the Five Elements in the chapter V of the Karika**

Buddhists adopted the traditional Indic “physics” of earth, water, fire, and wind, adding space as a fifth element later. These four elements are not the earth, water, fire, and air we actually experience in the everyday world: they are invisible elements constituting all that we see.

In traditional Buddhist metaphysics, space and nirvana are considered unconditioned and cannot affect anything.\textsuperscript{365} Nagarjuna does not directly tackle that issue. He instead applies his standard analysis in terms of self-existent entities and properties. Nothing suggests that he saw space as in any way different from the other elements.

The “defining characteristic (lakshana)” is not any possible characteristic, but the one essential to phenomenon. Of course, this depends on how something is defined: what is the essential characteristic of ice – its hardness or that it is composed of water? Nothing exists without a defining characteristic. So if we think of the characteristic as something existing distinct from the entity that embodies it, where could it exist? The entity already has the characteristic.

“Therefore, the characterized is not evident. Neither is the characteristic evident. Distinct from the characterized and the characteristic, an existent is certainly not evident.”

“When an existent is not evident, whose non-existence can there be? Who could comprehend the distinct things: existent and non-existent as well as existence and non-existence?”

Verse 5 draws the conclusion that no real (self-existent) entity or real characteristic is found. In verse 6, “non-existence (abhava)” does not mean nonexistence or nothingness in the usual sense. Rather it is the absence of an existing entity (bhava). Thus, without bhavas, there can be no abhavas and if bhavas are not real (self-existent) than neither are abhavas.

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366 MMK, V. 5.
367 MMK, V. 6.
“Those who are of little intelligence, who perceive the existence as well as the non-existence of existents, do not perceive the appeasement of the object, the auspicious.”  

Nagarjuna concludes in verse 8 that those “who see in terms of the ‘is-ness’ and ‘not-is-ness’ of entities, do not perceive the peaceful stilling of what can be seen.” It is not merely a matter of adopting a new metaphysical claim, but of actually seeing things differently. When we are free of a sense of eternal, permanent self-existent entities, there is the “stilling of what can be seen” in the sense that we no longer project our conceptual categories onto reality; thereby, we no longer create a false world of discrete, self-existent entities. But this does not mean that sense-awareness goes blank or that the phenomenal world disappears. It is a “stilling” of a sense of distinct objects, not of what is really there (tattva). The idea that whatever is dependently arisen is “still” or “peaceful” and thus free of any multiplicity suggested by our conceptualizing occurs throughout the karikas.

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368 MMK, V. 8.
370 Ibid., p. 178.
Analysis of Passion and the Impassioned in the chapter VI of the Karika

“If a lustful one, separated from lust, were to exist prior to lust, then depending upon him there will be lust. Lust exists when there is a lustful one.” 371

“When a lustful one does not exist, whence can there be lust? Whether lust exists or not, the method (of analysis) even of the lustful one would be comparable.” 372

If the impassioned person existed prior to the passion, then passion could only exist dependent upon someone who is already impassioned. And, if the impassioned person does not exist, there could be no passion. Again, the problem is the interdependence of concepts. Passion cannot occur without someone who is passionate, and if we try to conceive of passion as a distinct reality, we then would have to accept that it could exist independent of the impassioned – since it cannot, we have to give up the idea of passion and the impassioned ad being self-existent, discrete realities. This means that because the concepts are interrelated, what they refer to are also ontologically interrelated.

371 MMK, VI. 1.
372 MMK, VI. 2.
“If there were to be co-existence in discreteness, is it the case that lust and the lustful one are completely separated, as a result of which their coexistence is also established.”

"If complete separation between lust and the lustful one is established, for what purpose do you conceive of their coexistence?"

If passion and the impassioned person arose at the same time, they would not be mutually connected: if they existed only together, they would be two parts of the same thing and not two realities co-existing (sahabhava). Nor could they be identical because something cannot by identical to itself (since identity is of two different things). Moreover, the co-existence of two things is not possible: if they are different, then they are not identical and cannot occur in the same place. If they are either identical or distinct, we could imagine one without the other, but we cannot imagine passion without someone who has it or vice versa. In addition, if they are distinct, why would they always occur together?

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373 MMK, VI. 4.
374 MMK, IV. 7.
375 Inada, Kenneth K., Nāgārjuna: A Translation of his Mūlamadhyāmakakārikā with an Introductory Essay, p. 98.
“Thus, with or without the lustful one, there is no establishment of lust. Like lust, there is no establishment of anything with or without (accompaniments).”

In verse 10, Nagarjuna expands this analysis to all entities and their properties.

Analysis of the Conditioned in the chapter VII of the Karika

In Buddhist metaphysics, space and nirvana are considered “unconditioned.” Space in Indic cosmology is basically simply the absence of anything and so is unconditioned. Nirvana is considered unconditioned, even though attaining enlightenment requires our action because the final insight of enlightenment cannot be forced. All other phenomena depend upon conditions and arise dependently.

All conditioned things also have three characteristics: being impermanent, without a self, and open to suffering. But here Nagarjuna focuses on the fact that all conditioned things are constantly changing and that there are no entities that could arise, endure, and then cease. Real (self-existent) entities are unchanging and thus neither arise nor change to an enduring state nor cease from it – they exist eternally and without change. But what is dependently arisen and thus empty is not a “reality,”

376 MMK, VI. 10.
377 Inada, Kenneth K., Nāgārjuna: A Translation of his Mūlamadhyāmakaṭārikā with an Introductory Essay, p. 112.
378 Ibid., p. 115.
and thus there is nothing in a sunyata world to arise, endure, or cease. So, if we still see entities involved in the flow of arising and ceasing, we still see only from a conventional point of view – reality as it is (tattva) is free of differentiated entities.\textsuperscript{379}

“If arising is conditioned, therein three characteristics are proper. If arising is unconditioned, how can there be characteristics of the conditioned?”\textsuperscript{380}

“When the triad consisting of arising, etc. are discrete, they are not adequate to function as characteristics of the conditioned. If they were to be combined, how can they be in the same place at the same time?”\textsuperscript{381}

“If there were to be a characteristic of the conditioned other than arising, duration, and destruction, there would be infinite regress. If there were to be no such [characteristics], these would not be conditioned.”\textsuperscript{382}

In verses 1 to 3 are asking how arising could itself arise. If arising does not arise dependently, then this means that not all things arise dependently; but if it arises dependently, then the arising stage itself also has the three stages of arising, enduring, and ceasing. So, there is a prior

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{379}Ibid., p. 123.
\item \textsuperscript{380}MMK, VII. 1.
\item \textsuperscript{381}MMK, VII. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{382}MMK, VII. 3.
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“arising” upon which this arising is dependent (the arising of arising), and so on and so on – as infinite regress of beginnings and thus no actual beginning that would get anything stared.

“There exists no darkness either in the light or in whatever place it is situated. What does light illuminate? For, illumination is indeed the destruction of darkness.” 383

“How can darkness be destroyed by the emergent light, when the emerging light, indeed, does not teach darkness?” 384

“On the contrary, if darkness is destroyed by light without reaching it, then that (light) remaining here will destroy the darkness present in all the worlds.” 385

“If light were to illuminate both itself and others, then certainly darkness too will conceal itself and others.” 386

Verses 9-12 of this chapter present the problem that occurs if we think of darkness as an entity in its own right, not merely the absence of light. If light destroys darkness, then there is nothing left to illuminate. How does light destroy something it has not reached? But how does the

383 MMK, VII. 9.
384 MMK, VII. 10.
385 MMK, VII. 11.
386 MMK, VII. 12.
arising light reach an entity? And since it does not reach the entity “darkness,” it does not destroy it.

“Whatever that comes to be dependently, that is inherently peaceful. Therefore, that which is presently arising as well as arising itself is peaceful.” 387

“Svabhavata”388 in verse 16 means “by its own nature” or “inherently” in an everyday sense and without the accompanying metaphysical baggage of “svabhava” in the technical sense of “self-existence.” It is like Nagarjuna using “atman” to refer to oneself without any implication of the metaphysically-loaded sense of a transcendental reality.

Whatever arises dependently is inherently pacified (shanta). From a conventional point of view, there are real entities, but from the point of view of what is real, there are no discrete, ontologically-independent entities. Thus, in emptiness metaphysics there are no non-arisen entity anywhere that could arise.

387 MMK, VII. 16.
388 Partitya yad yad bhavati tat tac chantam svabhavatah, tasmad utpadyamanam ca santam utpattir eva ca.
“An existent that has endured is not stationary, nor is an existent that has not endured. The presently enduring is not stationary. What non-arisen can stay?”\textsuperscript{389}

Verse 22 says that what appears to endure is not in fact static over any period of time, no matter how brief. Nothing is changeless only even for a moment. Indeed, the cosmos does not endure even for an instant. Thus, it is not changeless realities and hence nothing is self-existent.

What in non-arisen cannot cease because it is either self-existent and so cannot cease, or it is empty and thus is not real and so there is nothing that could cease. A self-existent entity by definition cannot cease. Nor can we speak of an entity (bhava) and its absence (abhaca) together. A not-truly-existing entity (asat-bhava) is not the same as a non-entity (abhava). By definition, it has already ceased, and so cannot cease a second time.

When the conditioned cannot be established, the unconditioned cannot be established since the “unconditioned” is defined in contrast to the conditioned. Both concepts then have nothing to apply to: either something is real and thus self-existent and thus not conditioned by anything; or everything is empty and thus there is not real entities that could be conditioned or unconditioned.

\textsuperscript{389} MMK, VII. 22.
The image of a dream works for emptiness: a dream of a tiger is real and have a real effect on the dreamer even though the tiger is unreal. Thus, what is empty is efficacious and real in that sense.

Analysis of the Action and the Agent in the chapter VIII of the Karika

“With the non-occurrence of activity, etc., good and bad are also not evident. When both good and bad do not exist, a fruit arising from these would also not be evident.”

“*When the fruit does not exist, the path of release or of heaven is not appropriate. This would imply the futility of all activity.*”

Here, in this Chapter, Nagarjuna draws out the impossibility of our actions if all things are self-existent. The analysis is straightforward: if a person is self-existent, he or she could not change, but any type of action is by definition always a change – so the action and person must be distinct, with the action having no agent and the person having no activity. An actor who is not real (self-existent) cannot perform a real act, and so any alleged act would be without a cause; the actor being unreal, would also not have a real cause.

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390 MMK, VIII. 5.
391 MMK, VIII. 6.
Indeed, there would be no action or actor if metaphysics of self-existence prevailed. But such a metaphysics clearly conflicts with what we see in the world and so cannot be accepted. Verses 5-6 draw the conclusion relevant to the Buddhist soteriological goal of liberation: religiously propitious actions would be impossible.

“This really existent agent does not perform a really existent action. Neither is it intended that a really non-existent agent performs a really non-existent action.” 392

“A non-existent action is not performed by a presently existing agent. Nor is an existent action performed by a presently non-existent agent. Indeed, if that were to be the case, all errors relating to the agents would follow.” 393

Notice that verses 1 and 8 only together cover the basic four possibilities of a truly existing actor, a non-truly existing actor, a truly existing act and a non-truly existing act. In Nagarjuna’s analysis, neither type of actor can produce either type of act – for if the act is real it exists in its own right and is not produced, and a non-truly existing act is not real and so is not produced. So too, if the actor is real, he or she is permanent and so cannot act since that is a type of change; and if the

392 MMK, VIII. 1.
393 MMK, VIII. 8.
actor is not real, he or she does not exist and so there is nothing real to change.

“An agent proceeds depending upon action and action proceeds depending upon the agent. We do not perceive any other way of establishing.” 394

“Following this method of the rejection of agent and action, one should understand grasping. The remaining existents should be critically examined in terms of the concepts of action and agent.” 395

Verses 12-13 set forth the position that the concepts of “actor” and “action” are interchanged, and so neither can be established as an independently real entity. So too, as discussed below and in Overturning the Objections neither could establish the existence of the other. In the last sentence, this analysis is expanded as a model for all entities in a similar situation.

Analysis of the Prior Entity in the chapter IX of the Karika

This chapter tackles the issue of an entity or person existing prior to the property or act by which it gains an attribute – e.g., there can be no “mover” existing prior to the act of moving by which he or she becomes

394 MMK, VIII. 12.
395 MMK, VIII. 13.
labeled “a mover.” A “cause” cannot exist prior to its “effect” since it is labeled “a cause” only in its relation to an effect. Nagarjuna’s argument involves the interconnection of concepts and also the claim that different labels make different entities – e.g., a “seer” is not a “hearer” – which, he argues, would follow from a self-existence metaphysics.

“Whatever existent is determined as existing prior to seeing, hearing, etc., and also feeling, etc., by what means is he (it) made known?” 396

Verse 3 says, in effect, that an entity existing prior to seeing and the other senses could only be known by seeing or otherwise sensing it. The conclusion in verse 4 follows only if we see the person and his or her faculties in terms of distinct entities, which is how Nagarjuna thinks his opponent must see things.

For these reasons, we should abandon the fabrications of “is” and “is not” when it comes to an entity and its properties.

**Analysis of the Fire and Fuel in the chapter X of the Karika**

This example comes from the Buddhist Pudgala-vadins who used it to illustrate the relation of the person (pudgala) to the various physical and mental bodily aggregates. But in Nagarjuna’s characterization of self-

396 MMK, IX. 3.
existence metaphysics, fire and fuel in the process of burning are either identical or distinct. They cannot be identical – the wood that is labeled “fuel” exists independently of being on fire. But if they are distinct, then one could exist without the other, and clearly fire cannot exist without fuel.

“If fire were to be fuel, then there would be identity of agent and action. If fire were to be different from fuel, then it would exist even without the fuel.” 397

“A burning without a cause would be eternally aflame. Furthermore, its commencement will be rendered meaningless [useless]. When that happens, it will be without a function.” 398

“A burning without a cause, because it is not contingent on another and, therefore, eternally aflame, would imply the meaninglessness of its commencement.” 399

“Herein, if it is assumed that fuel is the present burning and, therefore, that [i.e., burning] is merely this [i.e., fuel], by what is fuel being burnt?” 400

397 MMK, X. 1.
398 MMK, X. 2.
399 MMK, X. 3.
400 MMK, X. 4.
“[Fuel] that is different is not reached; the unreached is not ignited. Furthermore, that which is not ignited does not cease. That which does not cease remains, like one that has its own mark.” ⁴⁰¹

Verses 1-5 show how Nagarjuna sees the world if self-existence prevails. If fire and fuel are real, then they are distinct entities, and one would occur without the other since real entities do not depend on any other entities. Thus, fire would be eternal since it does not depend on having fuel. And conversely, fuel would be untouched by fire and thus never consumed, and so it too would last forever.

“If fire were to be contingent upon fuel, there would be proof of fire that is already proved [to exist]. When that is the case, even fuel would exist without fire.” ⁴⁰²

The double dependency of verse 9 is this: in order for fuel to be “fuel,” a fire must already exist. Thus, to claim that the fire is dependent upon fuel would be to claim that the fire exists dependently upon something that already presupposes the existence of the fire.

“If that on which an entity depends.

Is established on the basis

Of the entity depending on it,

⁴⁰¹MMK, X. 5.
⁴⁰²MMK, X. 9.
Verse 10 means that if entity A is dependent upon entity B for its existence, then establishing the existence of A establishes the existence of B – but to Nagarjuna, this makes entity B dependent on A. So then, he asks, what is dependent upon what? This is true for both the idea of “establishing” and of “dependence.”

Examples responsive to this analysis include the relation of a pot to the clay that it is made of and the relation between a cloth and the threads that comprise it. For example, a clay pot is more than simply and old pile of clay molecules – it also has a particular structure. But the pot is not different from the clay material either. So, if we bifurcate the pots in our mind by our conceptualizations into two distinct entities – the clay and the pot – then we end up with the same sort of problems as with fire and fuel.

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403 MMK, X. 10.
404 The translation of this verse was taken from the translation of Jay L. Garfield since in translation of this verse is missing in the translation of David J. Kalupahana.
Analysis of the Prior and Posterior Extremities in the chapter XI of the Karika

“The Great Sage has stated that the prior end is not known. The life process is without beginning and end. There is neither a beginning nor an end.” 405

“How could there be the middle of that which has neither a beginning nor an end? Therefore, the methods of (distinguishing) the prior, the posterior or both together (i.e., the middle) are not appropriate.” 406

“If births were to come first and decay and death were to follow, then birth would be without decay and death, and an immortal would thus emerge”. 407

This chapter involves “samara,” which can refer to our cycle of births, deaths, and rebirths, or it can refer to the entire phenomenal world, which in Buddhist metaphysics is also constantly cycling. As Nagarjuna acknowledges, when the Buddha was asked questions concerning the age and size of the universe, he left these matters unanswered. There are three popular explanations within Buddhism for why these questions were left unanswered: any answer would be misconstrued by the unenlightened.

405 MMK, XI, 1.
406 MMK, XI, 2.
407 MMK, XI, 3.
and would have adverse consequences for the student; asking these questions focuses the mind on matters that are irrelevant to the successful practice of the Buddhist path, and one should focus one’s mind solely on more soteriological important issues; and they are metaphysically misguided because they involve incoherent presuppositions of self-existence. Notice that this is not a matter of “mystical ineffability of ultimate reality.” Rather, it is only about certain factual matters that may or may not have an answer but either way is irrelevant to the Buddhist quest.

“Effect and cause as well as characterized and characteristic, together with feeling and feeler or whatever fruits there are, the prior end of these is not evident. Of the entire life-process as well as of all existents, the prior end is not evident.”

Nagarjuna, however, does not follow the Buddha’s approach here. He bases his argument on the premise that samsara is beginning-less and endless, i.e., without limits in the past of future. Therefore from verse 7: entities also have an infinite or at least indefinite past since no limit to them is found. He then proceeds with the conceptual interconnections of beginning, middle, and end. For example, if “birth” is a distinct reality from “aging and death,” then birth never ages of dies, and one who is

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408 Joshi Lalmani, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture of India*, p. 34.
409 MMK, XI, 7-8.
born would be immortal. Hence the young by definition cannot become old – life is divided up into discrete entities that cannot change or be related to one another.

**Analysis of the Suffering in the chapter XII of the Karika**

In Buddhism, suffering (duhkha) does not necessarily mean direst pain. Not all things are painful. Many experiences in fact are pleasurable. But even the pleasurable ones come to an end, and so they are ultimately not satisfying but frustrating, leaving us in a state of disturbance.

“Some assume that suffering is self-caused, caused by another, caused by both or without a cause. [Suffering as] such an effect is indeed not appropriate.”

The chapter begins with four options: suffering is self-caused, caused by another, caused by both itself and another, or uncaused. Nagarjuna is trying to exhaust all the possibilities to show that suffering is not something that can be connected to the concept of causation in any way (since neither suffering nor causation is self-existent).

“If [suffering were to be] self-caused, then it could not occur dependently. Indeed, depending upon these aggregates, these other aggregates occur.”

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410 MMK, XII, 1.
“If suffering is caused by another person, who is that other person who, himself without suffering, causes it and bestows it on another?” ⁴¹²

“So long as suffering is not self-caused, it is, indeed, not caused by oneself. If the other were not to do it by himself, how could suffering be caused by another?” ⁴¹³

If a person is the cause of suffering, then he or she must be distinct from suffering in order to cause it. But as the analyses in chapters 2, 6, and 8 show, we cannot conceive a sufferer to be distinct from the suffering that gives him or her that characterization. It also leaves suffering to be self-created in that person and so still self-existent; or suffering is given by another person who is distinct from the suffering too.

Because the self-existent cannot change, it cannot suffer or be related to suffering since that would be a change. So, suffering cannot be self-caused or it would be unrelated to anything that suffers. If suffering cannot be self-caused, then it cannot be caused by another, for it would have to be self-caused in that other person. So it cannot be caused by itself, by another, by both (since causation by itself or another has been

⁴¹¹ MMK, XII, 2.
⁴¹² MMK, XII, 6.
⁴¹³ MMK, XII, 8.
eliminated), or by both (which is dependent upon both itself and another being possible causes). Only if emptiness prevails does the Buddhist first noble truth – “all is suffering” – prevail.

**Analysis of the Composite in the chapter XIII of the Karika**

What is compounded (samskrita) is anything made of parts. It can be any sort of composite, not just something mechanically assembled. In early Buddhism, all compounded things are considered impermanent. The question arose for the Abhidharmists of whether the component parts – the dharmas - were also impermanent or were in fact permanent.

Notice in the first verse that Nagarjuna states that “All phenomena that are put together are characterized by deception and thus they all are false.” Everything in the “conventional would” is compounded – so, is everything in the conventional world false? Are there no “conventional truths”? Since Nagarjuna is connecting falsity with deception here, he probably means that the conventional perception that what is compounded as distinct, self-existent entities is the deception and thus only that conventional claims about self-existent realities are false from the ultimate point of view.\(^{414}\)

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“Because of the perception of change, the absence of self-nature of existents is [recognized]. Because of the emptiness of existents, there is no existent without self-nature.”

Verse 3 is a succinct statement of Madhyamaka empirical and metaphysical claims: “Since we see change, all entities lack self-existence. Without self-existence, no entity can exist – thus the emptiness of all entities.” Nothing is real since anything “real” is self-existent and so all entities are empty. The self-existent has an “essence” or “own-nature” that cannot change, for if it changed it would not have that nature any more.

There also is the distinction here between “real entities” (self-existent, permanent, eternal, changeless) and “entities” in the conventional world (dependent, impermanent, and constantly changing). If there is no self-existence, there is no real thing that could change; and if there is self-existence, nothing could change. To the opponent, there must be something real for any change to occur. But to Nagarjuna, anything real cannot change – it cannot retain its nature and yet be different at the same time. Thus, either point of view, a “young man” does not grow old: from the point of view of self-existence metaphysics, no real (self-existent) entity ever changes and so the young man cannot

\[\text{MMK, XIII, 1.}\]
grow old; from the point of view of emptiness metaphysics, there is no real change – change itself is not a self-existent reality, nor are any real entities to change.

“If there were to be something non-empty, there would then be something called empty. However, there is nothing that is non-empty. How could there be something empty?” 416

In verse 7, emptiness as an entity is denied. There is mothering real in the world that we could point to and call “emptiness.” It is not a self-existent entity, nor do any entities without self-existence have “emptiness” as a property. Nor would real entities have emptiness as a property – to be real, they would have to have self-existence. This leads to the denial of all views (dirshtis) in verse 8. To hold “emptiness” as a view is to treat it as a self-existent entity, and anyone who does this is “incurable (asadhyan).”

Analysis of the Association in the chapter XIV of the Karika

“The object of seeing, the seeing and the seer- these three do not function in mutual association either in pairs or altogether.” 417

416 MMK, XIII. 7.
417 MMK, XIV. 1.
“Lust, the lustful as well as the object of lust should be seen in the same way. The remaining defilements as well as the remaining spheres of sense should be seen in the triadic mode.” 418

This topic naturally follows the topic of compounded-ness. For Nagarjuna, a self-existing reality is either identical to something else or absolutely different – no other connection is possible for self-existent realities. Here, the question is how the connection of an object that is seen, the act of seeing itself, and one who sees can be connected if they are three real entities.

“Different things are dependent upon different things. Different things are not without different things. Because something depends upon something, a different thing is not appropriate.” 419

“If a thing is different from another because it arises from a different thing, then it would exist even without that other thing. However, that other thing does not exist without the other, and therefore, it does not exist.” 420

418 MMK, XIV. 2.
419 MMK, XIV. 5.
420 MMK, XIV. 6.
“A difference is not evident in relation to a different thing. Nor is it not evident in a different thing. When difference is not evident, there is neither difference nor identity.” ⁴²¹

“Otherness” does not exist in one entity alone but is an inherently relational property: one thing cannot be an “other” without another thing. So, one thing’s property of “otherness” is dependent on another thing. Hence, “another thing” does not exist without the other thing.

With self-existent entities, on connections of independent entities or of identical entities or of an entity and its properties are possible. Nor can any connections themselves be real (self-existent) since they depend on the realities being related. And without self-existence, there are no real entities to connect. So if everything is empty, there are no “real” entities to connect. Thus, no connections are really possible whether we accept either a self-existence metaphysics or an emptiness metaphysics. Connections can be accepted on the conventional level, but ultimately there no realities to connect.

Analysis of the Self-Existence in the chapter XV of the Karika

“The occurrence of self-nature through causes and conditions is not proper. Self-nature that has occurred as a result of causes and conditions would be something that is made.” ⁴²²

⁴²¹ MMK, XIV. 7.
This chapter presents the independence and permanence of anything self-existent. This is applied to entities (bhavas) that exist through self-existence and the absence of such entities (abhavas). A non-entity is a change in a self-existent entity, and so if no self-existent entity can be established (since all entities are dependently arisen), the absence of an entity cannot be established either. That is, if there are no truly real entities, then their absence or destruction is not possible either. But this does not deny that there are entities in the conventional sense – they are simply not self-existent. If is-ness existed by self-existence, then there can be no is-not-ness since the latter would be a change in the former and the nature of what exists by self-existence cannot change.

“When the existent is not established, the non-existent is also not established. It is, indeed, the change of the existent that people generally call the non-existent.” [423]

Emptiness becomes the position between the views of “It is” (i.e., permanent, eternal, and changeless) and “It is not” (i.e., the destruction of what “was”). “Other-existence (para-bhava)” is the self-existence (svabhava) of something else. Thus, in the absence of self-existence, other-existence is not possible.

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[422] MMK, XV. 1.
[423] MMK, XV. 5.
“In the admonition to Katyayana, the two theories [implying] 'exists' and 'does not exist' have been refuted by the Blessed One who is adept in existence as well as in non-existence.”

Verse 7 has the only reference to a specific Buddhist text in the Karikas or any of the other texts in this book – the Discourse to Katyayana. In this discourse, the Buddha rejects the views of “all exists (sarvam asti)” and “all does not exist (sarvam na-asti)” and charts a middle way between them through dependent-arising (and refers to “right views”).

"Exists” implies grasping after eternalism. "Does not exist” implies the philosophy of annihilation. Therefore, a discerning person should not rely upon either existence or non-existence.”

"Whatever that exists in terms of self-nature, that is not non-existent" implies eternalism. "It does not exist now, but existed before” implies annihilation.”

This is interpreted in verses 10-11 to mean the rejection of the views that everything is eternal (eternalism, shashvata-vada) and that everything is annihilated (annihilationism, uccheda-vada). The Discourse

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424 MMK, XV. 7.
425 MMK, XV. 10.
426 MMK, XV. 11.
with Katyayana is not a Mahayana text, but part of the earlier Pali canon. The lack of any citations to Mahayana texts may be because they were too contentious at the time. Or it may be that the author of the Karikas did not think of himself as a Mahayanist at all. But other texts attributed to Nagarjuna do quote Mahayana texts.