CHAPTER VIII
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, to give the summary of the main philosophical conclusions for which Nagarjuna argues in the preceding chapters. And secondly, to show the metaphysical possibilities in philosophical statements of the Mulamadhayamakakarika of Nagarjuna as well as to show Nagarjuna’s connections with some contemporary western philosophical thoughts.

Nagarjuna’s central metaphysical thesis is the denial of any kind of substance whatsoever. Here substance according to him, or more precisely as svabhava, is taken to be any object that exists objectively. Thus the objective existence of the object is dependent upon the existence or the quality of other objects, human concepts or interests. Hence, there is no possibility for an object to exist independently.

To appreciate how radical this thesis is, we just have to remind ourselves to what extent many of the ways of exploring the world are concerned with identifying such substances whether it is the physicist searching for fundamental particles or the philosopher setting up a system of the most fundamental ontological categories. In each case we are looking for a firm foundation of the world of appearances, the end-points
in the chain of existential dependencies, the objects on which all else depends but which do not themselves depend on anything.

We might think that any such analysis which follows existential dependence relations all the way down must eventually hit rock bottom. As Burton notes, “The wooden table may only exist in dependence upon the human mind (for tables only exist in the context of human conventions) but the wood at least (without its ‘tableness’) has a mind independent existence.” According to this view there is thus a single true description of the world in terms of its fundamental constituents, whether these are pieces of wood, property particulars, fundamental particles, or something else entirely. In theory at least we can describe—and hopefully also explain—the makeup of the world by starting with these constituents and account for everything else in terms of complexes of them.

From this research, it was found that the core of Nagarjuna’s denial of substance is an analysis which sets out to demonstrate a variety of problems with this notion. The three most important are, as Nagarjuna focuses on his Mulamadhyamakakarika, causal relations between substances, change, and the relation between substances and their properties.

Supposing there were such things as substances, Nagarjuna argues that they could not stand in the relation of cause and effect. The first and
simplest argument to this effect is, of course, to point out that if one substance caused another, the latter being an effect would be existentially dependent on the first. Therefore it could not be a substance, since it is an essential property of substances not to be dependent in such a way.

Moreover Nagarjuna also employs a different argument which can be used against an opponent who does not want to rule out all dependence relations between substances. He might want to assert that substances can form a causal network. But he still claims that they are independent in other important respects (for example not being dependent on their parts or on human interests or concerns). This argument proceeds as follows: Nagarjuna agrees with the Abhidharma analysis that any substance, any object that exists by its own intrinsic nature, has to be atomic, for if it consisted of parts it would be existentially dependent on them. But as the Abhidharmika’s mereological argument aims to demonstrate, a partite entity cannot be regarded as ultimately real. It is rather to be conceived of as a conceptual construction from its parts, which may be ultimately real, presupposing that they do not depend for their existence on anything else. It is obvious that the demand for the atomicity of substance cannot just be restricted to mereological atomicity but must include temporal atomicity as well.

493 Mereology is the formal study of the logical properties of the relation of part and whole.
For in the same way in which we can argue that a house is conceptually constructed from its proper mereological parts, such as bricks, beams, tiles, and so on, we have to regard it as being constructed as a collection of temporal moments, namely from its temporal part which exists now, from that in the next second, from the one after that, and so forth.

Regarding to the problem of Change, it is an obvious fact that the world around us is always changing. However a substance or an object that has its properties intrinsically could not change with regard to these properties. For in this case the existence of the properties would rely on the causes and conditions that brought them about. Therefore these properties would turn out to be dependent after all.

For the same reason, substances could not come into existence or go out of existence; besides being changeless they also have to be eternal. For the defender of substances it is therefore necessary to regard all the change we observe as a mere difference in rearrangement of the most fundamental constituents of the world. Successive states of the world are just permutations of what is there all the time. An immediate consequence of this view is that the fundamental study of physics about the particles does not qualify as substances. For suppose such a particle is destroyed in
a collision close to the speed of light, and at the same time a burst of energy is detected in the close vicinity.

Now either we say that the particle went out of existence and the energy burst came into existence more or less at the same time, in which case neither can be a substance for the reasons just noted, or we say that the particle changed into the energy burst, in which case we have to explain this change in terms of some yet more fundamental elements the rearrangements of which could appear either as a fundamental particle or as a burst of energy. The fundamental constituents of the physical world thereby recede further and further.

We might want to argue that we are acquainted with some eternal, unchanging entities, such as mathematical objects. Of course this argument depends heavily on our ontology of mathematics, and looking at the contemporary discussion. Platonism does not seem to be a position attracting the most convincing defenses. But even if we assume Platonism is true, we would have to argue in addition that all the objects of our experience can be reduced to abstract objects if we follow the downward chain of dependencies for a long enough time. But to the question that how a complex arrangement of objects without spatio-temporal location could turn out to have such a location in itself would be only one of the startling questions such a theory would have to answer.
It therefore appears that the permanent entities we are acquainted with are not quite the right kind of thing for playing the role of fundamental parts of reality, while those that seem to be the right kind of thing (such as the fundamental particles of physics) cannot be regarded as fundamental as long as they are subject to change as well. Once more the notion of objects existing with *svabhava* seems to have slipped our conceptual grasp.

It is undeniable that our ability to grasp the world by concepts is acquired by our knowledge of language (or, as some might argue, is the very same thing as that knowledge).

Language is a public phenomenon, an ability we display in interaction with other speakers. We would therefore want to claim that we can be taken to have understood the meaning of a word or to have mastered some concept only if we can give a public display of its use or application. A concept, for which we could not give the application conditions even in principle, where we could not even tell in the abstract what kinds of objects would fall under it, is not a concept at all. But this seems to be exactly the situation with the concept of substance when seen as ineffable. Because what falls under this concept is understood to transcend all our conceptual resources, we would be necessarily unable to apply this concept to anything. It is for this reason that Nagarjuna claims
that the concept of an ineffable substance is necessarily empty. And once
this concept is ruled out, the only remaining conclusion to draw from
Nagarjuna’s criticism of substance is that there is no such thing, not even
an ineffable one.

We may obviously notice the deficiency of language to express the
reality in case of the emptiness. Suppose emptiness is taken as “O” and
existence is taken as “E”, the four ways of describing the emptiness can
be reduced into the following forms of statement.

1. \( O \) is \( E \)
2. \( O \) is \( \neg E \)
3. \( O \) is \( E \), \( \neg E \)
4. \( O \) is \( \neg E \), \( \neg \neg E \)

From the logical statements given above, if we take them in to
consideration closely, we can say that the statement 1 is obviously a self-
contradiction since it is undeniably ridiculous to say that the emptiness is
an existence. This condition can be applied to the statement 2 as well.
Because the statement saying that emptiness is not an existence is a
reverse affirmation to affirm the existence of emptiness, which is again a
self-contradiction. For the statement 3 and 4, to laid \( E \) and \( \neg E \) in
conjunctive relationship will land the statement in the very same problem
as statement 1 and 2.
Hence, emptiness and existence cannot be subject-predicate judgment. That means existence cannot be the predicate of the subject. To say that existence is a predicate of an entity is to differentiate it from the entity of which it predicates.

On the other hand, a non-entity is said to have the attribute of existence, the statement is going to become contradictory. Suppose the existence is stated as constituting the very essence of the subject (Emptiness), even that is contradictory. Either way if existence is treated whether as predicate or very essence of the subject, the statement \( O \) is \( E \) becomes contradictory. If we imagine \( E \) as an attribute of \( O \), as it warrants us as different from \( O \), we are forced to accept \( O \) is not existence, which again goes against Nagarjuna’s denial of existence.

Language has played a dominant role in the arena of philosophy both in the East and West. In the East the domain of study of language falls within the purview of epistemology. However, we cannot ignore the ontological pursuit by means of knowledge because these two fields of philosophy are interrelated.

Language for the East, that is, for the Brahmanical tradition including Advaita Vedanta is not a product of human being but is Divine. Language, therefore, refers to transcendent or absolute reality. In the naturalistic trend, on the other hand, treats language as conventional and
arbitrary. It is a product of human being, not that of Divine. Early Buddhism and the Madhyamika are also considered to be in a naturalistic trend. The Buddhists hold that language is convention and hence is flexible in nature; people can invent and break it to suit their life. The Western tradition also holds the similar view. Language for the Western mind is not the creation of God but human – made to serve as a mediator between man and the world.

Language, according to Advaita, seemed to be grounded in the Beyond. It can be used to refer to Brahman. We can refer to the Brahman by using language. However the language is incapable to explain or illustrate the nature of Brahman as it is. In other words, by using the language, Brahman can only be referred to but not to be known. Ludwig Wittgenstein\textsuperscript{494} of the \textit{Tractatus Logico Philosophicus} also believed that the Beyond belongs to the realm of what cannot be held back.

However, Nagarjuna believes differently. His belief is comparable to the later Wittgenstein of \textit{Philosophical Investigations}. Both Nagarjuna and Wittgenstein hold that language is not grounded in the Beyond or

\textsuperscript{494} Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) is an German philosopher, he is famous for reforming philosophy not once but twice. Among the central differences between the early Wittgenstein of the \textit{Tractatus Logico Philosophicus} and the later Wittgenstein of the \textit{Philosophical Investigations} is a shift in emphasis regarding the importance of logic. In the \textit{Tractatus}, logic is given central importance as determining the structure of language and reality. Wittgenstein’s later philosophy in the \textit{Philosophical Investigations} abandons the strictly structured world of the \textit{Tractatus} in favor of a less pristine and more modest conception of a complex world that resists any simple articulation. While the differences between the early and later philosophies of Wittgenstein go deep, significant similarities remain.
reality, but in sociolinguistic community or in what Wittgenstein called
the form of life. In the case of Nagarjuna, the question might be asked
that the Madhyamikas also uphold that the ultimate truth is inexpressible.
However, the answer would be that the inexpressible here does not mean
the mystic sense but in a special sense that our language is non-referential
in character. The term “inexpressible” means that our language lacks of
reference, it can function only in the environment of conventional truth,
but to treat it otherwise, that is, to mean something beyond, is untenable.
The Buddhist ultimate truth of emptiness is ineffable but in a special sense
– not because own words fall short of describing some transcendent
reality called “emptiness,” but because all words are such that they lack
referential concept or “empty” of substantive meaning.

Nagarjuna’s philosophy stems from the reactions against the
concepts of realism, atomism and pluralism. According to later
Wittgenstein, words in language have meaning only through the object
for which they stand. They would say that “what the names in language
signified must be indestructible and what corresponds to these names
cannot be destroyed, for otherwise the words would have no meaning.”

Nagarjuna opposes this view. He holds that meaning of words
depends upon the context for which it is used, meaning here is flexible,
indeterminate and has no boundary. Nagarjuna and Buddhism would
leave the words function in their original home, that is, in the conventional context. Beyond this concept words cannot serve to refer to anything. He also holds that negation does not mean to affirm the absence of the existence, but it is merely to affirm the negation itself. It does not imply something beyond language system either. Nagarjuna and Wittgenstein maintain that in their negation, they are not negating anything real. Therefore, their negation is not ontological but purely logical and grammatical. Thus, both of them insist that they have no theory to uphold. For Wittgenstein, philosophy may not interfere with the actual use of language. It can in the end only describe it. Nagarjuna also holds that if he has any the proposition, then the effect would be his, but he has none, therefore he has no fault.

This is to affirm the nature of Nagarjuna as a logician par excellence. His denial of those four statements describing the emptiness is to show that emptiness itself defies being described.

When we turn to this doctrine as expounded in the Mulamadhyamakakarikawe shall be in a better position to judge its exact status in Nagarjuna's system. However from what we have seen so far we can at least maintain that the group of concepts differ in many senses from most other ideas examined by Nagarjuna. They are never, like other concepts, demonstrated to be totally devoid of own-nature (svabhava) and
hence empty (*sunya*) in the sense of non-existent. How could they be since we are told frequently that they cannot be apprehended in terms of existence nor non-existence? On the contrary they have an ontological status which cannot be determined since all determination depends on the workings of an unenlightened mind i.e. one acted upon by *prapanca*. Like some 20\(^{th}\) century European existentialist, Nagarjuna holds that knowledge must always be conditioned by the stranglehold of the verb "to be" on the language we employ, and in consequence all speculation on the nature of things must resort to essentialist terminology. On this basis this research agrees that instead of taking things in terms of *asti* and *nasti* one should become aware that all entities are the dependent origination, without, however, committing the fallacy of conceiving the dependent origination as a fact and by itself.

Nagarjuna is not denying the existence of the external world and interpreting the Buddha’s dharma as some kind of philosophical idealism, but he is denying that a hypostatized description is true of it. That is, those events that comprise the world of experience do not exist in some permanent state (*asti*) and if they did so exist, they could never be said to not exist (*nasti*).

To review, existence does not exist, but becoming does occur. Yet any description of becoming rests on a coherent description of causality
and arising. These concepts, as shown above, are reduced to absurdity (contradiction) under analysis and so are incoherent. Thus events in the experienced world cannot even be said to arise or cease, be permanent or impermanent, identical or different, to come or go. They are emptiness and indeterminate. But this is not to say that events are indescribable or nonexistent. Events are not non-existent because nasti is logically impossible, as the son of a barren woman. And, according to Nagarjuna, events also occur in the only way beings in the world and the Tathagata could occur, without self-nature as empty and interdependent.

For the better understanding, Nagarjuna here draws a distinction between two truths in the teachings of Gautama as ordinary everyday conventional truth (samvrtisatya) and higher truth (paramathasatya). And he additionally claims his analysis is orthodox and that the opponent, thinking he is representing the True Teaching, has misunderstood Gautama by not distinguishing two truths.

Nagarjuna argues that paramathasatya is not, indeed could not be, taught apart from common practice, ordinary, everyday activities and discourse. Higher truth cannot be attained because it is simply the recognition that conventional truth is provisional and non-ultimate rather than a truth beyond the conventional that can be explicated. Thus
Nagarjuna can assert that the ordinary everyday world can occur and function.

Nagarjuna adopted the distinction between two truths elucidated by the Abhidharma masters but implied in the discourses of Gautama. Ordinary words were used in conventional ways without posing validity and soundness problems so long as it was recognized they were being used conventionally.

In respective of various interpretations given by scholars, if the denial of Nagarjuna toward the metaphysics is not absolute and applies only to the Samvrti Satya, nothing prevents us from stating that metaphysics is possible in Nagarjuna’s philosophy. On the hand, if his denial is absolute, the question as to the possibilities of metaphysics in Nagarjuna’s philosophy will remain.