

IMPORTANT TERMINOLOGY IN THE MADHYAMIKA DISCOURSE

"The principle of dependent origination is fundamental to the Buddhist worldview, and any interpretation of the doctrine of selflessness that fails to perceive emptiness in terms of dependent origination can never be complete." (Dalai Lama 1995 34)

"If you believe in the existence of independent dharmas with real properties [= svabhava], then you will see them existing without causes and conditions." --Nagarjuna, MK 24:16 (compare McCagney's 1997 202 translation; and Nagarjuna's YS 46-47 and CS III:51-52 on dogmas in Lindtner 1982 115, 157)

Terminology

(1) *Pratityasamutpada* is the technical Sanskrit term for the Buddhist law of causality: dependence on conditions. Generally, causality defines cause/effect relationships and determines HOW we see and respond to our world and others in it: independently or interdependently. *Pratityasamutpada* is variously translated as: relativity, dependent co-arising, dependent arising, dependent co-origination, relational origination, conditioned origination, conditional causes, conditioned co-production, conditional co-production, causal genesis, co-dependent nature, mutual dependence, (commonly) dependent origination, (and recently) interdependency.

The *pratityasamutpada* formula is "from this arises that" in the 12-fold chain of being, where each link is "conditioned by" the prior link and is also a condition for the next (Second Noble Truth). Stopping a condition cuts off all subsequent links: through the cessation of 'this' link in the chain, 'that' subsequent link will not arise (Third Noble Truth). At its simplest level, links in the chain reflect a linear (one-way) cause/effect relationship. But other possible causal explanations exist. (For more on causality, see The Egroup discussion site series on "A Critique of 'Causality as Soteriology' (Parts 1-3)."

Pratityasamutpada is said to be the Buddha's highest insight just prior to his enlightenment, and is called the central philosophy of Buddhism. Here, *pratityasamutpada* is used interchangeably with **interdependency**. *Pratityasamutpada* must be understood within its relationship to Emptiness as defined by The Two Truths doctrine.

(2) *Duhkha*. The Buddha introduced his *pratityasamutpada* doctrine in terms of the Four Noble Truths: the existence, cause, cure, and 8-fold path to end "duhkha." The Sanskrit "duhkha" is variously translated as suffering, anguish, pain, sorrow, unhappiness, unsatisfactoriness, turmoil, unrest, and misery. The 8-fold path (Fourth Noble Truth) to end *duhkha* is the moral practices of RIGHT views, intentions, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

(3) *Samsara*. The *pratityasamutpada* doctrine is also known as the 12-fold chain of existence (or being), which is the samsaric cycle of birth/death (or rebirth), and the wheel of life. The standard order for the twelve links are: ignorance, dispositions (karmic volition), consciousness, name and form, six sense-fields, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, and decay and death. These terms are also variously translated. Nagarjuna stresses that there is no difference between *samsara* and *nirvana*.

“There is no distinction whatever between samsara and nirvana. There is no distinction whatever between nirvana and samsara. The limit of nirvana is that of samsara. The subtlest difference is not found between the two.” --Nagarjuna, MK 25:19-20 (in McCagney 1997 209)

(4) *Self-nature* (svabhava) – The illusion of svabhavic self-nature, own-being, or self-existence means that dharmas (factors of experience: people, objects, events, ideas) have been reified (to make real) as permanent and independent objects of knowledge. To reify the object of knowledge also reifies the knower, and vice versa, like a mirror image. Reification promotes attachment to the reified object. The svabhava fallacy of independent dharmas contradicts the Buddha’s causal law of interdependency (dependence on conditions) and dharmic emptiness.

Practically speaking, with svabhavic reification of and attachment to our conceptualizations, the interdependency of daily life is experienced as samsara (cyclic birth and death). Without svabhavic attachment, however, interdependency of daily life is experienced as nirvanic freedom from the tyranny (fear, desire, grasping) of the illusory (svabhavic) self. (on dogmas see YS 46-47 and CS III:51-52 in Lindtner 1982 115, 157; Liu 1993 655 on fixed dogmas; Liu 1985 178 on the ontology of Buddha-nature reified as “pure mind”)

“Since the Buddhas have stated that the world is conditioned by ignorance, how is it not reasonable therefore that this world is a [result of] discrimination? When ignorance is stopped why is it not clear that [what also] stops was imagined by it?” --Nagarjuna, YS 37-38 (Lindtner 1982 113)

(5) *Emptiness* -- The doctrine of emptiness (sunyata: openness) is NOT nonexistence but the lack of a permanent, independent self-nature (svabhava) of all dharmas (= factors of experience: people, objects, events, ideas). This means that dharmas exist but are unfindable and indeterminate in any final or absolute sense. To fully understand emptiness it must be considered within the doctrine of The Two Truths involving its relationship to Interdependency, otherwise misconceptions occur. See the .pdf files which are available from our “Current Features” web page on emptiness, interdependency, and the two truths.

(6) *The Middle Path* -- See the .pdf file which is available from our “Current Features” web page for collection of comments on the Buddha's Middle Path (Sanskrit: madhyama pratipada).

(7) *The Two Truths* -- See the .pdf file which is available from our “Current Features” web page for an introduction to the doctrine of the two truths (interdependency and emptiness) within the CONTEXT of their mutually defining relationship.

(NOTE: For more information on these terms, see our "Selected References" page: Macy 1991 34-40; McCagney 1997 57-78, 112-113; Jamieson 2000 11-12, 16-17; Warder 1980 107-117; Conze 1986 186-187)

References

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