

# The Seed of Reasoning: Notes on the Five Great Logical Arguments of the Middle Way

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*Namo Mañjughoṣāya!*

The Five Great Logical Arguments of the Middle Way are:

1. Investigation of the cause: the Diamond Splinters
2. Investigation of the result: refuting existent or non-existent effects
3. Investigation of both: refuting the four permutations of arising
4. Investigation of essential identity: 'neither one nor many'
5. The logical argument of Great Interdependence

The first four overcome the extreme of superimposing existence and the fifth overcomes the extreme of deprecating [phenomena] as non-existent.

## 1. Investigation of the Cause: the Diamond Splinters

Ācārya Nāgārjuna says in the *Root Verses of the Middle Way*.

Not from itself, not from another,  
Not from both, nor without a cause—  
Does anything anywhere ever arise.<sup>1</sup>

Take whatever currently appears as the subject [of debate]. It follows that it is unreal, because ultimately it does not arise from itself, from something else, from both or without a cause, and is therefore like a dream.<sup>2</sup>

Consider arising from an existent cause. For a thing to arise from itself is illogical, because what is produced must be substantially different from its producer. In addition, there is no need for something already existent to arise. Furthermore, it would lead to an infinite regress of production. For a thing to arise from something other than itself is also illogical, because if a cause with a particular nature could produce an effect with an entirely different nature, this would mean that a lamp could produce darkness. Anything, whether a cause or not, would be capable of producing anything else, whether an effect or not. You might think that if there is no production self or other, there could be production from both. But this would simply incur all the faults listed above. You might suppose that entities arise without a cause, by their nature alone, but this would have its own absurd consequences: it would mean that a lotus garden could grow out of space, and it would render meaningless the worldly habit of planting seeds in order to produce particular crops.

## 2. Investigation of the Result: Refuting Existent or Non-Existent Effects

The same text cited above also says:

Whether for existent or non-existent things,  
A contributive condition would be invalid:  
How could it be a condition for the non-existent?  
And what would a condition accomplish for the existent?<sup>3</sup>

Take these various apparent entities as the subject. It follows that they are unreal, because they are not produced as either existent or non-existent. You might suppose that a vase arises while existing, but its production would then be illogical, because it must already exist. Were it to arise while not existing, this would involve the existent arising out of the non-existent. But such extreme incompatibility of substance is not possible.

## 3. Investigation of Both: Refuting the Four Permutations of Arising

The *Two Truths* says:

Several things do not produce a single thing,  
And many things do not create a multiplicity.  
A single thing is not produced by many things.  
And from one thing, a single thing is not produced.<sup>4</sup>

Take mere appearances as the subject. It follows that they are unreal, because ultimately there is no arising of a single thing from a single thing, of many things from a single thing, of many things from many things, or of a single thing from many things. This is similar to applying the label 'space' to an absence of things.

## 4. Investigation of the Essential Identity: Neither One Nor Many

The *Ornament of the Middle Way* says:

Since they lack a true identity as singular or multiple,  
Things are without inherent nature.

Take apparent objects as the subject. It follows that they cannot be established as real or unreal, because they are beyond singularity and multiplicity, like the moon's reflection in water. Any proposition that requires true, inherent singularity is unreasonable. And since oneness cannot be established, multiplicity, which relies upon it, cannot be established either.

## 5. Great Interdependence

The *Root Verses* says:

Whatever originates in interdependence  
Is explained to be emptiness,  
Which is a dependent imputation.  
This is the path of the middle way.<sup>5</sup>

Take mere appearances as the subject. It follows that they are unreal, because they are interdependent, like a reflection.

If something is interdependent, it is necessarily emptiness. The appearance of horses, oxen and the like can be created through the coming together of certain causes and conditions, namely sticks and magical formulae. But there are no actual horses or oxen in these appearances. Likewise, when these appearances change their features, whether on a coarser<sup>6</sup> or subtler level, this transformation means that they are empty of the earlier substance. At the same time, since there is no substance apart from what was there earlier, the later substance is empty as well. Like this, when the horses, oxen and so forth appear there is nothing more to them than sticks and mantras, so they are empty; they lack the actual essence of horses, oxen and the like. By this same logic, all apparent things, from mountains to ordinary men and women, are empty, because there is nothing more to their appearance than accumulations of atoms. They are also empty of continuity because on a subtle level they are by nature momentary. Thus, things appear unceasingly through interdependent conditions, and at the same time are mere appearances, because they lack even an atom's worth of intrinsic reality. Knowing this is the wondrous path of the Middle Way, the unity of appearance and emptiness. As the *The Sūtra of the Questions of the Nāga King Anavatapta* says:

Whatever arises due to conditions does not truly arise,  
For it lacks the nature of arising.  
Whatever depends on conditions is empty, it is said.  
Anyone who understands emptiness will be cautious.

Since there is no phenomenon whatsoever with any real nature, there is nothing to be refuted. Even so, an opponent might make an assertion that involves fixation on true reality, such as by projecting existence onto what is non-existent. At such times, any of the reasonings outlined above would be sufficient to pulverize the assertion. That is why we should recollect the meaning of this Middle Way that is superior to all, this great lion's roar spoken by the Buddha, who is the transcendent, accomplished conqueror. To do so and to cause the lotus of critical intelligence to blossom is the very pinnacle of all the many ways of making meaningful the freedom of this human life.

This was the supremely given instruction.

*Sarvadā śreyo bhavatu.*

1. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* I, 1 ↩
2. For each of the five arguments Jamyang Khyentse offers a syllogism in the formal language of debate, complete with thesis, reason and example. ↩
3. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* I, 6 ↩
4. *Satyadvayavibhaṅga* verse 14 ↩
5. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXIV, 18 ↩
6. Reading *rtaḡ pa* as *rags pa*. ↩



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