

Nagarjuna's Refutation of Objections

The Opponent's Twenty Objections

1.

If the intrinsic nature of all entities
does not exist in anything,
your words too lack intrinsic nature
and cannot refute intrinsic nature.

2.

But if those words do have intrinsic nature,
then your former thesis is undermined.
There is an inconsistency — and if so,
you must state a distinguishing reason.

3.

If you think "It is like not uttering a sound" —
that does not hold.
For in this case, because sound exists,
what arises is itself the refutation.

4.

If you claim "The refutation of the refutation
is likewise" — that too is not sound.
According to the character of your thesis,
the fault lies with you, not with me.

5.

First: if through direct perception
one apprehends entities and thereby refutes,
that direct perception by which
entities would be apprehended does not exist.

6.

Inference, scripture, and analogy,
and whatever is to be established
by inference, scripture, or analogy —
the reply given for direct perception applies.

7.

A person skilled in the positions of dharmas
considers that virtuous dharmas
possess a virtuous nature —
and so too for the remaining dharmas.

8.

Those dharmas that bring liberation —
the dharma-positions that are taught —
possess a liberating nature.
And those whose nature is not liberating, and so forth.

9.

If dharmas lack intrinsic nature,
then "lacking intrinsic nature" is merely a designation.
Likewise, the name would not exist,
for a name without a basis does not exist.

10.

But if intrinsic nature exists
yet does not belong to dharmas,
then it is fitting to demonstrate
that intrinsic nature which is devoid of dharmas.

11.

Because we see that the negation
"There is no pot in the house" applies to what exists,
therefore your negation too
exists and possesses intrinsic nature.

12.

If that intrinsic nature does not exist,
what does your statement refute?
For even without words, the refutation
of what does not exist is fully established.

13.

Just as children falsely apprehend
water in a mirage,
if you likewise refute
the false apprehension of what does not exist —

14.

— then do not the six exist:
apprehension, the apprehended, the apprehender,
refutation, the object of refutation,
and the refuter?

15.

If apprehension does not exist,
if there is nothing apprehended and no apprehender,
then refutation, the object of refutation,
and the refuter too do not exist.

16.

If refutation, the object of refutation,
and the refuter do not exist,
then all entities and their
intrinsic nature are established.

17.

For you, the logical reason is not established,
since your mark lacks intrinsic nature.
If it does exist, then since you lack
a logical reason, your meaning cannot be established.

18.

If for you the refutation of intrinsic nature
is established even without a logical reason,
then for me too, without a logical reason,
the existence of intrinsic nature is established.

19.

If a logical reason exists, it is not tenable
to say entities lack intrinsic nature.
In the world, there is no entity
that lacks intrinsic nature.

20.

If the refutation of what lacks intrinsic nature
comes before and the object of refutation after —
that is not tenable.
Nor is it tenable afterward, or simultaneously.

Nagarjuna's Replies

21.

If my words do not exist
in causes, conditions, aggregates, or individually,
then the emptiness of entities is established —
precisely because they lack intrinsic nature.

22.

Whatever entities arise dependently —
that is called emptiness.
Whatever arises dependently,
that is without intrinsic nature.

23.

Just as one emanation refutes another emanation,
and a magical illusion refutes
a person's illusion —
this refutation too is like that.

24.

My words lack intrinsic nature.
Therefore, regarding my equal position,
since there is no inconsistency,
I need not state a distinguishing reason.

25.

"Like not uttering a sound," you say —
but this example you have composed does not apply.
In that case, sound refutes sound,
but here it is not like that.

26.

If through the absence of intrinsic nature
the absence of intrinsic nature were refuted,
then the absence of intrinsic nature being overturned,
intrinsic nature would be thoroughly established.

27.

Or consider: someone develops
the false apprehension "a woman"
toward an emanated woman —
and an emanation refutes it. It is like that.

28.

Or: this proof and its object are similar,
for sound does not ultimately exist.
Without accepting conventional designation,
we do not make any explanations.

29.

If I had any thesis,
then I would have that fault.
But since I have no thesis,
I am without fault alone.

30.

If through direct perception and the other means
something were apprehended —
there would be something to establish or refute.
Since there is not, I am free from blame.

31.

If your objects are well established
through the means of knowledge themselves,
then tell me: how are those means of knowledge
in turn established?

32.

If you think "Through other means of knowledge" —
there is no end to the regress.
Neither the first is established,
nor the middle, nor the last.

33.

But if those objects are established
even without means of knowledge, your thesis is undermined.
There is an inconsistency — and if so,
you must state a distinguishing reason.

34.

"Just as fire illuminates
both other things and itself,
so too the means of knowledge
establish their own nature" — if you say this:

35.

I say: that does not hold.
Like a pot inside a dark cavern,
it is not apprehended, not seen —
fire does not illuminate itself.

36.

If by your words
fire illuminates itself,
then fire would also burn itself
just as it burns others.

37.

If by your words
fire illuminates both itself and others,
then darkness too, like fire,
would conceal both itself and others.

38.

In the firewood and whatever other fuel
where fire abides, there is no darkness.
If illumination means removing darkness,
how does fire illuminate where there is no darkness?

39.

To say that fire illuminates
at the very moment of its arising
is not valid — for at the very moment of arising,
fire has simply not yet encountered darkness.

40.

Or if fire removes darkness
without even encountering it,
then fire right here
would remove the darkness of the entire world.

41.

If the means of knowledge are self-established without depending on knowable objects, your means of knowledge would be established on their own. What is self-established does not depend on another.

42.

If your means of knowledge are established without depending on knowable objects, then those means of knowledge would not be means of knowledge of anything.

43.

But if they are established in dependence — what fault would there be in that?
It is by depending on what is not independently established that established things are established.

44.

If the means of knowledge are established in dependence on knowable objects, then the knowable objects would be established without depending on the means of knowledge.

45.

If the knowable objects are established without depending on the means of knowledge, since they would be established by themselves, what use are your means of knowledge?

46.

If your means of knowledge are established in dependence on knowable objects, then your means of knowledge and your knowable objects certainly exchange positions.

47.

But if you say: "The means of knowledge being established,
the knowable objects are established,
and the knowable objects being established,
the means of knowledge are established" — then neither is established.

48.

If the means of knowledge establish the knowable objects,
and those knowable objects in turn
are to establish the means of knowledge,
how can either be established?

49.

If the knowable objects establish the means of knowledge,
and those means of knowledge in turn
are to establish the knowable objects,
how can either be established?

50.

If a father is to beget a son,
and that very son in turn
is to beget the father —
then tell me: which begets which?

51.

Both hold the characteristics
of father and of son. Therefore
I am in doubt about this:
tell me, which is the father and which is the son?

52.

The means of knowledge are not established by themselves,
not by each other,
not by other means of knowledge,
not by knowable objects, and not without cause.

53.

One skilled in dharma-positions:
what is the virtuous nature
of virtuous dharmas among dharmas?
This must be clearly explained.

54.

If the nature of virtuous dharmas
arises in dependence on something,
that would be for the sake of another —
how then could it be its own essence?

55.

But if the nature of virtuous dharmas
arises without depending on anything at all,
then even so, the spiritual life
would not be tenable.

56.

What lacks a cause would be permanent.
All dharmas would become permanent.
There would be no dharma and no adharma,
and no worldly convention.

57.

The same fault applies to the unwholesome,
the indeterminate, the liberating, and so forth.
Therefore all your conditioned things
would become unconditioned.

58.

Whatever person says
"This possesses intrinsic nature" —
that is the one to whom you have replied.
But I do not assert the existence of names.

59.

"There is no name" — is this something
that exists or does not exist?
Whether it exists or not,
what you have said is undermined in both cases.

60.

Since the emptiness of all entities
has already been demonstrated,
what blame do you seek
even though I have no thesis?

61.

"But there is some intrinsic nature
that does not belong to dharmas" —
although this suspicion is not reasonable,
the suspicion is yours.

62.

If you say negation applies to what exists,
then emptiness is thoroughly established —
for you are negating
the intrinsic nature of entities.

63.

If the emptiness that you negate
does not exist either,
then is not the assertion
"Negation applies to what exists" undermined?

64.

Since there is nothing whatsoever to be refuted,
I refute nothing whatsoever.
Therefore "You make a refutation" —
what you have said is not accurate.

65.

"Without words, the refutation of what does not exist is not established," you say —
but in that case, "there are no words"
makes one understand; it does not bring about or remove.

66.

Regarding the great dispute you have made
about the mirage analogy —
listen to how that example holds,
and I shall settle it.

67.

If that apprehension had intrinsic nature,
it would not arise dependently.
Whatever apprehension arises dependently —
is that not itself emptiness?

68.

If apprehension had intrinsic nature,
who could refute it?
The same reasoning applies to the remaining five.
Therefore that blame does not apply.

69.

When the refutation is established by the mirage analogy,
what was said before —
that was answered earlier by the reply
about the logical reason, for it is similar.

The objection about the three times and the logical reason
has already been answered, for it is similar.
The argument concerning the three times
is appropriate for those who teach emptiness.

70.

For whom emptiness is possible,
for them all things are possible.
For whom emptiness is not possible,
for them nothing is possible.

To the Buddha who taught
that emptiness and dependent arising
have the same meaning on the middle way —
to that peerless supreme speaker, I bow.

Verses on Turning Back Disputes, by the noble master Nagarjuna, is complete.

Translated into Tibetan by the Indian pandita Jnanagarbha and the Tibetan translator Ka ba dpal brtsegs. Later revised by the Kashmiri pandita Jayananda and the translator Khu mdo sde dpal.