

NOTES ON “HOW TO SEE YOURSELF AS YOU REALLY ARE”

Chapter 5 - Appreciating the Reasoning of Dependent-Arising

If the whole and its parts existed the way they appear to you, you should be able to point out a whole that is separate from its parts. (p. 60)

In these notes, I won't be summarizing the chapter's points. Instead, I will be drawing out in more detail the points mentioned in the chapter that I think are important to warrant some more elucidation. This may be even more important for people who are coming to the emptiness teachings from other kinds of teachings that don't use the same tools or concepts. In the Dalai Lama's system, logic and inference are very important tools. They actually lead to direct, nondualistic, nonconceptual emptiness realization!

In a nutshell, this chapter is trying to get us to appreciate how this is true in general:

If something is a dependent arising, it is not inherent. It is empty.

The goal of this chapter is to get an idea of how this reasoning works. Notice the chapter title is “**Appreciating** the Reasoning,” not “**Performing** the Reasoning.” At this stage, we are simply to get an idea of how the overall reasoning works, and how it can form a conclusion that refutes inherent existence. We are still preparing our tools. In the Dalai Lama's system, this step, logical appreciation, traditionally comes after the earlier step of isolating the object of refutation (inherent existence).

In the emptiness teachings, logic can be our friend

To get an appreciation of the reasoning of dependent arising, we must see how the opposite of dependent arising leads to contradictions. Remember the Dalai Lama's statement back in Chapter 3?

*You have to put together that if objects really did exist in the way they seem to, **the logical consequences would be impossible**, and on this basis you can fully appreciate that phenomena do not exist this way. (p. 43, emphasis added)*

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Here's a quick example of logically impossible consequences. Logically impossible consequences would apply if objects were inherently existent. If they really were inherently existent, then they would not depend on anything else. They would be the opposite of dependent arisings. **One obvious example is change.** If things were inherently existent, then they could not change in response to factors, because they would be "already like that," however they are. But they **do** change. We age. Our bodies, faces and minds are not the same as they were 20 years ago. We appear to be one way, but in reality we are another way. Therein lies the contradiction.

An example: logic applied to inherent existence

Let's examine change a bit more closely. Let's see what would happen with change if it were really inherently existent.

The meaning of "**inherent**" in these teachings is "**independent.**" **Inherent existence means the opposite of dependent arising.** That is, it means total, 100% independence from everything, including causes and conditions, pieces and parts, and perceiving, knowing consciousnesses. If an object were independent in these ways, then how could it possibly change? It would not be able to change.

Let's consider the example of a table. The appearance of exaggerated, inherent existence of the table leads to a logical contradiction as follows. The appearance says,

(1) **The table does not change.**

On the other hand, careful observation and analysis of the table says,

(2) **The table does change.**

This is a contradiction between (1) and (2). Both cannot be true.

The contradiction can be removed by realizing that (1) is false. And you are then left with the truth of (2). Realizing that (1) is false leads to the realization that **the table is not inherently existent.** When we realize this, we no longer think that the table is inherent and shouldn't change. Our conceptions come to be in harmony with our observations.

This is just one example. Chapter 5 doesn't talk about change, but about whether the self can be found among its parts. It seems like it can, but really, it can't. How does this work with the logic we've been looking at?

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The logic of Chapter 5

Something that truly exists from its own side should become more and more obvious when analyzed— it should be clearly found. But the opposite is the case. (p. 64)

Chapter 5 will now give us some logical form, so that we can put this into a logical form so that we can “reason our way into reality” as the texts sometimes say. The general logical form is very simple. It says.

- (1) Appearance conflicts with reality. Both can't be true.
- (2) Reality trumps appearance.
- (3) Therefore, appearance is false.

Let's unpack this argument by examining it with respect to a table and its parts.

- (1) Appearance conflicts with reality. Appearance tells us that the table is really there, independently of its parts. Reality, which corresponds to our close observation, reveals that the table depends on its parts. Both can't be true.
- (2) What we discover in reality falsifies the appearance. This is because the inherently existent table should be there if it really exists in this way. We should really be able to find it. ***But the closer we look, the more we don't find it.***
- (3) Therefore, the table depends on its parts. The table is empty.

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The importance of designation

In this system, exactly how designation happens is very important. Designation is a way to establish a phenomenon in a way that is free from extremes. You can avoid falling into essentialism and into nihilism. You can avoid falling into the extreme of objectivism and into the extreme of idealism.

I'll quote the Dalai Lama's entire example how a table is designated:

A table depends for its existence on its parts, so we call the collection of its parts the basis upon which it is set up. When we search analytically to try to find this table that appears to our minds as if it exists independently, we must look for it within this basis— the legs, the top, and so forth. But nothing from within the parts is such a table. Thus, these things that are not a table become a table in dependence upon thought; a table does not exist in its own right. (p. 62)

A table has the following three kinds of dependencies:

- (i) It depends on **causes and conditions** (trees, oxygen, a carpenter, etc.)
- (ii) It depends on **parts** (legs, a top, etc.)
- (iii) It depends on **thought**, by being designated as a table.

Without all three of these kinds of dependencies, the table cannot exist.

Designation is not imagination

This is the important point to understand, especially for those who come to the emptiness teachings from an Advaita path, or some other path that says that everything is Awareness or Mind. We need parts + designation, or there is no table.

Designation without parts = NO TABLE

Why not? Sometimes people coming to the emptiness teachings from other paths think that an empty table means a purely imaginary table. But in the present system, the designation has to be applied to the right kind of parts. That is where this teaching is different from some others.

Let's say we were sitting in the room looking at the floor. We look around, and there is no table in the room, even conventionally speaking. There are no legs or tops. According to the emptiness teachings, we can't just imagine a table into existence. No matter how vividly we

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imagine a table, there will be no table without parts. Imagination is not enough. **The fact that the table depends upon parts saves emptiness from falling to the extreme of idealism.**

Parts without designation = NO TABLE

Let's say that in this room, there are five pieces of wood held together. Four long cylindrical pieces and a large, wide, flat, circular disk-shaped piece. Someone is sitting on top of it. Let's say this is a world in which the concept "table" didn't exist. There was no table-like pragmatic behavior. In this world, people eat on the floor, or the hoods of cars. No one had ever designated anything as a "table" or "mesa" or "Tisch" or "bord" or "탁자." In this alternative world, there is a configuration of pieces designated as "chair," but never "table." In this world, then, there will be no tables. Parts are not enough. **The fact that the table depends on designation saves emptiness from falling to the extreme of objectivism.**

The process of designation is where all three types of dependency come into play. Causes and conditions, pieces and parts, and being designated by thought.

Emptiness is not nothingness

The table under analysis

The Dalai Lama discusses this on pages 62 to 65. It is subtle and important. Just because we can't find the table when we look very closely among its parts doesn't mean that the table utterly lacks existence. It merely means that it is empty. Just because we can't find the self among the parts of the body and mind doesn't mean that there is utterly no self. These non-findings under analysis merely mean that these things don't exist in the inherent, exaggerated way they appear to exist.

The table in use

In this system, the criterion of regular or conventional existence is the ability to serve a purpose. Back to our regular world! In our world, the ability of this wooden object to hold my dinner while I sit and eat, and later, to hold my whetstone while I am sharpening my knives, warrants my saying that it exists in an everyday, conventional way. The ability to go to the store, buy groceries, and walk back home is all it takes to allow me to say that I exist in a conventional way. These designations are pragmatic only, not metaphysically final.

Here are two things to keep in mind when thinking about, when we consider looking for an object under analysis, and using it in the everyday sense. In this system,

- The everyday utility of an object establishes **whether** it exists.
- Not finding it under analysis establishes **how** it exists. (i.e., it's empty)

Good luck with this chapter!