

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

Chapter 6 – Seeing the Interdependence of Phenomena

*When this is, that arises,
Like short when there is long.
Due to the production of this, that is produced.
Like light from the production of a flame.*
(p. 68, quoting Nagarjuna)

Chapter 4 helped us see how the sense of inherent existence causes a conflict with the dependent way in which things exist. Chapter 5 helped us put this to use in reasoning about emptiness.

Our present chapter, Chapter 6, is concerned with helping us avoid nihilism and essentialism. This is why the Dalai Lama provides several quotes on dependent arising, and cause and effect.

There are many distinctions made in this teaching, such as emptiness vs. dependent arising, nihilism vs. essentialism, conventional vs. inherent existence, regular meditation vs. nondualistic meditation, that I created some tables that may help keep all these distinctions straight.

The Impact of Dependent Arising

Against Essentialism

The Dalai Lama starts out by saying that all phenomena are dependent on other things. For the more technically inclined, we could say that

For all X, X is dependent upon not-X.

For whatever X there is, X cannot stand on its own. X is not inherently existent. This dependence is not only causal. There are other kinds of dependence as well. In Nagarjuna’s quote, **short arises when there is long**. In this case, **long** didn’t cause **short**. **Long** wasn’t in existence first, only to cause **short’s** existence. It’s that their grammar or logic or use or conceptuality is mutually dependent.

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Against Nihilism

*Having thus seen that effects arise
From causes, one asserts what appears
In the conventions of the world
And does not accept nihilism.
(p. 68, quoting Nagarjuna)*

The Dalai Lama says repeatedly that people, ethics, actions and results are **feasible**. This is an interesting word choice. It is closer to the notion of **doing** and **making**. It doesn't have so much to do with existing. **Feasible** has its roots in Middle English *faisible*, and Anglo-French *faisable*, from *fais*. The original Latin was *facere* — more like **do**.

Being able to do something, being able to perform a function, is often the meaning given to conventional existence as opposed to inherent existence. To conventionally exist amounts to being able to serve some purpose.

Since we can serve some purpose such as eating dinner or going to the store, we don't utterly fail to exist.

Inherent Existence vs. Conventional Existence

Here is a chart that might help

FEATURES OF INHERENT EXISTENCE	FEATURES OF CONVENTIONAL EXISTENCE
Defined as existing on its own, independently.	Defined as existing in dependence on other things.
To affirm this is essentialism.	To affirm this is wisdom.
To refute this is wisdom.	To deny this is nihilism.
Nothing exists this way (but we feel that things do exist this way).	Everything that exists, exists this way.
Not found under analysis.	Found under observation.
There are no dependent arisings here.	There are dependent arisings here.
If it existed, it would not be able to perform actions.	Able to perform functions.

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If it existed, it would not be able to come or go.	Appears and disappears depending on conditions.
If it existed, it would not be able to change.	Can change.
Emptiness meditation refutes this.	Emptiness meditation does not refute this.
An inherently existing self is the object of refutation in analytic meditation.	A conventionally existing self is not the object of refutation in analytic meditation. The conventionally existent self performs the meditations. It goes to the store, suffers, meditates, and realizes emptiness.
The more that the inherently existent self is refuted and realized not to exist, the more the exaggerated sense of its existence diminishes, along with afflictive emotions.	When the conventionally existent self realizes emptiness more and more deeply, it finds more and more happiness and love.

When Thinking about Emptiness and Dependent Arising

FEATURES OF EMPTINESS	FEATURES OF DEPENDENT ARISING
At first, this concept may feel like nihilism, as though nothing exists, as though nothing functions (but it's not nihilistic).	At first, may seem like it is affirming inherently existent causality (but it's not).
Antidote: If thinking about this makes you feel depressed or nihilistic, focus instead on dependent arising. Things will balance out later.	Antidote: If thinking about this makes you feel like it is affirming inherent causality, then focus instead on emptiness. Things will balance out later.
As you progress, seems more like dependent arising.	As you progress, seems more like emptiness.

The Inexpressibility of the Truth

In this section the Dalai Lama is making a subtle reference to the direct realization of emptiness. The articulation about this realization can sound like it entails nihilism, but it doesn't.

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About Realization of the Truth (i.e., emptiness)

INFERENCEAL REALIZATION	NONDUALISTIC, DIRECT REALIZATION
A conceptual, dualistic experience, but still helpful and transformational.	A nondual experience, in which there is no subject/object distinction present. Likened to water being poured into water with no movement or ripples anywhere.
People unfamiliar with the teachings who hear about this can think that if it is conceptual it is valueless. But this path makes skillful use of conceptual resources that facilitate nonconceptual realizations. Inferential emptiness realization is one of the helpful conceptual resources.	People unfamiliar with the teachings who hear about this can conclude that the result is that nonexistence is being affirmed. But it's not.
Mediated by concepts.	Not mediated by concepts.
Can be expressed.	Cannot be expressed.
Can be realized without the cultivation of calm abiding.	Depends on the cultivation of calm abiding in meditation practice.
Depends on understanding how inferential realization works, which is what the Dalai Lama is explaining slowly in chapters 1-6.	Depends on close familiarity with inferential realization.
Realizes the emptiness of the target of refutation (i.e., whatever you set out to meditate on in that session).	Realizes the emptiness of the target of refutation and then leads to the realization of the emptiness of everything at once.
The teachings recommend many, many of these.	The teachings recommend many, many of these. Although there is now no longer an emotion-based or personal need to continue, nevertheless one's love, along with the humble, sincere intent to help others, serve as motivating factors.

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Similarity with Illusions

Just because the self and other phenomena are not findable under analysis doesn't mean they are utterly non-existent. Non-findability under analysis merely means that something doesn't exist as it appears to exist.

Actually, nothing is ever found under emptiness analysis. This kind of ultra-close focus is designed to look for things that we think exist by their own power. If they truly exist in this way, they should be found (but they're not).

Emptiness analysis is not designed to find conventionally existent things. Conventionally existent things don't need this kind of analysis. They fly under its radar. All they need is to be able to respond to conditions and accomplish functions.

That X is found not to exist under its own power comes to mean that X depends on other things. Emptiness comes to mean dependent arising.

I find it significant and helpful that the Dalai Lama says that beings are **similar to** illusions. He doesn't say that they **are** illusions. That's just the point – there is nothing that beings really are. They are merely **designated** as being something.

Good luck on this chapter!