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# Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

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## 1.1. Refuting permanent functional phenomena

### 1.1.2. Refuting the rejoinder

Having established that functional things are impermanent and that there cannot be permanent functional phenomena, the text then specifically refutes the non-Buddhist schools through the use of assertions.

*Vaisheshika Assertion:* Although things that are produced for their effect are not permanent, functional things—from space to the mind, which lack both the feature of being produced and that of being producers; and the smallest particles, which, though they are producers, are not produced—are permanent and truly existent,

*There is not anywhere anything* 202  
*That ever exists without depending.*  
*Thus never is there anywhere*  
*Anything that is permanent.*

We agree with the Vaisheshika that things that are produced for their effect are not permanent. However they also assert that all functional things from space to mind are permanent phenomena.

The Vaisheshika basically assert that all phenomena are included within the following categories of existence: substance, quality, activity, generality and particularity. Substance is further sub-divided into nine: which are the four elements - earth, water, fire, and air, together with space, time, direction, self and mind. Among the category of substance, the last five, from space to mind, are asserted as being both a substance as well as permanent phenomena. The Vaisheshika state that space, time, direction, self and mind are pervasive substances because they pervade everywhere, while the four elements are only partial because they do not pervade all existence. Furthermore, these five substances are considered as permanent phenomena because they 'lack both the feature of being produced and that of being producers'. They establish that substances arise independently, serve as a basis of other phenomena, and so have some functional features. Yet are permanent phenomenon, according to the Vaisheshika.

So, these phenomena - space, time, direction, self and mind - are said to be substance but to lack both the features of being produced and being producers. Whereas the four elements - earth, water, fire, and air - are producers and are produced. However all asserted as functional permanent phenomena.

The smallest particle is also asserted as being a permanent functional phenomenon. Because it is the smallest particle it does not produce any further. The smallest particle is a functional permanent phenomenon; it is not produced, and truly existent. So, they not only assert that it is permanent, but also that it is a truly existent phenomenon. In fact all five categories of substantial existences are asserted as being permanent phenomena, and furthermore truly existent phenomena. As stated in the assertion, all 'are permanent and truly existent'.

The verse refutes that view. As the commentary explains:

Never, at any time or at any place, is there any chance of finding a functional thing that does not depend on relatedness [or dependentness].

This is explaining that there is no time or place where a functional thing does not depend on relatedness, or does not depend on causes. In other words a functional thing is always dependent on its cause and there can never be a time when the functional thing is not dependent on its causes. Therefore, as the commentary reads:

Thus never is there anywhere a permanent functional phenomenon.

This is because a functional thing, by its very nature, is dependent on a cause and therefore cannot be a permanent phenomenon.

Functional phenomena are established as being impermanent phenomena for the reason that they have relatedness. As explained earlier, this means that any functional phenomena has to relate to its causes for it to be produced, and therefore for it to exist.

They are also called functional phenomena because they have a function. Establishing them as being a functional phenomenon negates functional phenomena as being permanent, as well as being truly existent phenomena. If it was a truly existent phenomenon then that would mean it is a phenomenon that does not depend on anything, and which exists from its own side, or which has inherent existence. If we were to assert a truly existent phenomena, we would have to assert a functional phenomenon that does not depend on anything. Thus negating functional phenomenon as being permanent phenomenon is at the same time negating functional phenomena as being truly existent phenomena.

The negation of a functional phenomenon as being a permanent phenomenon should be understood thus: if a functional phenomenon were to be a permanent phenomenon then it would have to be a phenomenon which never changed from moment to moment. However a functional phenomena does change from moment to moment - there are grosser and subtle levels of change that take place all the time. Thus it cannot be a permanent phenomenon.

Likewise the reason why a functional phenomenon is negated in being a truly existent phenomenon is because of the fact, if it were to be a truly existent phenomenon then it would have to be a phenomenon that did not depend on its causes and its conditions for it to be produced. And since a functional phenomenon does depend upon causes and conditions, it cannot be an independent phenomenon and it cannot be a truly existent or inherently existent phenomenon that does not depend on anything. That is how it is negated and that's what we need to understand.

By thinking along these lines one comes to the actual understanding of what is being explained and that will be useful for us. Rather than leaving this as a dry explanation from the text, if we can actually use it in our practice to meditate upon this meaning then we have derived a practice from hearing the teaching. As explained in the teachings we use what we hear in the teaching for analysing, and the wisdom that we gain from analysing for meditation. That is the process of how we should use this material to practice.

What we hear from the teaching on this point is that functional things are not permanent and are not truly

existent phenomenon. Rather than just leaving it at that, one uses it in one's analysis. One thinks, 'That is what I have heard. Is it so or not? Is functional phenomena permanent or impermanent? How could it be impermanent? Why is it not a permanent phenomena?'

One thinks along the lines of the explanation and tries to relate it to one's own logic. The very definition of functional phenomenon is that which is produced and changes from moment to moment. So if something is changing from moment to moment then it could not be permanent. That very fact negates that thing as being a permanent phenomena, which does not change from moment to moment. Thus we can understand how the functional object is not permanent, and thus one gains a further understanding of impermanence.

As the teaching further explains, furthermore a functional phenomenon cannot be a truly existent phenomenon. So, one contemplates the reason why it is not a truly existent phenomenon. The reasons that are given are that if it were to be truly existent phenomenon then it would have to be an existent phenomenon that exists independently, and not related to anything else.

When we investigate a functional phenomenon like a vase we use our own analytical wisdom and logic to realise that a functional phenomenon such as a vase could not exist from its own side, existing in and of itself, without having to relate to anything else. It could not exist independently in that way because we see that there are so many obvious causes and conditions that come together in producing a vase. So in that way we can realise how the vase lacks inherent existence or true existence, and in that way enhance our understanding of the emptiness of the vase.

## 1.2. Refuting them individually

This refers to individually refuting permanent functional phenomena as being permanent, and it has five categories.

- 1.2.1. Refuting a personal self
- 1.2.2. Refuting three substantially existent and compounded phenomena
- 1.2.3. Refuting permanent time
- 1.2.4. Refuting permanent particles
- 1.2.5. Refuting substantially established liberation

### 1.2.1. Refuting a personal self

What is being refuted is a personal self, which is asserted by the non-Buddhist schools. In Buddhism there is no self of a person that is defined as permanent, single and self-sufficient.

The non-Buddhist schools have different assertions about how a personal self exists, but there is a common trend. Five main features are asserted by the non-Buddhist schools called the Vaisheshika and the Samkya, although they differ in their details. The non-Buddhist Vaisheshikas say the features of a self are:

- It is a consumer of food and so forth,
- It is a functional permanent phenomenon
- It does not have knowledgeable qualities
- The self is the creator<sup>1</sup>
- The self has no action

This was all explained earlier when we were doing the Madhyamaka text. Therefore you will have it in your notes, and you should refer to them. When you combine these features then basically all the non-Buddhist schools assert the self to be a permanent, single and self-sufficient phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

There is also a non-Buddhist school which asserts that the self is actually just one entity which has many bodies. The analogy they use is that just as there is one sky that can be reflected on many lakes, so one soul is personified in many different beings, but there is actually only one entity.

A Buddhist point of view asserts that there is a self, but there is no self that exists as a single, permanent independent entity as asserted by the non-Buddhist schools. If there were to be a personal self then that is how the self would have to exist, but it does not exist in that way.

So when this outline refers to refuting a personal self then one needs to understand the self that is being refuted is a self that is permanent single and independent.

Refuting a permanent single and independent self is actually refuting a grosser level of self. There are much more subtle levels of self that are also refuted in Buddhism, but here it is a self on a gross level that is being refuted.

Refuting a personal self is sub-divided into two:

- 1.2.1.1. Actual meaning
- 1.2.1.2. Refuting the rejoinder

#### 1.2.1.1. ACTUAL MEANING

**Assertion:** Dependently arising phenomena like pleasure and so forth exist, and the self is the cause that attracts them [or combines them together]. Thus the self exists and, moreover, it is permanent.

**Answer:**

*There is no functional thing without a cause, 203*  
*Nor anything permanent which has a cause.*  
*Thus the one who knows suchness said what has*  
*Come about causelessly does not exist.*

The main point of the assertion is establishing a permanent self and that is what is being refuted by the verse. The commentary says:

There is no personal self since that which has no producing cause is not a functional thing nor is there anything permanent which has a cause.

If you establish a self that is a permanent functional phenomenon, then you would have to agree that there is no self, because of the fact that there cannot be a permanent functional phenomenon to begin with. It is absurd to assert the self is a permanent phenomenon, because by establishing it as a functional permanent phenomenon you could end up saying that the self does not exist. That is how a self is established in the assertion.

As the commentary further explains:

[The Buddha, the omniscient] one who knows suchness, said phenomena that come into being causelessly do not exist.

This explains the two last lines of the verse. The one who knows suchness said that what has come about causelessly does not exist. So in another words if it does exist as a functional phenomenon then it has to have a cause, as something without a cause could not exist.

<sup>1</sup> incorporated from notes of 18 May 2004.  
Chapter 9

<sup>2</sup> See notes of 18 May 2004 and 25 May 2004.

Then the commentary mentions these two lines from a sutra:

Phenomenon with causes and conditions are known.  
Phenomena without causes and conditions do not exist.

### 1.2.1.2. REFUTING THE REJOINER

*If the unproduced is permanent* 204  
*Because impermanent [things] are seen to be*  
*products,*  
*Seeing that the produced exists*  
*Would make the permanent non existent.*

What is being further refuted here is the absurdity of the assertions. The commentary begins the refutation in this way:

If on seeing that a pot and pleasure are impermanent and produced...

This relates to the assertions of the non-Buddhist schools that a partless particle is a permanent phenomenon. As mentioned before according to these schools all substances are permanent phenomena, so therefore a partless particle is a permanent phenomenon. They would establish that a vase is an accumulation of many partless particles. An accumulation of partless particles into one thing, such as a vase is an impermanent phenomenon, because they see functional things such as a part and pleasure as being impermanent, and produced by seeing. They also assert, as it reads here:

...one asserts that the self and so forth are by implication permanent...

That is how they assert the self to be permanent. Because things such as parts and pleasures are impermanent phenomenon they establish by implication that the self is a permanent phenomena, which is an absurd statement.

The following lines of the commentary point out this absurdity and thus refute the non-Buddhist schools.

...it would follow that because of seeing that pot and so forth are produced and exist, whatever is permanent like the self should be non-existent like a sky-flower.

This is refuting the non-Buddhist schools by pointing out the absurdity saying that that if you were to establish the earlier part then by implication one would also have to establish that a self is non-existent phenomenon like a sky-flower.

### 1.2.2. Refuting three un-compounded phenomena as substantially existent<sup>3</sup>

This is sub-divided into two:

#### 1.2.2.1. General refutation

#### 1.2.2.2. Specifically refuting permanent omnipresent space

##### 1.2.2.1. GENERAL REFUTATION

Assertion: The treatises of knowledge say space, individual analytical cessations, and non-analytical cessations are permanent and substantially existent. Any refutation of this is invalidated by your own assertions.

Answer: That is not so.

*That space and so forth are permanent* 205  
*Is a conception of common beings.*  
*For the wise they are not objects perceived*  
*Even by conventional [valid cognition].*

The verse is refuting the assertion by initially making a point against the Buddhist view. The Buddhist schools say that there are no functional phenomena, and the non-Buddhist

schools respond by quoting from the sutra *The treatises of knowledge* which says that three things, space, individual analytical cessations and non-analytical cessations are permanent and also substantially existent. 'So', they argue, 'If you say that these things are not functional permanent phenomena, does that not go against the sutra saying that they are?'

The Buddhist school says, 'That is not so, and it does not harm our assertions'. To explain this the commentary reads:

Not understanding the significance of applying the term "space" to mere absence of obstructive contact and so forth, common people think that un-compounded space and so forth are permanent [functional phenomena].

Although it is true that in the sutras there is a reference to space as well as analytical cessation and non-analytical cessation being permanent phenomenon, that is an explanation for common beings who can only accept a limited explanation of those entities.

**Space** is a mere absence of obstructiveness. The definition of space is the mere absence of obstructive contact.

**Analytical cessation** is the cessation that is gained from applying the appropriate antidotes. Through the constant application of antidotes one overcomes particular delusions within one's mental continuum, and then obtains analytical cessation.

**Non-analytical cessation** refers to those things that are abandoned not because of an antidote, but because of the mere absence of the conditions for that thing to arise. So certain delusions or instances are overcome due to the lack of conditions at that time, but if the conditions were right they might arise.

These three are explained in the topic of suchness in the *Treasure of Knowledge*, as being functional permanent phenomena, and this is accepted by the lowest Buddhist school, the Vaibashikas. Being the lowest Buddhist school implies that the intelligence of the Vaibashika is of a limited level. Thus some, although not all, of the Vaibashika school assert that space, for example, is a permanent phenomenon as well as a functional phenomenon. They assert that it is a functional phenomenon because the text says it has the function of allowing things to move about in space. As that is a function of space, therefore space is a functional phenomenon.

Although they assert space as being a permanent phenomenon there are also other phenomena such as a vase that they accept as impermanent phenomena. So they do accept impermanent phenomena. In other words, permanent phenomena is not synonymous with functional phenomena, as there are impermanent phenomena which are also functional phenomena. As explained here, it is because of their limited intelligence and their lack of capacity to understand fully what is being explained to them at that level, that the Vaibashika accept this point. That is why they are referred to here as 'common people'.

The Vaibashika Buddhist schools also assert that functional permanent phenomena such as space are substantially existent phenomena. That is what has to be refuted by the highest Buddhist schools. Therefore as the commentary explains:

Those who are wise concerning the suchness of functional phenomena, far from thinking they exist ultimately, do not regard permanent functional phenomena even as objects perceived by conventional valid cognition.

<sup>3</sup> The published text says 'Refuting three substantially existent un-compounded phenomena'

What is being explained here is that beings who have an understanding of suchness or emptiness would not see functional phenomena as being permanent as well as existing ultimately. Asserting functional permanent phenomena is also establishing phenomena as being truly existent, or as existing ultimately. That is what has to be refuted.

As explained here, a being who has an understanding of emptiness or suchness will not view functional phenomena as being permanent. Nor would they view them as being ultimately existent phenomena. So, as the text states:

Only that which does not change is termed permanent.

What is really established as being permanent is that which does not change from moment to moment.

What sutra says is not primarily stated to establish [a substantial existence but to refute an existence of permanent functional things].

What is being explained in that specific quote in the sutra about space, analytical cessation and non-analytical cessation as being a functional permanent phenomenon is uttered only to specific beings who have a limited intelligence. Because of their limited intelligence, they would not understand higher teachings on non-true existence or the non-inherent existence of phenomena. To such beings permanent phenomena such as space and so forth are explained as being functional permanent phenomena, but they are not explained as the ultimate object to establish for themselves in their meditation. Rather, because of their general limited knowledge and intelligence, it is explained in this way as a means to later guide and lead them on to further stages of understanding.

#### 1.2.2.2. SPECIFICALLY REFUTING PERMANENT OMNIPRESENT SPACE

Assertion: Space is permanent, because it is omnipresent. Whatever is impermanent like a pot is not omnipresent.

Perhaps a literal translation from the Tibetan word translated here as 'omnipresent' would be 'pervade'. Space is permanent because it pervades throughout all directions.

Answer: The following refutes permanence by refuting omnipresence. It is contradictory to assert that space is omnipresent but partless.

*A single direction is not present* 206  
*Wherever there is that which has directions.*  
*That with directions clearly*  
*Also has other directional parts.*

The assertion that space is permanent is an assertion of the non-Buddhist schools. Actually this assertion seems quite logical, because space, particularly un compounded space, is a permanent phenomena, which is accepted even by the Buddhist schools in our own system. Un compounded space is omnipresent in the sense that it is pervasive, whereas a functional phenomena like a pot, an impermanent phenomenon, is not pervasive. That is obvious, and of course, seems logical.

However while they assert that space is omnipresent or pervasive, at the same time they accept that space is what they call directionless (or partless), and that is what has to be refuted. Even though the non-Buddhist schools assert that space is permanent that is also accepted in our own system. However what is being refuted specifically is that space is partless. As commentary explains:

The part of space contiguous to an eastern pot is not present wherever there is space which has directions,

such as where there is a western pot. If it were, the western pot would be in the east and the eastern pot in the west.

If there is a pot in the east and a pot in the west then if one were to say there is no pots in space you would have to assume and thus imply that the space in the eastern pot also pervades the space in the western pot and *vice versa*. Thus there would be no difference in the space in those two opposite directions. It would be similar to saying that the pot in the west is also in the east and the pot in the east is in the west, which is an absurd statement.

The non-Buddhists come to understand the refutation, and want to counter that point. Thus, as the commentary reads:

If to guard against such a fallacy [they assert] that the part of space which is in the east is not in the west, Then directional space very clearly must have other parts.

This clearly connotes that there must be parts to space. So if you were to accept that space does have parts then one should not accept permanent functional things. So as the Buddhist system says, by default you cannot then accept functional permanent phenomena.

Then the commentary summarises the point with a quote from a sutra:

"Kasyapa permanence is one extreme, so-called impermanence is another extreme". The belief that ultimate truths are permanent functional phenomena is foreign [or contrary] to this teaching [meaning the Dharma].

Thus as this sutra explains, believing that ultimate truths are permanent functional phenomena is completely contrary to the main point of the teachings.

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