

Guanding's Introduction

Part Two: Establishing a Connection & Rebutting the Sceptic

Clear Serenity, Quiet Insight: T'ien-t'ai Chih-i's Mo-ho chih-kuan, SWANSON, 2017. pg 92-93.

Pg92: “A sceptic may say, “[The method of] the Middle Treatise¹ is to clear away, while cessation-and-contemplation is constructive. How can they be considered the same?””

The hypothetical skeptic here is pointing out that Nagarjuna's *Middle Treatise*, and the accompanying commentary, are written in the negative. The text takes aim at the reification of any and all claims, metaphysical and ontological, including basic Buddhist or Abhidharmic suppositions. Nagarjuna does not on the whole, intend to refute key Buddhist dogma or 'do away with' the suppositions altogether. It is the reification and speculation, which is at issue. It is worth pointing out here in the interest of fairness, that Nagarjuna and the Commentator do not always do justice to the positions of their opponents. Many of the objections by supposed Abhidharmika, most likely Sarvastivada in many cases, are simplistic or caricatures. Presumably this was not a problem in Nagarjuna's time, given that the Sarvastivada Abhidharma was an exceedingly dominant intellectual force. Most of the readers would have been reasonably familiar with Sarvastivada Abhidharma, and thus, these caricatures would have served as contextual reminders at best. The contemporary reader, absent sufficient grounding in the Abhidharma works, would be unwise to take similar liberties.

The critic also points out that cessation-and-contemplation, in contradistinction, are 'constructive' as opposed to negative. As a binome for Tiantai religious practice (dynamic) on the one hand, and an expanded over-arching term encapsulating the dual study and practice modes on the other, it would seem that this tradition², and that of the *Middle Treatise* are decidedly different. This matters if the above lineage is to be taken seriously even if symbolically, and directly, in light of the the quote from Zhiyi's *Guanxin Lun* above.³

As mentioned previously, the East Asian Madhyamaka School or *Sanlun Zong*, were a primary rival of the early Tiantai School, and we might see here a pre-emptive response to potential objections raised from this quarter. By utilising this pattern, of hypothetical objection and response, Guanding is consciously and firmly placing the Tiantai tradition within the purview of Nagarjuna. The *Middle Treatise* contains numerous hypothetical objections to the Madhyamaka system, from Abhidharmika opponents. It is no surprise here then, that Guanding places the staunch Madhyamikan, in the role of the Abhidharmika. The roles have shifted, and imply that an inability to appreciate the interpretations of Nagarjuna by Zhiyi, constitute nothing less than the Abhidharmic danger to reification in the former. This is quite a clever exegetic, and would have been clear to those intimately familiar with the genre.

Pg92: “However, it should be known that there are about seventy Indian commentators [on Nagarjuna's Mūlamadyamaka-kārikā]; we should not affirm only that of Qingmu [which emphasizes the negativistic side of Nāgārjuna's teachings] and reject the other commentators.”

¹ The *Middle Treatise* or *Zhonglun* 中論 is the Chinese translation of Nagarjuna's Mūlamadyamaka-kārikā, and an accompanying commentary by *Qingmu* or 'Blue Eyes'. This translation is credited to Kumarajiva; an English translation has been made by Bocking. In East Asia, the original *Kārikā* by Nagarjuna and the commentary of *Qingmu* were always read together. It is therefore common, in the East Asian context to think of the *Middle Treatise* as a single work, rather than as the combination of verses and treatise by two different authors.

² That is, the Tiantai School.

³ Swanson translates the title of this text as *Treatise on Contemplating Thoughts*. An English translation may be found here: *A Study and Translation on the Kuan-hsin-lun of Chih-i (538-597) and its Commentary by Kuan-ting (561-632)*, TAM, 1986.

- Guanding's response is an attempt to place Zhiyi's interpretations within the fold as it were, and not, an attempt to cast Qingmu's commentary aside. It is designed specifically to affirm the Zhiyi's connection with the Indian lineage, here represented by Nagarjuna. As mentioned, the commentary and verses were seen as synonomous, and were read together. Tiantai and Tendai Monks therefore, study Qingmu's commentary to this day. However, the commentary has always been treated with a certain degree of scepticism throughout East Asian Buddhism. Even the Preface to the Chinese translation of the text, by *Sengrui* (僧睿 371-438AD), speaks of the commentary in disparaging terms, and further suggests that Kumarajiva himself felt a need to correct its insufficiencies. "*Though he (Qingmu) believed and understood the profound Dharma, his language is not elegant and apposite. The Dharma-master (Kumarajiva) edited and emended all the errors, deficiencies and redundancies in it...*"⁴
- The sceptic's charge is indeed fair, if we limit our field of vision to the *Middle Treatise* alone, which deals most specifically with 'clearing away'. And it is clear that the *Sanlun* School tended most primarily to discourse on the negative aspect of *Sunyata*.⁵ In the Tiantai school however, the positive aspect of *Sunyata* qua *tathatā* came to hold great importance.
- In regards to the other commentaries, Zhanran gives us a few examples. He mentions the *Xunzhong Lun* By Asanga⁶, the *Zhonglun* by Rahu(?)⁷, and the *Prajna Pradipa* by Bhavaviveka.
- Zhanran comes down quite hard on Qingmu's commentary, he states: "*Moreover, Qingmu's [commentary] is the most inferior. [It is to be] set apart as in error; it cannot be relied upon.*" Taken in isolation this seems quite strong, but when read with Zhanran's comment to ch.24 v.18 straight after, it becomes clear what Zhanran intends. There, Zhanran tells us to *rely on Nagarjuna*. In other words, do not rely on *Qingmu*, rely on Nagarjuna's own words. The further implication being that Zhiyi is indeed in line with Nagarjuna. Guanding will claim something quite similar by providing Nagarjuna's 24.18 verse from the *Middle Treatise* below.

**Pg93: "All things that arise through causes and conditions,
I explain as emptiness.
Again, this is a conventional designation.
Again, this is the meaning of the Middle Way. "**

The first thing to be mentioned here is that Zhiyi, and Guanding, understand this passage via Kumarajiva's translation. The Tiantai community relied on Kumarajiva's translation exclusively. The above rendering then, is as Zhiyi and the Tiantai tradition interpret this passage, and Kumarajiva's Chinese allows for this interpretation. For a more orthodoxly Madhyamaka interpretation of this verse, Bocking renders the verse as follows:

*"Dharmas produced by causes and conditions
We say are non-existent.
And constitute conventional names
And this is the meaning of the middle Path."*⁸

Reminding ourselves of Zhanran's advice; that is that we consult Nagarjuna's own words, rather than the commentary of Qingmu, we see here Guanding's same advice. This is precisely why Guanding provides here the verse of Nagarjuna, as is, without the commentary. Both of the above

⁴ *Nagarjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, BOCKING, 1995.

⁵ Having said that, Jizang's Treatise clearly show influence from Tathagatarbha thought, notably through the Nirvana Sutra. This means that later *Sanlun* would find itself much closer to Tiantai positions than might have been true for early Madhyamaka.

⁶ 順中論(T30.50c-50b)

⁷ 中論 Not extant.

⁸ *Nagarjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, BOCKING, 1995.

renderings are equally possible from the Chinese, but the second rendering requires the commentary that follows to confirm its orthodoxy. The implication being, that when we look to Nagarjuna, we see teachings that look far more like Zhiyi's than that of Qingmu. This interpretation is not without controversy of course. Orthodox Madhyamika will object that the rest of the text speaks clearly and directly about Two Truths, not the Three Truths foreshadowed here.⁹ But the idea that the Buddha, and Buddhist teachers taught one thing, and meant something else, saturates Buddhist history. Here, the point is clearly to connect Zhiyi's teachings, and by extension the *Mohe Zhiguan* with the Indian lineage qua Nagarjuna.

The Two Truths

In the same chapter of the *Middle Treatise*, in verses 8 and 9, Nagarjuna lays out the Two Truths in their simplest terms:

24.8: *“All Buddhas rely on two types of truth
In order to teach the Dharma to living beings.
One is conventional worldly truth,
The other is the truth of the ultimate meaning.”*¹⁰

The two truths then, are 1) the Conventional Truth (*Samvrti satya* 世俗諦), and 2) the Ultimate Truth (*Paramārtha satya* 勝義諦 or 第一義). In simple terms, the Conventional Truth is the everyday world as it appears in our sensory perceptions. It is the unenlightened world of the *prthagjana* (凡夫 the ignorant) at the mundane level of understanding. It therefore is characterised by duality and distinction. *Qingmu's* commentary to the verse says:

*“As for “Conventional Worldly Truth”: all dharmas are empty in their nature, but because of our worldly perverted perceptions we produce false and illusory dharmas, and this is worldly reality.”*¹¹

Candrakīrti in his *Prsannapadā* tells us that:

*“Samvrti means being utterly obscured. Again, ignorance arising from the utter obscuring of the true nature of things is called samvrti. Again, to be reciprocally dependent in existence, that is, for things to be based on each other in utter reciprocity, is to be samvrti. Again, samvrti means social convention, that is, the world of ordinary language and of transactions between individuals which is characterised by the distinction between knowing and the thing known, naming and the thing named, and so on.”*¹²

From these sources, we might determine that Conventional Truth is that which is

- 1) False and illusory,
- 2) ‘Obscuration’; that which covers over the true nature of things.
- 3) Reciprocally Dependent: that is, synonymous with *Pratītyasamutpāda*. The mutual causal dependence of things which are necessary for their arising.
- 4) Social Convention: that which is agreed upon convention. That which is *upāya*.
- 5) Ordinary Language: our terms and linguistic discriminations derived of cognitive differentiation. That which is imputed upon, rather than of, the thing in itself.

Ultimate Truth or *Paramārtha satya* is then the opposite supposition. It is that which is perceived by the Ārya, the enlightened, at the ultimate level of Understanding. It is therefore characterised by non-duality and non-differentiation. *Qingmu's* commentary says the following:

⁹ Although interestingly, it doesn't appear that Chinese *Sanlun* Scholars found Zhiyi's position all that objectionable. They themselves were heavily influenced by texts such as the Nirvana Sutra, and this may be why the school was essentially absorbed into Tiantai communities throughout East Asia.

¹⁰ *Nagarjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, BOCKING, 1995.

¹¹ *Nagarjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, BOCKING, 1995.

¹² *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti*, SPRUNG, 1979.

“Since the saints and sages know the true nature of these perverted perceptions, they know that all dharmas are utterly empty and that there is no arising, and this is the truth of the ultimate meaning which constitutes reality for the saints.”¹³

Candrakīrti in his *Prasannapadā* puts it this way:

“When the object of thought is no more, there is nothing for language to refer to. The true nature of things neither arises nor perishes, as nirvāna does not. This being so how could verbal utterances or acts of knowledge be effective and valid in the higher or surpassing sense? Because what is higher or surpassing is not dependent on anything other than itself, it is at peace, it is known in and through itself by the wise; it is beyond the world of named things as such; it cannot be demonstrated nor even cognized.”¹⁴

Therefore, Ultimate Truth is that which is

- 1) Utterly Empty; that is not productions of false proliferation.
- 2) No Arising, No Ceasing¹⁵
- 3) Reality of the Ārya, as opposed to social convention.
- 4) Inutterable.
- 5) un-cognizable.¹⁶

It is the following verse in the *Middle Treatise*, verse 9, which has given so many Buddhists pause, and perhaps motivates the *Threefold Truth* system of Zhiyi:

24.9: *“If a person is unable to perceive
The distinction between these two truths
Then he will not know the real meaning
Of the profound Buddha-Dharma.”¹⁷*

In other words, it is essential that one come to understand the relationship between the Two Truths. Otherwise, one *will not know the real meaning*. Nagarjuna, Qingmu, and Candrakīrti all give us the same answer to this conundrum. That is, that it is through the conventional, that the ultimate is made known. It is through words and differentiations, that the inutterable and un-cognizable are made manifest, utterable, and cognizable. As such, the relationship is re-contextualised as one twofold truth in the sense that they are mutually dependent, and two ways of viewing a single reality.

However, there is a sense in which this leaves room for speculation. Many critics of Zhiyi’s Threefold Truth accuse it of being little more than a Chinese misunderstanding of Nagarjuna’s system. While it is true that the semantic nature of certain terms is altered in translation, it is not accurate to suggest that Zhiyi lacked the resources or the ability, to understand Madhyamaka ideas. Zhiyi lectured in Jinling where the *Sanlun* school was heavily active.¹⁸ Concern about the relationship between these two levels of truth, was not limited to China and the East either, as certain critics suggest. Zhiyi was not the first Buddhist to develop a stratagem for dealing with this concern, nor were the Chinese the only Buddhists concerned by its potential issues.

¹³ *Nagarjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, BOCKING, 1995.

¹⁴ *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti*, SPRUNG, 1979.

¹⁵ See the first chapter of the *Middle Treatise*.

¹⁶ Remember that Nagarjuna is not denying the categories he refutes, he is pointing out that any ultimate investigation of them, shows our categories and concepts to be insufficient; we hit the conceptual wall. As an example, Nagarjuna accepts the Buddha’s instruction on the causal sequence to Nirvana. It is the systems that arise which attempt to characterise the mechanism of causality which are the problem.

¹⁷ *Nagarjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, BOCKING, 1995.

¹⁸ The *Sanlun* or East Asian Madhyamaka School holds the same primary doctrines as Indic Madhyamaka. This shows that the school was accurately transmitted to the East, and that its ideas were clearly understood.

Yogācarin Elaboration?

The Yogācārin developed the Tri-Svabhāva theory(三性), in part as an attempt to confront similar concerns. An in-depth discussion of this doctrine, is not permissible here, but for the sake of comparison, it will be discussed briefly. For those wishing to understand this theory further, I recommend a thorough investigation of the primary Yogācārin texts.¹⁹ Before outlining the Tri-Svabhāva theory, it should be noted that while similar motivations led to the Tri-Svabhāva, and the Three Truths, they are not analogous. The two theories do differ but there are also striking parallels, with the former consisting of their own negation (i.e. three non-self), and used in conjunction with the Ārūpya-dhātu, and the latter entailing their own intersubsumption²⁰, and used in conjunction with the Three Contemplations. The tri-svabhāva or the ‘Three Self-natures’ discuss the cognitive stages or perceptive grounds, of reality. The are as follows:

- 1) *Parikalpita-svabhāva* (遍計所執性 • Fabrication Nature)

This refers to that which is conceptually constructed by the mind’s continual imputation of labels, names, distinctions, and so forth, onto reality. That is, the resultant ‘fabricated’ world, removed from the True Nature of things. It is synonymous with ignorance • *avidyā*, and is thus the stage of ordinary unenlightened beings. When the mind proliferates and gives substance to that which does not, in fact have substance - this is *parikalpita-svabhāva*.

 - It’s own self negation is found in the very fact that it is an illusory, fabricated reality; it possesses no ‘essence’ therefore.
 - This may corresponds to the first stage or *Bhūmi* of the *ārūpya-dhātu*: *ākāśānantyāyatana* (The Heaven of Boundless Space). This is because, much like *ākāśa*, *parikalpita-svabhāva* is all-pervasive. The *Chengweishi Lun* states that *ākāśa* is a mental construction.²¹
- 2) *Paratantra-svabhāva* (依他起性 • Arising Dependent on Others Nature)

The recognition that phenomena arise dependent on other qua conditions. Therefore, things lack ‘self-being’ in an independent sense. An acknowledgement of the fundamental teaching of *Pratītya-samutpāda*. This constitutes a slightly more skilful understanding of the world. *Paratantra* is an account of the causes and conditions that constitute the ‘fabricated world’ of *parikalpita*.

 - It’s own self negation is in its admission that nothing is independent, and derived as it is from other, lacks self-nature.
 - This may correspond to the second *Bhūmi* of the *ārūpya-dhātu*: *Vijñānānantyāyatana* (The Heaven of Infinite Consciousness). Consciousness arises dependent on causes and conditions, such as the contact between the *āyatana*.²²
- 3) *Pariniṣpanna-svabhāva* (圓成實性 • Perfected True Nature)

This is the highest level of understanding, and conforms with the true nature of the world. Often paired with Madhyamakan emptiness, or paramārtha. It is the ultimate ‘doing-away-with’ of the fabricated. *Pariniṣpanna* is the cure for ‘defiled-paratantra’ - that which is tinged with *parikalpita*.

 - It is the very definition of non-self inasmuch as its purpose it to destroy svabhāvic notions.
 - This may correspond to the third *Bhūmi* of the *ārūpya-dhātu*: *Ākiñcanyāyatana* (The Heaven of Absolute Nothingness). Here ‘emptiness’ as quality is matched with ‘nothingness’.²³

¹⁹ The idea is talked about extensively in the following texts: *Sandhinirmocana Sutra*, *Mahāyānasutrālamkāra*, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Lankāvatāra Sutra*, *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*, and the *Trimśika*.

²⁰ I.e. each subsumes the others. In practical terms, nothing can be either the same as, or different from each other.

²¹ *Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch’eng Wei-Shih lun*, LUSTHAUS, 2003.

²² *Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch’eng Wei-Shih lun*, LUSTHAUS, 2003.

²³ *Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch’eng Wei-Shih lun*,

- ❖ It should be noted that there are four bhūmi in the the ārūpya-dhātu. When the two concepts are paired, the ‘purified paratantra’ that comes through parinispanna is considered equivalent with the fourth bhūmi: Naivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana (The Heaven of Neither-ideation-nor-non-ideation). This is because, causality occurs without ideation.²⁴

It should be clear that the Tri-Svabhāva theory is not synonymous with, or of the same character as Zhiyi’s Three Truths. The point then, in elaborating on them here, is to show that concern with, or elaboration on, the Two Truths is not an East Asian peculiarity. Indian Buddhists themselves developed similar outgrowths.

Zhiyi’s Solution

Zhiyi developed his own solution to concerns about the Two Truths, known as the *Three Truths* or *Threefold Truth*. Zhiyi still makes use of the Two Truths discussed previously, but shifts certain of their parameters. The Three Truths will be discussed in extensive detail throughout the course of these notes, and so it would not do to belabour them here. Here, we will confine ourselves to briefly discussing how these Three Truths are discussed in light of the 29.4 verse from the *Zhonglun* quoted here in the *Mohe Zhiguan*.

“All things that arise through causes and conditions”

The First line of the verse is understood as referring to the Buddhist doctrine of causality. The term used in the Sanskrit for this line is *Pratītyasamutpāda* or ‘Conditioned Co-arising’. All phenomenal *dharma*s are *pratītyasamutpanna*; that is dependently originated from an aggregate of conditions. Therefore, they are commonly referred to as *samskrta* or ‘the compounded’, ‘the conditioned’. The *Mahāvibhāsā* defines *samskrta* in the following way:

“A dharma is said to be conditioned if it has arising and ceasing, cause and effect, and acquires the characteristics of the conditioned.”²⁵

The *Abhidharmakośa Bhāṣyam* of Vasubandhu says that something is

“Conditioned because they are made (*krta*) by conditions co-existing in assemblage- there is nothing that is produced by a single condition.”²⁶

Something is therefore conditioned if it is dependently arisen, and possesses the Four Characteristics of the Conditioned (*samskrta laksanāni*). The four characteristics are as follows: *Jāti* (production), *Sthiti* (duration), *Jarā* (deterioration), and *Anityatā* (impermanence).²⁷

The Four Characteristics of the Conditioned²⁸:

Skandhila’s *Abhidharmāvatāra* describes *Jāti* as follows:

“When dharmas are produced, there is a force of internal cause which makes them achieve their specific functions. It is this internal cause that is called the production-characteristic (*jāti-laksana*).”²⁹

LUSTHAUS, 2003.

²⁴ This particular concept-matching is not universally accepted. Dr Lusthaus is in favour of the pairing.

²⁵ *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2015.

²⁶ *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2015.

²⁷ *Entrance into the Supreme Doctrine: Skandhila’s Abhidharmāvatāra*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2008.

²⁸ It will be noted that I have avoided referencing the *Dazhidulun* on this, and the topics to follow, even though said text has a lot to say about them. This is because we will draw heavily on the *Dazhidulun* later, and this provides us with the opportunity to draw on other sources here. Nagarjuna will challenge these characteristics for example. But to appreciate his argument there, is to appreciate the arguments in support of them as well.

²⁹ *Entrance into the Supreme Doctrine: Skandhila’s Abhidharmāvatāra*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2008.

Sthiti is explained as:

“The cause which enables [a dharma] to stay temporarily, so as to be able to project a distinct fruit, is named the duration-characteristic (*sthitilaksana*).”³⁰

Jāra is:

“that which impairs [a dharma’s] efficacy of projecting fruit, rendering it incapable of further projecting another distinct fruit.”³¹

Anityatā is:

“that which causes a present dharma, whose activity having been impaired [by the deterioration-characteristic] to enter into the past.”³²

These Four Primary Characteristics of the Conditioned (*mūlilaksana*) are also conditioned, and so possess Four Secondary Characteristics (*anulaksana*). That is, the ‘production of production characteristic’ (*jāti-jātilaksana*) up to the ‘impermanence of impermanence’ (*anityatā-anityatā-laksana*).³³ In technical terms then, when a *dharma* arises, it is actually the co-arising of nine *dharmas*. That is, the *dharma* itself, its four primary characteristics, and four secondary characteristics.

- According to the *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma* there are two doctrinal schemes which are used to explain the process of causation. In addition to this, the Twelve Links scheme is also employed in a similar fashion. These schemes are referred to as the *Four Conditions* (四緣), and the *Six Causes* (六因). Before discussing each separately, it is worth clarifying what the difference between a *cause* and a *condition* is generally understood to be. In the *Sravaka sutra-pitaka* the terms are often used synonymously and interchangeably. The early *Abhidharma Treatises* also, do not articulate clearly what is significantly different about the two terms. The *Mahāvibhāsā* however, suggests that that which is of the same species³⁴, is proximate, is unique, primarily produces, and fosters its own series, is a *cause* (*hetu*). That which is of a different species, remote, common, subsidiarily produces, and fosters another’s series is a *condition* (*pratyaya*).³⁵ The early sutra only speak of the four conditions. Therefore, we might consider the six causes to be an elaboration of the earlier model.

The Six Causes:

Efficient Cause (Kāraṇa-hetu • 能作因)

This is the most general and encompassing of the causes. An efficient cause is any dharma that contributes to the arising of a dharma. This may be directly, as an actual cause, or indirectly by not *hindering* the the arising of said dharma. The former would be something like a seed, while the latter might be space itself, and anything which does not set itself up against the flourishing of the plant. In short, any conditioned dharma can serve as an efficient cause for another dharma. Although unconditioned dharmas are outside the workings of causality, and therefore cannot be the effects of any of the six causes, inasmuch as they do not obstruct the arising of other dharmas, they may be considered efficient causes.³⁶ A dharma cannot be an efficient cause to itself. “The cause (*hetu*) 1) which is not referred to by a special name, 2) which is simply *kāraṇa*, i.e., reason of existence or causation or efficient, without qualification, that is the efficient cause

³⁰ *Entrance into the Supreme Doctrine: Skandhila’s Abhidharmāvatāra*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2008.

³¹ *Entrance into the Supreme Doctrine: Skandhila’s Abhidharmāvatāra*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2008.

³² *Entrance into the Supreme Doctrine: Skandhila’s Abhidharmāvatāra*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2008

³³ The *Sarvāstivāda* claim that this does not lead to an infinite regression because each of the primary characteristics characterises eight *dharmas*, but each of the secondary *dharmas* can characterise only one *dharma*.

³⁴ I.e. of the same type: fire to fire, wheat to wheat.

³⁵ *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2015.

³⁶ *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2015.

(*kāraṇa-hetu*)”.³⁷

Due to the broad nature of this cause, it might be asked whether or not those things which do not cause an obstacle, are really to be called *efficient causes*. The theoretical opponent in the *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣyam* suggests that if this were true, when a being is murdered, all other beings by not hindering the murder, were efficient causes to the murder, and thus culpable. Vasubhandhu replies that to say that they are *efficient cause* in that case is simply to say that they are not an obstacle to the act. In that capacity, this is true. However, this does not make them *agents (kāraṇa)* of the crime.³⁸

Homogeneous Cause (Sabhāga-hetu • 同類因)

In this case, the English translation of the Sanskrit term is rather helpful. Taking as it does, ‘*homo*’ from the Greek meaning *same*, and ‘*genus*’ or *class/kind* from the Latin. Therefore, we can deduce that a *Sabhāga-hetu* is of the same class, kind, type, or species as its resultant effect. To illustrate, if **A** is a skilful dharma (i.e. not unskilful) and serves as the *homogeneous cause* of **B** (which being of the same type as it’s cause, will also be skilful), then **C**, to which **B** will be the *homogeneous cause*, will also be skilful, as it must to constitute being a member of the same genus.

The Sarvāstivāda hold that this type of causality holds in both mental and physical series’. However, the *Dārṣṭāntika* refuse that the physical (*rūpa-dharmas*) have a *homogeneous cause*.³⁹ There is some debate as to the parameters of this cause. The wholesome aggregates are *homogeneous cause* to the wholesome aggregates; the unwholesome aggregates are *homogeneous cause* to the unwholesome aggregates etc..⁴⁰

Universal Cause (Sarvatraga-hetu • 遍行因)

This cause is often considered a sub-set of the above *Homogeneous Cause*. This is because like the former, the *Universal Cause* gives rise to a fruit which is of the same type as the cause, in the the moral or *sphere* (i.e. it will be of the same moral type, or the same sense sphere). However, it is distinguished from the former because of the discrepancy in their pervasiveness. Vasubandhu tells us that “*The universal factors are only cause of the defiled factors; they are a cause of defiled factors in their own category and in other categories*”.⁴¹ In other words, the causal power of the *universal causes* is greater than that of the *homogeneous causes* because they are able to effect those factors from a different category of abandonment (that is *darśana* or *bhāvanā*).

Retribution Cause (Vipāka-hetu • 異熟因)

This refers to karmic causality. This is considered to be of imminent importance, due to the fact that it plays a defining role in the process of rebirth. It covers the unwholesome dharmas, as well as those wholesome dharmas which are with outflow (*āsrava*). The indeterminate and wholesome dharmas are not considered to be *vipāka-hetu*, because unlike the unwholesome, the indeterminate are not confined to a specific Karmic result. Sometimes this cause is set up in contrast to the homogeneous cause, and labelled a heterogeneous cause. This is because it’s effects may differ in both the time of its ripening, and the nature of its cause.⁴²

Co-existent Cause (Sahabhū-hetu • 俱有因)

These are co-existent dharmas which both bring about an effect, and mutually condition each other. These causes are said to be found in both the mental and matter. In theory, all Samskṛta dharmas are *sahabhū-hetu*. The Four Great Elements that are the basis of *rūpa* are co-existent to each other,

³⁷ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubhandhu: Volume 1*, SANGPO, 2012.

³⁸ For more detail on these matters see the second chapter of the *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya*.

³⁹ No reason for their denial is given in the *Mahāvibhāṣa*.

⁴⁰ *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2015.

⁴¹ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubhandhu: Volume 1*, SANGPO, 2012.

⁴² *Analytical Study of the Abhidharmakośa*, CHAUDHURY, 1983.

and mutually necessary. They cannot stand without the presence of the others. The same applies to *citta* and its associate *cittānūvartin* (it's accompanying/associated thoughts). Another good example are the Four Characteristics of the Conditioned discussed earlier, they cannot stand if we remove the other characteristics. These primary characteristics are also *sahabhū-hetu* to their secondary characteristics.

Conjoined Cause (Samprayuktaka-hetu • 相應因)

This cause is considered to be a subset of the aforementioned *co-existent cause*. It applies to the *citta-caitta* (i.e. to Thought and Thought-concomitants) rather than to karmic or rupic matters. It's domain is the mind and mental events. The *Mahāvibhāsā* explains:

*“Why are thought and the thought-concomitants mutually conjoined causes to one another?...Because they are reciprocally causes, arisen through mutual strength, mutually induced, mutually nourished, mutually strengthened, mutually dependent. This is like two bundles of straw which stay in position through mutual dependence.”*⁴³

The *Abhidharmāvatāra* says:

*“The thought and thought-concomitants which are mutually conjoined with one another and which apprehend a common object, are named conjoined causes”.*⁴⁴

The obvious question then, is what is the precise distinction between the conjoined, and the co-existent causes? The *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣyam* and the *Abhidharmāvatāra* provide useful examples of the sorts of distinction we may draw:

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣyam:

*“That which is an samprayuktaka-hetu is also a sahabhū-hetu. What is the difference between these two causes?...As for factors [which are sahabhū-hetu] they are called co-existent because they are mutually the effects of one another...As for the factors [which are samprayuktaka-hetu] they are called conjoined causes or mutual cause in the quality of association, because they function identically...”*⁴⁵

The Four Conditions:

Condition qua Cause (Hetu-pratyaya • 因緣)

As previously mentioned, the doctrine of the Four Conditions seems to predate the Six Causes theory. These conditions are said to be concomitants of the *hetu*-s. The first of these Conditions, *Hetu-pratyaya* is the condition qua direct cause in the production of an effect or resultant. In other words, it is the cause functioning in or as condition. Dhammajoti gives the example of the growth of a fruit tree. The condition qua cause in this case would be the seed. This is not the only cause of the fruit tree but it may be singled out as the main basis. This *hetu-pratyaya* subsumes all conditioned dharmas, and includes all of the causes except the efficient cause (*Kāraṇa-hetu*).⁴⁶ When one dharma is identified as the primary cause for another; it is said to be *Hetu-pratyaya*.

Equal-immediate Condition (Samanantara-pratyaya • 等無間緣)

Samanantara-pratyaya are the immediate preceding conditions to the arising of the succeeding

⁴³ *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2015.

⁴⁴ *Entrance into the Supreme Doctrine: Skandhila's Abhidharmāvatāra*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2008.

⁴⁵ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: Volume 1*, SANGPO, 2012.

⁴⁶ Technically an efficient cause is also included here if it plays a positive role in the causal process.

mental state. The *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣyam* refers us here to the *citta* and *caitta*. This is because a previous set of *citta* and *caitta* serve as the condition for the subsequent arising of the next *citta* and *caitta*. There is no intervening dharmas between the former, and the latter, and so it is *immediate*.

Condition qua Object (Ālambana-pratyaya • 所緣緣)

Cognition is generally understood to be cognition of something. Cognition cannot arise independently, and requires the taking of an object to serve as the object of cognition. This means that the object in question is the *ālambana-pratyaya* of cognition. The mind, as unbounded as thought itself may take any object *Samskrta* or *asamskrta* from the three times of past, present, or future, as it's condition qua object.

Condition of Dominance (Adhipati-pratyaya • 增上緣)

Adhipati-pratyaya corresponds to the *Kāraṇa-hetu* and is therefore also the most comprehensively broad of the conditions. It is whatever might function as a condition, both directly, and indirectly (by not inhibiting) the arising of a subsequent dharma. As in the case of *Kāraṇa-hetu*, even *asamskrta* dharmas may qualify, inasmuch as they do not hinder. A dharma may function as all of these conditions given the right circumstances.

The Twelve Links of Dependent Co-origination:

We now finally arrive at the *Dvādaśāṅga Pratītyasamutpāda* (十二因緣) or the *Twelve Links of Dependent Co-origination*. This schema is designed to discuss the causal process involved in the suffering and rebirth of the living condition. These links are traditionally divided among the previous, current, and future lifetimes of the being. The first two are said to pertain to the previous lifespan, the final two are found in the future lifespan, and 3-10 are found in the present. The Twelve Links are as follows:

1) Avidyā (無明)

Avidyā or Ignorance. Is inherited from our previous life. It is wrong view (*drsti*), rather than a lack of *vidyā* (knowledge), and so corrupts *Prajñā*.⁴⁷

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣyam:

“...in a previous life, the stream [with its five aggregates] which is defiled, the state of defilement [*Kleśa-avasthā*]. All defilements, in fact, accompany ignorance and become active through ignorance. In the same way, when it is said that the king is coming, it is understood that his courtiers are accompanying him.”⁴⁸

2) Samskāra (行)

Samskāra or (Karmic) Formations. These are the actions both good or bad, that result from *avidyā*.

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣyam:

“The stream of the previous existence, insofar as it performs meritorious, non-meritorious, etc., action, is what is meant by (Karma) Formations.”⁴⁹

3) Vijñāna (識)

⁴⁷ *Analytical Study of the Abhidharmakosa*, CHAUDHURY, 1983.

⁴⁸ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

⁴⁹ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

Vijñāna or Consciousness. The Skandha which have entered into the womb of the mother at the moment of conception are the *vijñāna* referred to here. These are namely *caksur-vijñāna*, *śrotra-vijñāna*, *ghrāna-vijñāna*, *jihvā-vijñāna*, *kāya-vijñāna*, *mano-vijñāna*, or the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind consciousnesses.⁵⁰

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyam:

“The five aggregates, in the womb, at the moment of reincarnation or conception (pratisamdhi) or of the existence-as-birth (upapattibhava), [is what is meant by consciousness].”⁵¹

4) *Nāma-rūpa* (名色)

Nāma-rūpa or Name-and-form. The four non-physical Skandha are *Nāman* (i.e. *Vedanā*, *Samjñā*, *Samskāra*, and *Vijñāna*). All physical or material phenomena are *Rūpa*. This refers specifically to the forming of the physical and psychological skandha within the mother’s womb.⁵²

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyam:

“The five aggregates, in the womb, from existence-as-birth and as long as the six sense-spheres are not manifested, [is what is meant by name-and-form].”⁵³

5) *Sadāyatana* (六處)

Sadāyatana or the Six Sense-spheres. The six sense organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, are fully formed, and the being emerges from the womb. At this stage the organs have not yet made contact with the objects of the sense-spheres, and so, the six *vijñāna* have not yet arisen.⁵⁴

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyam:

“The five aggregates, from the manifestation of the sense-faculties until the moment when the coming together of the three, i.e., the sense-faculty, the object-field of consciousness, and the consciousness, takes place, is what is meant by the six sense-spheres.”⁵⁵

6) *Sparśa* (觸)

Sparśa or Contact. The six sense-organs come in contact with their respective sense-objects, and arouse their respective *vijñāna*. There are six *sparśa* to coincide with the six sense organs:

- 1) *Caksusamsparśa*
- 2) *Śrotrasamsparśa*
- 3) *Ghrānasamsparśa*
- 4) *Jihvāsamsparśa*
- 5) *Kāyasamsparśa*
- 6) *Manahsamsparśa*
- 7) The first five all possess organs with which physical contact is made, and are therefore called *pratighasamsparśa*. *Manahsamsparśa* may be pure, impure, or indifferent (when associated with *vidyā*, *āvidyā*, or *sāsravaprajñā*). Often thought to encompass the first few years of a child’s life.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ *Analytical Study of the Abhidharmakosa*, CHAUDHURY, 1983.

⁵¹ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyā of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

⁵² *Analytical Study of the Abhidharmakosa*, CHAUDHURY, 1983.

⁵³ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyā of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

⁵⁴ *Analytical Study of the Abhidharmakosa*, CHAUDHURY, 1983.

⁵⁵ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyā of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

⁵⁶ *Analytical Study of the Abhidharmakosa*, CHAUDHURY, 1983.

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyam:

“[contact takes place because of the coming together of the three]. It [begins at delivery and]lasts until the time when the child becomes capable of distinguishing: “This is a cause of pleasure...””⁵⁷

7) *Vedanā* (受)

Vedanā or Sensation. Coinciding with the six sense organs, five physical and one psychological, there are six *vedanā*. *Vedanā* might arise simultaneously with *sparśa* (Vaibhāsika) or subsequent to *sparśa* (Sautrāntika). This stage is said to coincide with childhood and teenage years. However, sexual craving has not yet begun.⁵⁸

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyam:

“Sensation, which the verse renders as vitti, [lasts] as long as attachment to sexual union [rāga] is not in action. [This state is termed sensation because the causes of sensation are experienced in it: it is hence the state in which sensation is prominent.”⁵⁹

8) *Trsnā* (愛)

Trsnā or Craving. The stage at which one comes under the full sway of lust, passions, and desire. It entails the coveting of the flesh. It is of three kinds commensurate with the three realms.⁶⁰

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyam:

“(Craving) then is the active attachment to the objects of desire, visible forms, etc., and to sexual union. This state of “thirst” ends when one begins, under the influence of this attachment, to search out these pleasures.”⁶¹

9) *Upādāna* (取)

Upādāna or Grasping. The stage at which one seeks out the fulfilment of one’s cravings and desires, blinding by the craving to the consequences of the seeking. It is the intensification and next stage of *trsnā*.⁶² It is usually divided into four categories as will be seen below.

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyam:

“They run around everywhere in order to acquire the enjoyments...grasping is the fourfold defilement:

- 1) *Grasping of desire [kāmapādāna]*
 - 2) *Grasping of the doctrine of the self [ātmavādupādāna]*
 - 3) *Grasping of afflicted views [drstyupādāna]*
 - 4) *Grasping of morality and of certain types of spiritual practices [śīlavrata-upādāna].*
- The period during which this fourfold defilement is active is called grasping.”⁶³*

10) *Bhava* (有)

⁵⁷ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyā of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

⁵⁸ *Analytical Study of the Abhidharmakosa*, CHAUDHURY, 1983.

⁵⁹ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyā of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

⁶⁰ *Analytical Study of the Abhidharmakosa*, CHAUDHURY, 1983.

⁶¹ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyā of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

⁶² *Analytical Study of the Abhidharmakosa*, CHAUDHURY, 1983.

⁶³ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāsyā of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

Bhava or Existing. The individual accumulates karma which is capable of projecting his future existence.

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣyam:

*“Karma carried out and accumulated in the search for enjoyments will produce re-existence. The period during which this action is performed constitutes existence.”*⁶⁴

11) *Jāti* (生)

Jāti or Birth. This is the reincarnating or rebirth stage. Re-entering the womb, and re-entering the world to experience it all again.

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣyam:

*“After death, the five aggregates - at the moment when reincarnation takes place - are birth (jāti). When one examines future existence, the member which receives the name consciousness (vijñāna) is called birth (jāti).”*⁶⁵

12) *Jarā-marana* (老死)

Jarā-marana or Old Age and Death. The four factors of future *nāma-rūpa*, *sadāyatana*, *sparśa*, and *vedanā*.

Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣyam:

*“From birth (consciousness) until sensation (vedanā), which here is termed vid. Four members of the present existence: 1) name-and-form, 2) the six sense-spheres, 3) contact, and 4) sensation, are, in regard to future existence, designated by the expression old-age-and-death, the twelfth member of this twelvefold stream (of the five aggregates).”*⁶⁶

- We have now covered what might be considered the minimum required to appreciate anything more than a superficial understanding of the first line of the *Zhonglun* verse quoted here in the *Mohe Zhiguan*. The digression we took was significant, but it is important to understand, even if a little, that these phrases are not general platitudes. The educated reader of the *Zhonglun* would have been familiar with the concepts outlined above, in far greater detail than presented here. The modern reader is often quick to jump into discussion of emptiness, with little appreciation for what informs these discussions.
- Emptiness or *Śūnyatā* is descriptive as we will see, and without a firm understanding of what constitutes a conditioned being, it is meaningless.
- Due to the lengthy nature of our adumbration, we will repeat the previous line of the verse again here, and then proceed with the second line of the verse.

“All things that arise through causes and conditions”

We have seen now, how we might approach causality, in both a general, and doctrinally specific way. We have also touched on how the grammar of the Chinese, and our later extant sanskrit text seem to imply somewhat different relationships between the key terms.

- In short, this line refers to the doctrine of causality; that which is the case, for all conditioned

⁶⁴ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

⁶⁵ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

⁶⁶ *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubhandhu: Volume 2*, SANGPO, 2012.

things. By describing the nature of *Samskrta*, it has set the stage for the following line.

“I explain as emptiness.”

Emptiness or *śūnyatā* is often explained as being synonymous with conditioned co-arising. And due to this particular verse, this identification is especially true of Madhyamika interpretations of emptiness. However, given that we have outlined the basic supports for the doctrine of causality above, we would do well to understand just as precisely, how emptiness is related to conditioned co-arising.

Empty of what?

Svabhāva:

The doctrine of *śūnyatā* is utilised in a number of different ways which would lead us away from our purposes here. Therefore we will restrict ourselves to those of its facets, which we might deem essential to its appreciation. For those interested in a fuller treatment, I recommend looking into the Eighteen Forms, or Twenty Forms of Emptiness (十八空 · 二十空).

Svabhāva is often translated variously into English as ‘Self-nature’, ‘Intrinsic-nature’, or ‘Fixed-nature’. In simple terms, it refers to the intrinsic nature of something, which remains to one extent or another, consistent over time. This seems to imply an unchanging, and thus permanent essence. To say anything more about *svabhāva* would require us to distinguish between different positions and the respective schools that hold them. The *Sarvāstivāda* for example, hold that all *dharmas*/phenomena that are *samskrta* or conditioned, have *svabhāva*, that persists, but is also impermanent. That is, that it exists always, but that its *Karitra* or activity is finite.

- When Nāgārjuna speaks of emptiness in the *Zhonglun*, it is often as the negation of this *śvabhāva*, and it is accomplished through causality. This is the relation between the two concepts. See *Zhonglun* ch. 15, v.2 & v.8:

15.2: *“Suppose its nature were created;
But what would be the meaning of this?
“Nature” means something uncreated
Established without reliance on other dharmas.”*⁶⁷

15.8: *“If dharmas really have a nature
They cannot subsequently change.
For a nature to have varying characteristics
Would never be the case.”*⁶⁸

- The Sanskrit for ‘nature’ in these two verses is *svalaksana* and *prakṛti* although Kumārajīva translates them both with the same character (性). In this case however, both terms are used with relatively similar connotation, so the gloss is not detrimental.
- From these references we can see that *śvabhāva* is established ‘without reliance on other dharmas’, and thus *asamskrta*. This is because it ‘cannot subsequently change’, and so has fixed characteristics.
- The term here glossed as *characteristic* is in the Sanskrit *Svalaksana*. In order to establish something as an existent *dharma*, a factor of existence, it is required to be able to maintain its unique characteristic throughout time. A *dharma* is “that which sustains its specific characteristic” (*svalaksana-dhārānad-dharmah*).⁶⁹ The *Sarvāstivāda* establish 72 or 75

⁶⁷ *Nagarjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, BOCKING, 1995.

⁶⁸ *Nagarjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, BOCKING, 1995.

⁶⁹ *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, DHAMMAJOTI, 2015.

dharmas, the Yogācarin 100. These characteristics are fixed, because it is their persistence which defines the *dharma* as such, and keeps it from becoming some other *dharma*.

- By showing *svabhāva* to be incompatible with the conditioned, and ultimately with *dharmas*, Nāgārjuna shows the conditioned to be ‘empty’ of *svabhāva*. Being void of *svabhāva* is to be of *śūnyatā*.

Drsti:

To do justice to the concept of *drsti* would take us far afield. For our purposes here, and in the context of Nāgārjuna, *drsti* is often translated into English as *View* or *Position*. It refers to a conceptual lens which might be applied to make sense of the unconditioned; it is a determination which, aims to ‘pin-down’ and confine. In theory, and according to the *Abhidharma*, a *drsti* can be good or bad. The Right View or *samyag-drsti* of the Eightfold Path is an example of the former, *satkāya-drsti* or the view of a substantive self is demonstrative of the latter. Generally speaking, the word *drsti* is not qualified by anything else, chances are it is meant in the negative, as a wrong view.⁷⁰

For Nāgārjuna, all *drsti* are to be rejected, being as they are *limited*, and so inaccurate. They cannot be *Ultimate* we might say, and so are *Conventional*. *Śūnyatā* itself should not be clung to as a view. It is not a view, but nevertheless must be made manifest as the conventional. We can see this in *Zhonglun* ch. 13.9, and ch. 27. 30:

13.9: “The Great Sage speaks of the emptiness of dharmas,
In order to wean us from all views.
If you then reinstate a view of “emptiness”
You cannot be taught by all the Buddhas.”⁷¹

27.30: “To Gautama, Great Sage and Master,
Who from pity and compassion preached this Dharma,
Entirely cutting off all views;
We now bow our head in reverence.”⁷²

Here emptiness is understood as the negation of, and *emptying* of views. Said views obscure the Truth. *Drsti* are related to our tendency to *conceptualise*, or engage in *Prapañca*.⁷³ We are also warned here not to reify *śūnyatā* by making it into a view. *Śūnyatā* is the ‘curative’ which frees us from views, not the view, that by defeating *svabhāva* replaces it. To understand this is to come face-to-face with the emptiness-of-emptiness *śūnyatā-śūnyatā*. Once emptiness has been used as to overcome views about the substantive nature of things, it too, must be discarded.

Approaches for the application of Emptiness:

Now that we have established in general terms, causality, and emptiness, it is worth looking at the ways emptiness is *applied* qua *curative* by practitioners. Before we look in brief at some basic ways of applying emptiness in this way, we might note that in the Mahayana emptiness is applied to the self, and to *dharmas*, in much the same way that our discussion of causality dealt with the subject and the object.⁷⁴

In terms of Causality/ Analytical Emptiness:

⁷⁰ Nāgārjuna’s *Philosophy: as presented in The Mahā-Prajñāpāramita-Śāstra*, RAMANAN, 1966.

⁷¹ *Nagarjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, BOCKING, 1995.

⁷² *Nagarjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, BOCKING, 1995.

⁷³ *T’ien-t’ai Buddhism and Early Mādhyamika*, NG, 1993.

⁷⁴ Brook Ziporyn gives quite a nice overview of some of these approaches the following source: *Emptiness and Omnipresence: An Essential Introduction to Tiantai Buddhism*, ZIPORYN, 2016.

Once we have shown that something arises via a set of causes and conditions, we have by that very move shown that *other* is involved in the arising, abiding, and ceasing of a particular phenomena. In equationary fashion we could say that x requires $non-x$. The causes and conditions which necessarily play their part in my Being, are necessarily in themselves not 'me'. And yet, were I to remove these non-me components of me, I should cease to be. This same simple analysis extends to the component parts of my 'self'. Each thought, organ, component of some kind, taken in isolation is not me. And yet in a meaningful way, they are more 'me' than any conceptual ideas I might have about me.

And each of those components too, exist by virtue of causes and conditions which are necessarily *other* (of course, if I cannot establish this I, I cannot establish an *other*). The chair not established, the parts of chair not established, non-chairs not established. In order to define something I must refer to something else. In order to define that 'something else', I must refer to some equally *other thing* ad infinitum.

In terms of Temporality:

When we consider the causal chain which brings something into being, we are forced to acknowledge that the causes and conditions must differ in some meaningful sense, from the resultant. If they did not, it would be hard to assign any meaning whatsoever to the arising of something. To arise, implies a time prior to arising, in which the object did not exist. This temporal limit, in a similar fashion to the component argument above, confines, and thus defines the object in question.

A respective object will arise at a certain time, and place, where the appropriate aggregate of conditions is present. If this is the case, we implicitly accept a relationship of causality between the resultant object, and the causal conditions. To posit such a relationship however, the object, and the causal components must be established as existent phenomena.

Two issues then arise; firstly that we failed to establish the existence of the object in our analytical emptiness discussion, and so it seems unwise to try to posit the existence of an other (in this case the causal components). If we have failed to establish the object, we have failed to establish anything *other than* the object. If we have failed to establish either, what meaning could their be to the claim that they are *in relation*? How could a non-existent phenomena be in relation with a non-existent phenomena?

Secondly, for the two to be in relation, they BOTH must exist. But temporally this is not possible. There seems to be a temporal dimension to the relationship between cause and effect. How would one then go about claiming the relationship between an existent (cause), and an as yet, non-existent (result)?⁷⁵

In terms of dharmas and their laksana:

It will be remembered that the traditional definition of *dharmas* is that which possesses its own unique characteristic (*svalaksana*). This characteristic, is what differentiates it from other things, because it is unique to the thing in itself. I cannot remove this characteristic from it. If I remove the warmth from fire, the wetness from water, the firmness from earth, they cease to be fire, water, earth etcetera.

But surely this pre-empts the question. If the *dharma* is so dependent on the characteristic that it ceases to be, the latter removed, then are the *dharma* and *laksana* the same or different from each other? The answer in both cases is unsatisfactory. If they are one, then you do not satisfy the traditional definition of a *dharma*, and you have failed to establish anything at all. If they are truly different, then the mark has arisen separate from the *dharma*. However both still require their own respective characteristic or *dharma*. And so without adding more components, which does nothing to answer the original difficulty, you have failed to establish a *dharma* in possession of a

⁷⁵ For more on these questions see the *Zhonglun*.

svalaksana.

The *characteristic* itself seems to pose a problem. Does the characteristic itself count as ‘existent’? If it does not, you cannot use a non-existent characteristic to *characterise* an existent *dharma*. If it does exist, then it too must possess its own characteristic, ad nauseam. Why does this matter here? Because the *dharma* and *svalaksana* is the very means by which one would establish those things which are existent. If the entire endeavour can be shown to be untenable, you show in some sense that it is ‘empty’ of any tangible essence or *bhāva*.

- The above musings are not intended to be definitive, and do not cover all of the facets of emptiness. It will take on some unique interpretations or usages in this text in particular. The above is designed only to orient us for further discussion as we progress.

“Again, this is a conventional designation.”

Recall that one of the ways *Candrakīrti* in his *Prasannapadā* defined the Conventional Truth (*Samvrti satya* 世俗諦) was as “*social convention, ... the world of ordinary language*”. This is what is implied here by *designation* (假名). Ultimate truth is beyond words and expressions, but that does not negate the provisional necessity and usefulness in naming and describing. We may discuss things in terms of their ‘conventional existence’. Emptiness too, as *curative* of the view that there are substantive things which exist, is likewise conventional. It uproots what we might consider ‘lower-level conventions’, but it does not establish anything in its place. It is not to be thought of as truly ultimate. With this in mind we see this sentence as reaffirming the point made in the original two sentences.

“Again, this is the meaning of the Middle Way.”

The Middle Way in its simplest terms, here refers to that which is a course between the two extremes of eternalism(有), and annihilationism(無). Emptiness ensures that one does not cling to the idea of an unchanging or independent *svabhāva*, and conventional existence staves off nihilistic tendencies. “*Because it is separate from the extremes of both existence and nonexistence, it is called the middle path.*”⁷⁶

We have then, in this verse from the *Zhonglun*, four concepts: 1) *pratīyasamutpāda*, 2) *śūnyatā* 3) *prajñāpti* (conventional designation), and 4) *madhyama*. But these were understood as simply different ways of presenting the True Nature of Things (諸法實相·真如). And it is with this in mind that Zhiyi’s *Threefold Truth* as a singular concept, was designed. We will discuss the *Three Truths* or *Threefold Truth* in great detail over the course of our textual study. Here, we will touch on them only in the briefest fashion, excluding the minutiae, and I will endeavour to refrain from referencing the *Mohe Zhiguan* in my treatment here.

The *Three Truths* (*satya traya* · 三諦) in their simplest iteration are as follows:

- 1) Emptiness (*śūnyatā*·空諦) identifiable to a certain degree with Ultimate Truth (*paramārtha satya* · 勝義諦). Everything lacks a substantive self or *svabhāva*.
- 2) Conventional Existence (*prajñāpti* · 假諦) identifiable to a certain degree with Conventional Truth or Worldly Truth (*samvrti satya* · 世俗諦). Provisional positing of a quiddity to be one thing

⁷⁶ *Qingmu*’s commentary to the passage in question.
Nagarjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise, BOCKING, 1995.

or other.

3) The Middle Truth (*madhyama satya* · 中諦) The middle is the perfect integration of the three principles, such that all is equally empty, all is conventionally existent, all is the middle.

- In order to refrain from discussing the doctrinal content of these truths here, brief mention will be made to the scriptural authority and sources, traditionally given as inspiration for this formulation. We have seen that **24.18** of the *Zhonglun* is one such source. But this is by no means the only source drawn on.
- The *Lotus Sutra* is regularly drawn on, and Zhiyi suggests that the meaning if not the terms, are therein. In particular a passage in chapter 16, which reads as follows:

*“the Tathāgata knows and sees the character of the triple world as it really is: [to him] there is neither birth nor death, or going away or coming forth; neither living nor dead; neither reality nor unreality; neither thus nor otherwise. Unlike [the way] the triple world beholds the triple world, the Tathāgata clearly sees such things as these without mistake.”*⁷⁷

The bold section is thought to express the Threefold Truth. ‘Neither Thus’ refers to *paramārtha satya*. ‘Nor otherwise’ is *samvrti satya*. The whole section (‘neither thus nor otherwise’) refers to the Middle.

- The terms are most regularly linked with passages from the Pusa **Yingluo Benye Jing** (菩薩瓔珞本業經 · Garland of a Bodhisattva’s Primary Karmas), and the *Renwang Jing* (仁王經 · Benevolent Kings Sutra). This is not accidental; Zhiyi consciously draws upon these texts. See below:

Pusa **Yingluo Benye Jing** (菩薩瓔珞本業經 · Garland of a Bodhisattva’s Primary Karmas):

*“Buddha-Son, wisdom that arises from realization of the relative truth, the absolute truth, and the highest truth in the Middle Way is the mother of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.”*⁷⁸

Renwang Jing (仁王經 · Benevolent Kings Sutra):

*“[One can] use three truths to embrace all the constituents: the truth of emptiness, the truth of form, and the truth of mind. I have preached that all constituents do not transcend the three truths.”*⁷⁹

Zhiyi’s *Sijiaoyi*:

*“The names and concepts of the Three Truths appear in detail in two sutras: Yingluo Jing and Renwang Jing...As the Nirvana Sutra Says, “That which is perceived in the minds of worldly beings is called the Worldly Truth.”...”the Nirvana Sutra says, “Since it is what is perceived in the minds of the transworldly beings, it is called the Truth of Supreme Significance.”...Therefore the Nirvana Sutra says “Common beings are attached to existence and practitioners of the Two Vehicles are attached to nothingness. The Bodhisattva’s Dharma is neither existence nor nothingness.”*⁸⁰

- We began this section of the study on pg 92 with a hypothetical opponent, drawing a distinction between the teachings of Nagarjuna and Zhiyi. After Guanding’s response to this challenge, we find the *Zhonglun* verse which we have discussed here. This is because anyone familiar with the pertinent arguments, would know that it is this verse which is given as the primary source of Zhiyi’s Threefold Truth. Therefore the inclusion of this verse here is

⁷⁷ *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, KATO, 1975.

⁷⁸ *The Bodhisattva Way: Selected Mahāyāna Sūtras*, RULU, 2013.

⁷⁹ *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for Humane Kings in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism*, ORZECH, 1998.

⁸⁰ *Annotated Translation of the Ssu-chiao-i (On the Four Teachings)*, chuan 2, RHODES, 1984.

designed to show that *Zhiyi* and the Tiantai doctrines are indeed the transmission of the Indian Lineage.

Pg93: “Tiantai [Zhiyi] transmitted the three kinds of cessation-and-contemplation of [his master] Nanyue Huisi: 1) gradual-and-successive [or progressive] 漸次, 2) variable [or undetermined] 不定, and 3) perfect-and-sudden [or immediate] 圓頓.”

By including the verse from the *Zhonglun*, Guanding intends to cement the connection between Nagarjuna and Zhiyi. In doing so, a transmission from the Indian lineage to Zhiyi is implied. The transmission is shown to be in this context *doctrinal*, as it forms the basis for the *Threefold Truth* doctrine. Now we see an attempt to show a tangible transmission from the Chinese lineage to Zhiyi. This transmission is presented as being *practical*, as it the source of the *Three Kinds of Cessation-and- Contemplation*. So we have here a confirmation of the transmission received from both the Indian, and the Chinese lineages, as well as The Two Gates of Jiao and Guan 教觀二門 theme which permeated the lineage presentation earlier.

We will discuss the types of cessation-and-contemplation in our next instalment.

Pg93: “All of these are of the Mahāyāna, they all take the true aspect [of reality] as their object, and are alike called cessation-and-contemplation.”

Dr Swanson points out that modern scholarship holds that there are no works in which *Huisi* uses the term *Zhiguan*. This is because modern scholarship has cast doubt on the authorship of the *Dacheng Zhiguan* (大乘止觀) or ‘*Mahayana Zhiguan*’. This work is traditionally attributed to *Huisi*, and so according to that account, there is indeed a work on ‘*zhiguan*’ attributed to *Huisi*. While there has been some doubt thrown upon the genuineness of the work’s author, the case is not closed, and from the traditional account, it is still considered to be a very significant work of *Huisi*. Note also that this above passage appears to drawing a specific link to the work in question. The passage makes it clear that these forms of *Zhiguan* are of the *Mahayana*, and this is attested to in the title and content of the work by *Huisi*. The above passage has its own doctrinal significance of course, and informs us that these three forms of cessation-and-contemplation apply to the latter three of the Four Teachings (excluding the Tripitaka Teachings). However, that is a topic for another time.

