

Commentary on the fifteenth chapter: Investigation of Nature

By Ācārya Candrakīrti

Someone says: The nature of things¹ exists due to the appropriation of causes and conditions that function to produce them. That which does not exist lacks appropriation of causes and conditions that function to produce them; just like sky-flowers, for example. Sprouts, compositional [actions], and so forth are also appropriations of seeds, ignorance, and so forth (the causes and conditions that function to produce them); therefore, the nature of things exists.

Response: If things such as compositional [actions], sprouts, and so forth possess a nature, then what purpose would there be for causes and conditions for [things] that already exist at that time? Just as there is no functioning of the appropriation of ignorance, seeds, and so forth in order to produce compositional [actions], sprouts, and so forth that are already present; similarly, there will not be appropriation in order to produce others because their nature would exist.

In order to indicate this:

It is illogical for nature to arise
From causes and conditions. [1ab]

If someone thinks: Although the production of that which already exists would become meaningless, prior to their production things do not possess a nature whatsoever. That being the case, it is only natures that do not exist prior to production that subsequently arise in dependence upon causes and conditions.

Then, even if that is asserted:

Natures arisen from causes and conditions
Would possess production.² [1cd]

If someone thinks: I absolutely accept that due to being arisen from causes and conditions, natures would become products. Therefore, due to asserting natures to be products, arguing with production as the consequence does not act to harm our [position].

Then, this is also indicated as being illogical:

How would it be suitable
To refer to nature as possessing production? [2ab]

The meaning is that since saying this is both a product and a nature would be mutually contradictory, it would be irrelevant.

As such, other than particular explanations³ of own-nature⁴ as referring to nature, things that are produced are not ordinarily referred to as “nature”; for example, the heat of water and chrysoberyl and so forth made into things such as ruby and so forth through the effort of the alchemist.

That which is a nature is a non-product; for example, just as the heat of fire or naturally occurring ruby are referred to as their nature due to not being produced through encountering other things.

¹ Regarding the Tibetan terms: *rang bzhin* will be translated as “nature” as a noun and “inherent(ly)” as an adjective; *dnegos po* will be translated as “things” and *dnegos med* as “non-things” wherever possible;

² Tib: *byas pa can*; otherwise, wherever possible, *skye ba* is translated as “production” and *byas pa* as “product”

³ Could also be read as the title of the Vaibhāṣika fundamental text: Great Detailed Explanation

⁴ Tib: *rang gi ngo bo*.

Therefore, saying “natures are not produced” in that way remains with worldly conventions and we propound that also that which is heat is not the nature of fire because of being a product.

Fire arisen from the meeting of crystal, kindling, and the sun, or from rubbing sticks together, is observed to possess reliance upon causes and conditions and since heat that is other than fire does not exist, then heat is also produced through causes and conditions. Therefore, it is a product and since it is a product, it is clearly ascertained as not being a nature; just like the heat of water.

If someone says: Is “heat being the nature of fire” not renowned even among herdsmen and women?

Did we say it is not renowned? We propound that it is not suitable to be a nature because of being devoid of inherent characteristics.⁵ Due to following the errors of ignorance, worldly beings realise the aspect of things which lack nature to possess a nature.

Just as those with myodesopsia adhere to the hair-strands which lack nature as having a nature due to the condition of the myodesopsia; similarly, childish beings, due to the degeneration of their eyes of intelligence through the myodesopsia of ignorance, adhere to things that lack a nature as possessing nature. Thereby, they propound characteristics in accordance with their adherence that, due to being unique and not observed elsewhere, fire’s inherent own-characteristic is heat; due to saying that natural characteristics are own-characteristics.⁶

Also the Bhagavān presented the conventional nature⁷ of those in the Abhidharma by way of what is renowned for them and explained impermanence and so forth, i.e. those that are common, as being general-characteristics.⁸

Relative to the perception of those possessing the eyes of unstained wisdom, when devoid of the myodesopsia of ignorance, then just as those free from myodesopsia do not perceive the hair-strands observed by those with myodesopsia, Aryas, who do not perceive the nature imputed by the awareness of childish ordinary beings, were indicated as clearly saying “this is not the nature of things.”

This is stated in the Arya Laṅkāvatāra Sutra:

Just as those possessing myodesopsia
Wrongly apprehend hair-strands,
Similarly, these conceptualisations of things
Are the erroneous imputations of the childish.

Despite there being no nature, no cognition,
No Ālaya, and no entity,
These are designated by the childish,
Bad philosophers who are like corpses.

Likewise, it was extensively explained, saying:

Mahāmati, it was with the intention that they are not inherently produced that I said
that all phenomena are unproduced.

⁵ Tib: *rang bzhin gyis mtshan nyid dang bral ba.*

⁶ Tib: *bdag nyid kyi mtshan nyid* and *rang gi mtshan nyid*, respectively.

⁷ Tib: *rang gi ngo bo kun rdzob pa.*

⁸ Tib: *spyi'i mtshan nyid.*

Someone says: If you propound that these (the heat of fire and so forth) are not natures due to being products, which is due to their arising from causes and conditions, then it is necessary to explain what their inherent characteristics are and what nature is.

Response:

Natures are not fabricated and
Are not dependent upon other.

[2cd]

This says that own-nature⁹ is nature, thereby explaining that that which is the nature belonging to a thing¹⁰ is its nature.

What is that which belongs to something? That which is not fabricated by anything. Something fabricated is not something belonging to it; for example, the heat of water. That which does not depend upon anything is something belonging to it; for example, one's servant and one's wealth. That which does depend upon anything that is other is not something belonging to it; for example, being powerless over a temporarily borrowed object.

By reason of not asserting that which is fabricated and dependent upon other as being nature, it is also illogical to say that heat is the nature of fire because of depending upon causes and conditions and because of being a product due to subsequently arising having been previously non-arisen.

Due to being as such, fire's unmistakable, fundamental and unfabricated entity in the three times, which is not subsequently arisen having been previously non-arisen, and does not possess dependence upon causes and conditions (like the heat of water, this side and that side, or long and short) – *that* is explained as its nature.

Does such an own-nature of fire exist?

It does not exist by way of its own-nature and it is also not non-existent. Although that is the case, nevertheless it is propounded that it exists conventionally through reification in order to eliminate the fear of those hearing about it.

It is as the Bhagavān has said:¹¹

For Dharma without letters
What listener and what teacher could there be?
There are no letters without reification
That can be listened to and also taught.

Also, [Nāgārjuna's Root Wisdom Chapter 22 verse 11] says:

Not asserting "empty"
Nor asserting "non-empty"
Not asserting as both or neither;
It is asserted for the purpose of designation.

This will be explained [later].

⁹ Tib: *rang gi dngos po*. Only occurrence in this chapter and immediately glossed as *rang gi ngo bo*.

¹⁰ Tib: *dngos po gang gi bdag gi ba'i ngo bo yin pa*.

¹¹ Je Tsongkhapa attributes this to the King of Concentration Sutra in his Illumination of the Thought (*dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*), but could not find the precise quote in the sutra (or elsewhere).

If you assert that these exist through reification, what are they?

Their own-nature is simply that which is referred to as phenomena's dharmatā.

Then, what is this dharmatā of phenomena? It is phenomena's entity.¹²

What is this entity? It is nature.

What is this nature? It is emptiness.

What is this emptiness? It is the absence of nature.

What is this absence of nature? It is suchness.

What is this suchness? The unchanging and permanently abiding nature of suchness, which is unproduced in all aspects; due to not being fabricated and due to not depending upon other, it is asserted as being the nature of fire and so forth.

This is what will be indicated: that whatever entity becomes the object of the Aryas (who are free from the myodesopsia of ignorance) by way of not perceiving the aspects of things that are observed through the force of the myodesopsia of ignorance, that very entitiness¹³ is presented as their nature.

Natures are not fabricated and
Are not dependent upon other.

[2cd]

Saying this, it should be understood that the Ācāryas present these as its characteristics. Also, that which is the unproduced nature of things, due to not being anything, is merely a non-thing and therefore without nature; it should be understood to not exist as the nature of things.

It is as the Bhagavān has said:¹⁴

Those who understand things and non-things
Will never be attached to anything;
Those who are never attached to anything,
Will contact the meditative stabilisation of signlessness.

Someone says: Even if things do not possess natures, they could still possess other-nature¹⁵ because that has not been refuted. If they possess other-nature, then they will also possess nature because without nature, their other-nature could not be established.

Response:

If nature does not exist,
How could other-nature exist?
The nature of other-nature
Is asserted as being other-nature.

[3]

Ordinarily, only some natures are asserted to be other-natures in relation to other natures. If heat were the nature of fire, it could be asserted to be an other-nature in relation to water, which possesses the nature of wetness. However, when analysed, nothing possesses a nature, so how could an other become existent? Since the other does not exist, then nature is also established as not existing.

¹² Tib: *ngo bo*. For consistency would be translated as "nature", but that would lead to a tautology in the English in the next sentence.

¹³ Tib: *ngo bo nyid*.

¹⁴ A commentary on the Hevajra Tantra attributes this to the Laṅkāvatāra Sutra, but precise quote not found.

¹⁵ Tib: *gzhan gyi dngos po*.

Someone says: Even if things do not possess natures and other-natures, things still exist because that has not been refuted. However, if things exist, then they would necessarily become natures or other-natures. Therefore, natures and other-natures would also be existent.

Response:

Apart from natures and other-natures,
How could things exist?
If natures and other-natures exist,
Then things would be established. [4]

When things are investigated in this way, are they natures or other-natures? Neither of those two exist, as was previously explained. Therefore, since those two do not exist, then it should be ascertained that things also do not exist.

Someone says: Even if you have refuted things, nevertheless, non-things exist because that has not been refuted. Therefore, since its opposite exists, things will also exist; just like non-things.

Response: If the existence of non-things means that things also exist, then it is stated that they do not exist:

If things are not established,
Then also non-thing will not be established.
Things that transform into other
Are asserted by some as being non-things. [5]

Regarding this, if it were the case that some things exist and then become non-things upon having transformed into something else, then pots and so forth that have degenerated after the present moment and have transformed into something else would ordinarily be referred to as “non-things”.

When these pots and so forth are not established as the entitiness of things, how could [these] that possess the nature of not being existent transform into something else? Therefore, non-things also do not exist.

Therefore, [to those who are] erroneous with respect to nature and other-nature, as well as things and non-things, not existing in all aspects in that way due to their eyes of intelligence having been degenerated by the myodesopsia of ignorance, [it is said:]

Those who view nature and other-nature,
As well as things and non-things,
They do not perceive the suchness
Taught by the Buddha. [6]

Those who conceitedly [think] they are non-erroneously explaining the Tathāgata’s scriptures propound the nature of things, saying “The nature of earth is hardness, of feelings is experiencing objects, the nature of consciousness is individually knowing objects.” And propound other-nature, saying “With respect to other forms, consciousness is other and feeling is also other.” And propound that consciousness and so forth that are present to be things, whereas consciousness and so forth that are past to be non-things. They are not proponents of the suchness of supreme and profound dependent-arising.

Thereby, the existence of nature and other-nature and so forth is contradictory with reasoning, as has been explained. Also, the Tathāgatas do not teach a nature of things that is contradictory with reasoning because they have non-erroneously realised the suchness of [all] things without exception. Due to just that, the Masters assert that only the speech of the Buddha Bhagavāns is valid because it is non-deceptive due to according with reasoning.

Therefore, it is due to having come from those who are trustworthy and have abandoned [all] faults without exception, or due to bringing about complete understanding (i.e. bringing about a complete understanding of suchness), or due to being directed towards actualisation (i.e. in dependence upon that, worldly beings proceed to pass beyond sorrow), that the speech of the complete Buddhas is presented as scripture. Since textual systems other than that are devoid of logic, they are presented as not being valid and not being scripture.

Thereby, since these views of nature and other-nature, things and non-things, are devoid of reasoning, they are not suchness; therefore, to those disciples wishing for liberation:

The Bhagavān, through knowing
Things and non-things
Refuted both existence and non-existence
In the Advice to Kātyāyana. [7]

This is extensively indicated in the Sutra of the Bhagavān's Advice to Kātyāyana:

O Kātyāyana, since in this world most adhere to existence and non-existence, then due to that they will not be thoroughly liberated from birth, ageing, sickness, and death, as well as sorrow, wailing, various sufferings, mental unhappiness, and conflict. They will not be liberated from the five migrations of Samsara. They will not be liberated from the oppressing suffering of death.

This sutra is accepted by all the schools. Therefore, through this scripture and the previously explained reasonings, it would not be suitable for the wise to assert views of nature and other-nature, things and non-things, which are highly contradictory with the Words of the Tathāgata.

Due to what is the Bhagavān superior? "Through knowing things and non-things," i.e. due to possessing the state of knowing things and non-things, they are an exalted knower of things and non-things. Due to thoroughly and non-erroneously knowing the nature of things and non-things in accordance with how they abide, it is said that the Bhagavān is an exalted knower of things and non-things.

Since the Bhagavān, who is the exalted knower of things and non-things, refuted both existence and non-existence, then it is not reasonable to assert that the view of things and non-things is suchness.

Similarly, [the Ratnakūṭa Sutra¹⁶ says:]

O Kaśyapa, that called "existence" is one extreme; that called "non-existence" is a second extreme. That which is in the middle of those two is non-analysed, non-indicated, not a support, without appearance, without a knower, and non-abiding; O Kaśyapa, this is the middle path called the individual investigation of phenomena.

¹⁶ Seems to be from the ārya-kāśyapa-parivarta-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra, a chapter of the Ratnakūṭa; however, "existent" and "non-existent" are found as "self" and "selfless".

Similarly, [the King of Concentration Sutra] says:

Both that called existence and non-existence are extremes;
Pure and impure are also extremes;
Therefore, having abandoned both extremes,
Exalted knowers do not abide even in the middle.

That called existence and non-existence are in conflict;
Pure and impure are also in conflict;
The suffering of conflict will not be pacified;
Through the absence of conflict, suffering is ceased.

Someone says: If fire and so forth were to just inherently exist in that way, what would be the fault?

[*Response:*] The faults of this have already been explained by:

How would it be suitable
To refer to nature as possessing production? [2ab]

Moreover, it is due to indicating that if these [i.e. heat and so forth] were to exist as the nature of fire and so forth, then those that exist would not transform into something else:

If inherently existing,
That would not become non-existent. [8ab]

If these [i.e. heat and so forth] were the natures, i.e. own-natures, of fire and so forth, then those inherently existent natures would not transform again into something else because:

A nature that transforms into other
Will never be logical. [8cd]

If these [i.e. heat and so forth] were the natures of fire and so forth, then, since nature is unchanging, it is not logical that it would become something else. If inherently existent fire and so forth do not transform again into something else, just like the unobstructedness of space never changes into something else, their transformation into something else (i.e. their disintegration characterised by the severance of continuity) would also be observed by you. Therefore, it should be understood that due to possessing the property of transformation, these are not their nature; just like the heat of water [is not water's nature].

Someone says: If you say that because inherently existent [things] do not possess transformation into something else whereas their transformation into something else is observed, these things do not possess a nature, then nevertheless:

If they do not possess a nature,
What is it that transforms into other? [9ab]

Since those do not exist inherently, i.e. by way of own-nature, like a sky-flower, what is it that transforms into something else? Therefore, because that which does not possess a nature is not observed to transform into something else and because they are perceived to transform into something else, then nature exists.

Response: If your system propounds that because [things] that do not exist inherently, i.e. by way of own-nature, would not transform into something else and because they are perceived to transform into something else, then natures exist; then nevertheless:

Even if natures were to exist,
How could they be suitable to transform into other? [9cd]

Since those exist inherently, i.e. by way of own-nature, like what is presently arisen, what is it that transforms into something else? Therefore, due to inherently existent [things] not possessing transformation into something else, their transformation into something else is impossible in all aspects. Therefore, it should be understood that things lack nature.

Moreover, the explanation that due to perceiving transformation, natures do not exist is expressed in terms of the perception of transformation into something else that is renown to others; we have not asserted that anything ever transforms into something else.

Therefore, while such a permanent nature does not exist, all phenomena possess a non-existent nature, and their transformation into something else also does not exist; the investigation of some present things as being existent or non-existent will definitely only lead to the consequences that:

That called “existence” is grasping to permanence
That called “non-existence” is the view of annihilation. [10ab]

Due to that, since these views of permanence and annihilation act as obstacles to the path to higher status as well as liberation and enlightenment, they perform a great disservice and:

Therefore, the wise do not abide
In existence and non-existence. [10cd]

Moreover, why is it that if the view of things and non-things exists, it consequently leads to the views of permanence and annihilation? In this way:

Since anything that inherently exists
Cannot be non-existent, it would be permanent;
Saying “What previously arose is non-existent now,”
Consequently leads to annihilation. [11]

Anything that is said to inherently exist can never be non-existent since nature cannot be destroyed and in that way, due to having asserted the existence of nature, it becomes the view of permanence. Also, asserting that a nature of things [exists] on a previous occasion and then asserting that it has subsequently disintegrated and is presently non-existent consequently becomes the view of annihilation.

Either way, [asserting] that a nature of things is illogical will not consequently lead to the views of permanence and annihilation because the nature of things is not observed.

If someone says: Those who assert that things do not possess a nature might not have the view of permanence due to not having the view of things, but would that not definitely consequently become the view of annihilation?

That would not become the view of non-existence in that way.

It is in dependence upon the subsequent destruction of something that was initially asserted as the nature of things that it becomes the view of non-existence, due to deprecating the initially observed nature of things.

When those without myodesopsia do not observe any of the falling hairs observed by those with myodesopsia say that those do not exist, then since the object of negation is non-existent, why would they become proponents of non-existence?

Just like those without myodesopsia, we propound that all things do not exist in order to overcome the wrong adherence of those who are erroneous. However, when propounding as such, we do not consequently fall to the view of annihilation.

For example, as it is extensively explained in [the Lankāvatāra] Sutra:

O Bhagavān, those who initially assert attachment, anger, and ignorance as things and later propound that attachment, anger and ignorance are non-things, they become annihilationist.

Those asserting other-powered natures (minds and mental factors) as mere things, take the view of existence to be abandoned due to those being devoid of an imputational nature¹⁷ and take the view of non-existence to be abandoned due to the existence of mere things that are the causes of the thoroughly afflicted and completely pure through the power of other.

In that way, since imputational natures do not exist and because other-powered natures exist, they fall into both views of existence and non-existence; so how could they have abandoned both extremes? Since it has already been indicated that existents generated by causes and conditions possessing natures is illogical, this explanation is simply illogical.

Therefore, it should be understood that only the Mādhyamaka view lacks such consequences of the views of existence and non-existence; the views of the Proponents of Consciousness¹⁸ and so forth do not.

Due to just that, [Nāgārjuna's] Precious Garland says:

Ask the worldly proponents of the person being the aggregates,
The Samkhyas, Aulūkyas, as well as the Jains,
Whether what they propound
Is beyond existence and non-existence.

Therefore, the Buddhas' deathless teachings
Are explained as profound,
Beyond existence and non-existence;
It is said to be the uniqueness of this Dharma.

Just as, due to being a method for perceiving the ultimate, the Bhagavān (through the force of his great compassion) propounded the self of the Saṃmittīyas from the perspective of the types of disciples who conceive as such; similarly, it should be understood that he indicated the [assertions of the] Proponents of Consciousness as of interpretative meaning and not of definitive meaning.

For example, as the Arya King of Concentration Sutra says:

Emptiness as explained by the Sugatas
Is understood through specific sutra sections of definitive meaning;
Wherever a sentient being, person, or being was indicated,
All such Dharma should be understood as of interpretative meaning.

¹⁷ Lit. "due to their imputational non-nature"; Tib: *kun tu brtags pa'i ngo bon yid med pa*.

¹⁸ i.e. Cittamātra.

This should be extensively understood from the Teachings of Akṣayamati Sutra and so forth.

Therefore, having realised that so long as there is a possibility for the two views of things and non-things [to arise,] then there will still be Samsara, those wishing for sublime liberation should eliminate these two views and properly cultivate the Middle Path.

[In the Sutra Requested by Upāli,] the Bhagavān said:

Since everything is inconceivable and everything is non-arisen,
The understanding of things and non-things is thoroughly destroyed.
The childish who come under the control of mind,
They suffer for a billion existences.

Similarly, [the Arya King of Concentration Sutra] says:

I remember that in inconceivable eons past,
A supreme human arose,
A great sage, enacting the welfare of the world,
And his name was Abhāva-samudgata.¹⁹

As soon as he was born, abiding in the sky
He taught all phenomena to be non-things.
At that time, he was given that name in accordance with that,
And became renowned in all worlds through his words.

All the gods called out:
“He has become the Conqueror called ‘non-things,’
As soon as he was born he took seven steps
And the Conqueror explained all phenomena as non-things.”

When the Muni became a Dharma King,
A Buddha and Teacher of all Dharma,
The sound of “All phenomena are non-things”
Arose even from the grass, trees, branches, green hills, and rocks.

In that world, whatever sounds existed
[Arose] as “All are non-things; nothingness”;
In that way, the melodious words
Of the Guide of the World resounded.

Due to a nature of things being illogical, it says “the sound of ‘All phenomena are non-things’ arose even...” and so forth; the meaning of the sutra should be understood through this. Since it says “In that world, whatever sounds existed [arose] as ‘All are non-things; nothingness’ and so forth, due to asserting that it expresses a negation of non-existence, the meaning of non-things is the absence of inherent existence.

The commentary on the fifteenth chapter called “Investigation of nature” from Ācārya Candrakīrti’s Clear Words.

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¹⁹ Lit. “arisen from non-thing”