

Barry Kerzin

*Nagarjuna's Wisdom: The Middle Way*

Week Two: "Nagarjuna's Six Types of Logic"

May 13, 2019



Welcome back for session two of "Nagarjuna's Wisdom: A Practitioner's Guide to the Middle Way." In this session, we're going to explain a little bit about the genesis of my book, *Nagarjuna's Wisdom: A Practitioner's Guide to the Middle Way*, and we're going to introduce the different logical systems that Nagarjuna uses in the greatest of his works, his magnum opus called *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, or *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*.

My book started about 11 or 12 years ago when I was receiving teachings from the late, great Gan Namgyel Wangchen from Pomra Khamtsen in Drepung Loseling monastery in South India, not too far from Bangalore. This monastery is a part of the Tibetan Buddhist Mahayana tradition. The incredibly kind Gan Wangchen gave me teachings one-on-one, verse-by-verse of the full 27 chapters of *Mulamadhyamakakarika*. We did this over several months each winter for about five years. Then I transcribed, edited, and finalized nearly one thousand pages, and it was just too big for any publisher to handle!

It was then my job to condense this down to two hundred or three hundred pages. I didn't know how to do it so I put it on the back shelf for a while. Then I had some discussions with Professor Robert Thurman from Columbia University, a dear friend of mine. In those discussions, we brainstormed the situation and thought, "Why don't we approach it the way His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama approaches it?" That is, to pick out and extract five major chapters, and not in chronological order, but in the unique order that His Holiness the Dalai Lama uses. In fact, this is very similar to some of the writings of Je Tsongkhapa where he approaches Nagarjuna's text in a very similar fashion. We will start with Chapter 26, move on to 18, 24, 22, and then one. I'll give you a little bit of background on each chapter in the third and fourth session.

In this session, I'd like to give you the lay of the land regarding the different logical systems that Nagarjuna uses in this text and many of his other texts. There's six major texts that we know are attributable to Nagarjuna.

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Firstly, he talks about “destructive dilemma.” Destructive dilemma is a type of logic that looks at things to see if they're identical or different. Often it's about comparing two things: something and its basis. For example, we can look at the self and compare it to its basis, which is the mind and the body. Or we can expand that and get the five aggregates or five *skandhas*. One is form, which is the body, and the other four are different aspects of consciousness, or the mind. If we collapse it we get the mind and the body. The body and the mind are the basis for me, Barry, the self.

If we're comparing me (or Barry, the self) and the basis (my body and my mind), are they identical or are they separate? There are many arguments to contradict both positions. For example, if Barry is identical with his body and mind, since there's two aspects, body and mind, there must be two Barrys. That's ridiculous and contradictory. On the other side, as there's only one Barry, the mind and body must be one—again, a contradiction.

Additionally, if we look at how karma works, when the body dies Barry would have to die if they're identical. Therefore the consequences of the actions—the karma—that I'd done in this life wouldn't show up in the next life. Things would show up that I didn't do. This is another contradiction of identity between Barry and Barry's basis of body and mind.

Now, can they be different? The context we're talking about is objective reality here. If objectively, Barry and the basis for Barry—Barry's body and mind—are different, that means they can have no relationship at all. So we can't say “Barry's body.” We can't say “Barry's knee is hurting,” because there could be no relationship between Barry and the basis for Barry, his body and mind. These are the contradictions that are raised by Nagarjuna using this destructive dilemma type of reasoning for identity and separateness.

Secondly, he uses a system called tetralemma. Tetra means four. There's four logical positions in this system, which are basically A, B, A plus B, and neither A nor B. For example, in the first

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verse of Nagarjuna's text, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, he presents production in the context of this tetralemma. Things are either produced, they're not produced, they're both produced and not produced, and they're neither produced nor not produced. In using the tetralemma to refute production, what's implied here is intrinsic or objective production. We see that at the very beginning of the text in chapter one, and we'll come back to that in the fourth session.

Thirdly, Nagarjuna uses the logical system of a trilemma, tri meaning three. This refers to time. We're talking about the three times—past, present, and future—and Nagarjuna uses this logic quite extensively in the second chapter on the analysis of motion.

The future is yet to come. The past has already been. And the present, if you go down precisely, can't be found. It's either passed, or yet to be in the future. You can't find the present, the future is yet to come, and the past has already gone, so there is no time that is an objective or intrinsic kind of time. This logic is called the trilemma.

Fourthly, he uses a logic which we call infinite, and this is really infinite regress or regression. The example here is taken from the first chapter where he talks about conditions. We'll talk about that a little bit more in our fourth session. But basically he says that all phenomena have these three characteristics of originating, enduring, and disintegrating. If all phenomena have these three characteristics of origination, endurance, and disintegration, then what about origination itself? It is a phenomenon, so it must also have these three characteristics of origination, endurance, and disintegration. If that's true, then the quality of the phenomenon of origination must also have these three, and with this pattern extended, you get infinite regress. He uses this argument in talking about conditions in terms of production in his first chapter, "The Analysis of Conditions."

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Fifthly, he talks about refuting reflexivity. Reflexivity is refuting a relationship anything has to itself. He gives examples for this, and I believe these examples were originally given by the Buddha. For example, he says that a knife cannot cut itself. Secondly, he gives the example that darkness cannot cover itself. And thirdly, he provides the example that a finger cannot point to itself. This is the fifth type of logic that he uses.

Sixth, he uses a the type of logic we call mutual dependence. This is a type of logic that refutes directly intrinsic or objective existence. All arguments are understood to be distinctions between existence and inherent existence, and also between nonexistence and non-inherent existence. Understanding these two distinctions is crucial to understanding the lack of intrinsic existence, which is emptiness. This is a very direct argument that he uses to establish the lack of intrinsic existence directly.

Thank you for tuning in, and please join us for session three.