

Nagarjuna's FWOTMW, ch. 1 v.1-3: The Nondual

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Draft 1.07
2020 April 25

The Theme

Here I'm referring to *Fundamental Wisdom Of The Middle Way* by Nagarjuna translated by Nishijima.

Nishijima's commentary does not capture the following, in the first several verses. His translation of the verses is superb.

I've referred to of- the subject in my writings. This can be taken even deeper. There actually is nothing but at-once, the present moment, and function or manifestation. This entire universe is this. And it is absolute Suchness. (One could say it's a catenation; but an infinite-catenation, at-once, present moment, inseparable, nondual...not objectified...one can use 'the universe is a catenation' to penetrate the matter even more fully.)

There is no subjectivity because there is no separable thing to be a subject; there is no objectivity because to see in terms of objects (how we represent things) that have a hard edge of reified separable reality is a mistake. The entire *setup* of 'subject' and 'object' in our minds is often a mistake, unless we simply use the words for convenience – say to talk of entities, with all of this in mind, *as* our mind. There does seem to be some sort of telescoping, multi-angle entity-ness to things, but when we see in the aforementioned way, we can see the dimension to this. To see the spatial and the interstitial is a nice step, and a real perception – and, with entity-ness, the actuality of neither being nor non-being. It's a multi-layer thing, and seen from the dimension, real view, it's most interesting – just this actual world.

Nondiscriminating mind and the nondual penetrates to see all of this, over time. In addition, Shibayama states that samadhi, in Zen, is the pure working of no-mind that has transcended both action and quietude. He talks of Absolute Subjectivity as the working of the master – and this would I think also be this very at-once, present moment, nondual way. In *The Lankavatara Sutra* the Buddha recommends to Mahamati that one retire to a place of solitude and consider both what is said and innermost consciousness, and realize Noble Wisdom.

Nagarjuna writes in FWOTMW ch. 1 v. 3:

Subjective existence can never be recognized in miscellaneous existences or in the reliable facts.

When subjective existence cannot be recognized it is completely impossible to recognize objective existence either.

Here he is already striking at a deep level.

Shibayama speaks of the interplay of subjectivity and objectivity. He uses the words in a different sense, and it has a temporal aspect. But when we scrutinize this, we see that it, too, is One. To realize just how Maya has reality, and to see just how this world arises, is striking, pleasant, sublime, and awakened.

Now one should consider again v1 and v2.

FWOTMW ch. 1 v. 1:

The reliable facts are not that which is subjective, not that which is objective, not a mixture of the two, but never unreasonable at all.

Phenomena are just recognized as they are, and existence as we conceive it never exists anywhere; it is just nonexistence.

FWOTMW ch. 1 v. 2:

The four reliable facts are reason, the external world, the present moment, and reality – this world – which seems to be similar to God. A fifth reliable fact never exists at all.

‘existence as we conceive it never exists anywhere...’ – the separable, strictly individual, completely distinct subjective/objective way of seeing things, as described above.

‘a fifth reliable fact never exists at all’ – it is just a ghost haunting the trees and bushes and houses (Mumon).

Nishijima notes that here by reason Nagarjuna indicates principles of the universe as much as what we would usually consider reason.

There are other angles to view things, like sunyata (emptiness) or pratityasamutpada (dependent arising). These are both the absolute, made present in and as the relative.

Furthermore

The next two verses confirm this view.

FWOTMW ch. 1 v. 4:

Real action at the present moment is never an imitation of the reliable facts, so there is no possibility of an imitation of a reliable fact being real action.

The reliable facts are not different from real action, and there exists something real, which is very similar to real action itself.

FWOTMW ch. 1 v. 5:

Conspicuous things and phenomena are manifesting themselves as this world, and that which is called “things and phenomena” are just the reliable facts.

Inasmuch as that which manifests itself shows itself as things and phenomena, that which is different than the reliable facts can never really exist at all.

The electron is its very action and function – a manifestation in this world. And this is inseparable from other manifestations, including the next electron or not, or the photon. Similarly for a tree, or a field.

We can speak of objects – but this is a rough idea; and here again the object is not separable, it has no hard edge of separable, reified reality,[1] and its reality can be seen – arising in this world as this world – with nondiscriminating mind. Objects, with the temporal-spatial, have a total presence. It can help to see objects-spatial-temporal as wake-stating at-once in the ever-unfolding present moment. Nature expresses the thing-and-scene-spatial-temporal as wake-stating at-once in the ever-unfolding present moment.

Situations And The Nondual

I have to investigate this further: to see and act in dualistic terms, and not from the standpoint of nonduality, is to create a world that in Nagarjuna’s terms is impossible to really exist. There are attributes of that world and situation, but they do not really exist, in the very real sense. It is to create fragments and fracture and disjoint and unreasonable situations or aspects where integration and differentiation are impossible or difficult, and it may lead away from truth, apperception, and awareness – and real function. No matter what, the situation will always really be seen in nondual terms, and this may contradict the idea and so forth of what is in the first place seen and its action. But reality is nondual. The nondual will also take into account the function and the fragments. This then can turn into protection, instruction, and compassion; adept, skillful means; and the right thing said or not said, or done or not done, at the right moment in wisdom.

This nondual might be part of what Nagarjuna understood to be real action; and he takes up real action further in a later chapter.

Jesus’ Two Commandments

Jesus said, “The first commandment is to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul. The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.” What if God is the Absolute, and Absolute Truth? Then you would want to follow the first commandment. And since the world is one space, One, each thing in the world is one’s neighbor, and the way Jesus describes it, you would want to pay attention to and show love to each thing, person, and situation, and (in Buddhist terms) wish compassion, merit, and benefit for each sentient being. Even one’s everyday action is part of this one space, this world.

The electron is its very action and function – a manifestation in this world. And this is inseparable from other manifestations.

(I feel one of Jesus' themes and principles was 'to resolve'. And this would be a natural resolving of things – things would resolve themselves of their own accord. Each perspective – Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Taoist, or Indigenous – will have its own view on this.)

A Statement Of Dogen, And Conclusion

The oneness of practice and realization – Dogen.

Enjoy!

P.S. I am still perfecting my path. My journey continues.

Footnotes

1. This is deceptive, because often objects have hard edges of surface – and it takes some practice and contemplation of what is objectified and otherwise, to see beyond this, to avoid this particular mistake of perception, representation, thinking, and grasping.

The Following Resources Might Be Helpful

Zazen.

The everyday and just this world; reflection, contemplation, and study; journaling.

The Diamond Sutra And The Sutra Of Hui-neng translated by A. F. Price and Wong Mou-lam.

The Lankavatara Sutra translated by D. T. Suzuki.

The Gateless Barrier: Zen Comments On The Mumonkan by Zenkei Shibayama.

Zen Training: Methods And Philosophy by Katsuki Sekida.

The Logic Of Faith: A Buddhist Approach To Finding Certainty Beyond Belief And Doubt by Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel.

A Study Of Dogen: His Philosophy And Religion by Masao Abe.

A Note About Nagarjuna

Nagarjuna was a ca. 150-250 Indian Buddhist meditator and philosopher. His works and insight are highly respected in Buddhism.

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