

Class Two: An Analysis of the Parts of a Person

रूपकारणनिर्मक्तं न रूपमुपलभ्यते ।

रूपेणापि न निर्मक्तं दृश्यते रूपकारणं ॥ १ ॥

rūpakāraṇanirmuktaṁ na rūpamupalabhyate ।
rūpeṇāpi na nirmuktaṁ dṛśyate rūpakāraṇaṁ ।। 1

4.1

You could never conceive of a form
Separate from what makes it up.
But these components of a form
Could also never be seen
If they were removed from their “form.”

In this chapter, Arya Nagarjuna discusses whether the five main parts that make up a person truly exist. The first of these five “heaps” or skandhas is called “form,” referring to the physical body of a person as well as all material phenomena in the person’s world. Form is used throughout this chapter to stand in for all five heaps (see below, 4.7); the arguments pertaining to form extend also to the other four. The opening verse, as usual, states the basic argument of the chapter as a whole: Physical form or matter, one of the main parts of the person, cannot be conceived apart from its constituent material parts (which are sometimes enumerated as the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water). But the parts of form could not be conceived or perceived as parts of form if they were isolated from the whole of which they are parts. Parts and the whole are mutually dependent and neither exists self-existently.

Class Two: An Analysis of the Parts of a Person

रूपकारणनिर्मुक्ते रूपे रूपं प्रसज्यते ।

आहेतुकं न चास्त्यर्थः कश्चिदाहेतुकः क्व चित् ॥ २ ॥

rūpakāraṇanirmukte rūpe rūpaṁ prasajyate ।
āhetukaṁ na cāstyārthaḥ kaścīdāhetukaḥ kva cit ॥ 2

4.2

If we could ever separate
A form from its components,
Then we'd have a form
That didn't have any causes—

But there isn't an object
In all the world
Which doesn't have a cause.

The “components of a form” (rūpakāraṇa) are also understood as the “causes” (hetu) for the form. It is because of these components that form comes about. If there were form (a body, let's say) that existed apart from its components or causes, it would be partless (without limbs, head, and torso) or causeless. One set of problems ensues if we regard form as partless; another ensues if we take form as causeless. Arya Nagarjuna begins here by saying that form which isn't caused is impossible, for there is no entity or object of sense perception (artha) which doesn't come into existence due to causes and conditions. A person's body, for example, arises because of causes.

Class Two: An Analysis of the Parts of a Person

रूपेण तु विनिर्मुक्तं यदि स्याद्रूपकारणं ।

अकार्यकं कारणं स्याद् नास्त्यकार्यं च कारणं ॥३॥

rūpeṇa tu vinirmuktaṁ yadi syādrūpakāraṇaṁ ।
akāryakaṁ kāraṇaṁ syād nāstyakāryaṁ ca kāraṇaṁ ।। 3

4.3

If a component of form
Could ever be held
Apart from its form,

Then we'd have a component
That comprised nothing—
A cause without a result.
That could never exist.

If some part of one's body (the elbow, for example) could be isolated from the body of which it were a part, what would it be? It could no longer be a part of a larger whole, and thus it would be a "component that comprised nothing." Arya Nagarjuna is also here analyzing the process of causality and perception. If the parts of a form are the cause for that form, which exists first – the parts (cause) or the whole (result)? If we say, as would seem commonsensical, that the parts of form must come before the form, then we would have a cause for a result before the result occurs. But a cause is only a cause when it brings about a result, that is, after the result, not before. A cause without a result does not exist as a cause. A part can only be a part of a whole, which presupposes the existence of a whole of which it is a part. We cannot perceive things as parts until we perceive the whole of which they are parts.

Class Two: An Analysis of the Parts of a Person

रूपे सत्येव रूपस्य कारणं नोपपद्यते ।

रूपेऽसत्येव रूपस्य कारणं नोपपद्यते ॥ ४ ॥

rūpe satyeva rūpasya kāraṇaṁ nopapadyate ।
rūpe 'satyeva rūpasya kāraṇaṁ nopapadyate ॥ 4

4.4

Even if there was a form
What makes it up would be
Completely impossible.

And if there isn't any form
What makes it up is still
Completely impossible.

If form (like the body) truly existed, it would exist independently of its components and its causes. That would mean it would not need its parts and would not need causes to bring it into existence, since it already exists. And if form did not exist at all, then there would be no parts to it nor any causes for it, since it does not exist. A further implication is that if the components of form came together to make up or cause form, then we should be able to see that process at work. But when we look for any one of the individual parts that comprise form (the hand of a body, for example), those parts turn out to have parts too (the five fingers and the palm), and each of those parts have parts (the top, middle, and bottom of each finger), and so on ad infinitum. We could never see a hand, let alone a body, if this were how we were seeing things.

Class Two: An Analysis of the Parts of a Person

निष्कारणं पुना रूपं नैव नैवोपपद्यते ।

तस्माद् रूपगतान् कांश्चिन्न विकल्पान् विकल्पयेत् ॥५॥

niṣkāraṇaṃ punā rūpaṃ naiva naivopapadyate ।
tasmād rūpagatān kāṃścinna vikalpān vikalpayet ।। 5

4.5

A form not made of anything
Is illogical, in fact
It's totally ridiculous!
So just stop having
All these misconceptions
About form.

But a form that is not made up of its parts or brought about by its causes is also impossible. So Arya Nagarjuna advises us to start thinking very differently about form and the other parts that make up the person. Easier said than done!

Class Two: An Analysis of the Parts of a Person

न कारणस्य सदृशं कार्यमित्युपपद्यते ।

न कारणस्यासदृशं कार्यमित्युपपद्यते ॥६॥

na kāraṇasya sadṛśaṁ kāryamityupapadyate ।
na kāraṇasyāsadrśaṁ kāryamityupapadyate ॥ 6

4.6

We couldn't say
The thing that's made
Resembles that
Which makes it up.
But we can't say
The thing that's made
Doesn't resemble
What makes it up.

The parts of the body are not identical to the body they make up (the knee is not a miniature body); a cause is not the same as its effect (if it were, the two would be indistinguishable). But, on the other hand, the parts of the body cannot be entirely different from the body they comprise either, for if they were anyone's knee could be part of your body. A cause must be related to its effect to be a cause of that effect, or else anything whatsoever could bring about any other thing.

Class Two: An Analysis of the Parts of a Person

वेदनाचित्तसंज्ञानां संस्काराणां च सर्वशः ।

सर्वेषामेव भावानां रूपेणैव समः क्रमः ॥७॥

vedanācittasamjñānām saṃskārāṇaṃ ca sarvaśaḥ ।
sarveṣāmeva bhāvānām rūpeṇaiva samaḥ kramaḥ ।। 7

4.7

Now use the same progression
As we did for form itself
On feelings, discrimination,
Miscellaneous factors, mind,
And all existing things.

Here Arya Nagarjuna just states that all the previous observations about form hold true for the other four “heaps” or principal parts of the person – feelings, the faculty of discrimination, the miscellaneous factors or dispositions, and mind or consciousness – as well as all existing things of this type. What he is suggesting here is that if you understand the emptiness of any one thing – form, in this case – you understand the emptiness of every other thing. One of the commentators quotes here the following verse from the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra:

*Just as you understand yourself,
So too can you understand all living beings.
Just as you understand all living beings,
So too can you understand all things.*

Class Two: An Analysis of the Parts of a Person

विग्रहे यः परीहारं कृते शून्यतया वदेत् ।

सर्वं तस्यापरिहृतं समं साध्येन जायते ॥ ८ ॥

vigrahe yaḥ parihāraṁ kṛte śūnyatayā vadet ।
sarvaṁ tasyāparihṛtaṁ samaṁ sādhyena jāyate ।। 8

4.8

Whenever we use emptiness
In a debate
And someone tries to reply
They haven't made a reply at all
Because it is simply
Proving our point.

Arya Nagarjuna states here that any objection to his argument will be “simply proving our point” in that it will presuppose something which the opponent has just assumed must have some kind of inherent self-existence. But this is exactly what needs to be proven. Arya Nagarjuna asserts that any claim to self-existence can be refuted through the arguments put forward in this chapter.