

# Reading Response 2

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The Mahayana school of philosophy critiqued the Abhidharma explication of reality, primary the concept of all of reality being constructed of collections of dhammas. The Abhidharma teaching very heavily focused on the concept of anatman, and the fact that there is no eternal self. One of the other primary teachings was that of conditioned arising (pratitya samutpada), this is the concept that nothing just exists, but it instead arises due to conditions caused by other things.

With these two concepts the Adhidharma school of philosophy was that there is nothing except for the dhammas, and all other components of reality are some combination of dhammas, and are caused by conditioned arising. The main issue that the Madhyamaka school of thought had with the Adhidharma school was that if nothing exists and there is no self, then how do the dhammas exist?

If the dhammas exist outside of conditioned arising, then they are eternal, and could be considered to have a self. However, this is contradictory to the primary teaching of anatman. This would imply that the dhammas exist outside of conditioned arising, and that they poses an eternal essence, or a self.

The Madhyamika interpretation of conditioned arising is that phenomena are not only dependent for their arising, but also in their very nature. A phenomena can only be considered in relation to other phenomena and how they interact (Harvey 118). Thus the dhammas cannot exist on their own, but must arise from given conditions, and can only be considered in relation to other phenomena, and cannot be considered on its own.

The Mahayana school of philosophy developed a solution to this, by declaring that everything is subject to conditioned arising. That is including the dhammas, and Nirvana. This school of thought considered that even the dhammas were conditions of a more basic principal. Thus they developed their “universal truth” which consists of a number of most basic components, that are combined to construct everything. This includes the dhammas of the Adhidharma schools of thought.

Nagarjuna argues that the teaching of the Mahayana school is a middle way in the sense that “something with inherent existence would substantially exist and be eternal; to believe in such an eternity is to hold to the eternalism view, while to believe that such a thing could go out of existence is to hold to the annihilationist

view” (Harvey 118). Here he says that any thing that has inherit existence, such as the dhammas in the Adhidharma school, would lead to an eternalism view, which was condemned by the Buddha, and is counter productive for the progression towards enlightenment.

The Mahayana school considered the dhammas as a “convent truth”, such that is was convenient to use the terminology for discussion, but under scrutiny it does not withstand as the “ultimate truth” would.

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