

## The Madhyamaka (Middle Way) School – Conventional Truth

### **Conventional Truth – Direct Valid Cognizers**

- Direct valid cognition – both the Svatantrika and Madhyamaka subschools assert that there are two types of valid cognizers: *direct* perceivers (or direct valid cognizers) and *inferential* valid cognizers.
- Svatantrika subschool – an object cognized by *direct perception* is an unmistakable conventional truth. This subschool asserts that direct valid cognizers (e.g. an eye consciousness directly apprehending an object) are free from any mistaken element at all. Direct perceivers are valid and unmistakable. However, although every thing and event is empty of true existence, it still has its own established nature, an inherent or intrinsic nature (there is a subtle difference between *truly existing* and *inherently existing*).
- Prasangika subschool – consciousness can be divided into two: (a) valid (b) invalid. This subschool asserts that in unenlightened beings, no matter how valid or accurate the perceptions are with respect to their object, they are affected by the long-term appearance of the inherent nature of things and events. Not only are things and events lacking true existence, but they also have no established inherent nature from their own side whatsoever. Thus, perceiving such an inherent nature in objects is a mistake in direct valid cognizers.
- How the Prasangika subschool sees the mistaken view of the Svatantrika subschool – an object may appear to conceptual consciousnesses and to direct perceivers as having a true and inherent nature. However, no matter how valid a direct cognizer may be, there is still the mistaken element of the object appearing as if it has inherent existence. The error is as follows: While an eye consciousness perceives a book, which is valid and correct, the mistake is that within that process there is an element wherein the book appears to the eye consciousness as having a true and inherent book nature.

### **External Objects – How They Exist**

- Svatantrika subschool – further subdivided into two:
  - (1) External phenomena come into existence due to the aggregation of partless particles (same realist notion as held by the two lower philosophical schools). Became *Sautrantika Svatantrika*, whose main master was Jnanagarbha.
  - (2) Rejection of the existence of external things (same view as Chittamatra school). Became *Yogachara Svatantrika*, whose main master was Shantarakshita.
- Prasangika subschool – do not assert that external objects exist through the aggregation of partless particles. External objects exist simply because they are perceived by a conventional valid cognition that is not investigating their ultimate nature. Without any investigation, one sees books or chairs, and to a person they exist. Therefore, on a conventional level, external objects exist.

### **Conventional Truth – Inferential Valid Cognizers**

- Inferential valid cognition – an inference that has attained a clarity and certainty about an object can realize its object without fault (however, in general, conceptual consciousnesses are faulty). Without first going through the stage of valid inference, it is impossible, for example, to realize emptiness directly. We must first go through concepts, before we can go beyond them in direct realization.
- Both subschools assert that many hidden objects can only be understood through inferential cognizers, specifically those subtle modes of existence of things and events such as impermanence and emptiness.
- The difference between the subschools is in the methodology used to gain such an inference.
- Svatantrika subschool – assert that to have an inferential valid cognizer (for example, of emptiness), one needs to use an *autonomous sign* (a kind of self-existent reason). The method of making an assertion is to use syllogisms (in three parts: subject, predicate, reason [sign]) which stand on their own as proof of an argument. The thesis must be established from its own side, by way of its own power, as an "autonomous" sign.
- Prasangika subschool – rejected the idea of needing any form of autonomous syllogism, established from its own side in order to have a valid inferential cognizer of a hidden object, such as emptiness. This was because as soon as one believes in an autonomous sign, then one is asserting that something exists from its own side, and that there is some kind of inherent entity. Instead, it is enough to make use of *consequential* statements, which are statements that reject wrong conceptions. For example, to refute the assertion of true existence or inherent existence, one can take those assertions to their logical limits so that their absurdities are uncovered, which is enough to bring about valid inferential cognizers that realize the absence of true existence and the absence of inherent existence. In sum, the only valid method is to systematically reject whatever misconceptions other assertions raise about the object under analysis – this process will bring about valid inferential cognizers.

### **Conventional Truths – Real and Unreal**

- Svatantrika subschool – asserted that conventional truths can be divided into two categories:
  - (1) Real – tables, chairs, books, and so forth are real conventional truths because worldly beings take them as true, because it is how they appear to their consciousnesses (as apparently real).
  - (2) Unreal – unreal conventional truths are things for which a disparity exists between how those objects are and how they appear, even on the conventional level (e.g. a reflection, an echo, an illusion created by a magician); they are not apparently real.
- Prasangika subschool – all conventional truths (concealer truths) are unreal because they are all falsities and faulty. A face and its reflection, for example, are both deceptive because they both appear to be inherently existent – but they are both "unreal". However, there is a difference in the mode of existence between the face (it is true, right, and real) and its reflection (it is false, wrong, and unreal) from the perspective of the mundane world. On the other hand (according to Chandrakirti), there is no difference between "truly existing" and "inherently existing", and both must be refuted.