

Negatives

Phenomena (*dharmā, chos*) are divided into positive phenomena (*vidhi, sgrub pa*) and negative phenomena (*pratiṣheda, dgag pa*). It is important to note that the basis of division is phenomena and not statements, propositions, and acts of logic, and thus this is not a division of propositions and so forth into positive and negative statements, or logical affirmations and negations. Rather, this is a division of objects, or existents, into those that are positive and those that are negative. Since the divisions are exhaustive, anything that exists is either a positive or a negative phenomenon; there is no third category. Also, every instance of a positive or negative phenomenon is an existent.

Following is a table of synonyms of ‘existent’ with their respective definitions:

- 1 existent: something observed by valid cognition
- 2 established base: something established by valid cognition
- 3 object of knowledge: something fit to be taken as an object of an awareness
- 4 phenomenon: something holding its own entity
- 5 object of comprehension: something realized by valid cognition
- 6 object: something known by an awareness
- 7 object of comprehension by an omniscient consciousness: something realized by an omniscient consciousness.

That the above are synonyms means that whatever is a negative or a positive phenomenon is necessarily an existent, an established base, an object of knowledge, a phenomenon, an object of comprehension, an object, and an object of comprehension by an omniscient consciousness as well as something observed by valid cognition, etc. Hence, the mere fact that an emptiness is a negative means that it is an existent, an object, and so forth.

A positive phenomenon is defined as:

a phenomenon which is not an object realized by the thought consciousness apprehending it in the manner of an explicit elimination of its object of negation.

First of all, a positive thing (*vidhi*) is a phenomenon, an existent; a non-existent such as the horns of a rabbit could never be a positive phenomenon. Second, the

division into positive and negative phenomena is made by way of how objects appear to thought or conceptual consciousnesses; if a conceptual consciousness must realize the object by way of openly and explicitly eliminating an object of negation, the object is not positive but negative. For instance, to realize non-cow, cow must be openly eliminated, but to realize cow, non-cow does not have to be explicitly eliminated though indeed it is implicitly eliminated. Thus, non-cow is a negative phenomenon, and cow is a positive phenomenon.

The definition of a negative phenomenon is:

an object realized by the thought consciousness apprehending it in the manner of an explicit elimination of its object of negation.

Again, a negative must be an object, an existent, a phenomenon. It is also something that must be conceptually realized through the open or explicit negation of an object of negation. Examples of negative phenomena are non-pot, (bum pa ma yin pa), non-non-pot (bum pa ma yin pa ma yin pa), opposite from non-pot (bum pa ma yin pa las log pa), and non-existence of pot (bum pa med pa). Although non-non-pot means just pot, it must be realized by way of explicitly eliminating non-pot, and thus it is a negative phenomenon. Although it does not exist as a different entity from pot, which is a positive phenomenon, it is merely different from pot and is a negative.

Negatives are divided into two types—affirming negatives (*paryudāsapratiṣhedha*, *ma yin dgag*) and non-affirming negatives (*prasajyapratiṣhedha*, *med dgag*). In brief, the difference between the two is that the term which expresses an affirming negative suggests something else in place of its negation, whereas the term that expresses a non-affirming negative does not. For instance, the sentence, ‘The fat Devadatta does not eat during the day,’ expresses a phenomenon, namely, fat Devadatta’s not eating during the day, but it does not merely eliminate eating during the day since the mention of ‘fat’ implies or suggests that he eats at night. Thus, fat Devadatta’s not eating during the day is an affirming negative; it is an object, an existent, a phenomenon, and an object of knowledge that is negative, but the expression of it implies something in place of what it negates. Though the determination that it is a negative depends on how it is expressed, it is the phenomenon itself that is thereby determined to be a negative. For, the sentence, ‘The fat Devadatta does not eat during the day,’ is itself, as a sentence or group of sounds, a positive phenomenon. Thus, it is not the proposition, but the object of reference of the proposition that is the negative.

The formal definition of an affirming negative is:

a negative which is such that the term expressing it suggests in place of the negation of its own object of negation another, positive phenomenon which is its own object of suggestion.

In the example of fat Devadatta's not eating during the day, eating at night, a positive phenomenon, is suggested. Another example of an affirming negative is non-non-pot, which suggests pot. Another is non-pot, which suggests things that are not pots.

Affirming negatives are further divided into four types depending on how the terms that express them suggest positive phenomena in place of their negations—either explicitly, implicitly, both, and by context. These four are:

1 Affirming negative which is such that the term expressing it explicitly suggests another, positive phenomenon which is its own object of suggestion.

For example, a mountainless plain is expressed by the term 'mountainless plain'. The term eliminates mountains but openly speaks of a plain; thus, a mountainless plain is an affirming negative which explicitly suggests or reveals a positive phenomenon. The same is true of the existence of the absence of inherent existence, for the term expressing it, 'The absence of inherent existence exists', or 'existence of the absence of inherent existence' eliminates inherent existence but openly speaks of the existence of its absence, a positive phenomenon. Thus, though the absence of inherent existence is a non-affirming negative, its existence is an affirming negative of the explicitly suggestive variety. Since meditation on an emptiness means to meditate on a specific non-affirming negative, the object of meditation is not the existence of an emptiness (although it does exist) but an emptiness itself.

2 Affirming negative which is such that the term expressing it implicitly suggests another, positive phenomenon which is its own object of suggestion.

For example, fat Devadatta's not eating during the day. Also, since non-non-pot eliminates non-pot but does not explicitly suggest pot, it is an affirming negative of the implicitly suggestive type.

3 Affirming negative which is such that the term expressing it both explicitly and implicitly suggests another, positive phenomenon which is its own object of suggestion.

For example, the phrase, 'The existence of the non-emaciated body of the fat Devadatta who does not eat during the day,' eliminates eating during the day,

implicitly suggests eating during the night, and explicitly speaks of the existence of his body. Thus, the phenomenon which it expresses is an affirming negative the suggestiveness of which is both implicit and explicit.

4 Affirming negative which is such that the term expressing it suggests by context another, positive phenomenon which is its own object of suggestion.

For example, in the context of knowing that King Siddhartha is either of the royal or brahmin class, his not being of the brahmin class eliminates that he is of the brahmin class and, through the context of one's having determined that his lineage is either the royal or brahmin class, suggests that he is of the royal class.

In all four of these cases, something is suggested in place of the negation of the object of negation. However, with a non-affirming negative nothing positive is suggested—only an object of negation is negated. Nevertheless, a non-affirming negative is an object, an existent, a phenomenon, and so on.

Thus, the definition of a non-affirming negative is:

a negative which is such that the term expressing it does not suggest in place of the negation of its own object of negation another, positive phenomenon which is its own object of suggestion.

For example, the non-existence of the horns of a rabbit is expressed by the sentence, 'The horns of a rabbit do not exist,' and this does not suggest anything positive in place of the horns of a rabbit. Though it can suggest another non-affirming negative such as the non-existence of the beauty of the horns of a rabbit, it does not suggest any positive phenomenon in place of its object of negation.

In this same vein, an emptiness merely eliminates inherent existence; it does not imply anything positive in its place. Though emptiness is compatible with conventional existence, it does not suggest conventional existence in place of its object of negation; still, it is stressed that a proper *understanding* of emptiness acts to assist an understanding of conventional existence. An emptiness is the mere elimination of inherent or objective existence and thus is a mere negative, a non-affirming negative, a mere absence of its object of negation.

Even the emptiness of inherent existence of a table does not suggest a positive phenomenon even though the phrase 'the emptiness of inherent existence of a table', or the sentence, 'A table is empty of inherent existence,' openly and explicitly speaks of table. For, table is not suggested in place of the negated object of negation, inherent existence; it merely is the base of the negation.

Non-affirming negatives are divided into two classes—those whose object of negation does occur among objects of knowledge and those whose object of negation does not occur among objects of knowledge. For example, the non-existence of the horns of a rabbit negates the horns of a rabbit which do not exist anywhere, and similarly the absence of inherent existence eliminates inherent existence which never has nor will occur anywhere. Thus, these two are non-affirming negatives whose object of negation does not occur among objects of knowledge, that is to say, among existents. On the other hand, the non-existence of a pot, such as on a certain table, eliminates the existence of a pot there, but pot does occur among existents at some other place, and thus non-existence of a pot is a non-affirming negative whose object of negation does occur among objects of knowledge.

Through making this division in terms of whether the object negated is, in general, an existent or not, it is being stressed that an emptiness is a lack of something—inherent existence—that never did nor will exist. Though an emptiness exists, its object of negation never does. Realization of an emptiness, therefore, is not a case of destroying something that once existed or of realizing the passing away of something that did exist; rather, it means to realize a quality of objects, a negative attribute, that is the mere absence of something that never existed but nevertheless was imagined to occur.

The existence of an object right in its own basis of designation never did or could occur, but beings conceive the opposite and thus have been drawn beginninglessly into cyclic existence. Extrication from that misconception can happen only through realizing the absence of such reified existence, becoming accustomed to it in intense meditation, realizing it directly in meditative equipoise in which nothing but emptiness appears, and the mind is merged with it like fresh water poured into fresh water, and over and over again re-entering that direct cognition. Meditation on emptiness is the medicine that, when accompanied by compassionate method, can clear away all obstructions such that unimpeded altruistic activity is manifested. Thus, though emptiness is a mere negative, it is a doctrine neither of nihilism nor of agnosticism, but a confident affirmation of a basic nature, the realization of which yields powerful, beneficial results.

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