SD 65.14

Param Maraṇa Sutta

The Discourse on the After-death | **S 16.12**
Theme: Speculating about the afterdeath does not conduce to spiritual development
Translated and annotated by Piya Tan 2010, ©2026

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The Param Maraṇa Sutta (S 16.12) is a short teaching by the Buddha, in the form of a dialogue between Sāriputta and Mahā Kassapa, against speculating on **the afterdeath state** (*param maraṇa*), that is, whether afterdeath, one exists, or not, or both, or neither [2]. The Buddha has "not declared" (*avyā-kata*) any such speculative teaching because it is not beneficial for spiritual cultivation. The Buddha has only declared **the 4 noble truths** since they are beneficial to attaining the path of awakening.

1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 Avoid distraction from Dharma training

While **the Tiracchāna Kathā Sutta** (S 56.10) warns us against being distracted by wrong speech, specifically "animal talk" (*tiracchāna kathā*) [SD 65.13], **the Param Maraṇa Sutta** (S 16.12) warns us against being distracted by speculative thinking, specifically, by the tetralemma (*catu,ṭhāna*; Skt *catuṣkoṭi*) on the afterdeath state of *the tathagata* [2].

1.2.2 Focus on the Dharma's true purpose

Like **the Tiracchāna Kathā Sutta** (S 56.10) [1.2.1], **the Param Maraṇa Sutta** (S 16.12), too, advises us to properly use the Buddha's teaching, that is, for understanding **the 4 noble truths** [§8]. This is because this understanding conduces to the progress of "the fundamentals of the holy life," to letting go of attachment, to ending of suffering, to mental peace, to directly knowing true reality, to awakening and nirvana [§§8 f].

2 The tathagata and the tetralemma

2.1 MEANING AND USAGE OF *TATHĀGATA*

2.1.1 *Tathāgata* in the suttas

2.1.1.1 The Anurādha Sutta (S 22.86 = S 44.2)[1] is the key canonical text where the term **tathāgata**[2] is used in which the Buddha rejects the 4 undeclared points (*catu ṭhāna*) regarding the posthumous state of a *tathāgata* [2.2]. The Sutta opens with a group of sectarian wanderers that uses the term ***tathāgata*** to refer to "the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest" (*tathāgato uttama,-puriso parama,puriso parama,pattipatto*).

The Kutūhala,sālā Sutta (S 44.9), too, records the term being similarly used by each of the 6 sectarian teachers—Pūrana Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, Sañjaya Balaṭṭhi,putta, Pakudha Kaccā-

[1] **S 22.86**/3:116,13 f = **44.2**/4:380,14 f (SD 21.13).
[2] The romanised "tathagata" is an anglicized form of Pali *tathāgata.*

yana and Ajita Kesa,kambala—who claim that their "disciple who is the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest" (*sāvako uttama,puriso parama,puriso parama,pattipatto*) has attained such and such a rebirth (that is, some high divine birth).[3]

2.1.1.2 The Anurādha Sutta [2.1.1.1] records the outside sectarians using the term ***tathāgata,*** when they ask the elder Anurādha:

> Avuso Anurādha, when **the tathagata**[4]—the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest—is describing that tathagata,[5] he describes him in terms of **these 4 grounds**, that is,
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | a tathagata | exists | after death, or |
> | a tathagata | does not exist | after death, or |
> | a tathagata | both exists and does not exist | after death, or |
> | a tathagata | neither exists nor does not exist | after death. |
>
> (S 22.86,4/3:116), SD 21.13

The elder Anurādha then, quoting these outside sectarians, reports this view to the Buddha.

The Buddha responds by going through **the 3-characteristics pericope** with Anurādha—since the 5 aggregates are impermanent and unsatisfactory, we cannot claim any of them, thus, "This is mine, this I am, this Is myself," since the aggregates are nonself. With this full understanding, one is thus liberated.

The Buddha then goes through **the tathagata/aggregate pericope**, which describes the nature of the tathagata in the following ways:[6]

- he is not to be regarded as *form, as feeling, as perception, as formations, or as consciousness*;
- he is not to be regarded as in any of these aggregates;
- he is not to be regarded as apart from any of these aggregates;
- nor are the 5 aggregates as a whole regarded as a tathagata.

2.1.1.3 The Anurādha Sutta then records the Buddha as making this important statement, thus:

> But, Anurādha, when a tathagata [a being][7] is not being apprehended by you as true and real[8] here in this very life, is it fitting for you to declare:[9]

---

[3] S 44.9,4-9/3:398 f (SD 23.15).

[4] Comy explains ***tathāgata*** here as "your teacher" (ie, the Buddha), but regarding him as a "being" (***taṁ tathāgato*** *ti tumhākaṁ satthā tathāgato taṁ sattaṁ tathāgataṁ* (SA 2:312). On *tathāgata* as "a sentient being" (*satta*), see related comys: **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1,2.27/1:27,24 f; DA 118.1) ≠ **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63,2/1:426,14; MA 3:141,23), **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72,9-14/1:484-486; MA 3:199,2) ≈ **Khemā S** (S 44.1/4:376,26 f; SA 3:113,18); **Yamaka S** (S 22.85/3:111,14+112,6; SA 2:311,1), **Nānā Titthiyā S 1** (U 6.4/67,14; UA 340,6 (Ce Ee) 340; UA:Be *satto*; UA:Se *sattā*) ≠ Nm 64,20 (NmA 1:193,24). Cf **(Khandha) Anurādha S** (S 22.86,4/3:116), SD 21.13, where Comy explains *tathāgata* there as "your teacher" [SA 2:312 above]. See also **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63) @ SD 5.8 (3) & **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72) @ SD 6.15 (3.2).

[5] Here, the term ***tathāgata*** means a being, esp one who is regarded as a saint after death: see SD 40a.11 (2).

[6] S 22.86,18-20/3:118 (SD 21.13).

[7] On *tathāgata* as "being" (*satta*), see [2.1.1.2 n].

[8] "As true and real," *saccato thetato*; as at **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22,25/1:138; cf 22,36/1:140); **Yamaka S** (S 22.-85,34/3:112); **Anurādha S** (S 22.86,21/3:118 = S 44.2,21/4:384); **Titth'āyatana S** (A 3.61,2-4/1:174 f ×3); Vbh 376 f (×4), 382 (× 6); Pug 3.17/38 (×12); Kvu 67 f (×13). Vbh:T tr *saccato thetato* as "firmly as truth" (Vbh:T 487).

[9] *Ettha ca te anurādha diṭṭh'ev'dhamme saccato thetato tathāgato anupalabbhiyamāno, kallaṁ nu te taṁ veyyākaraṇaṁ.*

"Avuso, when a tathagata—*the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest*—is describing that tathagata, he describes him *apart* from these 4 grounds, that is,[10]

a tathagata exists	after death, or
a tathagata does not exist	after death, or
a tathagata both exists and does not exist	after death, or
a tathagata neither exists nor does not exist	after death?"

"No, bhante."

"Good, Anurādha, good! As before, Anurādha, and even so now,
I declare only suffering and the ending of suffering!"

S 22.86.21/3:118 f), SD 21.13

This passage is significant in that the Buddha clearly does not take the term *tathāgata* as the outside sectarians do. Furthermore, nowhere else in the suttas do we see the Buddha or his disciples using *tathāgata* in this sense. Hence, we see the Commentaries explaining the term *tathagata* as simply meaning "a being"—which we will now examine.

2.1.2 *Tathāgata* in the Commentaries

2.1.2.1 The Commentary to **the Param Maraṇa Sutta** glosses ***tathāgata*** here simply as "a being" (*satta*),[11] on which the Subcommentary comments:

> As in past aeons, in past births, one has come into being by way of karma and defilements, so one has thus come to be now (*tathā etarahi pi āgato*); hence, it is said ***tathāgata***. Or else, according to the karma one has done and accumulated, just so has one come, arrived, been thus reborn in this or that form of individual existence (*tathā taṁ taṁ atta,bhāvaṁ āgato upagato upapanno*).[12] (SAṬ:Be 2:169)

This passage highlights the 2 traditional teachings on **karma and rebirth**; while karma is rooted in ignorance, rebirth is fed by craving. Beings thus arise (*tathā … āgato*) through karma and defilements, their karma is what makes them just what they are (*tathā taṁ taṁ … āgato*).

Beings arise through the natural workings (*tathā āgata*) of causes and effects of karma and rebirth. There is neither an external agency nor fatalism involved, since we create our own karma, we also shape the kind of rebirth we go through. When we grow in our understanding of the nature of the mind and of reality, we learn to better shape our karma and rebirth, and free ourselves from suffering in due course.

2.1.2.2 From the opening of **the Param Maraṇa Sutta** (S 16.12), we can see that it is the outside sectarians themselves who use the term *tathagata* in a technical sense to refer to the "highest person … ." [2.1.1.2]. The Buddha, however, uses the term, *tathāgata*, simply to mean "thus-come," one who has naturally arisen from fully understanding true reality, and thus passes away in keeping with their self-realized wisdom of true reality.

The Buddha is neither a prophet of any divine being, nor does he claim to be God or a god. Any such claim would at once relegate one to the cyclic life of samsara, in which all beings are caught in the causes

---

[10] *Yo so āvuso tathāgato uttama,puriso parama,puriso parama,pattipatto taṁ tathāgato aññatra imehi catūhi ṭhānehi paññāpayamāno paññāpeti.*

[11] SA 2:201,5.

[12] *Yathā atīta,kappe atītāsu jātīsu kamma,kilesa,vasena āgato, tathā etārahi pi āgato ti* ***tathāgato****, yathā yathā vā pana kammaṁ katupacitaṁ, tathā taṁ taṁ attabhāvaṁ āgato upagato upapanno ti* ***tāthāgato****, satto ti āha* ***tathāgato to satti*** *ti.* (SAṬ:Be 2:169,22-25)

and effects of impermanence. By realizing how to let go being attached to any of the 5 aggregates—*form, feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness*—the arhat (of whom the Buddha is one) overcomes karma and rebirth, and, attaining nirvana (which is beyond time and space), does not arise again in samsara.

2.2 THE TETRALEMMA AND THE 4 UNDECLARED POINTS

2.2.1 The tetralemma in early Buddhism

2.2.1.1 The tetralemma or 4 possibilities of truth or reality—P ***catu,ṭhāna,*** Skt *catuṣ,koṭi,* "the 4 points"—that something is *true* (and true only), *false* (and false only), *both* true and false, or *neither* true nor false—is a venerable principle of ancient Indian philosophy and logic, especially well known in early Buddhism.[13] The tetralemma is listed in a number of ancient texts such as **the Cūḷa Māluṅkya,putta Sutta** (M 63) and **the Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86).[14]

The (Aggi) Vaccha,gotta S (M 72) mentions the tetralemma, especially popular amongst some outside sectarians, in the 4 logical alternatives or speculation on the possible states of beings or being (*tathāgata*) after-death [2.1.1], that is,

1. a being *exists*;
2. a being does *not* exist;
3. a being *both* exists and does not exist;
4. a being *neither* exists nor does not exist. (M 72,16) + SD 6.15 (3.1); SD 61.3 (2.1.2.2)

The Buddha rejects such speculative views, treating them as "**undeclared**," since they are irrelevant (*na upeti*) to the spiritual life and awakening. Ironically, in unequivocally rejecting (*na ṭhapati*) this tetralemma, with his famous noble (or awakened) silence (*ariya,tuṇhi*), Buddhism has preserved this understanding of the tetralemma for the examination by posterity. This enriches our understanding of early Buddhism, and the application of the teaching of "silence" to modern logic, especially modern mathematical logic. [1.2.2]

2.2.1.2 The tetralemma (*catu ṭhāna*) on the after-death state forms part of **the 10 points** undeclared (*avyākata*) by the Buddha, that is:

(1) The world is eternal;
(2) The world is not eternal;
(3) The world is finite;
(4) The world is infinite;
(5) The self is the same as the body;
(6) The self and the body are separate;
(7) A tathagata exists after death;
(8) A tathagata does not exist after death;
(9) A tathagata both exists and does not exist after death;
(10) A tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death. [SD 65.11 (2.1.2.2)]

[13] Readings: basic Y **Karunadasa**, *Early Buddhist Teachings,* Wisdom, 2013: ch 11; monograph G **Priest**, *The Fifth Corner of Four,* OUP, 2018; technical "None of the above: The *catuṣkoṭi* in Indian Buddhist logic," New Delhi: Springer, 2014.

[14] **M 63**,2.2 + SD 5.8 (2+3); **S 22.86**,4+21 (SD 21.13); **The unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10 (3-4).

The Buddha's famous rejection of such speculative points, which are "put aside" (*ṭhapana*), is called **the noble silence** (*ariya tuṇhi,bhāva*).[15] The silence is a reminder that these speculations have neither useful answers nor are they beneficial for spiritual training. One should instead focus one's efforts on spiritual training, such as examining and understanding the 4 noble truths, as stated in **the Param Maraṇa Sutta** (S 16.12) [§8]. In this sense, the Buddha's teaching is said to be "pragmatic," that is, avoiding speculative views and faith-based dogmas, and directed to personal development and spiritual awakening.

2.2.2 The tetralemma and the Aristotelian true-false dichotomy

2.2.2.1 Early Buddhism handles the 4 *avyākata* (undeclared/unanswered) points by rejecting the binary true-false framework, which contrasts sharply with the **Aristotelian** true-false dichotomy governed by the Principle of Excluded Middle (PEM), which says that every claim must be either true or false with no other options: in Latin, *tertium non datur,* "a third is not given." The other rule is the Principle of Non-contradiction (PNC): nothing can be both true and false at the same time.

Western classical logic relies on this strict two-valued system to organize rational thought and avoid ambiguity; this has made possible modern mathematics and computer science, and related technologies. Understandably, those familiar only with Aristotle's logic find it very difficult to imagine a *third* alternative; what more to make of a *fourth*! How to make sense of that? Some modern logicians inform us otherwise, that "contemporary developments in mathematical logic show exactly how to do it. In fact, it's not hard at all."[16]

2.2.2.2 Graham Priest (b 1948), a distinguished British professor of philosophy at City University of New York Graduate Center and professor emeritus at the University of Melbourne, has written a number of ground-breaking titles on the early Buddhist teaching on the tetralemma and early Buddhist logic [see nn]. His Aeon essay on "**Beyond true and false**" (2014) gives a learned, insightful and delightful introduction to this difficult subject. Excerpts from his essay have been reproduced below, but his essay should be read as a whole:

"At the core of the explanation, one has to grasp a very basic mathematical distinction. I speak of the difference between a *relation* and a *function*. A relation is something that relates a certain kind of object to some number of others (zero, one, two, etc). A function, on the other hand, is a special kind of relation that links each such object to *exactly one* thing. Suppose we are talking about people. *Mother of* and *father of* are functions, because every person has exactly one (biological) mother and exactly one father. But *son of* and *daughter of* are relations, because parents might have any number of sons and daughters. Functions give a unique output; relations can give any number of outputs. Keep that distinction in mind; we'll come back to it a lot.

Now, in logic, one is generally interested in whether a given claim is true or false. Logicians call true and false *truth values*. Normally, and following Aristotle, it is assumed that 'value of' is a function: the value of any given assertion is exactly one of *true* (or *T*), and *false* (or *F*). In this way, the principles of

[15] See **(Vaccha,gotta) Ānanda S** (S 44.10), SD 2.16(5); **Silence and the Buddha** (SD 44.1); SD 8.4 (5.1.3); SD 44.1 (4); SD 61.9 (1.0.2.2).

[16] Graham Priest, "Beyond true and false," Aeon essays 2014:2 (digital). The logic of Buddhist philosophy goes beyond simple truth | Aeon Essays. 27 July 2026. Graham Priest podcast: "Can something be both true and false … " 2026 [Youtube]. 28 July 2026.

excluded middle (PEM) and non-contradiction (PNC) are built into the mathematics from the start. But they needn't be.

To get back to something that the Buddha might recognise, all we need to do is make *value of* into a relation instead of a function. Thus *T* might be a value of a sentence, as can *F*, both, or neither. We now have 4 possibilities: {*T*}, {*F*}, {*T*,*F*} and { }. The curly brackets, by the way, indicate that we are dealing with *sets* of truth values rather than individual ones, as befits a relation rather than a function. The last pair of brackets denotes what mathematicians call the *empty set*: it is a collection with no members, like the set of humans with 17 legs. …

Thus the 4 *kotis* (corners) of the *catuskoti* appear before us. …

In case this all sounds rather convenient for the purposes of Buddhist apologism, I should mention that the logic I have just described is called First Degree Entailment (FDE). It was originally constructed in the 1960s in an area called *relevant logic*. Exactly what this is need not concern us, but the US logician Nuel Belnap argued that FDE was a sensible system for databases that might have been fed inconsistent or incomplete information. All of which is to say, it had nothing to do with Buddhism whatsoever.

(G Priest, "Beyond true and false," Aeon essays 2014a:2 f digital)

2.2.2.3 Now, Aristotelian logic only accepts the first 2 of the 4 propositions of the Buddhist tetralemma: something is either true or false (it exists or does not). What about the remaining 2 alternatives? Priest, in his 2014 paper, gives helpful examples of them which I shall quote here.[17]

"How can something be both true and false, or neither true nor false? In fact, the idea that some claims are *neither* true nor false is a very old one in Western philosophy. None other than Aristotle himself argued for one kind of example. In the somewhat infamous Chapter 9 of his *De Interpretatione*, he claims that contingent statements about the future, such as "the first pope in the 22nd century will be African," are neither true nor false. The future is, as yet, indeterminate. So much for his arguments in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

The notion that some things might be *both* true and false is much more unorthodox. But here, too, we can find some plausible examples. Take the notorious 'paradoxes of self-reference', the oldest of which, reputedly discovered by Eubulides in the fourth century BCE, is called the Liar Paradox. Here's its commonest expression:

This statement is false.

Where's the paradox? If the statement is true, then it is indeed false. But if it is false, well, then it is true. So it seems to be both true and false.

Many similar puzzles turned up at the end of the 19th century, to the dismay of the scholars who were then trying to place mathematics as a whole on solid foundations. It was the leader of these efforts, Bertrand Russell, who in 1901 discovered the most famous such paradox (hence its name, Russell's Paradox). And it goes like this:

Some sets are members of themselves; the set of all sets, for example, is a set, so it belongs to itself. But some sets are not members of themselves. The set of cats, for example, is not a cat, so it's not a member of the set of cats. But what about *the set of all the sets that are not members of themselves*? If it is a member of itself, then it isn't. But if it isn't, then it is. It seems that it both is and isn't. So, goodbye Principle of Non-Contradiction. The *catuskoti* beckons."

(G Priest, "Beyond true and false," Aeon essays 2014a:3 digital)

2.2.2.4 The suttas record the Buddha as refusing to answer speculations about any point of the tetralemma, responding with silence to any of these "undeclared" (*avyākata*) questions, like those concerning the posthumous state of **a *tathāgata*** [2.1.1.2]—which is after all, used in a non-Buddhist sense

[17] Priest, "Beyond true and false," 2014a:3 f (digital).

[2.1]. In some suttas [2.1.1.1], the Buddha simply says that such speculations are a waste of time: we should avoid such speculations if we want to free the mind from thoughts and focus it for concentration and insight, leading to awakening, as advised here in **the Param Maraṇa Sutta** (S 16.12).

But in other texts there is a suggestion that something more is going on. Though the idea is never really elaborated, there are hints that none of the 4 logical possibilities "fits the case" or "applies" (*na upeti*). This loose end (as it were) was later tied up, or attempts were made to tie it with interesting explanations by great Buddhist philosophers like Nāgārjuna [2.3.1] and Gorampa [2.3.2].

2.3 POST-BUDDHA ELABORATIONS ON THE TETRALEMMA

2.3.1 Nāgārjuna (2nd century CE, South India)

2.3.1.1 Nāgārjuna[18] was an Indian Buddhist philosopher traditionally regarded as the founder of the Madhyamaka (adj, Mādhyamika) school of Mahāyāna philosophy.[19] Mahāyāna Buddhists regard him as the most important and influential Buddhist philosopher after the Buddha himself. Now, the central early Buddhist teaching is that the principle of **nonself** (*anattā*) governs all states and existence. Their nature is to have *no intrinsic nature*; whatever exists does only in relation to other existents, without any abiding entity in any of them.

Nāgārjuna developed this teaching into the heart of his philosophy, which is the view that things are "**empty**" (*śūnya*). This does not mean that they are non-existent; only that they are what they are because of how they relate to other things without any abiding self.

2.3.1.2 The most important of Nagarjuna's writings is the *Mūlamadhyamakārikā,* the "Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way" (also known as *Madhyamakaśāstra,* the Treatise on the Middle Way"). This is a profound and cryptic book, whose key theme is precisely that everything is empty. In the course of making his arguments, Nagarjuna often mentions the tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*). In some places, he clearly states that there are situations in which none of the 4 applies. They do not apply to the posthumous state of an awakened being, for example.

Nagarjuna's reasoning and explanations are somewhat opaque, but essentially it seems to be something like this: The language we use frames our conventional reality (our *Lebenswelt*, "lifeworld," as it is called in the German phenomenological tradition). Beneath that there is an ultimate reality, such as the state of an awakened person. One can experience this directly in certain deep meditative states, but one cannot describe it. To say anything about it would be attempting to make it part of our conventional reality; it is but ineffable. This ultimate reality cannot be described by using any of the tetralemma of the *catu ṭhāna* or *catuṣkoti*.

---

[18] Traditional accounts state that he lived 400 years after the Buddha's passing. Some traditional biographies also state that he lived for 600 years after the Buddha, apparently attempting to identify him with a later Nāgārjuna known for his tantric writings. Two of the works attributed to Nāgārjuna, the Ratnāvalī and the Suhṛllekha, are verses of advice to a king, suggesting that he might have achieved some fame during his lifetime.

[19] The term Mahāyāna is used historically to refer to a movement that began some 4 centuries after the Buddha's death, marked by the composition of texts that purported to be his words. Although ranging widely in content, these texts generally set forth the Bodhisattva path to Buddhahood as the ideal to which all should aspire and described Bodhisattvas and Buddhas as objects of devotion and deification. The key doctrines of the Mahāyāna include the perfection of wisdom (*prajñapāramitā*), the skillful methods (*upāya,kauśalya*) of a Buddha, the 3 bodies (*trikāya*) of a Buddha, the inherency of Buddha-nature (*buddhadhātu*; *tathāgatagarbha*), and Buddha-fields or Pure Lands (*buddhakṣetra*). See Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism: Mahāyāna.

2.3.1.3 Following the Buddha, Mahāyāna philosophers hold some things to be **ineffable**; but they also *explain* why they are ineffable in much the way that is done above [2.3.1.2]. Now, we can't say, much less explain, why something is ineffable without talking about it. That's a plain contradiction: talking of the ineffable![20] This is an embarrassing predicament to be in, especially for a scholar; however, those familiar with the problem of describing the mind deep in meditation (what more of trying to "describe" nirvana) understand this predicament.

Understandably, Nāgārjuna is far from being the only one caught in it. The great luminary of the German Enlightenment, **Immanuel Kant** (1724-1804), said that there are things one *cannot* experience (*noumena*)—they are inaccessible to either the senses or the mind—and that we cannot talk about such things. He also explained why this is so: our concepts apply only to things we can experience. Clearly, he is in the same fix as Nagarjuna.

The great philosophers who try to explain their deepest ideas see the same predicament of self-contradiction. Among the greatest 20th-century Western philosophers, **Ludwig Wittgenstein** (1889-1951), claimed that many things can be shown but not said, and wrote a whole book (the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* 1921), explaining what and why.

The philosophy of **Martin Heidegger** (1889-1976) revolves around the "question of being." He argued that humans are *Dasein* ("being-there"), defined by being inextricably linked to the world and constantly shaping their existence through their choices, mortality, and active engagement with objects and others. He spent most of his adult life trying to explain why we can't even ask this question. He says things like: "'Being' is not something like a being but is rather 'what determines beings as beings'."[21] Informed Buddhists will see here a hint of familiar usage of nonself language.

Returning to Buddhism: what did Nagarjuna say about this problem? He made no comment on it; which is not so surprising. After all, he thought that certain things might be both true and false. But later Buddhist philosophers did try to find a way of explaining the self-contradiction of some things being both true and false at the same time; one such person is the 15th-century Tibetan philosopher, Gorampa.

2.3.2 Gorampa (Go rams pa bSod nams Seng ge, 1429-1489)

2.3.2.1 Gorampa,[22] like most Tibetan Buddhist philosophers, considered himself a follower of the Madhyamaka school developed by Nāgārjuna in the 2nd century CE. Gorampa's views with respect to particular issues within Madhyamaka, however, differ significantly from the views of scholars belonging to other sects of Tibetan Buddhism (eg, Tsongkhapa and Dolpopa), and, at times, his views even differ from those of other Sakya scholars (most notably Śākya Chokden). Gorampa's particular brand of Madhyamaka

[20] For an example of this in my writing, esp when talking about nirvana, see SD 65.13 (2.1.5.2).

[21] " ... das Sein, das, was Seiendes als Seiendes bestimmt, das, woraufhin Seiendes, mag es wie immer erörtert werden, je schon verstanden ist," *Sein und Zeit* [Being and Time], 1927, 1962 SCM Press, 1977 *Gesamtausgabe*, 1996 SUNY, 2008 Harper, p6.

[22] Gorampa is one of the most widely-studied philosophers in the Sakya (*sa skya*) school of Tibetan Buddhism. A fierce critic of Tsongkhapa, the founder of what later came to be known as the Gelug (*dge lugs*) school, his works were so controversial that they were suppressed by Gelug leaders shortly after they were composed. Gorampa's texts remained hidden until the early 20th century, when the monk Jamgyal Rinpoche (in full, Jamyang Gyaltsen Jampa Palden Sherab, 1870-1940) received permission from the 13th Dalai Lama (1876-1933) to collect Gorampa's extant texts and have them reprinted in Derge. Today, Gorampa's philosophy is studied widely in monastic colleges, not only in those affiliated with his own Sakya tradition, but also in institutions affiliated with the Kagyu (*bka' brgyud*) and Nyingma (*rnying ma*) schools. **Priest** 2014a:5 f digital; J Powers, "Gorampa," in (Edd) Keown & Prebish, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism,* Routledge, 2007:379 f. C **Kassor**, "Gorampa [go rams pa]" Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (online), 2021.

philosophy is defined by his understanding of the relationship between the two truths, the use of negation, the role of logic, and proper methods of philosophical argumentation.

Troubled by the predicament of **describing the ineffable**, Gorampa tried to distinguish between two ways of talking about ultimate realities: a real ultimate reality, which is ineffable, and a "nominal" ultimate reality, which is what we end up talking about when we try to talk about the real ultimate. But then, the *nominal* ultimate is obviously effable!

2.3.2.2 We have talked about the reality that we said cannot be talked about! When we say that ultimate reality is ineffable and we are actually talking about the nominal ultimate, what we are saying is false. Thus Gorampa's proposal refutes itself. So it seems, but the point here is just that: We have shown why we cannot talk about it.

As if echoing the Buddha's famous silence, Wittgenstein's final proposition, no. 7, in his *Tractatus* (1921) is:

> "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen."
> "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"[23] (or "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence"). (*Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung,* 1921)

In closing, we must say that early Buddhism treats certain metaphysical questions as category mistakes[24] or empty linguistic constructs rather than binary truths. Where Aristotle insists that in making a statement we must choose a side on the true-false duality, the Buddhist approach steps outside the dichotomy entirely to focus on a therapeutic, experiential framework.

— — —

Param Maraṇa Sutta

The Discourse on the After-death

S 16.12

1 At one time, the venerable Mahā Kassapa and the venerable Sāriputta were dwelling in the deer park at Isipatana outside Baraṇāsi.

2 Then, in the evening, the venerable Sāriputta emerged from solitary retreat and approached the venerable Mahā Kassapa,

2.2 and exchanged friendly words and cordial greetings with the venerable Mahā Kassapa. When the friendly greetings were concluded, he sat down at one side.[25]

[23] The first tr is by Ogden; the second by Pears-McGuinness. The *Tractatus* was first published in German in 1921; then translated—by C K Ogden, with F P Ramsey's help—and published in English in London, 1922. It was later re-translated by D F Pears and B F McGuinness, NY, 1961. [Wittgenstein]. 28 July 2026.

[24] **Category mistake**, a term popularized by philosopher Gilbert Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* (1949) to expose confusions about mental and physical entities. According to Ryle, the Cartesian dogma of the ghost in the machine commits a category mistake by describing the **mind** as belonging to the category of **substance**, when it actually belongs to the category of **disposition**. [Britannica] [Wiki] 12 Sep 2026.

[25] Be Se; but Ce Ee omit this passage, which gives a more natural and smooth narrative.

SPECULATING ABOUT THE AFTER-DEATH STATE

3 Sitting at one side, the venerable Sāriputta said this to the venerable Mahā Kassapa:
"How is it, avuso Kassapa, does the tathagata[26] exist after death?"
"The Blessed One, avuso, has *not* declared this:
'The Tathagata exists after death.'"
4 "Then, avuso, does the tathagata not exist after death?"
"The Blessed One, avuso, has *not* declared this either:
'The tathagata does not exist after death.'" **[223]**
5 "Then, avuso, does the tathagata both exist and not exist after death?"
"The Blessed One, avuso, has *not* declared this:
'The tathagata both exists and does not exist after death.'"
6 "Then, avuso, does the Tathagata neither exist nor not exist after death?"
"The Blessed One, avuso, has *not* declared this either:
'The tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death.'"

7 "Why hasn't the Blessed One declared this, avuso?"
"Because this is unbeneficial, irrelevant to the fundamentals of the holy life, and does not lead to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.
Therefore the Blessed One has not declared this."

WHAT THE BUDDHA DECLARES

8 "And what, avuso, has the Blessed One declared?"
"The Blessed One, avuso, has declared: 'This is suffering,' and
The Blessed One has declared: 'This is the arising of suffering,' and
The Blessed One has declared: 'This is the ending of suffering,' and
The Blessed One has declared: 'This is the path leading to the ending of suffering.'"

9 "And why, avuso, has the Blessed One declared this?"
"Because, avuso, this is beneficial, relevant to the fundamentals of the holy life, and leads to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana. Therefore, the Blessed One has declared this."

— evaṁ —

260724 260728 261021.2

[26] Comy glosses ***tathāgata*** here simply as *satta*, "a being," ie, as a question of the survival of the individual. [2.1.2]