

Today's Lecture

- Admin stuff
- Madhyamaka Buddhism

Admin stuff

- (1) For the meditation lecture (which we will have **NEXT Thursday [February 12th]**) I want you to read the etext titled *The Art of Attention* by Ven. Pannyavaro. I have posted this etext on the course website under “Handouts”.
- (2) Re assignments - remember, **IF** any of your arguments require it, go outside the course readings to defend your claims. Just ensure that the sources you use are appropriate sources for an academic assignment (if in doubt run them by me).
- (3) If there is not enough information in your course texts, by all means go elsewhere. Just ensure their academic quality.
- (4) I have reposted the grade spreadsheet online. Do check the numbers.

The Madhyamaka (or Middle Way) Tradition

- Nagarjuna, who founded the Madhyamaka (or Madhyamika) Tradition, did so out of concern to (adequately) defend the teachings on *Shunyata* contained in the Perfection of Wisdom Tradition(s) (*Asian Philosophies*, p.203).
- His interlocutors are not limited to fellow Buddhists. He is also concerned to defend the teaching of *Shunyata* in light of the competing views of the self and causality in the Hinduism and Jainism of his time (*Asian Philosophies*, p.203).

The Madhyamaka (or Middle Way) Tradition

- Nagarjuna's interpretation and subsequent defense of the teaching of *Shunyata* has been profoundly influential on subsequent Buddhist traditions, particularly Tibetan and Zen Buddhism (*Asian Philosophies*, p.203).
- The current Dalai Lama would consider his perspective on metaphysics to be Madhyamikan. (You may have heard that he is coming to Toronto in April. While in Toronto he will be teaching from various chapters in Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*.)

The Madhyamaka (or Middle Way) Tradition

- “As in the Perfection of Wisdom tradition, emptiness means that existence is empty of self-existence and permanence, that everything is connected to everything else and is constantly changing. One of the implications of [this view] ... is that because conceptual thought represents things as separate and nondynamic, it cannot be the highest truth. The highest truth, as emphasized in the Perfection of Wisdom texts, is realized directly in the experience of mindfulness” (*Asian Philosophies*, p.203).
- A good teaser for the meditation lecture!

The Madhyamaka (or Middle Way) Tradition

- Nagarjuna's view is so named because "it is *midway* between the two extreme views of existence" (*Asian Philosophies*, p.203) represented by 'naive' realism (i.e. every-thing exists as it is ordinarily perceived and conceived) and (metaphysical) anti-realism (i.e nothing really exists) (*Asian Philosophies*, pp.203-04).
- Three important aspects of Nagarjuna's position are brought out in Koller's discussion.
- (1) There are no mind-independent, separately existing, entities that qualify as referents for the concepts we (properly) use. *Such a view of Reality is false. In fact we don't need these entities to explain the relationship between our conceptual framework, or representational system, and Reality* (*Asian Philosophies*, p.204).

The Madhyamaka (or Middle Way) Tradition

- (2) Nagarjuna proffers a way to reconcile the higher truth regarding that which is Real and the lower, or conventional, truths of our pre-enlightened view of the world (*Asian Philosophies*, p.204).
- Nagarjuna prioritizes *direct experience* of that which is, achieved in a state of mindfulness, over how we represent, think or talk about (or describe) it (*Asian Philosophies*, p.204).
- This will allow for the possibility that our discourse about Reality is informed by our direct experience of It, even though it cannot adequately convey knowledge about It.
- It also allows for the possibility that our conceptual frameworks are accurate enough for many of our daily tasks.

The Madhyamaka (or Middle Way) Tradition

- (3) For the relevant Buddhists, Nagarjuna's Middle Way is valuable because, when applied, it contributes to the elimination of dissatisfaction/suffering/*duhkha*. Philosophy, here, *IS* practice (*Asian Philosophies*, p.204). This view of the role of philosophy has *greatly affected* Zen Buddhism, though, ironically, less so as it has moved 'West'.

The Madhyamaka (or Middle Way) Tradition

- It is important to understand Nagarjuna's philosophical method if you are to properly understand what you read in his work.
- (1) Nagarjuna sets out to show the absurdity of the standard (competing) views (but on their own terms). (I.e. Nagarjuna proffers *internal criticisms* of his competitors' views in such a way as to show that their views generate, or tacitly contain, contradictions.) (*Asian Philosophies*, p.205.)
- (2) He then sets out to show that his view of the relevant subject matter is the better one ([i] it does not contain or generate contradictions and [ii] is consistent with the Buddha's teaching on Interdependent Arising) (*Asian Philosophies*, p. 205).

An example: The self

- Here's the relevant passage from *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*:
“If the self were the aggregates,
It would have arising and ceasing (as properties).
If it were different from the aggregates,
It would not have the characteristics of the aggregates”
Chap. 18 verse 1, translated by J.L. Garfield (see *Course Pack* for bibliographical details).
- I'll now provide a rendition of Koller's interpretation of this passage (see pages 208-09 of your *Asian Philosophies*).

An example: The self

- (1) **Assume** that the self, understood “as a self-existent, enduring entity” (*Asian Philosophies*, p.208), exists. (I.e. assume that the statement ‘The self exists’ is true, where ‘the self’ is understood to be “a self-existent, enduring entity” (*Asian Philosophies*, p.208).)
- (2) Either the self is identical to the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual or it is not.
- (3) Let’s say that the self IS identical to the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual.

An example: The self

- (4) Given (3), IF the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual change, making them importantly different from moment to moment, then so does the self.
- (5) The putative constituent physical and mental processes of the relevant individual constantly undergo change, making them different from moment to moment.
- (6) Given (3), (4) and (5), the self constantly changes, making it importantly different from the self that precedes and succeeds it from moment to moment.
- (7) But given (1), the self does not change (it is enduring).
- (8) Given (6) and (7), it IS the case that the self constantly changes AND it is the case that the self does NOT change. Which is absurd.

An example: The self

- (9) So, given (3) through (8), the self is **NOT** identical to the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual.
- (10) Now let's say that the self, though it exists, is **NOT** identical to the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual.
- (11) Given (10), then no changes in the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual affect any change in the self.
- (12) Becoming generous, wise, compassionate (and, so, enlightened) involves changes in the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual.

An example: The self

- (13) Given (11) and (12), becoming generous, wise, compassionate (and, so, enlightened) does not affect any change in the self.
- (14) But the self does become generous, wise, compassionate (and, so, enlightened).
- (15) Given (13) and (14), it is the case that the self DOES NOT and the self DOES become generous, wise, compassionate (and, so, enlightened). Which is absurd.
- (16) So, given (10) through (15), it is NOT the case that the self, though it exists, is not identical to the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual.

An example: The self

- (17) Given (9) and (16), the self is not identical to the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual **AND it is not the case that** the self is not identical to the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual.
- (18) Given (2) and (17), either the self is identical to the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual or it is not **AND it is not the case that** the self is identical to the constituent physical or mental states and processes of the relevant individual and **it is not the case that** it is not. Which is absurd.

An example: The self

- (19) It is not the case that the self, understood “as a self-existent, enduring entity” (*Asian Philosophies*, p.208), exists. (I.e. the statement that ‘the self exists’ is false, where ‘the self’ is understood as “a self-existent, enduring entity” (*Asian Philosophies*, p.208)) (See *Asian Philosophies*, pp.208-09)
- Note that, **IF IT WORKS**, this argument seems to apply to both the Upanishadic view of an enduring self, the Jain view of an enduring self, AND any competing Buddhist views of an enduring self (see *Buddhist Scriptures*, pp.192-97 for an example of such a Buddhist view).

The Madhyamaka on the Four Noble Truths and *Nirvana*

- Some observations about Nagarjuna's view of the Four Noble Truths and *nirvana*.
- (1) The distinction between conventional and ultimate truth adopted by Nagarjuna allows him to talk of the *Dharma* as *conventionally true* (he denies that the relevant concepts have referents that exist as independently existing and enduring things/entities/individuals/events/states). This helps him avoid the appearance of self-contradiction when he argues that the Noble Truths are themselves empty (on the basis of their own truth) (*Asian Philosophies*, p.210).

The Madhyamaka on the Four Noble Truths and *Nirvana*

- Garfield, among others, goes out of his way to emphasize that conventional truths are, on the one hand *conventional*, and on the other hand, *true*. He writes,
- “It will be important to be very clear about the respective senses in which they [i.e. ultimate and conventional truths] are distinct and one. The term translated here as ‘truth of worldly convention’ ... denotes truth dependent on tacit agreement, an everyday truth, a truth about things as they appear to accurate ordinary investigation, as judged by appropriate human standards. The term ‘ultimate truth’ ... denotes the way things are independent of convention ...”
(Jay Garfield. Translator. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.297-98).

The Madhyamaka on the Four Noble Truths and *Nirvana*

- The teaching on emptiness (or *Shunyata*), adopted by Nagarjuna from the *Prajnaparamita* Tradition, is also self-reflexive (it applies to itself). So it does not ‘sneak in’ an alternate metaphysical essentialism, or substantialism, to the one denied (*Asian Philosophies*, pp.210-11).

The Madhyamaka on the Four Noble Truths and *Nirvana*

- (2) According to Nagarjuna, *nirvana* and *samsara* are *not essentially* different. Of course they can't be, from Nagarjuna's perspective, because there are no-things which could stand as separately existing referents for these terms. Ultimately, from Nagarjuna's perspective, *BOTH* refer to that which interexists (*Asian Philosophies*, p.211).
- What *is different* with regards to that which interexists, when we move from talking of samsaric existence to enlightened existence, is the presence, or absence, of (what we refer to conventionally as) suffering, ignorance, greed and hatred (*Asian Philosophies*, p.211).