

Hope you had a happy holiday.
Welcome back.

- Today's Lecture
- Admin stuff
- Buddhism continued: The Four Noble Truths

Admin stuff

- I have changed the online lecture notes page so as not to have a very long page by the end of this term. Do make sure you can find your way around. Let me know if I can make any more improvements.
- Do check over your grades as posted on the course web site and let me know of any discrepancies (those who haven't as yet handed in second assignments should come and see me after class).
- My sincere apologies for not getting the marks up on December 23rd. (At least you know how I spent my holidays.)

Admin stuff

- There were five relatively common problems in the second assignments.
- (1) Too many assignments contained too many sentences that were either awkwardly written or not grammatical. Do proof read your assignments before submitting them. Serious grammatical problems lower the grade of a given assignment.
- (2) Resist the temptation to make, *or imply*, claims for which you offer no defense. Also ensure that the defense you do provide *adequately grounds* your claims. (It's okay to only make one or two key points in your assignment.)
- (3) Make sure that you *adequately* and *accurately* describe the position you are examining. Do take care in your choice of words.

Admin stuff

- (4) If you wish to depart from the course texts in your interpretation of a given problem or issue, be sure to (adequately) defend your departure.
- (5) When using sources for your discussion, beware of inserting problematic claims (e.g. broad sweeping generalizations, generalizations or claims that overstep any supporting evidence, generalizations or claims that *cannot* be adequately justified given our current knowledge [or place in history]) made by the relevant authors. If a claim is problematic, but you agree with it, defend it.

Admin stuff

- Readings for the month of January:
- 1st week (**Jan. 6th and 8th**) The Four Noble Truths: **AP4** Chp.12 (pp.155-64); **BS** pp. 49-57, 60-64, 186-87.
- 2nd week (**Jan. 13th and 15th**) Some more basic Buddhist teaching: **BS** pp.55-56, 93-96, 146-62, 187-89; **AP4** Chp.13, pp.167-75; **CP** pp.125-30.
- 3rd week (**Jan. 20th and 22nd**) Some basic Buddhist moral philosophy: *Dhammapada* Chapters 1, 5-7, 9, 10, 12, 14 - 20, 24 -26 (recommended reading – **CP** pp.83-90).**
- 4th week (**Jan. 27th and 29th**) *Prajnaparamita* Tradition: **AP4** Chp.15; **BS** pp.162-68.
- ** May be dropped from our readings.
- **AP4** - *Asian Philosophies*; **BS** - *Buddhist Scriptures*; **CP** - *Course Pack*.

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- Where we left off: Arguably, the purpose of these stories is to ‘show’ that the Buddha tasted *completely* of both indulgence and asceticism before choosing a ‘middle way’ between these *perceived* extremes (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.153-55).
- What is the Middle Way of Siddhartha?
- Using meditation to quiet his mind, Siddhartha *draws conclusions* from his meditative experience about the nature of *duhkha*, its origins and its dissolution, and *using this knowledge* eliminates the origins of *duhkha* in his own life (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.153-54).
- The teaching that encapsulates this Middle Way is contained in the Four Noble Truths (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.154).

Buddhism: The Four Noble Truths

- (1) Samsaric existence is *characterized by dissatisfaction* (or *dukkha*, translated variously as “ill”, “sorrow” or “suffering”, see *Buddhist Scriptures*, p.186; *Dhammapada*, p.74; *Buddhist Scriptures*, p.113 or *Asian Philosophies*, p.155).
- (2) The *immediate cause* of this dissatisfaction is craving (attachment or aversion) (or *trishna*, literally “thirst” [*Asian Philosophies*, p.158]).
- (3) **There is an end** to the craving that is the immediate cause of dissatisfaction (or *nirvana*, literally “extinguished” [*Asian Philosophies*, p.159]).
- (4) This end of craving **can be achieved through** the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.155, 160).

The First Noble Truth: *Duhkha*

- Common translations of *duhkha* will give you *some* idea of what it *can* mean.
- As I have already said, translators will use terms like ‘ill’, ‘suffering’ or ‘dissatisfaction’.
- The use of such terms as ‘ill’ or ‘suffering’ lend themselves to the view that Buddhism is pessimistic.
- A better term is ‘dissatisfaction’. This term is better *primarily* because it *best fits all* the contexts in which the Buddha speaks of *duhkha*, but also because such an interpretation of *duhkha* resonates with a common view of life which you will find in the ‘West’ (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.155-56).

The First Noble Truth: *Dukkha*

- The notion that life is unsatisfactory is often recounted in the West as the ‘feeling’ that there has to be more to life (than what we have already achieved or acquired, or [given the present course of our life] can *reasonably hope* to achieve or acquire).
- This largely arises from an experience of lack we have from time to time even following moments of pleasure or happiness.
- This is a nice, though limited, understanding of *dukkha*.
- Arguably such a feeling lies at the heart of all ‘spiritual’ pursuits.

The First Noble Truth: *Duhkha*

- *Duhkha* comes in three basic forms: (1) pain associated with embodiment, (2) the dissatisfaction arising from the pursuit of that which is impermanent or fleeting, and (3) the frustration and dissatisfaction arising from false views about our embodiment, or about our-selves (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.156).
- Note that the First Noble Truth does not deny that pleasure, joy and happiness exist. The Buddha would contend that they are, however, impermanent and fleeting. The grasping after, pursuit of or obsession with attaining such impermanent states ultimately leads to dissatisfaction, frustration or even pain (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp. 157-58).

The First Noble Truth: *Duhkha*

- Central to the First Noble Truth is the Buddhist denial of ‘self’ (their doctrine of *anatman*), here understood as a denial of a permanent entity underlying our empirical selves (i.e. a denial of *Atman* or even of a soul) (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.157-58).
- Since, for the Hindu contemporaries of the Buddha, *Atman* is *Brahman*, the Buddha is, *ipso facto*, denying the existence of *Brahman*.