

Today's Lecture

- Admin stuff
- Buddhism continued: The Four 'Noble Truths'

Admin stuff

- Do look over the lecture notes from last day, as they have some comments about common (and easily correctable) problems in the second assignments.
- If you have questions about those comments, or concerns about the grade for your second assignment, come and see me (either in office hours or set up an appointment).
- If you have any questions about the topics for the third assignment, including sources or claims you wish to include or discuss, come and see me (remember that I will not look at drafts in the week of an assignment deadline).

Admin stuff

- Some things to note about some of the third assignments topics.
- (i) Topics (1) and (2) are perhaps the most challenging. Do remember that these topics are directed towards the plausibility or reasonableness of the Buddhist view of the self in the relevant area.
- (ii) I have some readings included in your course pack that will be useful for topics (1), (4), (6) and (7).
- (iii) The readings from *The Questions of King Milinda* in your *Buddhist Scriptures* will be useful in answering topics (1) and (2).

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- (iv) In answering topic (7) you can expand the focus to include Hinduism or Taoism (rather than the Christian or Judaic Traditions) if you so desire. Be sure to only talk about whether someone can be sensibly Buddhist and x , where x is *one other tradition*. I.e. don't try to cover Christianity AND the Judaic Traditions, or the Judaic Traditions AND some other (non-Abrahamic Tradition) tradition.

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*.

The First Noble Truth: *Duhkha*

- Where we left off:
- 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 Gautama Buddha, *Atman* is *Brahman*, the Buddha is, *ipso facto*, denying the existence of *Brahman*.
- There has been recent discussion of late as to whether the Buddha *actually* denied the existence of *Atman*, or *merely* stayed silent on the issue. There is little doubt, however, that the early teachings of Buddhism (including what you find in the Pali Cannon) contain this denial.

The First Noble Truth: *Duhkha*

- For the Buddha the empirical self is constituted by five *ever changing* aggregates (or *skandhas*):
- (1) Material form (consists of the body, the five senses and their objects, and the faculty of mind and some of its objects [e.g. ideas, categories/universals]),
- (2) Sensation (consists of the sensations [be they pleasant, unpleasant or neutral] caused by the contact between sense objects [e.g. objects in the world] and our senses [including the mind]),

The First Noble Truth: *Duhkha*

- (3) Perception (which includes conceptualization),
- (4) Mental Formations (includes volitional activity, and our dispositions of character) and
- (5) Consciousness (includes awareness arising out of the contact between the sense faculties and sense objects) (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.157).
- A person is a 'product' of the interplay of these five aggregates. I.e. just as a car or motorcycle is nothing more than, or over and above, a cluster of parts functioning or working in conjunction with each other in a certain (to be specified) way, so a person is nothing more than, or over and above, these aggregates functioning or working in conjunction with each other in a certain (to be specified) way.

The First Noble Truth: *Duhkha*

- Several things to note about this breakdown of the person.
- (i) It involves a series of *empirical* claims about the constituents of a person. In other words, it is the Buddhist view that the correct breakdown of the constituents of a person is an empirical matter.
- (ii) Though Buddhists are committed to this treatment of the person, at least some Buddhist philosophers recognize that the constituents of a person may actually be better enumerated in slightly, or substantially, different ways.
- (iii) This breakdown of a person is designed to help in both self-knowledge and in understanding the experiences of subjectivity to be gained through meditation.

The First Noble Truth: *Duhkha*

- It is the Buddha's view that we *do not need anything other than* these five aggregates to *explain* our talk of personal identity or subjectivity.
- What's more, it is argued that *when we inquire after* the self we find no more than the five aggregates already listed (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.157).

The First Noble Truth: *Duhkha*

- Two common objections are
- (i) that our language of self *implies* the existence of a possessor of the various properties we ascribe to ourselves (e.g. ‘our body’, ‘our mind’, ‘our soul’) and
- (ii) we appear to have a sense of ‘self’ as perceiver or enjoyer, a subjective entity lying behind, or beyond, our common experiences.

The First Noble Truth: *Duhkha*

- (i) will only succeed as an argument if we can show that there is nothing wrong with our common discourse about our-selves.
- If the phrase ‘my body’ implies a possessor of a body which is not that body, doesn’t this also mean that ‘my Ultimate Self’ likewise implies a possessor of an Ultimate Self which is not this Ultimate Self? Does this make sense? Can’t we extend this puzzle to include such locutions as ‘My soul’?
- (ii) will only succeed as an argument if we are properly describing the relevant introspective experiences as our “inner sense of ‘self’”. Are we?

The First Noble Truth: *Duhkha*

- Why is this view of self (or no-self, depending on how you are looking at it) crucial to Gautama Buddha's First Noble Truth?
- It is our *allegedly false view of the self* that, at least in part, produces *duhkha*.
- ***IF*** we are indeed constantly changing as selves through time, ***THEN*** attempts to preserve, protect, please or even destroy our selves (when understood as entities who exist through time and underlie the psychological or biological changes that mark our empirical existence) will consistently meet with frustration and failure ... i.e. *duhkha* (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.157).

The Second Noble Truth: *Samudaya*

- The *immediate* cause of *dukkha* lies in craving or thirst (or attachment and aversion).
- This craving or thirst primarily refers to our attachment to the self, understood as a *separate and permanent entity* underlying our empirical self. *In particular*, it refers to our determination to preserve or fulfill the perceived desires of this ‘self’. Since this craving or thirst arises out of a wrong view of ourselves, it results in dissatisfaction (*Asian Philosophies*, p.159).
- Of course *the impermanence of all the objects of our experience* will only add to this dissatisfaction.

The Third Noble Truth: *Nirodha*

- Buddha assures us that there is an end to dissatisfaction through the elimination of its immediate condition for arising: craving (harkening back to the Second Noble Truth).
- The state in which this craving is extinguished is called '*nirvana*' (which literally means 'extinguished') (*Asian Philosophies*, pp.159-60).

Fourth Noble Truth: *Marga/Magga*

- Buddha suggests an Eightfold Path to achieve *nirvana*.
- Right understanding/view, right intention, right speech, right livelihood, right action, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration (*Asian Philosophies*, p.160).
- According to tradition, the Eightfold Path can be divided into three categories: Right understanding/view and right intention fall under the general category of wisdom (or *prajna*).
- Right speech, right livelihood and right action fall under (moral) conduct (or *shila/sila*).
- Right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration fall under mental discipline (or *samadhi/bhavana*) (*Asian Philosophies*, p.160).