

# Today's Lecture

- Admin stuff
- More basic Buddhist philosophy
  - Concluding Rebirth without a soul
  - Beginning Buddhist moral philosophy

# Admin stuff

- Are there any questions about the Third Assignment topics?
- Any questions or concerns about the Third Assignment?
- There is a talk by Prof. J. Thompson (Sociology) for the Gender and Society Workshop on Thursday, January 22nd at 4:00 p.m. (in UC 224A) entitled “Feminism and Female Serial Killing”.
- Now I don’t often do this, but here’s a great (read reliable) Buddhist web site:  
<<http://www.buddhanet.net>>

# Rebirth without a soul

- Where we left off:
- If there is no soul, then how is transmigration possible? Isn't 'transmigration' a misnomer?
- Before answering this question ask the following:
- Without a soul how is it possible to have a personal identity through time (in this birth)? (The answer to this question will take you at least part way to answering the first question.)
- In seeking an answer this second question ask a third:
- Without an essence how is it possible to talk of a tree being the same tree through time, or a table being the same table through time, or a sun being the same sun through time? (The answer to this question will take you at least part way to answering the second question.)

# Rebirth without a soul

- Have a look at *The Questions of King Milinda* in your *Buddhist Scriptures*. On pages 149-51 you have a brief discussion of personal identity (with particular focus on rebirth and/or moral responsibility).
- Nagasena, the monk who is the primary interlocutor with King Milinda in this text, suggests that, in order to get an initial grasp of the Buddhist view of personal identity, we should think of, on the one hand, human ontogeny and, on the other hand, the flame of a lamp that endures a whole night's use.

# Rebirth without a soul

- In both cases, Nagasena ‘argues’, we can sensibly talk of the same person, or same flame existing through time, while at the same time recognizing that we can also *sensibly* talk of important or *significant* differences in the person or flame at an earlier and later time slice (see p. 150 of *Buddhist Scriptures*).
- Roughly speaking, this is the meaning of the claim that the one who is reborn is neither the same as the one who died, nor another (pp.149-50 of *Buddhist Scriptures*).

# Rebirth without a soul

- In human ontogeny compare yourself now to what you were like when you were one or one and a half years old.
- Buddhist philosophers will suggest that though we can sensibly talk of you existing at these stages of development, you are an importantly different person now than you were then.
- If this does not resonate with you, compare yourself now to what you were like when you were a new born (*assuming*, of course, that newborns *are* persons).
- If you live to be a hundred and ten, you may well be an importantly different person then than you are now, particularly if you undergo certain cognitive degradations often associated with extreme age.

# Rebirth without a soul

- It is the Buddhist view that to take any given time slice as being quintessentially you is arbitrary. So to consider yourself to be quintessentially you when you are twenty-five or thirty is arbitrary ... it reflects an idea of self that you hold about yourself, but it makes no more sense to pick out this period than the period when you were ten, nineteen, or when you will be seventy-five.
- According to the Buddhist view of personal identity, *you are the whole process*. What's more, the 'you' of this process undergoes change, sometimes significant change, through time.

# Rebirth without a soul

- To get to talk of personal identity through death and rebirth, according to Buddhism, you need to broaden your view of what it means to be a continuous process.
- For Buddhists it makes no more sense to treat death or rebirth as a break in the relevant causal process which constitutes you as a being through time than it would be to treat reaching seventy as the cut off point after which *you* no longer exist.
- Thus in one sense, according to Buddhism, you are reborn, and in another sense you are not. *Just as in one sense you are the same person through time in this birth, and in another sense you are not* (pages 149-50 of your *Buddhist Scriptures*).



# Buddhist Moral Philosophy

- Basic Buddhist ethics includes (*but is not limited to*), and this should come as no surprise, the following five precepts:
- (1) Avoid doing harm to other living beings,
- (2) avoid taking what is not yours (or what is not given),
- (3) avoid false speech,
- (4) avoid sexual misconduct,
- (5) avoid the ingestion of intoxicants (see your *Buddhist Scriptures*, p.70, p.162 of *Asian Philosophies*, or pp.83-90 of your *Course Pack*).

# Buddhist Moral Philosophy

- A relatively straightforward way to remember the basic precepts in Buddhism is to remember the relevant three stages or steps in the Eightfold Path, Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood.
- Right Speech includes not lying, and also gossiping, harsh language, hurtful speech and ‘superficial speech’ (or idle talk).
- Right Action includes the precepts above, excluding (3) (which is covered under Right Speech).
- Right Livelihood consists of a commitment not to do, or make a living from, that which would violate Right Speech or Action. This includes arms dealing or manufacture, soldiering, and butchering (see your *Asian Philosophies*, pp.162-63).

# Buddhist Moral Philosophy

- A question we can ask ourselves here: Given the importance of empirical testing AND the rejection of *mere* appeals to doctrinal authority when justifying claims within Buddhism, how are these precepts justified or grounded, and how are we to decide, in any given situation, what we ought to do?
- Through an examination of such scriptures as the *Dhammapada* we can, with a little effort, glean some Buddhist methods, or procedures, for deciding moral conduct that can apply to either acts or principles of action.
- I will describe four such methods, or procedures.

# Some grounds for deciding moral conduct in Buddhism

- (1) An appeal to ‘the method of universalizing self-interest’ is at work in at least some Buddhist moral philosophy.
- This is just to say, if you could imagine someone acting towards you in an analogous fashion to how you are planning to act and you would (strongly) prefer that she would not so act, then you ought not to so act now.

# Some grounds for deciding moral conduct in Buddhism

- “All are frightened of the rod. Of death all are afraid. *Having made oneself the example*, one should neither slay nor cause to slay. All are frightened of the rod. For all, life is dear. *Having made oneself the example*, one should neither slay nor cause to slay.” (*Dhammapada* 129, translated by John Ross Carter, emphasis mine).
- “All beings tremble before violence. All fear death. All love life. *See yourself in others*. Then whom can you hurt? What harm can you do?” (p.36 of your *Dhammapada*, emphasis mine).

## Some grounds for deciding moral conduct in Buddhism

- (2) Judging what is conducive to, or hinders, our spiritual advancement (i.e. our pursuit of *moksha*) is also a way of judging the value of certain actions (and the principles of action that these actions instantiate).
- This can also include judging what arises from the three root evils/poisons - delusion/ignorance, greed/grasping and hatred/aversion (*Asian Philosophies*, pp.153, 172-73) (as they are themselves condemned because of their influence in perpetuating the cycle of rebirth and preventing enlightenment).