

Final Exam Assignment for the course [Buddhism and Modern Psychology](#).

Final Exam Assignment:

In an essay of 800 words, answer two of the following questions and provide support for your answers:

Does modern science lend support to Buddhist ideas about the human predicament?

Does modern science lend support to Buddhist ideas about the human mind?

Does modern science lend support to the logic behind Buddhist meditation practice?

Does modern science lend support to the moral validity of Buddhism?

Hole in one, a short essay

Are Buddha's statements about reality true or not in accordance to modern science? we believe they are and we will argue that science lends them support. This demonstration rely on some assumptions, namely that Darwinism is true, and that science is an effective method to understand what is really 'out there'. What now follow are the links between those Buddhist truths and the conclusions produced by science.

Q1. Take Buddha's very first sermon, for example. Buddha stated that all our experiences are Dukkha, a kind of perennially painful dissatisfaction. To make sense of this we have to hypothesize that somehow dissatisfaction is biologically built into us. Life strives for survival. Living organisms try to keep themselves functionally cohesive against a background of constant change. Life can be regarded as the "characteristic distinguishing objects having signaling and self-sustaining processes from those that do not." [1] This life is only sustained as long as the organism stays ahead on the Red Queen's arms race for preservation. The living beings sustenance can only be achieved through "preserv[ing] their internal order by taking from their surroundings free energy, in the form of nutrients or sunlight, and returning to their surroundings an equal amount of energy as heat and entropy." [2] To preserve its internal order, living things rely on randomly acquired mechanisms that guide them to where they can meet their needs – as long as they continue to be successful. Any form of long-lasting satisfaction or enduring bliss seem to clash with the imperative to keep ahead of necessities that have to be physically met. A sensation of perfect satisfaction is not conducive to a functioning 'drive', so it naturally gets kicked out of the pool of living existence. Beings either 'feel the need' or get killed. This leads to the conclusion that dissatisfaction is biologically built into us. Thus all are our experiences are Dukkha by biological necessity.

Q2. So where is the subject that experiences dissatisfaction? According to Buddha, this 'experiencer' is not to be found in any of its parts. [3] So what does science says about the existence of an autonomous-self? According to the model proposed by evolutionary psychologists, the "mind is made up of genetically influenced and domain-specific mental algorithms or computational modules, designed to solve specific evolutionary problems of the past" [4]. The self is the result of nothing other than the aggregate effort of different modules competing for attention. The self acts then as a social PR machine for the different competing

events happening in the brain, the keeper of a social cohesive narrative ensuring social reliability. The work of Damásio and others also seem to validate the view of a self-generated conscious-self lacking any true substance. The self is nothing but a self-concocted necessity-driven fantasy of the brain, another tool for survival, somewhat akin to a well tuned orchestra generating its own conductor by their joint effort only. All these scientific proposals lend support to Buddha's not-self doctrine. We are all biologically 'self-void' creatures.

[1] Introductory paragraph to life, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life>

[2] Albert Lehninger quoted in

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entropy_and_life#Gibbs_free_energy_and_biological_evolution

[3] Anatta-lakkhana Sutta: The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic.

[4]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modularity_of_mind#Evolutionary_psychology_and_massive_modularity