



Buddhist Concept of Human Nature

Buddha

(ca 500 BC)

- Siddhārtha Gautama
- Buddha ← the awakened one
- Buddhism is a major global religion
- One of the most important Asian thinkers and spiritual masters of all time
- Contributions in almost all areas of philosophy, such as epistemology, metaphysics and ethics
- Buddhism as a philosophical school: heterodox, distrust in brahminical ritualism

Buddhist Concept: Good life

- The goal of the Buddha's teachings is to help individuals attain the good life
- Also considers other major concepts related to good life
- Such as:
 - the challenges to a good life
 - The problem of suffering
 - source of suffering
 - the nature of persons
 - how to acquire knowledge about the world and our place in it
 - achieving *bodha* by oneself

The problem entwined with the human nature (and the solution proposed)

- Human life is full of sufferings
- Ultimately dissatisfying character of human life
- Ignorance about our identity is responsible for suffering
- Ignorance consists in: the conceit that there is an 'I' and a 'mine'. This is the famous Buddhist teaching of non-self (anātman)
- Individuality implies limitation; limitation gives rise to desire; and, inevitably, desire causes suffering, since what is desired is transitory.

- **Impermanence of everything:**
 - Living amid the impermanence of everything and being themselves impermanent, human beings search for the way of deliverance, for that which shines beyond the transitoriness of human existence—in short, for enlightenment.
 - The Buddha's doctrine offered a way to avoid despair. By following the “path” taught by the Buddha, the individual can dispel the “ignorance” that perpetuates this suffering

The four Noble Truths (which everyone should realize)

1. There is suffering (dukha)

- not mere pain but existential suffering, the sort of frustration, alienation and despair that arise out of our experience of transitoriness
- the realization that all (oneself included) is impermanent can undermine a precondition for real enjoyment of the events in a life

2. There are reasons for suffering (dukha samudaya kāraṇa).

- ignorance concerning the three characteristics of sentient existence—suffering, impermanence and non-self—will lead, in the course of normal interactions with the environment, to appropriation (the identification of certain elements as ‘I’ and ‘mine’).
- This leads in turn to the formation of attachments, in the form of desire and aversion, and the strengthening of ignorance concerning the true nature of sentient existence. These ensure future rebirth, and thus future instances of old age, disease and death, in a potentially unending cycle

3. The cessation of suffering (dukkha nirodha)

4. The path to the cessation of suffering (dukkha nirodha marga)

3. The cessation of suffering (dukha nirōdha)

The key to escape from this cycle is said to lie in realization of the truth about sentient existence—that it is characterized by suffering, impermanence and non-self. But this realization is not easily achieved, since acts of appropriation have already made desire, aversion and ignorance deeply entrenched habits of mind

4. The path to the cessation of suffering (dukha nirōdha mārga)

- include various forms of training designed to replace above habits
- with others that are more conducive to seeing things as they are
- Training in meditation is also prescribed, as a way of enhancing one's observational abilities, especially with respect to one's own psychological states.
- Insight is cultivated through the use of these newly developed observational powers, as informed by knowledge acquired through the exercise of philosophical rationality.
- There is a debate in the later tradition as to whether final release can be attained through theoretical insight alone, through meditation alone, or only by using both techniques

The core: dukha samudaya kāraṇa

- The Buddha seems to have held (2) to constitute the core of his discovery.
- He calls his teachings a ‘middle path’ between two extreme views, and it is this claim concerning the causal origins of suffering that he identifies as the key to avoiding those extremes
- Extremes views on humans:
 - Externalism: persons are eternal
 - Annihilationism: persons go utterly out of existenceMiddle position?
- Distinction between conventional truths and the ultimate truth
 - The ultimate truth about sentient beings is just that there is a causal series of impermanent, impersonal psychophysical elements. Since these are all impermanent, and lack other properties that would be required of an essence of the person, none of them is a self.

Impermanence of the self (i.e. non-self)

- The argument for impermanence:
 - If there were a self it would be permanent
 - None of the five kinds of psychophysical element is permanent
 - \therefore There is no self.
- Five elements, five senses, five psychophysical aggregates
- The aggregates:
 - Form (rūpa)
 - Sensation (vēdana)
 - Perception (samjna)
 - Mental activities/formations (samskāṛās)
 - Consciousness (vijñāna)

Assessing human actions

- Not ethical nihilism
- Recommends the middle path
- The role of ignorance, attachments...
- Belief of Karma
- The wheel of samsara, the possibility of rebirth
- Attainment of bodha, enlightenment, saves!