

Vaibhashika

Also called the *Great Exposition School*

Divisions of Phenomena

This school is the least sophisticated, but their approach to the classification of phenomena has carried over to the other schools.

Before taking an extensive investigation into *how* things exist, it is very useful to be clear *what* exists in the universe.

The overall structure and concepts used in vaibhashika classification apply to the other schools.

Compounded and Uncompounded phenomena

existent things are presented in 2 categories:

1. compounded
2. synonym for impermanent phenomena and refers to those things that come into being from causes and conditions
3. form - refers also sounds and smells + color, shape, etc
4. consciousness - all mental events - 6 main consciousness'
5. nonassociated compositional factors - all other phenomena that come together due to causes and conditions but don't fit into the other 2 categories. A classic example is an image we see in a dream. Although the dream itself is consciousness the image that appears is not, nor is it form. -- also abstract phenomena such as time, aging, birth, and the very important phenomena of a person. The "I" is neither form nor consciousness, but it comes into existence due to causes and conditions.
6. uncompounded
7. something that is not created by the coming together of causes and conditions
8. something that does not change moment by moment during its existence
9. something that cannot perform a function

The main examples of uncompounded phenomena are space and the 2 types of cessations:

- **Non-analytical cessation** - temporary ceasing of certain types of negativities, misperceptions, and so on when we enter the meditative concentration that interrupts our attachment to sensory objects
- **Analytical cessation** - occurs by means of the meditation analyzing the reality of things and events and is complete cessation in that there is no reversal. It is the full cessation

Space is the mere absence of obstruction; as such it is not the result of any causes and conditions

Two truths

Unlike the Mahayana schools, there is no real comparable presentation of the 2 truths in this school or the next, even though the terms conventional and ultimate are often used in connection with other things.

The main focus of this schools presentation is on the 37 aspects of the path to enlightenment. These 37 are divided into 7 groups.

These 37 are the main focus for both the vaibasheka and sautantrika.

A mundane contaminated consciousness -- one that has not realized emptiness or selflessness -- knows conventional truths, whereas supermundane or uncontaminated consciousness - one that has realized selflessness directly - knows ultimate truth

Conventional Truth, and Imputed Existence

This verse from Vasubandhu explains their view of conventional and ultimate truth most clearly:

If the awareness of something does not operate after that thing
Is destroyed or mentally separated into other things,
Then that thing exists conventionally, like a pot or water.
Others exist ultimately.

When an object is destroyed or mentally separated into parts, the mind can no longer hold onto that object; therefore it is a conventional truth.

For example, a glass jar that falls and breaks. After it breaks the mind can't hold onto it anymore.

For mental events, the object can't be destroyed, but it can be separated into parts.. an hour can be separated into minutes... time can be mentally 'separated'

Objects that have this quality are called conventional truths

These are examples of **imputedly existent objects**

imputedly existant objects and conventional truth are synonyms

Conversely, if the object is not a collection of parts, but is the actual substance that makes up those parts, then it is a **substantially existent object**

imputedly existant => conventional truth substantially existant => ultimate truth

^^ these terms have different meanings in the other school so dont confuse them!

This category of conventional truth fits with the 3 types of compounded phenomena from earlier. That which can be destroyed is form, that which can be mentally separated is consciousness and nonassociated compounded phenomena.

Ultimate Truth, and Substantial Existence

Other than those are the ultimate truths because even if the mind is separated from the object, such as when the object is destroyed, the mind apprehending it still operates, for ex. the mind apprehending form.

Other here refers to anything that cannot be destroyed or mentally separated into other things. This is the ultimate truth according to this school. Which is synonymous with substantial existence.

What can't be broken down?

3 Categories:

1. aggregates
2. uncompounded phenomena
3. substantial particles (of matter or mind)

For this school, although the collections that make up an object can be separated more and more, the aggregate itself (form, feeling, etc) cannot. They differentiate between something having form and form itself.

For ex. if you have a body that has form and you break it down into smaller particles, it is still form. **The mind apprehending form is never destroyed.**

Ex. A glass jar as glass jar is a conventional truth but as a form it's an ultimate truth. If it breaks, the 'jar' is gone, but the 'form' is still there.

Happiness is conventional, but feeling is ultimate

For this school, ultimate and conventional truth can coexist within one object.

The body as a conventional truth, and the body as form as an ultimate truth.

For this school, uncompounded phenomena are an ultimate truth.. space, cessation.

Substantial Objects are ultimate truths. These are the fundamental building blocks of the universe called **partless particles, or in the case of mental events, partless moments of consciousness**. They are ultimate because they cannot be destroyed or further reduced... and the mind that apprehends these partless particles will never be stopped. They are substantially

existant because their existence is not dependent on other substances.

Ultimate Truth, Selflessness, and Emptiness

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In order to refute non-Buddhist concepts of the self as permanent, unitary, and indivisible, they assert that the self cannot exist as a different entity from the mind/body aggregates. In the same way that the body is imputed on the substantially existing particles that make it up, the sense of "I" is imputed on the mind/body aggregation.

There understanding of the nature of self goes only as far as selflessness of person.. this is the extent of their emptiness.

They do not talk about the other types of emptiness such as the emptiness of the body, car, etc.

At this level, the term emptiness refers only to the person being empty of a permanent, unitary, and indivisible reality.

They consider emptiness to be an ultimate truth.. but they are not synonymous. They assert form, feeling, etc as ultimate truths, but they are of course not emptiness.

This is the simplest explanation of emptiness and accords with the meaning of emptiness found in the 4 noble truths sutra.

Partless Particles and Partless Moments of Consciousness

The first 2 schools assert that there are substantial, truly existing objects.

The quest for what substantially exists was the prime foci of the Vaibashika scholars.

An object is made of parts, and that part is made of parts, so logically if we go deeper and deeper we would eventually come upon a particle that could not be broken down anymore.

They thought that these fundamental building blocks must be made of constituents that that could give rise to the different elements, like fire, earth, water, etc... so they would have the aspects of firmness, moistness, etc.

They also though that these particles must contain the sense objects of form, taste, and smell (sound was left out since it was considered a wave.)

So they said that these partless particles in the desire realm were made of 8 constituents: 1. earth 2. water 3. fire 4. air 5. visual form 6. tactile form 7. odor 8. taste

They determined the partless particles of the form realm have the 6 constituents 1. earth 2. water 3. fire 4. air 5. smell 6. taste

The reason that these constituents like odor, taste, etc are added is because of the belief of karma which states that if the cause does not have the potential to bring the result then its impossible for the result to arise. If these fundamental building blocks of external objects do not possess the potential to produce smell, then no matter how much we try, smell cannot be produced.

In the same way they posited the smallest form of matter must be the partless particles, they posited a similar fundamental building block for mental events, the **partless moment of consciousness**.

Our consciousness is a stream. Within that stream, I can remember what I did yesterday. And within that, it can be broken down into a smaller memory, and smaller, smaller, etc. But eventually, would come to a point where the moments of consciousness can no longer be broken down -- the partless moments of consciousness. Our consciousness is an aggregation of these moments.

The debate between the Vaibhashikas and the other schools is not about whether a partless particle can be further divided, but whether the fundamental constituents(earth, water, etc) can stand by themselves without relying on the other elements.

Scholars of the other schools contend that the elements (earth, fire, etc) that constitute the partless particle are themselves constituents of that particle and that in itself makes the particle divisible. In this way, the whole idea of partless particles is called into question.

If they ask the Vaibhashikas, these smallest units of matter have not parts, which implies no sides, or directions and so on, then it stands to reason then it stands that 2 particles would take up no more room than just one. Either these particles are 'atoms' as we know them, or they are partless and without sides. In this case there would be no spatial relationship where one side of one would touch the other side of another. That being so, one particle would take up the same space as would 2, as would 100, as would a million. An object, which supposedly consists of millions of these particles would itself take up no more space than one particle. Therefore, the other schools argue, it is impossible for matter to be built from such fundamental partless particles.

As the formulation came along later, the 2 truths -- relative and ultimate are not explicit in the vaibashika teachings. Nevertheless, the seed of understanding is there as these proponents strived to explain how the universe exists and how we misperceive it.

However, we can see that there are unstated assumptions that we can take to be their own 2 truths: that conventional existence -- that is, the point of view of a contaminated or mundane consciousness -- is imputed existence, and that ultimate existence -- that is, the world seen from the viewpoint of an uncontaminated consciousness-- is substantial existence

It is very helpful for us to understand as clearly as possible this schools idea of the 2 truths,

particularly with regard to substantial and imputed existence, for then we will see how much misperception we have in our daily lives when we encounter compounded phenomena -- in other words, all things and events we encounter in our daily lives. We impute substantial reality onto compounded phenomena all the time and create suffering for ourselves as the result. Studying this school will help us to reflect on the many misperceptions we hold, and by seeing clearly at this relatively simple level, we can start to reduce those misconceptions and the difficulties that they create for us.