

Quotable Quotes on Buddhism, Nagarjuna, and the Madhyamika

On the highest Buddhist philosophical school

"According to the explanation of the highest Buddhist philosophical school, Madhyamaka-Prasangika, external phenomena are not mere projections or creations of the mind. External phenomena have a distinct nature, which is different from the mind. The meaning of all phenomena being mere labels or designations is that they exist and acquire their identities by means of our denomination or designation of them. This does not mean that there is no phenomenon apart from the name, imputation, or label, but rather that if we analyze and search objectively for the essence of any phenomenon, it will be unfindable." --Dalai Lama. 1995. *The World of Tibetan Buddhism: An Overview of Its Philosophy and Practice*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Pubs., pp. 49-50.

On relating ideas to action

"It will become apparent as we proceed that the Madhyamika is a philosophy which relates ideas to action in a particularly subtle fashion. This is not accomplished by arguing against one view as 'wrong' and in favor of another as 'right,' but by demonstrating through any available means that the very fact of holding a view--any view--keeps one enmeshed in an endless cycle of clinging, antipathy, and delusion. If the Madhyamika cannot be understood in this way--if we insist on interpreting these texts as a set of answers to epistemological [= the study of knowledge] or ontological [= the study of being] questions then we have missed the point." --Huntington, Jr., C. W., with Geshe Namgyal Wangchen. 1989. *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Madhyamika*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 15.

On the fear of our self-need

"Out of the fear of our self-need we tend always to perceive others in ways which will confirm ourselves and so as to justify the ways in which we are often moved to treat them.... Our industrial materialist culture dehumanizes our experience of others and tends to reify or make things of them through many different forms of dominance, distancing, and depersonalization. How can our humanity truly flower unless we have dissolved the socially sanctioned exploitative and coercive relationships of wealth, power, sex and race?" --Jones, Ken. 1989. *The Social Face of Buddhism: An Approach to Political and Social Activism*. London: Wisdom Pubs., 326-327.

On the error of sexism

"From a Buddhist perspective, lust directed toward another person of either gender is not a sign of respect, regardless of the charming rhetoric that is often inspired by this mental affliction. Rather, attachment for another person actually dehumanizes its object by regarding this individual simply as an object for one's own gratification, rather than as a conscious subject with his or her own needs and desires." --Wallace, Vesna A. and Wallace, B. Alan, trans. 1997. *A Guide to the Bodhisattava Way of Life (Bodhicaryavatara) by Santideva*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, pp 14.

On selflessness

"For the Madhyamika, no matter how powerful or compelling they are, concepts are to be handled with the same measure of respect and caution given a useful but dangerous tool. One

must be especially careful with the concepts of dependent origination and emptiness, however, which should have the single purpose of turning one's attention away from notions of 'I' and 'mine' and toward the community, including all sentient beings. The focus on context and relation reflects the fact that one necessarily stands in a sociolinguistic community, and that it is both irrational and spiritually fatal not to align oneself with the best interests of the community as a whole. To act and speak at all is to act and speak in the context of the community. Most important, self-knowledge is nothing other than knowledge of one's role in the world community. There is no truly independent 'self' which can be stifled by others, for outside this complex web of relations there is no self at all. Therefore, to assume full responsibility for all sentient beings is to realize the highest truth and the deepest meaning of the self." --Huntington, C.W., Jr. 1989. *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Madhyamika*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii Press, pp. 125.