

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MADHYAMAKA TODAY

"The principle of dependent origination is fundamental to the Buddhist worldview, and any interpretation of the doctrine of selflessness that fails to perceive emptiness in terms of dependent origination can never be complete." (Dalai Lama 1995 34)

### **Terminology**

*Interdependency* -- The Buddhist causal law of interdependency (Sanskrit: pratyasamutpada) which is said to be the Buddha's highest insight just prior to his enlightenment, and it is called the central philosophy of Buddhism. The doctrine of interdependency rejects the svabhava illusion.

*The Svabhava Fallacy* -- Belief in the existence of a permanent (fixed) and independent self-nature (svabhava) which, by definition, mutually defines other-nature (parabhava). Thus, svabhava contributes to the self/other split that is characteristic of human conflicts historically and worldwide. (See Nagarjuna's MK 1:3; MK 15:3-4, 6; MK 22:2-4 on self/other in McCagney 1997 138, 171-172, 192-193.)

### **Some Specifics of the Madhyamaka System**

While easy to grasp, simplistic theories about human nature are also distortive and misleading. Buddhism is not intentionally designed to be hard to understand. It examines the depths of our humanity to aid us in becoming the best human beings that we can be. Humans are by definition complex and so discussing human nature will be unavoidably difficult at times. Human nature includes self-consciousness or self-reference which requires feedback between self and others and can be extremely complex.

"This [is] a matter hard to perceive, this conditionality, this [interdependency]...against the stream of common thought, deep, subtle, difficult, delicate...." --Buddha, Dialogues II.36 (in Macy 1991 45)

"What is interdependent origination, that is called openness [= sunyata: emptiness] by us. It [openness] makes use of convention and is the practice of the middle way." --Nagarjuna, MK 24:18 (in McCagney 1997 202)

At the simplest level, the doctrines reveal the mutually defining existence of self/other. Thus, since self/other are mutually defining, they exist interdependently--and NOT separately as the inherited, unexamined and habitual svabhava fallacy misleads us to believe. The philosophical and doctrinal rigor and energy of the Madhyamaka emphasize this interdependency between self/other, as well as all dualisms, including the "is/is not" of all dharmas (= factors of experience: people, objects, events, ideas) and the characteristics we ascribe to them.

"When this is, that arises, like short when there is tall. When this is produced, so is that, like light from a flame. When there is tall, there must be short; they exist not through their own nature, just as without a flame light too does not arise." --Nagarjuna, RA 48-49 (in Hopkins 1975 24)

"If something is [considered] different because it exists apart from [something else], then it will also exist without [that other thing]. But without a second thing to define the first thing, that first thing cannot possibly exist [as a different thing]." --Nagarjuna, MK 14:6

"When one affirms [any] existence (bhava: being) there is a seizing of awful and vicious dogmas which arise from desire and hatred, and from that contentions arise. That is the cause of all dogmas; without it the passions do not arise. So, when this is thoroughly understood, dogmas and passions disappear." --Nagarjuna, YS 46-47 (in Lindtner 1982 115)

To address this common human tendency to reify (= to make real) through the svabhava fallacy our perceptions of dharmas (= factors of experience: people, objects, events, ideas) and their characteristics, the Madhyamaka promotes the Buddha's middle path between extremes:

"When one does not swerve from the Middle View (madhyama-darsana) with regard to any phenomenon (dharma) whatsoever, there is acceptance [of the fact that things are] unborn [= do not arise in the mind], because all ideas [vikalpa: conceptual constructions] are eliminated." --Nagarjuna, BS 29 (in Lindtner 1982 231)

The Madhyamaka deconstructs our old inherited and unexamined preconceptions and then self-deconstructs its own premises, which are guided by and formulate essential Buddhist doctrines and deconstructive (upaya: skillful means) metaphysics. Thus, these doctrines are designed to deconstruct metaphysical misconceptions (such as svabhava) and NOT to replace them. This is soteriology (= theology of salvation: Buddhist liberation) at its best.

"When neither an entity nor a nonentity remains before the mind, then since there is no other possibility, having no objects, it becomes calm." --Santideva, BC 9:34 (in Wallace 1997 120)

"By thus expressing himself clearly through analogies such as illusions [and so on] the Supreme Physician [= Buddha] has shown the Good Law which cures [us] from all dogmas. The ultimate truth (tattva) is that things are without svabhava. This is the unsurpassed medicine for those obsessed by the fever of [grasping after things]." --Nagarjuna, CS III:51-52 (in Lindtner 1982 157)

### **The Svabhava of Popular Buddhism Today**

Popular Buddhism today undermines and distorts the Dharma's doctrinal tradition (emptiness, interdependency, the middle path, and so on) by defining the doctrines as irrelevant in our modern world. Their failure to grasp the importance of these doctrines as essential guiding principles in our daily lives and relationships is exposed by their continued abusive conversion tactics which are rooted in the self/other split of the svabhava fallacy. A thorough knowledge of the Dharma's doctrinal import shows that human actions of abuse, violence, and exploitation, for whatever reason, contradict the teaching, reinforce the illusion that self and other are permanent and independent existences and thus separate, and therefore contribute to the turmoil and misery in all human conflicts historically and worldwide.

Their Dharma-violating abusive conversions tactics aside, you do not see these positive results in

the social system promoted by popular Buddhism today. For this reason, the Madhyamaka is a more accurate and comprehensive view of the Dharma and, as such, provides a better practice.

The system of thought that popular Buddhism is rooted in not only does NOT eliminate the self/other split of the svabhava fallacy but actually reinforces it. Their root distortion is obvious in their playing self against other through fear and confusion, and mandating a turning inward, towards complacency and nonaction, as seen in their overriding separateness and exclusionism as well as their ruling all-is-relative dogma. The signs of their svabhava-driven worldview are blatantly obvious, and include: pervasive poverty, disease, and exploitation; corporate crimes against man and nature; myopic war advocates fueling mass hysteria with public deceptions; government inefficiency, dishonesty, and manipulations; selective drug law enforcement; teenage pregnancy; degrading and dehumanizing pornography; and so on and on.

Instead of working towards disarming individuals, they encourage arming through concealed handguns and legislation to "protect" the supposed rights of gun-owners. Instead of working towards a world free of all weapons, they encourage weapon supremacy of the U.S. Instead of cleaning up a rampant sexism's degrading and dehumanizing pornography, they allow it in the name of some transmoral agenda. Instead of promoting the sanctity of human life--which would be a more effective long-term deterrent against the taking of life--they allow capitol punishment which debases and demeans human life by defining it as expendable in the right circumstances. Instead of ensuring the health of our precious, irreplaceable environment which is essential to our survival, they put corporate economic concerns above environmental health.

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