

Additional information to
 “Seminar: Postmodern Buddhist Philosophy
 from the Viewpoint of Comparative Philosophy”

Why Buddhism now? Why in Comparative Philosophy?

Additional information to the course by Hisaki HASHI

Seminar: Essential Mind of the Buddhism

Postmodern Buddhist Philosophy from the Viewpoint of Comparative Philosophy

Buddhism has become well known all over the world. Thanks to the activities of the Dalai Lama and his organization, several aspects of Buddhism have become popular in the West despite being accompanied by misunderstandings. For example, the subject of rebirth and reincarnation is an important aspect of Tibetan Buddhism (Vajrayāna), which developed under the influence of late Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, which was itself in turn heavily influenced by Hinduism. Similar tenets with regard to reincarnation are not part of Mahayana Buddhism (daijō bukkyō) in East Asia. Reflections from the viewpoint of comparative philosophy serve to dispel misunderstandings of this kind.

Buddhism cannot solely be defined as a religion of reincarnation. It possesses dynamic dimensions: thinking and acting in order to recognize and experience a good and wholesome life. Here we see the various facets of Buddhism: it is not only a religion, but also a philosophy, ethics, and culture for the individual as well as society at large. Concerning its historical development, early Buddhism (based on the teachings of the Buddha) gave rise to many schools in various regions of Asia: the complex metaphysics and ontology of Nāgārjuna during the age of early Mahāyāna Buddhism in India; the unique psychological philosophy (called by some the phenomenology of the mind and psyche) of Vasubandhu in the middle of the Mahāyāna period in India; the unique practice of Zen Buddhism developed in East Asia; the tripartite system of theory-practice-belief of Tendai (Tiantai) Buddhism; as well as a cosmology integrated with ontology present in the Kegon (Huayen) Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism of East Asia.

Are they “many Buddhisms (in plural) or are they all one?” Some experts in philology answer “yes” in both respects; several linguists, under the influence of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, say “no, but they all came from the same origin: Buddha *dharma*.” Examining this question philosophically, both opposing positions *cannot be demarcated* as dichotomic.

We may observe in this fact a fundamental character of “Buddhism”: the words of the Buddha (preserved in the Pāli Canon) are colloquial, understandable by anyone. But the meaning of his words was not simple. The Buddha described a practice suitable for everyone; however, the precise meaning of what he said may be considered from many points of view. From the viewpoint of Philosophy, many philosophical insights may be

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derived from the words of the Buddha. From the viewpoint of Psychology, a great deal of stimulation for modern psychology may be gleaned. From the viewpoint of the natural sciences, several suggestions regarding the interpretation of the reality of the phenomenon of particle physics in a micro-world may be derived.

Since the basic theory of Buddhism is oriented toward a relationship connecting categories to one another, a network (dharma) is built up as a result, a network in which any given category is dependent on others. The relationship between two categories can be reflected on via comparative-philosophical thinking. The latter does not aim at a brief, superficial comparison, but an active interaction between two positions on a certain subject. Buddhism thus also mediates *opposed positions* through its principle of the interdependent relationship of all beings.

It is a religion, but without God as the absolute creator of all beings. From this starting position, Buddhism does not profess a “mission” of any kind, rather pointing to *a way of thinking and acting in life, in ethics, philosophy, and science*.

If you have any questions or doubts, I request you to investigate the cross-cultural dimensions of philosophy in a global world.

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