

What Is Human Happiness? What is Buddhist Emptiness?

Without past, present, future; empty awake mind.

The Crux of the Matter. Buddhist Middle Way View teaches of the “Two Truths”: ultimate (*paramartha satya*) and relative (*samvriti satya*). Ultimate truth may be broadly construed as basal *formless dharmakaya*; relative truth as the physical and mental *form* that continuously arises within this unbounded whole that is ultimate *primordial emptiness* “groundless ground”. How is this always present all embracing “supreme source” related to our human happiness?

What on earth might this “ultimate primordial ground” possibly be? As self-conscious beings in form we perceive the *figure* of our perceptual foreground—“other” beings, trees, stars—as these *objective* cosmic forms continuously arise through the vast array of their perfectly *subjective kosmic* background. A part participates in its whole. No whole, no parts. No parts, no whole. All of these seemingly individual parts perforce partake in that whole in which they arise. This all embracing whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Therefore, the *ultimate* relation of part to whole is one of *identity*. Infinite boundless whole is necessarily an inclusive ultimate primordial ground of being, by whatever name or concept. Now, we are immersed in a field of physical/mental foreground objects. Then we habitually impute, reify, objectify, then name the objects/parts. Alas, through the conceptual activity of naming (*namarupa*) that named departs the luminous trans-conceptual realm of being itself and becomes an “other”, separate from its knowing subject. The prior unity of subject and object is split. Dualistic view arises.

How do we expand our awareness from this mere multiplicity of parts, stuff in our perceptual foreground, to the numinous basal primordial ground itself? The subtlest or “highest” nondual teaching of our great wisdom traditions have told it: the perfectly subjective whole, conceptual mystery of our trans-rational primordial ground cannot be known by the fabrications of discursive concept-mind, even though we are always only participating in it. *There are many ways for this teaching to arise.* Consider contemplative trans-conceptual primordial Wisdom Mind as demonstrated by the lives of the masters and *mahasiddhas* of our Great Wisdom Tradition. As we enter their wisdom mindstream the direct, experiential knowing of this entire whole shebang arises as the inherent potential of all beings in human form. Moreover, such ultimate wisdom (*jnana*, gnosis), and the compassionate lifeworld conduct that spontaneously flows therefrom, is the secret of our everyday human flourishing; but as well, of ultimate happiness of being this whole that is liberation/enlightenment. How shall we understand this?

“Form is Empty”. Buddha told in his *Heart Sutra*: “Form is empty (*stong pa*); emptiness (*stong pa nyi*) is form.” These Two Truths of reality are a prior and present ontic unity, “not one, not two, but nondual.” Nagarjuna told, “There is not the slightest difference between *samsara* and *nirvana*.” For quantum pioneer Werner Heisenberg, “subject and object are only

one." The human predicament? We live in these two worlds—objective and subjective—at once!

Perhaps this perennially vexed human condition requires a centrist view between the ontic extremes of existence and non-existence; between relative Scientific Materialism, and nihilistic Idealism. Indeed, the 21st century Noetic Revolution that is now upon us suggests such a middle way between relative objective Science, and ultimate perfectly subjective unbounded wholeness (*mahabindu/thigle chenpo*), nondual ground of arising scientific knowledge. So let us further explore this profound Buddhist view that illumines the very nondual nature of mind.

In Mahayana Buddhist *Madhyamaka Prasangika*—the Nalanda Middle Way Consequence School of Nagarjuna (2nd century), Chandrakirti (8th century) and Tsongkhapa (14th century), and the very foundation of *Dzogchen*, the *Great Completion* of the Mahayana—even Ultimate Truth, primordial emptiness (*mahashunyata, dharmakaya, kadag*), is not a frozen absolute. In other words, ultimate boundless emptiness is not a metaphysical idol or false absolute existing unconditioned and *independently* as an unknowable “other” dualistic (subject-object separation) transcendent Creator God, *Atman* Self, metaphysical essence, or some vast logocentric substrate, entity, or being. Buddhist emptiness/boundlessness is not a transcendent absolute reality ground of the appearances of relative-conventional physical and mental form.

These forms of emptiness are not *concept/theory observer-independent*, existing in a separate “real world out there” (RWOT). Rather, this anti-essentialist view holds the appearing physical and mental objects of appearing reality—both objective and subjective—to be *observer/theory-dependent*, with no Platonic logocentric *independently* existent reality posited at all.

So Buddhist emptiness/openness is a non-essentialist *relativized* absolute, abiding *interdependently*, as “dependent arising” or “interbeing,” (*pratitya samutpada*), a timeless, spacious infinitely vast causal nexus of arising interconnected causes and conditions. Plenty of parking space here. This Buddhist View is then, non-essentialist, but not anti-realist. It's a centrist view.

"Emptiness is Form". The good news? Our appearing realities are not utterly illusory (*avidya maya*) as philosophical idealists, both East and West, would have it. There “exists” here the ultimately compassionate gift (*jinlob, grace, euangelion*) of a really real, nominal, relative-conventional spacetime reality. But there is no noumenal, permanent, *intrinsically* existent reality at all. Our arising realities are merely the relative “dependent arising” of spacetime mental and physical forms to a sentient perceiving consciousness. The reality status of emptiness itself? Emptiness too is “empty of any shred of intrinsic existence” (Nagarjuna). H. H. the Dalai Lama terms this counter intuitive perplexing reality paradox the “emptiness of emptiness.”

It is important for us to avoid the misapprehension that emptiness is an absolute reality from which the illusory world emerges... it's not some kind of [entity] out there somewhere... emptiness must be understood as 'empty of intrinsic or independent existence'...form's ultimate nature...[It] does not imply non-existence of phenomena but the emptiness of phenomena...its ultimate mode of being...the basis that allows form [to] arise as emptiness.

—H. H. the Dalai Lama, *Buddhadharma Quarterly*, Fall, 2002

Form is *something* that exists. How does emptiness exist? "Emptiness is established by conventional minds"; not absolutely, but by our relative, conceptual cognition. Emptiness does not exist ultimately. It exists conventionally, as the reified, conceptually imputed, dependent, or interdependent arising of form. Again, emptiness is not some deeper utterly transcendent reality. Thus it is not subject to the usual logocentrism criticism of postmodern deconstructionists (Derrida, Foucault), nor of premodern nor modern theists, nor atheists, West or East.

Are these Two Truth reality dimensions—the duality of form and emptiness—utterly incommensurable, as our modern prevailing cultural metaphysic—Scientific Materialism tells? No, they are complementary. *Madhyamaka* emptiness is then merely the *ultimate* nature of our everyday conventional, intersubjective reality of *relative* spacetime thoughts and things interdependently arising (*vasana*/quantum qubits) from the vast array of their nondual ultimate primordial ground—by whatever name—appearing to human consciousness. *Human consciousness then, is a numinous emergent spacetime instantiation of selfless, timeless vast, basal consciousness-awareness itself, primordial ground of all that is.* "Do you understand the two minds, the mind that includes everything, and the mind that is related to something?" (Suzuki Roshi).

The sublime primary *Dzogchen Semde tantra, Kunjed gyalpo* reveals this trans-conceptual ground to be our "supreme identity." Who am I? *Tat Tvam Asi*; That I Am! The Two Truths, *relative form*, and *ultimate emptiness* are an ontologically prior yet present unity. "Not one, not two, but nondual" (*advaya*). *Samsara* and *nirvana* are *ultimately* one and the same (*samata*). Realization of this wisdom of emptiness is nondual Wisdom Mind/Buddha Mind (*samatajnana*).

Awareness Management: No-Self Help. By the lights of nondual Vajrayana view and practice (*Dzogchen, Essence Mahamudra*) primordial awareness wisdom is selfless nature of mind, vast, panpsychic unbounded wholeness ground (*mahabindu*) of all that appears to its participating sentient instantiations. "Primordially pure from the beginning", it pervades everything. It is free of "any shred" of self-identity, or permanent, *inherent* existence. We, the participating parts are subsumed, embraced and animated by it. Wisdom apotheosis *Dzogchen* exegesis reveals our innate Buddha Mind Presence is always already present here and now.

Through practice of the Path we cultivate, connect to, and celebrate this subtle Wisdom Mind that abides always at the Heart (*hyidyam*). Here, now we may rest in it. We surrender to Presence of That (*tat, sat*), and be happy. We cannot *become* happy later. But we can *be* happy

now. Happiness, both relative and ultimate, is assiduous mindful *attention* to That. Thus spontaneously arises kind compassionate *bodhicitta*—primary cause of this double happiness.

Now there is nothing out there, or in here, that is more cool, or more real, or more blissful than our here now ordinary, directly present experience, “just as it is.” No need to change anything (*wu-wei*). No need to not change anything. “*So rest your weary mind and let it be as it is; all things are perfect exactly as they are*” (Shakamuni Buddha). Our past is past. Our future has not yet arisen. So, the *surrender of attention* to the present moment here and now is Happiness Itself; is it not? And wonder of wonders, from such a fully present beautiful mind effortlessly arises spacious spontaneous thought, intention and action for the benefit of sentient beings!

Not so for habitually conceptual modern materialist mind—proto-religion of the Scientific Materialism metaphysic—clinging as it does to our deep cultural background (Platonist/Cartesian) quest for permanence; and to our common objectivist “dogmatic slumber” (Kant) that embraces merely relative, conventional, eternally material “substantial” form.

Hence, selfless (*anatman*) Buddhist emptiness should not be construed as nihilistic “nothingness” or non-existence. *Amazingly, from this fantasque negation that is emptiness emerges the fullness of light/energy/motion ($E=mc^2$) that is the spacetime material cosmos; but also nondual body/mind/spirit kosmos.* Striking a balance between negating too much of this arising relative form, and negating too little of it; now that is the rub. Such cognitive discrimination is the secular, and as well, non-secular Buddhist Middle Way practice. But it is not the *goal* of the Path. To make this Path a goal to future happiness can derail the practice. Why? Happiness can be present only now. Past and future are elsewhere. So we “Make the goal the Path”, here now.

The Forms of Emptiness. There is a seminal relationship of Buddha’s reflexive dependent arising (*pratitya samutpada/tendrel*) of relative forms, and their ultimate emptiness matrix base/ground (*gzhi, kunzi*). From his *Heart Sutra*: “Form is not other than emptiness; emptiness is not other than form.” “Dependent arising is emptiness; reality itself” (Adzom Rinpoche). Thus, the mereological part/whole relation of form and emptiness is one of identity!

Shakyamuni Buddha, indeed countless Buddhas and *mahasiddhas* of the timeless “three times” have taught three aspects of this interdependent unity of form and emptiness: 1) *causal*, all phenomena and processes depend upon prior causes and conditions; 2) *mereological*, wholes are dependent on their parts, and parts are dependent on the whole; 3) *conceptual imputation and reification*, all arising phenomena and processes are real only via relative-conventional conceptual attribution and designation by a sentient consciousness, with no *essential* observer-independent absolute existence at all. All of our realities, including us, are (gasp!) insubstantial and impermanent! (Bad for the economy.) OK. Stuff exists. Yet, “No phenomena exist with an independent or intrinsic identity” (H. H. The Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom*, 2005).

The *kosmic* dance of geometry—our reification of arising physical/mental/social forms (*nomos*)—is the product of our social interobjective and cultural intersubjective deep

background semiotic “global web of belief” (W.V. Quine, “Ontological Relativity,” 1969). So much for four centuries of European Modernist objectivity, an *observer-independent* (stuff exists independently of our concepts/beliefs), separate, material/physical “real world out there” (RWOT). After all, both Middle Way Buddhism and Quantum Field Theory agree on this (Boaz 2019).

To be sure, this “ontologically relative” belief system has become respectable postmodern high culture dogma. The rub? The cognitive dissonance inherent in any such anti-realist, anti-materialist view is a very sticky wicket for Modernity’s moral liberal democratic, but amoral (too often immoral) corporate capitalism with its utterly ironic, postmodern destructive consumerist colonization of the Western Mind (Habermas, M. Gandhi, J. S. Mill). Better perhaps not to mention this naked discomfiting rub at upscale cocktail parties; or to your doctors.

With this ontologically relative, anti-essentialist view, Bohr, Quine, Kuhn, the Neo-Pragmatists (Rorty), and the new panpsychic Neodualists (Chalmers) agree (Boaz 2019).

Again, on this Buddhist view, phenomena arise in dependence upon prior causes and conditions; phenomena arise in mutual interdependence of parts and wholes within the vast spacious unbounded whole itself (*mahabindu*); and phenomena are absent any separate, essential *intrinsic* existence. This *absence* of inherent self-existence is the primordial emptiness ground (*dharmakaya*, the *trikaya* of the base/*gzhi*, *kadag*) of all that arises in and through it. All emptiness is emptiness of *something* that exists. No emptiness, no form. No form, no emptiness.

Brief Review: Form is empty. Empty of what? Empty of essential, ultimate existence. If spacetime form does not exist ultimately or absolutely, how then *does* it exist? For Middle Way *Madhyamaka* Two Truths—relative and ultimate—appearing reality exists nominally, relatively, conventionally, observer-dependently. Thus, objective reality is not purely illusory as nihilist Eastern and Western Absolute Idealism have told. So we still have to show up for work.

We’ve also seen that relative phenomena are dependently and conceptually designated; they exist by way of conventionally reified conceptual attribution, imputation and designation, the dualistic ambulation of language. So we had better be attentive to, and mindful of our presently activated mind-states; and even of our not so present unconscious cognitive biases. Why? In the words of Shakyamuni Buddha, “*What you are is what you have been; what you will be is what you do now*”. And our “bad karma” habitual negative mind states? Buddhism has powerful instant antidotes, if we will learn and apply them. Just so in Western philosophy: “Philosophy is the antidote to that bewitchment of our intelligence by language” (Wittgenstein).

No Self, No Problem. “*All the evil, fear and suffering of this world is the result of clinging to the self*” (Shantideva). Due to impermanence/change (*anitya*) of all causally interdependently arising phenomena, nothing has an *intrinsic* self-nature. The consciousness of persons, and everything else of this implicate unbroken whole *emerge* into an explicate, selfless (*anatman*), constantly changing continuum of causes and conditions, with no logocentric, absolute

permanent self-identity at all. "Who are you in the space between two thoughts?" Indeed, it is this profound spaciousness through which, or in whom everything—physical mental, societal, spiritual—arises and participates. *Well, if self is illusory, who is it that knows/realizes this wisdom?*

Vajrayana teaches of the "two selflessnesses"; the selflessness of the person (*rangtong*), and the selflessness of experienced phenomena (*shentong*). For the contemplatively stabilized mind (*samadhi*, *dhyana*) realizing emptiness—the unity of *shamatha*/mindfulness (settling the "wild horse of the mind" into its natural quiescent state), and *vipashyanā* (penetrating insight)—the *absence* of self-nature in all arising form, both "self" and "other", is a *relative* view. In the *ultimate* view, "self" and Wisdom Mind are a nondual unity. Who is it that knows? *That I Am!*

So we have here an authentic, auto-noetic reflexively aware (*rang rig*) liberating realization of nondual (interdependent trans-conceptual subject/object unity) "primordial wisdom of emptiness". Such "basic wisdom" is the prior epistemic unity of ignorant (*avidya*, *marigpa*), *relative* mind brimming with self-ego-I, and our innate selfless "clearlight mind" or Wisdom Mind that gently embraces ego/self in *ultimate* boundless emptiness whole itself, our inherent "supreme source" (*kunjed gyalpo*, basic space/ying of *dharmadhatu*, *cittadhatu*). No problem at all.

Human Happiness: Love and the Two Buddhist Wisdoms. Middle Way *Madhyamaka* "emptiness" with all its relatively real stuff, is none other than the "Buddha Nature" of the idealist Buddhist *Yogachara* School. According to His Holiness the Dalai Lama (based in part upon Shantarakshita's great 8th century syncretic *Madhyamakalamkara*) there is no *essential* difference between these "Two Wisdoms"—between selfless luminous emptiness (*shunyata*) and our indwelling heart-seed of Buddha Nature (*tathagatagarbha*). "Realizing emptiness we realize our intrinsic Buddha Nature; realizing our Buddha Nature we realize the wisdom of emptiness."

From prior unity of these two awarenesses spontaneously arises boundless altruism—kind, compassionate lifeworld conduct. This then is the very Buddhist foundational unity of Wisdom (both relative *prajna* and ultimate *jnana/yeshe*), and Compassion. *And from this Wisdom of Kindness* (*bodhichitta*) *emerges both relative and ultimate human happiness. "Love is the only cause of happiness"* (Garchen Triptrul Rinpoche). Love is Buddhist ethics writ large. Such "loving kindness" (*maitri*), and compassion (*karuna*) spontaneously arise from meditative equipoise (*upeksha*). Love is the heart essence of Buddhist "positive psychology", morals and conduct.

The great foundational Buddhist teaching on emptiness: 1) no-self (*anatman*); 2) impermanence (*anitya*); and 3) interdependent arising (*pratitya samutpada*). These three are a noetic, complementary unity, realized—step-by-step—through the "Two Wisdoms,": spacious emptiness, and our inherent, "primordially present" heart-seed of Buddha Nature. This teaching is perfected in nondual *Dzogchen* view and practice. Such realization is our liberating freedom, the happiness that cannot be lost—*mahasuka*, *paramananda*, *beatitudo*. Such nondual happiness is the result of "mind training": discipline (*yoga/religio*) in action (*karma*), wisdom (*jnana*), and devotion (*bhakti*). Yes, it takes a qualified master, and a bit of dualistic contemplative practice.

Wisdom Mind. The Buddhist View bespeaks the cognitive-emotional ignorance (*avidya/marigpa/ajnana*) that is Attraction (desire, greed, pride) and Aversion (fear/anger, aggression), the non-recognition and failure of realization of this tripartite compassionate wisdom: selflessness, impermanence, and dependent arising. Such non-recognition of the compassionate *bodhichitta* (awakened heartmind) is the root cause of human gloom: suffering, alienation and human evil. "If we do not understand that this internal enemy of non-recognition of *bodhichitta* is the cause of our suffering, our external enemies will be never-ending" (Adzom Rinpoche).

This adventitious ignorance that is suffering is a conceptual (vikalpa) superimposition or projection (vikshepa) onto our everyday, pristine, direct perceptual experience which is "intrinsically pure" and free, prior to the instantaneous intromission of the concept and belief of self-ego-I. Wisdom Mind is continuous effortless resting in selfless bright space of basal nondual awareness, prior to any concept of Wisdom Mind. Self-surrender embraces even itself. Perfect just as it is now.

Perhaps we limit ourselves most by clinging to, and ego defense of our current egoic "web of belief". Thus do we "miss the mark" (*hamartia/sin*) of the timeless nondual primordial perfection of indwelling, always already present numinous Presence (*vidya/rigpa, atman, epinoia, Christos*) of impermanent, selfless, empty, interdependently outshining consciousness-awareness itself (*cittadhatu*). *Astoundingly, the arising of fearful, angry, prideful negative emotion is a cognitive aperture through which the light of our primordial Wisdom Mind enters in. Yea, the wisdom of emptiness is always already present and awake within us. It's like coming home.*

On nondual Buddhist View, this potential for release from the ignorance that is human suffering is the practice of Buddha's *Eightfold Path* to the freedom that is both relative human flourishing, and ultimate Happiness Itself. **davidpaulboaz.org, coppermount.org** 1.19