

Introduction to Buddhist Logic (©2017-2020)

Lecture 1: An Overview

Historical background and cultural context:

World civilizations of the time: idea of “axial age” (pivotal age)

Karl Jaspers (1883-1969): in his influential book which entitled *The Origin and Goal of History* (1953; German original *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, was published in 1949), the renowned German philosopher Jaspers used the term *axial age* to suggest that during the 8th to the 3rd centuries BCE, major world civilizations enjoyed one of the most innovative and creative periods, almost simultaneously without interacting with each other.

For instance, Zarathustra of ancient Persia, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle of ancient Greek, Laozi and Confucius of China, and the Upaniṣad literature, Mahavira as well the Buddha of ancient India, all started to formulate their respective ideas which laid down the foundations of world civilizations. Against this background that we shall discuss the historical and cultural contexts of Buddhist logical reasoning.

Common sources for ancient Indian civilization: epics, folklore, myths and the *vedic* literature; amongst them, the 4 *vedas* are considered the most important original sources of Indian philosophy and religion.

Vedas: sources of ancient Indian civilization (religious as well as philosophical)

Six Schools of Indian Philosophy (*ṣaḍ darśana*): *Āstika darśana* (orthodox schools of Indian philosophy/religion)

Below are six schools which considered as orthodox schools; because of their shared similarities, those six schools can be divided into 3 broad groups:

Sāṃkhya (Kapila, ca. 7th -6th centuries BCE): enumerationists
Yoga (Patañjali, ca. 2nd BCE - 4 CE centuries)

Nyāya (Naiyayika): logicians and epistemologists
Vaiśeṣika (Kaṇāda Kashyapa; 6th -2nd century BCE): atomists

Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā (prior inquiry): scholars of Vedic exegesis
Vedānda (Uttara Mīmāṃsā or Jñāna Mīmāṃsā; posterior inquiry): studies of Upaniṣads

Amongst the above 3 groups, the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika scholars laid the foundation of the logical and epistemological tradition of ancient Indian philosophy. As a result, they were regarded as the logicians of ancient Indian philosophy. In particular, before the Buddhist scholars started to use the term *Hetuvidya* (*knowledge of reasoning*), Indian logic was simply called Nyāya – *method or rule of knowledge*.

Śramaṇic Movements/Schools: *Nāstika darśana (unorthodox school)*¹

Jain (Mahāvīra/Nigaṇṭha Jñātaputta)

Buddha-dharma (Buddha)

Cārvāka (Lokāyata or Bṛhaspatya): materialist

Ajñāna: skepticism

As you may know, while in Buddhist texts, 6 major representatives who were contemporaries of the Buddha, are categorized as 6 masters of unorthodox schools, Buddhism itself is so classified by the traditional Indian philosophers; whether orthodox or unorthodox, it should be noted that from the time of the Buddha or early Vaiśeṣika philosophy, Indian or Buddhist logical reasoning tradition already started burgeoning.

Four disciplines in ancient India:

Anvikṣī: logic

Trayī: vedas

Vārtā: commerce (please pay attention to this disciple, for in terms of Buddhism and economics, ancient Indian *Vārtā* can be seen as the traditional means of economy and the method of economics)

Daṇḍanīti: politics

From the above list, it is clear that logical reasoning also played an important role in the intellectual history of ancient India. In fact, amongst politics and economics/commerce, logic is one of the three secular subjects apart from the more religious oriented texts – *vedic* literature.

Pañcavidyā (five types of knowledge)

Śabda vidyā: knowledge of language

Hetu vidyā: (knowledge of reasoning)

Cikitsā vidyā: knowledge of medicine

Śilpa-karma-sthāna vidyā: knowledge of fine arts and crafts

Adhyātma vidyā: knowledge of spirituality

Apart the above mentioned 4 disciplines, those 5 types of knowledge were also the major learnings in ancient India. One of them, as expected, is knowledge of reasoning or *hetuvidyā*. However, please notice that traditionally, *anvikṣī* or Nyāya were used to denote the logical method or rule of knowledge. But *anvikṣī* also means philosophy without exclusively suggesting the meaning of logic. So it should be noted that *hetuvidyā* is more commonly used by Mahayana Buddhist texts.

Three major branches of Buddhist logic:

Indian origins: pre-Dignāga, Dignāga, and Dharmakīrti and after Dharmakīrti

Chinese inheritance: Xuanzang's translations of Indian texts, and the commentaries produced by him and his disciples

¹ It should not be confused with the unorthodox Schools listed in Buddhist texts. They are so regarded mainly according to Buddhist criteria because they were contemporaries of the Buddha himself.

Tibetan development: because of Buddhism, which was introduced around 7th century, a lot of works of Buddhist logical reasoning and epistemology were preserved and then developed in Tibetan Buddhist tradition and its *tripitakan*. Also, because the popularity of debate tradition, a lot of commentarial literature was created and even a debate tradition was created in Tibetan Buddhist monastic education.

Buddhism, its brief history and its association with the development of Buddhist logical thought (Cf. Stcherbatsky, 1994:11-14)

Buddha

After the demise of the Buddha: early Buddhist Schools

Middle period: Nagārjuna, Asanga and Vasubandhu

Later period: Dignāga and Dharmakīrti

“Western Philosophy has remained more or less true to the etymological meaning of ‘philosophy’, in being essentially an intellectual quest for truth. Indian Philosophy has been, however, intensely spiritual and has always emphasized the need of practical realization of truth.” (Sharma, 1991:13)

Before ending this first lecture, we shall keep in mind Sharma’s comment above for two reasons. First, as a religion, Buddhism was first and foremost a way of life and its pursuit is therefore spiritual. Secondly, as a logical reasoning method under Buddhism, the purpose of Buddhist logical reasoning is accordingly subordinated to the service of the pursuit of spiritual advancement. Thus, while there is a great deal of similarities between the western and modern ideas of logical reasoning, Buddhist logic is by and large unique. In addition to that, it may be pointed out that most Buddhist logical ideas were developed more than a thousand years ago. So what we can learn from such a tradition is the tradition itself and the modern approach to it. In other words, we shall discuss some important developments in Buddhist logical reasoning in its historical contexts. We shall also understand Buddhist logic by learning modern scholarship on that topic.

Exercises: Please remember to do the short exercises at the end of the PPTs and submit them as instructed. Please also notice that all exercises of this semester are compulsory.

Reading suggestions:

Since this is the first class of our course, I do not want to scare you away so please just leaf through the textbooks. You will be familiar with the contents and structure of the books. Then please read some pages of the Introduction (especially pp. 1-37) of *Buddhist Logic* (the first vol.) by Theodore Stcherbatsky. Since we are going to read the introduction during the first two weeks and will come back whenever necessary, you do not need to read the whole chapter. But if you are interested, just read as much as you can. If you read more at the beginning, the course would become easier and more interesting as we proceed with our course.

Also, please do read the Introduction (only 4 pages, pp.1-4) of Greg Restall’s *Logic: An Introduction*. I am sure most of you are quite familiar with that book.

References for this lecture:

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