

Comparison between Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, and Chittamatra Schools

Vaibhashika School

- **Phenomena:** Things are *compounded* (cause and effect; impermanent) or *uncompounded* (no causes and conditions; unchangeable).
- **Conventional truth:** Phenomena (things that actually exist) are *conventional* truths. Imputed existence (can be broken down) – a "whole object" is *imputed* onto its parts (such as form or consciousness) = conventional truth
- **Ultimate truth:** Irreducible phenomena that are recognizable, even if broken down, are *ultimate* truths. Ultimate truth is an object that is *not* a collection of substantial parts, but is the *actual substance* – it is substantial existence and cannot be broken down (such as uncompounded phenomena).
- **External objects:** Matter is formed by *partless* particles (substantial, independent, fundamental particles of existence). They exist independent of the mind observing them – real objects apprehended by perception. Object and consciousness are two different entities – and a causal relationship exists between them.
- Differentiate between what exists as only an *imputation* and what exists *substantially* (in and of itself) and is ultimately true – that is, distinguish between what is imputed or mere *appearance*, and what is *reality*. Look at actual experience, rather than conception of experience.

Selflessness

- Refers to the person being empty of a permanent, unitary, and indivisible reality. (This is emptiness.)
- Sense of identity ("I") is a compounded phenomena (due to causes and conditions), and is therefore impermanent.

Sautrantika School

- **Phenomena:** Permanent phenomena (non-things) are *conventional* truths. Impermanent phenomena are *ultimate* truths.
- **Conventional Truth** (Conception): Is inferential valid cognition. It is to experience phenomena indirectly through words and thoughts. Conception is generally characterized phenomena (abstractions); universals; mere imputation – it is conventional truth.
- **Ultimate Truth** (Perception): Is direct valid cognition. It is to experience phenomena directly through the senses. Perception is specifically characterized phenomena; particulars; exists from its own side – it is ultimate truth.
- Discriminate between mediating through *concepts* and *direct perceptual experience* – that is, be mindful of mistaking conceptions for perceptions.

Selflessness

- Is the lack of an intrinsic or inherent self. Self does *not* exist since it cannot be apprehended by direct or inferential valid cognition.
- Only selflessness (emptiness) of persons, not of phenomena.

Chittamatra School

- **Phenomena:** All phenomena other than emptiness are *conventional* truths. Emptiness (thoroughly established natures) are *ultimate* truths.
- **Three Natures:** All phenomena have three natures as follows.
 - (1) *Dependent nature:* An object is the result of causes and conditions; it is "other-powered".
 - (2) *Imputed nature:* The false distinction of subject and object that is superimposed onto the object by the mind. Imputing properties and values onto an object that it does not have.
 - (3) *Perfect nature:* Seeing that no subject-object duality exists. This non-duality is the perfect, or thoroughly established, nature of the object.
- **External objects:** Existence of external objects that are *independent* of consciousness is refuted. External phenomena *and* the mind perceiving them are not two separate entities. They are two aspects of the same entity. There is no causal sequential relationship. Appearances apart from the mind cannot be observed. The only way we can prove something exists is by our perception – therefore, a thing cannot exist apart from one's perception. An object (e.g. "table") exists, but to prove the object exists requires consciousness. Only the mind can prove the existence of something. That does *not* mean the thing is just in our mind. But things only exist when consciousness apprehends them.

Selflessness

- Is the lack of an intrinsic or inherent self (emptiness) of both persons and of phenomena.
- Both self and phenomena are therefore "illusory", but the mind is real.