

Chittamatra School – Conventional and Ultimate Truth

How Objects Exist

1. *Chitta matra* – mind only. However, this school's views are *not* nihilistic, and *not* stating that there is nothing other than the mind. It does *not* mean that all objects are purely mental constructions.
2. Perception: Is *subjective* by definition – it is the mind perceiving an object. (By contrast the other two schools stated that the existence of an external object implies that whatever is perceived by a consciousness must be *objective* – it must actually be there in exactly the way the consciousness perceives it.)
3. Existence of objects: Chittamatrins do *not* refute the existence of objects; they refute their *external* existence. The notion of difference between subject and object is mere hallucination, and this misconception (due to the impact of strong imprints from our countless previous lives' association with ignorance), this grasping at subject and object as separate entities, is the main root of cyclic existence. In fact, the perceiving consciousness and the object it perceives are the same entity.
4. Concept of "same entity": The eye consciousness apprehending an object (e.g. computer) and the object itself (e.g. computer) arise simultaneously; there is no sequence. Innumerable imprints are stored on our consciousness (are *fundamentally stored*). Both the *consciousness* that experiences and the *object* arise from the fundamentally stored imprints, and both are of the same substance. In sum, the object and subject are generated from the same source, and have a single substantial cause – that is, they are the same substance.
5. An explanation: Fundamentally stored karmic imprints are activated by the coming together of various causes and conditions, and when activated the karmic seeds turn into both the object experienced and the consciousness experiencing the object.

Conventional Truth

1. Dependent nature is a relative truth.
2. Imputed nature is also a relative truth.
3. Dependent nature is *truly existent* – it is based on facts; they are real.
4. Imputed nature is not truly existent – it is fiction, unreal, because it is only conceptually constructed; thus it does not truly exist..
5. Mind focus: Focusing the mind on dependent nature and imputed nature will not lead to a complete cessation of suffering because they do not have the five characteristics of ultimate truth. In fact, reliance on the imputed and dependent natures leads only to more confusion and suffering. That is, when the mind observes them, instead of purifying the mind, it increases the negativities, ignorance, and so forth.

Ultimate Truth

Ultimate truth has five characteristics:

1. Inexpressible: Impossible to verbally describe ultimate truth precisely.
2. Nondual: Within the realization of an *arya* (a superior being who has gained a direct realization of emptiness) there is no differentiation – no duality – of subject and object.
3. Beyond apprehension by the conceptual mind: Cannot be realized by ordinary people's cognition, but only by the direct perception of an *arya* being.
4. Beyond diversity: Ultimate truth of an object is not one with its dependent nature, which has many "diversities" – different factors such as production, result, causes, conditions, etc. All diversities cease.
5. All of one taste: The ultimate truth of an object is the absence of duality of subject and object. Tables, chairs, and so on are different objects, but their ultimate truth is the same. Their final mode of existence is also the mere absence of duality of subject and object. In sum, the ultimate truths of all phenomena are all of one taste.
6. Perfect nature is *truly existent* – it is based on facts; they are real.
7. Perfect nature: Is an ultimate truth, because it is the only mode of existence of an object that possesses the above five characteristics.
8. Mind focus: When a practitioner focuses on an object's *perfect nature*, delusions and ignorance are purified, and continued concentration on the perfect nature leads the practitioner to the complete cessation of suffering.

Summary

1. External phenomena are *not* separate entities independent of the experience.
2. The only way we can prove something exists is by our perception – therefore, a thing cannot exist apart from one's perception.
3. An object (e.g. "table") exists, but to prove the object exists requires consciousness.
4. 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.
5. Seeing consciousness and object as separate is the starting point of all our mistakes.

Source: Tsering, Geshe Tashi. *Relative Truth, Ultimate Truth* (The Foundation of Buddhist Thought, Volume 2). Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2008. (Pages 75-97.)

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