

Comparison Between the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika Schools

(Two Non-Mahayana Schools)

Vaibhashika School

Key Concept

Things are *compounded* (cause and effect; impermanent) or *uncompounded* (no causes and conditions; unchangeable).

Mind

Contaminated mind (faulty): a mind that has not realized selflessness directly → knows **conventional** truths.

Uncontaminated mind (correct): has realized selflessness directly → knows **ultimate** truths.

Conventional Truth

A whole object is *imputed* onto its parts (form, consciousness, non-associated compounded phenomena) → imputed existence (can be broken down).

Ultimate Truth

An object is *not* a collection of substantial parts, but is the *actual substance* → substantial existence (can't be broken down) → aggregates, uncompounded phenomena, substantial particles (matter or mind).

Two Truths Together

Both conventional truth *and* ultimate truth can co-exist within one object.
Regarding the two truths – one is not "better" than the other. They are different.

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).

Importance of Studying both Schools

- It is valuable to see how much of our "perceived" world may be *imputed* by our deluded minds.
- We can focus more on "real" things, and see the danger inherent within unreal expectations and unreal memories.

Meditation

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*.

Sautrantika School

Key Concept

There is *conceptual knowledge* of a subject (conceptual consciousness) and *direct experience* of a subject (perceptual consciousness).

Mind – Valid Cognition

Inferential valid cognition (concepts) → **nonthings** → conceptually constructed → uncompounded → generally characterized phenomena (general properties) → words (linguistic signs that mark objects only approximately) → unreal objects (unable to perform functions) → imputations → permanent → **conventional** truth

Direct valid cognition → **things** → compounded → specifically characterized (unique characteristics) → beyond words → real objects (specific time, place, and cause) that can perform functions and have real results → impermanent → **ultimate** truth

Mind – and Objects

- Real things exist independent of the mind (objects exist "out there").
- External things act as a cause for *consciousness* to arise.
- *Commonsense objects* (e.g. pen, table, house) are real and *not* mere imputations of a conceptual consciousness – they can be seen as objects of direct perception, free of constructs or interpretations.

Conventional Truth (Nonthings)

- unreal ▪ fictional ▪ non-effective ▪ general characteristics ▪ non-functional (unable to perform a function) ▪ concealer truth (conceptual mind obscures the unique entity of a specifically characterized phenomenon) ▪ objects of conceptual valid cognition
- Conceptual thoughts are: ▪ selective ▪ eliminative
- Selflessness*, *cessation*, and *space* can be described by words; therefore, they are conventional truths (but not in Vaibhashika school).

Ultimate Truth (Things)

- real ▪ effective ▪ specific characteristics ▪ functional (able to perform a function) ▪ any unique, specifically characterized object
- objects of direct valid cognition

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.

Importance of Studying both Schools

- Understanding the Sautrantika view enables us to grasp the higher view of the Madhyamaka school in a deeper and more profound way.
- We can better see our *presumptions* and so become more open-minded.

Meditation

Discriminate between mediating through *concepts* and *direct perceptual experience* – that is, be mindful of mistaking conceptions for perceptions. Also, use meditating on the Four Noble Truths as a kind of "background" meditation – do this for both schools.