

Types of Existence in Buddhist Philosophy From the Prasangika-Madhyamaka View Point

1. Inherent existence: Inherent existence (svabhaavasiddhi) is said to mean existence as the object's basis of imputation. For instance, legs and top are the basis of imputation of a table, but are not the table imputed onto them, and thus the table is said to lack inherent existence. Inherent existence is a mode of existence wrongly imputed on objects.

2. True existence: True existence (satyasat), or ultimate existence (paramarthasiddhi), is said to mean existence independent from the object's appearance to a consciousness apprehending it. For instance, a table does not become a table until it appears to a consciousness apprehending table, and thus lacks true or ultimate existence.

3. Natural existence: Natural existence (svalak.san.asiddhi) is said to mean existence as the referent of a name and a conception. For instance, apart from the mere name and conception table, a table cannot be found, and thus a table is said to lack natural existence.

4. External existence: External existence, or the existence of external objects (baayaartha), or duality (dvaya) is said to mean the existence of the object as a different entity from the mind apprehending it. For instance, because all objects are nothing but mental images, like dreams, they are said to lack duality.

5. Imputed existence: Imputed existence (prajñaptisat) means an object's existence as a mere imputation, and not as its basis of imputation. Imputed existence entails the object's non-inherent existence. The "object's non-existence as its basis of imputation" is the object's emptiness of inherent existence. Thus, imputed existence entails emptiness of inherent existence and vice-versa.

6. Substantial Existence: When an object is either broken down physically or mentally divided into parts, the awareness of that object is not cancelled but remains.

7. Self-nature: Self-nature (svabhaava) may have several meanings. It may mean inherent existence; it may mean an object's conventional nature, such as the heat with respect to fire; it may also mean an object's ultimate nature, its lack of inherent existence.

In the context of Cittamatra, it is said that the duality of subject and object lacks self-nature because it does not exist, being just imagined nature (parikalpita-svabhaava); that the imagination of such duality lacks self-nature because it is other-powered, or dependent on causes (paratantra-svabhaava); and that the perpetual absence of the imagined in the imagination, or a thoroughly achieved nature (parini.spanna-svabhaava), lacks self-nature because it is a selflessness (anaatman), a self of phenomena being defined as duality.

8. Conventional Existence: According to Prasangikas, imputed and substantial existence are the same as conventional existence (sa.mv.rtisat), whereas for all other Buddhist tenet systems conventional existence entails inherent existence. From a Prasangika viewpoint, there is just one type of existence - imputed or conventional existence, all other types being denied.