

The Buddha as Scientist

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To call the Buddha a Scientist may come as a surprise to many, including well-intentioned Buddhists.

Webster's defines a Scientist as "a specialist in science, especially as natural science". To be 'scientific' is to be "systematic and exact" and be "trained in following or observing the principles and methods of science". Part of this method is that conclusions are arrived at *after the fact*, i.e., objectively.

So how does the Buddha pan out?

What natural science is he a specialist of? Of course, the 'sentient being' – one with senses. This is the Buddha's term for both humans and animals. How much more 'natural' can you get?

While Aristotle allows only five senses, the Buddha, two centuries his senior, gives us a sixth, the mind. While Western medicine treats the body, the Buddha treats the mindbody. His point is simple. There is no matter without mind, and no mind without matter, no matter which way you look at it! Thus he calls a sentient being a Psychophysique, i.e., Mindbody (*namarupa*).

It is in this 'fathom-long body, with perception and mind' that the Buddha posits the world. That is to say that what has not been experienced through one or more of the six senses is not part of that individual's universe. That is not to say that Canada, e.g., doesn't exist. While it exists for me **now**, from sea to open sea, in

fact, it didn't before I set foot on it nearly five decades ago. It was not part of my universe! Toronto, our present home, was not in my eyes to see either.

This means that any and every thing relating to a sentient being can be *totally* explained in terms of this mutual mind-body relationship. There is nothing outside of the mindbody, no puppeteer, i.e., a 'soul', that would be required. Thus he teaches 'asoulity' (*anatta*), i.e., no soul. Everything changes (*anicca*).

Extending the 'no puppeteer' model to the universe naturally suggests no need for a Creator God either. With no God and no Soul, it should hardly be surprising that the Secularist Dawkins keeps Buddhism out of the pages of his vitriolic work, *The God Delusion*. It was in the 1890's that Prof. William James, the Harvard Historian of Religions, declared that Buddhism was the Psychology of the future.

The *Tipitaka* 'Three Baskets' which contains the Teachings of the Buddha, is said to be about 15 times the size of the Bible. Big enough? Yet, the Buddha says that he teaches only two things: *suffering* and *the way out of suffering*. And each is captured by a single word: *dukkha* 'suffering', *magga* 'path'. Precise, and short and simple, exactly as in Science.

Buddha's training relates to the mind. For over six years! How rigorous? Having come from a life of indulgence of a Prince, he goes to the other extreme, depriving himself of even a morsel of food. Trying to shut out breathing itself, and nearly dying, he swiftly snaps out to return to normalcy, arriving at his famous Middle Path. Training further, he arrives at a total objectivity, reaching 'Cessation of Perception', erasing all received learning

and thought, making the mind now a *carte blanche* ‘empty slate’. Let reality roll in!

As for objectivity, detachment is the very essence of being the Buddha. He is the ‘Worthy One’, i.e., Arahant, precisely because he has jettisoned the three characteristics of sentience: *attachment*, *anger* and *ignorance* of reality (*raga*, *dosa*, *moha*).

The Buddha also speaks the language of Science. “Do not accept anything because of hearsay, it is in the tradition or in texts, nor even in the thought, ‘This is my Teacher’, but only when you’re convinced for yourself” (*Kalama Discourse*). Did you say a *Charter of Free Enquiry*?

While the Buddha thus can be said to be a Scientist in every sense of the word, he can also be said to surpass a Scientist. While classical Physics gives way to quantum Physics and body medicine gives way to mindbody medicine, his discoveries have stood the test of time for a full 2500 years with a perfect score.

While Science pays no attention to an ethical dimension, the Buddha’s *raison d’etre* is to provide a base for ethical living (*sila*).

We have drawn attention to the Buddha’s scientificity firstly to educate ourselves out of some myths about the historical Buddha as an exclusive Religious Teacher. While he indeed is that, his Teachings are based in a sound analysis of reality, not in any speculation or philosophizing. His teaching of ‘Asoulity’, and the absence of a God comes not from philosophizing or theorizing. It is from two of his basic tenets: (1) that everything undergoes change, and (2) that everything is conditioned. A scientist would

pitch in to say, “Oh, like, in the DNA, the life of the party of every cell, proteins and amino acid feeding upon each other”.

So there is no first cause, nor an agent behind action, or thought. When you wake up this morning, tell me, who or what woke you up? I know you’d say, realistically, and wisely, the commonsensical thing: when my mindbody had had enough rest, conditions were ripe for it to get back into action! Likewise when you go back to sleep. Enough work, now rest buddy!

It is the Buddha’s scientificity that seems to explain why Scientists and Secularists, in the West in particular, continue to be attracted to him more and more. Einstein’s take on Buddhism as “The Religion of the future” speaks volumes:

“The Religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description”.

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