

Buddhist discourses



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Short Essay Philosophy: Buddhist Discourses. In his argument which is in favor of 'no permanent self' Buddha systematically builds his case through discussion with his disciples. Though I tend to agree with most of the points of his argument, I disagree with his conclusion that there is no such thing as the permanent self. Firstly the conversation centers upon external and internal anxieties experienced by a person. Buddha says that the anxiety about something non-existent externally can be overcome by the realization that the possession of things is impermanent (Early Discourses, 110). What mine was before is not certainly mine now. If a person understands this truth, he will have no external anxiety. Also a person who thinks he will become a permanent thing and remain so for eternity after death becomes anxious if he is exposed to the dhamma as taught by the tathagata or his disciple. The teaching eliminates all standpoints of speculative views which involve obstinacy, favoritism, and possessiveness, produces an effect of calming of all dispositions to actions, forsakes all attachments, and destroys craving (Early Discourses, 110). The teaching is for nibbana, the complete freedom from suffering. This internal anxiety could be overcome if the person does not think he will be permanent and then expose himself to the teaching. At the end of this part of the conversation, the disciples do not seem to continue their quest for solution to the anxiety. Buddha simply starts asking questions about permanency of things. It was not clear how the internal anxiety could be overcome, meaning the process of removal of the anxiety. It was hard to accept that the knowledge that everything is impermanent removes internal anxiety. It will be unfair to conclude that the bhikkus are just stray men who agree with questions in the next part of the conversation, yet it seems so certainly. Buddha establishes that body, feelings, perception,

dispositions to action, and consciousness are impermanent and therefore painful (Early Discourses, 112). Hence he says it is not proper to view these things as ‘mine or my self’. For each of his questions the monks just politely agree with him without making an effort to further explore the possibility of whether there is such a thing as a permanent self. Or one could argue that Buddha did not allow them space to raise such questions. Finally it is difficult to find a logical answer to Buddha’s contention that there is no such thing as the permanent self. It is agreed that the body, feelings, perception etc. are impermanent. But what about the one who undertakes the quest? Is he also impermanent? How can the person who establishes that everything is impermanent be impermanent? The conception that the one who observes that everything changes must be an unchanging entity has not been considered in Buddha’s teaching and hence the teaching can not be deliberated complete. Works Cited Early Buddhist Discourses. PP 110 -113. Ed. John. J. Holder. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006. Print.