

Buddhism

What is a  
"Person" ??

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World  
Religions

Phil 105  
DR Gayhart

intimate "person-to-person" contact, as when we say we spoke with someone "in person." This indicates a face-to-face interaction when one is in the perceptual, bodily presence of another. Indeed, most uses of the word foreground the embodied status of an individual, as when we speak of carrying something "on one's person" or when criminal assaults are spoken of as "violations of one's person."

In contrast with terms such as *subject*, *self*, and *soul*, the English word *person* and its cognates in other languages convey the idea of a human as an essentially embodied being. In contrast with the term *individual*, *person* conveys the idea of a human being's social identity and existence within a collective order. While the word *man* (when used in a generic sense) points to one's membership in humankind or in the biological species *homo sapiens*, *person* suggests an individual's concrete bodily presence. Indeed, it is the material condition of living human beings that places us in the direct presence of others, thereby making possible our most meaningful interactions of "personal" intimacy, but that also renders us vulnerable to mortal injury and to such punitive practices as incarceration, whipping, and execution by which we may be subjected to the police powers of the state. Yet the embodied person is not merely a physical body viewed in abstraction from perception, intentionality, and whatever else constitutes the concrete living being. A corpse is a body. It once was a person, but it no longer *is* a person. Perhaps most important, the term *person* expresses our concrete embodiment as itself a moral condition. The agent of moral action is not the body but the embodied person. As is especially evident in usages that characterize acts of violence, such as rape and torture, as violations of the person, it is the embodied vulnerability of ourselves and others that renders us moral agents responsible for the material effects that our actions have on others and that makes all of us vulnerable to the cruelest acts of inhumanity. Among the range of lexical choices to designate individuals, only the term *person* conveys this idea of our embodiment and the moral significance of this condition.

< But what do Buddhists mean by the term *person*? Does the Buddhist notion of person also foreground the idea of our material embodiment as itself a social and moral condition? A philological approach cannot answer this question, because there is no cognate of the word *person* in the languages of those societies in which authoritative Buddhist texts and institutions have arisen. If one follows the convention of regarding Sanskrit as the original language of Buddhism, one finds, as in any language, a range of lexical options for denoting a human individual: *pudgala*, *puruṣa*, *manu*, *ātman*, *jīva*, *sattva*, *prthagjana*. Translators have at times used *person* to render all these terms into English, depending on the context and their understanding of the intended meaning. But it is the scholarly consensus that *pudgala* is by far the closest in meaning to the English word *person*. Among the various Sanskrit terms used to designate an individual, *pudgala* is

distinguished by its emphasis on the aspect of material form (*rūpa*) by means of which individuals are concretely present to each other. However, as in the case of the word *person*, the *pudgala* may not be reduced to *rūpa*, the physical body. In Buddhist doctrine, the person is specified as a unitary functioning or process composed of five "aggregates" (*skandhas*): the material body, sensory feelings, evaluative perceptions, habitual mental dispositions, and consciousness. The person is the apparent entity that is experienced in the workings of this aggregated process and that appears to others. The Buddhist conception of the person thus does specify an individual's existence within the sphere of everyday materiality. Just as there is a consistent association in Western usage of the term *person* with the embodied condition of living, morally accountable individuals, so in Buddhism even "the early discourses do not speak of a human person without a body or material form (*arūpa*)" (Kalupahana 1992, 71). This is what distinguishes *pudgala* from terms such as *ātman* that posit a world-transcending soul or a self of ultimate being.

← This is a "Person"

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The Buddhist denial of the reality of the *ātman*, the eternal "self," does add a special complication to Buddhist usage of the term *pudgala*. The doctrine that self does not truly exist or exists merely as a pernicious delusion also entails a denial of the "ultimate reality" of the person as a substantive entity. This prompted a characteristically Buddhist "taboo on speaking of 'self' or 'person'" (Collins 1982, 71). However, given the common use of these terms in everyday language, this is a rather unworkable taboo if taken to extremes. Instead, as Donald Lopez has discussed, Buddhists have theorized the issue as a hermeneutic problem:

NO SOUL OR SELF

← "MATRIX" ?  
PEOPLE ?

Perhaps the most commonly cited examples of an apparent contradiction in the Buddha's teachings are his statements in which he makes reference to the self (*ātman*) or the person (*pudgala*). . . . In order to avoid the inconvenience of expunging all nouns such as "I," "myself," "oneself," and "person" from common parlance, Buddhist commentators have traditionally accommodated the provisional use of such terms by the Buddha by classifying them as teachings that require interpretation, while assigning the statements that there is no self to the more exalted category of the definitive. (Lopez 1988, 61)

The word *person* is to be avoided only when its use might impute to the person a mode of existence that is ontologically final or ultimate. The ordinary use of the term to denote an individual human being is not a problem. As Collins (1982, 71) explains, "The linguistic items translated lexically as 'self' and 'person' (in Pāli *atta*, *purisa/puggala*, Sanskrit *ātman*, *puruṣa/pudgala* respectively) are used quite naturally and freely in a number of contexts, without any suggestion that their being so used might conflict with the doctrine of *anatta*." Indeed, even during the historical Buddha's lifetime ordained monks were called *āryapudgala*, "worthy" or "noble persons" (Hirakawa 1990, 31). In early sūtras the historical Buddha

We exist -  
But we ARE NOT PERMANENT  
WE ARE NOT "REAL"

*kāyas*, “bodies,” in which pure beings that might exist in the immediacy of material existence (*rūpakāya*) were conceived as Neoplatonic emanations from a higher dharma body that was not constituted by the five aggregates. Moreover, the potential of ordinary humans (and perhaps other beings) to attain buddhahood was in some schools reconceived in terms of the presence of a separate “buddha nature.” This other pure “nature” is in everyone and is distinct from the “own nature” of an individual that prevails within ordinary reality, the sphere of karmically defiled entities. This was theorized by positing an equivalent to the *ālayavijñāna* (the transmigratory “consciousness” that contains the karmic “seeds” of past moral actions) for the pure “buddha nature.” This is called the *tathāgatagarbha*, the “womb” or “embryo” of enlightened being (Brown 1991; King 1991; Hubbard and Swanson 1997).

The principal objection to the Pudgalavādin theory of person was its proposal as a definitive category for an entity that falls neither into the category of conditioned existences nor that of the unconditioned. Within the confines of the ontological binary conventional/ultimate, this asserted a mode of being that, by transcending the sphere of “conventional” reality, trespassed upon the sphere of “ultimate” reality. All contemporary schools of Buddhism, I believe, find this unacceptable. Rather, they hold that it is correct to assert that Person is a category proper only to conventional existence, that is, to our embodied existence in the world as we usually live it. Persons do truly exist as real entities subject to moral (karmic) accountability, but only in this sphere, not that of ultimate reality.

The term *pudgala* is understood to be a conventional designation for a unique “aggregated” individual to whom names and social titles as well as actions and their moral consequences accrue (paraphrasing Thiên Châu 1987, 36). The person is not the self, the referent of the term I. Buddhism views the self as an illusion, a imagined entity that consciousness projects onto the components of the aggregate person. This self, then, derives not from one’s parents but from lifetimes, without beginning, spent in ignorance. In reality, the self never did, does not, and never will exist. Moral autonomy is located not in the imaginary self but in the total concrete person whose own conduct will lead to happy or unhappy rebirths until the absence of the self is recognized and liberation is achieved.

FACT: THE RIGHTS-BEARING PERSON  
FROM ANCIENT ROME TO MODERNITY

Buddhism regards our identities as persons living in the world of ordinary social existence as “conventionally real.” This might seem to accord nicely with the Western notion of *person*, a word derived from the Latin *persona*, “mask,” because the term attributes to us a public existence without asserting anything about the ultimate or essential being that might (or

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Buddhists  
Believe in  
ghosts -  
Are they, then,  
“energy  
Remains” of  
our  
“conventional”  
existence ??

??

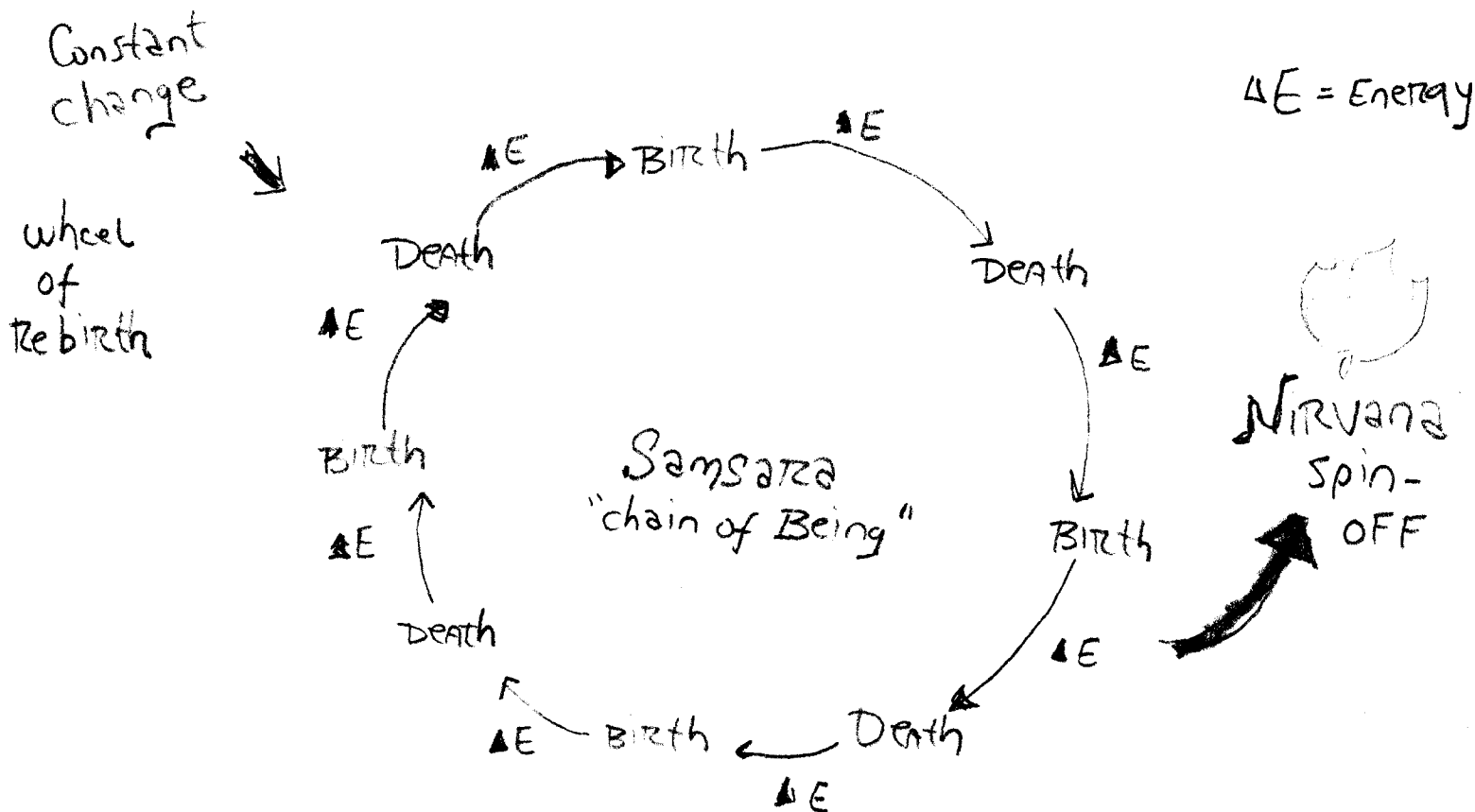
summary

whoa!!  
MATRIX !!

But - if so...  
that who or what  
undergoes re-incarnation

# Phil 105 Buddhism: who am I?

6 classes of beings  
 "heavenly" "humans" "Great" "Hungry ghosts"  
 "Animals" "hellish"



"You" are:

## 5 AGGREGATES

- ① Physical form
- ② feeling
- ③ Mental Activities
- ④ Consciousness
- ⑤ Perception



Karma = the Engine OF Motion

It fixes destiny

← Notice!  
 No  
 soul  
 or  
 spirit

"anatta" = NO SELF

"YOU"!  
 A conventional LABEL only  
 BUT NO PERMANENT REALITY