

NOTES ON “HOW TO SEE YOURSELF AS YOU REALLY ARE”

CHAPTER 2: DISCOVERING THE SOURCE OF PROBLEMS

This chapter goes into the detail that was not covered in Chapter 1. This chapter gives more details on the process by which ignorance (the sense of inherent existence) is formed.

What is notable in this approach is that the sense of inherent existence is not just a matter of belief. It does include belief, but depends on appearances which are not conceptual in the way belief is.

The appearance of inherent existence happens even at the sensory level. Sense objects appear to the eyes, ears, nose, fingers, etc., as though they existed externally, on their own. It's not that the senses form a conceptual conclusion that says “the object is inherently existent.” It's merely that the sense, as a cognizer, seems to take an object, and this appearance is passed on to the mind. And the mind usually assents to this appearance. What's more, the mind may take on objectivist teachings, philosophies and tenet systems that exaggerate this appearance. See the following video!

<http://www.facebook.com/download/482098441856847/Rand.wmv>

Scheme

Here, according to Chapter 2, is the Dalai Lama's scheme for how suffering results from the false appearance of things. This is the scheme he didn't go into in Chapter 1.

1. **Appearance.** To the senses, an “X” appears as an external object.
2. **Acquiescence.** The mind goes along with this appearance, accepting it without question.
3. **Exaggeration and Attribution.** The mind adds something that was not presented by the senses. It takes appearance as reality
4. **Attractiveness/Unattractiveness.** When we pay more attention to X, certain attractive or unattractive features become more noticeable.

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5. **More Attribution.** We begin to take the attractiveness or unattractiveness as integral to the object, inherent in the object.
6. **Obscuration.** The attractiveness or unattractiveness, which now seems inherent in the object, obscures other opposing qualities, which are not noticed as much.
7. **Afflictive Emotion.** Lust or hatred arise. The DL mentions a few more afflictive emotions in this chapter. Greed, belligerence and arrogance are also mentioned.

Step 3 deserves more detail. In Step 3, the mind has already given a “pass” to the appearances that came from the senses, with their appearance of the externality of the objects. In addition to accepting this mere appearance of the object, the mind comes to believe explicitly that X exists independently, as it appears. This belief is usually intensified by teachings. Different spiritual, scientific or philosophical teachings that posit inherent existence as the way things really do exist. Different philosophies make the claim of inherency about different kinds of X’s, different kinds of phenomena. Some claims are about matter, or brain function, or ideals, or cause and effect, or truth, or God, or the world itself.

When the self is closely involved with an object, then various elements seem more strongly like a true “I.” Other elements emerge more strongly as “mine.” Our happiness and our very self is seen to depend on being the right kind of person or having the right X.

Ignorance

The ignorance that is the seed of afflictive emotions is not the one that happens at the sensory level. That is just an appearance. It is when we take the appearance for reality that the seeds of afflictive emotions have been introduced.

This same ignorance, taking things as inherently existent, leads not only to afflictive emotions, but also to what Buddhism calls “cyclic existence,” the involuntary round of births and deaths in the same lifestream. It is only wisdom, the realization of emptiness, which breaks this cycle.

Comments

When we try to tease out the sense of inherent existence in our mind, the steps (3) and (5) are important. In my experience, I have had these three kinds of attributions of inherent existence. I think any of the three routes can be used as a way to get in touch with this sense in ourselves. In my own life, these particular things have come out the strongest in *romance* and *beauty*. Here are some examples of the ways that I thought of inherent existence, though I certainly didn’t call it that at the time!

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- A ***The object itself.*** The idea that the person exists inherently.
Example: My self, but even more importantly, a person I desired.
- B ***The quality of beauty itself.*** The idea that beauty exists inherently.
Example: I have spent many a dreamy evening wistfully yearning for this or that beautiful girl. I reified her beauty to cosmic proportions. I thought her beauty was something above and beyond her. Almost as though the beauty existed in some heavenly place, and she was only a single participant in it. But this beauty, the way I thought about it for so many years (decades!), was definitely something, I thought, did not depend on her or any other human being. And of course I thought that this beauty was inherently attractive and good. These were part of the very notion of beauty. That is a kind of dreamy, idealistic slant on inherent existence.
- C ***Beauty as inherent in the object.*** The idea that beauty is part of the very nature of this person.
Example: I would look at the girl I liked so much, and focus on a particular feature – I recall vividly one time fixating on the shape and color of her legs in some very opaque support hose. I was like 17 years old, and yet I still remember it. I was thinking that she was objectively there. I thought this beauty would deliver me to a heavenly realm. But I also thought that this particular saving beauty was only available with this one person in all of life. This beauty and she were integrally related. They were part of each other’s makeup, that beauty and that girl. Of course this set up lots of pressure and afflictive emotion, since it meant that I had to have **her** and **only her** as my girlfriend, or I would miss out on this delivery to the heavenly realms for all of my life. What was ironic was that I was thinking all this from a distance, from a position of not even being on her radar!

The DL says that it is very important to be able to identify these kinds of things. It’s important to be able to identify when we are attributing inherent existence, as opposed to merely using some phenomenon. It is the attribution of inherent existence, which is not always done in those specific terms, which is where the seeds of suffering enter into our experience.

Other Ways to Detect the Sense of Inherent Existence

We might even come to believe that we don’t believe in inherent existence any more. This is OK, and usually it is part of getting comfortable with this approach. But the conception of inherent existence can come along with other beliefs. When we make uncompromising or unconditional assertions about things, such as that certain things are strictly **necessary**, or **universal**, or **really like that no matter what anyone believes**, then there is probably an

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unacknowledged assumption of inherent existence at play, even though we may officially believe we are totally free of it. If we dig into our assumptions, we will be able to find it.

Another clue is the presence of the afflictive emotions in our experience, such as lust, hatred, greed, belligerence and arrogance.

If I hate someone, then there are various possibilities for things I take to be inherently existent. It could be the person. It could be the action or quality that they represent. And quite often it is some standard of conduct or esthetics that I take to be inherently established, and I regard this person as in violation of this standard. It could be a certain view I have of how things should really be. A standard or view is more subtle than a person, but it is nevertheless able to cause suffering.

The emotions themselves are not what we seek to refute. We use the emotions as direction finders, trying to pinpoint the objects they assume to exist inherently. When we thoroughly refute the objects, the afflictive emotions will wither away, having no more motive power.

Meditative Reflections for Chapter 2

Consider:

1. Does the attractiveness of an object seem to be integral to it?
2. Does the attractiveness of an object obscure its faults and disadvantages?
3. Does exaggeration of the pleasantness of certain objects lead to lust?
4. Does exaggeration of the unpleasantness of certain objects lead to hatred?
5. Notice how you:
 - i. First perceive an object
 - ii. Then notice if the object is good or bad
 - iii. Then conclude that the object has its own independent basis for existing
 - iv. Then conclude that the object's goodness or badness exists inherently in the object
 - v. Then generate lust or hatred according to your previous judgment.