

The general aim of this project is a critical reconstruction of the philosophical ideas of early Buddhism. The early Buddhist teachings contained in the Nikāyas focus on the issue of the liberation of an individual and are not presented in form of a systematic philosophical system. Nonetheless, early Buddhist teachings possess a strong philosophical grounding and are based upon a number of very original ideas concerning reality, cognition, language and its limitations. These ideas appear in various contexts and sometimes are not even expressed in an explicit way, but function as a sort of background for other teachings. Many problematic elements of the early Buddhist doctrine have not yet received a satisfactory explanation. This in particular concerns the paradoxical aspects of the teachings contained in the Nikāyas, such as the notion of cessation (*nirodha*), end of the world (*lokassa anto*) or the issues connected with ineffability of a state of a liberated person. Several interpretative difficulties are also connected with some early Buddhist meditative concepts. Interpreting these problematic elements using chronologically later categories connected with orthodox, classical doctrine of Theravāda Buddhism does not bring satisfactory results. There is a general consensus among contemporary critical scholars that the Theravāda doctrine differs significantly from the early Buddhist teachings. All this shows a general necessity of reconstructing philosophical foundations of early Buddhism.

The identification and critical analysis of several problematic early Buddhist texts serves as the point of departure of this research project. It will highlight the interpretative difficulties connected with these passages. A comparative analysis of the parallel versions of these texts contained in the Chinese Āgamas will also be undertaken. Next, a comparative analysis will highlight the significant discrepancies between the early Buddhist concepts and those of classical Theravāda. Then, the project will focus on reconstructing of philosophical ideas forming the background of the abovementioned problematic concepts. Due to inadequacy of the interpretative categories of classical Theravāda, an interdisciplinary approach will be used. Comparisons with the modern concepts from the fields of philosophy of mind, philosophy of language and cognitive science will help better understand the original but unsystematic philosophical ideas of early Buddhism. This approach already has a well-established position within contemporary critical Buddhist studies. The project will focus on reconstructing early Buddhist views concerning consciousness and cognition, the structure of reality as well as language and effability. A reconstruction of early Buddhist ideas concerning cognitive aspects of mediation will also be undertaken. The final goal will be a development of a holistic vision of early Buddhist philosophical ideas functioning as an organic part of a doctrine of liberation.

This research project concerns the very central elements of the earliest available form of Buddhism, one of the world's major religions. The project will therefore allow us to better understand the history of Buddhism and the evolution of its doctrine. Reconstruction of early Buddhist philosophical ideas is also important from the point of view of general history of human philosophy. The issues tackled in this research project can be considered the most basic, fundamental problems of philosophy possessing an universal significance independent of specific historic and cultural contexts. This research project fits into the trend of recent critical scholarship within the field of critical Buddhist studies. Several of the research problems connected to this project have not yet received a satisfactory solution from other scholars. This project offers many hypotheses going beyond current state of the art. Solutions offered within this research project can become topics of scholarly debate and influence the development of critical studies of early Buddhism. The project will also provide a presentation of early Buddhist philosophic ideas using the language of contemporary philosophy, so that early Buddhist ideas can become available to those unacquainted with the specific and specialized early Buddhist vocabulary and terminology.