An Inquiry into Views: Lessons from Buddhism, Behavioral Psychology, and Constructivist Epistemology

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Queen: Alas, how is't with you,
That you do bend your eye on vacancy,
And with the'incorporal air do hold discourse?
. . . Whereon do you look?
Hamlet: On him, on him! Look you how pale he glares!
. . . Do you see nothing there?
Queen: Nothing at all; yet all that is I see.
Hamlet, Act III, scene iv

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Views: The Real Boundaries

I'd like to begin by briefly retelling a story that the noted American literary critic/epistemologist Barbara Herrnstein Smith offers in the beginning of her recent book, *Natural Reflections*, which goes something like this: There appeared in the state of Minnesota in the mid 1950's a new religious cult that had arisen surrounding a prophecy received by their charismatic leader from beings in outer space, foretelling a cataclysmic flood that was to come on Dec. 21st of that year, expected to wash away much of the Midwest. The members of this group did their best to provide warning to as many non-members as possible and diligently phoned all of the local newspapers. One paper, the *Lake City Herald*, apparently thinking that this story would make for a nice little piece of amusement for their readers, published the warning from outer space on their front page.

It so happened that there was at that time a group of behavioral psychologists at the University of Minnesota who were conducting a research project on new religious cults founded on prophecies. The model that they were attempting to prove was one that held that in the case of such prophecy-founded cults, when the day came for the inevitable non-occurrence of the predicted cataclysm, the failure of the prophecy would be quickly explained away, having little or no effect on the adherence to the cult and its beliefs by its members. Thus, the posting of this information in the *Herald* provided an incredible windfall of opportunity for this team. They surreptitiously joined the cult, participating in its activities, painstakingly recording everything that transpired. When Dec. 21st rolled around, there was no cataclysmic flood, and the UM researchers awaited the expected write-off from the leader that would enable to cult to carry on in its activities, basically uninterrupted. The explanation was delivered.

Contrary to the researchers' expectations however, the majority of the believers did not buy it, and most of them ended up leaving the cult, which in a short time fell apart. Although

this outcome did not follow the lines of their proposed thesis, they were able to find a few people who continued to follow the leader and who remained staunch members for a period of time, so they focused their study on these people, and basically wrote up their conclusions along the lines originally proposed.

The point here, of course, is that the members of the cult, in whom most of us would tend to expect to see the qualities of rigidity and close-mindedness, actually ended up demonstrating greater flexibility in the face of the facts than the research team, the members of which rigidly held to their view. (See *Natural Reflections*, p. 2-4)

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When first offered the opportunity to make a presentation at this intellectual gathering, my first impulse, upon seeing the rubrics of "global peace," "borderless world" and "Asia in the 21st century," was to write something on the topic of the apparent increasingly prevalent dissolution of boundaries we are continuing to see in terms of the prodigious transmission, sharing, and appropriation (both ethical and otherwise) of information via the Internet — topics that I have been forced to deal with in the course of my work for some time. But a bit of reflection on these conference rubrics raised to my mind the awareness that assumptions are often made that the proliferation of information through non-borders will somehow help to bring about a heightened degree of mutual understanding between the people of different cultures, different countries, different ethnic groups, and different political and religious persuasions. This assumption is readily belied by the continued — and in some cases — intensified struggles between such groups. The new borderlessness of our world has not led us very far in the direction of peace through broader mutual understanding. This is because the borders that truly cause these problems do not lie so much in national or cultural boundaries, or disparities in infrastructure, but within our own thinking processes.

Within my primary field of Buddhist studies, my main interest lies in the study of the processes of knowing and belief: the way we come to know things; the way that knowing the things we know ends up binding us in further unknowing; and the way of unlearning those things that bind.[1]

In general, Mahāyāna Buddhists see the causes for nescience and entanglement in cyclic existence to be distinguishable into two main types of mental disturbances: (1) afflictive and emotional types of mental states that are produced based on attraction and revulsion, which directly draw us into trouble and continued rebirth (*kleśâvaraṇa*; 煩惱障; K. *beonnoe jang*) (2) states of cognitive error, misunderstandings about the nature of ourselves and our world that serve as the ground for the former (*jñeyâvaraṇa*; 所知障; K. *soji jang*). These two are known in Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy of mind[2] as the "two hindrances" (K. *ijang*; 二障).

While this clear division of mental imbalances into two classes is useful for making a wide range of distinctions in terms of doctrine and practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism, when commentators get down to actually explaining the two, they soon find themselves having to grapple with a nebulous area in between: mental functions that are problematic both afflictively *and* cognitively. Further investigation reveals, even more problematically, that most cognitive obstructions seem to have some kind of afflictive ramifications, and vice versa.[3] What we end up with, on the whole, is rather than two clearly distinguishable

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[1] These themes, by the way, can, I think, also be said to be the core interests of the illustrious Silla-period Buddhist scholar and practitioner Wonhyo (元曉; 617-686), whose works have been at the center of my research for more than a decade.

[2] Referring to works categorized as Yogâcāra, Tathāgatagarbha, and the considerable grey area that lies in between.

[3] For example, when the authors of the *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論 defined the two hindrances, they felt compelled to quickly defend their categorization of "views" as cognitive hindrances, since in the commentarial tradition of Huiyuan 慧遠 (523-592), views had been defined as part of the afflictive hindrances. The text says: "If the cognitive hindrances include views, doubt, and so forth, how would *that type* of scripture explain them to be part of the nescience entrenchments (in other words, they don't fit according to that framework, since there they are seen as afflictions existing outside of the nescience entrenchments)? As the effects of nescience expand, [these too,] are generally termed nescience. Views and so forth are not excluded. (T 1585.31.48c23-25)" 若所知障有見、疑、等、如何此種契經說爲無明住地。無明增 故總名無明。非無見等。

categories, a sliding scale going from the mostly afflictive to the mostly cognitive. And between the afflictive and cognitive, there is an especially problematic category, called "views" (見; K. *gyeon*, Skt. *dṛṣṭi*: Pāli *diṭṭhi*).

This is a concept that is quite readily translatable into all modern languages, as we, just like the ancient Indians, Chinese, Koreans, and so forth, possess a very clear notion of a certain type of predominating cognitive activity, that we term in English as "view," "way of seeing," "opinion," "belief," "mindset," and a range of other terms that indicate an idiosyncratic, or conditioned, or influenced, or unproven, or rigid and narrow way of apprehending the world and acting within it.

The notion of views is treated with decidedly more importance in Buddhism than in other religious traditions, as the most fundamental problem confronting sentient beings in Buddhism is an epistemological one — our distorted way of knowing the world. Thus, we have views discussed extensively from the very earliest strata of Buddhist literature, especially the distinction between right view(s) (正見 *samyak-dṛṣṭi*) and wrong view(s) (邪見 *mithyā-dṛṣṭi*). Views are discussed in all subsequent phases and major manifestations of Indian Buddhism, including early Nikāya Buddhism, Prajñāpāramitā, Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, and Yogâcāra. And although the Sinitic term *gyeon* 見 gradually ceases to carry negative connotations in East Asian Buddhism, it is amply replaced by other synonymous notions, such as that of reified marks 相, distortion 顚倒, and other expressions regarding attachment to personal understandings and removal thereof, which will end up becoming especially visible in the Chan literature. There is much to say about what these views actually are, their various permutations, their causes, and their removal, in the Buddhist tradition. We will return later to address some of these.

What is especially interesting about the notion of views is that the concept is quite readily apprehended with the same fundamental sense by modern philosophical and scientific discourse, as well as in everyday language. There exists a rich discourse on the topic in modern fields of inquiry such as epistemology, behavioral psychology, and even marketing

studies. Even though "views" (beliefs, opinions, etc.) may not be seen by modern scientists and philosophers as the causes of "binding into cyclic existence," they are clearly at the very forefront of our behavioral and cognitive experience, guiding and circumscribing every aspect of our lives. And even as different Buddhist traditions offer varying explanations as to the constitution of views, their formation, their correction, and their relation to other forms of cognitive activity, so do epistemologists, behavioral psychologists, and marketing persons from various schools of thought have their own highly developed language for the discussion of views and beliefs.

For example, among epistemologists, the relationship between "belief" and "knowing" is going to depend upon the brand of epistemology to which one subscribes. The *realist*, convinced that the external world consists of clearly knowable actualities, will sharply distinguish between "belief" and "knowledge." For the *idealist*, as well as for the *constructivist*,[4] the border between belief and knowledge would be much more difficult to demonstrate. Most psychologists, by virtue of the research activity that they pursue, wherein

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[4] In *Scandalous Knowledge,* Smith provides us with a helpful refresher on the meaning of constructivism: " In most informed contemporary usage, including the usage of practitioners, the term 'constructivism' indicates a particular way of understanding the relation between what we call knowledge and what we experience as reality. In contrast to the understanding of that relation generally referred to as 'realism,' constructivist accounts of cognition, truth, science and related matters conceive the specific features of what we experience, think of and talk about as 'the world' (objects, entity-boundaries, properties, categories and so forth) not as prior to and independent of our sensory, perceptual, motor, manipulative and conceptual-discursive activities but, rather, as emerging from or, as it is said, 'constructed by' those activities. In contrast to the prevailing assumptions of rationalist philosophy of mind, constructivist accounts of cognitive processes see *beliefs* not as discrete, correct-or-incorrect propositions about or mental representations of the world but, rather, as linked perceptual dispositions and behavioral routines that are continuously strengthened, weakened and reconfigured through our ongoing interactions with our environments. In contrast to referentialist views of language, constructivist accounts of *truth* conceive it not as a matter of a match between, on the one hand, statements or beliefs and, on the other, the autonomously determinate features of an altogether external world (Nature or Reality), but, rather, as a situation of relatively stable and effective mutual coordination among statements, beliefs, experiences and practical activities. And, in contrast to logical positivist or logical empiricist views, constructivist accounts of specifically *scientific* truth and knowledge see them not as the duly epistemically privileged products of intrinsically orthotropic methods of reasoning or investigation ('logic' or 'scientific method') but, rather, as the more or less stable products of an especially tight mutual shaping of perceptual, conceptual and behavioral (manipulative, discursive, inscriptional and other) practices in conjunction with material/technological problems or projects that have especially wide cultural, economic and/or political importance. " (p. 3-4)

they attempt to measure "known" entities and patterns in quantities, fall directly in the camp of the realist epistemologists, while the way Buddhists talk about views comes quite close to that of constructivists.[5]

At this juncture, we need not attempt to evaluate any of these approaches as possessing greater merit than the others. We only need to recognize that each, because of its own approach, brings a unique contribution to the discussion — each has its own vocabulary, based on its "viewpoint." Exemplary in this respect is the work done in behavioral psychology, as researchers in that area have found it necessary to make hair-splitting distinctions in the definition of "beliefs" and a range of related terms, such as "attitudes," "opinions," "inferences," and so forth. The vocabularies of belief-studies in other fields — and especially the field that I am trained in — Buddhism, do not always make these distinctions (but Buddhism makes other distinctions), and thus we can enrich our vocabulary and understanding through this interdisciplinary excursion.

Characteristics of Belief and Views

1 . *dṛṣṭi*

The terminology involved here, while on one hand generally understood by any non-specialist, rarely represents stable meanings, depending on the field, mode of discourse, and so forth. The connotations of "view," as a translation of the Sanskrit *dṛṣṭi* (from the root √*dṛṣ* "to see") are in the Buddhist context, often virtually the same as what we understand by the modern English word "belief," especially when used in the negative sense (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*; erroneous view; 邪見), which in the Buddhist texts most of the time refers to mistaken belief systems—usually associated with specific non-Buddhist philosophical or religious traditions,

[5] Some might argue that the Buddhist approach is idealistic, but it would seem that a careful reading of the texts of Yogâcāra and so forth that are deemed by some to be idealist cannot but bear out a most exemplary form of constructivism. For a thorough discussion of this point, see the first chapter of Dan Lusthaus' *Buddhist Phenomenology*.

or distortions and misinterpretations of some aspect of the Buddhist teaching itself. Especially in earlier Indian Buddhism, mistaken views are usually related to some mistaken understanding of causation—how the things of the world come into existence, and the laws by which they are governed. Thus, the representative mistaken views are those of the view of the existence of a controlling, external god, or underlying permanent substrate.

Dṛṣṭi itself, while ending up being used most of the time in Buddhism with negative connotations, is in itself a neutral term, as Buddhism has always taught that there is such a thing as "correct view" (*samyak-dṛṣṭi*). But the content of correct view is, as we will see, not a simple matter.

2 . Behavior

A critically important aspect of the determination between correct and incorrect views is that although the difference between them may be identified in some cases as an arguable distinction in degree of veridicality, the more important factor is, rather than a view's verifiability according to known facts, the effects that behavior according it brings about (and in this sense, we can see why, among modern scientists, it is primarily *behavioral* psychologists who are interested in beliefs). Thus, the behavioral effects of views and beliefs are a substantial aspect of the way they are interpreted and evaluated. Paul Fuller (who has done the most thorough work to date on the role of views in Buddhism) observes: "A wrong view need not be a wrong proposition. It is the tendency of views to become an object of greed and attachment that is important." (*The Notion of Diṭṭhi in Theravāda Buddhism*, p. 81), and "a view can be doctrinally correct, but if, through giving rise to attachment, it distorts the holder's response to the world, it is a wrong-view," and therefore, "The problem is not with what the views assert, but the influence that the view has on the actions of the person who holds the view."

In their conventional (*laukika*) interpretation, right views in Buddhism have to do with the creation of behavior that is *kuśala* (skillful, effective). Thus, "Views are evaluated according to the action they engender." (*Diṭṭhi*, p. 55) "The aim of right view is to cultivate what is *kuśala*." (p. 72), and "Right view is a statement of fact and value; it cannot be achieved without acting according to it." (p. 105).

3 . Truth

Nonetheless, it does remain a fact that beliefs and views are centered around what one takes to be *true*, and thus notions of the notoriously nebulous concept known as *truth* cannot but be an integral part of this discourse.[6]

Thus, truth and behavior are joined together in belief. But truth must be properly understood as not necessarily being directly related to some kind of verifiably objective fact. As B. H. Smith observes: "What we call the truth or validity of some statement — historical report, scientific explanation, cosmological theory, and so forth — is best seen not as its objective correspondence to an autonomously determinate external state of affairs. . . " (*Natural Reflections*, p. 13); "Beliefs are not . . . proposition-like statements." (p. 14). And finally, summarizing the ideas of Ludwik Fleck that form the centerpiece of *Scandalous Knowledge*, she says:

> With respect to the idea of truth, the central implication of Fleckian and post-Fleckian constructivist epistemology is that, although something *like* 'correspondence' is involved in the situations to which we give that name, it is not a matter of an *objective match* between, on the one hand, statements, beliefs, descriptions or models and, on the other hand, a fixed reality, but, rather, a matter

[6] In her three consecutive monographs that focus on belief (listed in the bibliography), Barbara Herrnstein Smith discusses the notion of truth extensively and insightfully, with the most sustained treatment found in the chapter "Netting Truth" in *Scandalous Knowledge*.

> of the production and experience of an *effective coordination* among statements, beliefs, assumptions, observations, practices and projects, all of which are independently mutable but mutually responsive. As pragmatists have always maintained, 'working well' is a key test of the theories or beliefs we call true. The testing, however, is not a discrete act of overt assessment directed toward *already formed* theories or beliefs but a tacit part of the very process of their *being formed* under the specific conditions of their conceptual elaboration, social communication and technological application. Contrary, then, to familiar charges, the pragmatist association of truth with effectiveness does not imply or permit the identification of truth either with personal convenience or with serving the ideological interests of some group. (p. 75-76)

Thus, "the proof is in the pudding." Also, "working well," is not far off from the meaning of the Sanskrit *kuśala*.

4 . Knowledge

One of the main contributions of modern epistemologists is their recognition of the central role that beliefs play in our lives. Fundamentally, all of our discursive interaction with our fellow beings occurs in the context of our worldviews and belief systems: As Hans Rott observes in his study of belief formation: "Most of our reasoning proceeds on the basis of incomplete knowledge and insufficient evidence. Implicit assumptions about the normal state and development of the world, also known as expectations, presumptions, prejudices or defaults, step in and fill the gaps," ("A Counterexample to Six Fundamental Principles of Belief Formation," p. 62) since, "Theories of belief formation are theories just about the processing of information that comes in propositional form" (p. 73), which, as we know, is a very large segment of the information we receive, esp. linguistically.

Some very helpful fine-tuning of the definition of beliefs comes from the behavioral psychologists. As Albarracín et al. broach the topic in the introductory chapter of *The Handbook of Attitudes* (an 826-page tome gathering the articles of 39 scientists in 18 detailed research articles) we find the operative keyword to be that of "evaluation." Beliefs are "cognitions about the probability that an object or event is associated with a given object." Or, "the perceived likelihood that an attribute is associated with an object." Albarracín and Wyer define beliefs in a later chapter as "estimates of the likelihood that the knowledge one has acquired about a referent is correct, or that an event or state of affairs has or will occur." (p. 273). Beliefs also concern "the likelihood that new information one receives about a referent is true." (p. 274) And finally, "the desire to construct an accurate representation of the world." (p. 311) The distinction made between *beliefs* and *attitudes*[7] is that an attitude can also be a belief, but while some beliefs can be verified or falsified, in general, attitudes cannot. Beliefs are differentiated from *inferences*,[8] *opinions*, and *attitudes*. However, whether it be called a belief, attitude, or opinion, all are dealing with cognitive constructs in regard to objective facts or phenomena. (p. 276) The critical difference, however, between the realist psychologists who contributed to *The Handbook of Attitudes* and constructive epistemologists like Smith, is that, for the psychologists, *knowledge* is clearly distinguished from belief, attitude, or opinion. And they go to considerable lengths to clarify this point:

> . . .beliefs pertain to knowledge. That is, they concern the likelihood that one's knowledge about a referent is correct or, alternatively, that this knowledge has implications for a past or future state of affairs. Beliefs can also concern the likelihood that new information one receives about a referent is true. But to say that beliefs *refer* to knowledge is not necessarily to say that beliefs are *part of* knowledge and are stored in memory as such. . . (Albarracín and Wyer, p. 274)

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[7] An attitude is defined in the *Handbook* as "A psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor." (p. 3)

[8] "The construal of the implications of information or knowledge for an unspecified characteristic, based on certain sets of cognitive rules." (p. 278)

> Knowledge is often acquired through direct experience with its referents. It can also be internally generated. That is, it can result from performing cognitive operations on information one has already acquired. Thus, for example, we might infer that a person is sadistic from evidence that he set fire to a cat's tail, and we might conclude that smoking is bad for the health from statistical evidence of its association with lung cancer and heart disease. Or, we could form a mental image from the description of a character in a novel, and we might experience a positive or negative affective reaction to a U.S. President's plan to permit logging in national forests.

Of course, an attentive constructivist/Buddhist is going to have problems with the second paragraph, as the types of inference described seem to come awfully close to the definition given just above that included the central notion of "probability." From this perspective, the relationship between belief and knowledge is more complicated than Albarracín and Wyer understand it to be.

Through her three-monograph series on beliefs, Smith takes us through a wide range of fascinating intellectual debates that have transpired over the past couple of decades: within the humanities fields; between the humanities and natural science; and between academia and the general media. Her most thorough account of the basic processes of belief formation is carried out in the introduction to the first of the three books, *Belief and Resistance*, but most of her core definitions of the positions of epistemological constructivism (which we soon understand to be her approach of choice) are laid out in *Scandalous Knowledge*. *Natural Reflections* takes as its special focus some of the recent debates between science and religion.[9] It is in the

[9] Her fascinating treatments of some of these recent controversies between science and religion are perhaps the most interesting for members of this gathering. Stanley Fish, in his review of *Natural Reflections*, observes: "Her point, stated frequently and in the company of careful readings of those who might reject it, is that while science and religion exhibit different models, offer different resources, display different limitations and enter into different relationships of support and (historically specific) antagonism, they are not, and should not be seen as, battle-to-the-death opponents in a cosmic struggle. Nor are they epistemologically distinct in a way that leaves room for only one of them in the life of an individual or a society: 'There is nothing that distinguishes how we produce and respond to Gods from

introduction to *Scandalous Knowledge* that she makes clear her position regarding the relationship of beliefs and knowledge, which she takes to be virtually non-distinguishable:

> Knowledge/beliefs can be seen as emerging from three interacting sets of forces: individual perceptual-behavioral activities and experiences; general cognitive processes; and particular social-collective systems of thought and practice: Accordingly, the familiar contrast between 'duly compelled by reason' and 'improperly influenced by interests and/or emotions' gives way to the idea that all beliefs are contingently shaped and multiply constrained. Similarly, such familiar distinctions as those between 'objectively valid scientific knowledge' and 'personal opinion' or 'popular superstition' are replaced by the idea that all beliefs are more or less congruent with and connectible to other relatively stable and well established beliefs; more or less effective with regard to solving current problems and/or furthering ongoing projects; and more or less appropriable by other people and extendable to other domains of application. That is, the differences expressed by the classic contrasts — and there certainly are differences, and they certainly are important — are not denied or flattened out (reason is not 'abandoned' for 'irrationalism;' scientific knowledge is not 'equated with' myth or ideology; and so forth), but are reconceived as *variable gradients* rather than fixed, distinct and polar opposites. (Smith's emphasis) (*Scandalous Knowledge*, p. 11)

Thus, according to Smith, "scientific knowledge" and "myth" are gradient, so there is no real border between what we "know" and what we "believe."

5 . Resistance to Change

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how we produce and respond to a wide variety of other social-cognitive constructs ubiquitous in human culture and central to human experience.' Which is not to say that science and religion are the same, only that that their very different efforts to conceptualize and engage with very different challenges have a common source in human capacities and limitations." (*New York Times* Book Reviews, January 18, 2010).

The final essential component of views/beliefs is one for which there is once again general agreement among the disciplines we are taking up for examination here: that is their embeddedness, their inertia, their resistance to change. Indeed, almost a half of the eighteen articles contained in the *The Handbook of Attitudes* deal directly with the problems related to the stark difficulties seen in the prospect of changing, or removing entrenched beliefs. Investigated in *The Handbook* are the roles of such factors as narrative structure, the hardening of beliefs in the face of opposition, memory, persistence over time, attitudes as biasing effects, and so forth. One thing that the contributors to *The Handbook* all seem to take for granted, however, is that "beliefs" can be corrected by "knowledge."

B. H. Smith is fascinated by the phenomenon of resistance to change of beliefs. What is especially interesting in Smith's work, is that for the most part she does not deal with the attitudinal rigidity seen in easily-influenced, uneducated masses — your ordinary man on the street. Rather, her work tends to focus on the resistance to be seen in the minds of those whom we regard to be the most intelligent and educated. The resistance to change in beliefs is especially strong among intellectuals, who tend to hold their positions regardless of the extent to which they are faced directly with powerful argumentation or direct evidence to the contrary. In demonstrating this point, she traces the power of beliefs through the highest echelons of informed scientific, thoughtful intellectuality.

From this perspective, she devotes considerable space to defining and describing such phenomena as "belief-persistence," with qualifying notions such as "selective perception," "confirmation bias," "blindness,""bullheadedness," and "cognitive conservatism," which are the opposite of "cognitive plasticity," and so forth. (*Natural Reflections*, p. 6-7) She also explains, providing numerous examples, how belief systems have a natural "tendency to inertia" (p. 13). What she finds to be of special interest, especially as an academic — and a point that I think many here will readily confirm: "A general resistance to alternative views is an observable effect ... of most established belief-systems and is often especially intense

among advocates of innovative intellectual positions . . .” (*Reflections*, p. 68). Examples of this probably need not be given.

Buddhism takes the importance of the aspect of rigidity and inertia one step further, since the concept of grasping in Buddhism (*grāha* 取, 執) is in many cases, a virtual synonym for views. A view, or belief, can be entirely accurate, but once it is clung to, it becomes *akuśala* (ineffective), creating problems. Paul Fuller stresses this point repeatedly in *The Notion of Diṭṭhi*: “A majority of the *miccha-diṭṭhi* are based on a wrong grasp, on craving ... not on ignorance.” (p. 28) “Wrong views are based upon anything they are attached to, upon anything that they identify with.” (p. 31) “[The] ...essential feature of *miccha-diṭṭhi*: is [that it] is the grasping, attached side of the cognitive process.” And: “a view can be doctrinally correct, but if, through giving rise to attachment, it distorts the holder’s response to the world, it is a wrong-view.” (p. 79) Right view, on the other hand, is “the non-clinging, detached aspect of *prajñā*.” (p. 109) While those conversant with Buddhism might assume that there is nothing special about this way of defining views, Fuller argues that this point is often poorly understood, even by some of the most respected scholars in the field, who have a tendency to drift back to seeing the problematic nature of mistaken views as having to do with their content or verifiability, or as seeing the achievement of some sort of state of “no views” as the real aim of Buddhist practice. We will return to this point in greater detail below.

Belief/View Formation

When it comes to the matter of the formation of views and beliefs, there is again considerable agreement among the three major approaches being taken under consideration in the present paper. However, it is important to be initially aware of the fact that although all three disciplines are referring to the same basic phenomena when they discuss beliefs and views, there is a difference in the particular aspects of views and beliefs in which they have primary interest.

Behavioral psychologists are interested in views as a broad social phenomenon, and thus they focus on everyday beliefs held by members of society, which may be influenced by general social currents, mass media, and so forth. Smith also pays some attention to these aspects, but is professionally more interested in the views that come into conflict in the course of major paradigmatic intellectual shifts, such as the way medical science evolves; the clash between Darwinian Evolution and Intelligent Design, and other conflicts seen at work in the intellectual arenas of academia. Buddhism wants most importantly to distinguish the views that lead one into further suffering from those that lead to liberation. Within this purview, it is very important for Buddhists to identify mistaken assumptions regarding the reality of the surrounding world, as well as the reality of the subject, and to utilize correct views in the removal of these mistaken assumptions. Thus, Buddhism tends to focus on a narrow range of religious and philosophical positions, which tend to be ontological in character, dissembling these from an epistemological standpoint. In this sense there is a noticeable affinity between the approaches of Buddhism and Smith, as distinguished from the objectivist/realist approach of behavioral psychology.

The phenomenon of belief formation is the foremost topic of *The Handbook*, being treated in depth from a variety of perspectives in several articles. The authors show us, not surprisingly, that we form beliefs based on a variety of factors, including our basic cognitive processes, accumulated experiences, etc. (Chapter 12 “Cognitive Processes in Attitude Formation and Change”) We are influenced by factors such as dogmatism and the need for closure (Chapter 14, “Individual Differences in Attitude Change”), and by persuasive communication and rhetoric. (Chapter 15, “Communication and Attitude Change: Causes, Processes, and Effects”) Social influences are of great importance, as beliefs and attitudes are understood as being formed and persisting in cultural and social niches. (Chapter 16, “Social Influence in Attitude and Attitude Change”) For example, the “cultivation effect” of television is well documented, illustrated with such examples as “...frequent soap opera viewers are relatively more likely than infrequent viewers to overestimate the proportion of Americans

who belong to a country club or who have a swimming pool in their back yard." ("Belief Formation, Organization, and Change," p. 300)

The philosopher Hans Rott, as we have seen above, sees belief formation from the perspective of reasoning. "Most of our reasoning proceeds on the basis of incomplete knowledge and insufficient evidence. Implicit assumptions about the normal state and development of the world, also known as expectations, presumptions, prejudices or defaults, step in and fill the gaps." (Rott, "A Counterexample to Six Fundamental Principles of Belief Formation", p. 62) As we will see, Buddhism also sees reasoning (discrimination) as an important part of the process.

Smith discusses belief formation and reification continuously throughout her work, making special note of the role of "epistemic communities" —, or as Ludwik Fleck calls them — "thought collectives" — groups with shared background, inclination, and temperament. Smith also refers to these as the "storehouse of prior inner competencies." (*Reflections*, 68) She also subscribes to the general position that the value of beliefs is borne out by their applicability, and Fleck's account of the series of adjustments of belief constructs that eventually led to an effective treatment for syphilis is held up as a centerpiece.[10] Cognitive dissonance — the basic innate possession of a distinctive set of values and criteria for judgment is the precondition for clashes, since, "the moment the skeptic understood the believer's position exactly as the believer did, or vice-versa, then the difference — and dispute — between them would dissolve."

In the Buddhist texts, we can find occasional hints as to how views and beliefs are formed, but discussion of belief-formation in Buddhism is relatively sparse as compared to explanations of how and why certain views are false, and how they are to be removed. Through various contexts we can infer that Buddhists understand, just as the psychologists

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[10] The treatment of Fleck's fascinating work forms the core for *Scandalous Knowledge*. Fleck was neither a psychologist or philosopher, but nonetheless masterfully articulated a constructivist account for the processes of scientific discovery and truth that is worth a full article treatment in itself. See *Scandalous Knowledge*, Chapter 3: "Netting Truth: Ludwik Fleck's Constructive Genealogy". Smith's account is based on Fleck's own book on the topic, listed in the bibliography.

and epistemologists, that views are formed in contact with cultural and societal norms, and by association with particular epistemic communities. At a more internal level of the cognitive process, it is understood that views take form as a reification of mental patterns produced by proliferation (*prapañca*) and dichotomizing (*vikalpa*). Ian Harris takes note of this process at a number of points in his comparative work on Madhyamaka and Yogâcāra, citing for example, Nāgârjuna's view that "*Vikalpa* further differentiates the basically dichotomized world produced by *prapañca* until definite views or dogmas (*dṛṣṭi*) are formed." (*The Continuity of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism*, p. 19; see also p. 47) Paul Fuller locates a few passages elucidating the causes of views, ranging from internal cognitive functions to societal interactions, listing eight kinds of bases for views: the aggregates, nescience, contact, apperception, applied thought, inappropriate bringing to mind, a bad friend, and the voice of another. (*khaṇḍa* 陰, *avijja* 無明, *phasso* 觸, *saññā* 想, *vitakka* 尋, *ayoniso-manasikaro* 邪念 , *papamitta* 惡知識 , *parato pi ghoso* 他人聲(?)) (*Diṭṭhi*, p. 87; Sinitic equivalents added by me.)

Change, Removal, and Otherwise

To speak of "belief change," is, in most secular and intellectual contexts, to speak of the creation of new beliefs that replace presently-held ones. Thus, from the standpoint of behavioral psychology, most of the factors elaborated as involved in the creation of beliefs are applicable to the process of changing them. One key element that stands out in this perspective is that of *persuasion*, and it is in regard to this particular area that the people in marketing have the most interest in the fruits of the research of behavioral psychologists on belief and attitude formation. The change in beliefs must be beneficial to *someone*, even if not the subject herself. In any case, belief change is possible, even if difficult, and there are ways of doing it, the principal being those of rhetorical strategy and change of social environment.

Smith, on the other hand, is interested more in the mechanisms and factors involved in *resistance* to change. Her position about this quality is somewhat neutral, since the beliefs we presently hold may well be well-tested, and leading to good results for some period of time, thus bearing out their merits, and should not be abandoned so easily. The dissonance of incommensurate beliefs also contains with it the potential to bring about something better. She writes:

> In the confrontation between belief and evidence, belief is no pushover. And yet beliefs do change—evidently in response to, among other things, evidence. Taken together, these two observations are not controversial. The urging of one in opposition to the other, however, together with different ways of explaining each, marks a perennial debate pursued in our era as constructivist-interactionist accounts of knowledge, scientific and other, versus more or less traditional (rationalist/realist) epistemologies. . . there is no obvious way to adjudicate objectively (in the classic sense) among them, no evidence that would demonstrate conclusively the correctness of just one of them, no logical analysis that would expose, once and for all, the flaws, failures, or fallacies at the heart of each of the others. It does not follow, however, that these efforts are futile or that the conflicting sides must remain forever constituted and divided exactly as before. For—and this is the second point to be noted—at the level of both individual cognitive activity and general intellectual history, the mutual abrasions of mutually resistant beliefs, in interaction with other events and contingently emergent conditions, may yield significant and relatively stable modifications of each and, thereby, significant and relatively stable *new* cognitive configurations and intellectual alignments. This recurrent possibility implies, among other things, that we may speak of conflicting and apparently incommensurable beliefs (theories, accounts, interpretations, and so on) as crucially and (from some perspectives)

> profitably *affecting* each other without having to maintain that one (and only one) of them must or could be, in the classic sense, correct. (*Belief and Resistance*, p. 39)

Buddhism and the Non-Abiding in Views

Once we reach this stage of the discussion, we return to Buddhism on a somewhat different terrain. There is a sense in which Buddhism can be said to be about *nothing else* than changing of views. But whereas the secular discourse of the philosophers and psychologists introduced above tends to take the approach of replacing presently-held ineffective views with better ones, or at least some kind of adjustment of one's present view to a more workable one, the Buddhist approach operates from two distinct levels. The approach of the first level is fairly close to that just described above, in that Buddhist practitioners are led to adjust inaccurate and unworkable understandings of such matters as causation with a more accurate view of causation, or of reality. But the second level takes a far more radical (or transcendent, *lokôttara*) position, wherein the active creation of a replacement view to which to adhere is entirely discouraged. Thus, rather than advocating a change in one's views (e.g., from improperly understood causality to properly understood causality), the problematic nature of views in themselves is emphasized. This does not mean, however, that Buddhism is advocating the utter *eradication* of views. This would be impossible, since the human cognitive process cannot operate without some kind of framework.

One of Fuller's core arguments is that the *lokôttara* approach to views in Buddhism is often misunderstood, or misrepresented, as having the goal of attaining a "viewless" state. Fuller maintains that this is a misunderstanding, based on a lack of recognition of the basic problem with views: it is not their content that is problematic: it is the attachment to the position itself that is problematic. Another major argument pursued by Fuller seeks to correct the misperception that Pali Buddhism only understood the first, conventional treatment of

views — the "conversion" from some incorrect way of seeing the world (such as belief in an ātman) to a correct way of seeing the world (such as a belief in anātman). The assumption has been made by many scholars, that pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism only worked from the first paradigm — i.e., the understanding that there is actually something that can be called "correct view(s)" which is a positive counterpart to the plethora of incorrect views.[11] The more radical approach, germane to most forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism (but which Fuller demonstrates to also be well-understood in Pali Buddhism) is that the real meaning of *samyak-dṛṣṭi* — correct view — is not the simply the adoption of a Buddhist view of causality. And it is certainly not the utter eradication of views, but instead a mental state of non-attachment to any particular view. Any view at all is by nature a rigid reification, an empty shell, or a rigid wall, that functions to jam up the function of the naturally free-flowing mind, preventing it from adapting to the naturally free-flowing world. Here we are beginning to reach to the core of the notion of views in Buddhism.

Views are emphasized very early in the Buddhist literature, being referred to as the critical component of the eightfold path, where "right view" is the key for the function of the rest of the aspects of the path. As the earliest Buddhist literature develops, "wrong views" become defined in a range of ever-widening categories, primarily as ontological positions and practices adhered to by non-Buddhist philosophers and religious adherents, as well as views regarding the carrying out of practices that can be seen as basically Buddhist, but which tend to be harmful when they are attached to exclusively, or carried out to extremes. In common with the behavioral pyschologistic understanding, as well as the analyses of B.H. Smith, the critical point regarding views is not whether or not they are logically or factually accurate. Rather, it is the results that are engendered from their adherence that makes them either useful (skillful, *kuśala*) or harmful (*akuśala*). Thus, as Fuller notes early on, "Right view is *practiced* — not 'believed in.'" (p. 11). False paths are proved false by their outcomes. "The problem is

[11] P. S. Jaini, for example, argued this position in his "*Prajñā* and *dṛṣṭi* in the Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma", which Fuller takes up for refutation.

not with what the views assert, but the influence that the view has on the actions of the person who holds the view." (p. 89)

This point is readily understandable from examples in everyday life. In most cases, no one cares, or especially notices, if someone is a Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, etc. But when someone is deeply and rigidly attached to the dogma one of these religions, there arises potential for conflict and harm. In the same way, the approaches toward healing of holism, modern scientific medicine, chiropractic, Āyur-veda, etc., may all be considered as individually valid. But if a person insists on adhering to one approach rigidly in every case, things probably won't go so well. Endless examples can easily be imagined.

Another related quality of wrong views that is especially emphasized in Buddhism, is that in their place as cognitive activities, they are not *purely* cognitive, as there is inevitably some kind of *desire* involved. Thus, no matter what, the expression of a view is seen to be an expression of some kind of craving. This can be seen as the important part of the reason that Śākyamuni is depicted as regularly refusing to answer the various ontological questions put to him by his philosophical opponents. It is not only that the questions are "not practical" as commentators often note. It is that Śākyamuni recognized them as being primarily expressions of desire on the part of their formulators. Thus, "[t]he unanswered questions 無記[12] put to Śākyamuni are not pure questions, the answers to which will significantly impact the personal behavior of the questioners; rather, they are expressions of craving. This is true of all views." (*Diṭṭhi*, p. 124)

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[12] The standard list for the unanswered questions includes fourteen questions 十四無記 based on the reified views of the non-Buddhist philosophers to which the Buddha made no reply. They are forms of: all is permanent 世間常, impermanent 世間無常, both permanent and impermanent 世間亦常亦無常 or neither permanent nor impermanent 世間非常非無常; the world is finite 世間有邊, the world is infinite 世間無邊, both 世間亦有邊亦無邊, neither 世 間非有邊非無邊; the Tathāgata exists after death 如來死後有, he does not 如來 死後無, both 如來死後亦有亦非有, neither 如來死後非有非非有; after death we have the same body (or personality) and spirit 命身一, or body and spirit are different 命身異. This set, with variations, appears in a number of places in the Buddhist canon, but is often cited from the 27th chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* (中論) T 1564.30.30c4. [Source: *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*]

In summary then, the three major defining characteristics for views in Buddhism are (1) their being cognitive processes to which one is deeply attached, (2) their being in themselves, expressions of desire, and (3) their bringing about unwholesome results in behavior in their accordance.

The Root of Views: Reification

Views, once established, inevitably become fixed. Thus, although Buddhist philosophers ended up enumerating as many as sixty-two views[13] involving a range of extremes in ontological positions practices, there is one type of "view" in particular that is crucial. This is the basic mental function of reifying entities, whether these be self or objects, called in Sanskrit *satkāya-dṛṣṭi*. This refers to the preconscious mental habit of all unenlightened people to assemble groups of raw sensory factors and unify them as a single notion, eventually resulting in a concept expressible in linguistic terms. The most fundamental forms of reification are those of reifying apperceptions of self and objects, eliciting the notions of "I" and "mine," etc. It is understood that it is based on this function that the rest of the more complex views and beliefs can come into existence. Thus, in comparison with other more complex *dṛṣṭi*s (views, beliefs, opinions), *satkāya-dṛṣṭi* is qualitatively different, and is

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[13] 六十二見: *sixty-two (mistaken) views* These are principally elucidated in the *Sūtra on the Brahma's Net of Sixty-two Views* 梵網六十二見經:(1) four kinds of eternalism, *śaśvat dṛṣṭi* 常論 (四種); (2) four kinds of dualistic eternalism and non-eternalism, *ekatya śaśvat dṛṣṭi* 亦常亦無常論 (四種); (3) four views of the world being finite or infinite, *antânanta dṛṣṭi* 邊無邊論 (四種); (4) four kinds of equivocation, *amara vikṣepa vāda* 種種論 (四種); (5) two doctrines of non-causality, *adhicca samutpāda vāda* 無因而有論 (二種). In terms of speculation on the future, there are wrong views in five categories of forty-four ways: (1) sixteen kinds of belief in the existence of cognition (*saṃjñā*) after death, *uddharma āghātanika saṃjñā vāda* 有想論 (十六種); (2) eight kinds of belief in the non-existence of cognition after death, *uddharma āghātanika asaṃjñi vāda* 無想論 (八種); (3) eight kinds of belief in the existence of neither perception nor non-perception after death, *uddharma āghātanika naivasaṃjñā nāsaṃjñā vāda* 非有想非無想論 (八種); (4) seven kinds of belief in annihilation, *uccheda vāda* 斷滅論 (七種); (5) five kinds of mundane nirvāṇa as realizable in this very life, *dṛṣṭa dharma nirvāṇa vāda* 現在泥洹論 (五種). Other versions and arrangements of the sixty-two can be found in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra* 維摩經, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* 俱舍論 and so forth. [Source: *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*]

not even really a "view" in the same sense as other political, religious, or practical beliefs, which operate at a conscious level. Fuller extensively elaborates on the primacy of *satkāya-dṛṣṭi* (Pali *sakkaya-diṭṭhi*) and its role as the source for the production of the other views.[14]

Views within the Levels of Consciousness: the Yogâcāra Contribution

Although the subtlety and the primal function of *satkāya-dṛṣṭi* is clearly elaborated by Fuller, what is not yet explained in the Nikāyas or even in the Abhidharma is exactly *why satkāya-dṛṣṭi* is so difficult to approach through contemplative techniques, or to rectify through other habit-changing religious practices. This explanation comes with the development of the advanced philosophy of mind of Yogâcāra.

Concerning views as a whole, Yogâcāra streamlines the sets of views of fourteen, twenty-eight, sixty-two, etc., reducing these into five major types:

1. *Identity view* — (or "reifying view," "entifying view,") etc. This is the *satkāya-dṛṣṭi* 身見 discussed just above.
2. *Extreme views* — 邊見, which is attachment to the positions derived from either eternalism or nihilism (*antaparigraha-dṛṣṭi*).
3. *Mistaken views* — 邪見, wherein — in any number of ways — one does not properly acknowledge the relationship of cause and effect (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*).
4. *Views of attachment to views* — 見取見, i.e. holding rigidly to one view in particular. (*dṛṣṭi-parāmarśa-dṛṣṭi*).
5. *Views of rigid attachment to the precepts* — 戒禁取見. Views that the austerities, moral practices and vows of non-Buddhist schools can lead one to the truth (*śīla-vrata-parāmarśa-dṛṣṭi*); or, an excessive or misguided attachment to the Buddhist code of morality.

The final four here subsume the gamut of the sixty-two views.

[14] See esp. pages, 26-28.

One of the most important contributions of the Yogâcāra school was their analysis of the mind into eight distinguishable regions of consciousness, and within this, the making of the all-important distinction of subconscious and conscious regions. The conscious region was seen to consist of the five sense activities, along with the conceptualizing aspect of the waking mind (called *manovijñāna*), which, through language and images, deals with the everyday world of experience. The unconscious level was distinguished into the two aspects of: (1) storage of experiences (*ālayavijñāna*) and (2) primitive but powerful thinking centered on self-identification and the evaluation of personal advantage or disadvantage (*manas*). The Yogâcāras also made the important development of identifying the source of delusive thinking in the form of *parikalpita* ("everywhere schematizing") referring to a basic dichotomizing tendency of the mind to seek out and establish entities on top of a world that is in fact perfectly fluid, and thus without entities. Thus function is basically synonymous with that of the *satkāya-dṛṣṭi*.

The most important insight yielded here for the purposes of our discussion, is the location of the function of the various kinds of views within the scheme of these layers of consciousness. The latter four of the five views were all seen as functioning within the sixth, *mano* consciousness — the conceptualizing consciousness of everyday waking awareness. This means that even if these views are powerfully embedded, we do nonetheless have conscious awareness of them, access to them, so that it should be theoretically possible to change these views through conscious effort. The *satkāya-dṛṣṭi*, however, originates in the subconscious *manas*, which means that we are already reifying things into discrete apperceptual units before we are aware of it. Once apperceptions reach the conscious level of awareness, names are applied, and the process of reification is already complete. This being the case, according to Yogâcāra, the counteracting of the activity of this "view" can only be carried out by an advanced meditation practitioner who has gained experiential access to the subconscious levels of his/her own mind. In other Buddhist traditions, it may be thought that the activity of the *satkāya-dṛṣṭi* can be countered by a deep and profound experience of faith.

In any case, since all views are rooted in *satkāya-dṛṣṭi*, this offers a clear explanation of why views, in general, are not readily changed. The roots of view-formation lie in the subconscious.[15]

Relying on the Yogâcāra analyses, we can also come to a better understanding of the precise cognitive character of views and beliefs. Since their most fundamental attribute is that of reification of frameworks created through the process of discrimination (*vikalpa*), they end up functioning as imposed templates, as it were, framing the way we see the world, limiting our view. We see something like the way one sees through a tube, like the narrow view of a telescope, microscope, or any other kind of scope. In this sense, as with these instruments, while they allow us to focus on something, they at the same time limit knowing, and are thus involved in the narrowing of our cognitive experience. Their opposite, as *samyak-dṛṣṭi*, is *prajñā* ("wisdom"). It is perhaps not surprising that some of the more substantial discussions of *dṛṣṭi* take place in the context of examinations of *prajñā*. Commenting on the relationship between *dṛṣṭi* and *prajñā*, Dan Lusthaus notes:

> First, [*prajñā*] signifies the clear and efficacious formulation and comprehension of Buddhist perspectives (*samyak-dṛṣṭi*). Not only must the correct views be engendered and nourished, but more importantly one must investigate how it is that views (*dṛṣṭi*) are engendered and nourished in the first place. Thus *dṛṣṭi* . . . signifies more than views or opinions, or even the mere holding of certain views. Etymologically implying a 'way of seeing,' 'point of view' or 'perspective,' *dṛṣṭi* is the imposition of limitations — imposed by the dynamics of the interrelation between horizons and a focal center —that invariably constitute any perspective. *Dṛṣṭi* signifies a partial vision, a limiting and limited perspective whose 'partiality' insists on appropriating by means of a reduction, in spite of the fact that what it

[15] For detailed explanation of how certain types of afflictions are based in the *manas* and are therefore difficult to remove, see Tagawa Shun'ei *Living Yogâcāra*, esp. Chapter 6: "The Deep Self Absorbed in Selfishness."

> appropriates can never be reduced to factors within the confines of its horizons. *Dṛṣṭi* implies a cognitive tropology, i.e., a program of tropological displacements and substitutions that ubiquitously reduces experience to an implicit, presupposed 'order of experience,' such that experience becomes reduced and constricted within the margins ascribed by the closure of that 'order.' . . . *Dṛṣṭi* is not just a view about a certain thing, but the manner by which views constitute one's orientation to and understanding of whatever goes on in the world . . . *Dṛṣṭi*s are the defensive stopgaps we use in our attempts to fill in the gaping abyss of anxiety that marks our nescience. (*Buddhist Phenomenology*, p. 115-116)

Thus, in Buddhism, ultimately no view of any type is to be held to as such — and one might even say that the entire purpose of the Buddhist teachings is to show people how to avoid clinging to views. Paul Fuller rightly observes that Buddhism has been consistently "anti-thesis," and that it is the avoidance of entrapment in views that it is more than anything concerned with. Thus, he states that "This aspect of the Buddhist teachings is important to my argument. It suggests that Buddhist doctrines should not be used to change the world, but to change the way we view the world." (p. 126).

East Asian Trends

As Buddhism develops in East Asia, the term used translate *dṛṣṭi* into Sinitic Buddhism — 見 (Ch. *jiàn*, K. *gyeon*; J. *ken*), moves away from its mostly negative usage back to neutral, and often positive connotations, as in the meaning of 知見 ("insight"), etc. But the emphasis on the avoidance of entrapment in views as the core of practice does not at all fade away. If anything, it gains intensity, with the vocabulary for the expression of the concept of attached, or reified view both shifting and diversifying. One of the notions already prevalent in a wide range of Indian texts was that of *nimitta*, or *lakṣaṇa*, rendered into Chinese as 相. In this case, it is the objective aspect of the process, the "seen part" that is being emphasized as

something that should not be attached to. One of the most concentrated exercises in the cultivation of non-abiding in reified concepts is found in the *Diamond Sūtra*, which ends up becoming one of the most important texts in Korean Seon Buddhism. There, the Buddha says to Subhūti:

> Why is [it that these persons are able to give rise to real faith]? It is because these sentient beings do not again [abide in] the notions of self 我相, person 人相, sentient being 衆生相, or life span 壽者相 . Nor do they abide in the notions of the dharma, or the notions of non-dharma. Why? If these sentient beings their minds grasp to these notions, then they will cling to self, person, sentient being, and life-span. If they grasp to the notions of phenomena, they will attach to self, person, sentient being, and life span. Why? If they grasp to the denial of dharmas, then they will attach to self, person, sentient being, and life span. Therefore one should not grasp to dharmas, and one should not deny dharmas. Expressing this, the Tathāgata always teaches: 'Monks, understand my correct teachings to be like a raft.' If even my correct teachings are to be abandoned, how much more incorrect teachings? (T 235.8.749b5-b11)

As we can see, it is not the ontological notions of self and so forth that are in themselves problematic; if so, then it would be quite right and efficacious to deny them. But it is the clinging to them that is problematic. Then, toward the end of the sūtra, the Buddha restates the same point, this time using the word *dṛṣṭi* 見 instead of *nimitta* 相 .

> Subhūti, if someone claims that I teach the view of self 我見, view of person 人見, view of sentient being 衆生見, or view of life span 壽者見, what would you say? Has this person understood the point of my teaching?
>
> World Honored One, this person has not understood the point of the Tathāgata's teaching. Why? What the World Honored One has explained as the view of self,

> view of person, view of sentient being, and view of life span, are actually not a view of self, view of person, view of sentient being, or view of life span. Therefore they are called view of self, view of person, view of sentient being, and view of life span. (T 235.8.752b16-21)

Views in Zen and Their Disposal

In the development of East Asian Buddhism, we can say that it is the Chan/Seon/Zen schools whose literature becomes completely focused on the non-abiding in views above all other practices, and it is no accident that texts such as the *Diamond Sūtra* become mainstream in the tradition. The Chan school's own scriptures, such as the *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment* and *Platform Sūtra* also become distinctly focused on the problem of reification of views. The *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment*, while re-examining the four signs of the *Diamond Sūtra*, also in its teaching of the two hindrances explains them to be nothing but reifications, with the most dangerous reifications being those of spiritual insights—incomplete awakenings—which can turn into enormously powerful new views and beliefs, damaging both oneself and those one presumes to take on as students. The *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment* also admonishes students not to fall into the "four maladies" 四病: the "doing malady" 作病, the "going along with things as they are" malady 任病, the "śamatha" malady 止病, and the "annihilationist" malady 滅病. Each one of these is actually a valid approach to practice, taught somewhere in the Buddhist canon. But when a practitioner adheres to one of them as "the way to salvation" s/he ends up bringing about *akuśala* effects. Here, "malady" 病 can be taken as synonymous with "view" 見.[16]

Examples in Chan, Seon, and Zen literature of attempts to undermine attachment to views are endless once one begins to look for them. Perhaps the most rarefied examples can be seen in the Zen kōan and encounter literature, where we have case after case presenting

[16] See *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment* 221-224; T 842.17.920b20-29.

masters going as far as to force students to express their views — though they may be hesitant to do so — and then snatching them away and hitting them over the head with them. The answer can never be right, since, of course, what the student is expressing (unless he is enlightened like his teacher) can never be anything but another view. Thus, the famous admonition of the commentary to the first case of the *Gateless Barrier*:

> So then, make your whole body a mass of doubt, and with your 360 bones and joints and your 84,000 hair follicles, concentrate on this one word *mu*. Day and night, keep digging into it. Don't consider it to be nothingness. Don't think in terms of 'has' or 'has not.' It is like swallowing a red-hot iron ball. You try to vomit it out, but you cannot. Gradually you purify yourself, eliminating mistaken knowledge and attitudes you have held from the past. Inside and outside become one, and you are like a dumb person who has had a dream. You know it for yourself alone. Suddenly *mu* breaks open. The heavens are astonished; the earth is shaken. It is as though you snatch away the great sword of General Kuan. When you meet the Buddha, you kill the Buddha. When you meet Bodhidharma, you kill Bodhidharma. At the very cliff-edge of birth and death, you find the Great Freedom. In the six worlds and in the four modes of birth, you can enjoy a samādhi of frolic and play. So, how should you work with it? Exhaust all your life-energy on this one word *mu*. If you do not falter, then it's done! A single spark lights your Dharma candle. (*Taking the Path of Zen*, p. 96)

Whether or not the dog has the buddha-nature is not necessarily the point — yet it is not a question that should be avoided, either. Whatever the answer might be, it can never be met or held through a view. That, without a doubt, is Zhaozhou's real point.

In the end this discourse ends up being weighted heavily in the Buddhist direction. But then again, views and beliefs are something to which Buddhism, as primarily an epistemologically oriented set of behavioral practices, has paid deep attention. At the same

time, we can see great overlap with the understandings of belief formation seen in modern scientific research as well as modern-day secular philosophy, most importantly in constructivist epistemology. In this sense, these three disparate traditions may have something to offer one another in terms of vocabulary, insight, and cross-fertilization.

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