An Inquiry into Views, Beliefs and Faith: Lessons from Buddhism, Behavioural Psychology and Constructivist Epistemology

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Published online: 20 Mar 2018.

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AN INQUIRY INTO VIEWS, BELIEFS AND FAITH: LESSONS FROM BUDDHISM, BEHAVIOURAL PSYCHOLOGY AND CONSTRUCTIVIST EPISTEMOLOGY*

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ABSTRACT
The causes of disagreements between individuals, social groups, cultural groups, political parties, and nations can be traced down to the basic human tendency to give form to – and to reify views, beliefs, and opinions. With this being the case, I would like to ask the question: what, exactly are 'views' (including here such overlapping categories as 'opinions', 'beliefs' and 'attitudes',)? How, exactly, do we give form to them? Why is it so difficult to change, or get rid of them? The Buddhist tradition since the time of its inception, has been greatly concerned with the matter of identifying 'false views' and replacing them with 'correct views'. But serious and insightful research into the formation and maintenance of views and beliefs is by no means limited to Buddhism. It has been a topic of great concern in the past century to a wide range of secular researchers: social and behavioural psychologists; literary theorists and epistemologists; scientists and marketing strategists. What the specialists in these various fields have to say about beliefs is diverse – and yet there is much overlap. The ways in which they overlap are thought-provoking, and their differences are revelatory. In this paper, I investigate a few prominent approaches to the study of views and beliefs, and show how these various approaches can do much to fill in each other's discourse. Finally, I reframe the Mahayana Buddhist notion of 'correct faith' within the context of this exploration of views.

Views: everyone has them

The concept of 'view' (including here such overlapping notions as 'opinion', 'belief' and 'attitude') is perhaps one of the most universally understood in the realm of human activity, as everyone possess a very clear notion of a certain type of predominating cognitive activity, which when seen in our ourselves, is

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usually taken to be based on facts and experience, and when observed in others, is often perceived as an idiosyncratic, conditioned, influenced, unproven, and often, a rigid and narrow way of apprehending the world and acting within it.

The problem of views is one of significantly greater importance in Buddhism as compared to other religious and philosophical traditions, as the most fundamental problem confronting unenlightened sentient beings in Buddhism is an epistemological one – our distorted way of knowing the world. Thus, views are discussed extensively from the very earliest strata of Buddhist literature, mainly in terms the distinction between right view(s) (Skt. *samyag-dṛṣṭi*; Ch. *zhengjian* 正見) and wrong view(s) (Skt. *mithyā-dṛṣṭi*; Ch. *xiejian* 邪見). Views are a seminal topic in all subsequent phases and major schools of Indian Buddhism, including Nikāya Buddhism, Prajñāpāramitā, Abhidharma, Madhyamaka and Yogâcāra. And although the Sinitic term *jian* 見 gradually ceases to carry negative connotations in East Asian Buddhism, it is amply replaced by other synonymous notions, such as 'conception' (*xiang* 相, 想), 'cognitive distortion' (*diandao* 顛倒) and other expressions that express attachment to personal understandings. There is much to say from the perspective of the Buddhist tradition about how these views are constituted, their various permutations, their causes and their removal. But views are a topic of interest not only for Buddhist scholiasts.

What is especially interesting about 'views' is that the concept is quite readily understood 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, behavioural psychology, political science and even marketing studies. Even though 'views' may not be seen by modern scientists and philosophers as the causes of 'binding into cyclic existence', (as they are seen in Buddhism) they are clearly at the very forefront of our behavioural and cognitive experience, guiding and circumscribing every aspect of our lives.

But when it comes to more precise definitions of views and belief, such as their relationship to notions such as 'truth', or 'knowledge', or 'reality', striking differences can be seen in the analyses given by researchers from various fields. Among epistemologists, the relationship between 'belief' and 'knowing' is going to depend upon the brand of epistemology to which one subscribes. The *realist*, assuming that the external world consists of distinctly knowable actualities, will clearly distinguish between 'belief' and 'knowledge', attributing a higher level of veridicality to the latter. For the *idealist*, as well as for the *constructivist*, the boundaries between belief and knowledge are more difficult to establish. Most psychologists, by virtue of the research activity that they pursue, wherein they attempt to measure 'known' entities and patterns in quantities, tend towards the camp of the realist epistemologists, while the way Buddhists talk about views comes quite close to that of constructivists.[1]

Characteristics of belief and views

The Buddhist view: dṛṣṭi

In Buddhism, the connotations of 'view', as a translation of the Sanskrit *dṛṣṭi* (from the root √*dṛṣ* 'to see') are often virtually the same as what we understand by the modern English word 'belief', especially when used in the negative sense of 'erroneous view' (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*; *xiejian* 邪見), which in the Buddhist texts usually refers to either mistaken non-Buddhist belief systems such as Brahmanism, or distortions and misinterpretations of some aspect of the Buddhist teaching itself; for example, the view that one can be liberated by perfect adherence to moral discipline. Especially in earlier Indian Buddhism, mistaken views usually refer to some mistaken (non-Buddhist) understanding of causation. Thus, the representative mistaken views are those of the view of the existence of an eternal, indelible 'self' (*ātman*), or of an underlying permanent substrate (*brahman*).

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

Behaviour

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 a provable distinction in terms of veridicality, the more important factor is, rather than a view's verifiability according to known facts, the effects that behaviour according it brings about (and in this sense, we can see why it is mainly *behavioural* psychologists who are interested in belief formation). Thus, the behavioural effects of views and beliefs are a substantial aspect of the way they are interpreted and evaluated. Paul Fuller (the scholar who has done the most thorough and concentrated work to date on the role of views in Buddhism) observes: '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'. (Fuller 2005, 81)

Truth

Nonetheless, beliefs and views naturally tend to be centred around what one at least *takes to be true*, and thus notions of the nebulous concept known as *truth* cannot but be an integral part of this discourse,[2] with the final outcome being that truth and behaviour are joined together in belief. But truth itself must first be properly understood as not necessarily being directly related to some kind of verifiably objective fact. As Barbara 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… (Smith 2009, 13)

'Beliefs are not … proposition-like statements' (14). And finally, summarising the ideas of Ludwik Fleck[3] that form the centrepiece 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 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. (Smith, 2006, 75–76)

Thus, 'the proof is in the pudding'. Coincidentally, 'working well' is what is implied by the Sanskrit *kuśala*, the term that designates the goodness, or appropriateness of behaviour in the Buddhist moral system.

Knowledge

One of the main contributions of modern epistemologists to this conversation 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', (Rott, 2005, 62) since, 'Theories of belief formation are theories just about the processing of information that comes in propositional form' (73), which, as we know, is a very large segment of the information we receive, especially through language.

Some very helpful insights into the definition of beliefs come from the field of behavioural psychology. As Albarracín et al. broach the topic in the introductory chapter of *The Handbook of Attitudes* (a massive 826-page tome that assembles the research of 39 behavioural scientists – all on this topic.) 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'. (Albarracín, 273). Beliefs also concern 'the likelihood that new information one receives about a referent is true'. (274) And finally, 'the desire to construct an accurate representation of the world'. (311) The distinction made between *beliefs* and *attitudes*[4] is that an attitude can also be a belief, but while some beliefs can be verified or falsified, in general, attitudes cannot. Beliefs are also differentiated from *inferences*,[5] *opinions*. However, whether it is called a belief, attitude, or opinion, all are dealing with cognitive constructs in regard to objective facts or phenomena. (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 realists, *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… (Wyer and Albarracín 2005, 274)

> 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.

An attentive constructivist or 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 seems to be more complicated than Albarracín and Wyer understand it to be.

Through her three-monograph series on beliefs, Barbara 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 mass 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* (1997), 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* (2006). *Natural Reflections* (2009) takes as its special focus some of the recent debates between science and religion.[6] It is

in the 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; Smith, 2006, 11)

Thus, according to Smith, 'scientific knowledge' and 'myth' are relative points on an epistemic spectrum, meaning that there is no real border between what we 'know' and what we 'believe'.

Resistance to change

The final essential component of views/beliefs is one for which there is once again general agreement among the disciplines we are taking up here for examination: that is their embeddedness, their inertia, their resistance to change. Indeed, almost a half of the articles contained in *The Handbook of Attitudes* deal directly with the problems related to the 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* uniformly take for granted, however, is that 'beliefs' can be corrected by 'knowledge'.[7]

Smith is fascinated more than anything by the phenomenon of resistance to the change of beliefs. An interesting aspect of her work is that she is not especially concerned about the attitudinal rigidity seen in what we might perceive as the easily influenced, minimally educated man on the street. Rather, she 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 – not so different from the followers of Sarah Palin – often tend to hold their positions even when they are faced directly with powerful argumentation or direct evidence to the contrary (but

also understandably, as they often put great amounts of time and rigour in the establishment of such positions, and are thus reluctant to abandon them too easily.). 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. (Smith, 2009, 6–7) She also explains, providing numerous examples, how belief systems have a natural 'tendency to inertia' (13). What she finds to be of special interest, especially as an academic – and a point that I think many scholars 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 …' (Smith, 2009, 68). Examples of this probably need not be given.

It can be said that the primary concern of Buddhism regarding views is precisely their tendency towards rigidity and inertia, and indeed, the concept of 'grasping' in Buddhism (Sk*t. grāha; Ch. qu* 取, *zhi* 執) is often a virtual synonym for *dṛṣṭi*. 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'. (Fuller, 28) 'Wrong views are based upon anything they are attached to, upon anything that they identify with'. (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'. (79) Right view, on the other hand, is 'the non-clinging, detached aspect of *prajñā*'. (109) While those conversant with Buddhism might assume that there is nothing special about this as a Buddhist 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 veridicality.

Belief/view formation

When it comes to the matter of the formation of views and beliefs, there is again considerable agreement among the major approaches being taken under consideration here. However, it is important to be initially aware of the fact that although researchers from various 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.

Behavioural psychologists are interested in views as a broad social phenomenon, and thus they tend to 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 utilise 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 constructivist approaches of Buddhism and Smith, as distinguished from the objectivist/realist approach of behavioural 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. (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', 300)

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'. (Smith, 2009, 68) She also subscribes to the general position that the value of beliefs is borne out by their applicability, and holds up as a centrepiece Fleck's account of the series of adjustments of belief constructs that eventually led to an effective treatment for syphilis.[8] Cognitive dissonance – the basic innate possession of a distinctive set of values and criteria for judgement

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, discussions of how views are formed can be gleaned here and there, but in fact discussions of the *formation* of beliefs in Buddhism are 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 early Buddhists understood, just as modern-day psychologists and epistemologists, that views are formed through 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 dichotomising (*vikalpa*). Ian Harris took 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'. (Harris 1991, 19, 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. (Fuller 2005, 87)

Change, removal and otherwise

To speak of 'belief change', is, in most secular and intellectual contexts, to speak of the creation of new beliefs to replace presently held ones. Thus, from the standpoint of the behavioural psychologists in the *Handbook*, most of the factors seen to be 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 the Marketing sector have the most interest in the fruits of the research of behavioural 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. She is not insisting that resistance to change is always a bad thing, since the beliefs we presently hold may well be well-tested, and have led 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. (Smith 1997, 39)

Buddhism and the non-abiding in views

Having reached this point in our discussion, we can return to look at Buddhism using some of the analytic tools provided by Smith, Albarracín/Wyatt, Rott and others. From a certain perspective, Buddhism can be said to be about *nothing other* than the 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 in Buddhism is 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. This is called the 'conventional' approach, in Sanskrit a *laukika*, or *saṃvṛti* standpoint. The second level takes a far more radical and transcendent position (in Sanskrit *lokôttara* or *paramârtha*), wherein the active effort towards the creation of a replacement view to which to adhere is seen as futile, since it is precisely the reification of the view that is problematic, and not necessarily the content. 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 emphasised, and thus, a significant portion of Buddhist discourse – most prominently in schools such as Madhyamaka or Zen – but also to be found in a wide range of works of various Buddhist schools, directly advocate the practice of not lingering in any view.

As far as conventional views are concerned, in common with the behavioural pyschologistic understanding, as well as the analyses of Smith, the critical point in their qualitative evaluation 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 (skilful, *kuśala*) or harmful (*akuśala*). Thus, as Fuller notes early on, 'Right view is *practiced* – not "believed in."' (11). False paths are proved false by their outcomes. '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'. (89)

In is in the transcendent notion of views where Buddhism departs from the modern, secular approaches introduced heretofore, since, although Smith, Albarracín/Wyer and others recognise the existence of worse and better views, and Smith recognises reification as an intrinsic aspect of views and beliefs, none of them conceive of, or advocate a 'viewless' state.

Regarding the state of viewlessness, a question sometimes arises as to whether the Buddhist *lokôttara* approach to Right View implies simply not lingering in views, or if it means having no views at all. The answer to this is that the two are the same. Viz., if the defining character of views is none other than reification, then not reifying any views is the same thing as not having any. This more radical approach, germane to most forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism (but which Fuller demonstrates to also be well-understood in Pali Buddhism) is the more profound version of *samyag-dṛṣṭi* – correct view. Any view at all is by nature a rigid reification, an empty shell or a rigid wall, that functions to obstruct the function of the naturally free-flowing Buddha mind, preventing it from adapting to the free-flowing, fluctuating world.

Another point where the Buddhist discussion agrees with these modern secular approaches, and yet provides more thorough definition is in the observation 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 recognised them as being primarily expressions of desire on the part of their formulators. Thus, '[t]he unanswered questions 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'.(Fuller 2005, 124)

View-cum-reification

Although Buddhist philosophers ended up enumerating as many as 62 views involving a range of extremes in ontological positions, 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 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, *satkāya-dṛṣṭi* is qualitatively different,

and is not even really a 'view' in the same sense as other political, religious or practical beliefs, which operate at a conscious level. Therefore, the Yogâcāra school of Buddhism, in its categorisation of views, theorises *satkāya-dṛṣṭi* as functioning at a subconscious level, while most other types of view function at the level of consciousness.[9]

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 almost completely absorbed in the non-abiding in views above all other practices, and it is no accident that texts such as the *Diamond Sutra*, consisting as it does of repeated anti-reifying contemplation exercises, become mainstream in the tradition. The Chan school's own ('apocryphal') scriptures, such as the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* (*Yuanjue jing*) and *Platform Sutra* focus repeatedly on the problem of reification of views. For example, the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, discussing the problem of reification of views, points out that the most dangerous reifications are those of spiritual insights – incomplete awakenings – which can turn into subtle new views and beliefs:

> A great worldling who expounds enlightenment depending on illusion has not yet let go of fixed views. He regards illusion as something which ceases and regards enlightenment as something that manifests, and still keeps the sentiments of loss and attainment, like and dislike. These are called fixed views; they are also 'illusion.' If, at the point where illusion is extinguished and enlightenment is actualized, you again produce mentation and move thought, and believe that illusion has indeed been completely extinguished and that the mind of enlightenment eternally remains, then you have not let go of 'enlightenment' and have fallen into the view of eternalism. Because of this, you do not let go of fixed views and do not free yourself from illusion. Again, if you hear this and again give rise to mentation and set thought into motion, imagining that you have indeed extinguished illusion, and that enlightenment is also nonexistent, then you are following the nihilistic view and are not free from illusion. But if you maintain awareness at the point of the cessation of all illusions and you do not again give rise to mentation and set thought into motion, the mind of enlightenment will be self-apparent. It is like polishing a mirror. When the filth is gone, the brightness appears. This brightening does not come from the outside, nor is it produced from within. The primordial stillness, which is clear and self-luminous, is called 'unchanging.' (Muller 1999, 94)

The *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* also admonishes students not to fall into the 'four maladies' 四病: the 'proactive malady' (*zuobing* 作病), the 'going along with things as they are' malady (*renbing* 任病), the 'cessation' malady (*zhibing* 止病) and the 'annihilationist' malady (*miebing* 滅病). Each one of these in itself actually constitutes 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.[10]

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 best known examples can be seen in the Zen kōan and encounter literature, where we have case after case presenting masters deliberately forcing their 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 to the master's question 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.

Despite differences in degree, it seems safe to say that all of the approaches we have encountered so far – Buddhist and non-Buddhist – share in the understanding that views/beliefs are best handled in a flexible manner. In the examples we gave from literature by behavioural psychologists, epistemologists and conventional-thinking Buddhists, views may be adopted as long as they work well, but should be abandoned when they don't. For transcendent-thinking Buddhists, we should never allow any flow or set of concepts reify into a view, but should instead seek to maintain a continuously fluid state of mind. But how, in fact, would one actually do that? One can meditate and still the mind, but how might it be possible to maintain a fluid state of mind while participating in daily activities? This problem was not lost on Buddhist thinkers, and especially a certain group of Mahāyāna Buddhist thinkers. They knew that in ordinary cases, it was impossible for people to maintain full mental fluidity, that some kind of special power was needed to bring about such a mental state. This power is what we can call the Buddhist notion of *faith*.

Buddhist faith in the context of views

Our having worked through the notions of views and beliefs from a variety of perspectives allows us to now take this as a new type of entry point into the discussion of the notion of faith in Buddhism – with the main point being that discourse on faith[11] in Buddhism can be seen as diverging along exactly the same lines of conventional and transcendent as seen in the discussion of views, and, further, that the transcendent version of correct views and the transcendent version of what is known in Zen Buddhism as correct faith (or 'patriarchal faith') are virtually indistinguishable.

Conventional faith as defined in Abhidharma/Yogâcāra

Among the general types of definitions we find for faith in Buddhism, that which is taken as standard is that of an Abhidharmic/Yogâcāric 'acceptance of reality' (usually the law of cause and effect) on its own terms. In the *Abhidharmakośa*, such a confidence, or acceptance, serves to purify the mind: 'Faith (*śraddhā*) purifies the mind. It is also said that faith implies acceptance of the reality of the truths and the fruition of karma' (T 1558.29.19b2–4).[12] The first part of this

definition is basic and ubiquitous in Buddhist texts – that of faith being a purifying power. Awareness of, along with the acceptance of the law of cause and effect (or, dependent arising, no-self, as the case may be) is, in the context of our earlier discussion, a view consisting of an accurate description of reality – none other than a type of conventional (*laukika*) right view, and so we can see that at this basic stage there is a close relationship between faith and the conventional correct view described earlier in the discussion.

The *Cheng weishi lun* is the text that provides the locus classicus for the definition of faith found in most modern East Asian dictionaries of Buddhism. There, faith is explained as having three aspects: acceptance of reality, believing in merit and providing the motivation to overcome obstacles to enlightenment. The text reads:

> Faith has three distinct aspects. The first is faith in reality. This means that one deeply believes in and accepts true events and principles as they appear as phenomena. The second is faith in the existence of merit. This means that one has profound faith in and enjoyment of the true pure merits of the three treasures. The third is faith in ability. This means that one deeply believes that all mundane and transmundane forms of wholesomeness have a power that is able to produce hope. Through this one is able to counteract those thoughts of nonbelief, and one has a strong will to witness and cultivate mundane and transmundane forms of wholesomeness.[13]

The first aspect of faith explained here in the *Cheng weishi lun*, that of understanding and acceptance of reality, is basically the same as the Abhidharma definition given above. The definition of 'faith in reality' is explained as belief in, and understanding of the proper doctrinal principles of Buddhism, including most importantly, confidence and acceptance of the thoroughness of the law of cause and effect. This means the awareness and acceptance of the fact that there will be consequences for every one of our thoughts, words and actions. It also means that practice will bring about results, also implied in the third aspect of faith. Once again, the faith that is defined here in the *Abhidharmakośa* and the *Cheng weishi lun* is based on the *laukika* understanding of right view – that is, a view based on correct doctrinal explanations of reality.

It is important to note that when we look at the explanations of faith provided in the above-cited Abhidharma and Yogâcāra texts, that these are relatively brief discussions, which do not foreground faith as being of primary importance for practice, and these discussions of faith only constitute a miniscule portion of the vast scholarly Abhidharmic and Yogâcāric discourse. I.e. faith is merely treated along with the other positive mental factors as one item in the list of 75 or 100 factors, not having any special priority over the others in terms of either precedence in order of discussion or in extent.

Transcendent faith in the Tathāgatagarbha/Buddha-nature tradition

The situation regarding faith in the Tathāgatagarbha/Buddha-nature tradition is radically different, as, in these texts, faith is taken to be the primary factor to

be paid attention, to be initialised, to be completed. This is seen, for example, in the oft-cited passage from the *Flower Ornament Sutra*:

> Faith is the origin of the way
> The mother of all merit.
> It develops all wholesome dharmas
> Removes all doubts,
> It reveals and furthers the peerless way.[14]

There is convergence with the definition provided in the *Cheng weishi lun* in the indication that faith furthers good mental factors and dispels doubt. But the labelling of faith as the origin of the way, the mother of all merit and as the revealer of the peerless way – this already puts faith in a category that lies far beyond that seen in the Abhidharmic and Yogâcāra literature.

This prioritisation of faith also has some precedent in Prajñāpāramitā commentarial tradition, the passages of which are cited by later Tathāgatagarbha thinkers. For example, in the *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論 we read:

> In the great sea of the Buddha's teaching, faith is that by which one can enter; wisdom is that by which one can be saved…if one has pure faith then one can enter the Buddha's teachings. One who does not have faith cannot enter the Buddha's teachings.[15]

The texts that would attain the highest degree of popularity in East Asian Buddhism are the ones that tended to offer deeper and more lengthy discussions of faith, which also stress the fact that practice without deep faith is fruitless, and that without faith, wisdom is not attainable. This trend in discourse is epitomised in the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* (*AMF*), which is written none other than for the purpose of generating a powerful and radical form of faith in the minds of its readers. Not to mention the presence of the word 'faith' in the title, the invocation at the beginning of the treatise reads:

> Because I wish to get sentient beings
> To remove their doubt and abandon mistaken attachments,
> And give rise to the correct faith of the great vehicle,
> And not allow the Buddha-lineage to perish[16] […] I deliver this treatise…

Followed directly below by: 'There is a teaching that is able to arouse the root of Mahāyāna faith. Therefore I must explain it'.[17]

The investigation of the meaning of the 'correct faith' foregrounded in the *AMF* is a core theme in Sung Bae Park's *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment*, wherein the question of what 'correct Mahāyāna faith' *is* forms the core of the book's investigations. Park concludes that the correct Mahāyāna faith described the *AMF* is something radically different than the faith introduced in such works as the *Cheng weishi lun* or *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, in that it is not a faith in any kind of object, such as a Buddha, or a principle such as cause-and-effect. Rather, it is an objectless kind of faith, a non-discriminating, profoundly held confidence (which is usually described as being attained in the course of struggling with a commensurate level of doubt) that one's own mind is intrinsically the same as that of the Buddhas. It is not the faith that things will eventually go well, or

that one will spiritually improve based on one's efforts (although these need not be excluded), but the direct realisation of one's innate Buddhahood here and now. (Park 1983, 35–42) Thus, the attainment of correct Mahāyāna faith is fundamentally not different than the attainment of enlightenment itself, and the discussion of this kind of faith is intrinsic to discussions on sudden enlightenment, since the arousing of this kind of radical mode of faith is the critical factor in the attainment of direct awakening.

Thus, the correctness of 'correct faith' (*zhengxin* 正信) is seen not in its being faith in a right doctrine as distinguished from faith in a wrong doctrine. It is the radical difference in mode that makes it correct. The explanation of this distinction can be found in the subsequent Huayan/Chan commentarial tradition, which articulates at length this kind of distinction in faith. Taking the 'correct Mahāyāna faith' of the *AMF* to be a kind of absolute faith, similar to the Christian notion of 'leap of faith' – it is given the label of 'patriarchal faith', which is to be distinguished from 'doctrinal faith' – the *laukika* type of faith articulated in the *Cheng weishi lun* and so forth, which is based on rational structures of doctrine, which posits the possibility of spiritual improvement based on wholesome activity and meditation.

Patriarchal faith

The main source for this term 'patriarchal faith' is a text attributed to the eminent Goryeo Seon monk Jinul 知訥 (1158–1210), Direct Explanation of the True Mind (*Jinsim jikseol*; 眞心直說),[18] where these two kinds of faith are clearly distinguished. This text reads as follows:

> Someone said: ' How do the faith of the patriarchal teaching and the faith of the doctrinal teaching differ?'

> Response: 'They differ significantly. The doctrinal teaching allows humans and celestials to believe in the law of cause-and-effect. Those who want to enjoy the fruits of merit believe in the ten kinds of wholesome actions as the marvelous cause, and that rebirth as a human or celestial is the happy result. Those who enjoy empty quiescence believe in arising and ceasing and causes and conditions to be the correct cause, and take suffering, arising, cessation, and the path to be the noble result. Those who enjoy Buddhahood believe that the practice of the six perfections through the three incalculably long eons are the great cause, and that bodhi and nirvāṇa are their direct result.'

> 'The correct faith of the patriarchal teaching is not like these. One does not believe in all kinds of conditioned causes and effects. It only demands the faith that one is originally Buddha. This nature is originally replete in every single person. The marvelous essence of nirvāṇa is fully perfected in every case. One does not need to look at the provisional other to find what is originally endowed in oneself.' (HBJ 4.715c1–15; T 2019A.48.999b13)[19]

Here, once again, the thick relationship of faith with accurate cognition is made clear. Jinul goes on to cite a number of texts, including the *AMF*, which

state that practice that is not guided by faith cannot but go off course, and cannot be empowered.

Working from the framework of the *Jinsim jikseol*, Park, in *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment* goes on to systematically elaborate the ramifications of this distinction between patriarchal faith and doctrinal faith, relying on scriptural sources, the words of eminent Chan masters and the philosophical observations of some of the great theologians of the West.

Most important for Park is the almost tautological relationship between the notions of patriarchal faith/sudden enlightenment and doctrinal faith/gradual enlightenment. For him, the issue of faith and enlightenment is not a matter to be relegated to the compartment of historical or philological studies, or something to be passed off as a matter of mere 'rhetoric'. It is a vitally important, living issue for any practitioner of Mahāyāna Buddhism who has any notions of his or her practice ever bringing about concrete results.

From one perspective, the possession of correct Mahāyāna faith implies the condition of empowerment that enables one to abide in a state of wordlessness, ineffability. But not as a type of empty dullness or blankness, but rather a sparkling awareness that functions without needing the constraints of linguistic frameworks. And at this point, we have come full circle back to the *lokôttara* interpretation of right view, the maintenance of a state of mind where one is utterly uncompelled to cling to, or base oneself on linguistic fabrications.

Conclusion

I have tried here to present the matter of views/belief/faith, as concepts that are understood in remarkably similar ways by members of different types of scholarly traditions in different ages, as ideas that overlap with each other on a broad continuum. The largest gap seen in the early discussion of views was along the lines of realist versus constructivist; yet for both realists and constructivists it is patently obvious that flexibility in views and beliefs is most desirable condition. And although it is not directly articulated in the writings of Barbara Smith, she would not, it seems, be able to avoid the inevitable conclusion that the most desirable epistemic/psychological condition would be that of *total* flexibility – although she does demonstrate a reticence to advocate the abandonment of views that are 'working well'. The Buddhist transmundane stance takes the discussion to its ultimate conclusion, by telling us that *any* view that we continue to hold onto is eventually going to turn bad, and that the Buddhist liberation resides in none other than the achievement of a state of continual mental fluidity. And finally, East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism in the tradition of the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* asserts that such mental fluidity requires empowerment, in the form of a deep conviction that is actually represented by the mental state of not being in views.

Notes

1. 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 Lusthaus 2002.
2. 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' (Smith 2006).
3. Ludwik Fleck (1896–1961) was a distinguished microbiologist and medical historian – credited with discovering an early cure for syphilis – who took issue with models of scientific discovery that assumed it to be a process of uncovering pre-existent facts. Fleck instead offered a constructivist account of scientific discovery that saw scientific facts as something developing from worldviews.
4. 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'. (Albarracín, 3).
5. 'The construal of the implications of information or knowledge for an unspecified characteristic, based on certain sets of cognitive rules'. (Albarracín, 278).
6. 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 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).
7. But this view is not shared among all social scientists. See, for example, the recent studies by the political scientist, Brendan Nyhan, in 'When Corrections Fail'. He shows, as one example, how the followers of Sarah Palin, when presented with clear documentation of the errors in her rhetoric, tended to side with her even more strongly. Since this time, Nyhan and others have produced a number of articles that further expand on this phenomenon (Nyhan and Reifler, 2010).
8. The treatment of Fleck's fascinating work forms the core for *Scandalous Knowledge*. Fleck was neither a psychologist nor a 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.

9. That is to say, satkāya-*dṛṣṭi* – sometimes rendered as the 'view of a composite self' is theorised as functioning only at the level of the *manas* (seventh) consciousness, while the other kinds of false views function at the level of the *mano-vijñāna* (sixth consciousness). See Tagawa 2009, 61–70.
10. See Muller 1999, 221–224.
11. When I speak of faith in this context, I am not referring to devotional, or other-power forms of faith that we see in Pure Land and so forth, but rather, the kind of Buddhist faith that is taken as a support of basic, self-motivated practice, meditative and otherwise, aimed at liberation.
12. 此中信者。 令心澄淨。 有說。 於諦實業果中現前忍許故名爲信。 This reference is provided in *Bauddhakośa* with a slightly odd translation by Pruden. See < http://www.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~b_kosha/html/index_75dharma.html > .
13. 然信差別略有三種。一信實有。謂於諸法實事理中深信忍故。二信有德。謂於三寶眞淨德中深信樂故。三信有能。謂於一切世出世善深信有力能得能成起希望故。T 1585.31.29b23–29.
14. 信爲道元功德母 增長一切諸善法 除滅一切諸疑惑 示現開發無上道 (T 278.9.433a26–27).
15. 佛法大海信爲能入。智爲能度。如是義者即是信。若人心中有信淸淨。是人能入佛法。若無信是人不能入佛法。T 1509.25.63a1–3.
16. 爲欲令衆生 除疑捨耶執 起大乘正信 佛種不斷故 (T 1666.32.575b16–17).
17. 論曰。有法能起摩訶衍信根。是故應說。(T 1666.32.575b18).
18. Recent research by Choe Yeonsik has called into question the accuracy of the attribution of authorship to Jinul, arguing instead that the text should be ascribed to the Jurchen Chan monk Zhengyan 政言 (d. ca. 1184–1185). See Buswell (2012, 89), which refers to Choe's article 'Jinsim jikseol ui jeojeo e dae han saero un ihae', 77–101.
19. 或曰。祖門之信與教門信有何異耶。曰多種不同。教門令人天信於因果。有愛福樂者信十善爲妙因、人天爲樂果。有樂空寂者、信生滅因緣爲正因。苦集滅道爲聖果。有樂佛果者、信三劫六度爲大因。菩提涅槃爲正果。祖門正信非同前也。不信一切有爲因果。只要信自己本來是佛。天眞自性人人具足。涅槃妙體箇箇圓成。不假他求從來自備。.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Abbreviation

T = Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經

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