

*American Academy of Religion Conference: Atlanta, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2015*

Saturday - 4:00 PM-6:30 PM

Buddhism Section and Buddhist Philosophy Group

Masahiro Shimoda, University of Tokyo, Presiding

**Theme *Dṛṣṭi*: The Problems of Views and Belief in Buddhism**

Saturday - 4:00 PM-6:30

PM Marriott-M103

(Marquis Level)

A. Charles Muller, University of Tokyo

A Comparative Philosophical Approach to a Universal Problem: Views and Beliefs in Epistemology, Psychology, and Buddhism

Rafal Stepień, Columbia University

From the "Cessation of Conceptualization" to the "Abandonment of All Views": An Ultimate Reading of *Mūlamadhyamaka kārikā*

Paul Fuller, University of Cardiff, United Kingdom

*Actions Speak Louder Than Words: The Danger of Attachment to Views in the Pāli Canon and Engaged Buddhism*

Akira Saito, University of Tokyo

*On Satkāyadṛṣṭi*

Responding: Daniel A. Arnold, University of Chicago

Actions speak louder than words: The danger of attachment to views in the Pali Canon and engaged Buddhism

In engaged Buddhism one must base ones political and social actions on the firm conviction that Buddhist doctrines should be used as guiding principles. However, it could be argued that it is not possible to be politically engaged without becoming attached to views. Buddhist social and political engagement is philosophically problematic given the Buddhist idea that views and beliefs are destructive when they become an object of attachment. To be politically engaged there must be a firm conviction in fundamental beliefs and opinions. As is well known, holding rigidly to views and opinions is extremely detrimental on the Buddhist path.

The idea that there is a danger in attachment to views, opinions and beliefs is clear throughout the philosophical history of Buddhism. Notable sections of the *Sutta-nipata*, once described by Luis Gómez, as ‘Proto-Mādhyamika in the Pāli Canon’, continuously stress that any view is a potential object of cognitive attachment. The so-called ‘unanswered questions’ were left unanswered for similar reasons. The Buddha compared his teachings to a raft which should not become an object of attachment. Nāgārjuna expressed similar ideas and this teaching was often emphasised in Chinese and Japanese forms of Buddhism. Borrowing from Christian Theology, these ideas can be described in

terms of cataphatic and apophatic philosophy. In my own research I have used the categories 'opposition' and 'no-views' understandings to describe the dilemma of 'views'. Either right-view stands in opposition to wrong-view, or all views are abandoned. Throughout Buddhist history the danger of holding rigidly to views has been paramount.

Allow me to expand on these basic ideas. The first distinction made in the early Buddhist texts are between views that are 'wrong' (*micchā*) and 'right' (*sammā*). Any view that does not agree with Buddhist doctrine is a wrong-view. Any view that agrees with Buddhist doctrine is a right-view. However, there is also a tradition of Buddhist thought that I have just alluded to, evident in some *Sutta-nipāta* verses (the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and, to a lesser extent, the *Pārāyanavagga*), and certain *suttas* from the *Nikāyas*, that equates 'right-view' with 'no-view' at all. The aim of the Buddhist path is here seen as the overcoming of all views, even right-view. Views, if held with attachment, are wrong-views. Just as objects of the senses are a hindrance, so all views and opinions, both 'wrong' and 'right' are rejected as the means towards the goal of complete non-attachment. The aim of the path is not the cultivation of right-view and the abandoning of wrong-views but the relinquishment of all views, wrong or right.

On the face of it, these understandings are somewhat different. However, it is my argument that the difference is apparent. I will suggest that the early texts do not

understand right-view as a correction of wrong-view, but as a detached order of seeing, completely different from the attitude of holding to any view, wrong or right. Right-view is not a doctrine, a correct proposition, but the correct knowledge of doctrine. Right-view is practised, not adopted or believed in. A true statement, if it is an object of attachment, is a wrong-view even though it is still 'true'. Primarily, wrong-view signifies a form of greed and attachment, a cognitive yearning and craving – at times a philosophical desire for certainty, while right-view signifies the cessation of greed and attachment. Its significance on the Buddhist path is precisely in its accomplishment of sound Buddhist epistemology, of how knowledge should be appropriated. Right-view, therefore, signifies the cessation of craving, not the rejection of *all* views. It is in this way that a correct understanding of views and opinions can be used in politically engaged Buddhism.

Right-view itself can be understood in four ways. First, it consists of knowing that our 'actions have consequences'. It is an acceptance of the law of karma; second, right-view is knowledge of what is wholesome and unwholesome (*kusala/akusala*); third, it is knowledge of the four noble truths (*ariyasacca*) and fourth, it is knowledge of 'dependent-origination' (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). These are the four broadest categories which describe the 'content' of right-view.

Wrong-views, as described in the Pali Canon, can also be understood in relatively simple terms. They are those views that deny that actions have consequences, that deny the law of *kamma* (in so doing they lead to what is unwholesome) and second, they are views about the ‘self’. They take what is not the Self, namely the *khandhas*, to be the self and become attached to them in various ways. Wrong-views disagree with key Buddhist ideas that are proposed by right-view.

Wrong-views *are* primarily a form of attachment, not a type of ignorance. For example in the list of ‘corruptions’ (*āsavas*), views and ignorance are given separately.<sup>1</sup> I would suggest that ‘ignorance’ applies to a lack of knowledge and wrong-views to attachment, often to knowledge itself.

Further evidence for this idea can be found in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* where wrong-view is explained using a stock set of terms ‘the thicket of view’ (*diṭṭhi-gaḥana*), ‘a wilderness of view’ (*diṭṭhi-kantāra*), ‘holding’ (*gāha*), ‘fixity’ (*patiṭṭhāha*), ‘adherence’ (*abhinivesa*), ‘clinging’ (*parāmāsa*), and ‘the hold of the perverted views’ (*vipariyesa-gāha*).<sup>2</sup>

Finally, in the *Diṭṭhi-kathā* of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* the simple question is asked, ‘what is view?’ (*kā diṭṭhi ti*, Paṭis I 135). The answer given is that ‘clinging by adherence is

view' (*abhinivesa parāmāso diṭṭhi*, Paṭis I 135). These three examples suggest that views are a type of attachment, not a form of ignorance.

If wrong-views do not signify a type of ignorance, then it seems to follow that right-view is not essentially a form of knowledge, but a way of seeing the world without attachment or craving.

There is sometimes a tendency in the Pāli canon which focusses on how views influence actions and how actions influence views. Wrong-views, indeed all views, can cause craving and attachment. In the *Brahmajāla-sutta* a 'supramundane' (*lokuttara*), order of seeing, one free from corruptions, is proposed. The text argues that a Buddha understands all views (the famous 62 views are described), he further understands that these 'bases for views' (*diṭṭhiṭṭhānā*),<sup>3</sup> grasped (*gahitā*) and clung to (*parāmaṭṭhā*), lead to a certain future rebirth.<sup>4</sup> A Buddha also understands what transcends (*uttaritaraṃ*)<sup>5</sup> this, yet he does not even cling to that understanding (*taṃ ca pajānanam na parāmasati*), and because of not clinging (*aparāmasato*) he has 'realised within himself the state of perfect peace'.<sup>6</sup> This understanding is an 'insight' and a right-view which transcends views, wrong or right.

These considerations of views and belief cause problems for the politically motivated or engaged Buddhist. At the heart of this problem is that in involving oneself in social and

political structures, or simply in political activity, one is potentially becoming entangled in suffering itself. Some would therefore argue that Buddhism has no political or social message. Indeed, the danger of holding to any fixed opinions makes this a religious and philosophical necessity.

It is then worth examining the psychological problems of holding and obstinately clinging to views, opinions and beliefs. In the study of Buddhism it has often been noted that the teachings do not point to the changing of the world, but to the changing our perception of it – there is nothing wrong with the world, but with the way we perceive the world. The problem of ‘suffering’ (*dukkha*) is not ultimately to do with the world, but with the fact that people tend to grasp and become attached to all sorts of things. The world is seen with greed, hatred and delusion. This aspect of Buddhist teaching suggests that Buddhist doctrines should not be used to change the world, but to change the way we view the world. They should be used to lessen greed, hatred and delusion and, in so doing, solve the problem of *dukkha*. What is needed is a way of ‘seeing’ that eradicates craving. The danger for the engaged Buddhist is that political conviction is often betrayed by rigid opinions leading to suffering.

The *Pāṭali-sutta* is of interest because it does not advocate views that are clearly explained as right-views in other parts of the Nikāyas. In this regard it might suggest ways

in which certain attitudes termed ‘right-view’ are a form of insight, a different order of seeing, not the negation of all views.

The second half of this *sutta* follows a conversation between Pāṭali and the Buddha. Pāṭali informs the Buddha that he has a rest-house and that on certain occasions ascetics and brahmins stay there. He recalls one particular occasion when ‘four teachers holding different views, following different systems’<sup>7</sup> came to stay. Pāṭali then recounts how each teacher ‘taught thus, held this view’ (*evaṃ-vādi evaṃ-diṭṭhi*). The first teacher held the view of nihilism (*natthika-diṭṭhi*, S IV 348), the wrong-view that actions do not have consequences. The second teacher the view of affirmation (*atthika-diṭṭhi*, S IV 348-9), the right-view that actions do have consequences. The third the view of non-doing (*akiriya-diṭṭhi*, S IV 349), the wrong-view that if we act in an unwholesome way, for example kills living being, no wrong is done by the performer of these actions. The fourth the view that there is doing (*kiriya-diṭṭhi*, S IV 349-50), the right-view that if we act in a unwholesome way, for example kill living beings, wrong is done by the performer of these actions.

On hearing these different views, Pāṭali explains to the Buddha that he has doubt (*kaṅkhā*) and uncertainty (*vicikicchā*) not knowing which recluse and brahmin was speaking truth (*sacca*) and which was speaking falsehood (*musā*, S IV 350).<sup>8</sup> The Buddha



replies that though Pāṭali doubts and is uncertain, it is on a doubtful point that uncertainty arose.<sup>9</sup> Pāṭali explains to the Buddha that he has much trust (*pasanna*) in him and asks for a teaching whereby his ‘doubt will be abandoned’.<sup>10</sup> The Buddha explains that there is a concentration of mind (*citta-samādhī*) which is attained (*paṭilabbhati*) by concentration of the *dhamma* (*dhamma-samādhī*, S IV 350). The Buddha goes on to explain what that *dhamma-samādhī* is. He explains that the *ariya-sāvaka*, the noble disciple:

‘abandoning the killing of living beings, abstaining therefrom; abandoning the taking of what is not given, abstaining therefrom; abandoning misconduct in sensual pleasure [...] abandoning false speech [...] malicious speech [...] harsh speech [...] gossip, abstaining therefrom. Abandoning covetousness, he is no more covetous. Abandoning malevolence and hatred, his heart becomes free from ill will. Abandoning wrong-view, he becomes one of right-view.’<sup>11</sup>

The ‘noble disciple’ thus abandons the ten unwholesome courses of action (*dasa akusala-kammaṭṭhā*), and cultivates the ten wholesome courses of action (*dasa kusala-kammaṭṭhā*). This is consistent with acquiring right-view in other parts of the Pāli Canon. The noble disciple is then said to be freed from covetousness (*vigatābhijjha*), freed from malevolence (*vigatavyāpāda*), not bewildered (*asammūḷha*), but attentive (*sampajāna*) and concentrated (*patissato*), with a mind full of loving-kindness (*mettā-*

*sahagatena cetasā*). That person then abides, suffusing the whole world with a mind possessed of loving-kindness.<sup>12</sup>

It is in this state, filled with ‘loving-kindness’ that the person considers each view. First, he considers the view of nihilism (S IV 351), then the view of affirmation (S IV 352), then the view of non-doing (S IV 353), and then the view that there is doing (S IV 354). The noble disciple further considers the view of nihilism with ‘a mind full of compassion’ and ‘a mind full of sympathetic joy’,<sup>13</sup> then the view of affirmation with ‘a mind filled with equanimity’,<sup>14</sup> then the view of non-doing (S IV 356-7) and the view that there is doing (S IV 357-8) with ‘a mind filled with equanimity’.

The noble disciple considers that even if any of these views are true (*sacca*), ‘for me it counts as incontrovertible’,<sup>15</sup> that the noble disciple does not cause harm (*vyābādhemi*) to anything weak or strong (*tasam vā thāvaram vā*). Thus the ‘state of doubt is overcome’.<sup>16</sup>

The emphasis is on behaviour and action, not on the acquisition of correct propositions. The noble disciple is not simply advised to reject wrong-views and adopt right-views, for he doubts both wrong and right-views. He is advised to act in a certain way, ‘abandoning the taking of life, abstaining therefrom’ etc., ‘abandoning wrong-view, he becomes one of right-view’, not by accepting that ‘actions have consequences’ or that ‘actions do not have

consequences', but by acting in a specific way. It is, in a sense, placing right-view in its context as part of the Buddhist path and, importantly, as a practice and not a proposition.

Conclusion: A different order of seeing

To achieve right-view is to have an attitude free from craving and attachment. One should strive to attain right-view in the sense of striving for the cessation of attachment. Views (all views) are susceptible to greed and attachment, and to achieve right-view is to have an attitude free from craving. The attitude of the holder of right-view is indicative of a course of action that leads to the abandonment of *all* views: precisely this is right-view. But to achieve right-view it is essential to act in accordance with the insight which it describes: by abandoning greed, hatred and delusion. At this point there is a solution for Buddhist political and social engagement. Rather than 'Buddhism' (or this aspect and interpretation of Buddhist teaching) advocating a set agenda or a set of viewpoints in its political engagement, it seems to me that the distinctiveness of its reasoning is precisely to do with it seeing a danger with strict and immovable standpoints. On a closer analysis it is 'action', as is often the case in Indian and Buddhist philosophy, which should be the object of religious contemplation. Views focus upon cognitive actions, the correct and incorrect grasping of Buddhist doctrines, and in turn are the means by which philosophically complex issues are seen in their correct context. If Buddhism is to be used politically then reflection on this aspect of Buddhist thought is essential.

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<sup>1</sup> In the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* (D II 72-168) at D II 81, 91, 94 and 98 the four *āsavas* are given: ‘The mind, when imbued with wisdom becomes completely free from the corruptions, that is, from the corruption of sensuality, of becoming, of wrong-views and of ignorance’ (*paññāparibhāvitaṃ cittaṃ sammadeva āsavehi vimuccati, seyyathīdaṃ: kāmāsavā bhavāsavā diṭṭhāsavā avijjāsavā ti*). There is another list of terms, identical to the list of four *āsavas*, that occur in the Nikāyas. These describe sensuality, becoming, views and ignorance as the four yokes (*yoga*), sometimes found in opposition to the four unyokings (*visaṃyoga*, see D III 230, 276, S V 59). There are also the four floods (*oghas*, D III 230, S V 59), consisting of the same categories.

<sup>2</sup> *yā tasmiṃ samaye diṭṭhi diṭṭhi-gataṃ diṭṭhi-gahanaṃ diṭṭhi-kantāro diṭṭhi-visūkāyikaṃ diṭṭhi-vipphanditaṃ diṭṭhi-saṃyojanaṃ gāho patitthāho abhiniveso parāmāso kummaggo micchā-patho micchattaṃ titthāyatanaṃ vipariyesagāho, ayaṃ tasmiṃ samaye micchā-diṭṭhi hoti*, Dhs 78, 183, 198, 202, 208, 212, *passim* (all references to page numbers of the PTS edition). Translation adapted from Gethin, ‘Wrong View (micchā-diṭṭhi) and Right View (sammā-diṭṭhi) in the Theravāda Abhidhamma’, p. 218. Most of these terms are found in the Nikāyas. In the *Sabbāsava-sutta* (M I 6-12), *diṭṭhi-gata* is described as the thicket, wilderness, contortion and vacillation of views: ‘This speculative view [...] is called a thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; he is not freed from suffering, I say’ (*idaṃ vuccati [...] diṭṭhi-gataṃ diṭṭhi-gahanaṃ diṭṭhi-kantāro diṭṭhi-visūkaṃ diṭṭhi-vipphanditaṃ diṭṭhi-saṃyojanaṃ. diṭṭhi-saṃyojanasaṃyutto bhikkhave assutavā puthujjano na parimuccati jātiyā jarāmaraṇena sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi, na parimuccati dukkhasmā ti vadāmi*, M I 8). In the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta* (M I 483-89), the Buddha is asked what danger he sees in the ten *avyākata*, so that he does not take up

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any of these views (*kim pana bhavaṃ gotamo ādīnavaṃ sampassamāno evaṃ imāni sabbaso diṭṭhi-gatāni anupagato ti*, M I 485). The Buddha replies that each of these views is a thicket, a wilderness, a contortion, a vacillation and a fetter of views (*diṭṭhi-gahanaṃ diṭṭhi-kantāraṃ diṭṭhi-visūkaṃ diṭṭhi-vipphanditaṃ diṭṭhi-saṃyojanaṃ*, M I 485). They are beset by suffering, vexation, despair and fever (*sadukkhaṃ savighātaṃ saupāyāsaṃ sapariḷāhaṃ*), and do not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, peace, direct knowledge, enlightenment or *nibbāna* (*na nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya saṃvattati*, M I 485). In a sense, in this reply, as in the *Dhammasaṅgani*, the Buddha is not alluding to the content of the views but the effect upon the person that holds to them. Vacchagotta asks the Buddha if he takes up any speculative view (*atthi pana bhoṭo gotamassa kiñci diṭṭhi-gataṃ ti*). The Buddha replies that speculative view is something that he has put away (*diṭṭhi-gataṃ ti kho vaccha apanītaṃ etaṃ tathāgatassa*, M I 486). What the Buddha has seen is each of the five *khandhas*, their origin and their disappearance. In the *Yoga-sutta* (A II 10-13) at A II 11, views are described as a bond (*diṭṭhi-yoga*). The bond of views is described as the lust for views, the delight in views, the affection for views, the greed for views, the thirst for views, the fever, clinging, and the craving for views (*yo diṭṭhisu diṭṭhi-rāgo diṭṭhi-nandī diṭṭhi-sineho diṭṭhi-mucchā diṭṭhi-pipāsā diṭṭhi-pariḷāho diṭṭhi-ajjhosaṇaṃ diṭṭhi-taṇhā*, A II 11). The term *diṭṭhi-visūkāni*, contrariness of view, occurs in the *Sutta-nipāta* where the sage is described as having gone beyond the contrariness of view (*diṭṭhivisūkāni upātivatto*), on a fixed course, wandering solitary as a rhinoceros horn, Sn 55.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the ‘eight bases’ in the *Paṭisambhidhāmaggā* which I discussed in chapter three.

<sup>4</sup> *ime kho diṭṭhi-tṭhānā evaṃgahitā evaṃparāmaṭṭhā evaṃgatikā bhavissanti evaṃabhisamparāyā*, D I 16.

<sup>5</sup> *uttaritaraṃ*, the highest, what transcends, i.e. *nibbāna*.

<sup>6</sup> *aparāmasato c’ assa paccattaññeva nibbuti viditā*, D I 16.

<sup>7</sup> *cattāro satthāro nānādiṭṭhikā nānākhantikā nānārucikā*, S IV 348.

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<sup>8</sup> Similar to the ‘doubt and uncertainty’ (*kaṅkhā* [...] *vicikicchā*, A I 189), of the *Kālāmas*; see chapter one.

<sup>9</sup> *alañ hi te [...] kaṅkhītum, alaṃ vicikicchitum, kaṅkhanīye ca pana te ṭhāne vicikicchā uppannā ti*, S IV 350.

<sup>10</sup> *kaṅkhādhammaṃ paṇaheyyan ti*, S IV 350.

<sup>11</sup> *pāṇātipātāṃ pahāya pāṇātipātā paṭivirato hoti, adinnādānaṃ pahāya adinnādānā paṭivirato hoti, kāmesu micchācārāṃ pahāya kāmesu micchācārā paṭivirato hoti, musāvādaṃ pahāya musāvādā paṭivirato hoti, piṣuṇaṃ vācam pahāya piṣuṇāya vācāya paṭivirato hoti, pharusāṃ vācam pahāya pharusāya vācāya paṭivirato hoti, samphappalāpaṃ pahāya samphappalāpā paṭivirato hoti, abhijjhaṃ pahāya anabhijjhālu hoti, vyāpādapadosaṃ pahāya vyāpānnacitto hoti, micchā-diṭṭhiṃ pahāya sammā-diṭṭhiko hoti*, S IV 350-1.

<sup>12</sup> *ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharati, tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthaṃ; iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantāṃ lokaṃ mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena avyāpajjena pharitvā viharati*, S IV 351.

<sup>13</sup> *karuṇā-sahagatena-cetasā, muditā-sahagatena cetasā*, S IV 354-5.

<sup>14</sup> *upekkhā-sahagatena cetasā*, S IV 355-6.

<sup>15</sup> *apaṇṇakatāya mayhaṃ*, S IV 351. Bhikkhu Bodhi cites the Spk: ‘This practice leads to what is incontrovertible for me, to absence of wrongness’ (*anaparādhakatāya*); *Connected Discourses*, Vol. II, p. 1453, note 364.

<sup>16</sup> *kaṅkhādhammaṃ paṇaheyyāsi*. The full passage is: *tassa pāmojjaṃ jāyati, pamuditassa pīti jāyati, pīṭimanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedayati, sukhino cittaṃ samādhiyati. ayaṃ kho so, gāmaṇi, dhammasamādhi. tatra ce tvaṃ cittasamādhiṃ paṭilabheyyāsi, evaṃ tvaṃ imaṃ kaṅkhādhammaṃ paṇaheyyāsi*, S IV 351-2, 353, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58.