American Academy of Religion Conference: Atlanta, 21st November 2015

Saturday - 4:00 PM-6:30 PM

Buddhism Section and Buddhist Philosophy Group

Masahiro Shimoda, University of Tokyo, Presiding

Theme Drṣṭi: 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 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’ (paticca-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’ (āsavaś), views and ignorance are given separately.¹ 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 Dhammasaṅgani where wrong-view is explained using a stock set of terms ‘the thicket of view’ (diṭṭhi-gahana), ‘a wilderness of view’ (diṭṭhi-kantarā), ‘holding’ (gāha), ‘fixity’ (patiṭṭhāha), ‘adherence’ (abhinivesa), ‘clinging’ (parāmāsa), and ‘the hold of the perverted views’ (vipariyesa-gāha).²

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),3 grasped (gahitā) and clung to (parāmatthā), lead to a certain future rebirth.4 A Buddha also understands what transcends (uttaritaram) this, yet he does not even cling to that understanding (tam ca pajānanaṁ na parāmasati), and because of not clinging (aparāmasato) he has ‘realised within himself the state of perfect peace’.5 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 Pāṭalī and the Buddha. Pāṭalī 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’ came to stay. Pāṭalī then recounts how each teacher ‘taught thus, held this view’ (*evaṁ-vādi evaṁ-dīṭṭhi*). The first teacher held the view of nihilism (*nattoṭika-dīṭṭhi*, S IV 348), the wrong-view that actions do not have consequences. The second teacher the view of affirmation (*atthika-dīṭṭhi*, S IV 348-9), the right-view that actions do have consequences. The third the view of non-doing (*akirīya-dīṭṭhi*, S IV 349), the wrong-view that if we act in an unwholesome way, for example kills living beings, no wrong is done by the performer of these actions. The fourth the view that there is doing (*kiriya-dīṭṭhi*, S IV 349-50), the right-view that if we act in an unwholesome way, for example kill living beings, wrong is done by the performer of these actions.

On hearing these different views, Pāṭalī explains to the Buddha that he has doubt (*kaṅkha*) and uncertainty (*vīcikicchā*) not knowing which recluse and brahmin was speaking truth (*sacca*) and which was speaking falsehood (*musā*, S IV 350). The Buddha
replies that though Pāṭali doubts and is uncertain, it is on a doubtful point that uncertainty arose. Pāṭali explains to the Buddha that he has much trust (pasanna) in him and asks for a teaching whereby his ‘doubt will be abandoned’.

The Buddha explains that there is a concentration of mind (citta-samādhi) which is attained (paṭilabbhāti) by concentration of the dhamma (dhamma-samādhi, S IV 350). The Buddha goes on to explain what that dhamma-samādhi 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.

The ‘noble disciple’ thus abandons the ten unwholesome courses of action (dasa akusala-kammapathā), and cultivates the ten wholesome courses of action (dasa kusala-kammapathā). 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 (asammūḥa), but attentive (sampajāna) and concentrated (patissato), with a mind full of loving-kindness (mettā-
sahagatena cetasa). That person then abides, suffusing the whole world with a mind possessed of loving-kindness.\textsuperscript{12}

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’,\textsuperscript{13} then the view of affirmation with ‘a mind filled with equanimity’,\textsuperscript{14} 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’,\textsuperscript{15} that the noble disciple does not cause harm (vyabhacchani) to anything weak or strong (tasam va thaavaram va). Thus the ‘state of doubt is overcome’.\textsuperscript{16} 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.
1 In the Mahāparinibbāna-sutta (D II 72-168) at D II 81, 91, 94 and 98 the four āsayas 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’ (paññāparibhāvitam cittam sammādeva āsavehi vimuccati, seyyathidham: kāmāsavā bhavāsavā diṭṭhāsavā avijjāsavā ti). There is another list of terms, identical to the list of four āsayas, 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 (visamyoga, 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.

2 yā tasmin samaye diṭṭhi diṭṭhi-gataṃ diṭṭhi-gahanam diṭṭhi-kantāro diṭṭhi-visūkāyikam diṭṭhi-vipphanditam diṭṭhi-saṃyojanam gāho paṭṭhāho abhiniveso parāmāso kummaggo micchā-patho micchattam itthāyatanam vipariyesagāho, ayaṃ tasmin 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-diṭṭhī) and Right View (sammā-diṭṭhī) 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’ (idam vuccati […] diṭṭhi-gataṃ diṭṭhi-gahanam diṭṭhi-kantāro diṭṭhi-visūkam diṭṭhi-vipphanditam diṭṭhi-saṃyojanam, diṭṭhi-saṃyojanasamyutto bhikkhave assutavā pathujjano na parimuccati jātiyā jāramaranena sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi, na parimuccati dukkhasmā ti vadāmi, M I 8). In the Aggivacchagottasutta (M I 483-89), the Buddha is asked what danger he sees in the ten avyākata, so that he does not take up
any of these views (kim pana bhavāṃ gotamō ādīnavāṃ sampassamāṇo evam imāni sabbaśo diṭṭhi-gatāni anupagatio 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-gahanam diṭṭhi-kantāran diṭṭhi-visukam diṭṭhi-vipphanditam diṭṭhi-sanyojanam, M I 485). They are beset by suffering, vexation, despair and fever (saddhākham savighatam saupāyāsam sparilāham), and do not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, peace, direct knowledge, enlightenment or nibbāna (na nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhiyāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambhidhāya na nibbānāya saṁvattati, 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 bhoto gotamassā kīci diṭṭhi-gatan ti). The Buddha replies that speculative view is something that he has put away (diṭṭhi-gatan ti kho vaccha aparitam etam 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-nandi diṭṭhi-sineho diṭṭhi-mucchā diṭṭhi-pipāsā diṭṭhi-parilāhā diṭṭhi-ajjhosānam diṭṭhi-tanhhā, A II 11). The term diṭṭhi-visukkāni, contrariness of view, occurs in the Sutta-nipāta where the sage is described as having gone beyond the contrariness of view (diṭṭhivisukkāni upātiyatto), on a fixed course, wandering solitary as a rhinoceros horn, Sn 55.

3 Cf. the ‘eight bases’ in the Paṭisambhidhāmagga which I discussed in chapter three.

4 ime kho diṭṭhi-ṭhānā evamgaḥiti evamparapāṭṭhā evamgati bhavissanti evamabhisamparāyā, D I 16.

5 uttaritaram, the highest, what transcends, i.e. nibbāna.

6 aparāmasato c’assa paccattānaheva nibbuti viditā, D I 16.

7 cattāro satthāro nānādiṭṭhikā nānākhaṇṭikā nānārucikā, S IV 348.
8 Similar to the ‘doubt and uncertainty’ (kankhā [...] vicikicchā, A I 189), of the Kālamas; see chapter one.

9 aḷanī hi te [...] kankhītum, aḷam vicikicchitum, kankhanīye ca pana te thāne vicikicchā uppannā ti, S IV 350.

10 kankhādhammam pajaheyya ti, S IV 350.

11 pāṇātipātam pahāya pāṇātipāta paṭivirato hoti, adinnādānam pahāya adinnādāna paṭivirato hoti, kāmesu micchācāram pahāya kāmesu micchācārā paṭivirato hoti, musāvādam pahāya musāvāda paṭivirato hoti,
pisunāṃ vācam pahāya pisunāyā vācāya paṭivirato hoti, pharasam vācam pahāya pharasāya vācāya paṭivirato hoti, samphappalāpām pahāya samphappalāpa paṭivirato hoti, abhijjhāṃ pahāya anabhijjhālu hoti, vyāpādapadosaṃ pahāya avyāpānacitto hoti, micchā-dīṭṭhim pahāya samma-dīṭṭhiko hoti, S IV 350-1.

12 ekaṃ disam pharitvā viharati, tathā duttiyam, tathā tatiyam, tathā catuttham; iti uddhamadho tiriyam sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbhāvantam lokam mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena avyāpajjena pharitvā viharati, S IV 351.

13 karunā-sahagatena-cetasā, muditā-sahagatena cetasā, S IV 354-5.

14 upekkhā-sahagatena cetasā, S IV 355-6.

15 apavattatāya mayham, 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.

16 kankhādhammam pajaheyya ti. The full passage is: tassa pāmojjanā jāyati, pamanuditassa pīti jāyati,
pītimanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukham vedayati, sukhino cittam samādhīyati. ayaṃ kho so, gāmanī, dhammasamādhī. tatra ce tvam cittasamādhīṃ patilabheyya, evam tvam imam kankhādhammam pajaheyya ti, S IV 351-2, 353, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58.