

Why Buddhists should be philosophers; and why philosophers should be Buddhists

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Introduction

Since my hope is that this gathering will involve quite a broad discussion of a range of issues in which philosophy meets Buddhism and the FWBO, in this paper I would like to set the scene a little by attempting quite a broad survey of the whole territory of how Western philosophy and Buddhism can usefully interact. In the process of doing this I will offer my own understanding of the relationship, which for me is a vital one: Buddhism needs philosophy, and philosophy needs Buddhism.

The short paper is a medium which I find rather frustrating in general. It is ubiquitous in academic circles, but as a form seems almost purposely designed to prevent anyone seriously questioning the *status quo*. In 7000 words or so one can only either provide a detailed argument within a narrow compass (ignoring the wider context) which is then not understood because its listeners place it in the wrong context, or attempt a broader argument, which will then inevitably be superficial and full of holes (and, if you submit it to a philosophy journal, instantaneously rejected!). Since I find that my own approach to either philosophy or Buddhism often unavoidably involves challenging what I regard as a great many interrelated false assumptions at the same time, it is impossible to offer a convincing argument using either of these strategies. I have come to the conclusion that, personally, I can only really express myself satisfactorily in philosophical argument at book length (and the thesis/book I am currently working on already runs to 250,000 words). So I make no apologies here for offering a general and probably superficial argument: I can only assure you that it is based on a much more detailed account in my thesis, which I may be able to use in responding to questions or comments. My main aim is to be provocative rather than fully convincing.

Philosophy in general

In time-honoured philosophical fashion I shall begin, not by completely “defining”, but by at least indicating what I mean by “philosophy” and “Buddhism”.

My own preferred provisional definition of philosophy is “The study of views and their justification”. Of course this could refer to all academic discourse, as “philosophy” once did: but it gives the idea of philosophy as a subject that may investigate the grounds of any set of views whatsoever. Its key role is thus firstly to identify assumptions which have been taken for granted, and secondly to provide a prescriptive framework according to which views can be selected.

This is, of course, a prescriptive account of philosophy (and I will try to make the grounds of the prescription clearer later on), not a description of what goes on in the realm of Western academic philosophy. In my experience the picture is a mixed one in both analytic and continental philosophy: some philosophers are usefully unearthing assumptions, but many are not even acknowledging the limitations of their own assumptions. All are erecting prescriptive frameworks which they use as a basis of judgement, but few acknowledge that this is what they are doing. False descriptivism, whereby some sort of value neutrality is pretended under the cover of which prescriptions are offered, is rife in both analytic and continental philosophy, based on the pernicious fact-value distinction. The obvious function of philosophy in providing guidance for judgement is neglected.

The reason for the perniciousness of the fact-value distinction, in brief, is that it assumes in us a capacity for the abstraction of facts from values which we do not in fact possess. Every statement asserting a fact also asserts a value, even if it is only the value of asserting that fact in the context in which it is asserted. Likewise, every assertion of value is accompanied by a background of presumed facts. The pretence of neutrality in factual discourse, then (like that of automatic “subjectivity” in prescriptive value discourse) is an illusion which permeates academia in general, and academic philosophy in particular, on a massive scale.

Here then, already, we are finding a way in which philosophers need to be Buddhists: for Buddhism offers not only a philosophy but a set of practices which are mutually geared towards examining assumptions and setting up coherent prescriptions. In other words it already appears that Buddhism may be able to help philosophers to perform their task more consistently. But of course I have defined philosophy in a Buddhist way which many philosophers might not accept, particularly in repudiation of the fact-value distinction. The real question, which I shall come to, is why philosophers should accept that way of understanding their role.

Buddhism in general

As for “Buddhism”, again I can only specify how I use the term, again in prescriptive terms that will be justified later. Buddhism can be regarded as a tradition of spiritual practices, or it can be regarded as a set of core doctrines. Naturally each is dependent on the other, so in a sense Buddhism is both. However, there is an essential tension between the cultural situatedness of tradition and the universality of the core doctrines which creates the danger that one can define Buddhism in terms of one without taking account of the other. The way to avoid this is to give an account of the universality of Buddhism which necessarily *includes* its practical dependency on tradition: not, however, ultimately on any particular tradition, but rather on *a* tradition which meets the demands of the universal dharma as far as is possible in the circumstances.

The work of isolating the basic universal principles of Buddhism and applying them in the Western context, giving those universal principles priority over the obfuscating conventional beliefs that have arisen either in the West or in the Buddhist tradition (or both) is the work which I take Sangharakshita to have begun, and in which I strive to follow him. And the more theoretical part of that work is philosophical work, because it involves identifying assumptions and offering coherent provisional prescriptions. So the very understanding of what Buddhism is and requires involves, to begin with, a relationship between Buddhism and philosophy.

But of course another way of looking at Buddhism is that it is neither a tradition nor a set of doctrines, but the path trodden by an individual. Buddhism is any path which leads towards enlightenment for that individual. That path will obviously involve practices drawn from tradition and will be consistent with universal doctrines. Here though, as part of the practice of that path, the Buddhist needs to gain a grasp of those universal doctrines as they apply to her own context, identifying previous conventional assumptions and setting up provisional prescriptions in their place. The role of philosophy in Buddhism, then, is not only that of a few individuals who engage in a relatively specialised philosophical task on behalf of the whole community: every individual Buddhist needs to engage in a similar process of examination of his own case. Every right or wrong view has its place in an individual psyche as well as in the sphere of public intellectual debate.

It may be argued that philosophical activity of any kind is only necessary to a certain type of Buddhist: a “doctrine type” as opposed to a “faith type” or a “body witness”. But what this means, I think, is that there are different ways of engaging with the same issues. As far as I

can make out faith types and body witnesses (not being one myself), they often seem to engage with issues that I think about abstractly in a more concrete and particular way, but nevertheless engage with what I ultimately consider the same issue. The justification for particular concrete attitudes then tends to be couched more in appeals to authority than in abstract generalisations. The way in which philosophical positions become embedded in narratives provides examples of this kind of concreteness: George Eliot, for example, communicates a whole moral vision in the context of the narrative of her novels, not explaining it so much as making us see how it works. Faith types thus have the advantage of living in the examples that I more often struggle to provide because I'm living in a more abstract universe. Nevertheless, in broader terms all types need to do philosophy in the sense of questioning their assumptions and developing a coherent prescriptive view, whether their main way of engaging with it is in abstract or concrete terms. The faith type runs up against a narrowness of focus, of not considering the broader perspective offered by abstraction, but on the other hand the doctrine type runs up against the difficulty of making ideals particular in her own life.

Buddhist principles in philosophical terms: non-dualism

But now comes the trickier question: what are the grounds of the prescription that Buddhists should be philosophers and philosophers Buddhists? On what grounds does Buddhism offer a set of universal principles which philosophers should accept?

Here the answer to me seems clear: non-dualism provides the basic Buddhist principles, in the light of which all other views (whether in the context of the Buddhist tradition or of Western philosophy) should be judged. I will spend the rest of this paper trying to explain something of what I mean by this and on what grounds I assert it, beginning with non-dualism and continuing with four other associated approaches which appear to be justified by it and to be essential to its application.

“Non-dualism” is a term which has been appropriated in different contexts to mean different things: but to me it means nothing other than attempting to recognise our degree of ignorance and unflinchingly taking that recognition to its logical conclusion. It is not a metaphysical position making claims about anything that exists or does not exist, concretely or abstractly, since we can always doubt any particular set of representational beliefs about the world or about ourselves, rather it is a set of attitudes involving not just philosophical positions, but psychological states. It is a method of withdrawing from metaphysical positions, which recognises that those positions consist in dualisms which we project onto a background of whose “real” nature we are ignorant. Examples of such dualisms are subject-object, absolute-relative, ideal-real, mind-body, freewill-determinism, unity-plurality, myself-other, conscious-unconscious, reason-emotion, fact-value, and theory-practice.

As such its nearest relation in the history of Western ideas is classical Pyrrhonian scepticism of the type offered by Sextus Empiricus¹. It was Sextus who made the distinction which is absolutely crucial to non-dualism – that between negative metaphysics and agnosticism. To deny a metaphysical claim, such as the existence of God, the existence of universal normativity, or even the existence of a particular object, is just as much to set up a metaphysical position as to affirm it. In my investigations of Western philosophy I have concluded that a great many Western thinkers are guilty of confusing negative metaphysics with agnosticism, simply because they imposed a dualism of acceptance or rejection on evidence which only justifies a recognition of ignorance. This seems to involve the feeling that agnostic scepticism somehow constitutes a threat and therefore we should seek refuge in positive or negative metaphysical certainties as the only alternative. But taken to its logical conclusions, agnostic scepticism poses no threat at all: it does not require total sudden abandonment of all our beliefs, or giving up action and lying about all day (as Hume

assumed²), or anything like that. As embodied and situated beings, our desires naturally drive us to act, and to hold beliefs consistent with our actions. Rather it requires *provisionality*, a modification of the *way* in which we hold beliefs in our context which is ultimately a psychological state rather than merely a cognitive belief.

Unfortunately not even the classical sceptics themselves took their scepticism to its logical non-dualist conclusions. Instead, it seems that they drew a distinction between “evident” and “non-evident” beliefs, apparently unaware of the extent to which they merely adopted the conventional beliefs of their social context by maintaining belief in what was “evident”. In the same way, their modern successors tend to reject one set of traditional metaphysical beliefs which have been used to rationalise social conventions for centuries, only to relapse into another set of counter-dependent conventions, instead of completing the job and using sceptical argument as an aid to paring down our views to the universal bone.

Sceptical non-dualism is clearly reflected in many aspects of the traditional Buddhist teachings. In the Pali Canon it can be understood in the Parable of the Raft³, the Kalama Sutta⁴, the Avyakṛta⁵ (the four sample metaphysical points on which the Buddha remained silent) and the Parable of the Man with the Arrow in his Eye⁶. I also understand it as the heart of the Prajñāparamita. These texts can of course be interpreted in different ways, and if you base your position on their authority then it will never be clear even provisionally what that position ought to be. So, though there are indications which appear to show that the Buddha was a sceptical non-dualist, it is the philosophical (and thence ultimately practical) advantages of sceptical non-dualism rather than the authority of the Buddha on which the Buddhist must rely.

Attempting to follow through non-dualism systematically, it seems to me that we should use it as the ground of judgement about the tradition, not the other way round. This leads me believe that a number of widely-accepted traditional Buddhist doctrines are not compatible with non-dualism and thus not the dharma. These begin with the appeal to enlightened experience itself, as opposed to our own incremental engagement with the Path, and go on to a number of doctrines which are only accepted on the basis of the appeal to enlightened experience: karma and rebirth as a system of cosmic justice, the claim to have holistic knowledge of the causal processes of the universe, and the assumption that consciousness is in some sense non-material⁷ (dependent on rebirth beliefs). The further we stray from our own experience, the more we stray into dogmatism. The Buddha’s experiences are now so remote from us, in terms of time, culture, layers of transmission and (probably) attainment that nearly everything we attempt to understand from the traditions of his utterances is subject to a great deal of doubt. We will maintain much more integrity if we simply remain with that doubt instead of using the massive ambiguities of the tradition as it has been handed down to us as a field for dogmatic speculation, or using it, as is probable, merely to lend authority to our own limited perspectives through a selective use of the evidence.

The examination of the fundamental features of the dharma itself offers us a much stronger basis for our beliefs than scholarship ever can: but to isolate those fundamental features and rigorously apply them requires not just philosophy, but philosophy in harmony with practice. Non-dualism, being not just a philosophical view but a psychological state, is not something which can just be adopted: it has to be developed and earned by each individual. It is earned philosophically through the long process of working out exactly how it applies everywhere: examining all the views within and around us (though these are correlative) for their degrees of dualism and non-dualism, working out its implications in all the specific issues and points of judgement we face.

Psychological integration

Since sceptical non-dualism of this kind does not lead to apathetic nihilism, it needs to be made clearer what sort of psychology (and ethics) it does lead to. Basically no sceptical belief alone is ever going to deprive us of our desires, because those desires are deeply habituated in our minds and bodies. The worst that a sudden adoption of any belief could mean would be alienation of that belief from the mass of ones desires, requiring a good deal of energy to be expended in the repressive activity of holding onto that narrow, rationalised belief and holding off our broader desires. A non-dualist scepticism, then, does not imply the adoption of any such alienated belief, either positive or negative in nature. Rather, with the adoption of provisional beliefs, it implies the desirability of psychological integration, whereby those desires are gradually brought together and focussed on both ends and means that are more capable of fulfilment given the range of conditions which bear on them. In this way, considered in the light of the psychological facts of the existence of desire and of the frustration (*dukkha*) produced by the lack of integration of our desires, non-dualism justifies psychological integration.

I understand psychological integration in terms of the model of ego and psyche. The psyche is a loose confederation of desires which are united in association with a particular individual mind to gain their ends, whilst the ego is a rather tighter federation of desires within the psyche, brought together for the rather more immediate end of gaining the fulfilment of a particular end. The ends of the ego are rationally defined and identified with against alternative ends, and it is this rational definition which gives rise to dualism. We identify only with what the ego has chosen to focus on (greed), to the exclusion of what it has chosen to reject (hatred), with the division on which this depends being the basis of ignorance. This egoistic focus and definition is what enables us to set and achieve objectives, but for every objective we set and achieve there are other possible ones in the remainder of the psyche which we reject, and our alternative desires, wherever they crop up, must be repressed because they interfere with the achievement of these egoistic aims.

Of course these egoistic aims keep changing, but this doesn't stop us identifying with them absolutely while they last, and setting up elaborate metaphysical systems to justify particular sets of beliefs on which these egoistic aims depend. Perhaps the most basic of this is the dualism of subject and object, which forms the basis of particular descriptions of objects, which are taken to be true at a given time, and of a particular view of the subject, a self-view which we take to be equally permanent. But all these views are subject to doubt and need to be constantly changed as we realise that they are based on particular dualisms.

The ego can be compared to a walled city which constantly defends itself against besieging armies of conditions. It has to justify its defence and constantly rallies the troops with one kind of scare story or another about the opposition. But in fact the war is based on nothing substantial at all, only fear. There is no reason not to abandon the fortified positions at any moment except the long habits of training to hold them, beliefs about the need to hold them, and lack of knowledge about the consequences if one were to let go. The war is entirely phoney.

But the way to overcome the ego is not to try to overcome the habits all at once, or to change ones identifications discontinuously. It's no good making a Kierkegaardian leap into the other, because then you just change sides and the old habits of opposition just reassert themselves the other way round. One starts to fight what one believes to be the ego, to identify with others, or an absolute ground of meaning of some kind "beyond oneself" rather than "oneself", but (whether or not one has actually done this, or merely invented it) one is still fighting the same phoney egoistic war.

The only way to overcome the ego is to integrate it, and that means its gradual extension (through harmonic unification, not dominance) to include the rest of the psyche. Such a gradual extension applies equally to all the dualistic beliefs which support the ego, which need to be gradually abandoned by us realising their nature and employing them, not as metaphysical absolutes, but in awareness of their conventionality. Wherever we are confronted with a dualism, then, one of the key roles of philosophy can be to help us think our way through absolute metaphysical identification with it, to see what was formerly an absolute opposition as an *incrementality*.

The very point of non-dualism is that it does not give absolute justification to any one rationally-expressed goal or type of goal, but instead it does give relative justification to a constant process of explorative theorisation and re-theorisation of our goals and of the supposed facts that surround their formulation. This process continues until complete integration of our beliefs, and finally even of the associated desires, occurs. Then we remain in ignorance of many matters, but have learnt to adapt our behaviour as fully as possible to the complexity and unpredictability of conditions. This is what I would understand by the point of enlightenment.

Balanced heuristic

This constant process of explorative theorisation is explicitly present in the traditional dharma, e.g. in the words of the *Tiratanavandana* which describe the dharma as “*ehipassiko opanayiko paccatam veditabbo viññuhi ti*”: to be discovered incrementally and seen by each of the wise. It can be thought of at the individual level of discovery, but also at the group or cultural level. At all three levels it has a striking relationship to the process of discovery in science, which at its best consists purely in exploratory theorisation and experimentation, pursued individually by scientists and built up by groups into traditions of exploration. (Science here should not be confused with scientism, which is the horrible dogmatic things you can do with the discoveries of science once you have accepted them into your culture, ossified them and taken them to be metaphysically proven.)

I have found much to learn here in Lakatos, the Popperian philosopher of science who attempted to work out exactly what it was which led to scientific discovery by examining historical examples. He interpreted these in a way which avoided either the relativism of his contemporary Feyerabend or the absolute scientific rationalism of the logical positivists. In brief, he recognised that no claimed theory could ever be conclusively verified or conclusively falsified, since the interpretation of evidence is always ambiguous, but at the same time thought that there were clear criteria which could be applied to provide objectivity in judging whether a theory had been falsified by an observation. There had to be a new alternative theory to move to from the old, and this should be able to account for all the previous observations, account for the errors of the old theory, and be fruitful in providing new predictions for observations⁸.

Even these criteria are not without possible ambiguities, and Lakatos seems to have effectively understood that they operate as non-absolute guidelines for judgement. The implications of this, however, are that scientific discovery advances rather through the judgement of scientists themselves through perceptions which provide absolute indications of its truth. If we are to account for the undoubted advances which science has actually made, we cannot do this through appeal to a representational reality which science discovers, but must rather appeal to the dispositional objectivity of scientists: it is their judgement which enables the continued correlation between theories and experiences. This judgement, to be successful, must be balanced: if the scientist sticks too dogmatically to a theory, defending its compatibility to apparently contradictory experiences through ad hoc hypotheses, he will make no advance from the illusions of that theory. If, on the other hand, the scientist moves too readily to another theory when Lakatos's criteria are only sketchily fulfilled, perhaps on

the basis of one apparent falsification which may be explicable through some auxiliary hypothesis (e.g. faulty observation equipment), he may lose a theory which is actually fruitful and deserving of more sustained investigation.

If a scientist best encounters (pragmatic) reality through this balanced heuristic, it is obvious that Buddhists must also do so by combining the dharma as *ehipassiko* with the Middle Way. The equivalent of dogmatic adherence to a theory through *ad hoc* hypothesis might be, for example, elaborate hermeneutical explanations of Buddhist scriptures to avoid having to admit that something the Buddha appears to be saying is wrong because inconsistent with the basic principles of Buddhism. Many re-theorisations about rebirth seem to fall into this category, because they begin with the assumption that there *must* be something in it. The equivalent of over-sceptical flightiness which is too ready to switch theories is, of course, the dash around the religious supermarket; the switch from one group to another on superficial grounds; the one week (or even one month) trial of meditation after which it is dismissed as too difficult; or the complete dismissal of something that the Buddha, or some other spiritual teacher, has said, with insufficient full contextual examination.

The basis of judgement on which the balanced heuristic depends seems to me both Buddhist and philosophical. Buddhism helps us to cultivate the clarity, the emotional openness, and the insight which is required for a balanced heuristic, whilst philosophy provides us with a different perspective which helps us to guard against the dogmatism into which we might slip in the practice of these very techniques through over-attachment to the tradition which provides us with them.

The balanced heuristic brings with it two other difficult but rewarding aspects of non-dualism: pragmatism and the Middle Way, which are essential corollaries of it and of each other. I will attempt at least a brief account of each of these before returning to my opening questions.

Pragmatism

By pragmatism here I mean specifically a theory of meaning and truth, not the negative metaphysical value position which one may associate with post-modern pragmatists like Richard Rorty. As a school of (mainly American) philosophy pragmatism has many promising features (which seem to have reached their height with John Dewey, a thinker with many non-dualist tendencies), but it has suffered from inconsistency in questioning some dogmatic dualisms but not others. The starting point in a non-dualist use of pragmatism seems to be a theory of meaning whereby it is the *functions* of our words (or other representations) which determine their meaning, rather than their relationship to a metaphysical reality, whether this supposed reality is objective (representationalism) or subjective (expressivism). By far the more common of these two is representationalism, which appears in subtle forms even in philosophers who have superficially acquired some of the trappings of pragmatism, like Wittgenstein and Heidegger. In both cases, pragmatic criteria for meaning operate inside a representational (or in Heidegger's case, abstractly non-dualistic but still metaphysical) framework. The language game or the world or Dasein is no substitute for genuine pragmatism, because each limits meaning to that identifiable context of egoistic identification, and rules out breaking out of that context into the yet unimagined worlds of meaning projected by other parts of the psyche.

Of course we constantly project "realities", but it is the provisionality with which we understand ourselves to do so which forms the basis of pragmatism: we require representational explanations within a pragmatist context, not pragmatic explanations within a representationalist context. Such an understanding of the meaning of our language has direct implications for its truth, for it is only in ultimately representational (or expressive) language that we could possibly forge dogmatic beliefs. The development of insight breaking down

dualist assumptions must thus involve the complete realisation that the very language we use is meaningful only in relation to the desires it helps us to fulfil in particular contexts. This view of meaning challenges the dominant truth-dependent model in linguistics as well as the cult of Wittgenstein in analytic philosophy, but it has academic allies. The linguist George Lakoff is one such, who has developed a pragmatic explanation of the meaning of language without relativism, based on the metaphorical extension of basic categories of our experience⁹.

The Middle Way

In traditional Buddhist conceptions of the Middle Way there is again a tension between two incompatible approaches: to define the Middle Way in terms of its metaphysics or in terms of its ethics. Canonical formulations often seem to take eternalism as defined by its adherence to continuing existence after death, and nihilism by its denial of any existence after death. But these metaphysical definitions do not always correspond to the more basic ethical teaching we find in the life of the Buddha, where the Middle Way lies between conventional indulgence and asceticism, focussing respectively on present gratification and future gain. Although in the Buddha's context the correspondence between these ethical tendencies and the use of each form of metaphysics may have been complete, it is no longer so in the modern West.

Eternalism as an ethical tendency is one in which beliefs about future gratification, guaranteed by metaphysical assumptions about order in the universe, but not all modern ideologies which follow this ethical tendency maintain a belief in survival of the soul after death: Marxism is one important counter-example. Likewise, the nihilist tendency to focus on the value of present gratification, and to justify this by denying the moral order in the universe which the eternalist believes in, does not necessarily entail materialism. There are many more sophisticated ways, especially in modern continental philosophy, of supporting nihilist assumptions through transcendental idealism or phenomenology, without recourse to materialism.

Selecting the pragmatic over the metaphysical definition of the Middle Way is vital to maintain the pragmatism which I have mentioned as a feature of non-dualism, and thus the balanced heuristic. The Middle Way is certainly about avoiding metaphysics, but it doesn't matter what sort of metaphysics is on each side. Metaphysics just gets used in order to support dogmatic claims, and thus defend the ego and the conventional beliefs it identifies with, but what I have discovered through a detailed survey of eternalist and nihilist types of thought is that eternalism and nihilism as ethical functions often seize weapons from each other's metaphysical armouries. Thus there are postmodern theologians, mystical Wittgensteinians, scientific utilitarians, biologised Kantians, systems theorists, pagans, and eco-feminists, let alone different sorts of Marxists, who are often rather hard to classify in terms of eternalism or nihilism: often there is a hotchpotch of elements of both tendencies, but they are certainly dualist rather than non-dualist because they appeal to some sort of metaphysical starting point assuming something dogmatic about the universe or about themselves, positive or negative.

So here we come to a crucial philosophical function for Buddhism: the identification and understanding of wrong views and the judgement between wrong views and right views. This isn't a crude sheep-and-goats exercise, because, of course, all views are only ever relatively wrong or relatively right, and they are only so in a particular context depending on how they will be understood and acted upon. In fact we encounter a spectrum of views in any given context, some of which are more right because they have more fully taken into account the conditions operating in that situation, others of which will be more wrong because they are based more on the mere application of a dogmatic dualism with little taking of the complexity of conditions into account. But in any given case of action we have to judge between the views according to the place we accord them on the spectrum.

The Brahmajala Sutta¹⁰, which provides a neat formulistic listing for the wrong views in its context, needs a good deal of updating. It is important to update it if as Buddhists we are going to be able to move confidently through a world swimming with wrong views and know how to engage with them skilfully. Otherwise it is much more likely that we will unknowingly drink in that wrong view from our environment in the belief that it's quite compatible with the dharma. The process of becoming aware of wrong views in this way is a philosophical process.

Of course a positive engagement with right view is also important: but right view cannot always be laid down in advance as it is by nature not metaphysically fixed. Right view really consists in a set of principles which then have to be carefully applied in each context. My own experience is that I have learnt much more from studying wrong views in the context of Western philosophy, feeling their appeal and then peeling it away through the application of the dharma, than I ever did through studying right view in Buddhist texts (most of which isn't right view any more anyway, because the context has changed so much) or even from the writings of Buddhist teachers (though naturally I needed to learn something from them first before I could test it against wrong views). To really feel the allure of a wrong view, and then realise its dogmatic foundations and its practical inadequacy, is deeply productive of shraddha. Of course it's a negative exercise carrying the danger of producing too much hatred, but the study of right views likewise carries the opposite danger of too much attachment. And the Middle Way consists more than anything of a set of avoidances: by avoiding metaphysical traps of all kinds, on both sides, you gradually come to recognise the far more difficult and subtle balancing point in between.

Conclusion

So that brings me to the end of a very brief survey of what I'd consider the five most important Buddhist principles seen in philosophical terms: non-dualism, psychological integration, a balanced heuristic, pragmatism, and the Middle Way. In doing so I've probably packed in most of the more controversial conclusions I have reached in my thesis, though without the detailed argument which supports those conclusions in their original context.

I have concentrated on the philosophical side, because that is the focus of our discussions, but it needs to be stressed that non-dualism cannot stand alone as abstract theory. One of the chief dualisms that it needs to break down is that between theory and practice: this doesn't mean the assimilation of one to the other, or a theory appended with a gesture at practice. Rather the heuristic process can only be engaged in through practice. Practice is the experimentation that supports theory as well as realising it.

In the course of this it should have become clearer on exactly what grounds I think Buddhists should be philosophers and philosophers Buddhists, but I will summarise these just to make sure it is clear. Buddhists should be philosophers, at least to some extent, because it could aid them in their practice: to work out their epistemological priorities in making judgements, to avoid falling unawares into eternalism or nihilism, and to maintain the sense of critical investigation which enables us to get the grips with the complexity of conditions.

Philosophers should be Buddhists for quite similar reasons: to avoid dogmatic metaphysical assumptions and the cyclic order of conditionality this promotes, to break down the dualisms which have long hindered their philosophical understanding, and to gain a philosophically justifiable sense of values, based on non-dualism, to enable them to take up again their traditional prescriptive role without fear. Apart from anything else, if they really want to solve the problems of philosophy, Buddhism offers the most justifiable and most practically applicable set of answers available.

¹ See Sextus Empiricus, trans. Benson Mates (1996) The Skeptic Way

² Hume, David (1777/1975) Enquiries Oxford University Press, §128: “A Pyrrhonian...must acknowledge...that all human life would perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action, would immediately cease; and men remain in total lethargy....”

³ Majjhima Nikaya i 135-6

⁴ Anguttara Nikaya, 3rd Nipata, Mahavagga, Sutta §65

⁵ Majjhima Nikaya I 426-432

⁶ ditto (this follows exposition of the avyakta in the same sutta)

⁷ This should not be read as an advocacy of the opposite dualism, the view that consciousness is wholly material: it is the dualism itself I oppose here.

⁸ see Lakatos, Imre (1974) “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes” from Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge ed. I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave, Cambridge University Press.

⁹ See Lakoff, George (1987) Women, Fire and Dangerous Things University of Chicago Press

¹⁰ Digha Nikaya Sutta 1