

**Believers, Contemplatives, and the Future of Human Civilization:
A Buddhist Response to the Current Metacrisis, Part 3
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III. Rebuttal of Objections

Common objections to introspection, or reflexive mental perception, claim that:

- If by “introspection” we mean a special capacity—just like vision only less colorful—that we have to *spect intro* (“look inwards”), then it seems to me there is no such capacity. There could not be, because the model of “specting intro” requires a distinction between the object spected and the specting of it, and we cannot make this distinction for conscious states.
- Introspective observations are unstable and impossible to verify.
- Introspective observations are useful only for understanding meditative states, but not ordinary and pathological mental states.
- Introspective observations are subject to contamination by theory and belief systems.
- Introspective observations are subject to phenomenological illusion.
- Introspective observations are subject to concealment and misrepresentation by unconscious mental processes and motivations.
- Introspective observations are subject to distortion due to the observer-participancy.

- Philosopher Alex Rosenberg (1946–), co-director of the Center for Social and Philosophical Implications of Neuroscience in the Duke Initiative for Science and Society:¹ “Empirical science has continued to build up an impressive body of evidence showing that introspection and consciousness are not reliable bases for self-knowledge. As sources of knowledge even about themselves, let alone anything else human, both are frequently and profoundly mistaken . . . We never have direct access to our thoughts . . . Self-consciousness has nothing else to work with but the same sensory data we use to figure out what other people are doing and are going to do . . . There is no first-person point of view . . . Our access to our own thoughts is just as indirect and fallible as our access to the thoughts of other people. We have no privileged access to our own minds. If our thoughts give the real meaning of our actions, our words, our lives, then we can’t ever be sure [of] what we say or do, or for that matter, what we think or why we think it.”
- Cognitive psychologist Anne Treisman (1935–2018) at Princeton University, recipient of National Medal of Science:²
 - Perception is a kind of externally guided hallucination. We create experience rather than “photographing it.”
 - Psychologists regard subjective reports as data, rather than as factual accounts.
- See B. Alan Wallace, *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Toward a New Science of Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹ Alex Rosenberg, “Why You Don’t Know Your Own Mind,” *New York Times*, July 18, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/18/opinion/why-you-dont-know-your-own-mind.html>.

² Mind and Life XVIII: “Dialogues between Buddhism and the Sciences: Attention, Memory, and the Mind—A Synergy of Psychological, Neuroscientific, and Contemplative Perspectives,” Dharamsala, India, April 6-10, 2009.

- Early objections to the astronomical use of the telescope:
 - Galileo's friend, Cesare Cremonini, a professor of Aristotelian thought, refused to look through a telescope, for Galileo's observations contradicted the views of Aristotle.
 - Galileo claimed that his opponent, philosopher Giulio Libri, refused to look through a telescope for reasons based on Giovanni Battista Della Porta's 1589 book *Natural Magic*, which argued that first-person visual experience was fraught with all manner of optical illusions.³
- William James: "The problems of philosophy are those that have not yet been solved by science. Indeed, the domain of philosophy may be partially defined by that criterion."⁴
- Further, there is the objection that, unlike scientists, contemplatives from diverse traditions have not achieved consensual knowledge, even within one tradition, let alone across religions. Moreover, their experiences are entirely subjective and private, so their validity cannot be subjected to third-person verification or refutation. So it doesn't appear that they have achieved any replicable, intersubjectively verifiable discoveries.

In response to all these objections, we respond:

Śāntideva (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, IX: 1-3):

The Sage taught this entire system for the sake of wisdom.
Therefore, with the desire to ward off suffering, one should develop wisdom.

The obscurative and the ultimate are asserted as being two realities.
Ultimate reality is not an object of cognition.
Cognition is said to be obscurative.

In light of this, people of the world are seen to be of two types:
contemplatives and the ordinary people.
The ordinary people of the world are superseded by the contemplatives of the world.

- A contemplative (*yogin*) is one who has *yoga*, that is, *śamādhi* that is characterized by the non-objectification of all phenomena. An ordinary person (*prākṛta*) is one born of ignorance and craving, which are the causes for entering *samsāra*. A contemplative is an authority who achieves valid perceptions of reality, while an ordinary person perceives things mistakenly, for such a person is deluded.⁵

Definitions: ⁶

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galileo_affair

⁴ *Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 24.

⁵ Paraphrased from the *Pañjikā* commentary on *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life* by Prajñākaramati; cf. Dégé Tengyur, Vol. 105, Toh D3872, 388.

⁶ Adapted from *A Compendium of Key Points on the Modes of Cognition* and *An Advanced Text on the Modes of Cognition: A Very Clear Presentation of Cognition According to the Madhyamaka Prāsaṅgika, Free of the Two Extremes*, by the Learned Master Lobsang Gyatso.

- Samādhi has the function of causing the mind to focus continuously, whether for just a moment, or for as long as one wishes. It is of two kinds: (1) authentic samādhi has the function of causing the mental continuum to focus one-pointedly on a virtuous object; (2) afflictive samādhi causes an increase in mental afflictions, so it is “samādhi” in name only. The former, authentic samādhi, functions as the basis for the increase of intelligence, while the latter is the basis for distraction and an increase of afflictive intelligence.
- Intelligence (*prajñā*) has the unique function of thoroughly investigating the distinguishing characteristics or else the faults and/or good qualities of an object apprehended by mindfulness, thus making fine distinctions. Because it completely ascertains its object, intelligence has the function of cutting off doubt or uncertainty. It is held to be the root of all good qualities, both seen and unseen, and it is like a lamp that illuminates or like the eye that sees hidden phenomena.
- There are four types of intelligence: (1) that which is there from birth, and (2) that which arises from hearing, (3) from reflection, and (4) from meditation, respectively. In sum, there is intelligence investigating phenomena as they actually exist and intelligence investigating the full range of phenomena. Afflictive intelligence occurs when the more one analyzes, the more one’s mental afflictions increase. Authentic intelligence occurs when virtue increases.