

**Believers, Contemplatives, and the Future of Human Civilization:
A Buddhist Response to the Current Metacrisis, Part 4
The Cultivation of Cognitive Intelligence
B. Alan Wallace, July 16, 2024**

Śāntideva (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, IX: 4-6):

Due to differences in their cognition, even contemplatives
are refuted by successively higher ones
by means of analogies accepted by both parties,
regardless of what they aim to prove.

Ordinary people conceive of things as being real, just as they see them,
and not as being like illusions.
It is in this respect that there is disagreement
between contemplatives and ordinary people.

Even the objects of direct perception, such as form and the like,
are established by consensus and not by verifying cognition.
That consensus is false, just as is the general agreement that
impure things are pure, and so on.

Exploring the Phenomenological Nature of the Mind

- *Sūda Sutta (The Cook Discourse) Saṃyutta Nikāya 5.150–52*:
 - “...here some foolish, incompetent, unskillful monk dwells reviewing the mind as a mind, diligent, introspective, and mindful, having dispelled worldly covetousness and grief... While reviewing the mind as a mind, his mind does not become concentrated, his obscurations are not abandoned, and he does not apprehend that sign... [He] does not dwell in happiness here and now, and he attains neither mindfulness nor introspection. What is the reason for this? Because, monks, that foolish, incompetent, unskillful monk does not apprehend the sign of his own mind.” (*sakassa cittassa nimittam na uggaṇhāti*).
 - “...here some wise, competent, skillful monk dwells reviewing the mind as a mind, diligent, introspective, and mindful, having dispelled worldly covetousness and grief. While he dwells reviewing the mind as a mind, his mind becomes concentrated, his obscurations are abandoned, and he apprehends that sign... That wise, competent, skillful monk dwells in happiness here and now, and he attains mindfulness and introspection as well. What is the reason for that? Because, monks, this wise, competent, skillful monk apprehends the sign of his own mind.”
 - The “sign of the mind” refers to the final moments of sense-sphere consciousness before one attains *dhyāna*, which corresponds to the *bhavaṅga*, or ground of becoming. (S:B 1919 n135)

- The *bhavaṅga* is the natural, unencumbered state of mind, for it is the mind of the very last moment of a person's life—i.e., the *bhavaṅga-citta* in the form of a “falling away” mind—the “natural” mind (*pakati-*) *citta*.¹
 - Nāgasena (c. 150 BCE): The *bhavaṅga* is like the radiance of the sun, for it is naturally pure and radiant. It is the resting ground-state of consciousness which is not turned towards the senses, and it acts as the foundation for the process of non-karmically-active life, of which it is the characteristic factor: the state it returns to when not doing anything else. The equation of the *bhavaṅga* with the luminous mind is directly asserted in the commentaries, as well as the *Milindapañha*, which cites similes indicating that while the normal functioning of mind is like light, which may get cut off, the *bhavaṅga citta* of dreamless sleep has a radiance which exists whether or not it is obscured. (*Milindapañha*, pp. 299-300).
 - The Mahāsāṅghika school believed in a *bhavaṅga*-like state which they referred to as a root- (*mūla*) consciousness that acts as a support (*āśraya*) for visual consciousness, etc., as the root of a tree sustains the leaves, etc.
- *The Dhammapada*: “All phenomena are preceded by mentation, issue forth from mentation, and consist of mentation.”
- *Ratnameghasūtra (Cloud of Jewels Discourse)*: “All phenomena are preceded by mentation. When mentation is comprehended, all phenomena are comprehended. By bringing mentation under control, all things are brought under control.”
- Buddha: “It is in this fathom-long body with its perceptions and its mind that I describe the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the way leading to the cessation of the world.” (*Samyutta Nikāya* 2.36)
- *Siṃsapā Sutta (The Siṃsapā Leaves Discourse)*, translated by Maurice O'Connell Walshe² (*Samyutta Nikāya* 56.31)

At one time the Blessed One was staying at Kosambī in Siṃsapā Grove. Then the Blessed One, taking a few siṃsapā leaves in his hand, said to the monks: “What do you think, monks? Which are the more numerous, the few leaves I have here in my hand, or those up in the trees of the grove?”

“Lord, the Blessed One is holding only a few leaves: those up in the trees are far more numerous.”

“In the same way, monks, there are many more things that I have found out, but not revealed to you. What I have revealed to you is only a little. And why, monks, have I not revealed it?

“Because, monks, it is not related to the goal, it is not fundamental to the holy life, does not conduce to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, tranquility, higher knowledge, enlightenment or Nibbāna. That is why I have not revealed it. And what, monks, have I revealed?

“What I have revealed is: ‘This is Suffering, this is the Arising of Suffering, this is the Cessation of Suffering, and this is the Path that leads to the Cessation of Suffering.’ And why, monks, have I revealed it?

“Because this is related to the goal, fundamental to the holy life, conduces to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, tranquility, higher knowledge, enlightenment and

¹ From *Kathāvatthu*, one of the seven books in the Theravāda Abhidhamma Pitaka, 615.

² <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.031.wlsh.html>

Nibbāna, therefore I have revealed it.

“Therefore, monks, your task is to learn: ‘This is Suffering, this is the Arising of Suffering, this is the Cessation of Suffering, this is the Path that leads to the Cessation of Suffering.’ That is your task.”

- Recommended readings:
 - Paravahera Vajirajñāna Mahāthera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice: A General Exposition According to the Pāli Canon of the Theravādin School* (Charleston SC: Charleston Buddhist Fellowship, 2010), Part II, ch. 13, “Kasiṇa Bhāvanā,” and Part IV, ch. 32 “Iddhi-Vidhā” and ch. 33 “Abhiññā.”
 - Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995)
 - Ian Stevenson, M.D., *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect* (New York: Praeger, 1997)
 - Jim Tucker, *Life Before Life: A Scientific Investigation of Children’s Memories of Previous Lives* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005)
 - Bruce Greyson, M.D., *After: A Doctor Explores What Near-Death Experiences Reveal about Life and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin’s Essentials, 2021)
 - B. Alan Wallace, *Mind in the Balance: Meditation in Science, Buddhism, and Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009)

The Participatory Universe of Contemporary Physics

- Cosmologist Thomas Hertog at KU Leuven University in Belgium and a key collaborator of Professor Stephen Hawking: “You can think of that quantum reality a bit like a tree. The branches represent all possible universes, and our observations—we are part of the universe, so we are part of that tree—and our observations select certain branches, and hereby give meaning, or give reality, to our past in a quantum world ... Quantum theory indicates we may *not* be mere chemical scum. Life and the cosmos are, in the quantum theory, a synthesis, and our observations now give in fact reality to its earliest days.”³
- Quantum theorist Christopher Fuchs, University of Massachusetts, Boston:⁴
 - “Schrödinger thought that the Greeks had a kind of hold over us — they saw that the only way to make progress in thinking about the world was to talk about it without the ‘knowing subject’ in it. QBism goes against that strain by saying that quantum mechanics is not about how the world is without us; instead it’s precisely about us in the world. The subject matter of the theory is not the world or us but us-within-the-world, the interface between the two.”
 - “QBism would say, it’s not that the world is built up from stuff on ‘the outside’ as the Greeks would have had it. Nor is it built up from stuff on ‘the inside’ as the idealists, like George Berkeley and Eddington, would have it. Rather, the stuff of the world is in the character of what each of us encounters every living moment — stuff that is neither inside nor outside, but prior to the very notion of a cut between the two at all.”

³ “Mankind in a multiverse: Thomas Hertog at TEDxLeuven”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3NiUZVGS9s>

⁴ Amanda Gefter, “A Private View of Quantum Reality,” *Quanta Magazine*, June 4, 2015: <https://www.quantamagazine.org/quantum-bayesianism-explained-by-its-founder-20150604/>

- Science writer Amanda Gefter, recipient of Physics World’s 2015 book of the year award:
 - “QBism... treats the wave function as a description of a single observer’s subjective knowledge. It resolves all of the quantum paradoxes, but at the not insignificant cost of anything we might call ‘reality.’ Then again, maybe that’s what quantum mechanics has been trying to tell us all along — that a single objective reality is an illusion.⁵
 - “So while neuroscientists struggle to understand how there can be such a thing as a first-person reality, quantum physicists have to grapple with the mystery of how there can be anything but a first-person reality. In short, all roads lead back to the observer.”⁶
- Recommended reading: B. Alan Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), Ch. 5 “A Special Theory of Ontological Relativity.”

Excerpted from the Tibetan translation of the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta* by Nyima Tsering and Dawa Sherpa (Tib. *dran pa nye bar gzhag pa'i mdo chen po*)

[2] “Diligent, introspective, and mindful, having dispelled worldly covetousness and grief, one dwells reviewing the mind...”

[9] “Monks, how does a monk dwell reviewing the mind as a mind? Monks, here one thoroughly knows an attached mind to be attached, and an unattached mind to be unattached. One thoroughly knows a hateful mind to be hateful, and an unhateful mind to be unhateful. One thoroughly knows a deluded mind to be deluded and an undeluded mind to be undeluded. One thoroughly knows a contracted mind to be contracted and a distracted mind to be distracted. One thoroughly knows a great mind to be great and a mind that is not great not to be great. One thoroughly knows a surpassable mind to be surpassable, and an unsurpassable mind to be unsurpassable. One thoroughly knows a mind settled in meditative equipoise to be settled in meditative equipoise and a mind not settled in meditative equipoise not to be settled in meditative equipoise. [10] One thoroughly knows a liberated mind to be liberated and an unliberated mind to be unliberated.

In that way, one dwells reviewing the mind as a mind internally; one dwells reviewing the mind as a mind externally; and one dwells reviewing the mind as a mind internally and externally. One dwells reviewing factors of origination in the mind; one dwells reviewing the factors of dissolution in the mind; and one dwells reviewing the factors of origination and dissolution in the mind. By simply recognizing ‘there is a mind’ to the extent necessary for simply being discerningly mindful and closely sustaining mindfulness, one dwells with no basis, not appropriating anything in the world. Monks, in that way, a monk dwells reviewing the mind as a mind.”

- A contracted mind is one that has succumbed to laxity and dullness, while a distracted mind has succumbed to excitation.

⁵ Amanda Gefter, “A Private View of Quantum Reality.”

⁶ Ibid.

- A great mind is one that dwells in the form or formless realm, while a mind that is not great dwells in the desire realm.
- A surpassable mind is one belonging to the desire realm, while an unsurpassable mind belongs to the form or formless realm.
- A mind in meditative equipoise is one that has achieved either access to a dhyāna or full dhyāna, while a mind not in meditative equipoise has not achieved access to a dhyāna or full dhyāna.
- A liberated mind is one that is partially freed from mental afflictions through systematic training, or that is freed through the suppression of mental afflictions by being absorbed in dhyāna. Or it may refer to the mind of an arhat that is completely free of all mental afflictions. An unliberated mind is one that is not freed in either of the above two ways.
- Recommended readings:
 - Anālayo Bhikkhu, *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 2006).
 - B. Alan Wallace, *Minding Closely: The Four Applications of Mindfulness*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2021).