

# Wrong view (*micchā-ditṭhī*) and right view (*sammā-ditṭhī*) in the Theravāda Abhidhamma\*

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Despite the fact that the Buddhist tradition has often accorded it an exalted status, the Abhidharma has received relatively little attention from modern scholars. Those working on the Pali materials tend to concentrate their efforts on the Nikāyas in the endeavour of elucidating the nature of the earliest phase of Buddhist thought, while for scholars working with the Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan materials it is the Mahāyāna philosophical schools—the Madhyamaka and to a lesser extent the Yogācāra—that have most consistently captured the imagination. There have, of course, been notable exceptions, such as Louis de La Vallée Poussin's monumental work of scholarship, his annotated French translation of Hsüan-tsang's translation of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* or Erich Frauwallner's *Abhidharmastudien*.<sup>1</sup>

In any review of works of modern scholarship concerned with Abhidharma studies, Professor Karunadasa's study of *rūpa* must be counted as one of the significant contributions.<sup>2</sup> One of the things that makes this an important contribution is Professor Karunadasa's commitment to dealing with the materials relevant to *rūpa* in both the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma systems. In the task of charting the evolution of Buddhist thought, the clarification of issues in the development of the Abhidharma thought is of paramount importance. As is becoming clearer, it is only in the context of Abhidharma discussions that the Mahāyāna systems of thought of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra can be properly understood. The present article represents an attempt to further the comparative understanding of issues in the study of the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma in the manner exemplified by Professor Karunadasa.

The particular focus of the present article is the Abhidharma understanding of 'views' (*ditṭhī/dṛṣṭi*). My starting point is an article by Padmanabh S. Jaini, a scholar who has made an important contribution to our understanding of, especially, the Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma. In 1977 Professor Jaini contributed a paper to a volume in honour of Edward Conze entitled '*Prajñā* and *dṛṣṭi* in the Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma'.<sup>3</sup> This paper pointed out that, contrary to what some

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might have expected, the understanding of *prajñā* and *drṣṭi* reflected in the Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma coincided in certain important respects with the understanding of the Prajñāpāramitā literature: the highest wisdom is free from all views including significantly ‘right view’ (*samyag-drṣṭi*). In passing, Professor Jaini contrasted the Prajñāpāramitā and Vaibhāṣika understanding of *prajñā* and *drṣṭi* with that found in the Theravāda Abhidhamma. The present paper owes much to Professor Jaini’s insights, but his comments on the Theravāda Abhidhamma understanding of *paññā* and *ditṭhi* seem to me misleading in certain respects, and I would like to try to explore the Theravāda treatment further.

First let me try to summarise more fully the account of the Vaibhāṣika understanding of *drṣṭi* that Professor Jaini presents in his article. He points out that *drṣṭi* is not listed as one of the seventy-five *dharmas* of the Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma. This is because it is understood not to be a *dharma* in its own right, but rather as a particular mode of occurrence of another *dharma*, namely *prajñā/mati*, one of the ten *caittas* common to all occurrences of *citta* (Abhidh-k-bh II 24). *Drṣṭi* in fact constitutes one of two basic subclasses of *prajñā*: *prajñā* that involves ‘judgement’ (*santīrika*), as opposed to *prajñā* that is free from or beyond judgement (*asantīrika*) (pp. 407–8). The latter subclass in fact consists of the two kinds of pure *anāsrava* knowledge that occur at the moment of the attainment of Arhatship, knowledge of the destruction of the *āsravas* and knowledge of their non-arising, together with the *prajñā* that arises in association with the five kinds of immediate sense consciousness;<sup>4</sup> all other occurrences of *prajñā* fall into the former class (Abhidh-k-bh I 41 c-d, VII 1) and are thus instances of *drṣṭi*. But this primary subclass of *prajñā* itself falls into two further subclasses: wrong or false views (*mithyā-drṣṭi*) and right views (*samyag-drṣṭi*). Wrong or false view, then, is not understood, as one might have perhaps expected, as some sort of manifestation of delusion (*moha*, *avidyā*), but counter-intuitively as a form of ‘wisdom’ or *prajñā*—albeit a form conditioned by delusion.

Views in general are instances of *prajñā* that entail a certain kind of determining or judgement: wrong or false views involve faulty and inaccurate determining or judgement; right views are correct and accurate. Prior to the arising of the *darśana-mārga* and the attainment of the path of stream-attainment, beings waver between false views and ordinary (*laukika*) right views, but at the moment of stream-attainment ‘the path of seeing’ abandons, once and for all, all false views. The first factor of the eightfold path, right view (*samyag-drṣṭi*), is thus established. But this does not mean that the stream-attainer has perfected wisdom; there is the higher *prajñā*, beyond judgements, beyond right view, to be attained by the path of Arhatship. Jaini interprets this *prajñā*’s being beyond judgement in terms of its being free from what the Mahāyāna texts call ‘conceptual constructions’ (*vikalpa*), although, unlike the Mahāyāna equivalent, it is still defined as having as its object true existents; namely, *dharmas*.

Since it was not his prime concern, Jaini’s account of *ditṭhi* in the Theravāda Abhidhamma is, understandably, incomplete. He merely notes that the Theravādins define *ditṭhi* exclusively in terms of ‘false view’ (*micchā-ditṭhi/mithyā-drṣṭi*), which is then treated as a *dhamma* in its own right,

distinct from both *paññā* and delusion (*moha*, *avijjā*); the Theravādins then take ‘right view’ (*sammā-ditṭhi*), established at the moment of stream-attainment, not as a form of *ditṭhi*, but as equivalent to the highest wisdom (*paññā*). From this he draws two conclusions. (1) On the Theravāda view, the highest *paññā* (= *sammā-ditṭhi*), although free of false views, is not understood, as it is in the Vaibhāṣika system, to be beyond all views; the Theravādins are in fact content with a simple ‘breakdown of cognition into “inaccurate” and “accurate” modes’ (p. 407), whereas the Vaibhāṣikas in effect propose a break down into three essential modes; namely, inaccurate, accurate and free of judgement. (2) Furthermore, for the Theravādins the distinction between stream-attainment and arahatship is not one of ‘understanding attained’, as it is in the Vaibhāṣika system, but one of ‘defilements overcome’ (p. 407). In other words, the highest wisdom and understanding is already attained at the moment of stream-attainment, and a text such as the *Atthasālinī* struggles to explain the function of *sammā-ditṭhi* in the higher paths.

This statement of the matter seems to me somewhat misleading and not to take proper account of the particular dynamic of the Theravāda system. For the remainder of this paper I would like to fill in the Theravāda account of *ditṭhi*, comment on the two conclusions drawn by Jaini and finish by passing some comments on the relationship of greed and ignorance in Buddhist thought and its significance for the Buddhist understanding of what constitutes wisdom and knowledge.

### ***Paññā* and *Ditṭhi* in the Theravāda Abhidhamma**

To say that the Theravādins understand *ditṭhi* in the restricted sense of what the Vaibhāṣikas call *mithyā-drṣṭi* is of course correct as far as it goes, but since in the Vaibhāṣika system *mithyā-drṣṭi* and *samyag-drṣṭi* are species of the same *dharma* (namely, *prajñā*) while in the Theravāda they are two quite distinct *dharma*s, to say this and no more obscures the peculiar dynamic of the Theravāda system. A closer examination of the Theravāda understanding of the relationship between *paññā* and *ditṭhi* in the light of Jaini’s findings thus promises to illuminate aspects of Buddhist thought more generally.

In trying to demarcate the differences between the Vaibhāṣika and Theravāda presentation of *prajñā/paññā*, one must first take account of the fact that, for the Theravādins, *paññā*, unlike *prajñā* for the Vaibhāṣikas, is not a universal *cetasika* arising with all instances of thought. For the Theravādins *paññā* is not even universal to all ‘skilful’ consciousness (*kusala-citta*). In sense-sphere (*kāmāvacara*) consciousness it is in fact restricted to the four types of skilful consciousness associated with knowledge (*ñāṇa-sampayutta*), along with the corresponding resultant (*vipāka*) and *kiriya* consciousness; otherwise wisdom is a feature of the types of consciousness constituting various meditation attainments: the fifteen form-sphere (*rūpāvacara*) consciousnesses, the twelve formless-sphere (*arūpāvacara*) consciousnesses and the types of ‘world-transcending’ (*lokuttara*) consciousness that constitute the attainment of the paths

and fruits of stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), once-return (*sakadāgāmitā*), non-return (*anāgāmitā*) and arahatship (*arahatta*).<sup>5</sup>

Jaini refers to the Theravāda understanding of the equivalence of *paññā* and *sammā-dit̥ṭhi*; this equivalence is established in the canonical Abhidhamma texts by the register of terms employed in the definition of *paññā* in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* and *Vibhaṅga*; this regularly includes the term *sammā-dit̥ṭhi*.<sup>6</sup> That *paññā* and *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* should be regarded as that which knows the four truths, and hence the highest wisdom, follows from various passages repeated in the Nikāya and Abhidhamma texts.<sup>7</sup>

For the Theravādins, then, as Jaini has pointed out (*micchā*)-*dit̥ṭhi* is taken as a distinct *dhamma* in its own right while *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* is equated with *paññā* or wisdom, but it does not necessarily follow from this, as Jaini seems to assume, that the Theravādins simply break down ‘cognition into “inaccurate” and “accurate” modes’, and that no distinctions are made in the Theravāda Abhidhamma between different levels and kinds of (*micchā*)-*dit̥ṭhi*, between different levels and kinds of *paññā*, or between different levels and kinds of *sammā-dit̥ṭhi*. Jaini makes the extremely important point (p. 406) that the Vaibhāṣikas use the term *prajñā* ‘in a generic rather than specific sense’, but as I have argued elsewhere, the same is true of the terms for all *dharmas* in both the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda systems: the terms for all *dharmas* signify generic classes of events.<sup>8</sup> Thus, for example, according to the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* the ‘awakening factor of investigation of dhamma’ (*dhamma-vicaya-sam-bojjhaṅga*), like *sammā-dit̥ṭhi*, can be seen as equivalent to the *dhamma* of *paññā*, yet this is only so at the moments of attaining the transcendent paths and fruits, and thus not all instances of *paññā* are instances of *dhamma-vicaya-sam-bojjhaṅga*.<sup>9</sup> Thus, for the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* a moment of ordinary sense-sphere consciousness accompanied by knowledge constitutes a real occurrence of wisdom and right view, yet it is only at the moments of attaining stream-entry, once-return, non-return or arahatship that wisdom is strong or intense enough to constitute the awakening factor of investigation of *dhammas*. For the Theravāda Abhidhamma, then, distinctions between different ‘degrees’ of *paññā* certainly exist. Indeed, if this were not the case we would have to conclude, on the basis of the fact that the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* regards *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* as a general concomitant of skilful sense-sphere consciousness connected with knowledge, that there is no distinction to be made not only between the understanding of the stream-attainer and the understanding of the arahat, but also between the understanding of the ordinary unawakened *puthujjana* and that of the arahat.<sup>10</sup> Such a conclusion can hardly be intended, since it makes a nonsense of the Buddhist path to awakening.

A basic distinction is already made in the Nikāyas—in the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta*—between, on the one hand, *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* that is not free of the defiling influxes (*sāsava*), concerned with auspicious, meritorious action (*puñña-bhāgiya*) and that results in the acquisition of further rebirth (*upadhivepakka*), and, on the other hand, *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* that is ‘noble’ (*ariya*), free of the defiling influxes (*anāsava*), world-transcending (*lokuttara*) and a factor of the path (*maggāṅga*).<sup>11</sup> The first is defined according to a stock Nikāya formula:

There are such things as giving, sacrificing, offering, the fruit and result of good and bad deeds, this world and the next world, mother and father, beings who are spontaneously born, ascetics and brahmins pursuing and following right practice who, having directly known and realized for themselves both this world and the next, make it known.<sup>12</sup>

The commentary explains that the former is concerned with ordinary insight (*vipassanā*), while the latter is concerned with the right view gained at the time of attaining the transcendent path.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the Theravāda Abhidhamma is clearly working with an understanding of *paññā/sammā-diṭṭhi* that allows distinctions of degree to exist: some instances of wisdom or right view amount to a fuller or more complete understanding and knowledge than others, despite the fact that all instances represent manifestations of the one and the same kind of *dhamma*.

The comment of the *Atthasālinī* to the effect that the three higher paths of once-return, non-return and Arahantship see only what has already been seen by the lower path of stream-attainment is not necessarily inconsistent with the view that *sammā-diṭṭhi* admits of differences of degree or intensity.<sup>14</sup> Essentially the same thing may be experienced more fully and deeply.

Furthermore, in detailing which *cittas* no longer arise for the stream-attainer, the commentator makes it clear that he does not interpret the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* as proposing that there is no distinction in understanding attained between the stream-attainer and the arahat.<sup>15</sup> The stream-attainer does not abandon all ignorance and thus has not perfected wisdom. He abandons five kinds of *akusala citta*: four connected with view (*diṭṭhigata-sampayutta*) and one connected with doubt (*vicikicchā-sampayutta*). There remain seven types of unskilful *citta* that the stream-attainer still experiences: the four rooted in greed and delusion, which may or may not be connected with conceit (*māna*) but are not connected with (*micchā*)-*diṭṭhi*, two rooted in aversion and delusion, and one connected with restlessness (*uddhacca*). All seven of these *cittas* are thus rooted in delusion (*moha*); the stream-attainer's understanding cannot be perfect; some degree of ignorance or delusion remains to be abandoned, and some degree of wisdom or understanding remains to be attained.<sup>16</sup>

If we examine the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* description of each of the four transcendent paths, we find that the path of stream-attainment is described as 'for the sake of abandoning views' (*diṭṭhigatānaṃ pahānāya*), the path of once-return as 'for the sake of weakening sensual desire and aversion' (*kāmarāga-vyāpādānaṃ patanūbhāvāya*), the path of non-return as 'for the sake of abandoning without remainder any sensual desire and aversion' (*kāmarāga-vyāpādānaṃ anavasesa-ppahānāya*), and the path of Arahantship as 'for the sake of abandoning without remainder any desire for the form and formless spheres, conceit, restlessness and ignorance' (*rūparāga-rūparāga-māna-uddhacca-avijjāya anavasesa-ppahānāya*).<sup>17</sup> This view of the matter fits with the earlier Nikāya/Āgama tradition of the stream-attainer's abandoning the first three of the ten fetters: *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, *vicikicchā* and *sīlabbata-parāmāsa*.<sup>18</sup> The remaining fetters include *avijjā*, which is completely abandoned only by the arahat.<sup>19</sup>

For the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* and *Atthasālinī*, at the time of the arising of the path of stream-attainment there occurs a particular manifestation of *paññā* that has the function of abandoning all kinds of (*micchā-*)*diṭṭhi*; this manifestation of *paññā* is called transcendent *sammā-diṭṭhi*. But the abandoning of all these views does not mean that understanding has been perfected. When the *Atthasālinī* raises the question of the function of *sammā-diṭṭhi* in the higher paths, its problem is not that with stream-attainment the possibilities of knowledge and wisdom have already been exhausted, but simply that the special function of *sammā-diṭṭhi* (i.e., the abandoning of false views) has been accomplished, yet, as everyone knows, the path taught by the Buddha is eightfold and tradition therefore demands that all eight limbs of the path are present not only at stream attainment, but also at the attainment of once-return, non-return and arahatship.

### ***Diṭṭhi/dr̥ṣṭi* as cognitive and affective**

If we consider the general use of the term *diṭṭhi/dr̥ṣṭi* in Buddhist thought, we see that it combines two logically distinct dimensions: the cognitive and the affective. On the one hand, certain specific views, ways of understanding that can be expressed in terms of formal propositions about the way things are, are characterised as ‘false-views’ (*micchā-diṭṭhi*); the most common are *sassata-vāda*, *uccheda-vāda*, *akiriya-vāda*, and *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*. On the other hand, in certain contexts what seems to be significant about *diṭṭhi* is not so much the cognitive content of a view, but the fact that we cling to it as a dogma, the fact that it becomes a fixed view: this alone is true, all else is foolishness. Thus, even so-called ‘right views’ can be ‘views’ (*diṭṭhi*) in so far as they can become fixed and the objects of attachment. Significantly, then, the early texts give us far more details of the cognitive or propositional content of the views we should not hold—the ‘false views’—than of the views we should hold—the ‘right views’.<sup>20</sup> For to define right view too rigidly and specifically makes for mental rigidity and fixed opinions, when perfect seeing is precisely the transcending of all view points; right view should not be understood as a view itself, but as freedom from all views. This way of thinking is perhaps most clearly expressed in a series of poems found in the *aṭṭhaka-vagga* of the *Suttanipāta*, but is also implicit in the treatment of ‘views’ more generally in the *Nikāyas*.<sup>21</sup> We can see the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, the *Mādhyamikas*, *Yogācārins* and—as Jaini has shown—the *Vaibhāṣikas*, as all in their way trying to articulate this early tradition of Buddhist thought more precisely. What of the Theravādins?

In the light of the fact that (*micchā-*)*diṭṭhi* is presented in the *Nikāyas* as a certain mental rigidity and opinionatedness, the most striking and significant aspect of the Theravāda Abhidhamma treatment of *diṭṭhi* is the fact that it is considered to be exclusively a concomitant of *citta* rooted in greed (*lobhamūla*): *diṭṭhi* can only be present in the mind when greed or attachment occurs; it is confined to four types of consciousness rooted in greed.<sup>22</sup> In order to form a clearer idea of this understanding of the nature of view and its cognitive and affective aspects, it is helpful at this point to consider the registers of terms used

in the early Abhidhamma texts, such as the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* and *Vibhaṅga*, to define *ditṭhi* and *moha*, respectively.

The following terms are used to define *ditṭhi*: gone over to view (*ditṭhigata*),<sup>23</sup> a thicket of view (*ditṭhi-gahana*), a wilderness of view (*ditṭhi-kantāra*), the contrariness of view (*ditṭhi-visukāyika*), the turmoil of view (*ditṭhi-vipphandita*), the fetter of views (*ditṭhi-saṃyojana*), holding (*gāha*), fixity (*patitṭhāha*),<sup>24</sup> conviction (*abhinivesa*), clinging (*parāmāsa*), a bad path (*kummagga*), a false way (*micchā-patha*), falsity (*micchatta*), the realm of (other) systems of crossing over (*titthāyatana*), and the hold of the perverted views (*vipariyesa-gāha*).<sup>25</sup> Most of these terms are drawn from various Nikāya contexts and their precise signification is sometimes unclear; my translations reflect the explanations offered in the *Atthasālinī*, and in fact it is worth quoting these in full:

It is ‘gone over to view’ because it is a way of seeing that, due to its being included among the sixty-two wrong views, has gone over to wrong views in the sense of not seeing in accordance with the truth ... View itself is a ‘thicket of views’ in the sense of being difficult to pass through—like a grass thicket, or a forest thicket or a mountainous region; in the sense of being fearful and dangerous it is a ‘wilderness of views’—like a wilderness with bandits and snakes, without food and water; in the sense of overthrowing and conflicting with right view it is the ‘contrariness of view’, for when the wrong way of seeing occurs it overthrows and conflicts with the right way of seeing. The ‘turmoil of view’ is the turning to the other form for one who at one time holds the eternalist view and at one time the annihilationist view, for one lost in views is unable to stick with one position, at one time he follows eternalism at another he follows annihilationism. The ‘fetter of view’ is view itself considered as a fetter in the sense of binding. Because it takes hold of its object firmly as crocodiles and so on take hold of a man, it is ‘holding’. As a result of becoming fixed it is fixity. Indeed, by reason of its forceful occurrence, having become fixed it takes hold; and, because it is convinced about permanence and so on, this is ‘conviction’. Because it misses the nature of dhammas and insists on holding on by way of the idea of their permanence and so on, it is ‘holding on’. A ‘bad path’ is a path that is vile due to its taking one to what is unbeneficial, or it is a path to the vile descents. As a way that is not in accordance with the truth it is a false way. For even though one who is confused about the way takes a road thinking ‘this is certainly the way to such and such village,’ it does not bring him to that village, just so, even though one who is lost in view holds a view, thinking ‘this is the way to a happy destiny,’ it does not bring him to a happy destiny; so a ‘false way’ is a way not in accordance with the truth. As something that is by nature false, it is ‘falsity’. A ‘system of crossing over’ is where, just because of their roaming about there, it appears the foolish cross over; and because this is the realm of things unbeneficial, it is the realm of other systems of crossing over.

Alternatively the ‘realm of other systems of crossing over’ is a realm in the sense of the dwelling place and country of birth of those belonging to other systems of crossing over. The ‘hold of the perverted views’ is a holding on which constitutes a perverted view;<sup>26</sup> alternatively it is holding on because of a perverted view; holding to what is perverted is the meaning.<sup>27</sup>

While there is certainly some notion of the wrong, mistaken and false content of ‘view’ in this treatment, two related notions seem to dominate: first, that view is something that we hold on to, cling to and that thus becomes rigid and fixed; second, that view is something we get stuck in, tangled in and lost in. Let me straight away turn to the definition of *moha* before passing further comment.

Delusion (*moha*) is: not knowing (*aññāṇa*), not seeing (*adassana*), not understanding (*anabhisamaya*), not cognising properly (*ananubodha*), not cognising fully (*asambodha*), not penetrating (*appaṭivedha*), not fathoming (*asamgāhanā*),<sup>28</sup> not thoroughly fathoming (*apariyogāhanā*), not regarding impartially (*asamapekkhanā*), not reviewing (*apaccavekkhanā*), lack of vision (*apaccakkhakkamma*), stupidity (*dummejjha*), foolishness (*bālya*), not clearly knowing (*asampajañña*), delusion (*moha*), strong delusion (*pamoha*), complete delusion (*samoha*), ignorance (*avijjā*), the flood of ignorance (*avijjogha*), the bond of ignorance (*avijjāyoga*), the latent tendency to ignorance (*avijjānusaya*), the manifestation of ignorance (*avijjā-pariyuṭṭhāna*), and the barrier of ignorance (*avijjālaṅgī*).<sup>29</sup> In contrast to the register of terms for *diṭṭhi*, this set of defining terms is dominated by verbal roots connoting knowing and seeing; a further dimension of delusion is suggested by the notion of its not being able to penetrate to and fathom the true nature of things. We should also note that the *Atthasālinī* makes clear that the negative prefix *a-* should not be interpreted as indicating the mere absence of knowing and seeing, but rather a definite *dhamma* that is opposed (*paṭipakkha*) to knowing and seeing.<sup>30</sup> Ignorance and delusion are thus seen as something that positively obscures the true nature of things. The standard commentarial definitions of *micchā-diṭṭhi* and *moha* further bring out their distinctive characteristics.<sup>31</sup> The characteristic of view is inappropriate conviction (*ayoniso abhinivesa*); its function is clinging (*parāmāsa*); its manifestation is wrong conviction (*micchābhinivesa*); its basis is the absence of a desire to meet the Noble Ones and the like (*ariyānaṃ adassana-kāmatādi*); and it should be seen as the ultimate fault (*paramaṃ vajjaṃ*). Delusion, on the other hand, has the characteristic of mental blindness (*cittassa andhabhāvo*), or of not knowing (*aññāṇa*); its function is not penetrating (*asappaṭivedha*), or concealing the nature of an object (*ārammaṇa-sabhāva-cchādana*); its manifestation is the absence of right practice (*asammā-paṭipatti*), or blindness (*andhakāra*); its basis is inappropriate bringing to mind (*ayoniso manasikāra*); it should be seen as the root of all that is unskillful (*sabbākusalānaṃ mūlaṃ*).

In summary, then, we can see from a cluster of terms used for *diṭṭhi* (*gāha*, *paṭiṭṭhāha abhinivesa*, *parāmāsa*) that for the Theravādins what is significant about *diṭṭhi* is not simply that it is a wrong or false way of seeing, but that it

is a grasping at or holding on to a particular way of seeing; it is a fixed or rigid view of things. The emphasis in the register of terms for *moha*, on the other hand, is on its not knowing, not seeing, not understanding, on its failure to penetrate (*appaṭivedha*) and get below the surface (*apariyogāhanā*) to the true nature of things.<sup>32</sup>

It seems, then, that to at least some extent what the Vaibhāṣikas in their analysis of *dr̥ṣṭi* see as a kind of ‘judging’ or ‘determining’ (*santīraṇa*), the Theravādins see as *lobha*. The difference is, however, that for the Vaibhāṣikas a subtle form of this fixity of view continues after stream-attainment in the form of *samyag-dr̥ṣṭi*, while the Theravādins apparently make no provision for its continuation since the greed-delusion that crystallises as *dit̥ṭhi* is abandoned by the path of stream-attainment. In the Theravāda, understanding the tendency to fixed opinion can only exist prior to stream-attainment, since the wisdom of stream-attainment is characterised as *sammā-dit̥ṭhi*, a form of *paññā* that precisely turns away from the inclination to hold fixed opinions; once the four truths have been directly seen, the mind has no inclination to either eternalism or annihilationism, the mind has no tendency to misinterpret Buddhist theory in terms of either annihilationism or eternalism.

### Right view and belief

Some fifty years ago Erich Frauwallner highlighted the fact that at one time (in the formula of the four noble truths) Buddhist thought sees ‘thirst’ (*tr̥ṣṇā/taṇhā*) as the root cause of suffering, at another time (in the formula of *pratīyasamutpāda*) ignorance (*avidyā/avijjā*); indeed, he saw this as something of an inconsistency.<sup>33</sup> Yet what Buddhist thought seems to be suggesting here is that what is logically distinct—the cognitive and affective, fact and value—is empirically inextricably bound up together; a mind that does not see in accordance with the truth is a mind that tends to grasp. As long as there is ignorance (a blindness to the reality of impermanence, suffering and not-self), there is a tendency for the mind to continue in its perverse insistence that what is impermanent is permanent, what is suffering is happiness, what is not self is self, and what is ugly is beautiful. And this is precisely where the notion of *dit̥ṭhi* comes in, for it combines both the root causes of suffering: ignorance and greed.

In order to gain a proper understanding of view we need to think carefully about the psychology involved in *dit̥ṭhi*. Buddhist tradition catalogues a number of wrong-views, but clearly it is not necessary to consciously hold precisely those views in order to be bound up in *dit̥ṭhi*. The manner in which the Buddhist tradition, from the *Brahmajāla Sutta* to the *Madhyamaka*, has a tendency to reduce all views to either annihilationism or eternalism, indicates how certain ways of understanding amount to annihilationism or eternalism; in other words, it is possible for us to form an annihilationist or an eternalist understanding in our own minds of a teaching that is intended to be neither. Indeed, the Suttas precisely tell us that some misinterpret what the Buddha teaches as annihilationism;<sup>34</sup> similarly the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Nāgārjuna* suggest that others—this time

‘Buddhists’—misunderstand what they are trying to say and accuse them of destroying the Buddha’s teaching.<sup>35</sup> What all this implies is that (false) view is as much a matter of the psychology and emotional attitude of the person holding a view as it is of the formal content of the view. The Buddhist tradition recognises that what is formally Buddhist theory can be grasped and held in a manner such that it constitutes wrong view.

On the kind of understanding that defines *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* simply as the occurrence of *paññā* or wisdom, and *micchā-dit̥ṭhi* or false view as an occurrence of something altogether different, namely, a particular psychological crystallization of delusion and greed (which is the understanding that underlies the Theravāda Abhidhamma), as a matter of definition *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* can never be *dit̥ṭhi*. That is, in spite of the fact that the same word is being used, for the Theravāda Abhidhamma *dit̥ṭhi* and *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* are not to be seen as different species of the same beast, but essentially different, and in fact *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* shares none of the characteristic qualities of *dit̥ṭhi*. In the Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma, on the other hand, *samyag-dr̥ṣṭi* and *mithyā-dr̥ṣṭi* do share the characteristic ‘view’ quality since they both involve conceptual judgement (*santīrika*). This means that *samyag-dr̥ṣṭi/prajñā* and *sammā-dit̥ṭhi/paññā* are conceived of rather differently in the Vaibhāṣika and Theravāda Abhidharmas. For the Vaibhāṣikas it appears that *samyag-dr̥ṣṭi* can be understood as a kind of correct belief or judgement based, in the case of the stream-attainer, on direct experience of the facts (impermanence, suffering and not-self). Possibly in the case of the ordinary follower of the Buddha’s teaching, the Vaibhāṣikas understand *samyag-dr̥ṣṭi* as equivalent to a correct belief or opinion that is merely in accordance with the facts: that is, a theoretical understanding of impermanence, suffering and not-self rather than one based on direct experience. Yet for the Theravāda Abhidhamma, it seems that *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* is never to be conceived of as correct opinion or belief, whether based on theoretical understanding or direct experience.

In the context of a discussion of *jñāna* in Yogācāra texts, Paul Griffiths has recently pointed out that whereas contemporary anglophone philosophers tend to take ‘knowledge’ as denoting either ‘a propositional attitude’ (i.e., an attitude, whether occurrent or dispositional, which someone has towards some proposition) or justified true belief, Yogācāra writers take *jñāna* as something that is instanced as ‘episodic mental events with cognitive significance’, and give no hint that *jñāna* can be used to describe assent to some claim or proposition.<sup>36</sup> These important observations are equally relevant, I think, to the understanding of *sammā-dit̥ṭhi/paññā* found in the Theravāda Abhidhamma. Since Buddhist texts furnish *micchā-dit̥ṭhi* with a formal content, it is all too tempting—perhaps because of the intellectual and cultural assumptions indicated by Griffiths—to assume that *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* has a formal content that is precisely the inverse of *micchā-dit̥ṭhi*, and that ‘right view’ thus consists in a propositional attitude (whether dispositional or occurrent) towards that content: right-view consists in assent to the claim that things are impermanent, suffering and not-self, to the claim that the five aggregates are suffering, the cause of suffering is craving, the cessation of suffering is the cessation of craving and

that the way leading to the cessation of suffering is the eightfold path, and so on. Indeed, Steven Collins, in a helpful survey of the Nikāya usage of the term, has suggested that *sammā-dit̥ṭhi*, in addition to being understood as a liberating knowledge that transcends all views, is used to denote first of all a ‘pro-attitude’ towards the general ideas of karma and rebirth, and secondly a knowledge of or acquaintance with certain basic points of Buddhist doctrine such as the four noble truths and dependent arising.<sup>37</sup>

Whether or not this is a correct reading of the Nikāya usage of *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* (I remain doubtful), it is clear that it simply does not work for the early Abhidhamma texts. Thus, when the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* states that right-view occurs as a mental-concomitant of ordinary, sense-sphere, skilful consciousness—a kind of consciousness that the commentaries suggest might occur when we give a gift, or turn away from harming a living creature or taking what is not given, or perform some other meritorious and auspicious action—it is not suggesting the occurrence of a dispositional attitude towards the propositions of Buddhist teaching, nor acquaintance with basic Buddhist doctrine, nor even a theoretical understanding of Buddhist doctrine.<sup>38</sup> Rather, we must take what it says at face value: the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* is claiming that at the time of the occurrence of that consciousness some kind of direct awareness of the nature of suffering, its arising, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation occurs. What I am suggesting, then, is that for a text such as the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, the occurrence of ordinary (*lokiya*) ‘right view’ does not necessarily have anything to do with acquaintance with or knowledge of Buddhist doctrine *per se*; indeed, if this were not the case then the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* would be claiming that only Buddhists could ever experience ordinary skilful consciousness associated with ‘knowledge’ (*ñāṇa*), only ‘Buddhists’ (in the sense of those familiar with Buddhist doctrine) could ever give with some sort of awareness that it is good (*kusala*) to give. Of course, it is not impossible that the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* is making just such a claim, but this is not the natural way to take the text, and such a claim would make it difficult for the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* to explain how any one could ever want to become a ‘Buddhist’.

From the perspective of Abhidhamma, what we generally refer to as belief or opinion must, I think, be analysed as the occurrence of a state of mind in which there is an attachment or clinging to some proposition or theory. If that attachment is directed towards a proposition generally approved by the Buddhist tradition—a proposition such as ‘actions have results’—then there is a sense in which the belief or opinion might be regarded, from the Buddhist view point, as ‘correct belief’; but such a state of mind remains quite different from actually seeing that actions have results. Attachment to some opinions may be generally more profitable than attachment to others, but it is nonetheless attachment. Rather than the occurrence of a mere belief or opinion in the flow of mental states, *sammā-dit̥ṭhi* is presented in the Abhidhamma as in some manner always a direct seeing of the four truths, and never simply a ‘pro-attitude’ towards or belief in, say, the four truths. For the Abhidhamma analysis, such a pro-attitude, if free from attachment and hence skilful, is possibly to be understood in terms of ‘faith’ (*saddhā*); if rooted in attachment, it must be considered unskilful and

possibly even as *ditṭhi*. Thus, the mental processes involved in someone agreeing with the proposition that actions have results, do not necessarily entail any occurrence of even ordinary (*lokiya*) *sammā-ditṭhi*. In fact, they might from the point of view of Abhidhamma be entirely *akusala*. On the other hand, we may fleetingly see and understand that actions do indeed have results without the proposition ‘actions have results’ ever being consciously formulated in our minds. I am suggesting here that according to the Theravāda definition of *sammā-ditṭhi/paññā*, it is always something that is, in Vaibhāṣika terms, essentially ‘beyond judgement’ (*asantīrika*).

If, in some sense, we directly see the four truths whenever the *dhamma* that is termed *paññā* occurs, why do we not immediately become stream-attainers or even arahats? I suggested earlier that the Theravāda Abhidharma, like other systems of Abhidharma, recognised different degrees or intensities of *paññā*. This raises a question that appears in various forms and guises through the history of Buddhist thought—the question of gradual or sudden awakening: is it possible to only half (or a tenth) understand the four truths? I think the Abhidharma understanding of these matters works along the following lines: in ordinary consciousness we do indeed directly see the four truths, but for various reasons (and the reasons are necessarily psychologically deep, subtle and complex) we wilfully ignore what we have seen; in effect, it passes us by and we are unaffected and unchanged by it. In this sense, seeing the four truths is like seeing anything else. I may look at the same view on different occasions but be quite differently affected by it on each occasion. What is significant about the path of stream attainment, however, is that it is a direct seeing of the four truths that does affect us; in fact, it changes us forever.

## Notes

- 1 de La Vallée Poussin, Louis (trans). 1971. *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu: Traduction et Annotations*, 6 vols, Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises; English translation by Pruden, Leo M. 1988. vols, 4 Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press. Frauwallner's studies were originally published in *WZKSÖ*, 7 (1963), 20–36; 8 (1964), 59–99; 15 (1971), 69–121; 16 (1972), 95–152; 17 (1973), 97–121; they have recently been translated into English and published in book form as *Studies in Abhidharma Literature and the Origins of Buddhist Philosophical Systems*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- 2 1967. *The Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, Colombo: Department of Cultural Affairs.
- 3 In Lancaster, Lewis (ed). 1977. *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems: Studies in Honor of Edward Conze*, Berkeley: University of California, pp. 403–15.
- 4 According to Jaini's chart (p. 411) these five are classed as such, but this is not stated explicitly in the body of the article. That these five are considered *asantīrika*, and thus prior to investigation and judgement, in fact corresponds to the position of *santīraṇa* in the Theravāda understanding of the consciousness process (*citta-vīthi*).
- 5 Dhs 9, 26–36, 55–6, 60, 74–5, 96–9, 116–7, 122–4; that is, of the eighty-nine classes of *citta* listed in the later Abhidhamma, a total of forty-seven are associated with *paññā*.
- 6 Dhs 11 (§ 16), 14 (§ 37): *paññā pajānatā vicayo pavicayo dhammavicayo salakkhaṇā upalakkhaṇā paccupalakkhaṇā paṇḍiccaṃ kosallaṃ nepuññaṃ vebhavyā cintā upaparikkhā bhuri medhā parināyikā. Vipassanā sampajaññaṃ patodo paññā paññindriyaṃ paññābalaṃ paññāsattaṃ paññāpāsādo paññāloko paññāobhāso paññāpajjoto paññāratanaṃ amoho dhammavicayo sammāditṭhi.*

- 7 D II 311; M III 251; S V 8–10, 196–200; Paṭi I 40–2; Vibh 104–5, 235–6; cf. Gettin, R. M. L. 1992. *The Buddhist Path to Awakening: A Study of the Bodhi-Pakkhiyā Dhammā*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, pp. 119, 190.
- 8 ‘*Bhavaṅga* and Rebirth According to the Abhidhamma’ in T. Skorupski, T. and U. Pagel (eds). 1994. *The Buddhist Forum*, vol. III, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, pp. 11–35.
- 9 Compare the definitions of *sammā-diṭṭhi* at Dhs 14 (§ 37) and 63 (§ 297).
- 10 Again compare the definitions of *sammā-diṭṭhi* at Dhs 14 (§ 37) and 63 (§ 297).
- 11 M III 72.
- 12 *atthi dinnam atthi yittham atthi hutam atthi sukaṭadukkaṭānam kammānam phalam vipāko atthi ayam loko atthi paro loko atthi mātā atthi pitā atthi sattā opapātikā atthi loka samaṇabrāhmaṇā sammaggaṭā sammāpaṭipannā ye imaṅ ca lokaṃ paraṅ ca lokaṃ sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedenti*. The reverse of this—the view that there is no such thing as giving, etc.—Vibh 392 terms ‘wrong view consisting of ten points’ (*dasa-vatthukā micchādiṭṭhi*).
- 13 Ps IV 131.
- 14 As 241.
- 15 As 245.
- 16 The precise nature of the distinction that Jaini is trying to make between ‘understanding attained’ and ‘defilements overcome’ is unclear to me. Jaini’s distinction is in part reminiscent of the kind of distinction found especially in Yogācāra writings between defilements as obstacles in themselves (*kleśāvaraṇa*) and the obstacles to knowledge (*jñeyāvaraṇa*), but the progression here—the defilements are overcome while the obstacles to knowledge remain to be abandoned by the higher stages of the *bodhisattva* path—is the reverse of the one Jaini suggests is assumed by Theravāda texts; namely, that full knowledge is gained while defilements yet remain to be overcome.
- 17 Dhs 60 (§ 277), 74–5 (§§ 362, 363, 364); cf. commentary at As 214, 238–9: ‘With regard to the third path, “for the sake of abandoning without remainder” means “for the purpose of abandoning with no remainder the fetters weakened by the path of once-return”.’
- 18 Note that Dhs takes *parāmāsa* as an alternative term for *diṭṭhi* (see later).
- 19 The ten fetters are *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, *vicikicchā*, *silabbata-parāmāsa*, *kāma-cchanda*, *vyāpāda*, *rūpa-rāga*, *arūpa-rāga*, *māna*, *uddhacca*, and *avijjā*. The stream-attainer abandons the first three; the once-returned abandons the first three and further weakens greed hatred and delusion; the non-returned abandons the lower five; the arahat abandons all ten (e.g., M I 141–2). Nett 14 refers to the first seven as forming a distinct group (cf. As 376–7).
- 20 The *khuddhaka-vatthu* section of the *Vibhaṅga* details some one hundred and eleven kinds of (wrong) view; there is some overlap here, but the vast majority (one hundred and two) concern, directly or indirectly, some sort of view about the nature of the ‘self’. The most significant views not concerned with the self are wrong view that consists in ten points (see note 15) and the only view for which a *bhikkhu* can be censured in the Vinaya; namely, *assāda-diṭṭhi* or the view that there is no fault in sense pleasures (*natthi kāmesu doso ti*) (see Vibh 368, Vin IV 134–5). Perhaps the fullest definition of the positive content of ‘right view’ in the Nikāyas is found in the *Apaṇṇaka Sutta* (M I 400–13); this largely takes the form of an expansion of the stock formula used in the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* to define ‘ordinary’ right view (see note 14); otherwise right view is defined in the context of the explanation of the eightfold path as knowledge of suffering, its arising, its cessation and the way leading to its cessation (see note 9).
- 21 See Gómez, Luis O. 1976. ‘Proto-Mādhyamika in the Pāli Canon’, *Philosophy East and West*, 26, 137–65; Collins, Steven. 1982. *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 120–31.
- 22 Dhs 75, 80–2.
- 23 The use of *gata* at the end of compounds is often largely pleonastic, but I have translated it as ‘gone over to’ in order to facilitate the translation of the following commentarial explanation.

- 24 E° has *patiggāho*, but C° and As have *patiṭṭhāho*.
- 25 For example, Dhs 78 (§381).
- 26 The four *vipariyesas/vipallāsas* consist of the perverted idea (*saññā*), mind (*citta*) and view (*diṭṭhi*) that sees what is permanent in what is impermanent, what is happiness in what is suffering, what is self in what is not self, what is beautiful in what is ugly (see, for example, Vibh 376).
- 27 As 252–53: *ayāthāva-dassanaṭṭhena micchā-diṭṭhisu gataṃ idaṃ dassanaṃ dvāsaṭṭhi-diṭṭhi-antogatattā ti diṭṭhi-gataṃ ... diṭṭhi yeva duratikkamaṭṭhena diṭṭhi-gahanaṃ tiṅgahanaṃ vana-gahanaṃ pabbata-gahanaṃ viya; sāsanika-sappaṭibhyaṭṭhena diṭṭhi-kantāro corakantāra-vāḷakantāra-nirudakakantāra-dubbhikkhākantārā viya. sammādiṭṭhiyā vinivijjanaṭṭhena vilomanatṭhena ca diṭṭhi-vīsūkāyikaṃ; micchā-dassanaṃ hi uppajjamānaṃ sammā-dassanaṃ vinivijjhati c’eva vilometi ca. kadāci sassataṃ kadāci ucchedassa gahaḍato diṭṭhiyā virūpaṃ phanditaṃ ti diṭṭhi-vipphanditaṃ; diṭṭhiyatiko hi ekasmiṃ patiṭṭātumaṃ na sakkoti, kadāci sassataṃ anupatati kadāci ucchedaṃ, diṭṭhi yeva bandhanaṭṭhena saṃyojanaṃ ti diṭṭhi-saṃyojanaṃ, sūsumārādayo viya purisaṃ ārammaṇaṃ dalhaṃ gaṇhātī ti gāho, patiṭṭhahanato patiṭṭhāho; ayaṃ hi balavappavatti-bhāvena patiṭṭhahitvā gaṇhātī ti. niccādi-vasena abhinivisatī ti abhiniveso. dhammasabhāvaṃ atikkamitvā niccādi-vasena parato āmasatī ti parāmāso, anattābhāvatā kucchito maggo, kucchitānaṃ vā apāyānaṃ maggo ti kummaggo. ayāthāvapathato micchā-patho; yathā hi disā-mūlḥena ayaṃ asuka-gāmassa nāma patho ti gahito pi taṃ gāmaṃ na samāpeti, evaṃ diṭṭhi-gatikena sugati-patho ti gahitā pi diṭṭhi sugatiṃ na pāpetī ti ayāthāva-patho ti micchā-patho. micchā-sabhāvato micchattaṃ. tath’eva paribbhamaṇato taranti ettha bālā ti tithaṃ c’etaṃ anattānaṃ ca āyatanaṃ ti tithāyatanaṃ; tithiyānaṃ vā sañjāti-desatṭhena nivāsa-tṭhānaṭṭhena ca āyatanaṃ ti pi tithāyatanaṃ. vipariyesa-bhūto vipariyesa-gāho vipariyesato vā gāho ti vipariyesagāho; vipallattha-gāho ti attho.*
- 28 As 254 explains this as *sāmaññato na gaṇhātī*; the term (*a*)*saṃgāhanā* is not listed in PED, but the form of the word suggests a derivation from *gāh-* (to plunge into) rather than *grah-* (to seize); such a derivation is reinforced by the next term in the register, *apariyogāhanā*, which As defines as *na pariyoḡāhati*. CPD does list *asaṃgāhanā* and derives it from *gāh-*.
- 29 For example, Dhs 78 (§390).
- 30 Cf. Matilal, B. K. 1980. ‘Ignorance or Misconception?—A Note on Avidyā in Buddhism’, in Somaratna Balasooriya *et al.* (eds), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*, London: Gordon Fraser, pp. 154–64.
- 31 Vism XIV 163–64; As 249.
- 32 Vism XVII 52 makes a distinction between two types of *avijjā*: *appaṭipatti* and *micchāpaṭipatti*; Vism-mhṭ (N°) 1220–1 explains that the former consists in not knowing suffering, and so on, and is disassociated from *diṭṭhi*, while the latter consists in the *vipallāsas* and is associated with *diṭṭhi*.
- 33 Frauwallner, Erich. 1953. *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie* Salzburg, I 195–212.
- 34 for example, M I 140.
- 35 for example, Madhyamaka-kārikā XIV 6–11.
- 36 Griffiths, P. J. 1994. *On Being Buddha: The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, pp. 151–3.
- 37 *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 88–90.
- 38 The nature of ‘theoretical understanding’ according to the Abhidhamma is complex and connected with the Abhidhamma treatment of *paññatti* or ‘concept’ as one of the possible classes of objects of consciousness; see Warder, A. K. ‘The Concept of a Concept’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 1, 181–96.