

How to See Yourself As You Really Are: A Practical Guide to Self-Knowledge. 2006. His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Translated, edited and read by Jeffrey Hopkins. Audiobook (unabridged), CD x 5. New York: Simon & Schuster Audio. ISBN 074 356 4642

Audible lessons in self

CONSTANTINE SANDIS

In this new, clearly-written, book (on some counts his 73rd) Noble Peace prize winner Tenzin Gyatso - known to most as 'Kundun' or 'His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama' - sets out to explain the Buddhist doctrine of *Paticca Samuppada* (translated here as 'Dependent-Arising') and what it entails regarding the nature of the self, the world and our place within it. In so doing this pacifist 'simple Buddhist monk' - who has his own website (<http://www.dalailama.com/>) and travels with bodyguards - aims to help the reader overcome a self-deception that he believes is the fundamental source of a variety of "destructive emotions that lead to actions contaminated by misperception" (p.46). The origins and nature of the false conceptions thought to give rise to such afflictive emotions is best understood within the context of the Buddhist philosophical tradition from which Gyatso's thought has emerged.

Buddhist philosophy traditionally divides into five interrelated writing genres: *Prajñāpāramitā* Sutras (scriptures dealing with the perfection of wisdom), *Madhyamaka* or Śūnyavada Sutras (scriptures advocating a middle way between nihilism and eternalism as a method for approaching *Prajñāpāramitā*), *Vinaya* Sutras (advocating the *Theravada* code of strict rules for monastic discipline known as the *Patimokkha*), *Abhidharma* Sutras (metaphysical scriptures that attempt to construct a systematic description of all phenomena e.g. the final book of the *Tripitaka* canon of the *Theravada* school of Buddhism), and *Pramāna* Sutras (scriptures dealing with the sources of knowledge).

The 'middle way'

While it engages with themes from all five genres, *How to See Yourself* is founded upon the *Madhyamaka* 'middle way' tradition of denying that the nature or essence of any phenomenon is independent from that of any other. This outlook was most famously expressed by the hugely influential Indian Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna (c. 150-250 CE) and his later follower Chandrakirti (c. 600-650 CE), who through his commentaries on Nagarjuna's work developed the *Prasaṅgika* ('logical consequence') approach. This approach involved establishing ultimate truth by first eliminating all views with absurd or contradictory logical consequences. This contrasts with the *Svatantrika* approach, which begins with positive assertions about that nature of phenomena (e.g. that they may possess inherent existence without possessing absolute existence). This method reaches conclusions by eliminating alternative views through the use of *Reductio ad Absurdum* arguments viz. arguments that aim to demonstrate the absurd consequences of following views and arguments to their logical extremes. There are parallels here with the reason employed by Sherlock Holmes in Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The Sign of Four* (1890): "When you

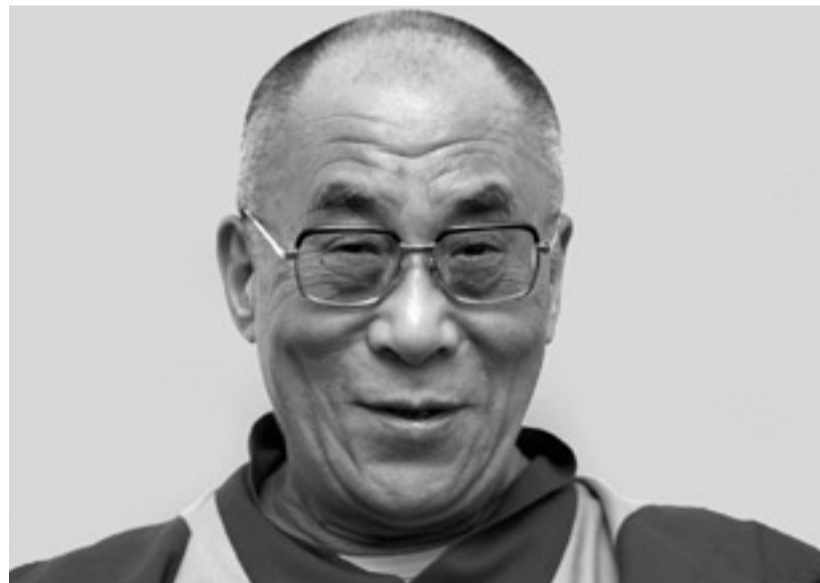
have eliminated the impossible, that which remains, however improbable, must be the truth".

Gyatso's application of the 'logical consequence' heuristic leads him to claim that phenomena are "empty of their own inherent existence" in that they "do not exist in their own right" (p. 81). Hence the aforementioned notion of Dependent-Arising: phenomena do not exist independently of the causes and conditions from which they arise. What is less clear is whether, on this view, it is *all* phenomena that arise dependently or merely those that tend to capture our attention. While Gyatso asserts that "*all* phenomena arise dependently" (p.49 my italics) referring to external conditions as well as to "the fact that all phenomena - impermanent and permanent - exist in dependence upon their own parts" (p. 56), he often makes more qualified claims such as that "all *impermanent* phenomene-

While it is not self-evident that the permanent/impermanent distinction maps onto the perceptible/imperceptible distinction perfectly, there is a long philosophical tradition, that dates at least as far back as Plato in the West and even further in the East, according to which eternal but imperceptible forms (such as those of Truth and Beauty) exist inherently while the impermanent phenomena that make up the world of sights and sounds exist only in so far as they relate to the former.

Illusory phenomena

Whatever its precise scope, Gyatso's claim is not merely that phenomena owe their existence to certain causes (in the sense that they would not have come into existence without them) but the considerably more radical thesis that phenomena are *illusory* (or 'like illusions' to use the translator's phrase) because, contrary to



Tenzin Gyatso, 'His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama'

na...come into existence dependent upon certain causes and conditions" (p.51, my italics).

There are several possible explanations for this oddity, complicated further by the fact that the text uses the phrases "does not exist as it appears" and "does not ultimately exist" interchangeably (cf. p. 160). The simplest, perhaps, is that something has been lost in the generally fine translation by Jeffrey Hopkins. Another possibility is that - like the captain of the HMS Pinafore who in Gilbert and Sullivan's musical boasts that he's "never, never sick at sea" but when questioned ("what, never?") immediately qualifies his claim: "well, hardly ever!" - Gyatso finds the exceptions unimportant. A third, more plausible, explanation is that while Gyatso typically uses the term 'phenomenon' to refer to any object, state of affairs, or occurrence *that may be perceived* by the senses, he occasionally also uses it in a looser sense which also covers what Kant called 'noumena' viz. the things that make up the underlying reality which causes us to perceive phenomena. In short, there may be things that do not arise dependently but which, being imperceptible, would not count as phenomena in the narrow sense.

appearances, they have no independent existence (they do not exist *in and of themselves*). Radical though this thesis may be, it should not be confused with the anti-realist view that they are illusions (i.e. that they do not exist at all, but only appear to do so):

"[A]lthough persons and things are empty of existing the way they appear to be established in their own right, they are not utterly nonexistent; they can act and can be experienced. Therefore being like an illusion is not the same as appearing to exist but actually not existing, like the horns of a rabbit, which do not exist at all". (p. 176ff.)

Indeed Gyatso uses *Prasaṅgika* to point out that if phenomena are empty of existence because they *arise* dependently on various (real) causes and conditions then they themselves must be real enough (p65).

So why should we think of *all* phenomena as dependent-arising? One obvious answer, which finds its modern Western expression in the chaos theory notion of 'sensitive dependence on initial conditions' - popularly known as the *Butterfly Effect* (the term originates from Ray Brad-

bury's short story *Sound of Thunder* in which the killing of a pre-historic butterfly alters human history) - is that everything in the universe is causally interlinked in a way that makes it incoherent to suppose that any one part of it could have been different without this having a deep impact on the whole.

Amour fati

While such thoughts have their origins in early Buddhism, they have appeared in various guises throughout the centuries, from Homer's *Iliad* to Hollywood's *Sliding Doors*. Sartre, for example, warns further that there is no clear dividing line between facticity and its transcendence, each new situation we find ourselves in being the result of both. A similar thought motivated Nietzsche's *amour fati* and the desire for eternal recurrence which follows from it (cf. *The Gay Science*, § 341) since,



Longchenpa (c.1308-1364), a major teacher in the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. His major work *Seven Treasures* encapsulates 600 years of Buddhist thought in Tibet.

given such interdependence, to wish for any aspect of the past to be otherwise is to desire a self-negation that only tragedy could call for. Other thinkers influenced by related Buddhist insights include Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristotle, Chrysippus, Virgil, Kant, Schopenhauer, Freud, Jung, Heidegger, and (more recently) Galen Strawson.

To give a rather simplistic illustration of the dependence in question, my being identical to the author of this review is dependent on numerous phenomena including not only an incredibly long (if not infinite) string of events without which I would never have been born, brought up, taught English, trained in philosophy etc., but also the entire prehistory that brought about the existence of the 14th Dalai Lama and all the further events (and the people they involved, each with their own strings of prehistory and personal history) that collectively made it possible for him to write this book and when he did, the life and work of his translator Jeffrey Hopkins, the word-processing technology

we rely on, and so forth. Each of these in turn arises from a dependence on a vast number of other dependent phenomena. More importantly, my writing this book review may (directly or indirectly) come to affect both my character and my relation to other people in such a way that I could not rationally come to regret writing it unless I also regretted the majority of effects this came to have on me (many of which I may not be aware of). It would seem that to rationally wish away any part of the history of the world that led to this moment is to (knowingly or otherwise) be willing to negate any part of my current self that was formed as a result of the events in question.

While such thoughts concerning interrelatedness are central to Gyatso's outlook, they do not capture the force of his 'logical consequence' approach in its entirety. After all, thoughts regarding dependence might - for all that has been said so far - motivate one (as it arguably did in Nietzsche's imagination) to treat certain others as obstacles to be defeated or removed at any cost. Yet nothing could be further removed from the Buddhist ideology which not only permeates this book but clearly manifests itself throughout Gyatso's personal life (think of his attitude towards China and the recent Olympics held there). By demonstrating that interrelatedness implies oneness - in the sense that none of us are held to exist in and of ourselves (Chapter 11) - Gyatso aims to show that s/he who knows thyself will stop acting selfishly as they come to realise that we are over-dependent upon things that we detach ourselves from and too attached to things that we misidentify with, thus wanting to possess them. This view is motivated by a combination of the Socratic suggestion that all vice stems from ignorance and the somewhat suspect conflation of dependence and identity (p. 82) which gives birth to a metaphysics of interpersonal identity at a global level (p.6).

So it is that Gyatso's view of the world leads to his philosophy of the self. In order to fully understand how the world relates to us it is not, we are told, sufficient to understand the nature of the (so-called 'external') world; we also need to also see *ourselves* as we really are. Thus we are led into various issues in the philosophy of mind pertaining to what we might call *logic* of the self. Gyatso begins by arguing that:

"There is no person to be found either separate from mind and body or within mind and body" (p.127).

He calls this view "name-only", but takes care to distinguish it from nominalist views according to which terms such as "mind" and "I" do not refer to actual things. If anything, both his general outlook and the underlying methodology of examining the logical relations between mental concepts is reminiscent of that employed by the post-war Oxford linguistic philosopher Gilbert Ryle who in *The Concept of Mind* (1949) attacked the Cartesian concep-

tion of a mind as a ghost residing within a machine-like body: "it seems to you that there is a Jane who owns her mind and body...this perspective is mistaken". The question is not *whether* minds or selves or persons exist but *in what sense* they can be said to: "They definitely do exist; how they exist is the issue" (p.161)

Gyatso's arguments in the second half of the book support an answer to this question already familiar to us from the first half: "dependently". While they all strive towards the same conclusion they are uneven in quality. For instance, the whole book is littered with goblets of wisdom from past Buddhist masters – a heuristic not easily distinguished from that of appealing to authority. On p.49, for example, he quotes approvingly Nagarrjuna's claim that "when there is long, there has to be short. They do not exist through their own nature". Yet this only makes sense as a claim about our *concepts* of being short and long, not about short and long things themselves. Elsewhere (earlier in the book) he conflates the notion of a person with the ever-elusive self or "I" that persons are sometimes said to have, which subsequently leads him to the absurd conclusion that people are not located anywhere (p. 63). At other times he simply relies on unquestioned assumptions that are central to the teachings of Buddhism. The following piece of reasoning is a paradigmatic example:

"If 'I' and the mind-body complex are exactly the same, it would be impossible to think of 'my body' or 'my head' or 'my mind' or surmise that 'my body is getting stronger.' Also, if the self and mind-body are one, then when the mind and body no longer exist, the self would no longer exist" (p. 141)

What exactly is wrong with the view that the self ceases to exist when both mind and body cease to exist? Nothing, other than the fact that it contradicts the fundamental Buddhist belief in reincarnation (p.142). Given that he is himself supposed to be the reincarnation of the reincarnation of each of the previous thirteen Dalai Lamas of Tibet, this is hardly a belief that he might be expected to readily abandon. Still, an argument that hinges on it is unlikely to convince many, certainly not the religious and political leaders diagnosed as self-deceived in the book's Introduction.

Obstacles to enlightenment?

Perhaps this is why each chapter of the CD and book end with a number of meditative reflections intended to assist with the internalisation of the Buddhist outlook. The repetitiveness of the book is no doubt also intended to perform the meditative function of helping the reader to overcome habitual association (see Gyatso's *How To Practice, Stages of Meditation, and The Dalai Lama's Book of Daily Meditation*). If you plan to meditate, I would especially advise you to stay clear of the audio-CD version of the book. Indeed I found Hopkins' narration so irritating that after listening to just the first CD I could no longer tolerate being dependent upon it. In this I do not seem to be alone. As a reviewer at *Audiophile Magazine* put it: "Jeffrey Hopkins's slow and tired narration creates an obstacle to appreciating the lesson. The fact that he's the translator and a preeminent Dalai Lama scholar doesn't compensate for this flaw in his performance".

Constantine Sandis

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Cribb, Joe and Georgina Herrmann, eds. 2007. *After Alexander: Central Asia before Islam*. Proceedings of the British Academy 133. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

After Alexander

ANDREW GLASS

This volume brings together many of the papers given at the conference *After Alexander: Central Asia Before Islam: Themes in the History and Archaeology of Western Central Asia*, which took place at the British Academy from June 23rd to 25th, 2004. This conference was convened in recognition of the new era of archaeological collaboration with the Central Asian republics that became possible following their independence from the Soviet Union in 1992, and to draw attention to this important but under-supported area of study.

The book begins with an introduction in which the editors summarise the history of the field of Central Asian archaeology, highlighting the roles of the Soviet/Russian archaeologists Boris Marshak, Boris Stavisky and Yevgeny Zeymal to whom the volume is dedicated. The remainder of the introduction explains the background to the conference, and the structure of the present volume under five themes: nomad, city, invasion, money, and religion. This thematic structure serves to unite the papers, which are, with few exceptions, reports of current work by specialists in the fields covered by the conference, namely, archaeology, numismatics, and art history. The themes, therefore, represent the broad strokes in the history of the region connecting the dots provided by the papers themselves. In combination, the structure and contents begin to justify the broad and ambitious title of this book, which might well be applied to an encyclopaedia rather than a single volume.

The first article, "Central Asia: West and East" by Sir John Boardman, lies outside the thematic structure, and therefore serves as a second introduction. It opens with a summary of the role Central Asia has played in fascinating the minds of Europeans from Marco Polo to Marlowe to Stein, before addressing another dominant theme in Central Asian studies, that of the crossroads between Europe, China and South Asia. This has been illustrated through an iconographical study which traces Greek and Chinese influences on a couple of Central Asian artworks.

Nomads, cities and invasions

The first paper (by Claude Rapin) in the Nomad section includes an introduction which provides background and places the theme in context. The main focus of this paper, and also of the following one (by Kazim Abdullaev), is tracing nomadic tribes in the archaeological record. Both authors have drawn on Graeco-Roman and Chinese sources to provide necessary historical detail. The third paper in this section (by Sebastian Stride) is striking for its originality in combining the study of geo-systems with archaeology in order to make determinations about the potential of a given landscape to support civilization. The most interesting result of this work seems to show that the city of Termez was too big to be supported by its surroundings and so must have depended on imports from the territories of the successive empires of which it was a part. Therefore, prior to the establishment of an imperial border near the city, it would have had little reason to exist. This is a point borne out in archaeological investigations described by Leriche and Pidaev later in the book (chapter 8).

The City section is introduced, appropriately, by an article entitled "Bactria, Land of a Thousand Cities" (Leriche), a reference to Apollodorus which has generally (esp. Tarn) been accepted to refer to the process of urbanisation initiated by the Greeks. Leriche combines the historical records with the latest archaeological data, and shows, contra Tarn, that most of the cities in the region date to the period after the decline of Greek power. This section also includes a description of the creation of a three-dimensional computer model of Ai Khanum (Guy Lecuyot), which includes vivid colour plates recreating the ancient city. Other contributions in this section describe archaeological discoveries at Nisa, Termez and Shahrstan.

Unlike the previous sections, the first article in the Invasion section does not serve as an introduction to the topic.

Instead, Michael Alram surveys Ardashir's coinage which he uses to show the eastward expansion of the Sasanian empire. The next contribution provides a report on a newly discovered Sasanian relief found at Rag-i Bibi in northern Afghanistan. This fascinating paper, part adventure story and part scholarly report, details the circumstances of the discovery and study of this important relief, as well as its art-historical significance. The four other papers in this section are reports from excavations at Gobekly-depe, Gorgān and Dehistan, as well as Gyaur Kala (Merv).

Money and religion

Joe Cribb's article introducing the Money section gives a survey of the coinage of the region throughout the period covered by the book. It is a well-conceived piece which could easily stand alone as a short introduction to the topic for future students of Central Asia. Contributions by Natasha Smirnova, Edvard Rtveldze and Helen Wang complement this section with focused numismatic studies of Merv, northern Tokharistan (Surkhan Darya and southern Tadjikistan), and eastern Central Asia (Xinjiang and Gansu).

The Religion section appears to have been named in an afterthought, as it is based on the conference section on the movement of ideas. It lacks an overview of the diverse religious history of this vast region. Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis's paper on the Iranian coins argues for rooting their iconography in the Iranian/Zoroastrian tradition rather than Hellenism. The next two papers also concern Zoroastrianism, but from an archaeological perspective, being reports on a fire temple at Tash-k'irman Tepe and a tower of silence from Bandiyan. The final paper "Buddhism and Features of the Buddhist Art of Bactria-Tokharistan" is one of only three papers in the book that are completely devoid of illustrations. In this case, the lack is symptomatic of a paper that appears to have been hastily put together for presentation and which received little further attention prior to publication. The author advances several important suggestions without any supporting evidence, for example, "it is likely that the anthropomorphic image of the Teacher [the Buddha] was not rejected out of hand in the early period of Buddhism" (p.476). A further statement which is not as contentious states: "the artists . . . were professionals, and they were probably not Buddhists" (p.480). This view is repeated in the conclusion without the uncertainty: "most of the work on the decora-

tion of Buddhist monuments at that time was undertaken by professional artists, who did not belong to the Buddhist community," (p.483) which is surprising when it appears alongside "the influence of Buddhist iconography on non-Buddhist art was minimal" (p.483). Accordingly this author considers that the "non-Buddhist" professional artists working on Buddhist monuments were separate from the artists creating non-Buddhist art, or at least did not carry over influences from their work on Buddhist projects. The question of influence can be tested, but I am not so sure that we can know much about the religious beliefs of the artists responsible for the Buddhist monuments.

There are a few problems elsewhere in the book with the transfer from conference papers to articles, but overall the project is a successful one. The contributions will be of interest to specialists and a few may serve as valuable introductions for a more general audience and students.

Finally, some minor editorial points: the book uses footnotes rather than endnotes, a welcome choice, and the bibliographical references follow individual contributions rather than being unified at the end of the volume is helpful. The main issues which I disagree with are explained in a note at the end of the introduction that states "we have not sought to standardise spellings in all instances and have chosen to omit the use of diacritical marks" (p. 7). One can sympathise with the former problem which is exacerbated by having many contributors, but transliteration systems ought to be standardised within a single article, yet this is not always the case. For example, we find both Yuezhi and Yueh-zhi on page 19, and the odd spellings Buddyiskye and buddiskih on page 484. Good reasons for omitting diacritics would be that the book is aimed at a general audience rather than scholars, or because of technical limitations. Neither of these should apply in this case. Fortunately, diacritics have been retained for French throughout, and for other languages in some contributions. Otherwise, the book is produced to the high editorial standards we would expect from the British Academy. The book contains many black-and-white images, seven colour plates, and a detailed index.

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