BUDDHISM RECONSIDERED

A Presuppositional Critique of Theravada Buddhist Philosophy as Interpreted by David Kalupahana and Illuminated by Other Select Buddhist Scholars

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ExPLANATION OF CORRECTIONS

I have tried to harmonize all the criticisms offered by all my committee members. It was impossible to only present the information in the last four chapters without any background material at all. To make my arguments I would have needed to summarize in each of the criticism chapters (previously 8 to 11, now 2 to 4) the necessary back ground to explain the arguments. But the criticism chapters are so interconnected that there was no practical way to introduce particular nuggets of Buddhist philosophy without creating ambiguities on what exactly was being criticized in each chapter. To solve this problem I have dropped chapter 9 entitled, “The Buddhist Problem of Other Minds.” And distilled a summary of Buddhist philosophy that only includes information directly related to the arguments presented later. Several sections have been dropped, like the historical introduction, the biography of the Buddha and the section on nirvana, just to name a few.

I also did my best to address all your concerns and criticisms in footnotes. I also increased my citations in conformity with every request for such. Where appropriate I also added more to the text, but Dr Beck made clear that I was to shorten the thesis to under a hundred pages so I have done that.
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PROLOGUE

WHEN THE WIDOW AWOKE THAT MORNING, she found that her only son had died. All her labors had proved futile, and her poverty kept her from those who could help. As new light crept across her village, she considered the duties of her day. She could not afford much wood for a cremation fire. Often the poor left their dead exposed, to decay in the streets. Better to feed the living than the fires for the dead. But now she had no living to feed except herself. She had lost her living monument to the man she loved, this son who would one day care for her aging bones. As the village waked in sound, she grieved in the new shadows of her silent home.

But the village life was different today. Soon she found out why. The Buddha was coming to her village. He'll be here soon! The Buddha was one of the recluses who lived in the forest. She had heard the stories of the men in the forest. They could do the miraculous, walk on water, heal the sick, levitate, raise the dead. Raise the dead! She stood straight, and for the first time in many months she felt hope.

Without delay she ran from her home. She pushed passed the other villagers making their way to the Buddha. She found him at the entrance of the village, and shoved her way to his audience. With tears she told him of her only son and begged the Buddha to raise him from the dead. The crowd stood silently waiting for his reply. He helped her to her feet and gave her instructions. He told her to bring him a mustard seed from a house in the village where a child had not died. If she did this he would raise her son from the dead.

With that she rushed from his presence. As morning stretched into the village, she made her way to the first house she could find. A child had once died there. The next house had once lost a child as well. In fact every family on that road had lost a child. But the village was full of houses. Surely one of them had not experienced the death of a child. The noon hour came and past. Her toil
only increased with her lack of success. Late in the day she came to the last house. There her morning hope was crushed.

In the setting sun she returned to the Buddha. Now she understood the point he wanted to make. He had never planned on raising her son from the dead. She revealed that she had no mustard seed. The Buddha calmly told her what she now knew, that everybody suffers just like her. She had to face that. Knowing that life is suffering is the first step toward enlightenment. She thanked the Buddha for this profound teaching, and returned to her home. She walked slowly. By the time she arrived darkness had fallen. With struggle she lit a single lamp. In silence, she prepared the stiff shell of her son.

What the Buddha did to that widow, has been done to millions of people for twenty-five centuries. At first glance we may think what the Buddha did was cruel. But we should not look at his actions that way. He was living out a teaching, a philosophy about life. The Buddha recognized that life is suffering. Before one can be enlightened they must first recognize their own darkness. The Buddha used this widow's suffering to teach her a lesson about the magnitude of suffering in the world. Certainly he was effective, though his compassion may be questioned. Buddhism, as a way of life, carries on the founder's perspective to the next generation in a suffering world.

In the two and a-half millennia since the enlightenment of the Buddha, the doctrines and interests of Buddhism have grown and changed. Certainly each sect holds the original teaching passed down in some way from the founder, and I could never persuade them otherwise. Buddhism, like Christianity, has rich doctrinal history. But the core of Buddhism, like Christianity, is relatively simple, and displays more than just sound insight. The Buddha's doctrine shows the work of one of the sharpest minds who ever lived, a mind devoted to uncovering some of the illusive issues of life.
To understand Buddhism, we must do our best to get back to that man who decided to teach that woman a lesson. We must let him instruct us. This thesis will work to return to the original philosophy, or teaching, of Buddhism, and then present a Classical, Protestant criticism of early Buddhist Philosophy. I use the designation “Classical, Protestant” because I want to keep distance from both Thomism and Liberal theology. One bleeds Aristotle, the other, Kant. By offering a Classical Protestant criticism, I hope to speak as a protesting Catholic, not as a sectarian Evangelical. Christianity’s history stretches back before Luther and Augustine, even Abraham.

Well meaning but misguided Christian’s often talk of building unity on the essential doctrines of the faith. But if the truth of Christ is in fact The Truth, which of the doctrines of Christianity are not essential. In this thesis I will comparatively analyze historical Christianity and early Buddhist philosophy. I want to take Moses, Solomon, Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, Augustine, and the rest of the historic progression of Christian thought back to the trees of Deer Park, to consider the mind behind those eyes that educated a widow by robbing her of hope.

Some may want to object here. Certainly many Christians disagree with one another. There is no unified Christianity, they may argue. In some sense this is true. Every person who claims Christ will also admit they are a work in progress. Also no Christian will claim that the referents of their beliefs are merely their own beliefs unless, of course, they are hemorrhaging Kant. For the purpose of clarity and simplicity, I will define Christianity as the doctrine and life, taught in the Old and New Testament, and guarded in the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Creed of Chalcedon.

Buddhism’s rich tradition also displays great differences of opinion. But in our desire to get back to the source, we will be able to step around some of those controversies. For those interested in a doctrinal criticism of Mahayana Buddhism will benefit from Paul J. Griffiths’ solid work of criticism against the later tradition in On Being Buddha. Our inquiry will focus on the philosophy contained in the Pali canon, the oldest records of the Buddha’s teaching. The Buddhist tradition that
sticks closest to the original Buddha’s teaching is the Theravada School of Hinayana Buddhism. The
Tripitaka (the three baskets) contain these teachings and has the following contents:

Vinaya Pitaka—Basket of Discipline:
1. Suttavibhanga—Analysis of a Sutta, including Mahavihanga—Great (or Monk’) Analysis and Bhikkhunivibhanga—Nuns’ Analysis;
2. Khandhaka—Division, including Nalavagga—Great Section and Cullavagga—Small Section;

Sutta Pitaka—Basket of Discourses:
1. Digha Nikaya—Long Discourses
2. Majjhima Nikaya—Middle Length Discourses
3. Sutta Nikaya—Linked Discourses
4. Anguttara Nikaya—Increased by One Discourses
5. Khuddaka Nikaya—Miscellaneous Discourses

Abhidhamma Pitaka—Basket of Higher Philosophy:
1. Dhamma-sangani—Explanation of Dhammas
2. Vibhanga—Divisions
3. Dhatukatha—Discourse on the Elements
4. Puggalapannatti—Descriptions of Persons
5. Kathavatthu—Subjects of discussion
6. Yamaka—Pairs
7. Patthana—Causal relations

The size of this vast collection of texts far exceeds the Bible. Many scholars have different interpretations of it. So for this work of criticism I have narrowed the scope somewhat by focussing on the work of the late K. N. Jayatilleke, whom Nancy McCagney calls “the greatest Buddhist philosopher since Buddhaghosa,” and David Kalupahana, one of today’s foremost Buddhist scholars. Kalupahana, Jayatilleke’s greatest student, has just retired as the senior Buddhist scholar at the University of Hawai. As a philosopher and Buddhist apologist, he seems a worthy and faithful modern expositor of the Buddha’s philosophy, attempting to present the Buddha’s teaching with philosophical rigor. Since Kalupahana has devoted his life to the labor of faithfully presenting the Buddha’s philosophy, problems in Buddhist philosophy should not be interpreted as failures in Kalupahana’s scholarship. You are about to read Buddhism Reconsidered not Kalupahana Reconsidered. We
will follow his outline for explaining Buddhism and draw on many of his works for the best defense of the Buddha's original teachings. Though controversial in his interpretation of the later traditions, his work on the early tradition has gone virtually unchallenged. He also does an excellent job of elucidating these early ideas through comparisons with modern philosophers like Wittgenstein, Quine, and William James.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter introduces early Buddhist philosophy, giving the necessary background for later criticisms. The last three chapters offer a critique of Buddhist thought, working through the Buddhist account of logic, causality and finally Buddhist pragmatism.

Though this thesis is a work of philosophical criticism, we ought not forget that ideas have consequences. Buddhism has not only changed, but shaped the lives of millions of diligent men and women, people who made their choices based on its promises. Detail becomes all the more important in weighty matters.

Let us begin.
Chapter One

A Directed Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy

As mentioned in the introduction, this work is a Christian criticism of Theravada Buddhist philosophy, a tradition that holds closely to the earliest Buddhist scriptures, the Pali Canon. In the following chapter, Buddhist philosophy will be explored through the work of one of its most formidable contemporary advocates, David Kalupahana. I will examine the Buddha’s view of knowledge, causality, personality, and ethics. Only then can we walk through a critical analysis of Buddhism.

The Beginning of Knowledge

The Buddha’s theory of knowledge will come under heavy criticism in later chapters. We shall criticize his justification for logic (ch.2), and his attempt to justify causality by the use of his epistemology (ch.3). The Buddha’s goal of ending suffering (which we will criticize in chapter 4) even effects what he accepts as knowledge. What we are about to consider is very important.

Buddhism has a distinct epistemology, which provides the basis for his claims.

The Buddha held that:

There are five things that have a twofold result in this life. What five? [Knowledge based on] faith, likes, tradition, reflection on form, and delight in views… Even if I know something on the basis of best faith, that may be empty, hollow, and confused, while, what I do not know on the best faith may be may be factual, true, and not otherwise. It is not proper for an intelligent person, safeguarding the truth, to come categorically to the conclusion in this matter that such alone is true and whatever else is false.¹

Faith, likes, tradition, reflection on form, and the contemplation and the debating of different views may result in true beliefs, but tripping over truth and possessing knowledge are two
different things all-together. Also, faith may be placed in an unfaithful knowledge claim. We may be wrong no matter how great a faith we have. Something is not true merely because we believe it.

The Buddha also rejected rational arguments about speculation\(^2\), and viewed the Vedic tradition as speculation compounded on speculation. Arguments were presented for different metaphysical views, but since the debates rarely focused on testable phenomena conclusions could never be reached. For these reasons the Buddha rejected the epistemic approaches of both the Traditionalists and the Rationalists.

**Sense Experience**

Having rejected Traditionalist authority and Rationalist speculation, the Buddha turned to a detailed analysis of sense experience. Curiously he does not separate the experience from the one experiencing. Kalupahana begins his explanation with this wooden translation:

> Depending on the visual organ and the visual object, O monks, arises visual consciousness; the meeting together of these three is contact; conditioned by contact arises feeling. What one feels, one perceives; what one perceives, one reflects about; what one reflects about, one is obsessed with. What one is obsessed with due to that, concepts characterized by such obsessed perceptions assail him in regard to visible objects cognizable by the visual organ, belonging to the past, future, and the present.\(^3\)

Here the Buddha begins his description of perception by acknowledging mutual dependence (pratīcārasampāda) of the organ and the object being sensed. Atman does not account for the unity between the inner and outer world, dependence (causality) does. The sensing organ is part of a physically identifiable person. Sense perception does not give us a world apart from our experience. Every experience is conditioned by both the senses and the object sensed. The resulting experience

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\(^1\) *Majjhima-Nikaya* 2.170-171. Quoted from Kalupahana, *Continuities and Discontinuities*, p. 31

\(^2\) Translated above as “delight in views,” *Majjhima-Nikaya* 2.170.

\(^3\) *Continuities and Discontinuities*, p. 32.
is the causal product of both items. We never objectively know an object in itself. And according to the Buddha, we do not need to.

Kalupahana comments on the phrase ‘What one feels, one perceives.’ Regular contact with certain perceptions develops feelings, emotions. Kalupahana connects these feelings with ethics. We place value on those things to which we develop attachments, and therefore our ethics have an empirical source (more later in this chapter). The Buddha thought that often our discussions of right and wrong leave the tangible world and bury themselves in metaphysical speculations. Then strife begets greater strife, and the solutions to our ethical problems muddy themselves. Often our search for them feels like grasping oil. To make ethics more empirical the Buddha suggests that our emotions condition our perceptions. Even though emotions seem to reign as tyrants in the mind, meditation can triumph over them. At any rate, knowledge begins with experience.

The Upanisadic thinkers sought to put themselves in states where they could gain direct access into the nature of the universe. In these states they ‘experienced’ that atman (Self as individual) and brahman (the Creator) are one and the same. These passionate pursuers of impersonality stopped at what they perceived as clear metaphysical perception. The Buddha discerned their halt as futility. In fact he left Ramaputta for this reason. The Buddha believed he had reached the meditative state where the distinction between oneself and other dissipates. This state has no linguistic descriptions because language presupposes distinctions. Though the Buddha reached this state of consciousness, he also thought he surpassed it. Kalupahana thinks he was able to exceed the achievements of his predecessor because unlike Ramaputta he was not looking for some state of cognitive experience. He was able to pass the early stages of meditative experience and bring an end to perception itself. The Buddha met the end of the meditative road, the cessation of perception all together in a non-cognitive state.

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4 Ibid., pp. 33-34
The Buddha recognized that nothing could be done with this state. Once perceptions have ceased, the gate to understanding the causes of suffering also closes. The techniques of the Upanisadic thinkers gave no knowledge as to the problems of existence. They brought no end to suffering nor could they ever.

The Pali canon claims that the Buddha developed extrasensory powers. Moderns tend to redact these ‘supernatural’ abilities from the Buddhist texts. If they are sympathetic to the Buddha’s doctrine they will expound a perspective consistent with modern naturalism and reject the miraculous. But consider that the question of whether the Buddha had these abilities, miraculous by our standard, does nothing to harm the epistemic case for Buddhism. Extrasensory perception is only an embellished empiricism.

The heightened forms of empirical knowledge accepted by the Upanisadic thinker are:

- Psychokinesis (iddhibhiddha): exhibiting the power of will in the world. This is not a source of knowledge but more of an ability.
- Clairaudience (dibbasota): a faculty of awareness regarding distant sounds, way beyond the range of normal hearing. This allows for the direct perception of events normally inferred
- Telepathy (cetoparikata): ability to apprehend the contents of another’s thoughts, while he thinks them.
- Retrocognition (pubbenivasa/v/mittana): the ability to access one’s memory of past lives.
- Clairvoyance (dibbacakkhno or cut’ upapana): awareness of the death and further states of beings on the wheel of samsara, who are experiencing the results of their moral actions (karma)
- Knowledge of destruction of defiling impulses (asavakka/vjana): This source of knowledge coupled with the others gives insight into the Four noble truths.

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5 Ibid., p. 37.
6 Historical Analysis, p. 21-22
The Buddha found the last three very useful. And he believed these perceptions to be empirical, thinking that man has such faculties to interact with these corresponding sensible items. The mind (mano) without concentration (asamabita) can grasp concepts (dhamma). But the concentrated mind (samahita), the mind cleared by meditation, can understand former lives, the thought processes of others, and even the causal process of defiling impulses.

We must be clear on this more ‘miraculous’ side of the Buddha’s theory of knowledge. Though far-fetched, these are merely elaborations on empiricism. The Buddha believed that we have senses that apprehend certain existing objects of sense in the world. There is no other way to gain knowledge. Even if one receives knowledge in the form of testimony, that testimony is just strings of words, words that must point to sense experience. So testimony refers to perceptions only.

Any knowledge claim in the universe (whatever that is) may only be justified in this empirical, and positivist manner. Even knowledge claims by the gods must be justified in the same manner. Reliable knowledge comes through sense perception. As mentioned in the introduction, this analysis focuses on Theravada Buddhism. But the basic truths of Buddhism, especially Buddhist epistemology, are found in all sects because the Buddha pointed to empiricism as the means for verifying his method and ending suffering. Even in Mahayana Buddhism, which emphasizes the divine, the divinities have no greater insight into the nature of the universe than what their senses provide.

In a Buddhist understanding of the divine, appeals to such beings provide no clarity to the nature of the universe. Who are the gods? They may be able to sense more than we, but they have no greater epistemic priority due to their being. And even if they did, the Buddha would want them to comply with the rules of his epistemology. He would hear their claims if they first verified them through sense experience.
Also, the views of the Buddha need not be established by extraordinary sense perceptions. In fact we ought to verify the highest truth of Buddhism, the truth of “interdependent causality,” solely on a common empirical basis. In Sutta-nipata 1122, one of the Buddha’s followers tells him “You do not have (or recognize) something that is not seen, heard, conceived, or cognized in this world.” The Buddha believed the average everyday man with normal perceptions could rid his own suffering without faith in things not seen.

Experience cannot provide us with certain knowledge, but the Buddha did not want certain knowledge. He wanted to understand causal relations (more later) for the purpose of ending suffering. We cause our own suffering by trying to make things permanent when everything is in constant flux. This is why the sixth form of knowledge, the highest form of knowledge, is the knowledge of the destruction of defiling impulses. Knowledge for the Buddha related to the here and now, not grand mystical, insensible claims. The understanding of causes and the means to end suffering is right before our eyes.

Justifying Causality

For the Buddha to remain consistent, causality—his all-encompassing explanatory principle—must be empirically justified. If the Buddha cannot account for his own theory of causality through his theory of knowledge then his epistemology and causal theory are at war with one another.

David Hume believed that the empirical justification of causality was impossible.

Before we are reconcil’d to this doctrine, how often we must repeat ourselves, that the simple view of any two objects or actions, however related, can never give us any idea of power, or of a connection betwixt them: that this idea arises from the repetition of their union: that the repetition neither discovers nor causes any thing in the objects, but has an influence only on the mind, by that customary transition it produces: that this customary transition is therefore, the same with the power and

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7 To be discussed in the section on causality.
necessity; which are consequently qualities of perceptions, not of objects, and are internally felt by the soul, and not perceive’d externally in bodies.\(^8\)

In other words, we associate two events which occur in sequence and assume that there is a causal relationship between them. So causality is merely a judgment call or worse a matter of faith. We assume that the future will be like the past, but the future is always in the future and therefore not yet available to experience. Any statements about connections between the future and the past depend first on the existence of a connection. But that causal connection is exactly what must be proved. So Hume accuses the defender of causality with circular reasoning. To causally connect the future and the past first requires that there be a causal connection.

The Buddha believed that our senses had no access to the past or future, only the present. Intentions toward the future and our memories of the past are concepts (sankha), not perceptions. In the modern period we relate a trustworthy observation to our ability to make scientific prediction. But to the Buddha, prediction is just a guide. It does not establish truth. Humans seek permanence. One expression of this today is the scientific mindset of belief in objective laws of nature describing the regular operations of the universe at any time. The Buddha thought that

Beings dominated by prediction (akkehippa), established upon prediction, not understanding prediction, come under the yoke of death. However, having understood prediction one does not assume oneself to be a foreteller.\(^9\)

In other words, the Buddha saw a place for prediction but rejected predictability as a solid basis for knowledge. But he did not jump to the other extreme, that of unpredictability. He thought he was walking a middle path between them.

Kalupahana defends the Buddha’s approach in arguing that in an essentialist philosophy (that brand of philosophy most common in Western history, where truths are based on certain things like universals, the character of God, or permanence in a regular universe) such criticisms

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make sense. If certainty is a necessary component of knowledge then the concept of causality turns into a guess within a strictly empiricist epistemology.

But the Buddha rejects essentialist philosophy (which for him was Upanisadic Thought), tying knowledge directly to experience. Instead of seeing experience as a collection of discrete, separate perceptions, he viewed experience as a continuum. The mind freezes perceived experiences into moments. But there are no moments separate from the causal flux of reality. Once we reject the ontological separation of cause and effect, then, Kalupahana argues\(^9\) the Humean criticism evaporates.

Causal connections are established not by deduction but by induction. Some experiences show us the causal connections between other experiences. Kalupahana writes:

> However, in a system that repudiates such [essentialist] rational distinctions and recognizes that relations between events are often revealed in experience, these experienced relations themselves serve as guides for possible future experiences. Uniformities are thus abstractions and imagination functions more in the formulation of such uniformities than in the experience of relations themselves. *Inductive inference thereby turns out to be an explanatory extension of sensible continuity into the obvious past and the future.*\(^11\) (emphasis mine)

He views induction then as an extension of experience but not a truth founding experience in itself. Here Kalupahana is showing the Buddha’s consistency, since the strength of inductive reasoning is its ability to stay close to particulars, in this case the particulars of experience. And it is these particulars, and only these particulars which give meaning to any inductive argument.

In the following section we will discuss the Buddha’s view of nonsubstantiality. But something should be said about it here in regards to knowledge. The doctrine of nonsubstantiality in short is that nothing has any fixed, permanent, unchanging essence. All of reality, knowledge, people, things, feelings, whatever one can think of, can neither be pointed to as a permanent reality or an isolated identity which may be considered as an object of knowledge. There is no bedrock of

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\(^9\) *Samputta-nikaya* 1.11, cited in *Continuities and Discontinuities*, p. 45

\(^10\) See my discussion in Chapter 3.
reality or knowledge, and no regular structure that we can point to that maintains the permanent integrity of knowledge and the phenomena that we see around us. So our knowledge can never be ultimately true according to the Buddha. Contingent truth, possible truth, is all we have. This presents the Buddha which the interesting question how he accounts for logic and truth.

If the search for the ultimate objectivity is to be abandoned in the analysis of the data of sensible experience, there seems to be no reason why it should be retained in the evaluation of other sources of knowledge, such as inference. Thus the Buddha’s theory of non-substantiality applies equally to all data of human thought and experience—objects of experience and relations among events, as well as uniformities.12 (emphasis mine)

The consequences of the Buddha’s epistemology do not stop with claims about causality and suffering. They extend to every area of human life. There is no aspect of life that does not feel the careful prod of the Buddha’s epistemological finger.

We have covered a great deal of important ground in this section. The Buddha based his theory of knowledge on a kind of radical empiricism13, proving causality through inductive inference. But radical empiricism leads to the abandoning of metaphysical claims.

Causality: The Heart of Buddhism

Chapters 2 and 3 will interact with the Buddha’s theory of causality. Many of the coming criticisms will focus on the problems of integrating the Buddha’s explanatory theory of causality with his justification for knowledge. So we must have a thorough understanding of his doctrine of causality.

In the previous section, we saw that through radical empiricism the Buddha inferred that everything arises from previous causes. This chapter will explore what ‘causality’ entails within the Buddha’s perspective. Causality is Buddhism’s central philosophy and the backbone of the four

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11 Continuities and Discontinuities, p.45
12 Ibid., p. 45
13 Radical empiricism is Kalupahana’s own term. See Continuities and Discontinuities, p. 52.
noble truths. The Buddha called this highest truth *pratītiśamputṭada*\(^{14}\), “interdependent coorigination.” Most books on comparative religion begin their exposition of Buddhism with the four noble truths. But we are reconsidering Buddhism as a worldview\(^ {15}\), so we must step back into the philosophy that the four noble truths presuppose. We begin with the Buddha’s view of nonabsolutist causal uniformity.

Once we have a right understanding of causal law in the universe we will naturally understand the three marks of existence (more later), namely: impermanence (*anicca*, Sk. *anitya*), the lack of a soul (*anatman*), and suffering (*dukkha*). The four noble truths that end ignorance and bring enlightenment follow from an understanding of the three marks of existence, and so the Truths hinge on the principle of causality. The Buddha believed his rigorous empiricism would protect those who wanted to end their suffering from speculations that gave no help.

Buddhist causal theory involves two concepts, (1) the principle of causality (*pratītiśamputṭada*), Skt. *pratītiśamputṭada*), and the product of previous conditions: (2) the causally conditioned phenomena itself (*pratītiśamputṭa dhamma*).\(^ {16}\) These two principles explain the arising of all phenomena, according to the Buddha and are the key to understanding all reality.

Though close to the Naturalist theory of causality\(^ {17}\), the Buddha saw enough of a difference to coin a new term to describe his view of causality (*pratītiśamputṭada*). The differences between the Buddha’s view and the Naturalist’s are two fold. First, the Buddha’s view applies to more than

\(^{14}\) The Buddha actually used the Pali term *pratītiśamputṭada*. But for simplicity here I am using the more widely used Sanskrit term.

\(^{15}\) Many Buddhists would oppose their way of living as a worldview. I acknowledge their perspective but use the term here for ease of explanation.

\(^{16}\) *Historical Analysis*, p. 26.

\(^{17}\) The Naturalists, held to an external theory of causality. Rejecting Upanisadic speculations, the Naturalists believed that phenomena have an ‘inherent nature’ (*svabhava*) and that this ‘inherent nature’ was the regulating factor behind the operations of nature. Man himself is governed and directed by this physical principle so that he is ultimately not responsible for his choices. The Naturalists envisioned causality as a strictly external relation\(^ {17}\) between particulars with a fixed essence.
physical causation. Later scholastics, looking at what the Buddha said, classified five realms\textsuperscript{18} in which the law of causation accurately accounts for arising and cessation. They are (1) the physical organic order (utu-niyama), (2) the inorganic physical order (bijai-niyama), (3) the sphere of thought or mental life (citta-niyama), (4) the social or moral sphere (kamma-niyama), and (5) the higher spiritual life (dhamma-niyama).

Note that in the West we see the interaction of these realms as a problem. Take as examples the mind body problem, and the problem of accounting for moral value within materialistic naturalism. The Buddha viewed causality as exerting influence from one realm to another. Another note about these five realms or spheres, if causal law accurately accounts for all relations within and between each realm then the truth regarding causal relations in one order must also be a truth that applies to another order. What is true of causality in the physical organic order must also be true of mental life, or the social or moral sphere. If this is not the case then the claim of causal law accounting for each of these realms becomes unintelligible.

The second difference separating the Buddha from the Naturalists is Buddha’s rejection of ‘inherent nature’ which predetermines the resulting causal nexus, leading to a fixed determinism. Instead, the Buddha thought of causation more in terms of conditionality, recognizing the multiplicity of causes bearing on any one event.

The importance of the Buddha’s conception of causality can not be overstated. It is the central philosophy of Buddhism and its highest truth. This highest truth of causality, \textit{pratitasamrupada}, is the empirical claim that every event arises from causes. As we saw in the previous chapter, this term receives many translations, including “interdependent co-origination,” “co-dependently arising,” “dependent arising,” “dependent origination.”

\textsuperscript{18} Historical Analysis, p. 30.
In the “Discourse on Causal Relations”\textsuperscript{19} the Buddha gives four characteristics of causation: (1) objectivity (tathata), (2) necessity (avitathata), (3) invariability (anannathata), and (4) conditionality (idappacayata).\textsuperscript{20}

‘Objectivity’ refers to the status of causal relationships as descriptive of the phenomena presented to us. Causality does not refer to a subjective state, or a projection we place on the world, as in Upanisadic thought. At one point the Buddha was asked who fashioned this theory of causality. He responded, “It was neither made by me nor by another. Whether the Tathagatas (or Buddhas) were to arise in this world or not, this pattern of things (fa chieh = dhammadatu) is eternally existent.”\textsuperscript{21} Clearly, the Buddha did not consider causality to be a product of the mind, but instead a real trait of the world. In fact the word tathata, translated here as ‘objectivity’, refers more to ‘correspondence’ in the early Buddhist texts.\textsuperscript{22} So causality must not be seen as a disconnected theory, but as a notion which directly corresponds to our findings in nature.

Regarding the second characteristic of the causal nexus, namely necessity, the fifth century Buddhist systematizer, Buddhaghosa said, “Since there is no failure, even for a moment, to produce the events that arise when the conditions come together, there is said to be ‘necessity.’ ”\textsuperscript{23}

‘Invariability’ also characterizes causality but in a different way. Everything, which arises, has several causes. In fact the same event can never happen twice since the identical causal situation never occurs twice. Each arising has multiple causal factors at work. ‘Invariability’ in the Buddhist texts does not refer to the nature of causes and effects but instead refers to the regular relationships

\textsuperscript{19} Paccaya-sutta, Samyutta-nikaya, 2.25 ff.
\textsuperscript{20} A detailed discussion of the characteristics of causality see Kalupahana, Causality, 90-96
\textsuperscript{21} Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo 2.85 b-c (Tsa a-han ching 30.16) in Causality, p. 92. Here I am breaking with my normal policy of siting only the Pali canon. Kalupahana mentions here that, “This short but very important sutraa does not appear in a Pali version.” (Causality, p. 210)
\textsuperscript{22} Causality, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{23} Samyutta-atthakatha 2.41, quoted in Causality, p. 93.
between causes and effects. A constant relationship stands between causes of a certain type and
effects of a certain type.

With necessity and invariability, no event could possibly fall outside the pattern of causality.
“Events that appear to follow no causal pattern, events that are generally called accidental
occurrences, are not really so. Merely our ignorance of the causal pattern prompts us to consider
them accidental.”24

The forth characteristic, ‘conditionality,’ Buddhaghosa defines as, “From the condition or
group of conditions that gives rise to such a states as decay and death there is said to be
conditionality.”25 This means that a thing or event will only be if the conditions are right for its
arising. While strict determinism involves a direct and necessary connection between cause and
effect, it neglects the sense of ‘conditions’ which are helpful to those of us who live in the world,
face decisions, and make plans. The Buddha tries to avoid the two extremes of fatalism and
accidentalism, the first removing the freedom to choose and the latter assuming an arbitrary view of
the will.

These characteristics describe the Buddha’s view of causality, which he explains in the early
discourses.

When this is present, that comes to be;
From the arising of this, that arises.
When this is absent, that does not come to be;
On the cessation of this, that ceases.26

We began the chapter by looking at the causal theories at the time of the Buddha. Though
close to the Materialists, he believed that causality referred to more than just physical events, and he
rejected inherent nature. Codependent-origination (pratitasamppada), the Buddha believed, accounts

24 Historical Analysis, p. 28
25 Samyutta-atthakatha 2.41, quoted in Causality, p. 94.
26 Historical Analysis, p. 28.
for all relationships between the five spheres of reality. Objectivity, invariability, necessity and conditionality characterize the application of this causal law.

The Middle Way of Phenomena

The Buddha believed his understanding avoided the extremes of annihilation and immutability. On the one hand, by forming our concepts in light of experience we realize that things are changed rather than ultimately destroyed. Yet no item or idea remains unaffected by the changing world, so our empiricism leads us to the rejection of immutability (existence). The Buddha's empiricism collapses the absolute distinction between sensations produced by an "objective" external world and the perceptions of one's own private inner being. Buddhism leads to a middle path between the two opposite poles.

The Buddha maintained this "middle path" by adhering to the radical empiricism discussed in the previous section. This Buddhist proto-positivism rejects metaphysical speculations. In the centuries following the Buddha, questions arose among the followers of the Buddha's teachings as to what actually was the fundamental nature of causality. A scholastic side of Buddhism developed called Abhidharma, which pursued debates over the 'mechanics' of causality and impermanence. They postulated that reality was comprised of staccato moments or flashes (dhamma) in which reality (dharma) would arise. Reality continually changes and demonstrates impermanence since each new moment of reality arises to take the place of the old. Kalupahana mentions that Stcherbatsky presents this view of staccato moments as the actual Buddhist theory of reality, but Kalupahana argues that the early texts do not suggest this view of causation. In fact the 8th Century Hindu philosopher Sankara criticized this view.

Those who maintain that everything has momentary existence only admit that when the thing existing in the second moment enters into being, the thing in the first

27 Causality, p. 70
moment ceases to be. On this admission it is impossible to establish between the two things the relation of cause and effect, since the former momentary existence ceases or has ceased to be, and so has entered into the state of non-existence, cannot be the cause of the later momentary existence.  

Early Buddhism did not isolate the elements involved in causal relationships into discrete moments. Instead the Buddha attempted to prove causal conjunction empirically, dissuading his followers from metaphysical investigation. The Upanisadic effort to unite \textit{atman} and \textit{Brahman} did nothing to alleviate suffering. But the Buddha advocated that his own students test his words to see for themselves if his understanding of the operation of the world was correct, thus breaking the Vedic epistemic stalemate.

In considering our own mental and external perceptions, we realize that certain states tend to associate themselves with prior conditions. But the Buddha did not look for some common substance underlying reality. Indeed his epistemology does not permit that type of knowledge. So the Buddha’s view of causal relations does not claim an insight into the fundamental nature of things in themselves, \textit{per se}, or in Pali, \textit{svabhava}. Our senses never give us insight into things in themselves.

Knowledge is comprised of two things, sensation or name (\textit{ nama}) and material body or form (\textit{rupa}). \textit{In The Great Discourse on Origination}, the Buddha designates reality as \textit{nama-rupa}, which is translated as Mind-and-body. The discourse discusses the \textit{nama} and \textit{rupa} components separately. But it does not use the term components. In his translation, Maurice Walshe renders the phrase \textit{nama-kaya} as mind-factor, and \textit{rupa-kaya} as body-factor. The mental component that makes up phenomena cannot be separated from the physical. Likewise, the physical factor of phenomena must not be thought of in terms of our own personal bodies as in some pop-New Age mind-body

\begin{itemize}
\item 28 Ibid., p. 72, quoting \textit{Sankara-bhasya} on \textit{Brahma-sutra} 2.2.20
\item 29 \textit{Mahanidana Sutta}, in \textit{The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya}, Translated by Maurice Walshe
\item 30 \textit{Digha Nikaya}, 2.62
\end{itemize}
oneness kick. Here “body” refers to all that we would think of in terms of material form, extended in space. These two aspects of phenomena are seen more as factors of consciousness.

In the West, our cultural common sense tells us that we have a mind that is not quite the same as the material we sense around us. The Buddha wants us to think of the surrounding world in terms of sense perception thought about by minds. Consciousness results from the contact that the senses make, but that contact itself is conditioned by the mind and the material form of what we call the world. As *rupa* (material form) seems go through the changes of “becoming” and “not-becoming” so does *nama* (mind or name).

Since the Buddha believed consciousness was the result of contact with the senses, that awareness of sensation cannot be separated from the interactive factors of mind-and-body (*nama-rupa*). But this interaction of the mental and physical factors of phenomena involves conditionally. Every event has prior causes, called conditions. In the Buddha’s view, causality is not a mere product of consciousness, but in fact the very account of the origin of consciousness. *Pratītiṇaṃ sāmyāna* is not a product of our minds. It describes the way phenomena really are.

No Metaphysical Speculations

Hopefully my last sentence seemed a bit strange. When we in the West hear “phenomena” we tend to think of something less than real. We have a strong absolutist tradition, going back thousands of years. In considering the Buddhist position, we approach it through our own categories, and if done carelessly we may suspect the Buddha of throwing away reality all together.

As the Upanisadic influenced Indian man examined the world, he saw that everything in his life was an aspect of the “Self.” Think of it. Everything! The capacity of his cognitive faculties, and tree bark are each an aspect of the one. We take the phrase “all are one” as an anti-logical proposition. But the Upanisadic sages saw it with their eyes, touched it with their hands; it
interpreted their going out and their coming in. They understood those words in terms of their own experience of life and cognition. Many Western minds want to reduce all knowledge to the categories of physics. Well, imagine if you rejected the idea of distinct matter. To what categories would you reduce the world then? The Upanisadic thinkers did not have two-thousand-year-old science culture behind them. They had an understanding of the “Self” which extended into the world and unified all reality and knowledge.

Buddha casts off this theorizing in search of the end of dukkha. But when he deduced that dukkha had causes, he felt no reason to justify connections between matter, mind, and spirit. If all these are in some way unified by atman, why not examine them all as phenomena governed by causal law? When things cause suffering, the question of their ontological status in regard to other realities matters little. Whether real, or appearance, this life is still dukkha. The things that cause suffering stay close to us.

The Buddha’s epistemology, which he credits for breaking the stalemate of Vedic-Upanisadic thought, leaves no opportunity to know anything outside of that described by pratitiasamupada (interdependent co-arising). Whether something exists beyond nama and rupa, we cannot know. Questions about atman or brahman, (or the deity or Christ) cannot be considered since they cannot be verified empirically. No one can observe any pattern of causal conjunction that could provide a criterion of falsifiability for metaphysical claims.

Doctrines, as linguistically expressed beliefs, assume the use of language. If phenomena are the only knowable thing, then phenomena are the only thing we can name. But if we understand pratitiasamupada, we recognize that words often trick us, since everytime we use a word we assume that its referent has not changed since the last time the word was used. Whenever we try to create permanence, we postulate something beyond our experience, and lead ourselves into greater suffering. Even the concepts behind our words are not absolute. Our next chapter will explore the
Buddhist understanding of existence. To recap this chapter we close with an appropriate summary, the last paragraph from Kalupahana's own analysis of Causality.

Rejecting an Absolute (such as the Brahman or Atman of the Upanisads) or a transemipirical reality, the Buddha confined himself to what is empirically given. Following a method comparable to that adopted by the modern Logical Positivists, he sometimes resorted to linguistic analysis and appeal to experience to demonstrate the futility of metaphysics. As a result of his empiricism he recognized causality as the reality and made it the essence to his teaching. Hence his statement: "He who sees causality sees the dhamma." 31

THE THREE MARKS OF EXISTENCE AND THE FIVE AGGREGATES

We have covered Buddha's epistemology and his account of causality, pratitiasamupada (interdependent co-origination). The three marks of existence—impermanence (anicca, Sk. anitya), the fact that the existence is unsatisfactory (dukkha), and non-substantiality or no 'self' (anatman) naturally follow from pratitiasamupada, so we should see this chapter as a continuation of the last. As mentioned at the beginning of that chapter, this understanding of existence provides the philosophical presuppositions that make sense of the four noble truths. The Buddha thought these were really important.

Impermanence

No sane man can doubt the impermanent and transitory nature of life. Babies grow up. Men get old and die. The companies that seemed so secure lay off workers; The joys of marriage end in divorce or death. These examples of impermanence demonstrate the "big-'E'-on-the-eye-chart" type of obvious impermanence, and that impermanence directly follows from the constant causal flux of life.

31 Causality, p. 185
However, the Buddha took impermanence past the daily grind of life, recognizing that if *pratitiasampada* accounted for all phenomena, then it accounted for the five realms of existence (ch.4): the physical organic order (*utu-niyama*), the inorganic physical order (*bija-niyama*), the sphere of thought or mental life (*citta-niyama*), the social or moral sphere (*kamma-niyama*), and the higher spiritual life (*dhamma-niyama*). All existence arises and diminishes in constant causal conjunction. Things and people come into being and pass away.

**Dukkha**

This leads to the second mark of existence, *dukkha*. In the brief summary of the four noble truths at the beginning of the previous section on causality, we learned that dukkha refers to that unsatisfactory quality of life. Now we see that the lack of satisfaction comes from the impermanent nature of the world. “Suffering” in some ways is too strong a word, in other ways too weak. *Sansara*, the perpetual cycle of reincarnation, is the “wheel of suffering” where you can once again relive the pains of this life. All the torture and shattered dreams are yours again. So *dukkha* has a range of meanings, all unpleasant.

*Dukkha* results from our own “grasping” of existence, trying to make things permanent. Human nature tends to grasp onto, or put faith in things, for hope, safety, satisfaction, whatever the case may be. But *pratitiasampada* (interdependent co-origination) which brought that item into “being” will also make it dissolve in our grasp. That empty clutching hand of the soul is *trshna* (craving). We will grasp onto many things, other people, objects, ideas, nations, memories—but all of them will dissolve. We will want them back, but they will never come back. And if something similar returns, by necessity it arose into existence by different causes so it must by causal origin be a different item. A man’s wife may die, leaving him with a little daughter to care for. But the maturing
of the daughter into the likeness of her mother does not replace his beloved wife, and instead may serve as a further reminder of who he has lost.

**No Self or Substance**

One may say, “At least I am still myself. I suffer the loss.” But the causal principle necessitates that our own person is also subject to arising and cessation, hence the third mark of existence, no self (anatman). The Buddha went farther than the obvious fact that all the born will die. He argued that no one could ever prove the existence of a permanent “self” (atman). Anything we may try to point falls into the five spheres of existence. Causal law applies to them all, a law which he believed he had proven empirically. This causal law describes the constant change of existence. Therefore even perceived mental moments are arisen phenomena that will cease at some point.

The only reason one has to suspect that he is the same person he was yesterday are his memories of yesterday. Therefore it is our memories, and likeness of figure to the person we were the day before that establishes continuity. The Buddha argues that the notion of a “permanent soul” is a non-referring concept, a concept which has no pertaining reality in the world. But even if there were a soul we could never know it, since it can not be empirically verified. To what permanent thing could one point showing that we have a changeless aspect to our being? Our beliefs change over time, along with the gaining and forgetting of different memories. Even our appearance changes a little each day.

All this led the Buddha to conclude a position of no “self” (anatman). Instead he explains the individual as composed of five aggregates (skhandas lit. “heap” or “bundle”): body or material form (rupa), feeling or sensation (vedana), perception (sanna), dispositions (sankhara), and consciousness (vinnana).

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Body or material form (rupa) is the physical personality, what we commonly use to distinguish one person from another. Clearly the body comes into being through conception and birth and ceases to be at death. (Interestingly the early discourses mention nothing of an immaterial personality.) Rupa refers to the sense organs and also the external, physical sources for their stimuli.

Feeling or sensation (vedana) denotes the emotional factor, resulting from sense contact with the rupa perceived as external to us. All things sensed are pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Ethical needs result from these feelings (more later).

Perception (sanna), the act of perceiving, like feeling of sensation, affects all the person in that our perception provides the content for our consciousness. But Kalupahana writes, “Each of our perceptions is a mixed bag of memories, concepts, dispositions, and material elements. The Buddha or any subsequent Buddhist psychologist who has remained faithful to the Buddha does not recognize a pure percept, undiluted by such conditions. A pure percept is as metaphysical as pure a priori category.” (emphasis mine)33

Dispositions (sankhara), the volitional “bundle” of the individual, put the mind in action. Resulting from dispositions we commit acts of Karmic value, and perpetuate our stay on the wheel of samsara.

Finally, consciousness (vinnana) results as the activity of contact between the senses and the external world. Six types of consciousness arise, each coterminous with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Consciousness means awareness of the outside world, not identification, which is a function of perception (the third aggregate).

Do not think of the aggregates as interactive substances. Instead they are categories of phenomena. In the end they all may be reduced to nama and rupa (name and form, or mind and body). Remember that nama-rupa is the Buddhist term for phenomena.

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33 Continuities and Discontinuities, p. 71.
Nonsubstantiality not only describes the individual person, but also the substance of the universe. Returning to radical empiricism, the Buddha believed that the content of knowledge is only sense experience. Even when people communicate knowledge, the meaning of their words must connect directly to sense impressions of the world. We can never separate the world as it is from the way it funnels into our own particular senses. Therefore, we must understand the six elements, earth (patha), water (apo), fire (tejo), air (vayu), space (akasa), and consciousness (vinnana) as phenomena—not as though we have a concrete understanding of essences outside ourselves. The Buddha defined the six elements in terms of human experience.

In this section we applied the Buddha’s doctrine of causality to the rest of life. Interdependent co-origination (pratitasamnopada) necessarily concludes the impermanence or existence. Any attempt to find satisfaction in this impermanent whirl of phenomena leads to dukkha (dissatisfaction). We cannot even take confidence in a permanent self or a permanent world. The Buddha accounted for non-substantial existence with the five aggregates, and interpreted the elements of the universe in terms of personal experience.

ETHICS

Elements of the eight-fold path will show up as I criticize the problems that arise from the Buddha’s epistemology. If Kalupahana is right, the Buddha’s eight-fold noble path teaches us that morality applies even to the formation of concepts, an idea that Abrahamic thinking (which I maintain historically culminated in Christianity) embraced long before Siddhartha Gotama ever thought about suffering (more in chapter 4). The final chapter will address the Buddha’s pragmatism, the goal which motivates his ethical theory.

Buddhism presents us with a perspective on the world that stretches beyond the curiosities of philosophy. The Buddha wanted to end suffering. His goal naturally led to a search for the causes
of suffering. We cannot hope to understand his goal without the possible foundation for a nonabsolutist ethical system based within a world characterized by interdependent co-origination (*pratityasamutpada*).

Ideology and agenda meet in ethics. Certainly Buddhist ethics present no exception. The Buddha had a goal of ending *dukkha*. His philosophical approach aided in that goal. But the "truths" he discovered need feet. They must be put into practice. If causality (*pratityasamutpada*) describes everything, then we can act on the causes of our suffering to bring an end to dissatisfaction. Apprehending the teaching (*dhamma*), though first realized in a moment, will involve the exercise of one's entire life.

The Buddha's theory of *karma* retained reincarnation, and the causal connection between the individual's actions and his future fate. Therefore his solution to *dukkha*’s causes must also apply to karmic theory. He believed the individual's own acts of craving were causally connected to the quality of incarnation he would enjoy. So putting an end to suffering meant putting an end to the suffering of this and the next life. John Dewey thought that morals seek escape from the hazards of existence.34 Hazards in the Buddha's view are all the causes of dissatisfaction.

In so much of ancient philosophy, morality and the good life seem intrinsically connected though not the same. Solomon conceived of the fear of God as the beginning of even moral knowledge (*Proverbs* 1.7a). This knowledge required instruction in Torah (*Proverbs* 1.7b). But the life led by dependence on divine council also brings great satisfaction and pleasure. No one can read through the *Book of Proverbs* and conclude anything else. Aristotle also recognized this connection between moral law and the good life, in that happiness guides the Golden Mean.35 Even though the ethical systems of Solomon and Aristotle approach ethics from completely different paradigms, they

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35 Compare 1104a 10-25 with 1097b 21.
both accept that morality and the good life cannot be divided. They assume this because both of their philosophies emphasize particularity.

The Buddha’s goal-oriented empiricism also makes the connection between morality and the good life, but unlike Aristotle the Buddha has a distinct goal in mind that motivates all ethical formulas. The Buddha’s goal in terms of karmic theory is the attainment of freedom from birth, and thus the avoidance of death and decay. In more broad strokes he wishes to end dukkha.

For a man to free himself from dukkha and rebirth, he must live a life that has constant causal influence on the causes of his dukkha. This means the creation of a self-culture of moral rectitude that perpetually works in bringing freedom, a goal which one achieves gradually because of his own trailing karmic baggage. Since the goal of Buddhism is this personal liberation (nirvana) from dukkha, Buddhist ethics serve this personal goal. In other words the good life goes before morality, qualifying the meaning of morality.

As we saw earlier, perceptions have a component of emotion that arises as our senses contact the nonsubstantial world. This emotional content is pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Kalupahana at the beginning of his own ethical treatise says that people “experience difficulty in accounting for certain feelings and aspirations, especially those relating to freedom, the latter being the foundation of all moral philosophy.” So ethics deals with the phenomena of feelings that arise from sense contact.

But the Buddha took feelings a step further, seeing a connection between the emotions and the dispositions. By our own volition, in our dispositions we crave things that we find satisfying or pleasing. But as mentioned earlier, nothing in this world is permanent. The Buddha’s ethical formula seeks to preserve the wellbeing of the practitioner. The system “lives” for him, and not he for the

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36 Kalupahana, Ethics in Early Buddhism, p. 3.
system. The Buddhist ethic rests on nothing beyond the man or woman who chooses to adopt it. Its goal is nirvana, which one can only find as an individual. No one can bring nirvana to another.

Since the Buddha’s ethical system works for the betterment of the individual, we may consider it a utilitarian ethical system with one proviso. When we think of “Utilitarianism” we think of Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and phrases like “the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.” We tend to think of happiness in terms of a refined and respectful pleasure. We see happiness in terms of how we treat one another, justice, charity, etc. But external conditions do nothing to serve the cessation of dukkha. Dukkha comes from within, as we hanker for satisfaction from the ever-changing nonsubstantial phenomena that results from sense contact. The Buddha taught that we must learn to control our own internal desire to grasp and make things permanent, for this action itself is the cause of karma. Believing the struggle for nirvana to be an internal one, he abandoned strict asceticism, thinking it profitless for ending dukkha, choosing a “middle way” between asceticism and the decadence he had once known.

The terms “right” and “wrong” in Buddhism correlate to the earlier discussion of epistemology. The Buddha rejected the absolute of “true and false” for “true and confused,” since he developed a pragmatic system of logic. In the same way, he did not view “right” with the same vibrant absolutist ethical force that it retains in the West. He saw it in a more contextual pragmatic sense. Samma, the Buddha’s word for “right” has more the sense of “complete.” Mica (wrong) has more the sense of the partial, of the confused. Right and wrong then are dependent on interpersonal context as the true and confused are dependent on empirical context.

The Buddha gave as the fourth noble truth the eight fold noble path. Like the Ten Commandments, the eight-fold path is a collection of “file tabs.” Buddhist ethics is not just the summary of the path, but each of the eight categories is gateway to a wealth of ethical insight, and centuries of further commentary. The eight-fold path consists of:
1. Right view (*samma ditthi*): One must have a complete perspective on morality, not the absolutist objectivity of the Upanisads, to the subjectivity of the materialist. “The right view, according to the Buddha, is a middle perspective that avoids the excesses of subjectivity and objectivity.”

2. Right conception (*samma sankappa*): A meaningful conception must reference an object that a community can agree upon. “In this sense, the difference between a conception and a convention is reduced to a great extent.”

3. Right speech (*samma vaca*): In short—don’t lie! But for the philosopher who must understand and qualify his truth claims, this means making statements that are empirically verifiable. In everyday terms it means avoiding slander, falsehood, mindless chatter, harmful words, and the like. All speech should be directed toward the edification of ones self and others. Edification means speech directed toward enlightening the hearer.

4. Right action (*samma kamma*): What makes actions right cannot be determined by an absolute law. So the goal of happiness of one’s self and others should be the goal of all actions.

5. Right livelihood (*samma ajiva*): If we desire to end the suffering of others then our occupations must also take compassion and consideration of others seriously. We will promote fair business, economic benefit, freedom from debt, and freedom from blame.

6. Right effort (*samma vayama*): We pursue the application of the teaching (*dhamma*) and apply it to our lives. But an absolute law does not govern this effort. “While denying a mysterious ‘ghost in the machine,’ the Buddha reduced the universal and objective laws

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37 *Continuities and Discontinuities*, p. 104.
38 Ibid.
to linguistic convention, thereby accommodating an element of skepticism.” 39 In ending our own grasping the Buddha considered four types of effort:

1. Preventive effort: not attempting to grasp conceptions of qualities and substances when sense contact occurs.

2. Effort at relinquishing: letting go of what we have already grasped

3. Effort to develop: cultivating wholesome attitudes consistent with the goals of enlightenment.

4. Effort to maintain: continuing the cultivation of what good one has already developed

7. Right mindfulness (sa1JJ1JJa): Retrospection, the function of the mind reconsidering what it has already perceived, aids in understanding the Buddha’s teachings. By this action we can see that experience is not a series of staccato moments but a continuum of change. Retrospection involves consideration of physical personality, feelings, thoughts, and ideas. But we ought not pursue such an inquiry to make dogmatic views about the past.

8. Right concentration (samma samadhi): This involves the concentration upon what we have learned previously, to check what we think to be the case, so we can revise former beliefs. This way we can keep from being caught up in healthy ideas. Kalupahana adds to this analysis that, “The above analysis of concentration would mean that there is no absolutely true or real event, state, or process on which the wayfarer may focus. In the absence of absolute knowledge, constant revision of our understanding and behavior becomes inevitable.” 40

39 Ibid., p. 107.
40 Ibid., p. 109.
If one walks this path, he will gain the clarity and take the action necessary to end his own suffering.

**Regulative Concepts**

The Buddha’s understanding was heterodox to Vedic views that held to an objective standard for ethics, and emphasized the place of divinities in the care of moral norms. But the Vedic gods were subject to the moral constraints that contributed to karmic debt. As such they provided no explanation for the nature of ethics. In fact their pursuit of sensual pleasure gives the Buddha a sermon illustration for the vanity of success within the karmic system.

The Buddha seems to have rejected concepts like the gods, demons, and hell. The gods provided no real insight into the means to end suffering. Demons are those who will suffer from their own wickedness. And ultimately “hell” is a metaphor for unpleasant feelings (dukkha). The Buddha saw concepts like “gods,” “demons,” and “hell” as *regulative* concepts. Only an uneducated ordinary man (assutana puthujjano) believes them.41

We should see the ethics of early Buddhism in terms of radical empiricism and pragmatism. No ethical norm can be justified beyond the Buddha’s epistemology so deontological ethics, ethics based on duty, are meaningless. For these two reasons he views ethics in terms of lessening the dukkha of one’s self and others. Bringing people happiness does not lend itself to absolute laws but instead to finding what will end their dukkha. Now we can understand what he means when he says even “what is good has to be abandoned, let alone evil.”42

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41 For a more detailed discussion see *Historical Analysis* p. 65-66.

42 *Majjhima Nikaya* 1.135. Quoted from *Continuities and Discontinuities*, p 101.
**THE BIG PICTURE: FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS**

We have gathered the appropriate blocks to finish the building. Here the Buddha will take us through to his logical conclusion, a path to a personal eschatology.

Having now worked through epistemology, causality, existence, and ethics, we can grasp the meaning of the four noble truths. Without understanding these concepts, Buddhism becomes just another pop-psyche self-help fad. The Buddha constructs an approach to knowledge, life, and reality that one must accept before appropriating his moral teaching. His teachings have epistemological consequences. The Buddha's words may sound like good advice, but the Buddha himself would be the first to say that his words must all be taken together to affect the ending of dukkha.

1. **Life is dukkha**: We all know that this is true. From the four-year-old disappointed by what is not under the Christmas tree, to the wealthy and powerful Howard Hughes who has everything and shoots himself, all men seem to see that during our lifetimes we encounter dissatisfaction. We see the hurt and suffering around us. The Buddha presented this noble truth first. As a brilliant rhetorician, he understood how to connect with the mass of men. Anyone can identify with dissatisfaction.

2. **Dukkha has causes**: This is the great doctrine of *pratītiśamspāda* (interdependent co-origination). Though not the first doctrine preached, we can now see its philosophical priority as the view, which makes suffering intelligible. As we have covered in previous chapters, the Buddha places a priority on causality (*pratītiśamspāda*) because he believes it holds the answer to ending suffering and dissatisfaction in life. To account for the arising of dukkha which culminates in death and rebirth, he isolates the twelve factors, a chain of causality from ignorance to suffering. In the Buddha's discourse with Kaccayana (the *Kakkaṇanagotta-sutta*) he describes this chain of causality.

   “Dependent upon ignorance arise dispositions; dependent upon dispositions arises consciousness; dependent upon consciousness arises the psycho-physical personality;
dependent upon the psycho-physical personality arise the six senses; dependent upon the six senses arises contact; dependent upon contact arises feeling; dependent upon feeling arises craving; dependent upon craving arises grasping; dependent upon grasping arises becoming; dependent upon becoming arises birth; dependent upon birth arises old age and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair. Thus arises this entire mass of suffering.”

So we can trace a pattern for the causal arising of suffering, through these factors.

1. ignorance
2. dispositions
3. consciousness
4. psycho-physical personality
5. the six senses
6. contact
7. feeling
8. craving
9. grasping
10. becoming
11. birth
12. old age and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair. Thus arises this whole mass of suffering.

Note that these factors cross over the five spheres from our discussion of causality. They are the physical organic order (utu-niyama), the inorganic physical order (bijā-niyama), the sphere of thought or mental life (dīta-niyama), the social or moral sphere (kamma-niyama), and the higher spiritual life (dhamma-niyama). The Buddha applies the law of causality across the board in accounting for the origination of dukkha.

43 Continuities and Discontinuities, p. 58.
3. **If we know the causes of dukkha we can put an end to them and thus end dukkha:** Here the Buddha explains *nirvana* (liberation), called *nibbana* in the early texts. He traces the causal chain from ignorance, to consciousness and so on—showing that if we cease ignorance, dispositions will also cease and so on all the way to the end. “From the ceasing of becoming, there is ceasing of birth; from the ceasing of birth, there is ceasing of old age and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair. And thus there is the ceasing of this entire mass of suffering.”

4. **The noble eight-fold path:** In the previous section on Buddhist ethics we sketched the path. Buddhism does not view the cessation of ignorance as merely a one-time event, but instead as a constant struggle. Since life moves in perpetual change, our discipline must confront the daily challenge of our own suffering. The resulting state is *nirvana*.

As we draw our exposition of Buddhism to a close, we should keep in mind some of the big themes. The Buddha stressed a radical empiricism, a pragmatic theory of logic, and a proto-positivist view of language. Regarding metaphysics, he taught to abandon the project altogether and focus on the intimacy and concrete quality of sense perception. Interdependent co-origination *(pratītiṃsānātpada)* describes his empirically based theory of causality. His goal is to end *dukkha*, and at the end of *dukkha* is *nirvana*.

With all this under our belts we are ready to criticize Buddhism.
Chapter Two
The Logic Problem

THE NEXT TWO CHAPTERS will present arguments against the Buddha’s philosophy. These arguments will attack Buddha’s notion of logic, and his understanding of causality. The final chapter will build on these arguments to present a Christian critique of Buddhist pragmatism, and lead Buddhism straight to its ideological center.

But for now we will consider logic.

The Need for Rationality

Logical arguments ask listeners to evaluate a claim by use of reason. The Buddha engaged in reasoned discussion. The third of the eight-fold noble path requires Buddhists not to lie. They are to think accurately and represent what they have experienced with logical integrity. The Buddha sought to be consistent, and he rationally engaged opponents. Many times he said,

What you said before does not agree with what you said afterwards, nor does what you say afterwards agree with what you said before. Yet you made this statement: ‘I will debate on the basis of truth, venerable sir, so let us have some conversation about this.’

Because of his openness to reason, he made our rational examination of his own thinking possible.

Setting up the Problem

The Buddha’s epistemology and theory of causality govern Buddhist philosophy. The Buddha rejects metaphysics. Instead he wants us to think in terms of nama-rupa (phenomena). We ought not to think of nama-rupa as a substance. Remember the Buddha rejected substantiality. Nonsubstantiality is

1 Majjhima-nikaya 1.378
one of the three marks of existence. *Nama-rupa* describes the result of contact with the senses. Because of the Buddha's epistemology, no supposition should be made about the nature of what we perceive as the contacting item. Causality describes relationships of phenomena.

Everything is in a state of flux and constant change. Remember the doctrine of the five spheres of existence. Interdependent co-origination (*pratitiasamupada*), the Buddha's view of causality, describes the relations within and between each sphere. *Pratitiasamupada* also describes the arising and operations of the five aggregates, which are different from the five spheres, since they specifically describe the human person. Within *pratitiasamupada* (interdependent co-origination) which the Buddha believed was empirically verifiable we can say that nothing remains the same, accept the empirical reality that nothing remains the same. (For now we can take this claim for granted even though it runs into considerable problems.)

When we ask for an accounting of validity within the parameters of *pratitiasamupada*, we are asking for an account of the reliability of validity. It seems to me that this question just never occurred to the Buddha. He was concerned about ending suffering. People at his time in history were not as concerned with the justification of formal logic. In the west, serious work on that project was not taken up until Aristotle. However some in both the East and West still had in mind the importance of justifying the objectivity of reasoning. In the Indian tradition we find that *Brahman* accounts for the objectivity of knowledge. In Christianity, God provides the basis for valid reasoning. As the Creator, his pattern of thinking is the standard for our thinking. Our thinking must submit to His standards, and our thinking maintains a qualitative difference, since we think in

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2 This claim will be criticized in chapter 3.
3 Upanisadic philosophy attempts to make knowledge objective by postulating the unity of the many in one. However this perspective if carried to its final conclusion makes rational argumentation useless, because the distinctions of language can never access this one fundamental reality. With rational arguments abandoned, the only available basis for objective knowledge becomes direct mystical experience. The Upanisadic thinkers reasoned consistently...which presents them with another problem.
temporal logical sequences to draw conclusions, but the Hebrew God would not need to reason in a temporal sequence the way we do.

Solomon writes personifying wisdom and the clarity of thought. Wisdom says of herself that:

The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his way, before His works of old. From everlasting I was established, from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth.... When He established the heavens I was there. (Proverbs 8: 22-24, 27)

Wisdom, one aspect of which is the ability to think with validity, was present before anything was created. It was present in God, according to Solomon. The Hebrews believed humans to be created in the image of God. Since God presents us with both truth claims and imperatives, clearly he expects us to recognize logically consistent statements. Within Solomon’s philosophy, we can understand why there are integrity bearing chains of thought in the human mind.

As has already been discussed in the previous chapter, the Buddha thought questions of the ontology of existence were not helpful to ending suffering. Indeed his own view offers no metaphysical clarifications. But without any ontology how does he account for the reliability of validity, without assuming it by faith? He cannot point to the five aggregates, the six elements, or the five spheres of existence to answer the question of why his mental acts retain valid connections over time, especially since the content of mental acts (experience) constantly changes. For the purpose of bringing cessation to grasping, the Buddha propounded a philosophy that made all reality turn to vapor in the hands of the one who grasps it. It seems that his doctrine of pratītiśamspatā worked only too well. It seems that the problem of constant change makes permanent validity structures impossible. And even if a valid relationship occurred in the mind, why would it appear again?

All moments arise from previous causes. Those causes arose from other causes. When we run this thinking out to the unfathomable, innumerable number of causal relationships that bring

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4 This is a more poetic description of what was covered in the section of the first chapter on the Three Marks of Existence.
about each successive moment, clearly no two events can have exactly the same cause. As
Kalupahana writes:

A theory of causation, maintaining that if the same cause is repeated the same effect will result, is said to have the shortcoming of emphasizing the sameness of causes and effects. It has no scope at all "since the same cause never occurs exactly."  

Since interdependent co-origination (pratītiṣasamupāda) cannot produce the same event twice, what is this validity that shows up in all valid arguments? The Buddha may not point to anything other than nama-rupa. If he tries to account for the permanent standards of validity with a metaphysical claim, a claim not supported solely by direct empirical investigation, then his epistemology is fighting itself.

One may argue in the Buddha’s favor that there are similarities in mental events. And that from these similarities one may draw structures that can be used to infer logically valid relationships. This argument will only work if we have the ability to isolate different instances of internal mental thought awareness into classes for reasoning. But such an activity may only transpire meaningfully if classes are things which may be evaluated in a valid manner. So this type of account presupposes that validity already exists and has meaning before the mind works to sort internal mental perception into classes for evaluation. The nature and ability of make valid inferences must first be accounted for before arguments about the similarities of mental events may be brought to the table.

But even if one could show that such a thing as validity was accounted for within the Buddha’s view of causality (pratītiṣasamupāda), one would still have to give an account for why validity does not change over time. If the Buddha makes a valid argument on Tuesday, why is that argument still valid on Saturday?

5 Causality, pp. 93-94.
6 The word exists here is not meant to suggest any special western essentialist baggage. In the context of this paragraph, I am discussing whether validity, whatever its precise ontological origin, can be abstracted from similarities in mental events. I argue in this paragraph that similarities require the accurate assigning of classes which presupposes that one is already reasoning cogently.
If one stipulates that composed arguments simply maintain validity over time, without any reason for that stipulation, then why not just stipulate that the Buddha’s right? Why all this talk of arguments and empiricism? When we use a stipulated criterion to prove something true, we just create a middleman to make our notions seem more palatable.

In a system that disdains appeals to authority, the Buddha must account for validity over time. Again there is nothing in early Buddhism to account for why the same argument should remain valid over any length of time. If life arises and ceases leaving a body, why not have validity arise and cease, leaving a lifeless lump of verbal guts?

As name and form (nama and rupa) change then so must everything except the truth that all things change. If validity is not one of the five aggregates, then it does not exist. If it is one of the five aggregates, then it too is subject to change. Therefore if we hold the doctrine of interdependent co-origination, we have no reason for thinking that the arguments that the Buddha presented almost three thousand years ago were valid then, or are still valid today.

**Some Objections**

We will now look at five possible objections to my argument that Buddhism cannot account for logical validity given the constant change of pratitiasamupada.

1. Quine’s notion of radical translation will be used to defend the cultural relativity of rational norms.

2. The analogy between physical laws and logical laws will be considered, as a possible response.

3. Solomon’s statements about wisdom will be challenged as the basis for developing an account of the nature of inference.
4. Natural selection will be considered as a possible source of explanation of valid relationships in the mind.

5. Finally we will consider the logical criticism of second century Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna.

**Objection 1 - W. V. O. Quine and “Two Dogmas of Empiricism.”**

Some may want to point the to the Harvard logician W. V. Quine’s attack on the Kantian division between analytic and synthetic sentences found in his essay “Two Dogma’s of Empiricism.” Quine concludes, based on what he calls “radical translation,” that a statement’s logical structure is determined by grammar. Kalupahana seems to agree with Quine. In his discussion of the sixth factor of the eight-fold noble path he writes, “While denying the mysterious ‘ghost in the machine,’ the Buddha reduced the universal and objective laws to linguistic conventions, thereby accommodating an element of skepticism.” Kalupahana in the next sentence points to “dependent arising” (pratitiasamupada) as the reason why we must see “objective laws” as conventional.

In languages, the lines for what functions as a predicate and what functions as a subject can get blurry. Quine believes that in many ways the difference between analytic and synthetic must be seen in terms of what is more or less easy to overthrow by experience. The easily overthrown is more synthetic, and the more difficult to overthrow we put in the category of analytic. But there is no real distiction.

Following Quine’s lead, the Buddhist apologist in Kalupahana’s position may argue that logical structure must be seen as grammar combined with an extension of empirical verification. If we grant that grammar is culturally relative and logic itself is a product of grammar, then the

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8 *Continuities and Discontinuities*, p. 107.
Authoritative structures of logic are conventional. They are dependent on cultural consensus.

According to the second noble truth, meaningful conception "must relate to an object, whether mental or material, that a community of intelligent beings can agree on. In this sense, the difference between conception and convention is reduced to a great extent." The Buddhist position then is ripe for Quine. Kalupahana told us that "universal law" type statements have no more status than the agreement of a community to use such statements. If grammar is culturally relative then the conception of logical validity is culturally relative. The Buddhist must also point to sense experience to validate validity itself. To summarize, the Quinean type counter argument suggests that logical structures are more conventional and represent generalizations that are merely difficult to overthrow by experience. This way the Buddhist may stick to ever-changing experience in the hopes that it will generate the regularity necessary to make logical validity a reliable norm for reasoning.

Response

As hopeful as the above Quinean counter might appear, it provides no help in answering Buddhism's problem of identifying and preserving logical validity. First, it reduces the laws of logic to conventionally held standards. However, logical laws are guides for intelligibly connecting truth bearing mental acts. Certainly a community of intellects maintains truth statements. It requires members to reason with integrity. It also provides checks and balances, but the importance of a logical community should not lead us to conclude that the rational standards of the language of the community have the same conventional quality as the grammar of the language used by the community. The Buddha's method of debating with his opponents seems to require this.

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9 Ibid., p. 104.
10 By rational structure I am not referring to any kind of particular mental essence. Earlier I mentioned how the mind cannot accurately establish classes without already anticipating the appropriate way these classes are to be interrelated. In this sense it is appropriate to see the formal relations of
Second, the conventional status that Buddhist philosophy places on logical norms does not seem to accord with their regular usefulness in the world. If they were merely conventional, like shaking hands instead of raising the palm of our right hand and saying “houw,” then we should not expect their application to fit so well with the ever-changing contingent realm of experience we daily navigate, let alone help generals plan battles and scientists build rocketships.

Third, an objection could never be sustained by an appeal to experience, since there is no normative experience to which one might appeal. Consider these two paragraphs from my current argument (I will now quote myself):

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No direct experience can refute these two paragraphs. Some one wishing to challenge them must challenge the reliability of their rational structure, coupled with the accuracy of previously presented information which these prose assume.

Empirical explanations of logic could not be reliable for the Buddha’s philosophical arguments against the Vedic and Upanisadic thinkers. The Buddha raises logical problems within their own metaphysical schemes. He accuses them of contradictions, not only botching empirical verifications.

rational structures as prescriptive for the associations of classes which are themselves mental acts (one should hope they are truth bearing).
Fourth, we have already noted that if the validity of logical relationships stems from conventions held between people then logic is culturally relative. Once this is accepted then the fact that the Buddha lived and taught in an ancient, foreign culture would suggest that his philosophy as well as that of the Vedas and Upanisads is irrelevant to the modern western culture.

Objection 2 – Laws of Thought Are Like Physical Laws
One may want to say that as certain norms arise out of “physical” experience, so will similar norms arise out of “mental” experience. This objection alleges that physical laws govern the external world such that we can live predictably, and logical laws govern the life of the mind such that we can reason and draw conclusions together. Nature definitely has something to say when I attempt to defy physical laws, and although it does not prevent me from saying “round square” or “man-onion,” it does nevertheless give strong hints that these things are impossible. Clearly then rational norms can emerge out of the experienced life of the mind.

Response
Though this objection seems strong, it depends on a metaphor equating physical laws of nature and norms of the mind. Metaphorical arguments are fine when the metaphor fits, but these two things should not be equated like this. Nature provides us with no evidence that the physical laws, mentioned above, even exist, only that the objects and properties of nature interact in regular patterns, many of which can be quantified. But to the contrary, mental events do not occur in regular patterns like the interactions of nature around us.

Another problem that arises is how logical norms “give strong hints” that a “round square” is impossible. The mind certainly does give strong hints when it “sees” a contradiction. But the
“strong hint” depends on mind’s ability to recognize contradictions. In contrast, physical laws do not cause the sensation\textsuperscript{12}, but are the product of inferences about experience. So rational norms that preserve validity are even needed before we discover physical “laws.” This objection seems to turn on itself.

**Objection 3 - Solomon’s Work Is No Basis for Formal Logic\textsuperscript{13}**

The objection may be raised that philosophy comes merely from the mind and experience, and not from an ancient text with any number of interpretations. Reference to Solomon or to any other biblical writer, then, could in no way illumine philosophy. Also, Solomon and other biblical writers do not present a formal system of logic, so in what sense can we apply Solomon’s insight on the source of wisdom to the subject at hand, namely how one accounts for the existence and reliability of rational norms. Is it not a stretch to get logic out of wisdom?

**Response**

To the first question about the conflict between philosophy and ancient texts: from a Christian perspective one should be able to read an ancient text and understand what it means if one does one’s historical, lexical, grammatical work. And certainly Buddhists must agree with this, after all Siddhartha has long been dead.

But more fundamentally, this part of the anti-Solomon objection forgets what philosophy is. Often people think that philosophical problems can be resolved if those involved would just do their homework better. But in philosophy, the method as well as the conclusion are open to scrutiny. Philosophy is not science, where a particular type of truth test is applied to every laboratory.

\textsuperscript{11} This objection was first brought to my attention by Nick Gier, professor of philosophy at the University of Idaho. Even some of the wording of the objection comes directly from him.

\textsuperscript{12} Maybe they do if you are a hyper-rationalist.
problem. Philosophy is about doing good homework, but also asking whether we are doing the right homework. My contention in this chapter is that early Buddhist philosophy, if held with integrity, makes doing any logical homework impossible, including the act of holding the “truths” of Buddhism with integrity.

Also, this provincial thinking forgets that many philosophers have held more revelational epistemologies. How can anyone read De Magister and not conclude that Augustine was a skilled philosopher. Or can anyone reject Ockham’s status as a philosopher simply because three of his five major arguments against Aristotelian universals assume the truth of a specifically Christian theology, especially argument five.14

The Christian philosopher, then, should not be chastised for looking to scripture for clarity on rational norms. Throughout this chapter I have used logical norms and rational norms interchangeably. This equivocation is no accident. And it is a concession to Buddhist philosophy. This chapter does not require the Buddhist to produce a defense of formal logic, predicate calculus and the like, as developed in modern times. We should expect the next generation to improve on the work of the previous. Both Buddhism and Christianity have their brilliant logicians. Buddhism has its Dignagas. Christian Philosophy has its Abelards and Ockhams. However, both the philosophies of Buddhism and Christianity must be able to account for why there are standards of reasoning that guide the formation and testing of arguments.

To keep this present work short I have not presented a lengthy constructive Christian theory of rationality.15 Nor should we expect one from the Buddha. But we should have some account of the regularity and effectiveness of rational norms? Why can we fashion reliable logical structures? Sure our own logical tools can always be improved. (Even Aristotle, arguably the most brilliant man

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13 This objection was also raised by Nick Gier.
14 See William of Ockham Summa Logicae, 1.15
who ever lived, missed the existential quantifier.) But the perspective of early Buddhist philosophy seems to provide us with no help in addressing this problem.

Here I do not present Solomon’s work as the foundation for rational norms. Instead I present the character of God. The God of the Christian Scriptures presents Himself as one who maintains His own integrity, and measures others by His own consistency. His character is the basis for prescriptive ethical norms and also logical norms. One cannot separate this from the Christian story.

Solomon’s Book of Proverbs is designed to train the mind is skillful thought. He writes, “To give to the simple shrewdness, to a novice knowledge and a clever mind.” He writes to train the mind’s ability to make inferences, but training the mind takes more that pouring over dry logic textbooks. Solomon’s goal is hokmab (wisdom). Hokmab is translated many different ways. In Exodus 36, Bezalel and Oholiab are wise (hokam) because they have a mind for craftsmanship. In Second Samuel 14 Joab sifts David’s character by the use of a wise or shrewd woman. The best universal rendering of hokmab may be “skill.” In Proverbs, it shows up as mental skill, the ability for reasoning judgements and making plans, though it is even more than this. Solomon was wise enough to know that human mental activity incorporates more than three line platitudes about the mortality of ancient Greeks. His understanding includes logical inference and deduction, as well as other types of reasoning. This wisdom was found with God before his act of creation, as mentioned above. A clear thinking God made a world that interacts best with a clear thinking mind. But where in pratitiasamnpada do we find the reliability of anything in one moment or over time such that rational norms may be maintained?

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15 For an introduction to contemporary work in this area see John Frame The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1987).
16 My translation.
Objection 4 - Logical Thinking as Evolutionary Product

As this author has raised the Buddhist logic problem to Buddhist philosophers\(^\text{17}\), he has often encountered the objection that we simply think this way because of natural selection. These Darwinian Buddhists believe they can wiggle out of the problem of justifying rational norms by assuming that humans have developed rational thought to help them survive. Their proposed solution can turn into a pragmatist account of validity, but we will save that discussion for the end of the chapter.

Response

Keith Lehrer criticizes epistemology by natural selection, and his comments apply directly to our discussion here on the evolutionary Buddhist account of validity.

Yet another way of saving observation statements, by appeal to the theory of natural selection, is equally faulty for similar reasons. To argue that beliefs about what we observe must be completely justified because they have survival value in the process of natural selection will leave one epistemologically bankrupt. First, the form of survival theory that currently appears most tenable is one recognizing that many factors bear little weight in the struggle for survival and consequently, may be retained even though they have almost no survival value. Hence, one cannot argue from the existence of beliefs to their survival value. Second, and more important, even if this inference is allowed, the epistemic leap to the conclusion that such beliefs are completely justified is totally unwarranted. Beliefs that are neither true nor completely justified may have considerable survival value. Perhaps the truth would destroy us.\(^\text{18}\)

We can apply Lehrer’s comments directly to the argument that the rational structures of the mind were adapted by natural selection. First, what we perceive as validity may simply have nothing to do with truth. For the Buddhist, this means that he has no reason to conclude that he can soundly infer the causes of his own suffering. From natural selection one cannot be sure that what we call validity developed as a necessary result of survival. This means that on such a platform as natural

\(^{17}\) I have brought up this in conversations with Nick Gier at the University of Idaho and Robert Zeuschner at Pasadena City College.
selection, one could never have confidence in arguments defending natural epistemic selection. This story of natural selection lacks the explanatory power to answer the Buddhist logic problem. Thankfully, Buddhists have come up with more formidable counter arguments than this one.

Objection 5 – Nagarjuna’s Dialectical Critique

The 2nd Century AD Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna presents a considerable threat to my criticism that Buddhism cannot account for rational norms. If he is correct, over scrupulous conception itself may lead to dukkha. Logic would be a useful fiction from which I am asking far too much.

In the few hundred years following the Buddha, sharp-minds engaged the problem of Causality. The notion of a continuum of staccato moments discussed in chapter 4 came from this Buddhist scholasticism called Abhidharma. Nagarjuna, the founder of the Madhyamika School of Mahayana Buddhism, found himself in this intellectual environment. Even with the many legends about him, we can be fairly sure that he authored the Mula-madhyama-karika (hereafter the Karika). In this treatise, Nagarjuna refutes other philosophical positions that claim a particular view on a philosophical matter, be it epistemology, causality, or any other issue in Buddhist philosophical debate. Nagarjuna’s philosophy had a powerful influence in the history of eastern philosophy. Hsueh-li Cheng argues in Empty Logic that the Zen rejection of concepts finds its source in Nagarjuna’s thought. Also Sankara, the eighth century philosopher, and the best known systematic presenter of Hindu philosophy in the West, actually borrows from Nagarjuna to solve several key problems within the relationship of Atman and Brahman. The borrowing is so strong that many of his contemporaries accused him of being a closet Buddhist.

Before analyzing Nagarjuna’s philosophy, we must look at the context of his thought. Nagarjuna is doing philosophy six-hundred years after the Buddha, in a tradition which has spent

much time trying to understand how the world can have patterns of consistency while still being *pratītiśamupada*, (interdependent co-arising). Everything that exists does so because previous process has made it to be. Different thinkers in the Buddhist tradition struggled with the idea of causality, the soul, and the uniqueness or nonuniqueness of perceived moments. Nagarjuna finds himself in a whirling mass of concepts. Attempting to return to the Buddha’s teaching, he (through logical critique) demolishes all claims about “fundamental natures” by demonstrating that all conceptual systems are ultimately self-contradictory. By letting go of concepts, one no longer experiences dukkha and finds nirvana (a ceasing of dukkha). Nagarjuna sees the forming of concepts as a way of trying to make things permanent. The Buddha taught that our desire for permanence is one of the causes of our suffering; the self wants to hold onto something steady. Ultimately one must learn that he is not a "self," but a process. Thus, Nagarjuna’s end goals are soteriological not epistemological. He claims his understanding is a method not a theory.

Though he is presented as not having any metaphysical claims, he does have a starting point. Nagarjuna’s method begins with the world and the observer (part of the process) who is trying to understand the world. There is no third point of reference. Douglas D. Daye, who holds a similar perspective as the later Kalupahana\(^{19}\), explains why the Buddhists begin here:

> "...consider that to be able to answer the question of either the uniqueness or non-uniqueness of momentary experience presupposes first that there be a position independent of both the world as it is and our knowing it, from which we might compare. This obviously seems impossible without further and equally weak appeals to assumptions which lead one to a circular argument."\(^{20}\)

Dependence on a third party would lead to a circular argument since the third party would be the foundation of proof. But to prove the foundational third party’s validity would require either another party outside of the foundation (hence the foundation is no longer the foundation), or the

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\(^{19}\) By saying Daye’s postion is the same as Kalupahana’s, I am only refering to the later Kalupahana’s rejection of Nagarjuna as a transcendentalist. Kalupahana maintains a minority position which is why I am illuminating this section with the work of other scholars.
third party is the justification just because it is the third party. In the second case we seem to have a
tautology on our hands.

The Buddhist epistemology is a radical empiricism, holding that the only available knowledge
comes from experience. Experience comes either in first person experience, or language (third
person experience) which is culturally agreed upon conventional symbols standing for experiences,
which have been generally categorized by the society. So members of a society can communicate
with each other through language because they share common experiences. People segregate
experience into categories useful for communication and for understanding the experiences they
perceive. Pratitasamappada (dependent co-arising) has no innate categories. We impose categories on
phenomena.

But the Buddha believes that causality is empirically demonstrable, so we must be able to
find causality in phenomena. One of the four noble truths is the causal origin of dukkha. Causality
must be a real quality of the world. A few hundred years after the Buddha, many of his followers
believed that they could explain causality. These scholastic Buddhists postulated the existence of
dharmas: localized moments of existence. We will talk about them later.

When Buddhist philosophers, contemporary with Nagarjuna, raised their solutions to
philosophical conundrums, Nagarjuna would shoot them down. Since they presented arguments,
they had to assume logical consistency. Nagarjuna would use their own commitment to reasoning to
demonstrate that their view lacked logical grounds. One example of this is his analysis of change.
When one argues for change they say that an object goes from what it is to something different.
Nagarjuna pointed out the age-old philosophical problem that if something becomes a different
thing then it becomes what it is not. If it becomes what it is not then how can it be the same item,
and therefore be an example of change? In the West, Parmenides, because of his love of

Prebish, Charles S., Buddhism: a Modern Perspective, p. 80
abstraction, accepted this as proof that change did not exist. Aristotle took a different approach in by introducing the concepts of potentiality and actuality. Nagarjuna thought the problem was not in the world or in the concept of change but merely in the assumption that the world should be like our concept. Today we call this type of mistaken reasoning reification.

In the Buddhist tradition we find an example of reification in the Abhidharmist theory accounting for the perceived moments we experience. Each of these perceived, located, moments they called a dharma (this is different use than teaching [dharma]). These dharmas arise into being and then cease. There is nothing behind dharmas. A dharma is what you perceive, that's all. But people can look around and see that the phenomena of experience has patterns. I am typing this thesis on a computer. This machine runs more computations that any mathematician ever will. If there is no pattern in the world then why does my computer act regularly? As you read my paper, why does your mind stay in the condition it does so that you can follow the flow of my arguments? To account for the connectedness of dharmas, the Abhidharma scholastics postulated the meta-dharma, which was like “dharma glue,” holding all these point instances of reality together. It gave the constancy needed to explain the seeming regularity of dharma action.

But when considered further, some Abhidharma scholastics realized that no amount of evidence could ever prove that meta-dharmas did not exist. They were just postulated to plug a hole in a system, like Ptolemy’s epicycles. Hence the concept was not falsifiable. It merely served to explain what we perceive. Once Buddhist philosophers realized this, they leveled the same criticism to dharmas as well. Dharmas were just extraneous concepts, which could never be proven by verification, they were just speculations. Many thinkers rejected dharmas because their only function was to make sense of language.
Reification also takes place, according to Nagarjuna\textsuperscript{21}, when we talk about the self. Each arising arises dependently based on everything else. What is it we will call “the self” since all is process? Where does the self-process begin and end? What part of us is unchanging so we can name it “self” and if there is no unchanging part then why do “we” still seek to be named? “We” should abandon this desire for permanence, which causes suffering, and realize that the stream of perceived moments we call a mind is just a process too.

As Nagarjuna attempts to stay faithful to the Buddha’s perspective, he does not seek to explain logic in relation to anything constant and permanent in the universe. Our alleged Buddhist logic problem is then labeled as the result of reification.

According to Buddhism, reification is something we do all the time. Nagarjuna points out that it happens when we make up words to talk about words.\textsuperscript{22} It is true that "walk" is a verb, but when we think that verbs exist in the same way that a walking man exists we commit reification. A language which talks about another language is called a metalanguage. When we then talk about how language relates to reality we have abstracted even further from the original concrete referent of words and are talking in a meta-metalanguage. That last sentence you just read is an example of meta-meta-metalanguage because it was a commentary on meta-metalanguage and so on ad infinitum. By analyzing concepts instead of the world, we are going beyond experience, which is the foundation of our concepts, and reading more into the world than is there.

These are just words about words about words. In the end, words are a raft to get you to the other side of the lake of this world. They are useful but no more. When you add to them a reality they don’t have, you create these problems. Meta-metalanguage on language. Once language loses its usefulness it can be cast aside like a raft you no longer need once you are on the other side.

\textsuperscript{21} Karika 18.
of the lake. There is no truth in concepts, only in experience, since words are symbols for experience. In the end, all statements which are true are both empirical and tautological. A teacup is a teacup. Love is love. Experience is just that, experience. As Daye writes:

"... all ontological descriptions are merely pragmatically useful but provisional fictions. They guarantee only that what is known is simply (and tautologically) consistent with what is known. That is, no conclusions about the transcendental or ultimate nature... are authorized by statements verified by public or private observation."

What is left is *sunya*ta (emptiness). Our categories lack internal meaning because phenomena do not come divided up into categories. Phenomena come to us devoid of conceptual meaning. Instead the observer allows conceptual meaning to be filled by having the concept point to something in phenomena. This means that the "world" is emptiness devoid of meaning, substance, and permanence. And emptiness is not a word you can grab onto. It is only our category for a lack of categories. As Daye puts it, "Emptiness is a nonreferring word about referring words; it has nine letters!" Nagarjuna would accuse anyone who felt as though they needed absolute certainty of grasping in such a way that will bring about suffering.

Logic, as a metalanguage, may describe relations between our conceptions, but it does not describe anything in the universe itself. In Nagarjuna's philosophy, this type of thinking must be thought of as a "pragmatically useful but provisional fiction." The laws of logic are not empirically verifiable. Instead we use them to evaluate whether or not something has been, in fact, empirically verified. If the laws of logic did not work for our purposes, then we would throw them away.

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23 Prebish, *Buddhism*, p. 93
24 Ibid., p.92
25 Ibid., p.92
Nagarjuna’s perspective then makes logic a fiction that individuals perpetuate to live in the world and nothing more. My argument shows the work of an unenlightened mind that is still looking for permanence. My objection is not wrong, just empty.

Some Responses to Nagarjuna

Responding to Nagarjuna’s objection presents us with a difficult task, second only to understanding Nagarjuna’s philosophy. Over the course of his career even David Kalupahanana, one of the greatest authorities of Buddhist philosophy, has changed his own position on the ancienct Buddhist thinker.26

Nagarjuna would like us to think that his method holds no assumptions—that it simply applies to an opponent’s assumptions, and dismantles them pointing the opponent away from hope in concepts like normative logical validity, and toward liberation from suffering. But this is not the case.

Daye, representing Nagarjuna’s position to modern minds, gives us two alternatives for understanding the relationship of knowledge. He suggests that we may consider knowledge as either the interaction between the world and the individual who perceives the world, or as something justified by a third party beyond merely the individual and the perceived world. Daye rejects this second situation, accusing it of being tautological. As quoted earlier he writes:

... consider that to be able to answer the question of either the uniqueness or nonuniqueness of momentary experience presupposes first that there be a position independent of both the world as it is and our knowing it, from which we might compare. This obviously seems impossible without further and equally weak appeals to assumptions which lead one to a circular argument. (emphasis mine)27

26 Kalupahanana’s early view of Nagarjuna as a transcendentalist is represented in Historical Analysis, pp. 129-141. The view of Nagarjuna represented by this chapter may be found in Continuities and Discontinuities pp. 160-169.

27 Prebish, Buddhism: a Modern Perspective, p. 80
The Theist claims that God is in "the position independent of both the world as it is and our knowing it." Following Daye's argument, the ability to know the way the world is apart from the Buddhist view of phenomena ends in circular reasoning. We may assume then that appeals to a Theistic worldview are tautologies since they are equally weak appeals to assumptions which lead one to a circular argument. Many opponents of the Christian faith have pointed out that assuming God in an epistemology that then proved God correct is arguing in a circle.

Daye gets out of that predicament by eliminating the help of any appeals to a third perspective. He then follows this notion through to its end, concluding that knowledge of what underlies experience is impossible. Meaningful statements directly refer to experience. Such statements are tautological. When we go beyond experience we reify.

... all ontological descriptions are merely pragmatically useful but provisional fictions. They guarantee only that what is known is simply (and tautologically) consistent with what is known. That is, no conclusions about the transcendental or ultimate nature... are authorized by statements verified by public or private observation; rather, what can be known (explicitly) is to be known. Language and its correct consistent use guarantees nothing except itself; it is empty. 28

Language has no special content apart from what can be verified by experience. But notice that knowledge in this interpretation also becomes tautological. A statement merely refers to experience. Knowledge is experience, or more clearly experience is experience. All Daye has done is exchange circles. In one case he rejects a third perspective to provide insight into metaphysical relationships. Then he embraces the "pragmatically useful but provisional fictions" of concepts, which due to radical empiricism "guarantee only that what is known is simply (and tautologically) consistent with what is known." But the tautological quality of concepts within the Nagarjuna's Buddhist epistemology extends straight out of his presupposed starting point. Nagarjuna may think metaphysical concepts (any concept not verified by sense experience: therefore the laws of logic fall

28 Ibid., p. 93
under this category) are useful provisional fiction that may be abandoned when they get in the way. But his conclusion seems the outgrowth of an assumption, which we may freely contest.

It is sufficient to show that both the third perspective and the assumption that the only two factors in knowledge are the knower and the object of knowledge (the world) both result in tautologies. So the choice to reject the third perspective seems arbitrary.

Now a second objection, Nagarjuna’s perspective seems to adopt a dishonest method. He views concepts as useful fictions. The standards of logical norms that might apply to the proper handling of concepts are at least a metalanguage, if not a meta-metalanguage. When we then ask how one justifies logic, we are then talking in a meta-meta-metalanguage. Therefore the very posing of our objection receives the nasty label of “reification.” In considering logic as a useful fiction, this nasty name calling tries to elude the problem of explaining the apparent permanence of logic over time as well as the apparent validity of rational structures at all places in the universe.

When interpreters of Nagarjuna press logic into the category of “useful fiction,” we must ask what use Nagarjuna might have found in it. “Usefulness” makes no sense without a goal. Useful things serve a purpose. As we have already said, Nagarjuna wanted to create a method to bring enlightenment to men who get stuck in philosophy. His analytical logical method is supposed to show that conceptual thinking involved the shuffling of “emptiness” (śūnyatā). Emptiness has no substance. Think of it like the conclusion to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus, “Whereof one cannot speak, therefore one must be silent.” Once we understand the Buddha’s radical empiricism it drives us to this. So Nagarjuna’s clever arguments attempt to make us let go of clever arguments. We cause ourselves suffering by holding onto concepts as though they are permanent entities in themselves. They are not. They change like the rest of phenomena. When we put strong confidence in logic, it will also disappoint us.
Nagarjuna offers 63 views with which he disagrees. The first 62 views suffer obliteration under his dialectical method. But the last view to suffer obliteration is his own view. He concludes the Karika with these two quatrains:

So, because all entities are empty,
Which views of permanence, etc., would occur,
And to whom, when, why, and about what
Would they occur at all?

I prostrate to Gotama
Who through compassion
Taught the true doctrine
Which leads to the relinquishing of all views.  

Nagarjuna advocates the rejection of all views, even his own. Some disagree with this interpretation. Jay Garfield, whose translation I am citing has argued that Nagarjuna clearly drew this conclusion. So it would seem from Nagarjuna’s perspective, that answering our question of how Buddhism justifies logic is futile. Buddhism does not justify anything; it ends suffering! Nagarjuna makes this clear in Karika 13.8.

The victorious ones have said
That emptiness is the relinquishing of all views.
For whomever emptiness is a view,
That one will accomplish nothing.

If one thinks through Nagarjuna’s method and makes the final step, then no way remains to return and consider any views at all. The notion of worldview then is completely antagonistic to Nagarjuna’s philosophy. His way claims to be a method with no content save that of direct experience. The method serves a soteriological goal, of bringing to nirvana the man who craves concepts.

31 Ibid.
But consider this. Nagarjuna wants to motivate those concept-craving fellows to abandon concepts. He does this by attempting to generate consistent arguments, for if the arguments were inconsistent then Nagarjuna would not advocate we embrace them (or would he). If we are to heed his valid arguments then we should heed them because they are good arguments, which requires that they be valid. But let us examine, in a terse form, Nagarjuna's main point.

By my logically consistent arguments you ought to relinquish all views
My view is also a view.
Therefore you should relinquish my view.

If one accepts his perspective and finally rejects his view then it has been accepted. This argument runs into a self-refuting problem, if its true, that makes it false, which makes it true, which makes it false, which makes it true.32

Now we are at the crux of the matter, Does Nagarjuna want us to accept his view because it's logical or not? If we accept it because it's logical then we end up abandoning logic as the means for evaluating the worthiness of a philosophical perspective. But if we accept it for nonlogical reasons, then what's the business of using arguments to persuade? The arguments give the appearance that Nagarjuna is doing honest philosophy. But Nagarjuna does not care about trying to justify the validity of logic. He wants you to stop asking those questions!

In the end, Nagarjuna's method does Buddhism little good in answering the objection raised against harmonizing logic with pratītiṣaṃsāpada. As we saw earlier his method assumes what it tries to prove. It presupposes the circle of radical empiricism's tautological knowledge instead of presupposing a third perspective which could possibly answer the Buddhist problem of logic. By presupposing an epistemology of radical empiricism, Nagarjuna leaves no option but a pragmatic criterion of truth, in which all apparently "objective" means of proof are arms extending from
human goals. Nagarjuna cannot account for logic. He can only reiterate his own arbitrary pragmatism.

**Pragmatic Account of Logic**

We have considered five objections to the argument that Buddhism cannot account for logical validity within the constant change of “interdependent co-origination” (*pratītiṃśamūpāda*).

1. The first objection, The Quine Objection, attacked logic as a structure emphasizing its connection to grammar, in such a way that logic was seen as culturally dependent. Yet logic was kept objective to some extent by attempting to connect it to sense experience. Though arising from the insight that we cannot make a sharp dividing line between analytic and synthetic statements, we still concluded this objection wanting. Before we can accept this argument, we must have a reason for considering it valid. It is an argument after all!

2. Then, I entertained the objection that laws of thought are like physical laws. There I discussed the problem with metaphorically likening logical norms to physical “laws.”

3. The Solomon Objection also assumed a false view of logical operations, failing to see the wide need for valid reasoning. Solomon describes the origin of mental skill. Ancient people still needed to think following rational norms, even if our grasp of their technical details deepen with time.

4. I then considered The Natural Selection Objection, which sought to account for validity as a structure in the mind that promoted survival. We concluded the objection wanting because it could not explain why validity helped us understand the

32 If the reader thinks that I should have said “confused” instead of “false,” I embrace that criticism. But such an objection only obtains if a bi-polar true false distinction is maintained in regard to the claim that I should have said “confused”
truth. Or put into Buddhist terms, it could not account for how validity gave us any tool for understanding the actual causes of suffering.

5. Finally, we considered Nagarjuna's analysis of concepts. He believed that concepts were useful fictions to help us navigate through the furniture of the world. Validity would fall into this category. Considering it an actual item that had some control or affect in the world would be reification. Likewise accounting for it as a method without explaining its connection to phenomena makes it something "with sound and fury signifying nothing." This is why Nagarjuna thought of concepts that were not directly connected to experience as "useful fictions." Nagarjuna then does not consider the meta-language of logic to have any foundation for constancy. He gives a pragmatic account of language.

Our counter argument for Nagarjuna's objection was two fold. Either his argument is valid in which case we should listen to it. Or invalid, in which case it should be rejected. If Nagarjuna has no confidence in logic then his arguments are surreptitious and deceptive. We concluded that his method was an enthymeme with a hidden premise. Application of that hidden premise to the argument then forced the rejection of that hidden premise, Nagarjuna's method then is an empty logic bomb designed to get the one who accepts it to stop asking questions. But Nagarjuna would simply pound the podium, reiterating his pragmatism.

This brings us to our closing remarks to our proposed logic objection, and here the Buddhists get the last word. Notice that in all of these counter objections, the subject of usefulness seems to appear either in the distance or, in Nagarjuna's case, up close and personal. Kalupahana points out time and again that the Buddha is a kind of proto-positivist. He separates all claims into statements about the world (facts) and statements about our own internal feelings (values). But the
Buddha is not a full-blown positivist because he rejects the absolute distinction between facts and values. Perception comes from sense contact. And every instance of contact has feeling involved with it.

As I have presented this logic problem to several Buddhists, they answer again and again that logical structures are useful fictions. We have goals and we think in ways to achieve those goals. If someone wants to build a rocket they need to think in such a way to facilitate building that rocket. They would say that if one does not think with what we call “validity” then he will be incompetent to achieve his goal.

The goal of the Buddha was the cessation of dukkha. The Vedic and Upanisadic thinkers did not provide answers that ended suffering. Their appeal to sources of knowledge other than empirical verification did not end suffering. So the Buddha’s method of reasoning was characterized by pragmatism, and as latter thinkers wrestled through his proto-positivism, they recognized that everything that was not fact or value was a tool.

To illustrate take the statement

All statements are either of empirically verified fact or value.

We recognize that this statement is self-defeating since it itself is not a statement of feeling (how the positivists define value), nor does it state something that is empirically verified. The above statement is instead a statement about statements. It defines classes. It is a meta-metalanguage, a useful positivist tool.

For the Buddha then, reasoning may be seen as useful for the goal of ending suffering. If the structure of our perceptions altered tomorrow so that we all had to adopt a completely different system of logic, the Buddha would advocate that we think in accordance with our own goal to gain the understanding necessary to end dukkha. Since the Buddha is goal oriented he does not need to account for absolute truth or absolute validity. We know that we are ending our own suffering when
we internally perceive the cessation of our own *dukkha*. If we reason a certain way and, following that, we see that our *dukkha* continues the Buddha would advocate that we stop, and think rightly. In other words, one ought to think in a way that will bring about one's desired goal. For this reason Kalupahana writes, "But since he did not believe that there is one absolutely true view, the Buddha could claim that his conception of truth is not confined to any particular time, i.e., that it is atemporal (*akalika*)."\(^{33}\)

Even though it would appear that Buddhism cannot answer the problem of logical validity, Buddhist philosophers like Kalupahana cast logical operations in terms of pragmatism. We should then think of pragmatism as Buddhism's epistemological Alamo. We will have to leave Buddhism's last stand for the last chapter.

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\(^{33}\) *Continuities and Discontinuities*, p. 91.
FROM THE TIME OF THE ANCIENT GREEKS, accounting for causality has presented philosophers with a problem, and the justification of causality is still not a closed case. So the Buddha’s claims of insight into the nature of causality merit our attention and criticism. We have covered causality by way of introduction in some detail in chapter 1.

The Buddha’s theory of causality (originally praticasammpadam, Sk. pratitasammpada) “interdependent co-origination” flows out of the Buddha’s epistemology of radical empiricism. I have already discussed how the Buddha believed that the Vedic and Upanisadic epistemologies did not provide insight into the causes of suffering. Also we have seen that the Buddha’s positivism requires that any statement be empirical fact, value, or useful fiction. So if causality actually accounts for all relations of phenomena (nāma-rūpa), it must be known empirically by the senses.

So we should expect that any causal theory presented by the Buddha must stand solely on the criterion of knowledge offered in his epistemology. He must justify causality empirically. He may not reject the theories of others and then suppose every claim must be positively verified by experience.

In this chapter, however, I will contend, first, that on the basis of Buddhist radical empiricism you cannot account for causality. I will argue that the justification for claims of a particular causal event requires an inductive judgment based on signs peculiar to the type of situation we are dealing with. Causal relationships are recognized through inference. When presented with two or more events, we recognize causality by first asking ourselves on some level, “Are these events connected?”
The informal fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (after this, therefore, because of this) refers to an inaccurate attempt to infer causality. But this canonical fallacy points out that for thousands of years people have looked at the world and realized that they can be wrong about what they perceive as a causal relationship. The codification of this inductive mistake into official canons of logic should at least slow us for a moment, to ask the Buddha to produce some credentials for what he considers a perceived causal moment.

Second, I will contend that a notion of causal uniformity must be presupposed in trying to show or explain a causal relationship in the first place. I believe the necessity of circularity in proving causality is not a problem. Instead the recursive character of causal proof merely means we must prove causality by the use of a transcendental argument, something that Buddhism cannot permit. It seems that causality must be proved from the impossibility of the contrary, and not by experience. Proving causality becomes a circular affair.

Now that we have the gist of the arguments, we will examine Kalupahana’s works to anticipate his objections to them. By elaborating the Buddha’s causal problem in this fashion, we will have the chance to respond to his criticisms with particular objections.

**Why Kalupahana Must Oppose My Objections**

For two reasons, Kalupahana must oppose my objections I mentioned above, namely (1) that Buddhist radical empiricism cannot account for causality and (2) that the notion of causal uniformity must first be presupposed in order to show or explain a causal relationship in the first place. First, the Buddha said that causality is not a mere mental concept. Some of the Upanisadic thinkers thought that causation was only a creation of the human mind. In the *Samyukta Agama* the Buddha is questioned as to who manufactured causal theory. Was it the Buddha or another? The Buddha replied,
It is neither made by me or by another. Whether the Tathagatas (Buddhas) were to arise in this world or not, this pattern of things is eternally existent. Concerning this [pattern of things] the Tathagata (the Buddha) has insight, is fully enlightened.

So the Buddha rejects causality as a mental construction. If causality were a real thing not perceived by the senses, then it would fall under the class of metaphysical claims. Time and time again the Buddha rejected metaphysical claims.

This brings us to our second reason why Buddhist Philosophy must address my two-fold criticism against the Buddha’s justification of causality. On the basis of experience, Buddhist philosophy tries to justify the principle of causality (paticcasamppada) inductively, arguing from specific examples to a general law. I will argue that to try and prove the direct perception of individual causal relations, the general regularity of causality must first be presupposed, even before starting such an effort. But if the Buddha’s empiricism must first presuppose causality to prove causality then either the Buddha is making a viciously circular argument, or he is making a claim that must be supported by a transcendental recursive argument. In either case, if the Buddha’s proof for causality is a viciously circular argument or a transcendentally recursive argument, then such circularity would seem to make both the Buddha’s epistemology and view of causality (pratitasa1llllpada) completely untenable.

Hume’s Staccato Moments

To oppose these anticipated objections, in Causality: the Central Philosophy of Buddhism, Kalupahana fights against the belief that humans perceive causality through mental inference. Going back to the theory of moments, he first deals with Stcherbatsky’s view that early Buddhism believed in a theory

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1 Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo 2.85 b-c (Tsa a-han ching 30.16) in Causality, p. 92.
of irreducible momentary point flashes of reality (dharma), pointing out that this development arose well after the Buddha.

He then deals with Hume's arguments against causality. He sees Hume's thought as maintaining that reality is comprised of irreducible moments in time, which passed in perpetual succession. He quotes Hume:

All this reasoning takes place with regard to time; along with an additional argument which it may be proper to take notice of. 'Tis a property inseparable from time, and which in a manner constitutes its essence, that each of its parts succeeds another, and that none of them, however contiguous, can ever be co-existent. For the same reason, that the year 1737 cannot concur with the present year 1738, every moment must be distinct from, and posterior or antecedent to another. 'Tis certain then, that time as it exists, must be compos'd of indivisible moments. For if in time we cou'd never arrive at an end of division, and if each moment, as it succeeds another, were not perfectly single and indivisible, there would be an infinite number of co-existent moments, or parts of time; which I believe will be allow'd to be an arrant contradiction.

So interaction between each successive moment becomes solely a personal hope. Kalupahana rejects Hume's staccato moments as a metaphysical claim since they cannot be falsified. Kalupahana believes that once fixed, irreducible, homogenous, staccato moments are rejected, then reality can no longer be sectioned into discrete units. Without this idea of discrete moments before our eyes, we can see the world as it is—see the causality perceived in phenomena itself.

Kalupahana contends that the notion of staccato moments arose from seeing causality in terms of constantly conjoined but isolated phenomena. When one sees the stream of our

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2 Causality, p. 67-88.
3 Ibid., p. 102, quoted from Hume, Treatise, p. 39.
4 Ibid., pp.102-104.
5 "If the objective world is explained in this manner, then it is possible to maintain that we have experience not only of individual objects but also of the causal connections between them." (Ibid., p.104)
6 "Speculation on the problem of time, which [Hume] considered a necessary condition for the analysis of experience, led him to the view that time consists of indivisible moments, never coexisting but succeeding one another. If experience is analyzed in terms of time, time itself being considered momentary and discreet, the experience of external objects also has to be explained in this manner. Hence, experience of external objects of the outer world came to be analyzed in terms of points, discrete and momentary. Once the experience of the outer world is analyzed in this
perceptions in terms of constantly conjoined phenomena (*post hoc ergo propter hoc*), concluding fixed units of phenomena is only a short step. To prevent the staccato conclusion, he argues that we include with constant conjunction the notion of productivity.\(^7\) Causes produce their product.

Kalupahana looks to the Buddha’s causal formula, which we have seen earlier. But he emphasizes the notion of production within the formula. “When this is present, that comes to be” is followed up with “From the arising of this, that arises.” We are supposed to find it more illuminating that causality involves productivity, and we are told to think of constant conjunction as merely relating two discrete perceptions. “Therefore, the causal connection itself becomes an object of experience.”\(^8\)

He thinks rejecting the staccato moment theory necessitates that causal connection is an object of experience.

Though epistemologically optimistic, Kalupahana makes a critical mistake, assuming that abandoning irreducible staccato moments only leaves directly perceived causality. I will show why this assumption is simply false. But furthermore, he must also show us what causality “looks” like. I have only been able to find one given example of a direct experience of causal conjunction in Kalupahana’s work. That example will be dealt with later.

For now please consider Kalupahana’s argument that the simple rejection of irreducible staccato moments leaves only the direct perception of causality. The first line of the Buddha’s causal formula reads, “When this is present, that comes to be.” So the causal relation ship is between *this* and *that*. *This* and *that* are not substantive (*anatman*) so they must be phenomena (*nama-rupa*). Buddhism claims that nothing is permanent (*anitya*), which means nothing exists forever. So *this* and

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\(^7\) Ibid., p. 102

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 96.
that refer to two or more items of phenomena. And we can still ask whether those two or more items of phenomena are causally related.

Suppose a brilliant old Buddhist man, confined to a rest home bed, one time held the staccato moment view, and during his time at the rest home he came up with a calibrating system based on his staccato view for measuring the length of certain events. The event he measured most often was the length of time it took for his nurse to answer after pushing the call button. Then he changed his view to the Buddha's original teaching. After realizing the metaphysical nature of his staccato view, he changes his calibration system now to measure the length of time it takes for his nurse to answer in relation to the flash of an instant it takes for him to push the call button. He calculates that the average ratio is 1 to 500. Even though he does not now hold the staccato view, it still makes sense to talk about the pushing of the call button and the arrival of the nurse as discrete events of a finite length, and apply this and that respectively. They may also be seen as discrete phenomena (nama-rupa) within all the Buddhist categories, and qualifications.

If these two elements of phenomena cannot be made discrete then we have only a this with no that. Without a second event, no causal theory is intelligible let alone possible. So it seems that we have warrant to request Kalupahan to give an explanation as to why denial of the staccato theory necessitates empirically perceived causal relations. He offers none.

His appeal to productivity does not help because causal relationships already suggest that the cause produced the effect. If we assume constant conjunction, the product is just the phenomena that followed the previously arisen phenomena. “Productivity” simply acts as a synonym for “causality.” “Productivity” feels as though new content has been added to the term causality, when it only emphasizes the that rather than the this (alluding back to the Buddha's causal formula). He has succeeded in making us look at one side of the causal chain, without adding any significant content to the constant conjunction theory.
Empirical Justification Through Normal Perception and ESP

So far we have examined Kalupahana's defense against the staccato moment view of causality. His defense seems weak in that we have yet to see solely empirical verification that all events are part of a causal continuum. Saying so does not make it so. But none the less, Kalupahana believes that the objective validity of a causal proposition is possible. On the basis of perceived causal moments he thinks that we can inductively derive a general causal law.

Next we will examine Kalupahana's justification for the entire theory of causality (pratītiṣasamppada). Bertrand Russell, who discussed the justification of causality earlier this century, argued that inductive judgments about particular causal relations cannot support an inductive general causal law. He concludes, "To sum up: the strict, certain, universal law of causation which philosophers advocate is an ideal, possibly true, but not known to be true in virtue of any available evidence."10

Russell believed that one act of assuming a causal relationship could not then be used to prove general causal regularity. To get around this circularity in proving "causal law," Kalupahana distinguishes between causation: the empirically verified causal relation—and causal uniformity: the causal law derived from inductive inference.11 So his answer to Russell is the difficult proposition that causality is directly perceived in experience. That way only the general theory is inductively derived.

Allegedly one can verify causal law through normal experience and ESP. Let us begin with normal experience. In Causality he gives his one concrete example, and we should examine it. His

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9 Ibid., p. 99.
11 Causality, p. 107.
one normal example is that of grabbing a live wire and receiving a vigorous shock.\textsuperscript{12} We must not underestimate the rhetorical power of this illustration: the vivid picture that comes to one’s mind of clasping ones hand around a bare wire and feeling the scrambling jolt of kilowatt power surging through one’s brain.

Though an effective illustration, when examined further it only reiterates that we judge moments of causality on the basis of constant conjunction. Imagine that this live wire is inside a power shed, out on a farm in the flatlands of Kansas. A tornado wiped out a rural county’s power, but long after the power returns to the county, one of the prairie farms still has no electricity. The farm calls Buddy, an electrician, because their power shed directly encountered the tornado’s path.

But Buddy has a significant hangover from the night before and forgot his gloves for this call. He does not like gloves anyway. They make it hard for him to pull up his pants as they have a tendency to slip down his bulging midsection. Not telling his customer for shame that he forgot his gloves, he enters the feeble twisted shack and sees loose wires everywhere. He begins feeling all the loose power cables to see which one has the juice. He finds himself climbing all throughout this tall power shed, but he finds nothing. By now the prairie sun cooks him in the shed and his tight ribbed tank top drips with sweat. He wipes his brow looking up. There next to a power box he sees a loose cable with promise. Getting a ladder he climbs up into the recesses of the shed. But to reach the wire he finds himself almost leaning against a power box. He grabs the wire. ZZZZZAAAP. He awakes at the bottom of the shed now confident what to do.

After two days of cable hunting and blue print reading he finds where this wire should connect. He connects them and voila!...nothing happens. It turns out that a short in the power box caused the shock. Sweaty Buddy had leaned against it while grabbing the loose cable.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 104.
In this counter example, Buddy has a justified belief that the big cable at the top of the shed was the loose wire he sought. He was wrong. But the phenomenon of grasping the loose wire and receiving the significant shock from the power box felt the same. (Someone may want to dispute this. If they want they can set up a laboratory situation and publish what nuances of shock quality they personally observed in each case.) It seems that even the wire illustration shows that the recognition of particular causal relations is still an inductive inference, a judgment.

Concrete examples also show something we see in common experience, and something that any employer will look for in the employees he hires, the precious need for the development of wisdom, in “seeing” causal relationships with a level of confidence.

Kalupahana’s second example addresses the relationship of cause and effect where the cause and effect are separated in time. He tells us that in such a case we may allegedly sense the connection by ESP. We have already dealt with ESP to some degree. But our tactic will be somewhat different here.

Kalupahana reiterates the Buddha’s empirical claim that he could perceive things beyond the five common senses, by the use of the mind, which they believed to be a sixth sense.

By means of the knowledge of the past existence and the knowledge of the decease and survival of beings, the Buddha was able to verify the problem of rebirth. In Buddhism, the propositions about the phenomenon of rebirth are inductive inferences based on the data of direct experience. With knowledge of the destruction of defiling impulses, and also through the foregoing four forms of knowledge, one is able to verify the four noble truths and the origin and cessation of defiling impulses. Thus having experienced particular instances of causation through sensory as well as extrasensory perception the Buddha arrived at a general theory of ‘causality’ or ‘causal uniformity,’ which he considered to be a universally valid principle[13]

Now for the sake of argument, let us take the Buddha at his word and assume that by ESP one can directly perceive causal relationships. How would such a perception occur? Keeping in mind our discussion of the six senses, lets return back to chapter 1, which discussed the Buddha’s
epistemology. In the section entitled “Sense Experience” we opened our analysis with an exegesis of
the Buddha’s theory of perception. We quoted this section:

Depend on the visual organ and the visual object, O monks, arises visual consciousness; the
meeting together of these three is contact; conditioned by contact arises feeling. What one feels, one
perceives; what one perceives, one reflects about; one is obsessed with. What one is
obsessed with due to that, concepts characterized by such obsessed with, due to that,
concepts characterized by such obsessed perceptions assail him in regard to visible
objects cognizable by the visual organ, belonging to the past, future, and the
present.14 (emphasis mine)

Kalupahana then reminds us that what connects our nonsubstantial mental faculties with the
nonsubstantial external world is dependence (praticasamppada, the original word for pratitasamppada,
“interdependent coorigination”).

The principle according to which sense experience begins to take place is
“dependence” (paticcasamppada). The conception of a “self” (atman) that function as
the agent is thereby eliminated.15

What allows us to perceive that alleged “causal relation” object out there is the fact that there is a
causal relationship between that relation and our senses. Then, when the two meet that causes
something else…contact! Contact causes perception. All of these causal relationships are necessary
parts of perceiving one causal relation “out there.” If these relationships are not the case, then the
alleged “causal relation” does no one a bit of good.

Causality (praticasamppada) accounts for all interrelation, including those that make
perception possible. So the Buddha’s view of causality must first be accurate for his epistemology to
work, but the epistemology is what justifies any claim, including that of causality. Here’s the rub.

Even if we have an objective causal object out there to “observe,” we must still use the Buddha’s
radical empiricist positivism, which requires a causal relationship between the empirical observer and
the object out there in the nonsubstantial world. So we find ourselves in a circular argument. If there

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14 Continuities and Discontinuities, p. 32, quoting Majjhima-nikaya 1.111-112
15 Ibid., p. 32.
is no causal relationship between the perceived object and our own perception of it then the causal law \( (pratittasammpada) \) can never be proven. So the Buddha seems to assume what he tries to prove, even though he tells us not to do that.

Some may think we are just taking an isolated text and building a case. In the Buddha's account of the twelve factors we see the same analysis of causality and perception.

\[
\text{...dependent consciousness arises the psycho-physical personality; dependent upon the psycho-physical personality arise the six senses; dependent upon the six senses arises contact; dependent upon contact arises feeling.}^{16} \text{ (emphasis mine)}
\]

Once again we see the psycho-physical personality causally relates to the six senses (which causally relate to the "causal relation" object [CRO]) that cause contact. Once again we see the internal/external universality of causality which must first be assumed before a CRO can begin to serve us. And once again causality must be assumed to be proved, something not allowable within the Buddha's epistemology.

There is a way to beat our accusation of circularity within the Buddha's epistemology and causal theory. All the Buddha would need to do is empirically verify each causal relation during the act of directly perceiving a causal relation.

ESP involves the sense of the mind (\( \text{mano} \)) causally relating to things not normally sensed through the other senses. To illustrate what would be involved in examining this process let us only examine the CRO between the senses and the Original CRO. We will call the CRO that evidences causality directly: CRO1. The relation between CRO1 and the mind we will call CRO2.

To have a noncircular account of causal relations we must empirically account for all causal relations within that act, so the mind must empirically verify the causal relationship between CRO2 and the mind. That causal relationship also must be verified, for if it is assumed then the causal law once again is the support for the empirical verification and not vice-versa. So the mind must also

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16 Ibid., p. 58, quoting \( \text{Samyutta-nikaya} \) 2.16-17.
verify the causal relationship between the mind and CRO2. If we verify that causal relationship empirically then that relation becomes CRO3.

For a noncircular account of the empirical causal relation between the sixth sense of the mind and CRO3, we must also verify the relationship between CRO3 and the mind. The causal relationship between the senses and CRO3 may be termed CRO4.

The reader can see where this is going. To defend a solely empirical account of causality we must be able to account for each element of the epistemological causal chain. Such a labor is not possible since each act of verification creates another causal relation which requires further verification. Plato's theory of forms ran into the same problem, and Plato apparently had the integrity to expose the "Third Man Argument" in the dialog *Parmenides*.

It seems to me that any particular causal relation cannot be proved empirically, without assuming causal law. The very act of empirically verifying it is fraught with causal relations. These "internal" causal relations cannot be verified as causal relationships without creating more causal relationships to verify. At some point then the empirically minded man must assume causal relationships even during the act to try to verify one. So *pratitasamupada* is a metaphysical claim.

In this section we have examined Kalupahana's justification of causal law. We have found it wanting because:

1. It sets up a false either/or distinction between irreducible staccato moments and fluid causal relations.
2. The proof of causality in the live wire illustration proved to be an inductive judgement.
3. His ESP example combined with radical empiricism lead to an infinite regress.
4. We concluded that it seems he must still assume causality before being able to prove a causal moment.
Transcendental Recursive Causal Proofs

The arguments presented so far suggest that to prove causality, one must assume a causal regularity. This makes causality something that must be proven transcendentally. Up to this point, “transcendent” has had the connotation of Vedic thought, something as far off and removed, something inaccessible to normal experience and language. But transcendental proofs are not like that. A *transcendental proof* seeks to validate something on the basis that is a necessary precondition to making all human experience intelligible. A *transcendental argument* then tries to establish a proposition on the basis that if such a statement were not the case, then phenomena could never be made intelligible. Transcendental arguments must have a recursive element to them.

The Hebrew prophet Isaiah uses a type of transcendental argument for the purpose of showing the futility of a system of thought that opposes the God of Scripture, and these points can be applied directly to the Buddha. In the middle of Isaiah’s great exposition of the attributes of God to the Gentile nations (chapters 40-48), he stops to critique the idol worshiper. He describes the idolater’s resourcefulness. Then with some sharp satire, criticizes the idol worshipers worldview.

(14) Surely he cuts cedars for himself, and takes a cypress or an oak, and he raises if for himself, among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow. (15) Then it becomes something for a man to burn, so he takes one of them and warms himself; he also makes a fire to bake bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it a graven image, and falls down before it. (16) Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats meat as he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He also warns himself and says, “Aha! I am warm, I have seen the fire.” (17) But the rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, “Deliver me for thou art my god.”

(18) They do not know, nor do they understand, for He has smeared over their eyes so that they cannot see and their hearts so they cannot comprehend. (19) And no one recalls, nor is there is there knowledge or understanding to say, “I have burned half of it the fire, and also have baked bread over it’s coals. I roast meat and eat it. Then I make the rest into an abomination, I fall down before a block of wood!” (20) He feeds on the ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside. And he cannot deliver himself, nor say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (NASB)
In verses 14-17, Isaiah points out the folly of hoping in a god that one manufactures. But notice that his critique shows the worldview of the idolater. He burned one half of the thing he’s hoping will save him. If he can craft tools to build it, how much more can another tear it down and him with it. Not only does the worldview of this idolater not comport, more importantly his method does not comport with his own worldview.

Isaiah goes on to links their idolatry to an inability to understand the internal contradiction of their method and system. God smears over their eyes and hearts (leb, the Hebrew word for ‘mind’) so they cannot even see the absurdity of their own method. In this passage, the cost of idolatry is not the pain of harsh fortune, but the loss of ones discernment and rational clarity. Verse 20 begins, “He feeds on ashes.” The Hebrew literally reads, “He herds ashes.” The phrase here looses much of its punch on modern ears. The herd gave you milk and food. Often animals were capital for bartering. The herd provided skins for many household items. So people gave great attention to their flocks. Solomon gives instruction that the wise man should watch his flocks. For if the herd suffers loss by negligent hands then the consequences will be felt by those of the family whose well being depends on the herd’s condition. When Isaiah says that the idolater herds ashes, he is making his words count. The idolater invests his energies into caring for something, and hoping in something that can never produce anything for him. But in the act of herding, he brings to bear his considerable cognitive and physical resources, and consumes them in serving the vision of his own created fiction. Isaiah tells us that his idolatry consumes him and gives him nothing, except futility.

The passage goes on to show that he can no longer deliver himself because he does not recognize the lie. The right hand in Hebrew literature refers to one’s power, skill, and strength. This passage harkens back to the first chapter of Proverbs, which claims that forsaking God has necessary epistemic consequences. The one who forsakes wisdom looses clarity to deliver himself in times of trouble.
Isaiah then produces a kind of informal negative transcendental argument. With a *reductio ad absurdum*, he points to the inconstancy—no that's too weak—the complete folly of the idolater's method. Instead of fearing the actual God who set up the world the idolater must cleverly cast a fiction in His place. The resulting item becomes the means for this person to evaluate all of his own life. But to make the world intelligible, account for the phenomena around him he must think in terms of the One who is the necessary precondition for intelligible experience. When the idolater does not, he will pay with the integrity of his mind. Isaiah addresses this *reductio* not only to Jewish idol worship, but also to those who had never even heard of Moses.

Isaiah makes two helpful points that we may now apply directly to the Buddha. First the Buddha's method seems absurd. He offers an epistemology to prove *pratitasamrupada* but the causal law of *pratitasamrupada* must first be assumed before his epistemology can work. He then demands that nothing can be proven recursively in a transcendental method. The Buddha then tells us not to have faith, but his circle of epistemology and causality still require their adherent to “believe in order to understand.” Absurdly then, it is also the case that if one accepts the Buddha's epistemology, then he must *never* accept the Buddha's epistemology. But the Buddha, himself a brilliant rhetorician, presents his view in stages so that one might accept either his epistemology or theory of causality without realizing that he has also accepted the other.

Second, by choosing to blind his mind by this system he makes it impossible to see his way out. One could prove causality by arguing from the impossibility of the contrary. After all, even a conclusion that causal regularity is not the case would still follow as the final step in a series of mental acts. But when such proofs are allowed, then we must also be able to transcendentally justify the adoption of that method of proof. In no time we will find ourselves in need of an entire cohesive worldview that accounts for epistemology, metaphysics, value theory, and the mundane issues of life.
Buried within the Buddha's system is the deep, desperate need for a transcendental proof. But he chose to bar himself from even attempting one. His pragmatic decision to make the end of suffering his all-consuming goal conditioned him to reject any type of transcendental proofs when he denied the validity of any thing but sense experience. As Isaiah wrote, he can not say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"
WE HAVE COME ALONG WAY since the claim was made, in the introduction, that you would be reading a specifically presuppositional and Christian critique of Buddhism. Only late in the last chapter did we spend time in any biblical texts. We have offered arguments, yet it may seem as though we have presented nothing distinctively Christian.

Moses writes “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Ex. 20.16). In a Christian critique of a neighboring philosophy, we have the responsibility to represent that philosophy accurately and offer good arguments. I attempted in the first chapter to give early Buddhist philosophy a sympathetic presentation. In the last two chapters I have offered arguments that attack serious problems within that religious perspective. But my goal in those chapters was not to refute so much as to clarify Buddhism.

The Buddha provided an account of logic, epistemology, and causality that seem to have considerable problems. The Buddhist view of causality (pratītiṣaṃsāpada) leaves no way to account for the value of validity structures and their permanence over time. The previous chapter argued that causality could not be proven without first assuming causality, and since it could not be proven from direct experience it too would seem to also fit into the category of metaphysical claim. Finally we concluded that the Buddha’s epistemology assumes the doctrine of causality (pratītiṣaṃsāpada); at the same time to know pratītiṣaṃsāpada one must apply the a-fore mentioned epistemology. So the Buddha’s epistemology must reject itself.

Christian critique means that this criticism presupposes the truth of the Christian worldview. Buddhism cannot be refuted by simply pointing out alleged contradictions, since it has its own criteria for evaluating what consistency and truth are. These standards and approaches to truth
depend upon a personal choice to end suffering. Christianity makes direct claims about the morality of this goal.

A presuppositional and Christian critique does not simply stop at saying that a pagan philosophy is suppressing the truth. Paul makes clear in Romans 1 that those who choose to worship someone other that God suppress the truth (vs. 18) and that they are without and apologetic, a defense (vs. 20). A presuppositional and Christian critique is not accomplished by simply declaring that someone is suppressing the truth. Such a criticism must also show where the unbelieving perspective has suppressed the truth. The last two chapters demonstrated where. This final chapter will build on that exploration by confronting Buddhist philosophy at its core, the seemingly arbitrary choice to make the end of suffering a final, system-defining goal.

Christianity and Buddhism Meet: Dukkha In Particular

The subject of *dukkha* receives a detailed exploratory surgery in *Ecclesiastes*, Solomon’s great treatise on the meaning of existence. *Dukkha* roughly equals the concept of “vanity” (*habal habalim*, lit. ‘breath’ or ‘vapor’) which may be rendered “utter meaninglessness,” “utter futility,” “utter frustration.”, and “all is vapor.” The Greek term “futility (*numaioi*)” is used to translate this passage in the Septuagint, and Paul uses this term in Romans 8.20 to describe the current condition of creation. Solomon uses this term to describe the human condition and gives us clear concrete examples in a poetic introduction.

“Vanity of vanities” says the preacher, “Vanity of Vanities! All is vanity.” What advantage does man have in all his work, which he does under the sun? A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. Also, the sun rises and

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1 The authorship of *Ecclesiastes* has been debated by critical scholars over the last two centuries. Without diving into the debate, there is no conclusive reason to think that King Solomon, the son of David, did not author *Ecclesiastes*. For a current discussion and summary of the various arguments in a defense of Solomonic authorship see Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction. Moody Press, Chicago, 1994, pp. 528-536.
the sun sets; and hastening to its place rises there again. Blowing toward the south, then turning toward the north, the wind continues swirling along and on its circular course the wind returns. All the rivers flow into the sea, and yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again. All things are wearisome; man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, “See this, it is new”? Already it has existed for ages which were before us. There is no remembrance of earlier things; and also of the later things which will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later still. (Ecc. 1.2-11, NASB)

The universe continues the same as it always has, a regular process of constant change in which man can make no permanent contribution. Whatever he does will be wiped away by the permanently impermanent world. Not only does the universe have this quality, but also man cannot see everything that can be seen. “The eye is not satisfied with seeing.” Man will always encounter more to know, and once one generation accomplishes a thing, the next generation forgets.

Solomon’s empirical starting point bears remarkable similarity to the Buddha’s theory of causality—pratitiasamppada. Solomon, like the Buddha, had all the riches a man could want. He sought to experiment and find if pleasure could be satisfactory. “I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.’ And behold it was futility.” (Ecc. 2.1) Pleasure is also vanity. Solomon conducted the same experiment with wisdom, folly, accomplishments and riches. Because of the nature of impermanence due to the regular causal flux and change in the universe, none of these patterns of life in themselves led to satisfaction.

But this lack of satisfaction has not fallen upon us randomly. The fact of change yields the alternating epochs of life. But God appoints these times. “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—A time to be born and a time to die…” (Ecc. 3.1-2a) Someone appoints these times. We do not choose the time we are born. Most of us do not choose the time of our death. But God has made our toil without profit. Yet Solomon writes, “He has made everything appropriate to its time.” The word “appropriate” may literally be rendered
“beautiful.” The alternating states of life are beautiful in God's sovereign foreordination. Yet the curse of Gen. 3.17-19 makes the ordered harmony of life fruitless and painful for us. We cannot fix this futility. “Consider the work of God, for who is able to straighten what He has bent?” (Ecc 7.13).

In the midst of this vanity, Solomon advocates pursuit of pleasure in the fear of God. As the curse of sin removes the pleasure from our work, it is the gift of God that a man enjoys his work, even though the work itself is chasing after the wind. Solomon writes:

As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, he has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart. (Ecc. 5.19-20)

All men face the same fate, whether rich or poor, wise or foolish—we all will die. And our works will be swallowed up in the constant causal process, which alters everything we would grasp as satisfactory. In light of this Solomon advises the God fearing man:

Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life. (Ecc. 9.7-9)

Part of the cyclical futility of this world is human evil. People always perpetuate oppression and injustice. Solomon knows that God will judge sin, but wicked men often do well in this life, at least for a time. Complete equity does not come to its full fruition in this life. Any honest man who looks to his own life must be thankful for God's patience, but this does not ease the dissatisfactory quality of all events under the sun. Man examines the work of God and cannot sort it all out.

When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night), and I saw every work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover. (Ecc. 8.16-17)

No one will ever be able to understand all the work of God, His motives, or His goals in full detail. Nor do we need such an explanation. As mentioned above, we have no right to demand that God
should reveal to us all that he plans. Such demands have no logical basis. They only have a psychological foundation in desires that must also finally submit to God's plan.

God will judge sin. Solomon writes that at death "Man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street." (Ecc. 12.5b). At death "the spirit will return to the God who gave it." (Ecc. 12.7b) With this in mind, Solomon advocates that we "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth." (Ecc. 12.1). From the start of life we ought to seek the Lord, enjoying all of life. "Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things." (Ecc. 11.9).

Solomon concludes the inquiry into "vanity":

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. (Ecc. 12.13-14)

God will judge everyone exhaustively. We may not be able to unpack God's plan, but we are accountable for our sin. God will set all accounts right. Solomon understood the futility of trying to unbend what God had made crooked. He thought there was no way to fix the unsatisfactory quality of the world except to see every event in relation to God who intimately governs the particular events of the world. But God has bent all this for a reason.

The Buddha thought one could end the causes of the dissatisfactory quality of existence. He built an epistemology and causal theory for the purpose of ending dukkha. But God cursed the created order to produce dukkha. God has a purpose for all our suffering. It is one thing to try to lessen suffering. Lessening suffering is part of loving one another, but it is by no means an absolute. Sometimes loving someone means increasing their suffering. Love in a Christian worldview is the act of obeying God's law, Christ's law. We may choose our own goals in the light of God's will, not in spite of it. When we substitute the goal of ending dukkha for the great commandment, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength," it is then that we create an idol. God does not permit us to make the end of suffering into an idol. He has promised that dukkha will be ended.
in this plan, at his time. But for now we must endure the “vanity” and “futility” of life. Here
Buddhism and Christianity bisect and each heads their different ways. Solomon and the Buddha
both recognize the fact of dukkha, but both thinkers have mutually exclusive worldviews that cast a
different plan and purpose for its existence and elimination.

A Christian Critique of Buddhist Pragmatism

The Buddha did not teach in terms of absolute truth but conditional truth. His truth was relative to
the situation. “Truth” is verified when shown to be useful. The Buddha recommended people try his
teaching. If it did not work for them, they should not continue its use.

Pragmatism tells us that truth is what works. But we must ask, “Works for what?”
Kalupahana expounds that the Buddha held neither a correspondence theory, nor a coherence
theory of truth. Instead he embraced a pragmatic criterion of truth.2 In chapter 2, we concluded this
was the one option available for explaining the nature of logical norms. Based on Nagarjuna’s
method of rejecting all metalanguage analysis, the Buddhist may choose not to think about these
problems because such considerations get us away from experience, and therefore away from the
knowledge that will end suffering. Also one may choose not to consider the serious problems with
the Buddhist theory of Causality (chapter 3), thinking they also result from to much philosophical
speculations about reality that do not lead to the ending of suffering. It seems to me, then, that the
pragmatic backbone of the Buddha’s teaching must be addressed. When I consider my own
conversations with Buddhists, things always seem to hinge on the pragmatic value of the Buddha’s
teaching (dharma) to end suffering.

The problem with the Buddha’s pragmatic criterion of truth is the inability to answer the
question of why one goal is chosen over another. No item can have utility without a purpose. A
Swiss army knife has may have great utility. But if we melt it down into a little puddle of molten ooze, the utility goes away. Utility is goal determined. So to talk in terms of pragmatism, one must have a goal to achieve. We must ask, “Why make ending dukkha our highest goal?”

Pragmatism brings with it a great ambiguity. As early as 1908, Arthur O. Lovejoy had isolated thirteen different pragmatisms, involving theories of meaning, the nature of truth, differing justifications of knowledge, and ontology. Clearly, then, people can have different goals even in their theories of pragmatism, deriving contradictory systems based on different goals. The Buddha clarifies this problem since he has the goal of ending dukkha. But the Buddha provides no criterion for evaluating whether we should have this goal. Nor can he really. If we want to end dukkha then we may adopt his method. If we do not want to end dukkha, we do not need to consider the Buddha’s method.

But the Buddha generated a theory of knowledge that constrains knowledge claims. When we pressed the Buddhist account of logic, it claimed logic as a useful fiction. Since usefulness must be seen in terms of goals, this argument really amounts to, “I think like this to achieve a desired end.” We reason to draw conclusions. The Buddha, then, reasoned pragmatically in order to draw useful conclusions.

As we have already covered, Buddhism’s criterion of truth is utility. One cannot escape the conclusion this leads us to. The desire to end suffering becomes the basis for the Buddhist method. But the Buddhist method cannot justify that people ought to choose that method over another. For some people, the goals of Buddhism may not fit. So for some people the Buddhist epistemology and causal theory may not be needed. So if each and every person did not need Buddhism then Buddhism would not have any utility and therefore it would be confused (musa), or in more Western terms—false. If the

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2 “The Buddha is thus left with only a pragmatic criterion of truth, and this is what we come across in the Discourse to Prince Abhaya (Abhayaraja-kumara-sutta).” Continuities and Discontinuities, pp.50-51.
world is set up in such a way that Buddhism cannot really end *dukkha*, then Buddhism is false for every one on its own terms.

Now the Buddha very clearly said in the *Samyukta Agama* that causal law is neither made by me or by another. Whether the Tathagatas (Buddhas) were to arise in this world or not, this pattern of things is eternally existent. Concerning this [pattern of things] the Tathagata (the Buddha) has insight, is fully enlightened.4

Buddhism claims that phenomena actually operate in the way the Buddha described.

Buddhism also claims insight into the way that knowledge works. But if Kalupahana is right, then that epistemology that the Buddha used to justify his claim in the *Samyukta Agama* seems to rest on his goal, the ending of suffering.

In the previous section we discussed suffering, and *dukkha* in particular, from a theistic worldview. God has a purpose for them. He has not revealed all of his plans, but He has said that he will end *dukkha* in his own time and for his own glory. For now it serves His purpose. The world ought to contain it for now, both temporally—because of our sin5, and ultimately—for His glory.

When the Buddhist selects liberation from *dukkha* as his all-consuming goal he creates an idol. The nation of Israel was surrounded by pagan nations which made idols that replicated good things that God made. The Pythagoreans made conceptual idols and worshiped abstract mental objects, numbers. The Greeks idolized the human mind. In Christian terms the Buddha merely chose a different item for fixation. That item was the *nirvana*, the “snuffing out,” liberation.

Interestingly, the inability to answer where the *arahant* goes after death is created by the Buddha’s epistemology, which followed from pursuing liberation as a worldview-defining goal.

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4 *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo* 2.85 b-c (*Tsa a-han ching* 30.16) in *Causality*, p. 92.

5 By sin here, I am not referring to the opportunity to sin, namely personal freedom. Free will does not excuse eliminate God from the responsibility of willing *dukkha*. In this sentence, I am merely claiming that *dukkha* has been put in place as a consequence from mankind’s sin. But in the final reckoning, God has bent the world with *dukkha* for his own glory.
The Buddha’s method works in the will that wishes to end its suffering. The method requires a certain epistemological outlook to exclude every thing except the empirical causal data. On that basis one can see the causes of dukkha. But the Bible identifies a broader context for comprehending the causes of dukkha. God requires us to obey with a perspective that sees even dukkha in relation to Him. The Buddha’s method can never provide this. The pragmatism of the Buddha’s all consuming method isolates dukkha from the One who will one day end suffering for His people. Therefore the Buddha’s method can neither explain the nature of dukkha’s causes, nor the effectual end of them. For the Christian and the Buddhist, therefore, God has recognized and explained why the Buddha’s method is not useful.

Pragmatism, the philosophy that “truth” is only a synonym for usefulness, flies in the teeth of Christianity. Jesus claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life (John 14.6). God reveals that his word is truth (John 17.17). Christ requires that all thoughts be taken captive to him and not to a surreptitious philosophy (Cor. 10.4-5). But pragmatism defines truth outside of God being and will.

In A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities, Kalupahana regularly points out points of analogy between William James and the Buddha. James, one of the fathers of modern psychology, attempts to defend pragmatism’s value for supporting religious claims.

[Pragmatism] widens the field of search for God...She will count mystical experiences if they have practical consequences. She will take a God who lives in the very dirt of private fact—if that should seem a likely place to find him. Her only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience’s demands, nothing being omitted. If theological ideas should prove to do it, how could pragmatism possibly deny God’s existence? She could see no meaning treating as “not true” a notion that

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6 Some may wish me to argue for this conclusion, showing that Buddhism cannot account for dukkha on their own terms. The Buddhist can establish the existence of dukkha within the system of Buddhist thought. Here I am merely stating, “On the contrary God has said...” But I am doing this strategically. The Buddhist wants to reply but, according the previous chapters he cannot. This presses him back to pragmatism. The Buddhist may wish to say, “What you offer is not useful.” But on what basis would a Buddhist make such a claim, apart from merely appealing to his choice to end suffering. This is what leads to my next sentence.
was pragmatically so successful. What other kind of truth could there be, for her, than all this agreement with concrete reality?  

James argues that pragmatism cannot “possibly deny God’s existence.” Nor can it affirm the God of the Bible who claims the right to create truth—the kind of truth that our vacillating goals can never touch, the kind of truth that constrains our being, truth dangerous enough to damn you. James’ emasculated truth holds no concourse with the Christian gospel. Christianity assumes no common ground with pragmatism. Though the ancient faith may be useful, it is useful because of its truth and not vice-versa. The pragmatism of Buddhism focuses on its own utility to end suffering, and it stands on the choice to make the end of dukkha the highest goal. That very method stands in opposition to the gospel. It is disobedient.

St. Paul preached to the philosophers in Athens, telling them to repent (Acts 17.16-34). Often Christian apologists misread this account, suggesting that Paul grants some sort of common ground with Greek culture by quoting the poets Epimenides and Aratus. But clearly from the text, Paul sees his own role as declarative. He does not come to the Athenians saying, “We Christians and

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8 Though I have argued that 20th Century pragmatism is disobedient, I am not saying that truth has no component of usefulness. Certainly concepts which bear truth should also be helpful to us as tools.

There are also those who may want to argue that pragmatism is correct as an ultimate test for truth because truth can be defined as the most useful thing. Such a definition of truth cannot be challenge. Truth in fact is that which is the most useful. But people who stop here show their own foolishness since usefulness must be seen in terms of a goal, and if the goal of a man is contrary to the Christian gospel, his “truth” will never agree with God. Christian pragmatism may only work if we talk in terms of God’s goal.

But such talk creates the epistemological problem of verifying our knowledge of God’s goal. This means that a “Christian pragmatism” would be revelation dependent. Though we may happily embrace Christianity as the most useful perspective, we must also account for how we know that it is useful. Truth claims cannot be separated from the method by which we know that they are true. God tells us which goals are the best, and we can also experience which goal is the more satisfying. But God also created us in such a way that some choices, those that agree with his nature, have to bring greater satisfaction. This means that God can make appeals to his law as the most useful course of action without separating such an appeal from the His own certainty that his law is the most satisfactory.
you Athenians both agree on your poets therefore you ought to believe what I'm saying about Jesus Christ." Instead he uses the poets of a culture ignorant of the Bible to show members of that culture their accountability to this God, that he proclaimed. Having presented the Christian God, Paul admonishes them:

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17.30-31)

Though Paul never went to India, consider for a moment, what if Paul had gone east on a missionary journey and spoke to a group of Buddhists. And what if he had known the culture as well as he had known that of the Greeks. He would declare the God of the Hebrew scriptures to them, in the same way he did to the Greeks, practically paraphrasing the Hebrew prophets and psalmists. But instead of engaging the Greek tendency to idol worship, what if he stepped inside Buddhism, showing that the Buddhist view of logic, knowledge, and causality first presupposed concepts and methods that were only possible based on the God who revealed Himself in the Hebrew scripture?

God's character is the foundation for rational consistency. He created individuals to function as a community of learning minds that are called to love each other in maintaining truthful integrity. He governs the world in regular causal relationships so that humans can exercise dominion over creation. But the fact that Buddhism still uses logic, assumes the existence of other minds, and the regularity of causal relations in a philosophical method which could never account for these concepts demonstrates the truth of Romans chapter 1. Incidentally, Paul writes this about people who have never heard of Moses.

[T]hat which is known about God is evident within them for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world, His eternal power and divine attributes have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God they did not honor Him as God

If humans try to establish a pragmatic criterion of truth, they run into all the problems we have discussed so far.
or give thanks but they became futile in their speculations and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image made in the form of corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.... For they worshiped the creature rather than the creator who is blessed forever, amen. (Rom 1.18-23)

If the Buddhists emphasized the goal to end suffering, Paul would likely ask the grand question. Why should ending dukkha be our ultimate system-basing goal? They may even clarify that Buddhism is not a system but a method, so Paul would reclarify. “Why should ending dukkha be the ultimate goal of your life consuming method?”

Paul clearly taught that we may not have idols before God, even nonphysical idols like sinful desires (Col. 3.5). As surely as Buddhism denies the possibility of making reliable metaphysical claims, so God commands that nothing be put before Him. When the Buddha created a system having an epistemology that necessarily prohibits any knowledge of God, he disobeyed God. God requires the Buddhist to repent. This repentance involves renouncing the life-consuming goal of ending dukkha. Before acting like a rebel by trying to straighten what He has bent, one must line his own will according to the One who established dukkha for His own purposes.

Paul might argue that the Buddhists claim is circular. If they appeal to their logic, epistemology and causality, we have seen that those already run into serious problems. But because of the pragmatic criterion of truth presented by the Buddha, appealing to any of these concepts means presenting a chain of reasoning which must finally be judged by its usefulness to end suffering. But if this criterion of utility governs all arguments put to the service of Buddhism, then every proof for Buddhism assumes the truth of Buddhism. Therefore every proof for Buddhism must be question-begging. If the Buddhist defend his pragmatism, he must either use his own utility criterion to justify the utility criterion (an obvious circle) or he must choose another standard, which means abandoning Buddhism. So Buddhist pragmatism either is chosen arbitrarily or it must first be assumed false.
In the end Buddhism's truth claims are based on a choice, to make the end of suffering the ultimate goal. Therefore, Buddhism's conflict with Christianity is not logical but ethical. Buddhism would seem to have no philosophical leg upon which to take a stand. The acceptance of Buddhist doctrine leads to a place where one cannot say, "I have a lie in my right hand." The decision to obey God becomes an integrity bearing choice, which opens one to the storehouse of tools necessary to conduct inter-religious system debate. To reason with integrity, one must obey. Paul would tell the Buddhist that God has said he may not make the search for "liberation" his truth defining choice. The Buddhist has two options. He may try to rationally fight Paul, but where would he find tools for such a conflict? Or he may arbitrarily choose, without any rational process at all, to accept the Buddha’s method over the Christian gospel.

To summarize: If a Buddhist makes any arguments that reach beyond Buddhist pragmatism (like the Buddha's claim in the Samyukta Agama, that causal law describes all the relations in phenomena independent of the observer) then he is ideologically standing on Christianity's shoulders. As we have seen in the two previous chapters, the Buddha's philosophy cannot account for itself.

The Buddhist may want to arbitrarily accept the Buddha's method and the necessary outlook and epistemology that it leads to. In this case he may not claim that he accepted Buddhism because it was verified, since the standards of verification necessarily first require one to accept the goals of Buddhism. And any counter arguments with an alternate position require some type of standard beyond the personal choice to accept Buddhism.

On the other hand, the Buddhist may want to turn to another worldview, showing that Christianity is not the only worldview that accounts for a functional logic, epistemology, and causal
theory. Paul would certainly contend with such an attempt. Addressing this argument involves stepping into other worldviews the same way we have for Buddhism. Such efforts would be entitled *Hinduism Reconsidered or Islam Reconsidered*. But even so, once the Buddhist steps out of Buddhism to answer these questions, then our debate is over.

**Summary of Arguments**

We opened this work with a detailed examination of Buddhist philosophy. In the last three chapters I have worked through logic, causal theory, and pragmatism. In the first three areas we examined several problems with Buddhist Philosophy. First the doctrine of *pratisthasamppada* cannot account for the reliability of rational structures.

Buddhist causality was also considered. In that chapter the problem of circularity in proving causality was addressed. The Buddhist epistemology presupposes causality, and to know causality the Buddhist epistemology must first be assumed. We then investigated the possibility of supporting the Buddhist view of causality with a transcendental proof but realized that the Buddha’s radical empiricism would never allow for transcendental arguments, a form of argumentation used throughout history—illustrated by Isaiah.

Finally we examined what seems to be the place for Buddhism’s last stand, the pragmatic criterion of truth. We noticed that with such a view one either accepts it arbitrarily or has reasons to

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9 Some slippery philosophers have claimed that one can use opponent’s system without making worldview commitments. Once you can show contradictions in that system then the opponent will be motivated to leave his system of thinking and embrace Buddhism. The problem with this type of thinking is that if the arguments have no proof value beyond merely getting a person to accept them then they are rhetorical tricks. Such tricks cannot be used to substantiate any of the Buddha’s claims regarding causality, epistemology and logic, since they do not establish the truth of anything. They merely motivate. But in a such a method where moving an opponent from this position to another is the only goal, then proof can be seen in no other terms other than “that which motivates.” The fellow using this type of argument commits a sly bait and switch where the logical structures are used to motivate his opponent to embrace a claim, which can no truer than the fact that the former opponent now embraces it. See section on Nagarjuna.
accept it. If the pragmatic criterion is defended with arguments and evidences, and the standard for evaluating the proofs is the pragmatic criterion, then we have a viciously circular argument based solely on the goal chosen. We see then that no noncircular argument may be presented in support of a pragmatic criterion of truth. So when the Buddhist pragmatist makes arguments, he stands on the shoulders of Christianity. He may demand that we not attribute Buddhism’s thievery only to the Christian worldview. But then the debate would seem to have run its course.
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