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The Fragility of Foundations and Frameworks: A Review Essay on *Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy*

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Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy: Freedom from Foundations. Edited by Jay L. Garfield. Routledge Studies in American Philosophy. London and New York: Routledge, 2019, 254 pages. ISBN 978-0-367-11209-7 (hardback), \$128/978-1-03-209415-1 (paperback), \$39.16/978-0-429-02794-9 (e-book), \$44.05.

The American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars (1912-1989) was one of the seminal figures in the analytic movement that came to dominate American college and university philosophy departments after the Second World War, a development in which Sellars's efforts and intellectual stature played a key role. Philosophical analysis itself had its immediate roots earlier in the twentieth century, following the rejection (most famously articulated by G. E. Moore, 1873-1958) of the idealism that had earlier held sway in British philosophy and, simultaneously, in line with the work of Gottlob Frege (1848-1925) and the philosophers of the "Vienna Circle," remarkable progress in formal logic and the philosophy of science. Coming to terms, philosophically, with the explosion of scientific discovery and

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the revolutionary theoretical innovations that marked the era was a matter of foremost concern.

Like some of the other leading analytic philosophers, Sellars drew on a broad range of sources and did not hesitate to engage with other schools of philosophy; he sometimes compared aspects of his own method, for instance, with the phenomenological “bracketing” of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). For Sellars, analytic philosophy marked a promising new way that remained continuous with a perennial philosophical tradition reaching back to Plato and Aristotle. Nonetheless, analytic philosophy, as practiced in the United States and elsewhere, was effectively closed to non-Western philosophies, which it tended to dismiss as “mysticism” (meaning, essentially, fuzzy mindedness), and there is no reason, so far as I am aware, to suppose that Sellars parted company with dominant trends in this regard.

The very idea of “Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy,” therefore, may strike some as little more than an amusing oxymoron. To this, the present collection begs to differ, though, as volume editor Jay L. Garfield writes in his introduction, Sellars “would probably be astonished to learn of his enormous influence and reputation in contemporary Buddhist Studies” (ix). This is, however, an exaggeration: within Buddhist Studies generally I would wager that Sellars remains and will continue to remain almost unknown. But limiting our scope to just that part of Buddhist Studies that has sought to learn from and to engage in dialogue with recent work in philosophy, Sellars has certainly emerged as an important, albeit imagined, interlocutor.

The notion that Sellars might furnish significant points of contact with Buddhist thought rests primarily on the ideas advanced in two of his most influential essays, among the many that he published: “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (also entitled “The Myth of the Given,” 1956)²

² Originally published in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 1: The Foundations of Science and the Concepts of Psychology and Psychoanalysis, edited by Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven, University of Minnesota Press, 1956, pp. 253-329. The version

and “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man” (1962).³ These two works define the topics given prominence in the two parts into which the twelve chapters of *Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy* are evenly divided: “Two Images and Two Truths” and “The Myth of the Given and Buddhist Philosophy of Mind.” In some respects, the order of the book’s two parts strikes me as awkward, not because it runs counter to the chronological sequence of Sellars’s publications, but because “The Myth of the Given” concerns what have been sometimes taken to be the most basic elements of experience and knowledge, while “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man” constitutes an inquiry into fully elaborate social and historical frameworks. However, because Sellars himself raises the question of the role of our social reality (“learning, . . . forming of associations, . . . setting up of stimulus-response connections”) in the formation of even the most elementary concepts (“Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” 476), the two essays may be taken to be complementary, best read and reread against one another.

Sellars’s ideas are challenging and subtly argued, as are the engagements with them we find in the volume reviewed here. The brief remarks that follow must therefore simplify matters to a considerable extent, though I hope that in so doing they will nonetheless avoid becoming simplistic. Although part of what I have to say about *Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy* will focus upon points about which I disagree with one or another of the authors, I found this to be an unusually stimulating collection, one that I recommend unreservedly to a broad readership in comparative philosophy. I shall first consider each of the two main parts into

at my disposal and to which I refer appears in *Empirical Knowledge: Readings from Contemporary Sources*, edited by Roderick M. Chisholm and Robert J. Swartz, Prentice-Hall, 1973, pp. 471-541.

³ Originally published in *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, edited by Robert G. Colodny, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962, pp. 35-78. The version at my disposal and to which I refer appears in *Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*. 2nd ed., edited by A. P. Martinich and David Sosa, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 542-566.

which the book is divided separately, before offering a brief concluding reflection on the work as a whole.

Part I: Two Images and Two Truths

The issue that occupies Sellars in “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man” is, very broadly, the apparent disjunction between our “manifest image” of a world in which, for example, persons perceive, fabricate, and make use of tables and chairs, and a “scientific image” in which animal bodies and items of furniture alike are mostly empty space punctuated by points of energy. It would seem that, once the problem is posed in this way, it almost cries out for comparison with the Buddhist conception of “two truths” (*satyadvaya*), although this proves to be less evident than it may at first appear. For it is important to note at the outset that, for Sellars, the “manifest image” is not taken to be a naïve, pre-reflective and “natural” view of the world; it is already the product of human history and culture.⁴ And not any philosophical view that challenges our manifest image of the world with one that is supposed to be closer to the truth of things will count as exemplifying the “scientific image.” The illusion/reality or relative/absolute dichotomies of traditional philosophies, however they be couched, do not capture the distinction that Sellars has in mind here, for the “scientific image” is specifically that which is “derived from the fruits of postulational theory construction” (“Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man” 553).⁵ Sellars’s conception of the two images, like

⁴ Of course, this much might be said of Buddhist conceptions of *vyavahārasatya* as well.

⁵ I believe that Sellars’s idea may have been in part inspired—whether consciously or not I do not know—by the distinction of *understanding* and *explanation* that arose in the hermeneutical movement, but it would be beside the point to enter into detailed discussion of this here. On the background of the distinction and its role in contemporary philosophy, one may refer to the classic study by G. H. von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*.

Buddhist two-truths theories, is philosophically problematic.⁶ As such, it cannot be taken as an off-the-shelf interpretive device that provides contemporary students of Buddhist philosophy with a ready key for understanding what Buddhist thinkers were up to with their two truths; to attempt to use it in this way will do justice neither to Sellars nor to Buddhism. The challenge, rather, is to see if a critical dialogue between Sellars on the two images and Buddhist theories of the two truths might serve to advance our own thinking and not just land us in a muddle.

In the first chapter of *Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy*, “The World in Which Everything is the Self: The Philosophy of the Original Image and Pan-Self-Ism,” Naozumi Mitani focuses on a third image that Sellars briefly delineates in connection with his scheme of two images: the “original image” in which the manifest image itself first took form. Given Sellars’s concern with the primacy of the person in his conception of the manifest image, the original image corresponds to an archaic state in which persons as we think of them were not yet distinguished from other sorts of things: tree, sky, and sun were, at this stage, all persons. Persons as we know them, therefore, emerged from a process of *depersonalization* in which most of our world lost its personhood and the duality of person and object was born. Against Sellars’s account, in which it is not difficult to detect the unstated (though possibly unconscious or indirect) influence of the nineteenth-century cultural anthropology of Edward Tylor (1832-1917), with its prominent emphasis on primitive “animism,” Mitani seeks to retrieve the “original image,” via what he terms *pan-self-ism*, as constitutive of the thinking of the thirteenth-century Zen teacher Dōgen (1200-1253) and of the latter’s modern philosophical successor, Kitarō Nishida (1870-1945). Among the interesting points raised in this context, he usefully introduces readers to another work by Sellars that seems particularly resonant with aspects of Buddhist thought, “Foundations for a Meta-

⁶ For a critical assessment, see Bas C. van Fraassen “The Manifest Image and the Scientific Image.” Van Fraassen does not hesitate to characterize Sellars’s conception of the two images as “an incoherent fiction.”

physics of Pure Process” (discussed on pp. 23-25), which is not discussed at length elsewhere in the volume (though Garfield also references it in chapter seven).⁷

The second chapter, “Two Tables, Images, and Truths,” by Monima Chadha, addresses the important problem of how the two images might be “fused” to form a single embracing view, and pursues this inquiry in dialogue with Buddhist Abhidharma philosophy, which Chadha regards as confronting a closely similar problem in its doctrine of the two truths, conventional (*saṃvṛti*) and ultimate (*paramārtha*). The problem of fusion turns, in particular, on the status of the person, for, in Sellars’s words, we are faced with

the task of showing that categories pertaining to man as a *person* who finds himself confronted by standards (ethical, logical, etc.) which often conflict with his desires and impulses, and to which he may or may not conform, can be reconciled with the idea that man is what science says he is. (“Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man” 564)

Chadha sees in this an analog to problems generated by the *dharma* theory of the Abhidharma, wherein persons are reduced to (or: eliminated in favor of) causal sequences of primitive phenomena, the *dharmas*, and hence nowhere to be found in ultimate truth. To overcome the two-tier view of reality that, Chadha holds, flows from both Sellars’s two images and the two truths of Buddhism, she suggests that

we might be able to enrich the scientific image and the ultimate truth not by incorporating persons . . . but by incorporating intentions and norms into the scientific image or the level of ultimate truth. And, in fact, the notion of *cetanā*, often translated as intention in the contemporary Buddhist literature, figures in the list of ultimately real *dharmas*

⁷ Sellars “Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process: The Carus lectures of Wilfrid Sellars.”

enumerated by Abhidharma philosophers. (*Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy* 41)

In her conclusions, she adds, “The Abhidharma notion of ultimate truth does not reject intentions and norms; rather, it transforms them into ultimately (scientifically) respectable entities that no longer resist incorporation into the scientific image” (46). I must confess that I am puzzled as to how something that is not “scientifically respectable” (phlogiston, for instance?) might be “transformed into” one that is. However, we are to understand this, the chapters that follow make it quite clear that some leading Buddhist thinkers would have in fact rejected the path that Chadha here proposes.⁸

In all events, I can see no reason to privilege *cetanā* over and against other *dharmas* as Chadha suggests that we do. And if the Abhidharma treats *cetanā* as an unanalyzable primitive, as is required for it (or any other *dharma*) to be considered ultimate, it is plainly wrong to do so. For, indeed, the Abhidharma treatises themselves propose definitional analyses of *cetanā*.⁹ (For such reasons, among others, the Mahāyāna philosophers, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra alike, refused to countenance an ultimate status for the *dharmas* of the early Abhidharma.) Although Chadha is certainly correct that Abhidharma thought requires us to confront the implications of its thoroughgoing treatment of persons in terms of impersonal phenomena, the solutions it offered were not to privilege

⁸ On p. 33 Chadha herself nods in the direction of Madhyamaka, but then immediately turns away, stating that “the Madhyamakas emphasize the primacy of conventional truth and are thereby not concerned with the Sellarsian project of fusing the two images.” This strikes me as misleading at best, as will be seen in the discussion of the next chapters.

⁹ Thus, in his *Bhāṣya* on *Abhidharmakośa* 2.24, Vasubandhu reads *cetanā cittābhisamkāro manaskarma*, “*cetanā* is that mental act which conditions the mind,” to which Yaśomitra adds as a gloss *cittapraspaṇḍaḥ*, meaning roughly “motivating the mind.” This is far from being quite limpid and unproblematic, but my point here is just to stress that, however these Abhidharma masters understood *cetanā*, they did not in fact take it to be beyond analysis and thus not really ultimate in their own terms.

any single *dharmā*, but instead to focus upon the causally constituted stream of *dharmas*, the *santāna*. Personhood might be erroneously attributed to such a stream, but, unless one follows the Pudgalavādins, it is not to be identified with any particular element of reality within or beyond it.

The following chapter, Catherine Prueitt's "Is There an Ideal Scientific Image? Sellars and Dharmakīrti on Levels of Reality," presents an astute and nuanced reading of the two-truths doctrine as elaborated in the work of the seventh-century master of the Buddhist epistemological tradition, Dharmakīrti. In contrast to those who have held that the ultimate reality for Dharmakīrti is that which is causally efficacious, Prueitt—correctly, I believe—holds efficacy to characterize only what is ultimate *in conventional terms*. The ultimate itself, however, is altogether exempt from causal relations. As Prueitt encapsulates Dharmakīrti's position about this, "Dharmakīrti thereby is left with an ontology in which only non-dual reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedana*) ultimately remains. This reality is utterly devoid of distinctions of any kind—and therefore cannot serve as a causal basis for differentiated phenomena in the conventional world" (56).¹⁰ The upshot of this in relation to Sellars is that his scientific image is no longer analogized to the Buddhist ultimate truth but must in fact be considered as another way of describing the conventional. As Prueitt states in her conclusion, "causal analysis at its best can provide an accurate picture of how things work in the conventional world . . . No matter how refined the manifest image becomes, it will never fully align with an ideal scientific image" (61). On my own reading of Sellars, however, I am not sure that such "alignment" was in fact what he was after. More on this below.

¹⁰ Dharmakīrti's notion of a self-aware ultimate, exempt from causal relations, as Prueitt describes it, seems strikingly reminiscent of the Sāṃkhya conception of *Puruṣa* as pristine consciousness, similarly standing outside of the causal order. To unpack the similarities and distinctions of the views in question, however, lies outside of the scope of the present review.

Douglas Duckworth, in chapter four, “Sellars and the Stereoscopic Vision of Madhyamaka,” provides an account of the main lines of the renowned Tibetan teacher Tsongkhapa’s (1357-1419) analysis of the two truths, focusing on those aspects that seem most pertinent in relation to Sellars. Duckworth is, I believe, often on target in signaling significant disanalogies with Sellars’s description of the two images, for instance, in writing that, for Tsongkhapa, “the ultimate truth is always only empty, end of story, so there is nothing more for science to contribute to the ultimate nature of reality. In a complete and closed system, we thus reach the limit of the Buddhist contribution to the reconciliation of the images” (73). This seems to me an important point, for all Buddhist philosophical traditions, and not just Madhyamaka, hold that the ultimate truth has already been fully realized by the Buddha and that our first task is to recover it hermeneutically, by penetrating his message. Nor is it the case that science just has to catch up with Buddhist insight, for the latter has emerged not from the challenge of explaining the ultimate nature of the physical world but “from the wish to alleviate suffering . . . [it] presumes that the answer to suffering has been discovered by the Buddha. Sellars’ scientific image, in contrast, is a product of . . . the challenges to humans’ self-understanding brought about by advances in modern science” (78).

Duckworth, moreover, in conformity with Prueitt’s understanding of Dharmakīrti (one of the key influences on Tsongkhapa’s thinking), argues that “[u]nder a Madhyamaka gaze, we can see that the two images do not correspond to the two truths but that both of Sellars’ images fit into Tsongkhapa’s account of conventional truth” (74). This seems to me to be right, but it gives rise to a curious paradox. For, if Sellars’s scientific image cannot be part of Buddhist ultimate truth, neither can the latter be part of Sellars’s scientific image but must be instead an expression of the manifest image; there seems but little prospect, the protests of various advocates of neo-Buddhist “inner science” notwithstanding, of treating the Buddhist investigation of ultimate truth as part of the project of science

as Sellars understands it.¹¹ It seems we have now landed on a conceptual Möbius strip, where the two faces of the two ways of thought we are considering turn out not to be parallels as was expected but lead us instead into an unresolved cycle.

The apparent incommensurability of the scientific image with Buddhist versions of the ultimate truth casts, I think, the project of considering Sellars's two images in direct relation with varieties of the Buddhist two truths into considerable doubt, though the exercise may nonetheless be heuristically useful. In Chadha's Abhidharma-based examination, for instance, although there is a rough structural parallel between the two images and the Abhidharma conception of the two truths, with a bit of digging it becomes evident that the similarities that seemed apparent at first were illusions. This is in part because, in line with Duckworth's argument, the scientific image, in Sellars's sense, which is derived from what he called postulational theory construction,¹² is not at all similar to the Buddha's revelation of a soteriologically valuable vision of reality. The reality postulated by science, moreover, does not exist in an ultimate sense as defined in the Abhidharma, that is, as that which is incapable of further analysis or division (*a-tomos*); instead, molecules are analyzed into atoms, atoms into variously charged particles, and so on down to eleven-

¹¹ See Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" 550-552 ("Classical Philosophy and the Manifest Image"). I am in fact by no means convinced that Sellars's arguments are quite coherent here, though I am sure that they entail that, for Sellars at least, the ultimate truth of the Buddhist two-truths theories cannot be considered part of the scientific image, but that, like the absolutes of some traditional Western philosophies, they are to be classed within his manifest image.

¹² Sellars ("Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" 553) offers this definition: it is "that which postulates imperceptible objects and events for the purpose of explaining correlations among perceptibles." As stated here, this is certainly not adequate. Even demonology might be thought to fit Sellars's definition, not to mention Buddhist *dharm*a-theory. At the very least, his definition needs to be filled out with reference to precise measurement and mathematicization, the exclusion of secondary properties, and controlled experimental methods of verification and falsification. I imagine that Sellars took all this to be understood by his readership.

dimensional superstrings and beyond (though not all of this was on the books in Sellars's time). And perfecting the scientific image to arrive at a final theory, even if some day that becomes feasible, carries with it no promise of the gnosis and freedom from suffering that is the goal of the Abhidharma.¹³

The problems we see in reconciling the frameworks proposed by Sellars with those proposed by the Buddhists may stem not only from the specific features of these frameworks, but from deep underlying incoherencies afflicting broad conceptual frameworks more generally. The strategy of "deflationism" advocated by Tom Tillemans in chapter five, "Deflating the Two Images and the Two Truths: *Bons baisers du Tibet*," suggests such a diagnosis as well as a cure, the elimination of frameworks from our systems of discourse. To achieve this, he proposes the adoption of deflationism. This, in the philosophies of logic and language from which it is derived, usually refers to accounts of truth in which we may dispatch with considering "truth" to be a genuine property in order to explain or analyze sentences to which the values of "true" or "false" are attributed. Thus, "Jackrabbits hop" is true if and only if jackrabbits hop; there is no need to posit some special additional property to justify the ascription of truth here. There is also no need to qualify our truth-statements in relation to frameworks, such as the "two images" or "two truths."

Of course, Tillemans could not be expected to have presented a fully detailed deflationist theory in the space of just a few pages. Even allowing for some cutting of corners, however, part of what he says seems to me to be clearly wrong. Thus, for instance, his deflationist definition of reference is given in the formula: $\langle n \rangle$ refers to x iff $n = x$ (*Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy* 89). But this would mean that the word "cat" refers to a cat iff "cat" = a cat, which is clearly not the case, except, perhaps, in a magical theory of reference ("Intone 'ghost of Hector' three times and

¹³ As Vasubandhu puts it in the second verse of the *Abhidharmakośa: prajñāmalā sānucarā 'bhidharmaḥ*, "Abhidharma is taintless wisdom, together with the [incorruptible (*anāsrava*)] factors that accompany it."

behold! Hector's shade now appears!") or under a notably queer interpretation of '='. Indeed, reference has posed a problem for deflationary theories,¹⁴ as have issues of value, intention, etc., pretty much all that we need in order to flesh out Sellars's conception of persons.¹⁵ It is therefore by no means evident that the magic wand of deflationism will achieve all that Tillemans hopes that it will.

While the idea of doing away with frameworks altogether may seem initially attractive, I suspect that the pragmatics of language will require at least a weak commitment to frameworks of various kinds; we cannot really cash out a language of pure semantics without syntax. With Tillemans, we may wish to avoid grand, embracing frameworks like the "two truths" and "two images" that he considers to be especially troublesome—and I concur with him that they are—but we may nevertheless have to start down the slippery slope of admitting some frameworks, however "weak" they appear to be: Tillemans, for instance, gives as an example of a deflationary "T-statement," "'Snow is white' is true in English if and only if snow is white" (90), which explicitly references the linguistic framework of the English language. That is to say, the statement quoted will be true *for* English-language speakers, but perhaps gibberish for others. But this truth-*for* qualification is precisely, according to Tillemans, what inevitably leads to unintelligibility in framework-reliant systems (87-89). It is therefore difficult to see, on his account, just what principle will ensure that we stop sliding before our frameworks get out of hand. We may hold that we must dispatch with them *ultimately* but that this is not to say that we do not need them *conventionally*, but this view reaffirms frameworks

¹⁴ See, for instance, Arvid Båve "A Deflationary Theory of Reference."

¹⁵ Although Tillemans makes gestures towards statements of value, intention, etc., at some points in his chapter, his actual treatment of deflationism focuses solely on statements of fact. This seems to be often the case in philosophical work on deflationism and it is quite unclear, to me at least, just how proponents of deflationist programs suggest that value is to be treated, how their accounts apply not only to "is" sentences, but "ought" sentences as well. See, for instance, Jacob Ross "Rejecting Ethical Deflationism."

all over again. This, in a nutshell, was Dharmakīrti's beef with Candrakīrti, later redeployed in Tibet by Sa skya Paṇḍita as well (1182-1251).

Tillemans, like Duckworth, turns to Tsongkhapa to help us out of this quandary. But I am not sure that Tillemans gets Tsongkhapa right when he asserts that “truths are established and not just believed in, customary things exist and are not just errors, but no truth is better grounded, better established, or ‘truer’ than the other. It is only the procedures for establishing the truths that differ” (91). While this surely pertains to Tsongkhapa's treatment of the conventional and the ultimate-as-known-conventionally, it cannot characterize his vision of the final realization of the ultimate, wherein the two truths arise as one.¹⁶ At that point, all that is conventional—including the ultimate-as-known-conventionally—is seen to be just false (*rdzun tsam*). Although this may seem to be about as deflated as one can get, it is not clear to me that when contemporary philosophers speak of deflationism, this is what they have in mind. Tillemans, however, is perhaps more concerned to present to us what he believes Tsongkhapa should have held than what, in fact, he does.¹⁷

If the siren song of deflation fails to seduce, we shall have to return once more to the problem of “fusing” Sellars's two images. Sellars, as Chadha rightly emphasizes (46), did not treat persons as atomized

¹⁶ On this one may refer to Duckworth's chapter, esp. 76-78. However, I do not concur with Duckworth that “Tsongkhapa's depiction of Madhyamaka is unique in that the two truths for him are not really distinct.” Far from being unique, this seems to me to be standard Madhyamaka operating procedure—“form is emptiness and emptiness, form.” The point is stated explicitly, for instance, by the late-11th-century Indian master Abhayākara Gupta: “the ostensible truth . . . and the truth of the ultimate objective . . . are one alone” (quoted in my *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought* 396; cf. 219 for a similar citation from Prajñākaramati). Many other examples might be adduced. Nevertheless, Tsongkhapa's precise way of formulating the union of the two truths may be unusual.

¹⁷ Tillemans himself suggests as much in writing: “A radical deflationism across the board . . . could not only be a way out of the twin species of Sellars' philosophy; it would be a promising Madhyamaka” (90-91).

individuals, but considered the being and concept of persons to be inextricably bound up with communities. Without communities, there simply are no persons. It is in the final chapter of this section of *Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy*, “The Ambience of Principles: Sellarsian Community and Ethical Intent” by Sheridan Hough, that the implications of this aspect of Sellars’s thinking, and what Buddhism might contribute to it, are explored.

Hough deftly situates Sellars’s reflections on community and the ethical obligations to which it gives rise in dialogue with leading continental thinkers of the twentieth century: Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas. As she interprets Sellars’s project:

There is evidently some basic “way of being” for humans that Sellars is attempting to capture; the comparison with Heidegger’s existential analytic is irresistible. Yes, there is a human way of being—*Dasein*—that is irreducible, a way of being that makes possible the scientific endeavors that explore what is the case; however, that way of being is the shared agreement in our cultural practices that allows entities to show up as those entities . . . we are able to comport ourselves in culturally relevant ways, having grown up and into a language or languages and particular habits and practices. (101)

Husserl’s concerns about “intersubjectivity” and the “lifeworld” (103) resonate similarly. The moral dimension of this perspective, as developed by Sellars, finds a parallel of sorts in Levinas’s focus on “the neighbor” (104). In this vein, one may recall, too, Levinas’s emphasis on “ethics as first philosophy” (Levinas *Éthique comme philosophie première*).

Despite my admiration for this finely crafted essay overall, it seems to me to make a false turn in arguing that the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness may ground Sellarsian “benevolence” in a way that “Christian platitudes” cannot (*Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy* 105). Although

something like this has been widely assumed in some contemporary Buddhist circles, there is really no basis for it; for the Buddhist concept of selflessness—however it be cashed out, given the different views of the various schools—is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being benevolent, in the sense advocated by Sellars. It cannot be a necessary condition, because there are plenty of benevolent people, including both religious persons and diehard atheists, who either do not know or, if they do, do not assent to Buddhist views. And it cannot be a sufficient condition, for, as much recent work on Buddhist ethnonationalisms has shown, there are plenty of Buddhists, including some who are aware of and assent to normative doctrines, whose words and actions towards certain “others” (ethnic minorities, for example) are clearly not at all benevolent.

In fact, if Hough had taken on the full weight of an adage from Sellars that she cites on several occasions with *emphasis* (105, 109)—“The commitment to the well-being of others is a commitment *deeper than any commitment to abstract principle*”—this unnecessary attempt to use Buddhist *anātmavāda* to ground Sellars’s ethics might have been avoided. Her assumption that “ontological insight necessarily precedes ethical action” (106), which reinstates metaphysics as first philosophy, is where her argument goes astray. Following Sellars, I would argue that, when it comes to social emotions such as benevolence, metaphysical doctrines probably do not matter very much. They may cooperate with any number of conditions, especially non-doxastic conditions such as an unreasoned, spontaneous disposition to look kindly on others, to reinforce benevolence in circumstances in which it is rationally valued, that is, in which one is not only inclined to be benevolent but also judges this to be appropriate. The reasoned conviction that we are beings without enduring selves may surely be an aid to such cultivation, but so might the conviction that we are part of a great community of co-equal souls, dependent upon and sustained alike by a loving creator, or the conviction that all religions are sheer nonsense, but that humankind—or the whole animate world, for that matter—nonetheless forms a natural sisterhood, in which one’s fundamental obligation is to the welfare of all.

Hough's emphasis on the importance of community to Sellars's way of thinking is, indeed, echoed in some of the earlier contributions to "Two Images and Two Truths." But I do not believe that Sellars's real intentions in positioning it as the locus in which the manifest image joins the scientific image has yet been made clear. This, in fact, reflects Sellars's own sketchiness about this. Nevertheless, he has given us some important clues:

[S]omehow the world is the cause of the individual's image of the world . . . [T]he essentially social character of conceptual thinking comes clearly to mind when we recognize that there is no thinking apart from common standards of correctness and relevance. ("Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" 551)

As he then stresses in his conclusions:

[T]he conceptual framework of persons is the framework in which we think of one another as sharing the community intentions which provide the ambience of principles and standards (above all, those which make meaningful discourse and rationality itself possible) within which we live our own individual lives. A person can almost be defined as a being that has intentions. Thus the conceptual framework of persons is not something that needs to be *reconciled with* the scientific image, but rather something to be *joined to it*. . . . We can, of course, as matters now stand, realize this direct incorporation of the scientific image into our way of life only in imagination. But to do so is, if only in imagination, to transcend the dualism of the manifest and scientific images of man-of-the-world. (566)

Complementing what the authors of *Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy* have said about this, let me attempt to unpack briefly my own understanding of Sellars's idea:¹⁸

According to one way of conceiving of language and thought, and of the intentions expressed in them, these are phenomena that arise within the mind and are then articulated outwardly, that is, publicly, in speech and action. For Sellars, this picture, which informs the manifest image and the classical systems of philosophy that have arisen within it, reverses the true order of things. Intentions, and the words and concepts that embody them, emerge in the frameworks established by communities, as communal imperatives are impressed upon, internalized, and represented by the individual members of those communities.

Now, within the scientific image, communities of biological organisms, such as human beings, should be explained in principle without appeal to occult entities of any kind. If we then consider "intentions" to have arisen through the internalization of communal requirements by the individual organisms constituting the community, we begin to glimpse the possibility of a wholly naturalistic explanation of language and thought within the scientific image,¹⁹ which, however, must itself emerge from the manifest image. It is here that the "joining" of which Sellars speaks is to be found, not a reconciliation in which one of the images dissolves into the other, but a continuum in which both are fully expressed. Of course, the basis for this has never been fully worked out in scientific theory and Sellars himself, as seen above, neither assumed nor claimed that it was. His aim was to present a *philosophical* account of how it might be. In all

¹⁸ I believe that my reading of Sellars here comports, too, with his "Myth of Jones" in the final sections of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (522-540). See, too, the discussions of this in chapters nine (Maitra) and twelve (Doctor) of the volume under review.

¹⁹ I worry, however, that this may invite the charge of what Husserl called, parallel to "psychologism," "biologism," the idea that the apparently necessary principles of logic are in fact grounded in biological contingency. Sellars's insistence on the "essentially social character of conceptual thinking" may require some concession to this prospect.

events, it should be evident now that his path parts company quite radically from the Abhidharma, or for that matter any version of the Buddhist two-truths theory (as well as from Vedantic or Platonic or Averroist two-truths theories).

One of the reasons for which the supposed analogy fails is because, as I have suggested earlier in connection with Duckworth's discussion of Tsongkhapa, the Buddhist ultimate truth is not really analogous to Sellars's scientific image at all; it is best considered as an expression of the manifest image. The appeal of treating it as much like the scientific image is largely due to attempts, particularly in "neo-Buddhism," to rationalize Buddhism in scientific terms. This is reflected in Chadha's repetition of the widespread but surely erroneous assumption that the Abhidharma was the product of an experimental practice deriving its data from meditation (38). It was not. The Abhidharma arose from the effort to rationalize what was recalled, through recitation, of the Buddha's teaching. To the extent that it may be related to the experience of meditation, it is in its presentation of rubrics intended to guide meditation. As such, it may be said to be part of a way of processing the manifest image, of helping us to cope with the troubles and pains that characterize it. Good reasons for seeing meditation in this way will in fact come clear in Karl Schmid's chapter in the second part of *Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy*, to which we may now turn.

Part II: The Myth of the Given and Buddhist Philosophy of Mind

Editor Jay Garfield's "Givenness and Primal Confusion," the seventh chapter of the book and first in this section, serves as an excellent introduction to Sellars's finely argued essay, taking particular care to clarify just what Sellars means by "givenness" and why he regards it to be a pervasive problem for epistemology. For Sellars trenchantly attacks not just the humdrum assumption that sense data and appearances of external objects are "given," but also sets his sights on the presumed givenness of our own

inner states, to our cognition of which, following Descartes, many philosophers have attributed incorrigibility and, as such, held them to afford perfectly secure foundations upon which the entire edifice of our knowledge may be built. This, in Garfield's words, "is the deepest and most seductive version of the Myth of the Given. It is tantamount to what Buddhist philosophers regard as self-grasping and is the very thesis against which the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness is aimed" (121). The "primal confusion" of Garfield's title is what he characterizes as the "proximal cause of suffering" for Buddhist thinkers, viz., the "primal confusion about the nature of reality" that gives rise to "the psychological complex of attraction and aversion" (ibid.).

In Garfield's telling, the Buddhist epistemologists Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, and their followers, via their idea of the immediate perception of an instantaneous particular feature, the *svalakṣaṇa*, have made substantially the same assumption of givenness as that which has dogged much of modern and contemporary Western philosophy. The Madhyamaka masters, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti above all, are, in this reading, the Buddhist counterparts to Sellars, advancing an anticipation of his anti-foundationalist assault on the Myth.

Garfield's treatment of the analogy is elegantly and for the most part convincingly developed. Nonetheless, there are some matters in his exposition of the Dignāga-Dharmakīrti tradition that require further clarification. As he presents it (116), these thinkers held "that perception (*pratyakṣa*) puts us in immediate contact with particulars—momentary occurrences of sensory properties—and that all other knowledge is derived from this immediate perceptual knowledge through inference (*anumāna*)." Although this indeed reflects a widely promulgated interpretation, it misconstrues several important points that are relevant in our present context. For, while the Buddhist *pramāṇavādins* did indeed hold that "perception puts us in immediate contact with particulars," at least in conventional terms, they did not hold that this in itself *constitutes* knowledge, *even conventionally*. Rather, knowledge (*jñāna*) is

(conventionally once more) a *product* of such events. For these philosophers, the self-presenting, or reflexive, cognitive instant, *svasaṃvedana*, is nevertheless the point at which perception and the cognition born from it do converge. They may, therefore, have succumbed to “the deepest and most seductive version of the Myth”; the Madhyamaka thinkers, in all events, certainly held that they did.²⁰ I say “may have,” however, because some readings of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti suggest that they sought to steer clear of this conclusion; consider once more Prueitt’s comment, cited above: “This reality [the reflexive cognition in its ultimate, non-dual nature] is utterly devoid of distinctions of any kind—and therefore cannot serve as a causal basis for differentiated phenomena in the conventional sense” (56). Dharmakīrti, here, is seeking to block the possibility of taking the phenomenon of *svasaṃvedana* to be foundational, whether ontologically or epistemologically so. Garfield himself seems to concede that this is the case when speaking of the ultimate, in stating that “on any Buddhist account of . . . transcendent insight, the perceptual state itself is not *foundational* to knowledge” (128). More will be said of this point below.

It must be stressed, too, that Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, and company do not quite maintain that “all other knowledge is derived from this immediate perceptual knowledge through inference.” Perception, for them, is non-conceptual (*kalpanāpoḍha*) while inference is an entirely conceptual operation. Conceptions are related to perceived particulars solely through error (*bhrānti*), so that conceptual thought, including what we take to be correct inference, is vitiated by error through and through.²¹ Like most Buddhist philosophers, the epistemologists thus embraced a pervasive error theory, nothing like the apodictic certainty for which much of early

²⁰This issue is taken up in my “An Intoxication of Mouse Venom: Reading the *Guide*, Chapter 9,” including references to earlier contributions on the topic.

²¹This requires that Buddhist epistemologists distinguish, in effect, between good error, the inference that Socrates is mortal, and bad error, the inference that the rope-seen-as-a-snake might bite. This is a difficult business, but it is not without analogies elsewhere. Newtonian physics, for instance, is now thought to be erroneous, but nonetheless good enough, that is, “correct,” when it comes to many sorts of “local” calculations.

modern Western philosophy (Hume being a particularly prominent exception) aimed. Even if some among them are taken to be committed to a type of foundationalism, it cannot be the strong foundationalism in regard to perceptual objects that is often attributed to them. This indeed, is one of the reasons for which an important wing of the Buddhist *pramāṇa* tradition embraced idealism over and against the representationalism of Sautrāntika thought.

The issues opened up in Garfield's chapter are addressed in some detail in several of the chapters that follow, and, as we have seen, in Catherine Prueitt's contribution, summarized above. The non-conceptuality that for the Dignāga-Dharmakīrti tradition characterizes perception (*pratyakṣa*), a technical term that might be better translated as "bare sensing," "unmediated intuition," or something similar,²² is in particular a central topic in the three chapters that follow.

In "Givenness as a Corollary to Non-Conceptual Awareness: Thinking About Thought in Buddhist Philosophy," Dan Arnold addresses many of the issues we confront throughout *Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy*, so that his wide-ranging discussion resists brief summary. He holds that Dignāga and his successors, through their commitment to treating perception as non-conceptual awareness, have in fact tacitly excluded what

²² In the context of Buddhist Studies, "perception" is an unfortunately ambiguous term. It refers to *saṃjñā* in the Abhidharma scheme of five *skandhas*, in which case it designates the process of identifying or allocating to a conceptual category the object that has given rise to sensation (*vedanā*) and thus fulfills the Jamesian definition of perception ("Perception thus differs from sensation by the consciousness of farther facts associated with the object of the sensation," *The Principles of Psychology* 77; vol. 2). But it also designates the direct, non-conceptual intuition of sensory or mental happenings in the Dignāga-Dharmakīrti system. In the Jamesian sense, "perception" as we use it is often indissociable from conception: "she perceived a vase" seems often to imply, though strictly speaking it does not entail, that "she saw the vase as a vase." It is, therefore, not without problems to employ the same term for *pratyakṣa* in Buddhist *pramāṇa*, wherein the same sentence, "she perceived a vase," might be consistent with the interpretation, "she perceived (= had a raw visual sensation of) a vase-like shape but saw it as a bunny-rabbit."

we think of as ordinary sensory perception from its scope altogether, leaving us with “perception” as pure intuition, entailing what Arnold terms “epistemic idealism.” In the end, “it is only the fact that *mental events occur* that is really knowable with the kind of immediacy that counts as perceptual” (143). It is this, in Arnold’s view, that paves the way for Dharmakīrti’s famous argument for idealism, the “rule” that whatever is known can only be known together with the apprehension of it as an object of knowing (*sahopalambhaniyama*; 143-144). And this, in turn, leads to the position that *seeming* precedes *being*, or, in Sellars’s terms, a form of givenness that Arnold summarizes in saying: “That cognition is *of a world* is not, according to the myth, among the things of which we can be certain; only that it *seems* so is indubitable” (145). This is a view that Sellars decisively rejects, holding that reality must be *logically prior* to appearance. Following Sellars, with a nod to Kant, Arnold urges, against the Dignāga-Dharmakīrti line of thought, that to endorse any claim “just is to take the content of the claim as rationally relatable to all manner of other claims” (146). In short, our cognitive apparatus cannot really operate non-conceptually. (This was, incidentally, also the objection voiced by thinkers of the Mīmāṃsā tradition.)

It is fitting, then, that Arnold turns to consider just how Dignāga and Dharmakīrti treat conceptual activity, to do which he focuses upon their doctrine of *apoha*, “exclusion” (146-150). Following on his previous conclusions regarding their idealism, he wants to show us that this is “an essentially psychologistic theory of how *thinking works*” (147). I am not at all sure that this is correct. In building his case, Arnold rightly holds that *apoha* is not an attempt to offer a phenomenology of thought. But he then goes wrong in asserting that it is

a theory of the unconscious mental process . . . that *produces* . . . the finally *phenomenal* content of any occasion of conceptual thought. According to their theory, one arrives at an image with the requisite generality simply by

excluding everything that's irrelevant on the occasion of conceptual thought. (148)

This view of the matter seems plainly absurd to me, and I am confident that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti would have agreed.

Part of the absurdity stems from the etiological interpretation of *apoha* as productive of concepts. For consider: Joan has a pretty good idea of a cow, but she has never seen, encountered a definition of, or imagined an aardvark. She is therefore unable to exclude aardvark from her concept of cow; hence, poor Joan has not yet formed a very good idea of cow after all, because she has not excluded *everything* that is irrelevant to it. But when at last she encounters an aardvark, she immediately recognizes that it is no cow. How could she have known how to do this, if she could not have, *per impossibile*, already known that it was to be excluded?

Another part of the absurdity comes from the notion of arriving at “an image with the requisite generality.” For, just speaking for myself, I have never in my life formed an *image* of a generic cow. I have imagined a Jersey or a Guernsey, Bessie or Daisy, a comic-book sketch of a cow, or just the word “cow” without additional imagery, and any of these particular conceptual tokens has served, in the context in which it has arisen, the purpose of betokening the broad concept “cow,” of which, however, I have no image at all.

But if *apoha* neither concerns the production of ideas, nor the imagery that accompanies them, then just what is it? My own view is that the *apoha* doctrine represents a strictly logical attempt to characterize what concepts are—one has not got a clear notion of a cow if one cannot recognize that an aardvark does not belong here, that is, if one cannot see what the concept does not cover—and not at all how such strange things (for concepts are indeed very strange!) have arisen.²³ Dignāga and

²³The literature on *apoha* has grown considerably in recent years; for a strong collection of philosophical investigations, refer to Mark Siderits et al. editors. *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*. Columbia University Press, 2011. This is not the place to

Dharmakīrti were grappling here with one of the really hard problems, one that remains no less perplexing for us today. The great abyss separating empiricism from rationalism concerned precisely the nature of concepts and the old puzzles about this continue to haunt us: do concepts belong to the innate hardwiring of the brain, or reflect societal inputs as we develop, or do structuralist accounts steer a surer path between these alternatives? However this may be, I think we can safely rule out psychological explanations; although psychological contingencies may well influence our concepts in various ways (“cow” may be associated with the idea of bucolic peace for Joan, but that of stupidity for Jill), the intersubjectivity of concepts and the language through which we express them demonstrates that they are not merely psychological artifacts. I believe that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, together with Sellars, would have affirmed this as well. In any case, these Buddhists’ etiological story about concepts concerned not psychological contingencies, but dispositions, *vāsanās*, formed in “beginningless time” and thus resembling innate ideas. As this suggests, idealism does not, by itself, entail psychologism.²⁴

Despite my dissent from Arnold’s treatment of *apoha*, I am mostly in accord with what he then does with it. For he is correct in holding that, for Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, the occurrence of a particular conceptual act (e.g., my idea of a cow as it arises just now) is in itself non-conceptual, inasmuch as it is grasped as a particular, that is, as a particular act of reflexive cognition. Inference, therefore, must concern just relations amongst the *conceptual contents* of thoughts that are themselves *non-conceptually* apprehended as particulars. And this, Arnold argues, brings the Buddhist epistemologists’ view into conflict with Sellars’s doubts that “epistemic facts can be analyzed without remainder . . . into non-epistemic facts,” that is, “that the conceptual order can be reduced to anything essentially non-conceptual” (150). It remains, however, questionable to my

attempt a detailed review of this special field and my remarks here provide only a cursory sketch of my own approach to the matter.

²⁴ This is true of many Western idealisms as well; in Bishop Berkeley’s system, for instance, the operations of God ensure that psychologism can be avoided.

mind whether the proposed reduction is really what the Buddhists were after.

Keya Maitra, in chapter nine, “Dignāga and Sellars: Through the Lens of Privileged Access,” and Sonam Kachru, in chapter ten, “Who’s Afraid of Non-Conceptuality? Rehabilitating Dignāga’s Distinction Between Perception and Thought,” part company with the preceding chapters by Garfield and Arnold in arguing that there may be less distance between Dignāga and Sellars than supposed. Dignāga, they hold, may not be committed to the same brands of foundationalism as those that Sellars attacks. However, Maitra and Kachru approach this quite differently. For the former, “If we compare Sellars’ account of self-knowledge with Dignāga’s account of self-intimation . . . we will see that Dignāga’s account is far less Cartesian than a cursory treatment of it as a target of Sellars’ ‘Myth of the Given’ argument might make it appear” (157). Kachru, on the other hand, holds that it is Dignāga’s bifurcation of perception and thought that is, in fact, “immune to Sellars’ criticisms of the myth of the Given” (172-173).

It will not be possible here to do justice to the arguments of chapters nine and ten in sufficient detail. For present purposes, I will limit myself to suggesting why I believe that these two contributions are heading in the right direction—in short, why it is that Sellars may be more Dignāgian than others have held. This hinges on the question of how it is that *pratyakṣa*, “perception,” a non-conceptual operation as Dignāga understands it, comes to be mixed up in the kind of epistemic judgments that would lend to it the “givenness” that Sellars questions.

The crucial passage from Dignāga’s *Pramāṇasamuccaya* appears to me to be the first half of verse eight in the chapter on *pratyakṣa*, together with its autocommentary. In Hattori’s translation:

[we call the cognition itself] “*pramāṇa*” [literally, a means of cognizing], because it is [usually]

conceived to include the act [of cognizing], although primarily it is a result.

Here we do not admit, as the realists do, that the resulting cognition (*pramāṇa-phala*) differs from the means of cognition (*pramāṇa*). The resulting cognition arises bearing in itself the form of the cognized object and [thus] is understood to include the act [of cognizing] (*savyāpara*). For this reason, it is metaphorically called *pramāṇa*, the means of cognition, although it is [ultimately speaking] devoid of activity (*vyāpāra*). (Dignāga *Dignāga, On Perception* 28)²⁵

The interpretation of this passage is certainly tricky; much hinges on how we understand and weigh his qualification “metaphorically,” and the specification that the initial “perception” itself is “devoid of activity.” But keeping in mind my earlier suggestion (n. 22 above) regarding the problematic interpretation of *pratyakṣa* as “perception,” I believe that we can say that Dignāga is in fact embracing an idea of a non-conceptual, inert (“devoid of activity”) “raw feel” that is not at all “given” in Sellars’s sense; it is however the stimulus that yields a “resulting cognition” bearing its form, at which point the problem of givenness indeed arises. Thus, Maitra holds that “[i]t is true that there is a *kind* of givenness in Dignāga’s self-intimating self-awareness episodes. . . . But this appearance is non-conceptual. For this reason, Dignāga’s account is not a version of the given that is the target of Sellars’ attack; it is *not posited as an epistemic foundation*” (169; second *emphasis* added). And Kachru, for his part, argues that “[n]ot only does Dignāga’s insulation of perception from thought not commit us to the Myth of the given, his insulation does not entail the familiar philosophical story that would have us *move from* non-conceptual *to* conceptual content” (184). On my reading, and in accord with their suggestions, Dignāga’s story about stimulus and result amounts to neither an

²⁵ For the reconstructed Sanskrit text, see Steinkellner *Dignāga’s Pramāṇasamuccaya, Chapter 1* 3-4.

affirmation of an epistemic foundation, nor a philosophical “move” intended to derive conceptual content from a non-conceptual ground.

The final two chapters of *Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy* mark a departure from the concerns of those that came before. In “Knowing How to See the Good: *Vipaśyanā* in Kamalaśīla’s *The Process of Mediation*,” Karl Schmid does not engage directly with “The Myth of the Given” at all, though his topic may nonetheless be seen as in some sense related to it. As mentioned earlier, a common assumption of some streams of neo-Buddhism is that Buddhist meditation is a scientific method through which the truths of Buddhist doctrine have been discovered. Focusing upon the eighth-century philosopher Kamalaśīla’s presentations of *vipaśyanā*, or “insight meditation” as it is now widely known, Schmid aims to demonstrate that this understanding is wrong, that in fact “*Vipaśyanā* changes not *what* the practitioner knows, but *how* she knows it . . . no new declarative knowledge is acquired through *vipaśyanā*” (206). Meditation practices are guided by doctrine, they are not a laboratory for the formation thereof. And the doctrine itself, notably in the case of the Abhidharma, is derived primarily from the effort to systematically sort out the essential concepts in the Buddha’s teaching as recalled by tradition. A definition of the two truths given in the Pali *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, cited by Tillemans (82), makes this quite clear.

In this context, Schmid makes interesting use of another article by Sellars, “Scientific Realism or Irenic Instrumentalism,” in which Sellars presents the example of learning to “see” an electron by first observing its trace in a cloud chamber (207).²⁶ The novice scientist, lacking the disposition to respond appropriately to the pattern that appears sees just the trace and must infer the presence of the electron, but later “this

²⁶ The full title of the Sellars article is “Scientific Realism or Irenic Instrumentalism: A Critique of Nagel and Feyerabend on Theoretical Explanation,” published in *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 2: Proceedings of the Boston Colloquium for the Philosophy of Science, 1962-1964, edited by Robert S. Cohen and Marx W. Wartofsky, Humanities Press, 1965, pp. 171-204.

disposition can be developed through stimulus-response conditioning” until the scientist “sees the hooked vapor trail as an electron” (209). The lesson Schmid derives from this for thinking about Buddhist meditation is that a “novice practitioner can only infer that a phenomenon has a certain property, such as emptiness, but . . . eventually the practitioner is conditioned to construct habitually, or deploy, the concept ‘emptiness’ directly” (210).

Although this is a far cry from the notion of meditation as the laboratory of “inner science,” it may be nevertheless possible to salvage something of the project of Buddhism-as-empirical-science by imagining that, as in the experience of Sellars’s novice scientist, meditative practice is an experimental method in the service of confirmation. But consider: when I was a very young child, I did not yet appreciate the beauty of Bach’s B-minor Mass. Eventually, I learned to listen to it until its beauty was just evident to me, without any effort to develop further faculties of music appreciation. Now, I believe that most would agree that learning to hear the beauty of Bach and to see an electron in a cloud chamber are not quite similar. At the very least, we will say that the former involves some element of “taste,” of personal aesthetic judgment. Fine. But the question this leaves me with is this: is learning to perceive emptiness in *vipaśyanā* more like seeing the electron, or hearing the beauty of Bach? In the spirit of the old math textbooks I grew up with, I leave this as an exercise to be completed at home.

The problem that occupies the concluding chapter, Thomas Doctor’s “Mr. Jones and the Surpluses of Reality,” has its origins in Buddhist soteriology: how is it that, in a causally ordered world of ignorant, suffering beings, the possibility of awakening and freedom can ever emerge? With some help from Sellars, Doctor seeks to find a naturalistic solution to this conundrum:

Sellars’ myths show that knowledge necessarily arises in an open-ended semantic commune. Whereas any search for object and subject in isolation is going to come up empty-

handed, both object and subject can arguably instead be meaningfully accessed . . . by virtue of a field that cannot itself be meaningfully determined as either self or other.
(224)

In such a system, the “outflows of the pure sphere of reality” (*dhar-madhātuviśuddha-niśyanda*) invoked in Mahāyāna Buddhism to explain the intrusion of liberating enlightened activity in our benighted world are, in Doctor’s words, “not incomprehensible metaphysical posits dragged in as *ad hoc* solutions to an insoluble soteriological problem. They are recognizable consequences of a dynamic and collectively constituted, ever-present field” (230).

Conclusion: Buddhism and the Scientific Image of Man

I am not usually very keen on dyadic comparisons (Neoplatonism and Vedānta, Xunzi and Hobbes—that sort of thing), though I am not entirely sure just what my reserve towards them stems from. In part, no doubt, from a tendency we sometimes see to lay too much stress on apparent similarities, as if the act of comparison obliges us to focus upon whatever it is that the comparanda are supposed to have in common. However, despite the editor’s gushy affirmation that “Buddhologists see in Sellars a contemporary exponent of the most central ideas articulated by the Madhyamaka tradition” (xii), what I most enjoyed about this book was to be found in the friendly cacophony of the contributors’ voices, by no means expressing a uniform view of how Sellars’s work may or may not relate to ideas gleaned from Buddhist sources. Sellars proves “good to think” in this context not because he marches in lockstep with any Buddhist school, but because he offers us just enough in the way of possible points of contact, together with the critical perspective of contemporary philosophical analysis, so that the challenge of imagining what he might have to say to Buddhist thought urges us to refine our ideas of both.

Although it is not among the chief concerns of *Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy*, my reading of this collection had the effect of sharpening my skepticism regarding the project of reconciling Buddhism with Science, or, indeed, of presenting Buddhism as Science, that has been much touted in recent years. That these two paths of knowledge are really quite distinct from one another is the take-away, for they differ fundamentally from one another both in method and aim. This, of course, is not to say that they are incompatible, and Sellars's concern to join the manifest and scientific images, but not reduce one to the other, may prove to be a helpful way of thinking about their true relationship. For, much as Sellars held with respect to his two images, if the category of the person is not the point at which Buddhism and Science intersect, it becomes difficult, for me at least, to see where they do.

Wilfrid Sellars and Buddhist Philosophy is certainly no beginner's book, but I think that it would make a marvelous text for a seminar bringing together relatively advanced students in Philosophy and Buddhist Studies. As I hope that my remarks in this review make clear, there is a considerable wealth of material in these pages to stimulate ongoing thought and conversation.

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