

## Epistemology of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*

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*The Brahmajāla Sutta includes a list of ‘views’ that are wrong in some sense. The present paper turns the focus away from the content of the views to ask in what sense they are problematic, by what criteria they are here found to be so, and, indeed, just what kinds of things the views are. The framework in which the views are set suggests that what the Buddha finds problematic is not the content so much as the epistemological standpoint, or, more properly, the mode-of-being of which the views are a part: it is the samaṇa-brāhmaṇas who proclaim the views rather than the views per se that are wrong.*

In two previous papers (Evans 2007, 2008), I called into question what Frank Hoffman (1982) has called the ‘Buddhist empiricism hypothesis’, the interpretation of Buddhist epistemology as empirical and rational in a modern Western sense. That interpretation, I believe, is a projection of modern orientations that obscures the understanding of knowledge and the means of pursuing it advocated by the Buddha of the *Nikāyas*. But saying what that epistemology is *not* immediately raises the question what it *is*. If the Buddha did not advocate a search for knowledge in a way that is recognizable as scientific or proto-scientific, what means of pursuing knowledge did he advocate? How did he understand ‘knowledge’, ‘truth’ and the like? The present paper is offered as the beginning of a renewed attempt to answer those questions. I approach the task through an examination of one *sutta*, the *Brahmajāla*.

The first *sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*, the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, is well known as a list of wrong or false doctrines. Walshe entitles his translation, ‘What the Teaching is Not’ and Bhikkhu Bodhi, in the introduction to his translation, calls the positions listed here ‘wrong views’ that must be relinquished to make way for ‘right views’ (Bodhi 2007, 3). Interest in the *Sutta* has, accordingly, often been in how it delimits the doctrines of the *Nikāyas*. My interest here is rather epistemological. As a critique of views, there must be some epistemological standpoint in terms of which the critique is made: in what sense are the views wrong and by what criteria are they wrong in that sense? What hints does the critique make about what sorts of views might be right and the criteria for judging them so?

I take the *Brahmajāla Sutta* to be a critique of answers to questions of ultimate concern. In the cultural milieu of the time, that would have included issues of karma and rebirth, *saṃsāra*, and liberation from it, *vimutti*. Those issues included both how karma and rebirth function and whether or not they are real. For Buddhism, as for many, but not all, of its sister movements, *saṃsāra* was taken as a reality and liberation was to be achieved through knowledge, or, at least, through dispelling ignorance. The urgent question, then was, 'What knowledge, and what *kind* of knowledge, is liberating?' and, hence, the question how such knowledge was to be acquired takes on an urgency and ultimacy of its own. What was required is what I shall call an epistemology of ultimate concern, that is to say, epistemology from the perspective of ultimate concern and that is capable of approaching issues of ultimate concern. I attempt here to extract important features of such an epistemology, on the assumption that it is at least implicit in the critique given in the *Sutta*.

In matters of ultimate concern, I would argue, it is insufficient simply to generate statements that are true and to judge given statements as true or false. The judgement *that* God or the soul does or does not exist, or that dependent origination does or does not occur, yields only neutral bits of information that, moreover, remain contingent, since the judgement may always turn out to have been flawed. What is required, and indeed the point of religious teachings, is not a database of true statements that can be retrieved as needed, not information, but a fundamental transformation. An epistemology of ultimate concern then must yield at least two results:

First, it must yield certainty. We would not stake the ultimate (however conceived) on probabilities and the like; Pascal's wager, for example, is not the ultimate commitment that is meant by religious 'belief'. Scientific methods, then, whose results are by definition tentative, are inadequate to questions of ultimate concern.

Second, the epistemology must yield transformation. That is to say, the knowledge, or the search for it, transforms the knower in some fundamental way.

Of course, certainty may be a matter of *choice*, of a commitment that goes beyond reason and evidence, as in the Christian idea of faith; transformation, in turn, might be intimately connected with the choice or commitment that yields certainty, again, as in Christianity where the act of faith is both the act of knowing and of accepting salvation. In saying this I only mean to illustrate the difference between an epistemology of ultimate concern and an epistemology of everyday and scientific concern; I emphatically do not mean to suggest any similarity between Buddhist epistemology and Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

The *Sutta* itself is open to multiple interpretations and I turn often to the commentaries for clarification. I have relied on Walsh's and Bodhi's translations of the *Sutta*, and Bodhi's translation of the commentary and sub-commentaries, turning often to the original Pali as well. It is to be acknowledged that the following is largely conjectural, put forth as hypotheses for verification or falsification through broader studies of the *Nikāyas* and their commentaries. It is further to be acknowledged that these conjectures themselves involve projections of mod-

1. The distinction I am making here may be similar to the post-*Nikāyan* distinction between *sammuti-sacca* and *paramattha-sacca*, truth from a conventional perspective and truth from an ultimate perspective; however, I shall not pursue that possibility here.

ern orientations upon the material, as have interpretations of Buddhism that see it as empirical, rational, and scientific. In particular, the present interpretation applies phenomenological orientations to the material.<sup>2</sup> Further work will require attempts to situate these interpretations within the culture of ancient India, with adjustments as necessary and all the hermeneutic circularity that that involves.

I begin by looking at the *Sutta* in the usual way, as a list of problematic propositions. In what sense are the views problematic? Difficulties with this approach lead to a shift of focus from the views themselves to the framework in which they are presented. Based on that framework, I suggest that the object of the critique is an epistemological standpoint as much as it is propositional content. I conclude by suggesting a positive epistemology implicit in the *Sutta* that involves an altered epistemological standpoint amounting to a transformation of the mode-of-being of the questioner.

### PROPOSITIONS AS THE OBJECT OF CRITIQUE

The *Brahmajāla Sutta* is typically taken, naturally enough, as giving a list of false doctrines, thus propositions, along with the reasons, or grounds, that the various *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* have for believing them (for example Bodhi 2007, v, 3; Rhys Davids 1899).<sup>3</sup> Except for the ‘Eel-wrigglers’, whose views are not propositions at all, those grounds are either experience or reason. The Commentary and Sub-commentary recognize that these are not mutually exclusive, as views based on experience also involve acts of inference from what is experienced to what is not (Bodhi 2007, 135), and as views based on reason often are inferences from experience as well (Bodhi 2007, 138). Although no specific critiques of the propositional content of the views or of their derivations are immediately evident in the *Sutta*, several implicit criteria for branding them as problematic are easily inferred.

Many of the views could be critiqued as inferences drawn from insufficient data (Rhys Davids 1899; Jayatilleke 1963, 354–355). That data often comes from meditatively induced trance, *jhāna*, yielding, for example, past-life memories. Those memories are taken to be veridical by the Buddha, yet the conclusions based on them, that the world and self are eternal (views 1–3), or that some beings are eternal while other’s are not (views 5–7), are problematic in some sense; presumably the Buddha holds the conclusions to be false. Although the memories extend, in some cases, to millions of lifetimes through many contractions and expansions of the cosmos, they evidently provide insufficient evidence for the relevant views. This seems like a reasonable interpretation, especially, for the partial eternalists (views 5–7) whose limited past-life memories left them with the impression that there were one or more deities who remained forever in heaven: while the partial eternalists themselves fell from heaven, their reasoning seems to go, the deities who remained behind must therefore be eternal. Those with

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2. The reader will notice the influences especially of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, but the influence is impressionistic and I make no attempt here to identify specific linkages.
  3. I see little reason for accepting Jayatilleke’s presupposition that these represent 62 ‘schools’ (evident throughout, 1963, e.g. 121, 244) of thought, although various movements would have held one or more. In any case, he treats them, in the end, as propositions, formulated and defended in various ways.

more extended memories (views 1–3), on the other hand, had sufficient data at hand to transcend the anthropomorphic conclusions that some deities are eternal. For them, ‘the self [*attā*] and the world [*loka*] are eternal, barren like a mountain-peak, set firmly as a post. These beings rush round, circulate, pass away and re-arise, but this remains eternally’ (DN I 16).<sup>4</sup> Thus, the greater data behind views 1–3 show correctly, from the Buddhist point of view, that no personal beings are eternal, leaving only, but incorrectly, the impersonal *attā* and *loka*.

None of these *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas*, however, actually experienced the self, the world, or eternity as such. Indeed, interpreting eternity temporally, as forever, which certainly seems to be the case here, no amount of data would justify the inference with any certainty, since forever is always infinitely longer than any span of experience. The only thing that could give any of these conclusions certainty is the presupposition that *something* is eternal, with experience invoked to identify exactly *what* that something is. That presupposition would help to explain also the eternalism and partial eternalism that is ‘hammered out by reason’ (views 4 and 8) but that go unexplained in the *Sutta*. Bodhi indeed, understands presuppositions as giving rise to all the views, citing the *Samyutta-nikāya* in support of his interpretation (Bodhi 2007, 7). According to the cited passage, the 62 views arise owing to *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* — views which see a (permanent) self as somehow related to the *khandhas* — and in the absence of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* they do not exist (SN IV 287).

The operation of unexamined presuppositions seems especially evident in the partial eternalist positions. For the views based on experience, again, the reasoning is that since those beings who fell from heaven are not eternal, those deities who remained must be. For the view based on reason, the reasoning is that since the senses are clearly not eternal, consciousness must be. These positions amount to arguments from lack of evidence, that is, they implicitly take the absence of evidence as proof: given a cosmos consisting of A, B, and C, since eternity is not found in A or B, it must be present in C — again, on the presupposition that *something* is eternal. It is interesting that the reasoner here (view 8), like the Buddha, examines the senses directly. He apparently does not, however, subject consciousness itself to examination, for, as the Buddha often pointed out, consciousness is in a constant state of flux as well.

The problem of insufficient data is evident in many of the other views as well. The chance-originationists based on experience (view 17) cannot remember any lifetimes earlier than their previous existence as non-percipient beings, and thus conclude that they came into being out of nothing. If the partial-eternalists argued from the lack of evidence to existence, the chance-originationists argue from the lack of evidence to non-existence. Similarly, however, for the conclusion to be supportable they would have to assume that their, in fact, limited experience was exhaustive.

The assumption that limited experience is exhaustive is evident in an interesting way among those who assert the annihilation of the self after death (views 51–57) and *Nibbāna* here-and-now (views 58–62). In these, those who assert each subsequent view, posit the existence of a more refined self, based on more refined

4. Unless otherwise noted, translations are from Walshe. References are to the PTS Pali version, cross-referenced in Walshe.

experience, each with the apparent assumption that the experience is exhaustive: 'There is such a self as you say. ... But ... there is another self. ... You don't know it or see it, but I do' (DN I 34). Of course the prevailing presupposition in all these is that there is a self, or a hierarchy of selves, and that the only question is: What exactly is it? Another presupposition, operative for the annihilationists, is that since the self is produced, born of a father and a mother, it must eventually cease (DN I 34). That is, that which is of a nature to arise is also of a nature to cease. That, of course is also an important Buddhist presupposition, and while annihilationism itself is certainly an object of critique here, that presupposition, we assume, is not.

Another epistemological problem that may be inferred from the *Sutta* is that experience is not necessarily veridical. Positions 9 through 11 argue, based on trance experiences, that the universe is or is not infinite in extent. One yogi says that the world is finite because he has *seen* the edge, another that it is infinite because he has *seen* it so. These are straightforward descriptions of experience, but the disagreement among them says that trance experience can be misinterpreted or even hallucinatory. Having 'attained to such a state of concentration that he dwells perceiving the world as finite' (DN I 22) suggests that the experience may be an artefact of the meditation technique, and the Commentary supports that suggestion (Bodhi 2007, 162). If there are unwarranted presuppositions here, they are that the experience reveals the objective world and that it does so exhaustively.

There are also hints in the *Sutta* that the search for truth requires objectivity in the sense of avoiding the influence of emotions and desires. In the preamble, the Buddha tells his *bhikkhus* that when others praise the Buddha and the *Saṅgha*, they must not be elated, because elation would cloud their judgement of the specific ways in which the praise was correct. Then he tells them not to be dejected or angry when others criticize the Buddha and the *Saṅgha*, because those emotions would cloud their judgement of the specific ways in which the criticism was incorrect. Towards the end of the *Sutta*, the Buddha asserts that each of the views is 'merely the feeling [*vedayitam*] of those who do not know and see, the worry and vacillation of those immersed in craving' (DN I 40), again hinting at the need for emotional detachment. Bodhi worries that a view is not literally a feeling, and interprets the phrase as 'a device ... for driving home an important point, ... that views are fabricated and proclaimed because they satisfy the cravings and desires'. Bodhi elaborates that we tend to believe what we want to be true and what feels good, and that our investigations tend to confirm those beliefs; our cravings, in other words, distort our understanding of reality (Bodhi 2007, 32–33).

On this reading, the Buddha of the *Brahmajāla Sutta* would seem to have had a surprisingly modern grasp of certain epistemological problems: reason alone is never sufficient. Empirical methods yield only probabilities. Even accurate data, for example, past life memories, may be interpreted incorrectly, particularly by drawing conclusions on the basis of insufficient data and assuming limited data to be exhaustive. Unexamined presuppositions lead to projecting unwarranted interpretations onto the data and to drawing insupportable conclusions, for example by arguing from the absence of data, to the existence or non-existence of some entity or principle. Moreover, the *Sutta* seems to recognize that experi-

ence cannot be assumed always accurately to reflect the actual world: personal experience cannot be trusted without further ado. Finally, researcher bias, that is, emotions and their accompanying *vedanās*, tend to cloud judgement. Bhikkhu Bodhi (2007, 15–16) writes:

Speculative views are erroneous because they stem from a false apprehension of things. ... They *superimpose* on the concrete actualities an entirely imaginary character [originating] in subjective biases rather than on *detached observation* and clear comprehension. (First emphasis in original; second added).

Given the common assertion that Buddhist doctrine is based on experience, one familiar with the scientific paradigm might expect corrective measures to ensure the veracity of knowledge based on experience. For example, repeatability (multiple researchers record the same data when making observations under the same conditions) to ensure the objectivity of the data, peer review to neutralize researcher bias, hypothesis formation and attempts to falsify them as means of exposing insupportable presuppositions and of moving incrementally closer to an accurate understanding of the world.

Although there is no doubt a great deal of validity to the above reading,<sup>5</sup> there are problems with it. In this *Sutta*, the Buddha does not explicitly articulate any such criteria for declaring the views problematic; neither is any remedy given for correcting these problems. It is true that, after listing the views, he says they are only *vedayita*, leading to Bodhi's interpretation that feelings distort understanding. But then the Buddha says that the views are conditioned by *phassa* (contact), leading to *vedanā*, seeming to identify *phassa* as the ultimate culprit. But eliminating *phassa* would constitute a thoroughgoing rejection of *any* experience as a basis of knowledge, and that cannot be the Buddha's intention. Indeed, he does not propose *eliminating vedayita, phassa, and vedanā* but *knowing* them. Moreover, the word here is *vedayita*, which could be translated 'experience' as much as 'feeling', and while the Commentary makes it clear that the affective tone, thus *vedanā*, is paramount in the experience (Bodhi 2007, 197), we may understand the views as the ways in which reality is experienced by those immersed in craving. The Commentary, indeed, suggests that the views, like experience, are *caused* by feeling, ignorance, and craving. Thus we might read that: the views are experience arising from contact leading to feeling. There is then no need to posit, with Bodhi, a (rather obscure) rhetorical device used to drive home a point. But also, considering the views as experience, moves us away from considering them as propositions, thus as doctrines, or even heresies.

It is also true that elsewhere in the *Nikāyas* the Buddha criticizes inferences drawn from insufficient data, for example, in the famous simile of the blind men and the elephant (Ud. 65–69). Yet, taken to its ultimate conclusion, that criticism would apply to the Buddha's own teachings as well, for example, on karma and rebirth. The Buddha has seen the rebirths of others in accordance with their deeds, but he has not seen the rebirths of *all* others, and his empirical observations

5. Jayatilleke (1963) has identified evidence of similar epistemological sophistication throughout the *Nikāyas*. For example: criticism of inference from insufficient evidence (462ff), the need for emotional detachment (430), the need to avoid unexamined presuppositions (272ff). Mindful and probing discussions amongst the community of meditators, and between a meditator and his teacher, might also be seen to have some analogy to 'peer review'.

can therefore only yield the *probability* of a universal law of karma. Moreover, the insufficient-data critique as applied to the progressively more subtle concepts of self based on progressively more subtle experience, each imagining itself to be exhaustive (views 51–62), turns back on the Buddha’s own experience and teaching. How do we know — how did *he* know — that the *Nibbāna* that he experienced was the ultimate? For that matter, how do we know — how did he know — that his memories of past lives and his visions of the fates of others were veridical?

What about the problem of unexamined presuppositions? The Commentary lists as grounds for views (*diṭṭhi-tthāna*), ‘the aggregates, ignorance, contact, perception, initial thought, unwise reflection, evil friends, and the voice of another’ (Bodhi 2007, 142). While that does not exclude logical inference from presuppositions as a culprit in generating views, it gives more of the sense that the views express the totality of the *person* situated in the world in a particular way: a mode-of-being. In the *Samyutta* passage cited by Bodhi (SN IV 286), moreover, it is not at all clear that logical inference from the proposition ‘there is a self’ to the propositions of the views is intended. It is, moreover, difficult to imagine the evasions of the Eel-wrigglers as inferences from that, or any, proposition.<sup>6</sup> I would rather take *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* in the *Samyutta* passage as a mode-of-being in the world for which the 62 views obtain, perhaps as refinements of that mode-of-being, whether or not *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* is articulated as a proposition.

Another problem with reading the *Sutta* as a list of false propositions is that, although some of the 62 views must be false (some are mutually contradictory), they cannot all be false in terms of Western propositional logic. Taking views 9 through 12 as false we get:

- A. It is not the case that (view 9) the world is finite:  $\neg(Fw)$
- B. It is not the case that (view 10) the world is infinite:  $\neg(Iw)$
- C. It is not the case that (view 11) the world is both finite and infinite:  
 $\neg(Fw \ \& \ Iw)$
- D. It is not the case that (view 12) the world is neither finite nor infinite:  $\neg(\neg Fw \ \& \ \neg Iw)$

If all the views are false, then A, B, C, and D must all be true (A & B & C & D). However, D directly contradicts (A & B). If something’s being infinite is the same as its not being finite, ( $Ix \iff \neg Fx$ ), then A and B directly contradict each other as well, and C is a tautology. It may be objected that the world may be infinite in one direction and finite in another, and that in fact is what view 11 says. Now, view 11 is presented as an explicit rebuttal of views 9 and 10, and view 10 explicitly says that view 9 is wrong. Clearly, views 9 and 10 claim that the world is either finite or infinite — not both; in other words views 9 and 10 presuppose ( $Ix \iff \neg Fx$ ) and, hence, both (view 9 & view 10) and (A & B) directly imply C ( $\neg(Fw \ \& \ Iw)$ ). However, view 11 allows both finitude and infinitude ( $Fw \ \& \ Iw$ ) by interpreting ‘world’ to mean ‘world horizontally’ and ‘world vertically’ thus, more properly, ( $Fw \ \& \ Iw$ ) rejecting the presupposition that ( $Ix \iff \neg Fx$ ) where ‘x’ is constrained

6. Jayatilleke imagines these as representing schools of scepticism, hence as inferred from propositions about the impossibility of knowledge (1963, 121ff). That, however, is unsupported (Jayatilleke gives no justification for this interpretation): the *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* here are simply unsure of their knowledge of right and wrong (*kusala* and *akusala*). They make no suggestion that what is right and wrong is unknowable; indeed the contrary.

to represent the whole world. But in that case, A and B are both true, but C is false (A & B & ¬C), or, if you prefer, views 9 and 10 are false and view 11 is true; Jayatilleke insists that in the ‘four-fold logic’ the first two propositions are contraries rather than contradictories (1963: 341), replacing (Ix  $\Leftrightarrow$  ¬Fx) with ¬(Fw & Iw). That would allow (A & B & C), that is for views 9, 10, and 11 all to be false. In that case, view 12 (¬Fw & ¬Iw) would be true, satisfying Jayatilleke’s insistence that one and only one of the propositions in the four-fold logic must be true (see Jayatilleke, 1963: 345)<sup>7</sup> while falsifying the hypothesis that all of the 62 views are false. But, indeed, the Buddha never says in this *Sutta* that any of the views are ‘false’; neither does he suggest true propositions in their place.

Yet another problem is that there are not, after all, 62 distinct propositions here. Several views are identical as regards content (1–4, 17 and 18), while the four eel-wiggler views are not propositions at all, yielding only 54 distinct propositions. What distinguishes these 62 views, then, is not only propositional content. But if we shift our focus away from the propositional character of these views, then our focus also shifts away from their truth-value as the locus of what is problematic about them.

I would suggest that attempts to find an epistemology in this *Sutta* and in the *Nikāyas* in general, have failed to disentangle what I called above an epistemology of everyday concern from an epistemology of ultimate concern. As such, they may have assumed the ordinary presuppositions and categories of logic and empiricism, for example, that knowledge consists in true propositions about objective entities that exist independently of the observer and of the knowledge of them. If the epistemologies derived, such as the critiques inferred above, seem not quite to fit the material, it may be because those presuppositions and categories are inadequate for matters of ultimate concern.

I therefore attempt a different approach below.

#### MODE-OF-BEING AS THE OBJECT OF THE CRITIQUE

Bhikkhu Bodhi notes that the *Sutta* gives no ‘specific criticisms of the doctrinal positions it describes, nor does it even attempt to refute the general principles governing each class of views’ (Bodhi 2007, 8). He gives several plausible reasons for the omission, for example that disputation involves unhealthy states of mind and that refutations may already have been well known. Then he ‘cuts to a deeper level’ (Bodhi 2007, 8–10): the Buddha is less concerned with the content of these views than with showing the way beyond suffering. These views, as ‘metaphysical speculations’, according to Bodhi, are barriers to going beyond suffering, and thus must be relinquished along with such speculation. It seems evident that, from the Buddhist perspective, the answers to such questions as to the duration and extent of the cosmos, even if they were answerable with certainty, would not be liberating. The Buddha himself does not claim to know the answers, and, in this *Sutta*, the knowledge that is liberating, as we shall see, is knowledge of *vedanā* and of *phassa*.

I should like to pursue Bodhi’s insight that the primary concern here is other than the content of the views, asking what that something is without being drawn

7. I am not aware of any logically rigorous and consistent interpretation of the ‘four-fold logic’, but on the face of it, these four views cannot all be false.



back into the content. It is not, however, my intention to deny any propositional content at all, either to the Buddha's knowledge or to the views, but, for the moment at least, to put the focus elsewhere.

Bodhi himself cannot quite relinquish the notion that what is being criticized here is the content of propositions. When he writes that, 'In order to develop right view, wrong views must be eliminated, and in order to eliminate them it is necessary to know what they are' (Bodhi 2007, 3), he represents the *Sutta* as containing a list of false and harmful views, propositions, that, on the Buddha's authority, must not be believed by those who hope to attain *Nibbāna*. Bodhi's interpretation is plausible, based on the fact that the Buddha says that 'these standpoints [*ditṭhi-tṭhāna*], thus assumed and thus misapprehended, lead to such a future destination ... in the world beyond' (DN I 16; Bodhi 2007, 69). We shall shortly have occasion to question Bodhi's translation of this phrase, but it seems rather strange that simply assenting to the truth of a proposition would drive rebirth, or even that 'metaphysical speculation' *per se* would, until abandoned, bar one from liberation.<sup>8</sup>

The Eel-wrigglers' views, since they are manifestly not propositions, may be a good starting place. The first three of these involve those who do not know whether a thing is good or bad (*kusala* or *akusala*) and when asked, use evasions like: 'I don't say this, I don't say that. I don't say it is otherwise. I don't say it is not. I don't not say it is not' (DN I 26; Walshe). After this, the interlocutor might suppose that something had been said. But what distinguishes these views is not what the *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* say — content — but their motives for evading a direct statement. The *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* don't want to lie (view 13), they fear that a direct answer will bring about attachment (*upādāna*) in themselves (view 14), or that they will not be able to defend their answers if challenged (view 15). It is interesting that these responses have to do with knowledge of good and bad, rather than of fact. The first two motives, fearing to lie and avoiding attachment, seem to be legitimate motives from a Buddhist point of view. The Commentary points out that the *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* who expound these three views are at least clearly aware of their own ignorance concerning right and wrong, but that those who expound the next one (view 16) are not (Bodhi 2007, 172).

View 16 returns to matters of fact, and here the *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* evade questions about the existence of another world and about the existence of the *Tathāgata* after death. It is striking that this last evasion is identical to the Buddha's response to questions on the same topic. Should we say that the Buddha was evasive on these questions? Since this is a Buddhist *sutta*, it is more natural to suppose that what is problematic about this answer is something other than its content.

What is problematic about these four views must have something to do with the way in which they are adopted and expressed, for example, the motive behind them, the ignorance of the *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas*, their failure to acknowledge their ignorance publicly by saying 'I don't know', or perhaps the perspective from which these views are adopted and expressed.

8. The commentators themselves certainly do indulge in metaphysical speculation in offering refutations to some of the views (Bodhi 2007, 143–144).

We gain a clearer picture of what is at issue here if we resist distraction by the list of views and focus instead on its framework.

At the end of the long preamble in which the Buddha lists in interminable detail the ‘elementary, inferior matters of moral practice [for which] the worldling would praise the *Tathāgata*’, (DN I 11) he says (DN I 12):

There are other *dhammas*, *bhikkhus*, deep, difficult to see, difficult to awaken to, peaceful, excellent, not of the realm of reason (*atakkāvacarā*), subtle, to be experienced (*vedanīyā*) by the wise, which the *Tathāgata*, realizing (*sacchikatvā*) through his own higher faculty of knowledge (*abhiññā*), proclaims, and about which those who praise the *Tathāgata* as he really is would speak.<sup>9</sup> (Author’s translation)

The Buddha then says ‘What are those other *dhammas* ...?’, and launches without further ado into the first four views. One is left wondering exactly what those ‘other *dhammas*’ are. The Commentary glosses *dhamma* in this instance as ‘quality’ or ‘virtue’ (*guṇa*) and says that *dhammas* refer to the Buddha’s omniscience; that, the Commentary and Subcommentary clarify, is his ability to know, through direct experience and one at a time, whatever he wishes to know (Bodhi 2007, 122–124). The fact that the Buddha may have had such an ability, however, is not at all deep, difficult and so on to understand, and the explanation seems inadequate. In any case, the bulk of the *Sutta* is presented as an answer to the question and we continue, keeping the question in mind: for what, exactly, is the Buddha to be praised?

An interesting little refrain is repeated after each group of views (DN I 16–17):

*Tayaḍaṃ, bhikkhave, tathāgato pajānāti – ‘ime diṭṭhiṭṭhānā evaṃgahitā evaṃparāmaṭṭhā evaṃgatikā bhavanti evaṃ-abhisamparāyā’ti, taṅca tathāgato pajānāti, tato ca uttaritaraṃ pajānāti; taṅca pajānanaṃ na parāmasati, aparāmasato cassa paccattaññeva nibbuti viditā. Vedanānaṃ samudayaṅca atthaṅgamaṅca assādaṅca ādīnavaṅca nissaraṅca yathābhūtaṃ viditvā anupādāvimutto, bhikkhave, tathāgato.*

In Walshe’s translation:

These viewpoints thus grasped and adhered to will lead to such and such destinations in another world. This the *Tathāgata* knows, and more, but he is not attached to that knowledge. And being thus unattached he has experienced for himself perfect peace, and having truly understood the arising and passing away of feelings, their attraction and peril and the deliverance from them, the *Tathāgata* is liberated without remainder.

Bodhi translates:

[The *Tathāgata* understands:] ‘These standpoints, thus assumed and thus misapprehended, lead to such a future destination, to such a state in the world beyond’. He understands as well what transcends this, yet even that understanding he does not misapprehend. And because he is free from misapprehension, he has realized within himself the state of perfect peace. Having understood as they really are the origin and passing away of feelings, their satisfaction, unsatisfactoriness, and the escape from them, the *Tathāgata*, *Bhikkhus*, is emancipated through non-clinging.

9. *atthi bhikkhave, aññeva dhammā gambhīrā duddasā duranubodhā santā pañitā atakkāvacarā nipuṇā paṇḍitavedanīyā, ye tathāgato sayamaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedeti, yehi tathāgatassa yathābhuccaṃ vaṇṇaṃ sammā vadamānā vadeyyuṃ.*

(Bodhi 2007, 64)

The key phrases here are, in Walshe, ‘viewpoints thus grasped and adhered to’, ‘he is not attached’ and ‘being thus unattached’. For *diṭṭhi-tṭhānā*, Bodhi has ‘standpoint’ and Walshe has ‘viewpoint’. For *gahitā*, Bodhi has ‘assumed’ and Walshe has ‘grasped’. For *parāmaṭṭhā/parāmasati* Bodhi has ‘misapprehend’, Walshe, ‘adhered to’ and ‘attached’.

*Gahitā* means ‘grasped’ or ‘clutched’ and Bodhi has evidently taken it as a metaphor for ‘assumed’. *Diṭṭhi-tṭhānā*, literally ‘viewground’, could mean either the grounds from which the views arose or that the views themselves become grounds for further views or actions. According to the Commentary, it means both (Bodhi 2007, 141). *Parāmaṭṭhā/parāmasati* means to touch, hold on to, to stroke or caress and the like, with connotations of being under the influence of or seduced by the object.<sup>10</sup> The image suggests attachment more than misapprehension, but also a fascination with, a repeated handling, thus a reviewing or rehearsing of the viewground. The image suggests as well that the viewground in some sense demands or requires sustenance through rehearsal. The Commentary and Subcommentary clearly support the idea of a seductive repetition or rehearsal of views (Bodhi 2007, 127), interpreting *parāmaṭṭhā* in terms of repetition (Bodhi 2007, 142). Bodhi’s translation is evidently rather interpretive, assuming the *Sutta* to be a critique of propositions and taking *gahitā* and *parāmaṭṭhā* to be metaphors for cognitive operations.<sup>11</sup> We might rather translate, perhaps no less interpretively than Bodhi: ‘These views in their grounds and in their being grounds, anxiously held and sustained through rehearsal lead to ...’ and that the *Tathāgata* is ‘not stuck in rehearsal’. That suggests something quite different from the inferential progression suggested by ‘assumed’ and ‘misapprehended’, or even the rather moralistic and static psychological condition suggested by Walshe’s ‘grasped’ and ‘adhered to’.

The two words variously translated as ‘understand’, ‘realized’, ‘experienced’, and ‘know’ in the passage, are *pajānāti* and *viditā*. *Pajānāti* means penetrating (*pa*) knowledge (*jānāti*); *jānāti* is much like the English ‘to know’ with all its ambiguities, including ‘to be aware of’, ‘to be acquainted with’ ‘to discern’ and the like. *Viditā* (past participle of *vindati*), in turn, means known, found (out). Thus the passage could be translated:

This, *bhikkhus*, the *Tathāgata* clearly discerns (*pajānāti*): These views in their grounds and in their being grounds, thus held, thus rehearsed lead to such and such destinations in the next world. This the *Tathāgata* clearly discerns, and he clearly discerns what is higher as well. This discernment he does not rehearse; not rehearsing, he discovers/knows (*viditā*) perfect peace (*nibbuti*). Having discovered/known (*viditvā*), as they really are, *vedanā*, their arising and passing, their attraction and peril, and deliverance from them, the *Tathāgata*, *bhikkhus*, is liberated without clinging.

10. PED: ‘to touch, hold on to, deal with, take up, to be attached or fall a victim to’; The Chaṭṭa Saṅgāyana CD-ROM embedded dictionary has for *parāmasati* ‘To touch, rub, stroke, seize, handle’ and Buddhadatta’s *Concise Pali-English Dictionary* has ‘To touch, to hold on to; to be attached; to caress’.

11. Bodhi’s interpretations of these terms are those given in Nāṇamoli, *A Pali-English Glossary of Buddhist Technical Terms*.

Note that the first occurrence of *viditā* is translated ‘experienced’ by Walshe and ‘realized’ by Bodhi and the second as ‘understood’ by both, thus presenting the Buddha’s relation to the dynamics of *vedanā* as more conceptual and propositional than is his relation to ‘perfect peace’. The knowledge of perfect peace is comprehensible only as more experiential than conceptual, and the use of the same word suggests that the Buddha’s knowledge of the dynamics of *vedanā* is experiential as well.

Immediately following each instance of this refrain, the Buddha says that ‘These are the *dhammas*’ for which the Buddha is to be praised, exactly repeating the wording cited above. The Commentary reaffirms that *dhammas* refers to the ‘knowledge of omniscience expounded in the above passage’ (Bodhi 2007, 148). But specifically what knowledge?

What the Buddha knows is: (1) that such views are held and the grounds for holding them; (2) the karmic consequences of grasping and rehearsing view-grounds; and (3) perfect peace and *vedanā* as they really are. The first two are differentiated from the third by a different term for ‘knowledge’, *pañānāti*, as opposed to *vindati*, suggesting a different kind of knowledge. The first two are subordinated to the third in that the Buddha says that he knows also what is higher than the first two but does not say that he knows what is higher than the third; moreover he does not grasp and rehearse the first and second kinds of knowledge, as do the *sāmaṇa-brāhmaṇas*. Indeed, the third knowledge is presented as dependent on his not grasping and rehearsing the first and second (and what is higher). Most importantly, it is clearly this last, knowing *vedanā* as it really is, that is liberating, bringing perfect peace. That, in turn, strongly suggests that the *dhammas* for which he is to be praised have more to do with his knowledge of *vedanā* than with the other kinds of knowledge.

We may now revisit the odd impression that simply assenting to the truth of certain propositions would bar one from *Nibbāna* and lead to particular rebirths. It is rather grasping and rehearsing the viewgrounds that is said to be the problem. If we further accept the Commentarial definition of viewgrounds as the ‘aggregates ... contact ... unwise reflection’ and so on (Bodhi, 2007:142), then what is problematic about the 62 views may have to do with the grasping and rehearsal, thus the continual maintenance, of a *mode-of-being* which would manifest not only as particular beliefs but also as particular kinds of action, presumably actions leading to particular kinds of rebirth. Some such understanding is indicated in the *Sutta* itself when, toward the end, the Buddha says that the views are experience, *vedayita*, conditioned by *phassa* leading to *vedanā*, *tanhā*, *upādāna*, *bhava*, *jāti* (DN I 45), evoking dependent origination. Thus it is not intellectual assent to the truth of certain propositions, or even metaphysical speculation, that condemns one to a problematic rebirth, but rather the existential process of which the views are a part. And if dependent origination represents anything, it is the continual self-regeneration of a mode-of-being in the world. We return to this notion below.

The Buddha, by contrast, does not grasp and rehearse his own, presumably true, knowledge of the first two types, which, moreover is not represented in terms of ‘viewground’. The fact that the Buddha feels no need to say that he does not grasp and rehearse the knowledge of *vedanā*, suggests again that a different kind of knowing is involved, perhaps one which cannot be grasped and rehearsed.

However, *vedanās* are not so much *objects* of experience as they are constituent *parts* of experience. Hence this liberating kind of knowledge involves a mode of experience that is also aware of itself: in examining, say, the duration of the cosmos through past-life memories, the examination would simultaneously be aware of its own *vedanā*. That, experience-of-something that is aware of itself, as a kind of knowing, might be a candidate for a *dhamma* that is ‘deep, ... not of the realm of reason, subtle, to be known by the wise’.

#### TOWARD A NIKĀYAN EPISTEMOLOGY OF ULTIMATE CONCERN

Having completed the list of views, the Buddha says of each set that their proclamation is but the experience, *vedayita*, of those who do not know and see (DN I 40). What is it that they do not know and see? Certainly, many do know and see, for example, a number of their past lives. Retrocognition, moreover, as one of the *tevijjās*, is an important kind of knowing and seeing in the Buddhist project. Part of what they fail to know and see must be *vedanā*, since that is the decisive knowledge through which the *Tathāgata* is liberated (cf. Bodhi 2007, 197). The sense here seems to be that in focusing on the object of interest to the exclusion of the accompanying *vedanā*, an essential element is missed, and that because *vedanā* is excluded from explicit awareness and consideration, it distorts experience and the formulation of views, from behind as it were. The Commentary, Subcommentary, and New Subcommentary reinforce the sense that the views *miss* what is most essential. They note that what is actual (*paramattha*) are *dhammas* such as *vedanā* and *rūpa*, then go on to suggest that the views fail to represent things as they really are, that they ‘overshoot’, projecting unwarranted interpretations upon experience (Bodhi 2007, 129).

Jayatilleke’s (1963, 430) interpretation of this material is that *vedanā* gives rise to desire which, in turn influences our beliefs: we tend to believe something because it accords with our desires rather than because it is true. While that interpretation is not wrong, I think that it misses the point. What is to be known, I suspect, is *not* the truth-value *per se* of propositions about the extent of the cosmos, the eternity of the self and the like, but rather, what is to be known is just *vedanā*, with an immediate knowledge or familiarity. Said differently, the point is not to eliminate the influence of *vedanā* on perception and reasoning so as to be able to learn the objective truth of objective things, but to know *vedanā* and its dynamics.

The *Sutta* continues with the Buddha saying that the views, being *vedayita*, are conditioned by contact, *phassa*; without *phassa* they could not exist (DN I 43). The *Sutta* then carries the process forward through dependent origination: *phassa* conditions *vedanā*, *vedanā* conditions *taṇhā* and so on (DN I 45). Part of the sense here is that *vedanā* itself obscures or hinders awareness of *vedanā* by throwing the awareness beyond immediate *vedanā* in pursuit of ever-renewed *vedanā*. Conversely, scrutiny of immediate *vedanā* can break the entrapment that *vedanā* engenders. The Commentary notes that the liberating meditation is meditation on the very *vedanā* in pursuit of which ‘the sectarians enter the jungle of views’ (Bodhi 2007, 145).

As ordinarily conceived, phrases about reality, in order to have definite truth-value, that is, to be true or false, must be causally independent of their objects, of

the reality that they describe. The phrase, ‘This is the way things are’, in order to have a definite truth-value, to be a statement, must not be involved in the ‘things’. That is to say, the phrase cannot be causally conditioned; to the extent that it is so conditioned, that it is caused, it would be *real*, but neither true nor false. We might say, for example, that a waterfall is beautiful or that the force of the water expresses the height of the mountain from which it descended. We would not, however, say either that it is true or that it is false, partly because it is caused: it doesn’t assert anything *about* the height of the mountain, for example, rather the flow of the water simply is as it *must* be. Similarly, the warmth on my skin and the brightness in my eye are neither true nor false — they are *causally conditioned* by the sunlight of a sunny day. If, on the other hand, I say ‘it is sunny’, that utterance will be judged true or false based on conditioned experiences, but to the extent that the utterance is itself causally conditioned it has no more truth-value than the warmth on my skin. A psychiatrist does not so much treat his client’s utterances as true or false statements, as he treats them as evidence of underlying forces — whether subconscious desires or brain lesions — that is, as caused, rather like the force of a waterfall. The requirement that statements must be causally independent of their referents is implicit in Jayatilleke’s concern that *vedanā* distorts judgement and in Bodhi’s call for ‘detached observation’. However, this is not only a matter of independence from emotional bias, but more fundamentally, the independence of statements from causal conditioning. Indeed, a biased utterance is still a statement, that is, has truth-value, to the extent that it is not *caused*. We may admit of degrees, not of the truth or falsity of specific phrases, but of the degree to which they are independent of their referents, and thus potentially have definite truth-value.<sup>12</sup>

Now, by insisting that the 62 positions are *vedayita*, conditioned by *phassa*, leading to *vedanā* and so on, the *Sutta* implies that they are causally conditioned hence lack fully definite truth-value. But since these are represented as all possible positions on the past and future and so on, the *Sutta* implies that there are, *in principle*, no fully determinately true or false statements on these topics. The Buddha, indeed, here makes no positive assertions on these topics, not even so much as to say that the views are false, and many of them (views 1–12 and 16) are attempts to answer the famous ‘unanswered questions’ (see, e.g., the *Poṭṭapāda Sutta*, DN I 189).

Does that mean that the *Nikāyas* deny the objectivity of all knowledge? Elsewhere, the Buddha says about certain of his teachings, such as the four *Ariyan* truths and dependent origination, that they are true whether or not a Buddha arises, discovers, and teaches them, hence that they are unconditioned, or ‘objective’ (SN II 25–6, cf. AN I 286, on the three marks). But those claims of objectivity, are made of statements about conscious existence and do not, as Jayatilleke believes, imply a general affirmation the objectivity of knowledge about the objective world (1963, 448). On the other hand, the *Brahmajāla* critique would apply only to those positions that, like the 62 views, are ‘merely experience’, conditioned by contact and so on, leaving open the possibility that objectivity might be obtained, for example, through reflection on experience. It is

12. The other side of statement-reality independence is that the statements should not alter the reality that they describe. That problem, however, need not detain us here.

also important to recall that we are here looking for an epistemology of ultimate concern, which would have much higher standards than those serviceable for everyday life. I would suggest that the *Sutta* allows for sufficient objectivity, in the sense of independence of knowledge from the objects known, for everyday purposes, while calling into question the possibility of sufficient objectivity for matters of ultimate concern.<sup>13</sup>

What is wrong, then, with the 62 views? Not that they are false *per se* or even that they are conditioned *per se*, I would suggest, but that conditioned views are taken as unconditioned views and as knowledge that reveals or unlocks the ultimate. As such, they rather bar or conceal the unconditioned.

The Buddha then says that when a *bhikkhu* ‘understands as they really are the arising and passing away of the six bases of contact [*phass’āyatanānaṃ*] their attraction and peril, and the deliverance from them, he knows that which goes beyond all these views’ (DN I 45). But *phassa* is the concrete relation among the instrumentality of perception, and the *other* that is perceived, and consciousness;<sup>14</sup> essentially, then, *phassa* is rudimentary experience. To speak of someone discerning *phassa*, explicitly names experience that is also aware of itself as experience, or discerning that discerns itself, knowledge that knows itself, and so on. More precisely, it names experience that is immediately aware of itself as relation (which, of course, is not the same as knowing *that* experience is defined as relation). The *sāmaṇa-brāhmaṇas* evidently do not discern *phassa*, they know *only* their views, the Commentary says (Bodhi 2007, 208); thus, in their mouths, the views are not knowledge that knows itself as knowledge, the ‘viewground’ does not know itself as a perspective and as a multifaceted relation.

One thing, at least, that is wrong about the views, then, is that they adopt the radically objective epistemological stance of an ideal observer independent of and unaffected by the object of study, as though ‘things as they really are’ meant ‘things in themselves apart from the observer’.

It may be objected, from a modern perspective, that the problem is *subjectivity*, taking private experience as though it were both veridical and exhaustive, as though ‘things as they really are’ meant simply my personal, private experience. The effect is the same, however, in that reality is approached as an ‘in itself’ about which statements can be made which are true independent of any particular observer. Subjectivity, then, is not a stance that is aware of itself as a *stance*, but rather that takes inner experience as the *object* of interest, without awareness of itself as a mode-of-being *towards* an object. Thus, what we would call subjective experience is taken as objective, and the relations that constitute experience, or *phassa*, as such, are *missed*.

I do not mean to suggest here that there is no reality independent of the observer, much less that the *Nikāyas* make such a metaphysical assertion, but

13. Again, this may parallel the post-*Nikāyan* distinction between *sammuti-sacca* and *paramattha-sacca*, where *sammuti-sacca* is true from the conventional, everyday, perspective, and *paramattha-sacca* is true from an ultimate perspective – and the two need not coincide.

14. One might say: the conjunction of sense organ, object, and consciousness. That, however, may project a modern physiological perspective upon the material that is unwarranted. *Phassa* is described, for example at MN III 281, as: ‘Dependent on the eye and forms, eye consciousness arises; the conjunction of the three is contact’ (*cakkhuṇca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso*).

rather, first, that knowledge of such an observer-independent reality is always contingent, lacking the certainty demanded in matters of ultimate concern, and second, that what is called for is not merely knowledge of objective things, but also knowledge of the knowledge of objective things.

Adopting the stance of the ideal observer making statements about a reality that is causally independent of both the statements and the observer — since, as the *Sutta* seems to suggest, full independence may be unattainable — is a stance that takes the conditioned as unconditioned. But even if all experience is causally conditioned, it is conceivable that experience's immediate awareness-of-itself-as-conditioned might not be so conditioned. Experience might potentially be transparent to itself and the dynamics of awareness-of-something might be knowable 'as it really is' to itself. Indeed, the Buddha's and the *bhikkhus*' knowledge of the dynamics of *vedanā* and of *phassa*, the conditioning agents themselves, are presented as not conditioned.

In any case, it is difficult to imagine a knowledge of objects — what is in front of me, as it were — that would be transformative, whether the known objects are, for example, things in the world, inner experiences, memories of past lives, or doctrines. The potential for knowledge to be transformative would seem to evaporate to the extent that I adopt an objective attitude, attempting to know the thing in front of me as it really is without reference to or influence upon my own feelings, desires, presuppositions. That is, the very attempt to know things *objectively* as they really are deliberately resists personal transformation by the knowledge. This may partly explain Kassapa's objection to proto-scientific methods in the *Pāyāsi Sutta* (Evans, 2008). Bodhi's suggestion, noted above, that 'subjective bias' must be overcome with 'detached observation' (Bodhi 2007, 16) would thus seem to miss the point.

The Subcommentary's assertion that the views depend on 'ignorance of specific conditionality' (Bodhi 2007, 126), further suggests that the knowledge-of-conditionality itself might escape conditioning. But knowledge of conditionality could derive only from a knowledge of *phassa*, *vedanā* and so on, and that could only mean *phassa* knowing itself, in the sense of immediate self-awareness. That, in turn would entail a transformation of *phassa*.

A transformation of *phassa*, I argue, would be a transformation of being-in-the-world. An interesting discussion in the Commentary (Bodhi 2007, 201) will help to make my point. It is not, according to Commentary, that the six fields of perception (*āyatana*s, sense/instrument and object; Bodhi has 'bases') perform the function of *phassa* but rather that *phassa* itself performs the function. The *āyatana*s are incorporated within *phassa*, which is the conjunction of (*saṅgati*) instrument (sense base), object, and the relevant kind of consciousness. The Subcommentary adds that *phassa* does not adhere to the object on any one side. It is not the case, then, that the instrumentality of perception and perceptible objects, and, for that matter, consciousness, first exist as independent entities and only subsequently come into contact, but rather that *phassa* is in some sense prior, and that instruments, objects, and consciousness are elaborations of *phassa*. Or, better, perhaps: each individual *phassa* reveals instrument, object, and consciousness in its own particular way and what we know of world and self is always post-*phassa* knowledge, with the presuppositions of past experience, feelings, conditions, and so on already embedded in the raw experience itself, and necessarily so. *Phassa*, then,



is in some sense prior to the subject-object distinction while still being conditioned. Some sort of priority, without making it a metaphysical absolute, seems indeed necessary in the absence of an independent self, *attā*, that comes to an independently existing world, *loka*: one is always already *there* and *phassa* names that *being-there*. This interpretation makes more sense if we recall that *phassa* is always inseparable from, and implies, consciousness, feeling, historicity, and intention,<sup>15</sup> and, inverting the relation, that consciousness *always* is characterized by *phassa*, that is, consciousness is always consciousness of something *else*, thus always already and inseparably embedded in a context.

On the one hand, these reflections restate the thesis that a *total* causal independence of knowledge from the thing known, necessary for statements to have fully determinate truth-value, is impossible, and that any mode of investigation that depends on that independence is inadequate for issues of ultimate concern. But understanding *phassa* as *being-there* means that it refers to the unstable, suffering-related and self-less mode-of-being-in-the-world that, at any moment, *I am*. When the Buddha speaks of knowing *phassa* then, he indicates a mode-of-being that knows itself as a mode-of-being. Such a knowing would be a transformation of the mode-of-being that, properly effected, I suggest, is what is called 'liberation'.

## CONCLUSION

The *Brahmajāla Sutta* critiques epistemological standpoints that, as it were, negate, or overshoot, themselves in favour of the object of study, thus overshooting the only subject-matter that can be known as it really is. Such standpoints fail to yield the certainty required for matters of ultimate concern and fail to yield transforming knowledge.

The Buddha rather advocates an epistemological standpoint that is aware of itself as a standpoint and as a mode-of-being in the world. The dynamics of that mode-of-being can be immediately known as they really are with a certainty that is not available concerning the objective entities towards which the mode-of-being always already *is* a mode-of-being. And since the mode-of-being, the being-there or being-with, is what I am, and *all* that I am, it is a matter, perhaps *the* matter, of ultimate concern. Finally, for a mode-of-being to become aware of itself as a mode-of-being would be a self-alteration that may be called transformative.

But in that case it would not be the knowledge that the epistemological stance generates that is transformative but the stance itself. Or, since the knowledge is self-referential, the knowledge and the stance are different faces of the same transformation. Said differently, the epistemology, if it can still be called that, of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, is not so much concerned with the truth of statements, that is with the relations of statements to reality and themselves, as it is with the relations of *persons* to reality and to themselves: it is the *samaṇa-brāhmaṇas* rather than the views that are wrong and the *Tathāgata* as a mode-of-being, rather than his doctrines, that are to be praised.

15 The Commentary explicitly notes that what is at issue here is the 'pentad of contact (*phassa-pañcamakā dhammā*)' – *viññāṇa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *cetanā* and *phassa* (Bodhi 2007, 201).

## ABBREVIATIONS

References are to Pali Text Society editions

AN	<i>Anguttara-nikāya</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
PED	Pali Text Society <i>Pali-English Dictionary</i>
SN	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>

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