

The Dalai Lama's Dialogues

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The purpose of this paper is to construct and critique the Dalai Lama's conception and practices related to dialogue. I shall attempt to construct his 'theory' by simultaneously looking at both his practice and his writings. I will then offer a critique of his views. I hope to be able to show that His Holiness offers a profound understanding of dialogue—which, if put into practice, offers a number of fruitful consequences.

The central thesis of this paper is that one of the best ways to understand and make sense of the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is to see his beliefs and practices as particular instantiations of broader Buddhist teachings. In other words, one way of thinking about the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is to see his practices as instances of some basic Buddhist beliefs. Without going into an exhaustive account of these various beliefs, I want to suggest that four of them, in particular, are useful for understanding His Holiness's approach to dialogue. The four are: meditative practice, interdependent arising, compassion, and expedient or skillful means.

Key words: Dalai Lama, dialogue, meditation, interdependent arising (*pratīca-samuppāda*), compassion, skillful means (*upāya*)

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to construct and critique the Dalai Lama's conception and practices related to dialogue.¹ This is a worthwhile exercise not only because of the international influence of the Dalai Lama as a religious leader, but also because his beliefs and practices compel serious consideration in themselves (because of their sophistication and practicality), to say nothing of their truth and benefits.

Nevertheless, such a project is fraught with serious potential pitfalls, including, misconstruing the Dalai Lama's understanding, his practices, or both, and the very real possibility of merely characterising his views in a superficial way, because he does not offer a complete, self-contained discussion of the nature, purpose, and

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1 For my purposes I shall understand 'dialogue' to refer to 'meaningful interaction and exchange between people of different groups (social, cultural, political and religious) who come together through various kinds of conversations or activities with a view to increased understanding.' This is the provisional understanding specified by the *Journal of Dialogue Studies*.

goals of engaging in dialogue in any of his numerous publications. Furthermore, one must always keep in mind both the form and content differences among the various writings and teachings of His Holiness, as well as the differences among the various audiences to whom his messages are addressed. In short, one must be aware that the Dalai Lama does not speak the same way to every audience.

In order to mitigate these potential problems, I shall attempt to construct the Dalai Lama's 'theory' by simultaneously looking at both his practice (what he does) and his writings (what he says and teaches) in order to assess their coherence and consistency. I will then offer a critique of his views. I hope to be able to show that the Dalai Lama offers a profound understanding of dialogue which if put into practice offers a number of fruitful consequences.

The Central Thesis: the Dalai Lama and the Buddha

The central thesis of this paper is that one of the best ways to understand and make sense of the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is to see his beliefs and practices as particular instantiations of broader Buddhist teachings. In other words, one way of thinking about the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is to see his practices as instances of some basic Buddhist beliefs. Without going into an exhaustive account of these various beliefs, I want to suggest that four of them, in particular, are useful for understanding the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue. The four are: meditative practice, interdependent arising, compassion, and expedient or skillful means.

Meditative Practice

I have argued elsewhere (Laumakis 2008) that the single most important or most basic insight of the historical Buddha is the claim that who we are, and what we think exists, is a function of our mind and its cognitive powers. In other words, it is our mind and our various uses of it that determine how we see and understand our self, the world, and other things. Let me propose an analogy in order to help clarify what I take the Buddha to be claiming.

In the same way that I can maintain, shape, and transform my physical body through a proper diet and a serious weight-training and exercise program, I also can maintain, shape, transform, and indeed strengthen, improve, and perfect my mind by meditative practices and exercises. It is precisely this insight and power that the Buddha himself is said to have experienced and exercised under the Bodhi tree. In fact, it was Siddhattha Gotama's experiences with his first teachers, Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta, and their yogic meditative practices, that formed the foundation of both his enlightenment experience and his own understanding of the value of meditative practices.

It is not surprising that the Dalai Lama is firmly committed to this same belief and begins every day with two hours of prayer, meditations, and prostrations. He also ends each day with prayers and meditations, and has spoken on numerous occasions and written extensively about the value and power of meditation (Gyatso 2001a; 2000; 1999a; 1991a; 1984). In fact, one of his most recent books, *The Mind's Own Physician: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama on the Healing Power of Meditation* (2011), is a perfect piece of evidence and example of his commitment to both the value of meditative practice and the importance of dialogue. There is no doubt that the Dalai Lama's beliefs and practices in this regard can be traced all the way back to the earliest teachings of the historical Buddha.

Interdependent Arising

The second basic Buddhist belief that provides the background for understanding the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is the Buddha's account of causation. Without going into all of the details of this rather complex teaching, the simplest formulation of *paticca-samuppada* or 'interdependent arising' (which may be found in the *Nidanavagga*, or the *Book of Causation*, in Part II of the *Samyutta Nikaya*) says: 'Thus when this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.' (Bodhi 2000, 533-620)

Historically, the Buddhist tradition has generally interpreted the Buddha's teaching on 'interdependent arising' in one of two ways. First, it is considered to be an account of causation or the process by which 'things' come to be, exist, and change. Second, it is a claim about the ongoing ontological status of all beings, all phenomena, and all 'things' that exist, whether these 'things' and phenomena are beings of the mind or beings of the world. The former view, typically associated with the early Theravada tradition, tends to focus on the metaphysics of being and becoming, or more generally, the relationship of causes and effects, especially with respect to the generation and corruption of particular beings, i.e., human beings. The latter view, which is common among various Mahayana Buddhist traditions, focuses more broadly on the continuing existence, from moment to moment, of the entire network of extra-mental beings and mental phenomena as well.

The Dalai Lama is part of this latter tradition, and as a result, his teachings tend to focus very broadly on how 'things' and mental phenomena arise 'interdependently' or, more technically, how our interactions with 'things' (as well as our subjective reactions to them) arise out of causes and conditions that do not exist as 'independent agents' or discreet, particular substances, but as nodes in a fishnet lattice of dynamic happenings or events. This rather rich conception of causation also helps explain the Dalai Lama's ongoing dialogues with various constituencies (i.e., religious leaders,

scientists, political leaders, and common folks²), because he is firmly committed to the view that all such efforts will produce positive karmic consequences that will profoundly affect all participants who act peacefully with wisdom and compassion.

Compassion

The third basic Buddhist belief that provides the background for understanding the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is the Buddha's teachings on compassion. Like his teaching on 'interdependent arising,' there are two main interpretations of the Buddha's teachings on compassion or *karuna*. The Theravada interpretation sees compassion as one of the four 'divine abodes' (i.e., what makes our minds like divine beings) along with loving kindness, equanimity, and sympathetic joy. According to this tradition, these four habits and the meditative practices from which they arise not only help one overcome one's own negative mental states and expand one's mind and feelings outward to all beings, but they also lead to happiness in this life, a divine rebirth in the next, and ultimately to *nibbana* for the followers of the *arahant* path. The Mahayana tradition, on the other hand, sees compassion as the necessary complement to wisdom for those who follow the *bodhisattva* path. The basic difference is that the former, from the point of view of the latter, is self-centred in its focus and intentions, while the latter sees itself as selfless in its concerns to liberate all sentient beings from suffering. The Dalai Lama follows the latter interpretation and consequently has much to say about how wisdom and compassion are necessary for both happiness and the elimination of suffering (Gyatso 2013; 2006; 2005a; 2005c; 2005d; 2004a; 2003a; 2003b; 2001b; 1999c; 1997a; 1997b; 1995c; 1990b; 1984). In fact, one might say that wisdom is the aim of his many teachings and dialogues, while compassion is the outward manifestation of the content of that wisdom. They are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin, and arise interdependently in those who practise meditation; they are, for the Dalai Lama, both the seed and the fruit of meditative practice precisely because they lead to inner tranquility and well-being.

According to the Dalai Lama,

From my own limited experience I have found that the greatest degree of inner tranquility comes from the development of love and compassion.

The more we care for the happiness of others, the greater our own sense of well-being becomes. Cultivating a close, warm-hearted feeling for others automatically puts the mind at ease. This helps remove whatever fears or insecurities we may have and gives us the strength to cope with any obstacles we encounter. It is the ultimate source of success in life.

2 See Gyatso 2010; 2009; 2008; 2005b; 2001b; 1999b; 1999c; 1998b; 1998c; 1990a.

As long as we live in this world we are bound to encounter problems. If, at such times, we lose hope and become discouraged, we diminish our ability to face difficulties. If, on the other hand, we remember that it is not just ourselves but every one who has to undergo suffering, this more realistic perspective will increase our determination and capacity to overcome troubles. Indeed, with this attitude, each new obstacle can be seen as yet another valuable opportunity to improve our mind!

Thus we can strive gradually to become more compassionate, that is we can develop both genuine sympathy for others' suffering and the will to help remove their pain. As a result, our own serenity and inner strength will increase. (Gyatso n.d.a)

Clearly the Dalai Lama's understanding of compassion is anchored in his own personal experiences of its benefits, which he insists will not only put our own minds at ease but also help us remove the pain and suffering (*dukkha*) of others. As a result, his teaching echoes the Mahayana view that *dukkha* arises interdependently and is eliminated by both meditative practices and the cultivation of *karuna*.

Upaya

The fourth and perhaps most important background Buddhist belief (because of its practical rather than theoretical influence) for understanding the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue is to see it as an instance of *upaya* or 'skillful means', the traditional practice of the Buddha himself suiting the message of the Dharma to the capacity of his audience in order to lead them to enlightenment. There are at least three good reasons for this claim: two internal to Buddhist beliefs, and the other external to them.

The first piece of internal evidence, peculiar to Tibetan Buddhism, but also shared by other forms of Mahayana Buddhism as well, is the belief that the Dalai Lama is the fourteenth reincarnation of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who made a vow to postpone his own Buddhahood until he assisted all sentient beings in achieving Nirvana. According to the Dalai Lama's official web site (n.d.), 'The Dalai Lamas are believed to be manifestations of Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and the patron saint of Tibet. Bodhisattvas are believed to be enlightened beings who have postponed their own nirvana and chosen to take rebirth in order to serve humanity.'

The second piece of internal evidence can be found in the Dalai Lama's three main commitments in life: the promotion of basic human values or secular ethics in the interest of human happiness, the fostering of inter-religious harmony, and the preservation of Tibet's Buddhist culture, a culture of peace and non-violence (Official website of His Holiness the Dalai Lama n.d.). These three main commitments are

further specified by the Dalai Lama's efforts to promote the universal values of compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, contentment, and self-discipline (or what he refers to as 'secular ethics'), as well as his beliefs that all human beings are the same, and that all human beings want happiness and do not want suffering. In fact, his web site asserts, 'He remains committed *to talk about* the importance of these human values and share them with everyone he meets.' (Official website of His Holiness the Dalai Lama n.d., emphasis added) This commitment leads directly into his actions as a religious practitioner who is committed to promoting religious harmony and understanding among the world's major religious traditions. Although he recognises that there are real and serious philosophical and religious differences among the major world religions, the Dalai Lama is nevertheless committed to the view that all of these religions have the potential to help their followers become good human beings. As a result, he believes that it is 'important for all religious traditions to respect one another and recognise the value of each other's respective traditions.' (Official website of His Holiness the Dalai Lama n.d.) In fact, his commitment to fostering inter-religious harmony is the clearest evidence of his belief in and practice of *upaya*, because of his recognition of both the individual's concerns about the particular truths of his or her own traditions and beliefs, and the necessity of several truths and various religions in the larger world community. Finally, the Dalai Lama, as a Tibetan, is committed to working to preserve Tibet's Buddhist culture, and its beliefs and practices in cultivating peace and non-violence.

The third, external piece of evidence of the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue as in instance of *upaya* or 'skillful means' is the obvious pedagogical necessity of suiting one's teaching and message to one's audience. No one, for example, would begin to teach children how to play baseball by beginning with the infield fly rule, any more than one would begin teaching someone about Christianity by talking about the metaphysical subtleties of Transubstantiation or the mystery of the Trinity. The basic pedagogical truth, recognised by all great teachers, is that one must approach one's audience at their level of understanding in order to lead them to the truth of one's message. This is precisely what the Buddha himself did after his enlightenment, and it is the same kind of practice that the Dalai Lama is committed to in his own teaching practice and dialogues with others. It is to these particular dialogue practices that we now turn our attention.

The Dalai Lama's Practice

If I am correct about the Dalai Lama's approach to dialogue as an instance of *upaya* or 'skillful means' then one would expect to find evidence of this throughout his various books and public discussions. In fact, this is precisely what I think we find when we look at the practices of the Dalai Lama. In order to support this claim I will focus on just three areas of the Dalai Lama's teachings, because these three areas

provide clear and ample evidence of the Dalai Lama's practice. The three areas are inter-religious dialogue, science, and politics.

For those who are familiar with the teachings and writings of the Dalai Lama it should be obvious that he is deeply committed to promoting and fostering religious harmony and understanding among not only the world's major religious traditions but also among those who do not believe in any religion. However, in this section, I want to focus on the Dalai Lama's actions or practices before we turn to consider his writings.

As previously noted, the Dalai Lama's actions are informed by serious meditative practices. Although the Dalai Lama sees himself as 'a simple Buddhist monk', that assertion is clearly contradicted by his schedule and numerous speaking engagements. Even though his web site offers an account of his routine day, it is obvious from his schedule and travels that his 'routine day' is the exception, rather than the rule of his daily activities. For example, forty years ago, the Dalai Lama made his first visit to the West, when he visited twelve countries in seventy-five days. During the last ten years alone, he has made more than 110 trips to various countries, including: Italy, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Poland, Latvia, Hungary, Mexico, and the UK. In addition to these visits—which often extend for days and even weeks—he also spends a great deal of his time visiting numerous cities throughout India where he lives in exile.

He has met with presidents, princes, Prime Ministers, Nobel Laureates, chancellors, governors, Popes, Archbishops, Imams, Kings and Queens, and various other governmental Ministers from countries around the world. He also has held audiences and delivered numerous talks to millions of ordinary people throughout the world, and his teachings and messages can be easily accessed at his official website.

Inter-Religious Dialogue

As is to be expected, his messages include a variety of talks on Buddhism, compassion, religious harmony, world peace, and Tibet. His efforts at inter-religious dialogue, in particular, have tended to focus on the idea of religious harmony and how to promote it, and he has claimed that the basic cause of most, if not all of our problems and conflicts, is our inability to control our agitated minds. In fact, he asserts that one of the most important features of all religions is that they offer strategies for controlling our mind and its biased and unsettled states. However, he also recognises that we naturally tend to play religious favoritism and focus on

the unique features of our own religious beliefs and traditions and, perhaps most importantly our differences with others, instead of making every effort to calm the source of all of our suffering—our agitated minds. As a result, the very thing that ought to be helping us achieve both inner and outer peace by teaching us how to settle our agitated minds leads us into more conflict and troubles.

Almost all of the Dalai Lama's efforts at achieving religious harmony tend to focus, at least to some degree, on the fundamental Buddhist idea that happiness is the result of an enlightened mind while suffering is caused by a distorted mind. The Dalai Lama, like the Buddha before him, asserts, 'A distorted mind, in contrast to an enlightened mind, is one that is not in tune with reality.' (Gyatso n.d.b) In short, an agitated or distorted mind simply cannot grasp reality, and as a result he urges all of us to use our own religious traditions and practices to settle our minds and ultimately achieve inner peace and social harmony. This is what he does every day.

Scientific Dialogue

In addition to these topics, he also has spoken about the environment, ecology, spirituality and nature, and reincarnation. With respect to the subjects of science and technology in general, and biology, psychology, and neuroscience in particular, and their value and uses, the Dalai Lama maintains that these pursuits have made tremendous advances and could provide profound benefits in terms not only of improving our understanding of ourselves as human beings but also with respect to our knowledge of and responsibilities toward the world and the environment. The Dalai Lama readily acknowledges his debt to his various teachers and eminent scientists (i.e., Carl von Weizsacker and Davis Bohm in physics and quantum mechanics, and Robert Livingstone and Francisco Varela in biology, psychology, and neuroscience), and admits that his conversations, conferences, and dialogues with them through the auspices of the Mind and Life Institute (<http://www.mindandlife.org>) have helped inform his own understanding of the value, uses, and indeed, convergence of science and spirituality.

According to the Dalai Lama,

Although Buddhist contemplative tradition and modern science have evolved from different historical, intellectual and cultural roots, I believe that at heart they share significant commonalities, especially in their basic philosophical outlook and methodology. On the philosophical level, both Buddhism and modern science share a deep suspicion of any notion of absolutes, whether conceptualised as a transcendent being, as an eternal, unchanging principle such as soul, or as a fundamental substratum of reality. Both Buddhism and science prefer to account for the evolution and emergence of the cosmos and life in terms of the complex interrelations of the natural laws of cause

and effect. From the methodological perspective, both traditions emphasise the role of empiricism. For example, in the Buddhist investigative tradition, between the three recognised sources of knowledge - experience, reason and testimony - it is the evidence of the experience that takes precedence, with reason coming second and testimony last. This means that, in the Buddhist investigation of reality, at least in principle, empirical evidence should triumph over scriptural authority, no matter how deeply venerated a scripture may be. Even in the case of knowledge derived through reason or inference, its validity must derive ultimately from some observed facts of experience. Because of this methodological standpoint, I have often remarked to my Buddhist colleagues that the empirically verified insights of modern cosmology and astronomy must compel us now to modify, or in some cases reject, many aspects of traditional cosmology as found in ancient Buddhist texts.

Since the primary motive underlying the Buddhist investigation of reality is the fundamental quest for overcoming suffering and perfecting the human condition, the primary orientation of the Buddhist investigative tradition has been toward understanding the human mind and its various functions. The assumption here is that by gaining deeper insight into the human psyche, we might find ways of transforming our thoughts, emotions and their underlying propensities so that a more wholesome and fulfilling way of being can be found. It is in this context that the Buddhist tradition has devised a rich classification of mental states, as well as contemplative techniques for refining specific mental qualities. So a genuine exchange between the cumulative knowledge and experience of Buddhism and modern science on wide-ranging issues pertaining to the human mind, from cognition and emotion to understanding the capacity for transformation inherent in the human brain can be deeply interesting and potentially beneficial as well. In my own experience, I have felt deeply enriched by engaging in conversations with neuroscientists and psychologists on such questions as the nature and role of positive and negative emotions, attention, imagery, as well the plasticity of the brain. The compelling evidence from neuroscience and medical science of the crucial role of simple physical touch for even the physical enlargement of an infant's brain during the first few weeks powerfully brings home the intimate connection between compassion and human happiness. (Gyatso n.d.c)

Given these claims, there can be little doubt that His Holiness is firmly committed to the convergence of science and spirituality, and that this belief is anchored in the fruits of his own dialogues and discussions with scientists (and for which he was named the 2012 Templeton Prize Laureate). In fact, he has openly and readily admitted, on numerous occasions, that if particular claims of his own Buddhist tradition are out of harmony with the best scientific data and evidence, then he is willing to modify and even reject authoritative textual claims in precisely the same

way the Buddha himself did when he taught,

Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reflection on reasons, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think ‘The ascetic is our teacher.’ But when you know for yourselves,...then you should do or do not. (Thera and Bodhi 1999, vol. 3, 65)

Political Dialogue

Finally, in the realm of politics and, in particular, with regard to the status of Tibet, the Dalai Lama continues to insist that he is committed via any peaceful means possible to preserving Tibet’s Buddhist culture of peace and non-violence. He has made numerous appeals to world leaders, to all Tibetans, to the Chinese people and their government leaders, to the United Nations, and to all people of good will who have expressed concerns over the tragic events in Tibet, for peaceful and meaningful dialogue as the only way to achieve a lasting solution for his people. In fact, His Holiness has gone so far as to relinquish his political and administrative position and authority as head of state in favor of democratically elected leaders of the Tibetan Parliament-in-exile and the Central Tibetan Administration. As a result of his ongoing efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution to this matter he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal in 2007.

Most recently, His Holiness has been engaged in dialogues and discussions with his own people and the Chinese government over issues related to the matter of his reincarnation or the incarnation of the next Dalai Lama.

According to the Dalai Lama,

When I am about ninety I will consult the high Lamas of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Tibetan public, and other concerned people who follow Tibetan Buddhism, and re-evaluate whether the institution of the Dalai Lama should continue or not. On that basis we will take a decision. If it is decided that the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama should continue and there is a need for the Fifteenth Dalai Lama to be recognised, responsibility for doing so will primarily rest on the concerned officers of the Dalai Lama’s Gaden Phodrang Trust. They should consult the various heads of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions and the reliable oath-bound Dharma Protectors who are linked inseparably to the lineage of the Dalai Lamas. They should seek advice and direction from these concerned beings and carry out the procedures of search and recognition in accordance with past tradition. I shall leave clear written instructions about this. Bear in mind that, apart from the reincarnation recognised through such legitimate methods, no recognition

or acceptance should be given to a candidate chosen for political ends by anyone, including those in the People's Republic of China. (Gyatso n.d.d)

The Dalai Lama's Writings

In view of the evidence presented above, it is clear that the Dalai Lama is firmly committed to dialogue and discussion as a necessary vehicle for conveying truth and understanding. It should also be obvious that the Dalai Lama's teachings and views are informed by some of the most fundamental Buddhist beliefs (i.e., the importance of meditative practice, interdependent arising, compassion, and *upaya*). In fact, I want to argue that his public audiences, international visits, and published writings are really just so many different attempts to expediently adapt his message with respect to his three main commitments (i.e., the promotion of basic human values or secular ethics in the interest of human happiness, the fostering of inter-religious harmony, and the preservation of Tibet's Buddhist culture of peace and non-violence) to his various audiences. In order to support this claim, I will focus my attention on just three³ works: *Toward a True Kinship of Faith: How the World's Religions Can Come Together* (inter-religious dialogue), *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* (Science), and his *Five Point Peace Plan* (Tibet).

In *Toward a True Kinship of Faith: How the World's Religions Can Come Together* (Gyatso 2010), the Dalai Lama explores how differences between religions can be genuinely appreciated without serving as a source of conflict. In it, he also asserts that the establishment of genuine harmony is *not* dependent upon accepting the claim that all religions are fundamentally the same or that they lead to the same place. According to the Dalai Lama, many religious believers fear that recognising the value of another faith is incompatible with having devotion to the truth of one's own. However, the Dalai Lama insists that a sincere believer can, with integrity, be a pluralist⁴ in relation to other religions without compromising commitment to the essence of the doctrinal teachings of their own faith. In fact, His Holiness often suggests⁵ that it is possible to see the truths of other religions through one's own eyes. In other words, he thinks it is possible to be a committed believer and simultaneously respect the beliefs of others and, perhaps most importantly, he

3 There are obviously many other writings that one could consider with respect to each of the three subjects that I am interested in. See the bibliography for more titles.

4 A pluralist is someone who is committed to the belief that more than one religion can lead its followers to ultimate truth. An exclusivist, on the other hand, thinks that only one particular religion is and can be true.

5 For example, in *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus* (Gyatso 1996), His Holiness not only reflects on the teachings of Jesus but also affirms the sacred in all religions.

thinks this is the only way to cultivate peaceful coexistence.

In this particular work, the Dalai Lama tries to show how the challenges and opportunities of globalisation and technological developments can move us away from traditional religious conflicts and cultural clashes and instead help us peacefully connect with one another in our shared humanity. He not only readily acknowledges that all religions confront the same perennial questions (i.e., Who am I? Where do I come from? Where will I go after death?) (Gyatso 2010, xii) but also admits that they each offer their own distinct responses to these questions. Moreover, he insists that this diversity of insight into the questions and problems that we confront has the potential for inspiring heartfelt dialogue that can enrich everyone's pursuit of wisdom and happiness.

The Dalai Lama further claims that all faith traditions, in one form or another, appeal to compassion as a guiding principle for living a good human life. He firmly believes that it is the duty of all people of faith who aspire to spiritual perfection not only to affirm the fundamental value of compassion, but also to work to develop a profound respect and appreciation of the value of other faiths. On the basis of these beliefs, he thinks it is possible to cultivate both genuine respect and peaceful coexistence.

In *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* (Gyatso 2005b), the Dalai Lama is concerned with how the different approaches of science and religion to understanding ourselves, our universe, and one another can be brought together in the service of humanity. After forty years of study with some of the greatest scientific minds as well as a lifetime of meditative, spiritual and philosophical study, the Dalai Lama offers an account of why both disciplines—science and spirituality—must be pursued in order to arrive at a complete picture of the truth. According to the Dalai Lama, science offers us various ways of interpreting the physical world, while spirituality helps us both understand and cope with reality. He also insists, quite appropriately, that the extreme view of privileging one at the expense of the other is impoverishing and falsifies reality. In fact, he insists that the purely scientific view that everything is reducible to matter and energy leaves out a huge range of human experience: emotions, yearnings, compassion, and culture. At the same time, he also recognises that holding unexamined spiritual beliefs, beliefs that are contradicted by evidence, logic, and ordinary experience, can lock us into narrow-minded fundamentalist misconceptions.

Through examinations of Darwinism and karma, quantum mechanics and philosophical insight into the nature of reality, neurobiology and the study of consciousness, the Dalai Lama draws significant parallels between a contemplative and a scientific examination of reality. 'I believe that spirituality and science are

complementary but different investigative approaches with the same goal of seeking the truth,' His Holiness writes. 'In this, there is much each may learn from the other, and together they may contribute to expanding the horizon of human knowledge and wisdom.' (Gyatso 2005b, 4)

At the very end of this book the Dalai Lama writes,

My plea is that we bring our spirituality, the full richness and simple wholesomeness of our basic human values, to bear upon the course of science and the direction of technology in human society. In essence, science and spirituality, though differing in their approaches, share the same end, which is the betterment of humanity. At its best, science is motivated by a quest for understanding to help lead us to greater flourishing and happiness. In Buddhist language, this kind of science can be described as wisdom grounded in and tempered by compassion. Similarly, spirituality is a human journey into our internal resources, with the aim of understanding who we are in the deepest sense and of discovering how to live according to the highest possible idea. This too is the union of wisdom and compassion.

Since the emergence of modern science, humanity has lived through an engagement between spirituality and science as two important sources of knowledge and well-being. Sometimes the relationship has been a close one—a kind of friendship—while at other times it has been frosty, with many finding the two to be incompatible. Today, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, science and spirituality have the potential to be closer than ever, and to embark upon a collaborative endeavor that has far-reaching potential to help humanity meet the challenges before us. We are all in this together. May each of us, as a member of the human family, respond to the moral obligation to make this collaboration possible. This is my heartfelt plea. (Gyatso 2005b, 208-209)

Finally, in his *Five Point Peace Plan*, the Dalai Lama offers a practical plan for addressing the situation on Tibet. Before considering the particulars of his plan, however, it is important to keep in mind that the Dalai Lama's efforts at preserving Tibetan culture are directed to a number of different audiences. His speeches, messages, and appeals (which are perfect examples of his own use of *upaya*) are directed to 'all Chinese spiritual brothers and sisters—both inside as well as outside the People's Republic of China and around the world,' to 'all Tibetans,' to 'world leaders, Parliamentarians, NGOs and members of the public who have expressed their concern over the recent deeply saddening and tragic events in Tibet,' to the Members of the European Parliament, and also to the Assembly of the Tibetan People's Deputies (Gyatso n.d.e). His consistent message, skillfully adapted to these various audiences, has been the freedom of Tibetan people and the preservation of their Buddhist culture and identity.

His *Five Point Peace Plan*, which was addressed to the U.S. Human Right's Caucus in 1987, contains five basic components: first, the transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace; second, the abandonment of China's population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people; third, respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms; fourth, the restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste; and fifth, the commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples.

The Dalai Lama clarifies and explains each of these components and, as previously noted, his basic goal throughout the plan is the freedom of Tibetan people and the preservation of their Buddhist culture and identity. In order to support his claims, His Holiness appeals to the Buddhist notions of the value and importance of meditative practice, interdependent arising, and compassion precisely because each of these contributes to his on-going goal of achieving peace and non-violence.

According to the Dalai Lama,

We wish to approach this subject in a reasonable and realistic way, in a spirit of frankness and conciliation and with a view to finding a solution that is in the long term interest of all: the Tibetans, the Chinese, and all other peoples concerned. Tibetans and Chinese are distinct peoples, each with their own country, history, culture, language, and way of life. Differences among peoples must be recognised and respected. They need not, however, form obstacles to genuine cooperation where this is in the mutual benefit of both peoples. It is my sincere belief that if the concerned parties were to *meet and discuss* their future with an open mind and a sincere desire to find a satisfactory and just solution, a breakthrough could be achieved. We must all exert ourselves to be reasonable and wise, and to meet in a spirit of frankness and understanding. (Gyatso n.d.f, emphasis added)

The Goals of Practice and Writing: Harmony and Happiness

Even the most casual and superficial survey of the titles and topics of the Dalai Lama's numerous writings and speeches (see his official website for details) reveals his basic focus on doing everything he can to cultivate international peace, global harmony, and human happiness. In fact, one need go no farther than his homepage, www.dalailama.com, where one finds the following prominently displayed quotation (in Tibetan, Chinese, Hindi and English) from Shantideva, 'For as long as space endures, and for as long as living beings remain, until then may I too abide to dispel the misery of the world.' One cannot help but hear the echo of the teachings and

actions of the historical Buddha in this quotation, and there can be little doubt that these teachings and actions continue to inspire the His Holiness's ongoing efforts to promote both personal happiness and social harmony in the world.

Nevertheless, there appear to be some rather obvious criticisms that one might raise with respect to the Dalai Lama's conception of and practices related to dialogue. It is to these criticisms that I now direct my attention.

The Limits of Practice and Writing: What Have You Done for Me/Us Lately?

The most obvious criticism of the Dalai Lama's understanding and practices related to dialogue is that they are really just so much talk—with or without theoretical justification (depending on one's understanding of the teachings of the Buddha), but most definitely talk with too little or even no action. In other words, the real standard for judging the effectiveness and truth of one's teachings and practices with respect to dialogue is simply the pragmatic goal of producing effective, real world change. According to this view, words and good intentions may be necessary, but they are clearly not sufficient, to validate one's views and actions, because one's ultimate goal is not merely to change minds, but to change the world.

A second, practical, criticism of the Dalai Lama's understanding and practices related to dialogue is that they are simply too superficial—with little empirical evidence to show their potential to produce both long-lasting effects and the kinds of changes necessary to achieve all of his desired ends. In fact, it is precisely because so little has changed in Tibet during his exile, as well as the ongoing troubles seen throughout the rest of the world, that one cannot help but believe that there will always be those who simply refuse to be persuaded or motivated to change their thoughts and habits.

A third, more theoretical criticism of the Dalai Lama's understanding and practices related to dialogue is that they are too dependent on 'Buddhist' beliefs and principles that some would question as unjustified at best or find laughable at worst. Who, for example, given the Dalai Lama's own commitments to science (assuming he is to be believed) would take seriously his claims about reincarnation? Furthermore, it is easy to see how anyone who had serious reservations with respect to the question of reincarnation could easily doubt the veracity of other Buddhist beliefs and principles. After all, people of the world have had ample opportunity (more than 2000 years!) since the time of the historical Buddha, to put his teachings into practice, yet things definitely do not appear to be getting any better either on a global level, or especially in supposedly Buddhist countries. So why, one might wonder, ought anyone accept the teachings of His Holiness, especially because it is

rather obvious that they simply do not work?

Results Do Matter: Change Your Thinking and Change the World

As a tentative response to the previous objections, I would like to suggest that despite these criticisms, the Dalai Lama's teachings, like those of other great religious leaders, continue to be relevant today not because they have been tried and found wanting, but more precisely because they simply have not been tried—at least on a scale large enough to produce obvious and lasting results. Putting aside the subject of reincarnation, I think there continues to be a growing body of evidence⁶ that some of the basic teachings and principles of the Buddha are true. These include his teachings on the value and benefits of meditative practices, his teaching on interdependent arising, and the necessity of compassion.

The Dalai Lama's understanding and practices related to dialogue seem to me to be informed by what I claimed at the beginning of this essay to be the single most important or most basic insight of the historical Buddha, namely, that who we are and what we think exists is a function of our mind and its cognitive powers. If I am correct about this foundational idea, then one would expect the Dalai Lama to teach us how to shape, form, and use our minds in order to bring about the kinds of changes he thinks will happen, if we just change our thinking. And that is precisely what we see His Holiness doing in his writings and other activities when he meets with and discusses his views with people throughout the world.

Yet it is absolutely crucial to keep in mind that genuine dialogue can only lead to understanding when both or all parties to it are fully committed to realising that aim by taking the necessary steps to acquire the knowledge and understanding that will ultimately lead to the changes that are being sought. Perhaps it is equally important to recall and keep in mind the basic truth that no genuine teaching and learning takes place without the interdependent cooperation of both the teacher and his or her students. Both must do their parts, or the practice will fail. It seems that the Dalai Lama has done and continues to do his part. The real question is whether his audiences have done theirs.

For anyone who has had the opportunity to experience His Holiness in person, there can be little doubt that he radiates a certain undeniable quality or charm that exudes an aura of peace and tranquility. Those who have been in the presence of

6 See for example, most recently, his *The Mind's Own Physician: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama on the Healing Power of Meditation* (2011) and other evidence at <http://www.mindandlife.org>.

Mother Theresa, Pope John Paul II, and other spiritual leaders and practitioners have reported similar kinds of experiences. Fortunately, I have had the opportunity to experience this first-hand at a public talk with the Dalai Lama in Washington, DC and at papal Masses in Rome and Philadelphia.

Whatever the ultimate explanation for these experiences turns out to be, I can personally testify to their power and pervasiveness. In fact, even though I know there are purely psychological or other 'scientific' explanations for the phenomena, I do not and cannot doubt the veracity of my own experience. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that, like the Buddha, the Dalai Lama has convinced me that if I want to change the world, I have to change my thinking. The truth of that insight is the ultimate priceless fruit of genuine dialogue that is so much more than mere words.

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