

# The 'Sixty-two Views' – A Comparative Study

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## Abstract

The present paper offers a comparative survey of the sixty-two views, with a view to ascertaining their significance.

## I. Introduction

References to the sixty-two 'views' occur in various Buddhist texts, reflecting the degree to which this set has become a standard referent to views presumably held in ancient India. A detailed survey of these sixty-two positions can be found in the Brahma-Net Discourse, of which the following versions are extant:

1) The 梵動經,<sup>1</sup> the twenty-first discourse in the *Dīrgha-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation undertaken in the year 413 by 竺佛念, based on a text recited by Buddhayaśas, a text that was probably in Prākṛit and stemmed from a Dharmaguptaka line of transmission.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, this *Dīrgha-āgama* discourse will be referred to as "DĀ 21".

2) The 佛說梵網六十二見經, an individual translation (in the sense of not being part of a translation of an whole *Āgama*) whose rendering into Chinese the Taishō edition attributes to 支謙, a translator active during the third century – though according to modern scholarship this attribution is doubtful.<sup>3</sup>

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\* The present paper is an extract from my study and partial translation of DĀ 21 in Anālayo 2009.

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the title 梵動, Karashima 2006: 361 explains that "the translator(s) confused *-jāla* ('net') with *-cāla* ('moving'), both of which may have become *-yāla* in the underlying language, as is common in Middle Indic, including Gāndhārī".

<sup>2</sup> T 1, 1b10; cf. also the 高僧傳, T 2059 at T 50, 334b20. On the probable role of Buddhayaśas during translation cf. Silk 2006: 81-82. On the school of the *Dīrgha-āgama* cf. Demiéville 1951: 252-253; Brough 1962/2001: 50; Lü 1963: 242; Bareau 1966; Yinshun 1971/1983: 720; Waldschmidt 1980: 136; Mayeda 1985: 97 and Enomoto 1986: 25; on the language of the original cf. esp. Karashima 1994.

<sup>3</sup> T 21 at T 1, 264a-270c. Nattier 2008: 121 does not include T 21 among those works that can with reasonable certainty be attributed to 支謙.

In what follows, this individual translation will be referred to as "T 21".

3) The *Brahmajāla-sutta*, the first discourse in the *Dīgha-nikāya* of the Pāli canon transmitted by the Theravāda tradition.<sup>4</sup> In what follows, this *Dīgha-nikāya* discourse will be referred to as "DN 1".

4) A few Sanskrit fragments from Central Asia have preserved sections of a version of this discourse.<sup>5</sup> Recent findings of Sanskrit manuscripts from Afghanistan, containing considerable parts of the (Mūla-)sarvāstivāda *Dīrgha-āgama*, have made it possible to determine that the Sanskrit version of the *Brahmajāla-sūtra* was the last discourse in the (Mūla-)sarvāstivāda *Dīrgha-āgama*.<sup>6</sup> In what follows, Sanskrit fragments of the Brahma-Net Discourse (whenever available) will be referred to as "Skt. frgm.".

5) The *Tshangs pa'i dra ba'i mdo*, a version of the "Brahma-Net Discourse" rendered into Tibetan by an unknown translator at some point after the eighth century, presumably a (Mūla-)sarvāstivāda version of the text. In what follows, this Tibetan discourse will be referred to as "Tib. disc."<sup>7</sup>

6) A *sūtra* quotation from the Brahma-Net Discourse can be found in the *Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra*, 舍利弗阿毘曇論, apparently a Dharmaguptaka work,<sup>8</sup> which quotes the entire treatment of views.<sup>9</sup> In what follows, this *sūtra* quotation in the *Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra* will be referred to as "Śāri-putrābh.".

7) Another *sūtra* quotation from the Brahma-Net Discourse can be found in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa* – the *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* – a (Mūla-)sarvāstivāda work extant in a Tibetan translation undertaken by Jayaśri and Shes rab 'od zer at some point after the eighth century, perhaps in the eleventh century.<sup>10</sup> The *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā*

<sup>4</sup> DN 1 at DN I 1-46.

<sup>5</sup> Several of these fragments have been edited by Hartmann 1989: 46-57 and Hartmann 1991: 78-90. Other fragments have been edited in the series *Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden*, cf. SHT III 803; SHT III 882b (which, as pointed out by Skilling 1997: 470 note 8, could also be parallel to MN 102); SHT V 1571; SHT VI 1248 and SHT VI 1356.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the *uddāna* in Hartmann 2004: 125 and his survey of the *Dīrgha-āgama* collection, *ibid.* p. 128. On the position of the *Brahmajāla-sūtra*, Hartmann 2002: 134 comments that "this points to a considerable difference in structure, since this sutta opens the Pāli collection, while it falls last in the present Sanskrit version".

<sup>7</sup> Q (1021) *mdo sna tshogs*, ke 72b-88b, which has been edited by Weller 1934.

<sup>8</sup> This is the conclusion arrived at by Bareau 1950.

<sup>9</sup> T 1548 at T 28, 656b-661a, which directly begins with the actual *Brahmajāla* treatment, introduced at T 28, 656b19 as the 何謂六十二見, 如梵網經說.

<sup>10</sup> The entire *Brahmajāla-sūtra* is quoted at Q (5595) *mngon pa'i bstan bcos*, tu 162b-177b; intro-

quotes the entire discourse. In what follows, this *sūtra* quotation in Śamathadeva's commentary will be referred to as "Abhidh-k.-ṭīkā".

## II. Survey

The treatment of sixty-two views in these different versions of the Brahma-Net Discourse proceeds through these two main areas:

- 18 positions taken in relation to the past
- 44 positions related to the future

The eighteen positions taken in relation to the past cover these five themes:

- 1) 4 cases of eternalism
- 2) 4 cases of partial eternalism
- 3) 4 cases related to the dimensions of the world
- 4) 4 cases of equivocation
- 5) 2 cases of fortuitous origination

The sequence adopted above and in the remainder of this survey follows the discourses in the *Dīrgha-āgama* (DĀ 21) and the *sūtra* quotation in the *Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra* (Śāriputrābh.) – presumably the Dharmaguptaka presentation – which generally tends to be similar to the *Dīrgha-nikāya* (DN 1) of the Theravāda tradition.

The individual translation (T 21), the Tibetan discourse (Tib. disc.) and the *sūtra* quotation in Śamathadeva's commentary (Abhidh-k.-ṭīkā) – a group of texts that tends to be similar and where the latter two represent the (Mūla)-sarvāstivāda tradition – follow a somewhat different sequence, as they present the two cases of fortuitous origination as their third theme, after which they turn to the four cases related to the dimensions of the world (4<sup>th</sup>) and the four cases of equivocation (5<sup>th</sup>).

The above traditions agree, however, when it comes to the forty-four positions taken in relation to the future, where the five themes covered are:

- 6) 16 cases on the survival of a percipient self
- 7) 8 cases on the survival of an impercipient self
- 8) 8 cases on the survival of a neither-percipient-nor-impercipient self
- 9) 7 cases proclaiming annihilation
- 10) 5 cases proclaiming Nirvāṇa here and now

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duced at Q tu 162b6 under the title *tshangs pa'i dra ba*, "Brāhma's Net". On the translators and the date of translation cf. Skilling 1997: 135-136 and Skilling 2005: 132.

In what follows, I will examine each of these ten themes, providing at first a comparative survey of the respective cases (where in a smaller font I note in which texts a particular variation is found), followed by examining the chief aspects of each case in question.

II.1) The topic of eternalism, being the first of the positions taken in regard to the past, covers these four possible cases:

- 1) Eternalism:
  - a) recollection of past lives for several 100,000 births  
(according to DN 1)  
or recollection of past lives for 20 aeons  
(according to DĀ 21, T 21, Tib.dis., Śāriputrābh., Abhidh-k.-ṭīkā)
  - b) recollection of past lives for 10 aeons  
(according to DN 1)  
or recollection of past lives for 40 aeons  
(according to DĀ 21, T 21, Tib.dis., Śāriputrābh., Abhidh-k.-ṭīkā)
  - c) recollection of past lives for 40 aeons  
(according to DN 1)  
or recollection of past lives for 80 aeons  
(according to DĀ 21, T 21, Tib.dis., Śāriputrābh., Abhidh-k.-ṭīkā)
  - d) theorizing  
(according to DĀ 21, DN 1, Śāriputrābh.)  
or meditative experience  
(according to Tib.dis., Abhidh-k.-ṭīkā)

Of the above four, the first three involve the ability, gained through meditation practice, to recollect a vast number of past lives over distant periods. This leads to the conclusion that beneath the apparent changes there is a permanent substrata, in that the self and the world are eternal. The different versions of the Brahma-Net Discourse agree closely on these three, the main difference being that the *Dīgha-nikāya* discourse lists time periods that are shorter than those given by all other versions: it proceeds from several hundred-thousands of births to ten and forty aeons,<sup>11</sup> whereas the others proceed from twenty to forty and eighty aeons.

The fourth case leading to eternalism could either be due to theoretical speculation – according to the discourses in the *Dīrgha-āgama* and the *Dīgha-nikāya*, as well as the *sūtra* quotation in the *Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra* – or else one might arrive at the view of eternalism because of some meditative experiences, as

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<sup>11</sup> DN 1 at DN I 13,20. Another variation is that in T 21 the twenty aeons are of the past, T 1, 266a14: 過去二十劫事, the forty aeons are of the future, T 1, 266a18: 當來四十劫事, and the eighty aeons are of the past and the future, T 1, 266a23: 過去當來八十劫事. This presentation may be due to some error in transmission or translation during which an original expression similar to the Pāli *saṃvaṭṭa-vivaṭṭa* was misunderstood to intend the future and the past.

suggested by the Tibetan discourse and the *sūtra* quotation in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*.<sup>12</sup> According to the two Tibetan versions it is the exercise of the divine eye, with the help of which one sees beings passing away and being reborn, which can lead to upholding an eternalist position.<sup>13</sup>

II.2) The second topic under the heading of positions related to the past is partial eternalism, which manifests by way of the following four possible cases:

- 2) Partial Eternalism:
  - a) recollection of a past life in the presence of Brahmā
  - b) recollection of a past life as a *deva* corrupted by pleasure  
(according to DĀ 21, DN 1, Śāriputrābh.)  
or recollection of a view held by Brahmā  
(according to T 21, Tib.dis., Abhidh-k.-ṭikā)
  - c) recollection of a past life as a *deva* excessively looking at others  
(according to DĀ 21, DN 1, Śāriputrābh.)  
or recollection of a past life as a *deva* corrupted by pleasure  
(according to T 21, Tib.dis., Abhidh-k.-ṭikā)
  - d) theorizing  
(according to DĀ 21, DN 1, Śāriputrābh.)  
or recollection of a past life as a *deva* excessively looking at others  
(according to T 21, Tib.dis., Abhidh-k.-ṭikā)

The first of the above four involves an entertaining tale, according to which at the beginning of an aeon a being is reborn in an empty Brahmā world. Feeling lonely, this Brahmā wishes for company. When others are eventually reborn in the same world, the first-born Brahmā comes to the conclusion that he must be the creator of the others, as he had earlier wished for company. Someone from this realm is later on reborn as a human being and through diligent practice of meditation develops the ability to recollect his past life meeting with this particular Brahmā, whom at that time all held to be the creator. The being reborn in the human world thereon comes to the conclusion that Brahmā is eternal, whereas other beings, like himself, are Brahmā's impermanent creation, in this way upholding par-

<sup>12</sup> The case in the individual translation is to some degree ambivalent. Its description does mention how energetic practice and the removal of evil leads to the attainment of concentration and calmness, but then speaks of deluded thinking, cf. T 21 at T 1, 266a26: 精進寂一心, 行斷惡行, 即如其像三昧定意, 念寂根住癡念 (Kuan 2007: 191 note 24 explains that 如其像 renders *\*tathārūpa*, "such"). The expression 念癡 recurs in the same discourse at T 1, 267a12 in a description of theoretical speculation. Thus, as far as I can see, T 21 might combine the presentations in the other versions, in that some meditative experience is involved, yet the basis for upholding eternalism would nevertheless appear to be theorizing.

<sup>13</sup> Weller 1934: 20,9: *lha'i mig rnam par dag pa mi'i las 'das pas sems can 'chi ba dang, skye ba dang ... lta ste* and Q tu 165b5: *lha'i mig rnam par dag pas sems can rnam kyi 'chi 'pho ba dang, skye ba dang ... mthong nas*.

tial eternalism. This amusing depiction of how Brahmā came to mistakenly believe to be a creator would be a parody of the creation myth found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.<sup>14</sup>

The second case also involves recollection of a past life spent in a heavenly sphere. According to the *Dīrgha-āgama*, the *Dīrgha-nikāya* and the *Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra*, some divine inhabitants of this realm excessively engaged in pleasure and amusement, which caused them to pass away.<sup>15</sup> One such being is reborn in the human world and after meditative efforts is able to recollect his former life, whereon he comes to the conclusion that those who do not indulge in excessive pleasures are eternal, in contrast to himself and others who did indulge in excessive pleasures and therefore became victims of impermanence. In the individual translation, the Tibetan discourse and Śamathadeva's commentary the second case involves rather a divine being witnessing Brahmā proclaiming the view that matter is impermanent but mind is eternal.<sup>16</sup> After being reborn as a human, through meditative practice this being acquires the ability to recollect that past occasion, when he heard the view proclaimed by Brahmā.

The third case in the *Dīrgha-āgama*, the *Dīrgha-nikāya* and the *Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra* speaks of recollecting a past life spent in a heavenly sphere where the divine inhabitants excessively looked at each other, a looking that apparently

<sup>14</sup> Norman 1991/1993: 272 explains that "in the Brahmajālasutta the Buddha jokes about the way in which Brahmā thinks that he has created other beings, and he makes reference to the creation myth in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*", cf. also Masson 1942: 59. A few verses relevant to this myth in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* are 1.2.1: *naiveha kiṃcanāgra āsīt*, translated by Radhakrishnan 1992: 151 as: "there was nothing whatsoever here in the beginning"; 1.4.1: *so 'nuvikṣya nānyad ātmano 'paśyat*, ibid. p. 163: "looking around he saw nothing else than the self"; 1.4.3: *sa vai naiva reme ... sa dvitīyam aicchat*, ibid. p. 164: "he, verily, had no delight ... he desired a second"; and (after successful creation of another) 1.4.5: *so 'vet, ahaṃ vāva sṛṣṭir asmi, ahaṃ hīdaṃ sarvaṃ asṛkṣīti*, ibid. p. 165: "he knew, I indeed am this creation for I produced all this". Another reference to the tale of how Brahmā came to believe himself to be a creator can be found in DĀ 15 at T 1, 69b2 and DN 24 at DN III 29,1.

<sup>15</sup> DĀ 21 at T 1, 90c15: 喜戲笑懈怠, identified by Akanuma 1929/1994: 305 as a rendering of *khiḍḍāpadosika*. Haldar 1977: 73 explains that these *devas* "spend their time laughing and in sports of sensual lust ... while they play, they forget to eat and drink and [therefore] fade away like flowers".

<sup>16</sup> Weller 1934: 26,22 and Q tu 167b5 contrast the four material elements to the mind, referred to with the three terms *sems*, *yiḍ* and *rnam par shes pa*, corresponding to *citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa* listed in the Pāli version, cf. DN 1 at DN I 21,21: *yañca kho idaṃ vuccati 'cittan 'ti vā 'mano 'ti vā 'viññāṇan 'ti vā, ayaṃ attā nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo* (where these are contrasted to the bodily senses); on these three terms cf. also McGovern 1872/1979: 132; Johansson 1965; Swearer 1972: 358; Pieris 1980: 213; Matthews 1983: 37-52; Schmithausen 1987/2007: 426 note 820; Sugunasiri 1995: 414-415; Bodhi 2000: 769 note 154; Minh Thành 2001: 4; Premasiri 2003: 1-3; Somaratne 2005. T 21 at T 1, 266c1, however, contrasts the permanent five aggregates to the impermanent material elements (which here are five, as they include space), 其有色法, 痛痒, 思想, 行, 識, 是法爲常, 亦不轉移, 不死, 其有地種, 水種, 火種, 風種, 空種, 此非常, 不堅固.

makes them become upset.<sup>17</sup> This causes them to pass away. After passing away, one such being is reborn as a human, practices meditation and recollects that former life. He thereon comes to the conclusion that those who do not excessively look at others (and thus do not get upset) remain eternally in that realm, whereas impermanence holds under its sway those who, like himself, look at others and get upset. The individual translation, the Tibetan discourse and Śamathadeva's commentary at this point instead describe the predicament of divine beings who indulge in excessive merriment, corresponding to the second case in the Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka versions.

The fourth case arises according to the *Dīrgha-āgama*, the *Dīrgha-nikāya* and the *Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra* due to theoretical speculation. The individual translation, the Tibetan discourse and Śamathadeva's commentary instead present the case of beings that excessively look at each other at this point.

In sum, disregarding variations of sequence, which naturally tend to affect material transmitted by oral means, the different versions can be seen to agree on three cases:

- recollection of a past life in the presence of Brahmā
- recollection of a past life as a *deva* corrupted by pleasure
- recollection of a past life as a *deva* excessively looking at others

They differ in as much as the remaining case involves either theorizing or else recollecting a past life in which one heard Brahmā proclaiming partial eternalism.

II.3) The dimensions of the world involve the following four possible cases:

- 3) Dimensions of the World:
  - a) meditative experience of a limited perception
  - b) meditative experience of an unlimited perception
  - c) meditative experience of a limited and unlimited perception
  - d) theorizing  
(according to DĀ 21, DN 1, Śāriputrābh.)  
or meditation experience  
(according to Tib.dis., Abhidh-k.-ṭīkā)

In the first case, meditation practice leads to a deep experience characterised by the fact that perceptions during this experience are of a limited nature, hence the practitioner comes to the conclusion that the world must be limited. In the next case, the experience of an unlimited perception during deep meditation leads to

<sup>17</sup> T 21 at T 1, 266c17: 瞋恚; DN 1 at DN I 20,17: *padūsentī*; Weller 1934: 30,25: *khros pas*, Q tu 168b3: *sdang bas*; cf. also fragment Pelliot bleu 258 Vc, no. 15 in Hartmann 1991: 84: *(pra)duṣyamte ma(naḥ)*. According to Halder 1977: 73, these *devas* "fall from their state on account of their feeble bodies and polluted minds which are the results of their continuous burning with envy against each others".

the assumption that the world must be unlimited. In the third case, the meditative experience is limited in the upward direction but unlimited in the four cardinal directions, hence here it is assumed that the nature of the world must be likewise. In the last case the *Dīrgha-āgama*, the *Dīgha-nikāya* and the *Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra* speak of theoretical speculation; whereas the Tibetan discourse and Śamathadeva's commentary point to a meditative experience.<sup>18</sup>

II.4) Equivocation is motivated by the following four reasons:

4) Equivocation

- a) fear of being worsted in debate  
(according to DĀ 21, Śāriputrābh.)  
or fear of falsehood  
(according to DN 1, Skt. frgm.,<sup>19</sup> Tib.dis., Abhidh-k.-ṭīkā)  
or fear of a bad rebirth  
(according to T 21)<sup>20</sup>
- b) fear of falsehood  
(according to DĀ 21, Śāriputrābh.)  
or fear of succumbing to desire and aversion  
(according to DN 1)  
or fear of being interrogated  
(according to T 21)  
or fear of holding a wrong view  
(according to Skt. frgm.,<sup>21</sup> Tib.dis., Abhidh-k.-ṭīkā)
- c) fear of succumbing to desire and aversion  
(according to DĀ 21, Śāriputrābh.)  
or fear of being worsted in debate  
(according to DN 1)  
or fear of falling into an evil path and being criticized  
(according to T 21)  
or fear of succumbing to ignorance  
(according to Skt. frgm.,<sup>22</sup> Tib.dis.,<sup>23</sup> Abhidh-k.-ṭīkā)

<sup>18</sup> T 21 at T 1, 267a28 only describes the four views and how they conflict with one another, but does not indicate whether these arise out of meditative experience or due to theoretical speculation.

<sup>19</sup> Fragment Hoernle 168/168a V6 in Hartmann 1989: 48: (*mṛṣāvā*)*dabhayabh[ītaḥ mṛṣ](āvādam eva pa)[riju](gupsamānas)*.

<sup>20</sup> T 21 at T 1, 267c15: 死墮惡道. This is slightly puzzling, since such fear prevents from taking a position on the existence of another world. That is, fear of a bad rebirth is here presented as causing fear among those who are not even sure if there are other worlds.

<sup>21</sup> Fragment Hoernle 168/168a R6 in Hartmann 1989: 48: (*mityādr*)[s](i)m [e]va *parijugupsamānas*.

<sup>22</sup> SHT III 803 V4 in Waldschmidt 1971: 5: *saṃmoham-eva parijugupsamānas*.

<sup>23</sup> Weller 1934: 44,28: *shes bzhin ma yin pas 'jigs*, which would literally be fear of lack of alertness, but Weller 1935: 53 note 303 suggests that in the present context *shes bzhin* could render *jñāna*

- d) being stupid  
 (according to DĀ 21, DN 1, T 21, Śāriputrābh.)  
 or fearing stupidity  
 (according to Tib.dis., Abhidh-k.-ṭikā)

The first three cases involve fear, though the causes of the fear are presented with considerable variations in the different versions of the discourse.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, central themes can be seen to recur in all of them. According to these central themes, one may resort to equivocation as a way of escaping being worsted in a debate situation, or in order to avoid taking a position that then turns out to be false or that leads to desire and aversion. In the fourth cases, most versions assume that equivocation is adopted by someone who is foolish,<sup>25</sup> while according to the Tibetan discourse and the quotation in Śamathadeva's commentary, equivocation is adopted in order not to be shown up as a fool.<sup>26</sup>

II.5) Fortuitous origination involves two cases:

- 5) Fortuitous Origination  
 a) recollection of a past life as an imperipient being  
 b) theorizing

The different versions agree that fortuitous origination is being proclaimed either by those who through meditative effort are able to recollect a past life spent as a being devoid of perceptions or else through intellectual speculation.

– With the above, the section on the past is concluded –

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in the Indic original, based on which he renders *shes bzhin ma yin pa* as "ignorance", an interpretation confirmed by the corresponding section in *Q tu 172a2: mi shes pas 'jigs*.

<sup>24</sup> The versions also vary on the type of inquiry in regard to which equivocation is resorted to.

<sup>25</sup> Equivocation recurs in DĀ 27 at T 1, 108c21 and DN 2 at DN I 58,26 as the position adopted by Sañjaya Belatthiputta, whereas T 22 at T 1, 271c16 associates equivocation with Ajita Kesakambalī, and according to the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 226,20, equivocation was undertaken by Pakudha Kaccāyana (for a comparative study of the different versions of this discourse, which tend to vary considerably regarding the viewpoints associated with each of the six teachers, cf. Bapat 1948, Meisig 1987 and Macqueen 1988). Basham 1951: 17 suggests that the description of equivocation given in DN 2 "is probably satirical, a tilt at agnostic teachers who were unwilling to give a definite answer to any metaphysical question put to them" (for critical remarks on Basham's presentation cf. Jayatilleke 1963/1980: 132). Collins 1982: 128 comments that "the 'eel-wrigglers' ... lack of positive assertion has a verbal resemblance to the Buddha's own [lack of positive assertion] in certain other contexts". Dutt 1932: 710 draws attention to the relationship between the ten unanswered questions and the views treated in the *Brahmajāla-sutta*; for a criticism of his presentation cf. Wijebandara 1993: 90. Pérez-remón 1978: 67 notes that the theme of equivocation does not fit too well under the heading of views related to the past.

<sup>26</sup> Weller 1934: 46,13: *gti mug gis 'jigs*, and *Q tu 172a8: rmongs pas 'jigs*.

II.6) The different versions of the Brahma-Net Discourse continue with propositions regarding the survival of a percipient self in the future, which cover sixteen cases.

- 6) Survival of a Percipient Self
  - a-d) material/immaterial/both/neither
  - e-h) limited/unlimited/both/neither
  - i-l) happy/unhappy/both/neither
    - (according to DĀ 21, Śāriputrābh. these four are the third set = i-l)
    - (according to DN 1, T 21, Tib.dis. these four as the fourth set = m-p)
  - m-p) single/multiple/narrow/boundless perception
    - (according to DN 1, T 21,<sup>27</sup> Tib.dis. these four are the third set = i-l)
    - (according to DĀ 21, Śāriputrābh. these four are the fourth set = m-p)

The different versions agree mostly on these sixteen modes in which the self will survive death.<sup>28</sup> A variation occurs in the sequence of presentation, as the *Dīgha-nikāya* discourse, the individual translation, and the Tibetan discourse have the four-fold set on a self surviving in a condition characterized by happiness, unhappiness, both or neither as their last, preceded by the four-fold set on this surviving self being endowed with a single perception, multiple perceptions, a narrow perception or a boundless perception.<sup>29</sup>

II.7) Next come eight proposals of a self that survives in an impercipient manner:

- 7) Survival of an Impercipient Self
  - a-d) material/immaterial/both/neither
  - e-h) limited/unlimited/both/neither

The different versions are in agreement on these eight.

<sup>27</sup> A variation in T 21 at T 1, 268b19 is that in its treatment of this set it adopts the sequence single/narrow/multiple/boundless (the last in T 21 seems to rather signify "innumerable"), whereas the other versions list these perceptions as single/multiple/narrow/boundless, i.e. in the other versions the contrasting propositions come in a pair.

<sup>28</sup> The *Śāriputrābhidharma* differs in so far as it presents these views as declarations made about the nature of the self in this present world, adding that this self does not exist after death, e.g. in the first case T 1548 at T 28, 659a16: 色是我想是世, 命終已, 我不復有.

<sup>29</sup> The quote in Śamathadeva's commentary also differs in its sequence, which, however, seems to be due to a textual corruption, since Q *tu* 172b7 announces sixteen cases, but then Q *tu* 173a1-3 treats only twelve (material/immaterial/both/neither; single/multiple and narrow/boundless; happy/painful/both/neither). After this comes the concluding statement to the exposition on views about a percipient self, with Q *tu* 173a4 reiterating the count of sixteen cases, but then Q *tu* 173b3 lists the missing four cases (limited/unlimited/both/neither).

II.8) The same basic pattern then recurs with the eight proposals about a self that survives neither-percipient-nor-impercipient:

- 8) Survival of a Neither-Percipient-Nor-Impercipient Self
  - a-d) material/immaterial/both/neither
  - e-h) limited/unlimited/both/neither

Here, too, the different versions are in close agreement.<sup>30</sup>

II.9) The next theme is annihilation, which comes in seven cases:

- 9) Annihilation
  - a) material realm
  - b) desire realm
  - c) form realm
  - d) space
  - e) consciousness
  - f) nothingness
  - g) neither-perception-nor-non-perception

The various propositions on how the self can be annihilated are presented in all versions in the same manner.

II.10) The final theme is the attainment of Nirvāṇa here and now, which covers five cases:

- 10) Nirvāṇa here and now
  - a) pleasures of the five senses
  - b) first absorption
  - c) second absorption
  - d) third absorption
  - e) fourth absorption

Here, too, the different versions are in close agreement that the five modes of proposing Nirvāṇa here and now involve either being equipped with the pleasures of the five senses or else the four levels of absorption.

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<sup>30</sup> A minor variation occurs in T 21 at T 1, 269a9+11, which treats the case of a neither-percipient-nor-impercipient self being material as well as immaterial twice, 有色無色, where the first instance appears to be an error for the otherwise missing immaterial self.

### III. Study

What emerges from the above survey is the centrality of meditation experiences behind the 'sixty-two views'. In the case of the last topic (II.10), meditation experiences constitute four out of five cases that lead to the proclamation of Nirvāṇa here and now, by way of attaining the four absorptions.

In the case of the previous topic on annihilation (II.9), again considerable room is given to themes that appear to be related to meditation experiences. Except for the first, which identifies the self with the body and presumably then assumes the self to be annihilated with the death of the body, the other six propositions could be envisaging annihilation as a goal to be achieved through some kind of practice.<sup>31</sup> This is particularly evident with the last four instances, which correspond to the four immaterial attainments. Since to experience these immaterial spheres requires a considerable degree of meditative proficiency, an annihilationist view related to the attainment or experience of these states could not reasonably assume that all beings are destined to such annihilation. That is, from the perspective of the upholders of such a view, annihilation would have been considered as a goal to be attained through an appropriate form of conduct and meditation practice. The idea behind such an aspiration for annihilation could be a merger with a form of ultimate reality, held to be equivalent to boundless space, or to boundless consciousness, or to nothingness, or to neither-perception-nor-non-perception.<sup>32</sup> Attaining such a merger at the death of the body, any self-hood would be successfully left behind.<sup>33</sup>

According to the Pāli commentary, the majority of the positions taken on the survival of a self (II.6-8) are also the outcome of meditation experiences.<sup>34</sup> The powerful influence of experiences derived from meditation practice thus forms a continuous theme throughout the analysis of positions taken in regard to the future.

<sup>31</sup> Bodhi 1978/1992: 30 comments that "it may be that these latter six positions do not regard annihilation as the ineluctable fate of all beings, but as the ultimate destiny and highest good of the spiritually perfected saint".

<sup>32</sup> Barua 1968: 11 suggests that here the immaterial attainments appear to be "considered as the ultimate means of stopping the course of *samsāra*".

<sup>33</sup> That such annihilation was perceived by some contemporaries of the Buddha as a goal to be attained through a particular mode of conduct and practice would also be implicit in the formulation of the aspiration "may I not be, may it not be for me, I shall not be and it will not be for me", which SN 22.81 at SN III 99,4 identifies as an expression of an annihilationist view: *evaṃ diṭṭhi hoti: 'no c'assaṃ, no ca me siyā, na bhavissāmi, na me bhavissatī'ti. yā kho pana sā, bhikkhave, ucchedadiṭṭhi.* AN 10.29 at AN V 63,28 reckons this aspiration as supreme among heterodox views: *etad aggaṃ ... bāhirakānaṃ diṭṭhigatānaṃ, yad idaṃ: 'no c' assaṃ, no ca me siyā, na bhavissāmi, na me bhavissatī'ti.* Since this formulation clearly involves an aspiration, what it probably intends is a form of annihilation that requires effort and practice, such as would indeed be required for attaining the immaterial spheres.

<sup>34</sup> Sv I 119,6ff.

The same holds true for most positions taken in regard to the past, where in the case of fortuitous origination (II.5), the dimensions of the world (II.3), partial eternalism (II.2) and eternalism (II.1), the majority of cases are related to meditation experiences or else to recollection of past lives, an ability that is based on a considerable degree of meditative expertise.

This highlights the fact that the various positions described in the Brahma-Net Discourse are not necessarily the outcome of emphasizing theory over practice, but are often shown to result from misinterpretations of meditative experiences.<sup>35</sup> This invests the survey of the 'sixty-two views' with considerable significance from a practical perspective

In contrast to such misinterpretation of meditative experiences stands the aloofness from any speculations by the Tathāgata, an aloofness gained through his eradication of craving by having attained Nirvana.<sup>36</sup> Such aloofness is in fact the theme of the concluding section in the different versions of the Brahma-Net Discourse, which reveals that those who uphold any of these positions are simply entangled in craving.

A simile given in this final section of the discourse describes a fisherman who by spreading his net over a pond is able to catch all living beings that are inside of the water. This simile appears to draw out the implications of the reference to a net in the discourse's title.

According to the Sanskrit fragments, the Tibetan discourse and the *sūtra* quotation in Śamathadeva's commentary, the net is being spread by Māra.<sup>37</sup> This

<sup>35</sup> Bodhi 1997: 55-56 comments that "it is sometimes assumed that the Buddha rejects speculative views simply because these views are distractions from the practice of meditation. Being fabrications of the intellect ... it is held, views keep the individual tied to the level of intellectualisation and produce a complacency that obstructs the single-minded commitment to meditation practice". Yet, as the *Brahmajāla* exposition reveals, "speculative views sometimes arise at the end of a long course of meditative development", which goes to show that "speculative views spring from a root more deeply grounded in the human mind than the disposition to theorisation".

<sup>36</sup> The relevance of the experience of Nirvana to the present passage is not fully appreciated by Evans 2009: 72, when he comments that "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 for knowledge." This is not the case from an early Buddhist perspective, cf. e.g. MN 9 at MN I 52,19: *phassanirodham pajānāti* (representative of the third noble truth = realization). Hence Evans' conclusion that "the Buddha does not explicitly articulate any ... criteria for declaring the views problematic; neither is any remedy given for correcting these problems" does not appear to be correct, as – from an early Buddhist perspective – the criteria is precisely the need to go beyond *phassa* leading via *vedanā* to craving and views, hence the remedy is the experience of the cessation of contact viz. Nirvana.

<sup>37</sup> Fragments Pelliot 1400/19/bleu 35 R1-2, no. 16 in Hartmann 1991: 86, reads: *sarv[e te] a(n)[t] (arjā)[l](a)[g](a)[t](ā mārasya pāpīyasa āvaśa)[g](a)[t]ā vaśagat[ā] ... [yathā]kāmakaraṇīyā mārasya pāpīyasaḥ*. Weller 1934: 62,5: *bdud sdig can gyi dbang du song zhing lag tu*; Q tu 176a2: *bdud sdig to can gyi dra bar chud cing dbang du gyur cing*. The Pāli commentary, however, holds that it is the Buddha who spreads the net, Sv I 127,18: *kevaṅṅo viya hi bhagavā, jālaṃ*

places the present discourse in line with other passages that depict Māra's mischievous activities. An example would be a discourse in the *Samyukta-āgama*, according to which Māra even threatened to catch the Buddha in his net.<sup>38</sup> The qualification "Brahma", applied in the present case to the net, would then convey the sense of "divine", similar to its usage in expressions like *brahmacarya* or *brahmavihāra*, in that it is a "divine net" that Māra spreads to catch beings. Thus the title of the discourse could be understood to imply the "the Divine Net [spread by Māra]".

Regarding the various views that make up this Divine Net, closer inspection brings to light that they do not amount to sixty-two. This can be seen right at the beginning of the treatment, where the first four cases all lead to the same view, namely an affirmation of eternalism (II.1). Thus even though the discourse works through sixty-two cases, the actual number of views is less than sixty-two.

Moreover, while the Chinese versions employ 見, a standard rendering for derivatives of *√dr̥ṣ*, to refer to these sixty-two, the Pāli version of the *Brahmajāla-sutta* speaks rather of "grounds for views", *vatthu*.<sup>39</sup> The Tibetan discourse uses *gzhi* and Śamathadeva's commentary *dn̄gos po*, which, similar to the Pāli *vatthu*, stand for the "ground" that leads to the arising of a view.<sup>40</sup> That is, according to these versions the theme of the present survey are sixty-two grounds for views, rather than sixty-two views.

Even with "grounds for views", however, the count of sixty-two does not fully work. In the above mentioned first treatment on eternalism, the first three grounds for views are all recollection of past lives (II.1a-c). What causes a treatment in a threefold manner are variations in the time period that is recollected, variations that do not really make a difference in relation to the mode in which the view arises.<sup>41</sup> If one were to combine the time periods mentioned in the different versions – several hundred thousand births, ten aeons, twenty aeons, forty aeons

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*viya desanā*. This seems a less probable interpretation, as the whole point of the discourse is to show the Buddha's aloofness, who has no need to catch others in a net. In fact, the purpose of the whole exposition is to lead others out of this net, not to catch them in it.

<sup>38</sup> SĀ 1086 at T 2, 285a6: 執長繩羈下, 正欲縛沙門, 不令汝得脫 (adopting the 宋, 元 and 明 variant 正 instead of 政); and SĀ<sup>2</sup> 25 at T 2, 381c7: 羅網遍虛空, 沙門於我所, 終不得解脫. The Pāli parallel SN 4.15 at SN I 111,28 instead speaks of a "snare": *antalikkhacaro pāso ... tena taṃ bādhayissāmi, na me samaṇa mokkhasi*.

<sup>39</sup> DN 1 at DN I 39,13. However, another Pāli discourse, SN 41.3 at SN IV 287,12, does speak of "sixty-two [modes] of going into views": *dvāsaṭṭhiḍḍhigatāni Brahmajāle bhaṇitāni*, a reference not found in its counterpart SĀ 570 at T 2, 151a20.

<sup>40</sup> Franke 1913: 22 note 14 explains that *vatthu* in the present discourse, in addition to meaning "ground", also can carry the nuances of being a "point of view", a "way", a "mode", or a "perspective" (Gesichtspunkt, Weise, Form, Hinsicht).

<sup>41</sup> Maithrimurthi 1999: 134 note 8 comments that in order to arrive at a total count of four, at times the exposition in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* seems to have incorporated additional grounds that do not necessarily add to the content of the exposition. According to Syrkin 1983: 157-158, the *Brahmajāla-sutta* shows "an evident tendency to use fours or the multiples of four".

and eighty aeons – one could with equal justification distinguish recollection of the past into five cases. Thus the first three cases mentioned in the discourse amount to just a single ground for the arising of eternalist views, namely recollection of past lives.

This goes to show that the purpose of the treatment in the present discourse is not to establish the number sixty-two, be these sixty-two views or sixty-two grounds for views. Its purpose is rather to analyse how views arise, for which it employs a framework of sixty-two instances.

#### IV. Conclusion

In sum, then, the Discourse on Brahmā's Net covers sixty-two instances that illustrate how misinterpretation of meditative experiences and theoretical speculation can lead to the arising of various views. Though several of these instances would naturally reflect modes of thought held by contemporaries in ancient India, the main purpose of the discourse is not a historical survey of an actually existing set of 'sixty-two views'.<sup>42</sup> Instead, the main point that emerges from a closer study of the analysis given in this discourse is that craving and attachment to one's meditative experiences and intellectual reflections can lead to the genesis of views which, from the perspective of the discourse, equals being caught in the divine net spread by Māra.

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<sup>42</sup> In fact the count of views in ancient India varies, and 法顯 reports that he came across ninety-six heretical views, T 2085 at T 51, 861a8: 有九十六種外道. Deeg 2005: 310 note 1512 draws attention to a passage in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinayavibhāṣā*, which arrives at the same number by counting fifteen groups led by disciples of each of the six heretical teachers. When added to the followers of each teacher himself, this then leads to six times sixteen, hence ninety-six, T 1440 at T 23, 536a22: 六師者, 一師十五種教, 以授弟子... 師與弟子通為十六種, 如是六師有九十六. References to these ninety-six views are a recurrent feature in the Chinese canon. Occurrences where such a reference is absent from the parallel Pāli discourse are: T 68 at T 2, 869a6 (parallel to MN 82), SĀ<sup>2</sup> 52 at T 2, 390b28 (parallel to SN 11.16), SĀ<sup>2</sup> 223 at T 2, 456b3 (parallel to SN 5.8), SĀ<sup>2</sup> 325 at T 2, 483a21 (parallel to SN 10.12), T 120 at T 2, 541c5 (which, though not really a parallel, cf. Nattier 2007: 185 note 16, has narrative elements in common with MN 86). The *Sūyagaḍa* 2.2.79 of the Jain tradition even speaks of the existence of three-hundred-sixty-three views, cf. Vaidya 1928: 98,17 (2.2.25), trsl. in Bollée 2004: 74 and Jacobi 1895/1996: 385, studied in Schrader 1902: 2-4.

## Abbreviations:

Abhidh-k.-ṭīkā	<i>Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā</i>
AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i>
DN	<i>Dīrgha-nikāya</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Q	Peking edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ <sup>2</sup>	'other' <i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
Śāriputrābh.	<i>Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra</i>
SHT	Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>
T	Taishō edition (CBETA)
Tib.dis.	Tibetan discourse

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