

Journal of Buddhist Studies, Vol. XV, 2018

**On the Two Paths Theory:
Replies to Criticism**

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Published by
**Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka &
The Buddha-Dharma Centre of Hong Kong**

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Introduction

In this article I reply to criticism raised by Wynne (2018) of my examination of the two paths theory, according to which the early discourses reflect two conflicting approaches to liberation, one of which is based on intellectual reflection, the other on absorption.

The Two Paths Theory

The two paths theory (or “two path thesis”, TPT) holds that the early Buddhist texts reflect a tension between two contrasting accounts of progress to liberating insight, one of which just requires an intellectual understanding of the four noble truths whereas the other envisions absorption attainment on its own as productive of such insight. I critically examined the main arguments advanced in support of this theory as part of a comparative study of the *Tevijja-sutta* in Anālayo (2015), to which I added further observations in Anālayo (2016a), written in reply to the assumption evident in Polak (2016) that the two paths theory represents scholarly consensus. The material from both articles then became part of a monograph on early Buddhist meditation, Anālayo (2017b).

In an article entitled “Text-critical History is not Exegesis, a Response to Anālayo”, Wynne (2018) raises a series of critiques of my assessment of the two paths theory. The title of his article succinctly conveys what appears to be the central thrust of his presentation: his belief that I engage in Buddhist scriptural exegesis instead of text-critical academic research.

1. Foreclosing Further Discussion

Wynne (2018: 102) is under the impression that I attempt to foreclose further discussion. As in this context he summarized the main criticism he makes in his paper, this part of his argument can conveniently be used as a starting point:

Anālayo’s case against the TPT, followed by his judgement that the debate is settled, go against the grain of normal academic procedure. Why is this? The problem perhaps is possibly due to

the distinction between exegesis and history being unwittingly blurred. Whereas exegetes naturally prefer tradition to remain unchallenged, historians deal in arguments and uncertainty. Indeed, historical doubt inevitably invites an [sic] strong exegetical response, and this might explain Anālayo's response to the TPT: casting aspersion on the intellectual proclivities of others; reading one's own conclusions into texts which lack them; ignoring other perspectives which challenge one's own ideas; failing to take one's sources seriously, at their own word; and, most seriously of all, relying on commentarial and scholastic perspectives: all of this signals an approach which is more exegetical than philological. The overall effect is to seal off what tradition regards as sacred – the homogeneity of the canonical discourses on the Buddhist path – while at the same time attempting to shut down debate.

The above assessment is not correct. In what follows, I will take up one by one the allegations raised to show that they are unfounded. The first of these allegations relates to the comment in Wynne (2018: 101) that:

rather strangely, however, Anālayo believes his own arguments are an unqualified success: 'As far as I can see, the two paths theory has by now been successfully refuted and might best be set aside as an erroneous projection of the Western contrast between the thinker and the mystic onto material that does not warrant such an interpretation.' (2016[a]: 41)

Before the passage just quoted by him, in my article I survey the criticism or reservations other scholars have voiced regarding the two paths theory, in particular of Eliade (1958), Swearer (1972), Cox (1992/1994), Keown (1992/2001), Gethin (1992/2001), Gómez (1999), Bodhi (2003), Cousins (2009), and Stuart (2013). My impression that the two paths theory has been successfully refuted is not an assertion of the success of my own arguments. Instead, I consider the arguments by other scholars to have successfully refuted the main planks of the two paths theory.

Here it also needs to be kept in mind that I am replying to the underlying assumption in Polak (2016) that the two paths theory represents scholarly consensus, ignoring the criticism that has been levied at this theory to date. Thus I am not attempting to close the debate, but only to point out the need of taking into account criticism that has been raised in previous scholarship. Consultation of the full passage in my article confirms that I am not presuming the debate to be closed (Anālayo 2016a: 41):

As far as I can see, the two paths theory has by now been successfully refuted and might best be set aside as an erroneous

projection of the Western contrast between the thinker and the mystic onto material that does not warrant such an interpretation. Of course, others will not necessarily agree with my assessment. Yet, those who wish to uphold this theory or one of its two main assumptions need to engage seriously with the criticism that has been voiced, rather than ignoring it. At the very least, the notion of two conflicting paths can no longer be taken as representing scholarly consensus, but needs first to be argued by addressing in detail the different objections that have been raised.

This is fully in line with academic procedure. The accusation that in my works I attempt to seal off what tradition regards as sacred is not justified.

2. Reliance on Later Exegesis

Another of the criticisms voiced by Wynne (2018: 101) is the impression that I rely uncritically on later Buddhist exegesis:

Anālayo assumes that the meditators of AN 6.46 are at least stream-enterers, but this idea is based on a later Buddhist notion of stream-entry, one unknown to the canonical discourses. Similarly, his assertion that Nārada (in SN 12.70 [six]) is a ‘non-returner’ (*anāgāmin*) is based on the Pāli commentary; the idea of experiencing but not fully realising Nirvana also belongs to later exegesis. Rather than studying the many internal parallels which actually help clarify what these texts mean, Anālayo prefers to read relatively late schemes, anachronistically, into them.

Beginning with the second of the two issues mentioned by Wynne, the relevant part of my discussion in Anālayo (2017b: 95) proceeds as follows:

In all versions the monk Nārada employs the simile of seeing water that one is unable to reach physically to illustrate that, even though one has already seen the goal, one therefore need not have fully reached it. In other words, the simile conveys that he has reached a stage of awakening that falls short of being arahantship. This conclusion finds confirmation in the commentary, which reports that Nārada was a non-returner.

The first sentence in the passage quoted above is based on a comparative study of the simile found in the parallel versions, references to which I provide in the footnote at the end of that sentence. In the discourse, the simile serves to illustrate an explicit statement made in the Pāli and Chinese version by Nārada, namely that he is not an *arahant*.¹ This is

not an anachronistic reading of later schemes into the texts, but rather a conclusion drawn based on a comparative study of the discourses. The reference to the Pāli commentary is only in support of the conclusion reached by studying the main texts. This single instance of consulting the commentarial tradition as a secondary source is hardly sufficient grounds for the allegation that exegesis is being “smuggled into Buddhist studies” (Wynne 2018: 104).

In general terms, it seems to me that conscientious research requires consulting the commentarial tradition. The commentators are considerably closer in time and culture to the early Buddhist period than we are and therefore should not be dismissed out of hand. This also means that the burden of proof, in my view, is with those who wish to propose ideas that are in complete contrast to the exegetical tradition. This holds for the other criticism in the passage quoted above, regarding the implications of stream-entry. To maintain the position that the commentarial traditions of Indian Buddhism entirely misunderstood the nature of stream-entry would require a study of its own and should not be based on a summary dismissal. It would require surveying stream-entry descriptions in the early discourses, extant in various transmission lineages, and conclusively proving that they are incompatible with what the commentarial traditions assume.

Besides, in a critical study of the two paths theory, Bodhi (2003) provides support for such an understanding of the implications of stream-entry from the discourses themselves. Even though this paper is explicitly mentioned in both of my publications that Wynne criticizes, Anālayo (2016a) and (2017b), he appears not to have consulted it. This paper, and other publications that discuss the nature of the lower levels of awakening, would also need to be refuted conclusively rather than being ignored.

The allegation that I merely adopt the position of later exegesis needs to be considered in the light of my other publications, which have repeatedly subjected to text-historical scrutiny notions and beliefs central to the Theravāda exegetical tradition. For example, I have argued that the traditional Theravāda belief in the Buddha’s omniscience, just as the Theravāda doctrinal denial of an intermediate existence, conflict with the position taken on these issues in the early discourses.² Through comparative study I have provided evidence supporting the conclusion that the prediction of the advent of the future Buddha Maitreya, a central element in the religious world of Theravādins, is a late element that

conflicts with the early Buddhist conception of conditionality.³ Other publications of mine have critically examined the Theravāda attempt to authenticate their Abhidhamma by claiming that it was taught by the Buddha during a sojourn in heaven,⁴ and tried to show that the tale of Vessantara, the most well-known and beloved past-life story of the Buddha in Theravāda circles, has its origin in a Brahmanical plot that is at odds with Buddhist values.⁵ Yet other publications by me contend that the scheme of seven purifications that serves as the scaffolding for the *Visuddhimagga*, the most important meditation manual in the Theravāda tradition, appears to involve a misunderstanding by Buddhaghosa of the seventh stage of purification, as presented in the relevant discourses.⁶ More examples could be given, but the above should already suffice to show that, although I am a Theravāda *bhikkhu*, I do not uncritically adhere to Theravāda beliefs and doctrine.

As can be seen in each of the above cases, my position was based on providing evidence that runs counter to the respective commentarial notion or Theravāda belief. This is clearly the appropriate procedure for advancing our knowledge, namely a text-historically informed approach to evaluate the commentaries. In fact, just rejecting the commentarial exegesis is as much a form of ignorance as just adhering to it. For this reason, I deem it important that later exegesis, such as the *Visuddhimagga* or comparable works of other traditions (like the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, for example) are taken seriously on their own terms for the information that they can potentially offer. They should only be set aside if there is sound evidence to the contrary. This does not mean that later schemes are read anachronistically into the early texts. My work reflects the distinction between exegesis and history.

3. Taking the Texts Seriously

After examining three discourses he considers most relevant to the two paths theory (SN 12.68, SN 12.70, and AN 6.46), Wynne (2018: 87) states that “since our three texts apparently provide strong support for the TPT, it is somewhat strange that Anālayo (2016[a]) does not mention them.”

This is not the case. AN 6.46 is mentioned in the main text of Anālayo (2016a: 39) and in a footnote in Anālayo (2016a: 41 note 8) I refer the reader to another publication of mine in the following way:

in Anālayo 2015: 12–15, I surveyed the main passages quoted in support of the two paths theory, arguing that none of these warrants such a reading.

That other paper surveys the three discourses mentioned by Wynne (SN 12.68, SN 12.70, and AN 6.46,) and offers arguments to counter interpreting them as supportive of the two paths theory. Based on referring to my earlier detailed study, published in 2015, in Anālayo (2016a: 41) I then explain, in the main text of that article, that I will proceed “without rehearsing most of what has already been said.” This is a clear statement. It leaves no basis for puzzlement that I do not even mention these passages and then argue, as Wynne (2018: 92) does, that earlier “he has not analyzed the most important texts, an omission which he corrects, however, in his *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies* (2017[b]).” It is by ignoring the explicit reference to my previous discussion in Anālayo (2015) that Wynne arrives at the mistaken impression that I had to correct an earlier omission.

Another criticism, also related to the topic of not taking the texts seriously, takes the following form in Wynne (2018: 101):

Anālayo claims that the standard account of insight into the Four Noble Truths is a motif for the meditative realisation of Nirvana. In other words, the texts are not to be taken seriously at their word: although the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* talks of ‘turning the mind towards knowledge’, and the *Kāya-gatā-sati Sutta* explains this idea with quite precise similes, Anālayo believes that his own interpretation of the *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta* is to be preferred instead. Dissenting voices are again overlooked.

The contrast seen between my position and the terminology in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* and the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* appears to be based on a misunderstanding. In his earlier discussion, Wynne (2018: 89f) quotes two passages from Anālayo (2016a: 44 and 45), without the part that comes between them, and then states “Anālayo concludes that the path does not culminate in the Four Truths”, adding that, in this way, “Anālayo’s hermeneutic allows the explicit testimony of the texts to be explained away.” In the part in Anālayo (2016a: 45) not quoted by Wynne, I propose the following:

what the entire set of the four noble truths points to is a realization experience, which is described by analogy with a medical scheme of diagnosis.

At an earlier point, I also speak of “the level of insight into the four noble truths gained with awakening” (Anālayo 2016a: 42).⁷ Consultation of the rest of my discussion shows that my intention was not to deny the relevance of the four noble truths in any way, but only to explain that the culmination point of the path is not just a matter of intellectual reflection.

This is hardly a case of explaining away the explicit testimony of the texts. In fact my explanation relies on indications made explicitly in the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* and its parallels.

The other criticism by Wynne in the above passage, according to which I supposedly overlook dissenting voices, comes with a footnote reference to a comment by Schmithausen (1981: 203) on the probable late nature of the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*.⁸ In two detailed comparative studies, published in the same journal that Wynne has recently joined as an editor and which he now employs as a venue for his criticism, I examined in detail the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* in the light of its parallels (Anālayo 2012a and 2013). In both publications, I refer to Schmithausen (1981).

In addition to providing a comparative study with translations of the Chinese *Āgama* and *Vinaya* parallels, I also examine arguments proposed by other scholars supporting the alleged lateness of what tradition considers to have been the first teaching given by the Buddha, finding these arguments to be in need of revision. In sum, instead of me overlooking dissenting voices, it seems rather that my dissenting voice is being overlooked here.

4. Circularity

Another criticism by Wynne (2018: 100) is that my presentation involves circularity:

To prove the ubiquity of the calm-insight paradigm in early Buddhist discourses, Anālayo refers to two texts (AN 6.60 and the *Brahmajāla Sutta*). But both texts lack calm-insight schemes. Anālayo's argument seems to be that calm-insight is universally applicable not because of what the texts say, but simply because calm-insight must be universally applicable.

Anālayo similarly claims that distinguishing between calm and insight ignores the subtle 'interrelation between tranquillity and insight' that the Buddhist path implies. Once again, the argument seems to be that calm-insight is universally applicable because calm-insight is universally applicable; what the texts actually say is ignored.

My discussion of AN 6.60 and the *Brahmajāla-sutta* is not about the ubiquity of the calm-insight paradigm, but much rather about "discourses that highlight the potential drawbacks of absorption attainment" (Anālayo 2017b: 112). As I mention in the very next sentence, my point is that

“such discourses imply that the early Buddhist texts did not consider absorption attainment to be in itself productive of liberating insight.” Wynne’s criticism is based on a misunderstanding.

Regarding the interrelation between tranquillity and insight, in Anālayo (2017b: 173f) I summarize my previous work on this topic in the following manner:

Tranquillity and insight are closely interrelated in the early discourses, and it is only in later tradition that these came to be seen as two distinct paths of meditative practice. An illustrative example is when the *Āneñjasappāya-sutta* and its parallels showcase the contribution the cultivation of insight can make for the development of tranquillity. An example for the contribution of tranquillity to insight can be seen in the *Cūlasuññata-sutta* and its parallels, which employ the perceptions of the immaterial attainments for the sake of a gradual deepening of insight into emptiness. The possibility of such cross-fertilization between tranquillity and insight shows that in the early discourses these two do not function as separate paths, but rather constitute complementary dimensions of the path.

Instead of being a case of circularity, my position is based on detailed comparative studies of relevant early discourses.⁹

Wynne (2018: 88) identifies another instance of supposed circularity as follows:

Invoking the notion of ‘cumulative and interrelated aspects of the path’ as the key to understanding the Buddhist path merely begs the question: is a ‘cumulative and interrelated’ model assumed in the key texts? In other words, there appears to be a serious circularity in Anālayo’s thinking. To the question, ‘is there a distinction between calm and insight in some early texts?’, Anālayo’s answer is ‘There is no distinction, because there is no distinction between calm and insight in early Buddhist path schemes’.

The notion targeted in this criticism occurs in a passage concerning attempts to standardize accounts of the gradual path (Anālayo 2016a: 40):

Although such standardization yields neat theoretical presentations, a problem inevitably results from the fact that theoretical accounts can only describe one item at a time. There is therefore an inherent danger that cumulative and interrelated aspects of the path recede to the background, whereas its

sequential aspects are foregrounded. This might explain the variations found in path accounts in the early discourses.

The expression “cumulative and interrelated aspects”, the notion under criticism, comes with a footnote reference to a more detailed comparative study of accounts of the gradual path in the discourses in Anālayo (2016b). In that study, I adopted a distinction, proposed originally by Bucknell (1984), between “sequential” and “cumulative” activities described in accounts of the gradual path. Consultation of my article would have quickly clarified that this is not about a distinction between calm and insight, but merely about the problem of how to understand variations in parallel accounts of the gradual path. In line with previously-examined instances of criticism, Wynne continues to ignore explicit references in my work that could have clarified the situation for him. The allegation of circularity proves to be without a foundation.

5. Criticism Ad Hominem

Another criticism by Wynne (2018: 100) proceeds as follows:

Playing the man, not the ball. This sporting metaphor refers to the use of psychological tactics to undermine one’s opponent (‘gamesmanship’), rather than concentrating purely on the game at hand. It is an apt description of Anālayo’s *ad hominem* attacks on Louis de la Vallée Poussin. Rather than deal with the academic problem identified by de La Vallée Poussin (the ‘ball’), Anālayo prefers to ‘play the man’, by suggesting that de La Vallée Poussin was influenced by Vasubandhu, or is guilty of Orientalism. Personal criticism demeans academic endeavour. One might as well say that Western converts to Buddhism are not sufficiently objective to study Buddhism academically. Of course, such a point would be absurd.

This assessment is based on an identification by Wynne (2018: 93) in my work of an “*ad hominem* critique of Louis de La Vallée Poussin. He does this by claiming that de La Vallée Poussin was influenced by Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.” Actually, the suggestion of such influence was just an attempt to understand what might have inspired de La Vallée Poussin. This was not meant to convey anything negative. In fact, I see nothing inherently wrong in taking up what the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* seems to suggest and trying to see whether this fits with the discourses. This is all the more understandable given the early stage in the history of Buddhist studies at which de La Vallée Poussin produced what I refer to as “his remarkable annotated translation of Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*” (Anālayo 2017b: 91).

My discussion here was never meant to be a critique, *ad hominem* or otherwise. If this much can already be considered criticism *ad hominem* by “casting aspersion on the intellectual proclivities of others” and playing the man instead of the ball, then how should Wynne’s style of criticism of me in his article be regarded?

6. Ignoring Dissenting Scholarship

In the last of the criticisms to be examined here, Wynne (2018: 100) contends that I ignore modern scholarship that disagrees with my own ideas:

Anālayo (2016[a]: 41) makes the reasonable point that those ‘who wish to uphold this theory or one of its two main assumptions need to engage seriously with the criticism that has been voiced, rather than ignoring it.’ This is sensible and commendable, but Anālayo unfortunately fails to follow his own advice. The arguments made here have already been made, albeit more briefly, in Wynne (2007: 102-04). Other important works are bypassed: Gombrich (1996) is not taken seriously, and Schmithausen’s study (1981) of early path schemes is more or less ignored, as is Bhikkhu Bodhi’s tentative support for the TPT (2007). By ignoring alternative points of view, Anālayo makes a one-dimensional case that ultimately harms his own analysis.

In the course of my discussions in Anālayo (2017b), I refer to Schmithausen (1981), Gombrich (1996), Bodhi (2007),¹⁰ and Wynne (2007).¹¹ Without more specific indications as to what precisely should have been mentioned and taken more seriously, it is not clear to me in what way I warrant being accused of ignoring conflicting scholarship.

The lack of clarity in this respect can perhaps best be illustrated by following up the reference Wynne gives to his own work: Wynne (2007: 102-04). Following up this page reference leads me to the later part of a discussion of the *Udayamānavapucchā* and the beginning of a discussion of the *Posalamānavapucchā*. Although the discussion starts off with the topic of *jhāna*, the remainder is concerned with various other terms used in the relevant verses. I fail to see any specific arguments in support of the two paths theory that I could have taken into account.

On the assumption that he might have given a wrong cross-reference to his own work,¹² I checked the index in his book, which has led me to Wynne (2007: 117–120) as what he would have had in mind. Yet, this is just a summary of already well-known arguments for the two paths

theory. It does not seem to me to be worth being taken up explicitly, as it does not add significantly new arguments to the discussion.

Although I would not consider it worth explicit reference in the context of a survey of main arguments proposed in support of the two paths theory, which after all only needs to acknowledge who made certain points first and not who just repeated them, it definitely deserves being considered in the present context. Reading Wynne's entire coverage of the two paths theory it becomes clear that it lacks even a single reference to scholarship that dissents from it. This is indeed a case of "ignoring alternative points of view" and thereby making "a one-dimensional case that ultimately harms his own analysis".

This stands in contrast to my own work where, in addition to the scholars already mentioned above (as being referenced in Anālayo 2017b), in the course of my discussion of the two paths theory I also refer to several other scholars who endorse that theory and thereby dissent with my position, including de La Vallée Poussin (1929) and (1936/1937), Pande (1957), Griffiths (1981), Sferra (2011), Clough (2012), and Polak (2016). To the best of my abilities, I have tried to include relevant scholarship, covering material published in English, French, and Italian, and to address the main arguments that emerge from their publications.

In general, I think it is fair to state that detailed annotations and extensive bibliographies are characteristic of my writings. My examination of the two paths theory is no exception to this. In this way, the complaint that I ignore dissenting scholarship to make a one-dimensional case is contrary to the evidence. In turn, it is fair to ask if this is instead applicable to Wynne's work.

7. Arguing the Two Paths Theory

In the first part of his article, Wynne (2018: 81–87) discusses three passages he considers to be "key texts" in support of the two paths theory: SN 12.68, SN 12.70, and AN 6.46. Given his frequent emphasis on the importance of taking into account dissenting scholarship, as well as the need to do justice to the explicit testimony of the texts and avoid any circularity, it seems fair to employ these same principles to evaluate his own academic work. In fact, towards the end of his article, Wynne (2018: 101) offers general reflections on proper academic research, as follows:

Perhaps academic progress can be made even when the objectivity of its practitioners is undermined or when

contemporary scholarship is ignored, or even when circular argumentation is deployed. But progress is surely impossible when the explicit statements of the texts are bypassed in favour of one's own preferred ideas.

I wholeheartedly agree on the need to beware of reading our own ideas into the texts, to avoid circularity, and to make sure that all relevant academic publications are taken into account rather than ignored. The preceding pages will have shown that Wynne's assessment of my work as failing to be up to these standards is contradicted by the evidence.

Turning to the three key passages in question, since Wynne has already provided details of each episode, suffice it for the present context to consider an aspect of their presentation, namely the level of awakening attained, if at all, by chief protagonists in each discourse. These are Nārada in SN 12.68, Susīma in SN 12.70, and a group of scholar monks in AN 6.46.

7.a) Nārada in SN 12.68

In the case of Nārada in SN 12.68, Wynne (2018: 85) holds that the phrase "having touched with the body", *kāyena phusitvā*, in SN 12.68 refers to the attainment of the formless states and their goal, cessation. Wynne does not refer to the detailed discussion of this discourse by Bodhi (2003), a study critical of the two paths theory, which marshals relevant evidence from other discourses that Wynne has not taken into account: a reference to *asekhas* as having touched with the body the consummation of the five spiritual faculties,¹³ and another discourse that defines the consummation of these five spiritual faculties to be the deathless.¹⁴ This in turn leads Bodhi (2003: 63) to the conclusion that "both the *sekha* and the *arahant* 'see' *nibbāna* with wisdom, but the *arahant* alone can 'dwell contacting it with the body'."

In another study critical of the two paths theory, which also takes into account parallels to SN 12.68 preserved in Chinese, Gómez (1999: 703) concludes that, contrary to the assessment by de La Vallée Poussin, "the contrast is not between the intellectual apprehension and the intuitive apprehension, but between all mental apprehensions and an experience in the body or the whole person: in short, a realization."

Another expression of criticism of an interpretation of SN 12.68 as supportive of the two paths theory can be found in Swearer (1972: 369), who argues that the interpretation proposed by de La Vallée Poussin "is

severely challenged by an analysis of *viññāṇa* and *paññā*”, presented by him. Wynne (2018) does not even mention Swearer (1972), Gómez (1999), or Bodhi (2003), let alone engage seriously with the points raised by them.

7.b) Susīma in SN 12.70

In the case of Susīma in the second of the three passages to be taken up, SN 12.70, Wynne (2018: 86) has similarly failed to take into account the discussion by Bodhi (2009). This has brought to light that two Chinese parallels to SN 12.70, found in the *Samyukta-āgama* and the *Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya*, explicitly report Susīma’s stream-entry.¹⁵ While acknowledging that the textual evidence on this point is ambiguous, Bodhi (2009: 65) rightly points out that such an attainment would fit the context of SN 12.70.

7.c) Scholar Monks in AN 6.46

The third passage, AN 6.46, involves a contrast between meditator monks and scholar monks. Wynne (2018: 81–84) has studied this in detail, dedicating more space to AN 6.46 in his article than to the other two passages together. Thus his study of AN 6.46 affords a convenient occasion for taking a closer look at his methodology. The issue at stake is whether the scholar monks, described in this passage, can be considered *arahants*, this being the original take on the discourse by de La Vallée Poussin (1929). Evaluating this attribution requires an examination of the qualification of these scholar monks as *gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijja passanti*, translated by Wynne (2018: 81) as “they see, having penetrated the profound words of the doctrine with insight.”

In his discussion of other occurrences of the compound *atthapadaṃ*, Wynne (2018) does not mention that such occurrences have already been surveyed by Cousins (2009: 37–39), yet another study that voices disagreement with the two paths theory. Cousins’ survey covers three discourses in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and three consecutive verses in the *Dhammapada*: in addition to AN 6.46 itself, these parallel occurrences are AN 4.192 and AN 9.4, as well as Dh 100 to 102.

The ensuing discussion in Wynne (2018) shows that he finds AN 4.192 particularly relevant for his argument. His procedure for giving priority to this particular occurrence is as follows: after mentioning the *Dhammapada* verses, Wynne (2018: 83) states that, “apart from this, the term only occurs in the definition of the Dhamma devotees at AN 6.46,

and in one other Sutta, AN 4.192”. In other words, the verse occurrences are set aside, as if only prose occurrences are relevant to ascertaining the meaning of the compound. Moreover, the second prose parallel (AN 9.4) is completely ignored.

Only two paragraphs later on the same page, in the context of a discussion of the phrase “penetrating with insight”, Wynne (2018: 83) states: “AN 9.4 refers to the mendicant who preaches the Dhamma, and then ‘penetrates and sees the profound meaning (*gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ*) with insight, just as he illumines it.’”

This contradicts his earlier statement that there is only one other prose occurrence paralleling AN 6.46, namely AN 4.192. The statement just quoted shows that this earlier statement was made in full awareness of the second prose parallel in AN 9.4. In other words, Wynne is clearly aware of *atthapadaṃ* being found in AN 9.4, but he fails to take it into account when discussing occurrences of *atthapadaṃ*.

This illustrates a tendency to not represent the relevant information fully and accurately, be it intentional or out of negligence, evident in his various criticism of my work surveyed above.

The reference to AN 9.4 in the context of his discussion of the phrase “penetrating with insight” also clarifies why it had to be ignored earlier. AN 9.4 not only shares the term *atthapadaṃ* with the description of the scholar monks in AN 6.46 but also the reference to “penetrating with insight”. A listing of the three occurrences in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* side by side illustrates the situation as follows:

AN 4.192: *gambhīraṃ c’ eva atthapadaṃ udāharati*,¹⁶

AN 6.46: *gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijjha passanti*,¹⁷

AN 9.4: *gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijjha passati*.¹⁸

Clearly, AN 9.4 employs the same phrasing as the passage under question, AN 6.46, in its description of the scholar monks. In contrast, the phrasing in AN 4.192, although it involves *atthapadaṃ*, employs a different verb. In an earlier part of his discussion, Wynne (2018: 91) states that

the philological or text-critical method should rather draw out the meaning of difficult passages by using closely related textual parallels ... every effort must be made to keep the discussion firmly rooted in what the texts actually say, rather than edge towards what one would like them to say.

On following this approach, AN 9.4 would clearly have been the right candidate for drawing out the meaning of the description of the scholar monks in AN 6.46, instead of AN 4.192. The problem with applying his own proposal here, however, is that the reference to *atthapadaṃ* in AN 9.4 appears in the context of an ascending list of five benefits of listening to the teachings, where it is part of the description of the third benefit. The fifth benefit is that those in training who hear such teachings will be inspired to make an effort to progress to awakening; for *arahants*, hearing such teachings will serve as a pleasant abiding in the here and now. The context does not allow for considering the reference to *atthapadaṃ* in the third benefit as already involving the final goal.

This would explain the omission of AN 9.4 in the earlier discussion. Taking into account AN 9.4 in this context would have inevitably led to a conclusion that does not accord with the two paths theory. It would have undermined the required basis for considering the scholar monks to be *arahants*. For this reason, it had to be left out.

By proceeding in this way, Wynne (2018: 83) is then able to conclude, in reference to AN 4.192, that “as the only other prose occurrence of *atthapadaṃ* is found in AN 6.46, it is likely that it too uses the term as a designation of Nirvana.” Based on this type of analysis of the term *atthapadaṃ*, the needed basis has been established to vindicate the assessment originally made by de La Vallée Poussin in what is the first and foundational publication advocating the two paths theory in the history of Buddhist studies: the scholar monks described in AN 6.46 are indeed “not merely doctrinal experts, but rather liberated Arahants”, Wynne (2018: 83).

From the viewpoint of the need to take the sources seriously and at their own word, this procedure is rather disconcerting. Far stronger words could in fact be used here to qualify Wynne’s methodology. Anyway, the facts speak for themselves.

The procedure adopted by Wynne in this way also appears to involve some degree of circularity: the need to consider the scholar monks as *arahants* motivates the selection of AN 4.192 as the only prose parallel occurrence of *atthapadaṃ* to be taken into account. Based on this selection, the conclusion can then be drawn that the scholar monks are indeed *arahants*.

7.d) Overall Assessment

The study by Wynne of three key passages relevant to the two paths theory shows signs of ignoring dissenting scholarship, not doing justice to the explicit testimony of the texts, and some degree of circularity.

The omissions or errors made in the course of studying these three passages make it unmistakably clear that Wynne has not even read the contributions made by scholars whose conclusions are critical of the two paths theory, in particular Swearer (1972), Gómez (1999), Bodhi (2003), Bodhi (2009), and Cousins (2009). I referred to each of these papers in Anālayo (2016a) and again (2017b), my two publications taken up by Wynne for criticism, and these references are found not only in footnotes, but in the case of Anālayo (2016a: 41) even in the main text, where I speak of “papers with criticism of the assumptions underlying the two paths theory and/or with clarifications regarding the discourses quoted in its support.” This makes it impossible for Wynne to be unaware of these publications and their potential significance for his attempt to defend the two paths theory.

This is indubitably an example of “ignoring modern scholarship in disagreement with his own ideas”, in stark contrast to his own assessment in Wynne (2018: 100) that it is “sensible and commendable” to engage seriously with the criticism that has been voiced, rather than ignoring it. With all due respect to a fellow academic and former pupil of Richard Gombrich, when other critical scholarship is not even consulted and instead strongly worded attacks are launched to discredit and thereby silence a dissenting voice, then this leaves me with the impression that the two paths theory (as an icon of the belief in the incongruity of the texts) is being turned into an unquestionable truth, instead of remaining an academic hypothesis that is open to being disproved.

From the viewpoint of the audience of his article, since Wynne never refers to any of the studies by scholars critical of the two paths theory, a reader unacquainted with relevant publications could easily get the impression that no other scholar has ever disagreed with the interpretation that these three passages support the two paths theory. The only recent exception would then appear to be Anālayo (2017b), taken up swiftly for criticism in Wynne (2018) by declaring this to be merely an attempt “to seal off what tradition regards as sacred – the homogeneity of the canonical discourses on the Buddhist path – while at the same time attempting to shut down debate”. In doing so, Wynne (2018: 104) presents himself

to his reader as a custodian of proper academic procedure who, wisely foreseeing future decline, has intervened in a timely manner, realizing the danger if in this way

exegetical thinking is unwittingly smuggled into Buddhist studies, and if modern studies are cherry-picked towards a desired end, little progress will be made in understanding intellectual history ...

This might also be a trend which will further develop in the future, as the academic study of Buddhism grows at Theravāda monastic universities, and as more 'Western' monastics turn their attention to academic studies. At this point in time, then, it is crucial that a firm effort is made to distinguish text-critical history from exegesis.

The way Wynne visualizes his own role reveals his agenda, also evident in the style of his unfounded criticism of my work. Such an agenda invariably impairs his ability to live up to his own rhetoric, evident in his examination of relevant canonical passages. In fact, it prevents him from even reading dissenting scholarship.

Pertinent to understanding the dynamics behind the agenda of scholars posing as custodians of proper scholarship are observations made by Gómez (1995: 211f), regarding

the scholar who understands his or her role as the custodian of a cultural object, or an idea, perhaps a "truth" ... This role of course overlaps with that of the "cleric", the custodian of standards, values, truths. The cleric is no longer charged with the cure of souls but serves as a true "clerk", the custodian of grammar and the proper genres of scholarship. Perhaps, if this clerk is up to date, he or she will also be the custodian of "method" ...

Common among contemporary scholars is the role of the anti-priest: the guardian of "secular authority". I do not refer here to the common iconoclasm directed at the consecrated work of other scholars, rather, I refer to the scholar's interest in undermining the authority of the tradition he or she studies. Seldom is this role part of the scholar's public role.

This also ties in with observations I made above, in that being a monastic does not imply that one must automatically be a blind adherent to religious beliefs. Similarly, not being a monastic does not mean that one is automatically free from bias. In fact the "anti-priest", to borrow the term used by Gómez, can be just as biased, in particular in favour of dismantling the authority and homogeneity of the tradition studied.

In the end, the problem of confirmation bias is universal to human beings, simply because beliefs that can impact objectivity can be secular just as much as religious. The forces of cognitive dissonance affect us all. We all face the challenge of having to avoid bending evidence in our favour and ignore dissenting research.

Conclusion

The series of allegations by Wynne (2018), regarding my examination of the two paths theory, are unfounded. His various accusations are based on a misreading of my research and a failure to consult footnotes and references given, with the result that his contentions of improper scholarship appear to characterize his own approach better than my own. This is particularly evident in his discussion of three discourses relevant to the topic of the two paths theory, which show consistent disregard of dissenting scholarship combined with incorrect representation of the textual evidence to yield confirmation for his belief in the two paths theory. In sum, a closer examination of Wynne's discussion shows that much of what he accuses me of in his article is actually what he engages in himself.

*Quid autem vides festucam in oculo fratris tui,
et trabem in oculo tuo non vides?*¹⁹

How come you see the speck in your brother's eye
and do not see the plank in your own eye?

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SHT	Sanskrit Handschriften aus den Turfanfunden
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i> (commentary on SN)
T	Taishō edition (CBETA)

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Notes

1. SN 12.68 at SN II 118,10, and SĀ 351 at T II 99a1. The Sanskrit fragment parallel, SHT II 680a 95, Waldschmidt et al. 1968: 39, has unfortunately not preserved the relevant part.
2. Anālayo 2006 and 2018: 20–22.
3. Anālayo 2010: 107–113; see also Anālayo 2014.
4. Anālayo 2012c.
5. Anālayo 2016c.
6. Anālayo 2005 and 2009b; for a reply to criticism see Anālayo 2017a: 507 note 14.
7. Admittedly my statement, regarding the four truths, that “they are not the goal itself, just as the finger pointing at the moon is not the moon itself” could be read to carry such implications. But this can only happen if one disregards the remainder of my discussion. In the revised version of my discussion, published in Anālayo 2017b (to which Wynne 2018 refers in his discussion), this statement is in fact no longer found, precisely because I realized that it could be misunderstood.
8. Wynne 2018: 101 note 32 refers the reader to his own note 19; the reference is actually found in his note 24.
9. The relevant studies are Anālayo 2009a and 2012b.
10. The assumption that the article by Bodhi 2007 is in “tentative support” of the two paths theory is another case of misunderstanding. The point he is concerned with in this article is to what degree absorption attainment is required for reaching the final goal; he does not envisage reaching the final goal by mere intellectual reflection.
11. Anālayo 2017b: 77 note 30, 94 note 61, 94 note 62, 118 note 19, 159 note 106, 160 note 108, 166 note 123.
12. For another instance of wrong cross-referencing to his own work see above note 8.
13. SN 48.53 at SN V 230,17.
14. SN 48.57 at SN V 232,17.
15. SĀ 347 at T II 97c5: 爾時須深見法得法，覺法度疑，不由他信，不由他度，於正法中心得無畏 (later on this version also records his eventual realization of the final goal, an attainment also reported in the Pāli commentary, Spk II 127,20) and T 1425 at T XXII 363b11: 滅惡邪見，得法眼淨.
16. AN II 190,7.
17. AN III 356,20.
18. AN IV 362,2.
19. Matthew 7.3.