CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Deluded mindfulness
Authors	Dockstader, Jason
Publication date	2023-12-22
Original Citation	Dockstader, J. (2023) 'Deluded mindfulness', in Ferrarello, S. and Hadjioannou, C. (eds.) The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Mindfulness. London: Routledge, pp. 175-188. doi: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003350668-14
Type of publication	Book chapter
Link to publisher's version	10.4324/9781003350668-14
Rights	© 2023, the Authors. All rights reserved. This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in Ferrarello, S. and Hadjioannou, C. (eds.) The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Mindfulness on 22 December 2023, available online: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003350668-14 - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
Download date	2026-11-06 12:34:43
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/15571



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Deluded Mindfulness

Abstract This paper looks at two Chinese traditions that can be described as offering a similar kind of unorthodox practice of mindfulness. Both the classical Daoism of the *Zhuangzi* and the medieval Buddhism of the Tiantai school develop an approach to mindfulness that presupposes unique metaphysical and epistemic views. In contemporary philosophic terms, by combining a strong many-one identity view in mereology, a novel form of existence monism in fundamental metaphysics, and an explosive trivialism in epistemology, both classical Daoism and Tiantai Buddhism develop an approach to mindfulness wherein each and every moment of experience or thought is accessed and regarded as creating, inherently including, and ultimately being identical to each and every other moment of experience. Every partially and locally coherent, yet wholly and globally incoherent, phenomenon is created by the discerning, deluded mind of everyday sentient beings, and it is by contemplating this deluded mind that one reaches similar soteriological goals of liberation and independence. In the *Zhuangzi*, this is found in the discussions of the 'fasting of the mind' and 'sitting in forgetfulness,' of matching Nature's endless production of momentary indexical distinctions, each of which contains the entirety of the Dao's infinite multiplicity. In Tiantai, this is found in discussions of the 'contemplation of the mind' and 'contemplation of inherent inclusion,' of the attempt to access 'one moment of experience as three thousand worlds,' with such 'three thousand worlds' being all phenomena created by the deluded mind, which is, namely, everything. The paper, then, develops this novel form of mindfulness and calls it 'deluded mindfulness.' In the process, it aims to ascribe to deluded mindfulness the capacity to offer therapeutic benefits that follow from affirming the many contradictory understandings of mindfulness today.

Keywords Daoism – Tiantai Buddhism – Mindfulness – Trivialism – Delusion

1 Contemporary Mindfulness

As with most highly contested terms, one can find many contradictory conceptions of mindfulness today. Bhikkhu Bodhi has described the term as being "so vague and elastic that it serves almost as a cipher into which we can read virtually anything we want" (Bodhi, 2011, p. 22). The aim of this paper is to claim that such seeming incoherent all-inclusiveness in the conceptions of mindfulness might not be such a bad thing. In fact, by focusing on specific traditions of Chinese philosophy—classical Daoism and Tiantai Buddhism, in particular—a conception of mindfulness can be developed that will enable it to positively affirm all of its contradictory meanings. The very contradictory plurality of conceptions of mindfulness might itself provide insight into what mindfulness can tell us about the world and how it can help us live in accordance with it.

If there is any consensus today regarding the meaning of mindfulness, it is that it has something to do with "non-judgemental, present-centred awareness," a distinct kind of paying attention: "on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4; Lutz et al., 2015, p. 636). It is "a kind of nonelaborative, nonjudgmental, present-centred awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is" (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 232). Most agree that mindfulness must at least involve some sort of lucid awareness or clear comprehension, some kind of transparent access either to the world, the mind, or both. And the point of reaching such a state of mind is to obtain some sort of therapeutic or soteriological release, whether it be more mundane stress relief or overcoming of anxiety, or something much more extraordinary like embodying and expressing wisdom or reaching full Buddhahood. But this is about as far as it goes with respect to agreement concerning the meaning of mindfulness. Debates have emerged as to whether

mindfulness is more a trait, a state, or a practice. There are also more pressing philosophical debates about the meaning of mindfulness along temporal, moral, and epistemic dimensions (Stone & Zahavi, 2021).

Looking to its Buddhist pedigree, there are debates concerning the meaning of the Pali *sati* and Sanskrit *smṛti*, terms which originally meant 'memory,' 'recollection,' and 'remembrance,' and which when compared to contemporary mindfulness seem to lack an emphasis on present-centredness, bare attention, and being nonjudgmental. It is hard to tell then whether mindfulness should be understood as being present-centred at the expense of any accessing of the past or projecting into the future, or should be present-centred in the sense of depending upon past experiences with the intention of preparing for inevitable futurity. Also, if mindfulness is meant to be exclusively present-centred to the degree of being non-evaluative and nonjudgmental, then it is hard to tell what happens to the necessarily moral motivation that leads most to entertain mindfulness in the first place and the moral, or at least normative, content of most mindful judgments. As Rupert Gethin emphasizes, *sati* is supposed to be an awareness not just of things, but of the *value* of things (Gethin, 1992, p. 39).

Finally, there is much consternation about whether contemporary mindfulness is not epistemically self-refuting to the degree of bordering on an elimination of consciousness itself. If one is meant to be mindful in the sense of utterly nonjudgmental, then it becomes difficult to see how one could exhibit mindful knowledge or wisdom, how one could apprehend things are they truly are, or indeed how one could even remain a conscious being with intentional mental states while becoming so 'nonconceptually aware.' The danger is that the lucid awareness gained through mindfulness might drift into an unintentional mirroring of the world that a Mādhyamika like Candrakīrti (ca. 600-650 CE) offered and which has recently been described as a robotic or zombified form of Buddhism (Siderits, 2006, p. 308-333). Now, of course, most contemporary proponents of mindfulness do not go so far as to follow Candrakīrti, but the 'dangerous' epistemic implications of mindfulness remains a contentious issue within contemporary mindfulness and between it and its historical sources.

This is not to say that the main lines of dispute in the understanding of mindfulness are only between contemporary secular, scientifically-inclined proponents of the practice and historically relevant Buddhists. There is as much disagreement about mindfulness and proper meditative techniques within the Buddhist tradition as there is between the tradition and its champions today. And this says nothing of the non-Buddhist traditions integrated into contemporary mindfulness where something close to the technique seems to have been practiced as well. Contemporary mindfulness appears, then, to be either a contradictory mix or at least a bizarre collection of Theraveda and Mahayana Buddhist elements, latent non-Buddhist Stoic and Christian tendencies, and pieces of contemporary psychological evidence.

One could do one of two things about this situation. On the one hand, as most do, one could untangle and resolve these contradictions and show how the apparent tensions are really only superficial and non-threatening. This is usually best done through historical and scientific cherry-picking, or through plain indifference to the problem. On the other hand, one could take the tensions and contradictions in the understandings of mindfulness as an opportunity to explore mostly unaddressed ways of engaging in mindfulness, and contemplation more generally, that aim not to resolve paradoxes but affirm them and, moreover, indulge in their total explosion. This paper will take the latter route. The view on offer here can be described as a form of meta-mindfulness where the contradictory views about time, morality, and epistemology within the understandings of mindfulness will be found to be inherently true contradictions. The understandings of mindfulness are so contradictory because mindfulness is so contradictory, as are all things. Mindfulness can be a way to access and affirm this, and to experience release on the basis of such an accessing of the inherent contradictoriness of all things.

The key to properly understanding and practicing this sort of mindfulness will be to view mindfulness itself as the meditative or contemplative technique which can access, affirm, therapeutically appreciate, and ultimately identify with the intrinsically contradictory nature of reality. The lucid awareness of oneself and the world found in the Chinese traditions of Classical Daoism and Tiantai Buddhism will be seen as being identical to the delusions of the everyday limited and perspectival mind. There is a way of being mindful—about mindfulness, about the mind, about the world, about everything—that sees lucidity *as* delusion, the present *as* the past and future, goodness *as* evil, truth *as* falsity, mind *as* matter, things *as* their conditions and constituents, and vice versa and so on. Being nonjudgmental will be the best way of making judgments, both moral and epistemic. Being present-centred will be the best way of living entirely in the past and the future. Exhibiting bare attention will be the best way of being utterly immersed in things. Feeling and identifying with all the defiling emotions, false beliefs, and evil deeds that characterize the world, karma, and *saṃsāra* will be the best way to experience the true peace and moral perfection of nirvanic therapeutic release. This approach will be called 'deluded mindfulness.' We can start with an earlier form of this approach in the contemplative practice of Daoist mindfulness as found in the Daoist classic, the *Zhuangzi*.[1]

[1] The *Zhuangzi* is the name of an ancient Chinese text composed during the late Warring States period (476-221 BCE). Along with the *Laozi*, or *Daodejing*, it is one of the two main texts of Classical Daoism. The first seven, or 'inner,' chapters are commonly thought to be the work of Zhuang Zhou (ca. 369-286 BCE), who was also called Zhuangzi ("Master Zhuang"). The authorship of the outer and miscellaneous chapters is usually attributed to other Daoist followers, often trying to add chapters written in the spirit of the inner chapters.

2 Daoist Mindfulness

At the start the fourth of the seven 'inner chapters' of the *Zhuangzi*, entitled 'In the Human World' in Brook Ziporyn's translation (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 24-32), there is a discussion between Confucius and his disciple Yan Hui.[2] As with each of the discussions in this chapter, there is a concern with determining how to best combine the achievement of wisdom with living an everyday normal human life, especially a life in which there is an attempt to practice one's wisdom in the context of being employed in a stressful line of work like that of a political advisor. In more general terms, the issue in this chapter is how one can both effectively play their allotted and fated social role while remaining one with the Dao, the Course or Way of all things. The question is, how can one reconcile genuine knowledge, wisdom, and peace of mind with the necessity of having to perform certain social roles? That is, how can one healthily combine the natural or heavenly (*tian*) power (*de*) of the Dao within oneself with the pathological necessities of living in the human world?[3]

Yan tells Confucius that he has heard there is a tyrant in the state of Wei and that he plans on taking his master's advice to head out in search of a tyrant to remonstrate with and teach the proper moral virtues to. Surprisingly, Confucius—who is ironically Zhuangzi's mouthpiece in the text given the deep conflict between Confucianism and Daoism—tells Yan he is more likely to get himself executed than anything else doing something so foolish and premature. Yan is not wise enough yet to perform his social role of Confucian political advisor with the requisite agility and ease. Confucius must first teach him about a meditative or contemplative

[2] A word about Brook Ziporyn: this paper is heavily reliant upon his work considering he is by far the Anglophone world's leading expert on the *Zhuangzi* and Tiantai Buddhism. The best or only translations into English of the *Zhuangzi* and Tiantai texts come from Ziporyn. Therefore, he is my source for all the quotes from original texts in this paper. Also, I mostly follow his interpretations of Daoism and Tiantai. However, there are a few moments where I push his readings a bit further and perhaps end up with conclusions he might not be totally happy with. Thus, the paper could be viewed as an at least partial application of Ziporyn's interpretations of Daoism and Tiantai to the topic of mindfulness with some added flavor on my part.

[3] In Daoism, Dao refers to the condition of possibility or ground for the emergence of concrete particular things. It is what makes things, how things are made, and that out of which they are made. It is that in, by, and through which things emerge as present entities. It is also that to which things return as they decay and disintegrate. In their emergence and decay, things are so produced as to always depend upon and ultimately interpenetrate with each other. Everything is interconnected in and through the Dao. Dao is often translated as either the Way this is so, the Course all things follow.

Tian, in the *Zhuangzi*, is roughly synonymous with the Dao. Originally meaning 'sky' or 'heaven/s,' it comes to serve as the name for the process of the Dao's self-creation and -destruction as all things. *Tian* is the name for whatever happens naturally, spontaneously, unintentionally, which for the *Zhuangzi* is everything that happens, including all that is human, artificial, contrived, and intentional. Daoist *de*, when applied to the Dao and *tian*, is the power by which the Dao or nature does what it does. In things, *de* is that in virtue of which they do what they do. It is anything's share of the Dao's infinite and constant power to self-create and -destroy, to emerge and decay. When one excels at identifying with their nature, they activate and affirm their *de*, their power to become what they are, their ability to be the expression of the Dao they are. They thereby exhibit virtuosity.

technique needed for successfully thriving in the human world. It is called the "fasting of the mind" (*xinzhai*) or "sitting and forgetting" (*zuowang*) (Ziporyn, 2009a, pp. 26-28).[4]

Fasting the mind initially involves emptying one's mind of its own particular intentional content, its own 'understanding consciousness' (*zhi*) (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 27). One is to first listen to the world—with all its concrete particular beings with their particular perspectives and preferences, including one's own—not with one's ears, but with a mind in which all of one's own intentions have been merged into a singularity. Then one is to listen to the world not with one's singular intentional mind, but with one's vital energies, one's *qi*, which is "an emptiness, a waiting for the presence of beings" (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 27). What gathers in this emptiness is the Dao itself, the Course or Way of all things, the way all things interdependently emerge and decay. This emptiness in which the Dao gathers *is* the emptiness of the fasted mind. The fasted mind *is* the emptiness in which the Dao gathers. It is that in, through, and as which all beings emerge and decay as so many interdependent and transforming perspectives on the world.

One is to fast their mind to the degree of listening to the world with one's vital energies because listening with one's ears leaves one only hearing what the ears can receive. Likewise, listening with one's non-fasted mind leaves one stuck at "whatever verifies its preconceptions" (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 26). It leaves one with a mind that can only entertain what it can slot into its categories and count in its usual tallies. Instead, with a fasted mind that listens with its vital breath or energies, the powers with which it is disposed to react to the world effectively and spontaneously, it can hear the entire history and future of the Dao's endless production and destruction of itself as all things, beings, perspectives, and so on. This is what is meant by emptiness, the emptiness the fasted mind becomes by hearing with its vital energies: the openness of an all-affirming identification with and as all the specific and distinct things or perspectives thereby created and destroyed. A fasted mind hears calmly and freely through and as all non-fasted minds hearing the world through their necessarily perspectival and limited ears and intentional minds. The point then of being present-centred and nonjudgmentally, nonconceptually, and unintentionally aware is to view the world through and identify with all limited, deluded particular memories and projections, all pathological attachments and normative judgments.

There is thus a oneness to the fasted mind, but a oneness that is also the affirmation of the absolute plurality of all that emerges and decays within, through, and as its emptiness. It sees or hears all things as so many

[4] The Chinese concept of mind (*xin*) in the notion of the 'fasting of the mind' (*xinzhai*) is notoriously difficult to translate into English. While 'mind' is appropriate insofar as *xin* is understood in its more cognitive aspects, 'heart' is just as appropriate insofar as *xin* is understood in its more affective aspects. *Xin* is thus the seat both of consciousness and feeling. *Xin* is as cerebral as it is sentimental. This is why it is sometimes translated as 'heart-mind.' It is important to keep these aspects of *xin* in mind, or in your heart, going forward.

openings and opportunities for its vital energies and powers to be unintentionally exercised, as so many ways it can dwell in and effectively respond to the world. These ways are fated (*ming*), the workings of the fate of the production and destruction of all things or perspectives that is how the Dao gathers in the fasted mind's emptiness. And this is precisely how Confucius thinks Yan could get away with performing his social role of political advisor effectively, how he could "play in the tyrant's cage without impinging on his concern for a good name" (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 27).

Yan is to advise him opportunely, whenever the occasion calls for it, without him much realizing that advice is being given or without him much noticing who is giving it. Yan's performance, if it is done with a fasted mind, will display a virtuosity that consists in Yan forgetting his very existence, of his being absorbed into Nature's (*tian*) intrinsic structure, which is the Dao's endless unfolding of interdependent impermanent perspectives. Yan will "make his real home in the oneness, letting himself be temporarily lodged in whatever cannot be avoided" (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 27). Zhuangzi has Confucius describe the powers of Yan's fasted, forgetful mind in quite poetic terms:

> This will get you close to success. It is easy to wipe away your footprints, but difficult to walk without touching the ground. It is easy to use deception when you are sent into your activities at the behest of other humans, but difficult to use deception when sent into activity by Heaven. You have learned how to fly with wings, but not yet how to fly without wings. You have learned the wisdom of being wise, but not yet the wisdom of being free of wisdom. Concentrate on the hollows of what is before you, and the empty chamber within you will generate its own brightness. (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 27)

We can thus already see that Daoism offers a unique twist on a meditative or contemplative practice that can be described as a kind of mindfulness. The fasted mind is a mindful mind that is also quite mindless. It exhibits a wisdom free of wisdom. It is a mind full of its own essential emptiness. It is a mind without conscious intentionality, yet is also the very condition of possibility and ultimately the identity of any conscious intention. It is a mind, a fasted mind, that, through its emptiness, gathers the Dao's expression of itself as all the world's limited perspectives and beings, including the conflicting and contradictory interpretations of mindfulness as well. A mind without intentional consciousness is the emptiness through, by, and as which all intentional consciousnesses can emerge and decay, can endlessly impermanently interdependently produce and destroy themselves and each other as the world and all its beings. A fasted mind hears, takes, and simply becomes all the limited perspectives of non-fasted minds. Fasting of the mind is a kind of mindfulness that can be not only present-centred and nonjudgmentally aware, but also a remembrance of past and projected future moral and epistemic judgments. And not only this: a fasted mind is the fact that any present-centred and nonjudgmental awareness *is* already nothing other than past- and future-centred moral and epistemic judgments and vice versa. Such is what gathers as the Dao in the emptiness of the fasted mind.

To flesh this out more, let us look to the famous second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, the 'Equalizing Assessments of Things.' Here we find further description of the fasted mind as a "large consciousness [that] is idle and spacey" (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 10), a consciousness that understands "the Course that is not a course" (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 17). The fasted mind is a consciousness that "can be called the Heavenly Reservoir—poured into without ever getting full, ladled out of without ever running out" (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 17). And what is poured into and ladled out of it? Everything, all beings that come to presence as the Dao's infinity of perspectives in the emptiness of its vital energy, its constant power. The *Zhuangzi* describes beings as so many perspectives on and of the world, as the indexicals by which things distinguish themselves and are so distinguished. Each being is a 'this,' a 'that's it.' Each being is also a 'that,' a 'that's not it.' Each being is a this that is also a 'that,' a 'that' that is also a 'this.' Each being is a this/that (*shi*/*fei*) distinction. *Shi* also means a 'this' that is morally and epistemically right. *Fei* also means a 'that' that is morally and epistemically wrong. Beings are not just indexical distinctions, but necessarily limited and perspectival normative judgments (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 12). Each being is right. Each being is wrong. Each being is a right/wrong judgment, a true/false epistemic judgment and a good/bad moral judgment.

What is therapeutically key for the *Zhuangzi* is that the large consciousness of the fasted mind, the Heavenly Reservoir, can view all things from their own perspective, from the perspective of each 'this' and each 'that,' especially insofar each 'this' is a 'this/that' or 'right/wrong' distinction that is entailed, included, and ultimately identical to the 'this,' any 'this,' that is making the distinction. Inside each perspective or being are all the perspectives or beings they are not. Inside each 'this' are all the 'thats' that it is not, which is everything. This is the case for each and every being. This is because, for the *Zhuangzi*, all beings are constantly transforming and depending (*dai*) on each other for their existence to such an extent that they are ultimately indiscernible. And this is so since, after all, there is no 'this' without a 'that,' no 'right' without a 'wrong.'

But, again, such transformative interdependence is so extreme that there is no principled way to discern and thus know how or whether one thing is or is not another. This is a case of what Donald Baxter has labelled the "the discernibility of identicals" (Baxter, 1999). All things are identical, but discernibly so. All things are distinct, yet identical. So, all things are distinct, they are their own perspectives, but they are only so by including, entailing, and ultimately being everything they are not, all other perspectives. Each thing/being/perspective/this/right *is* each and every thing/being/perspective/that/wrong and vice versa. There is no getting away from this. It is what each thing is. All things are right and wrong by being each right and wrong,

by being each right *as* being each wrong and vice versa. Each 'this' is a 'this' and 'that' that is all 'thises' and 'thats.'

Now, to be able to take THIS perspective is to have fasted one's mind, to have filled one's large consciousness with all perspectives, to have emptied oneself so that the Dao's ceaseless production of itself as all perspectives can gather, emerge, decay, and interdependently transform in, through, and as one's/the Dao's vital energies, its *de*. In other words, in contrast to Ziporyn's reading of "the Heavenly Reservoir as the Daoist's wild-card mind, rather than its object, the Course" (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 17), I would claim the fasted mind *is* the Dao, the Heavenly Reservoir *is* the gathering and unfolding of all the ways or courses that are the Course, and not only any one of them in particular but rather all of them individually and indivisibly. What this involves is no longer viewing this/that distinctions as really opposites, as somehow only relatively distinct or only partially knowable. No, now each 'this,' each being or perspective is illuminated as obvious, is transparently viewed and absolutely known as what the *Zhuangzi* calls "the Course as axis, the axis of all courses:"

> When 'this' and 'that'—right and wrong—are no longer coupled as opposites—that is called the Course as Axis, the axis of all courses. When this axis finds its place in the center, it responds to all the endless things it confronts, thwarted by none. For it has an endless supply of 'rights,' and endless supply of 'wrongs.' Thus, I say, nothing compares to the Illumination of the Obvious. (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 12)

Thus, what the fasted mind knows and ultimately is, is the absolute plurality of delusions that are each and every limited perspective, each and every 'this' and 'that,' right and wrong. The Heavenly Reservoir is a fasted mind that is every deluded mind, the idle and spacey large consciousness that includes and ultimately is every "small consciousness [that] is cramped and circumspect" (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 10). A proper Daoist mindfulness practice then would not only affirm a present-centred nonjudgmental nonconceptual awareness *and* a past- and future-centred epistemically and morally normatively judgmental awareness, but affirm the former *as* the latter and the latter *as* the former. A mindful mind is a mindless mind that is all deluded minds. To exhibit the wisdom of a fasted mind, a mind without any particular conscious intentions, is to have access to and ultimately identify with and as every distinct deluded judgment, every limited perspective, every right and wrong, every dependent and transforming being, every conscious intention. This is true clear comprehension and lucid awareness.

The *Zhuangzi* offers a variety of names or descriptions for this fasted mind—it is "the Radiance of Drift and Doubt," it involves "Walking Two Roads," it is a "remaining at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter's Wheel" (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 14-15)—but the texts returns in chapter five, Markers of Full Virtuosity, to a discussion of the Heavenly or "Numinous Reservoir" (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 37). Here we read about the joy of having fasted the mind:

> That is what allows the joy of its harmony to open into all things without thereby losing its fullness, what keeps it flowing on day and night without cease, taking part everywhere as the springtime of each being. Connecting up with This, your own mind becomes the site of the life-giving time. This is what is called keeping the innate powers whole. (Ziporyn, 2009a, p. 37)

We can thus see the therapeutic upshot of the *Zhuangzi*'s approach to fasting the mind. It is a contemplative or meditative technique that allows one to view all contradictions as true. Daoist mindfulness entails not only a dialetheism in which some contradictions get to be true, but a full-blown trivialism in which all contradictions are true.[5] It takes a fasted mind to know this trivialism and one-all monism, and yet it is what all deluded minds already know. And it takes a fasted mind to experience the therapeutic benefits of knowing that trivialism is true, and yet again it is already the experienced condition and nature of all deluded minds. This is the content of the wisdom that is free of being wise. It is also the means by which one can obtain not only certain therapeutic benefits, but reach a kind of impersonal immortality. A fasted mind is the Dao, the constant (*cheng*) empty center or axis in, through, and as which all things interdependently impermanently exist as so many intensities of the vital energy's infinitely self-causal and self-destructive natural power. To effectively practice Daoist mindfulness is to become what one is: this vital empty center that is all the deluded, defiled, limited, consciously intentional perspectives that project, create, and ultimately are all beings.

3 Tiantai Mindfulness

Along with classical Daoism, there is another tradition in Chinese philosophy where pathology and therapy are ultimately identical, where mindfulness consists in viewing the world through all its delusions. It is Tiantai Buddhism. The main figures in Tiantai are Tiantai Zhiyi (538-597), Jingxi Zhanran (711-782), and Siming Zhili (960-1028). It is a kind of Mahāyāna, and in particular Mādhyamaka, Buddhism. It can be viewed as both a Daoist-inflected kind of Buddhism and the "earliest attempt at a thoroughgoing Sinitic reworking of the Indian Buddhist tradition" (Ziporyn, 2016, p. ix). Specifically, Tiantai's main contribution to Mādhyamaka Buddhism was its addition of a third truth to the classic Two Truths doctrine. The point in adding a third truth was to "open the provisional to reveal the real" (Ziporyn, 2009b, p. 62). The third truth was meant as an expansion and exacerbation of the presentation of the Two Truths doctrine by Nāgārjuna (c. 150-c. 250), the Indian Buddhist monk often regarded as the founder of the Mādhyamaka line.

[5] Such trivialism presupposes a kind of monism in which each being is the one being that is all beings, a one-all monism, as I'll call it, as opposed to the priority and existence monisms on the menu of contemporary global metaphysics where the one is either the whole thing all things, all parts, depend upon as their transcendent source or the total denial of the existence of any parts whatsoever, of anything that is not the one concrete particular 'blobject' that is the whole universe (Schaffer 2010; Horgan & Portč, 2008). Tiantai, and I would add Daoist, monism is instead a one-all monism where each thing, each part, is everything, the whole, which means each part is all parts and all parts *as* the whole. It seems one-all monism would need to obtain for a global trivialism to be true. After all, if every statement is true, then every thing will need to be every thing else and thus everything.

According to Nāgārjuna, there is first of all Conventional Truth, which includes most ordinary speech and articulated Buddhist doctrines. Usually excluded from Conventional Truth is what can be regarded as plain or simple error: something like metaphysical views which take ordinary speech much too seriously and assume that its posits actually enjoy some kind of mind-independent, objective existence. Conventional Truth is just our everyday descriptions of ourselves and the world of objects and properties, of phenomena, found in the spatio-temporal manifold of apparent reality as at least existing in some kind of real way. This includes the Buddhist doctrines of the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Noble Path, impermanence, suffering, no-self, and so on as well.

Ultimate Truth is the view that all the posits of Conventional Truth are merely provisional, that all apparent phenomena are in fact empty (*śūnya*) of any independent or substantial existence (*svabhava*). All provisional posits, all conventional entities, are so mutually interdependent and impermanent (*pratītyasamutpāda*) that they cannot be ultimately distinguished from their causes and conditions, which in the end are all other equally as empty conventional entities. In truth, things are so empty of their own being that they ultimately only have other being, which is just as emptily interdependent as their own. This includes everything, even the doctrine of emptiness itself and the Ultimate Truth, which brings us to Nāgārjuna's famous claim of the emptiness of emptiness itself. Emptiness, the Ultimate Truth, is only a conventional truth as well, thereby becoming a sort of ineffable experience of liberation from attachment to the substantial existence of anything whatsoever.

At this point, Tiantai Buddhism makes a crucial addition. There is a third truth. Along with the provisional positing of Conventional Truth (*jia*) and the emptiness of Ultimate Truth (*kong*), there is the center, the Middle Truth (*zhong*). The first move Tiantai makes with this notion of the 'center' is to note that nothing is a plain or simple error, that no view is just incorrect. All claims are equally conventionally true and ultimately empty. Second, the 'center' is the nature of the very identity of Conventional Truth and Ultimate Truth, of the emptiness of emptiness. The Middle Truth is the truth that Conventional Truth *is* Ultimate Truth and vice versa. But this is so in not some merely reductive sense. So, the third aspect of Tiantai Middle Truth is that the identity of Conventional and Ultimate Truth does not exclude their sustained difference. Indeed, it is precisely by remaining distinct that Conventional Truth and Ultimate Truth are not only ultimately identical but ultimately identical *as* ultimately distinct and vice versa. Not only are all phenomena both provisional and empty, but all phenomena are provisional by being empty and empty by being provisional. To be provisional is to be empty, and vice versa, which is precisely the Middle Truth. The center is the way in and by which the provisional and ultimate are and are not each other. The center is the 'as' of simultaneous ultimate identity and ultimate difference. This

can be found in a line that may stand as a slogan for the entire Tiantai approach: “The absolute totality encounters the absolute totality, and the result is the arising of the absolute totality” (Ziporyn 2022).

In a sense, one can read the Tiantai addition of a third truth as a total explosion of the general Mahāyāna identification of *saṃsāra* with *nirvāṇa*. For example, Nāgārjuna’s identified *saṃsāra* with *nirvāṇa* in pretty clear terms: “There is not the slightest difference between cyclical existence and *nirvāṇa*” (Garfield, 1995, p. 75). *Saṃsāra* is the world, the entire permanent, constant, indefinite cycle of emergence and decay, endless creation and destruction. It is the total interdependence of all things in their ceaseless impermanent production and destruction of each other and themselves. And it is precisely this which is emptiness. That all things are so causally and conditionally interdependent that they lack any existence or identity of their own is what makes them ultimately empty. The liberatory experience of this emptiness is *nirvāṇa*, the release from attachment to phenomena, but *nirvāṇa* is also nothing but the very nature of all things in their *samsaric* interdependent totality. So, all things are inherently soteriologically or therapeutically perfect even if they are also impure, imperfect, defiled, finite, limited, conditioned, caused, deluded and so on. That is, all *samsaric* delusions inherently entail and ultimately are the experience and fact of the Ultimate Truth of emptiness accessed by *nirvāṇa*, which is precisely what the Middle Truth tells us.

Tiantai takes this identification to its fullest possible expression. It emphasizes that through the center each and every deluded or finite thing or phenomenon leads to and ultimately is liberation, therapeutic or soteriological release. That is, every single instance of *saṃsāra*—every specific claim, statement, proposition, posit, thing, property, and so on—is ultimately true as the emptiness through and as which all things cyclically, interdependently exist. Each thing is the center of the universe, and each center of the universe is the entire universe. Each thing is all things, the way all things are provisionally posited and ultimately empty and both and both as each other. That all things are distinct even though they are identical is what is meant by Conventional Truth, provisional positing. That all things are identical even though they are distinct is what is meant by Ultimate Truth, emptiness. That Conventional Truth and Ultimate Truth are *both* conventionally distinct yet ultimately identical *and* ultimately identical yet conventionally distinct is what is meant by Middle Truth. That each thing, each entity, each phenomenon is an instance of the Middle Truth is the center, the fact each thing is also all other things and is all other things by not being them and is not them by being them. It is as distinct that all things are identical as the one thing that is all things. This is what Tiantai calls the ‘non-exclusive center’ (*budan zhong*). Ziporyn labels it as “intersubsumptive asness” (Ziporyn, 2009b, p. 64)

With respect to accessing and realizing the non-exclusive center oneself, and thereby becoming what one is, realizing one's inherent therapeutic perfection and total Buddhahood, Tiantai offers a specific meditative or contemplative technique called 'the contemplation of mind' (*guanxin*). It is also sometimes called the 'contemplation of inherent inclusion' (*guanju*) (Ziporyn, 2010, p. 156). It is through the contemplation of mind that one can view 'each moment of experience as three thousand worlds' (*yiniansanqian*). 'Three thousand worlds' is a Buddhist way of saying 'everything.' The point is to see each moment of experience as all experiences, both all the experiences that can be had of things and all the things so experienced. To contemplate the mind and view each moment as everything would be to have the clear comprehension and lucid awareness of all views as so many delusions and limited perspectives, each of which gives access to the Middle Truth and so serves as the center. Just as with the *Zhuangzi*'s contemplative approach of 'fasting the mind,' this Tiantai 'contemplation of mind' can be seen as an example of what I am calling deluded mindfulness. To get clearer about this Tiantai version of deluded mindfulness, it is important to address what certain Tiantai Buddhists meant by concepts like 'mind' (*xin*), 'thought' or 'thinking' (*nian*), and 'nature' (*xing*), and how they claimed that the mind 'creates' (*zao*), 'inherently includes' (*ju*), and 'is identical to' (*ji*) all phenomena (Ziporyn, 2010, p. 156). Another way of discussing the Tiantai approach to contemplation is to discern the nature of the distinction between insentience and sentience, dharma-nature and Buddha-nature, objective and subjective nature, and so on.

As Ziporyn declares, for Tiantai, "reality means, by definition, phenomenal reality" (Ziporyn, 2009b, p.67). Reality is phenomenal because all things result from the projections and divisions of the sentient, experiencing mind (*xin*), the mind which is indistinct from its activities of thought or thinking (*nian*), which is the process of making and projecting distinctions. As emphasized by Zhili, mind is the "arising and perishing of conditional, determinate 'thoughts,' 'experiences,' 'moments of consciousness'—not a pure, true, eternal awareness, but a deluded process of moment-to-moment distinction-making" (Ziporyn, 2010, p. 158). As Zhanran puts it as well, "all *dharmas* [things] without exception are *xinxing*," literally 'mind-nature,' which could be understood to mean that all things are in essence expressions of the nature of the mind, ways in which the mind or mental activity expresses itself, both what the mind experiences and how it experiences and that in, by, and through which it experiences (Ziporyn, 2010, p. 157). Mind is that which experiences and what is experienced even though, of course, the non-mental or objective remains at least provisionally posited as objective and distinct by the very distinction-making mind. All of this is to say that, for Tiantai, all reality is created by, is the changes of, is included within, and is ultimately identical to the deluded mind, the nature of the mind that is constantly

producing the distinct, conditioned, impermanent, interpenetrating, and interdependent nature of all things, of reality itself.

So far, the Tiantai approach sounds fairly panpsychist, or at least idealist. However, it is by realizing that the 'True Mind,' the mindful mind, already is the deluded mind that one sees that the Tiantai view can also easily be labelled as materialist and even eliminativist insofar as the true mind is as much 'True Matter' as it is anything else. This is because 'true' here means the center of the Middle Truth, the totally reversible and interchangeable identification of each thing, each distinct moment of experience, with each. This is the insight that is to be accessed through the Tiantai practice of 'contemplation of the mind.' The Tiantai Buddhist meditative practitioner is to see that the deluded mind's distinctions of subject/object, sentient/insentient, awareness/unawareness, this/that, Buddha-nature/dharma-nature and so on are all in fact so many instances or experiences of the single suchness that is the center, that each side of each distinction and each distinction itself are all the Middle Truth that all the deluded mind's thoughts are in fact identical to, and the identity of all, that it thinks, that all thoughts are one thought, all deluded minds are one true mind, all true minds are one deluded mind, and so on. This is how the contemplation of mind leads to the realization that one moment of experience is all moments of experiences. Zhili puts this in terms of the 'contemplation of the deluded mind' (*wangxinguan*), which he understood as the practice which "manifests the Nature of the Three-Thousand in the aggregate mind" (Ziporyn, 2010, p. 161). Here is the way Zhanran discusses the topic in terms of the distinctions mentioned above:

> Object means the unaware. Buddha means the aware. Ordinary sentient beings possess the principle of awareness, but lack the wisdom to become aware of the unaware, which is why we temporarily make a distinction between the two, to make them aware of the unaware. But once they are aware of the unaware, it is no longer still unaware. How could the object of unaware be separated from the agent of awareness? …Originally the two are not different, but the ordinary sentient being regards them as separate. Hence we reveal this to sentient beings, to make them aware of the unaware, make awareness and unawareness converge into a single suchness. Hence we know that awareness without unawareness cannot be called the Buddha-nature (subject), and unawareness without awareness cannot be called the dharma-nature (object). If there were no unawareness within awareness, how could it be called the Buddha-nature (subject)? Hence the idea of a dharma-nature (object) without the Buddha-nature (subject) belongs to the lesser vehicle, but in the great vehicle, the dharma-nature (object) is precisely the Buddha-nature (subject). (Ziporyn, 2009b, p. 74)

To return to the contradictory interpretations of mindfulness we find today, we can apply this Tiantai approach to contemplation, just as with the *Zhuangzi*'s Daoist 'fasting of the mind,' and see how there can be a way of practicing mindfulness that enables the practitioner to affirm all these contradictions as so many opportunities for release and salvific fulfilment. For Tiantai, the single moment of experience accessed through the contemplation of the mind is both entirely the present and all past and future moments, and the present *as* all pasts and futures and vice versa. Again, this is because, for any given thing or moment or experience, there is no principled way to distinguish one from another insofar they all depend upon, contain, entail, and ultimately are

each other even though they all remain distinct thereby. In other words, for Tiantai, to practice mindfulness by being nonjudgmentally and nonconceptually present-centred and aware is already to practice mindfulness by making (normative) judgments, applying concepts, dwelling on the past and future and being absorbed into the insentience of the objective dharma-nature. The present is already all pasts and all futures and vice versa. Being nonjudgmental is the way all judgments are already made.[6] The nonconceptual is already all applied concepts. Each contains and ultimately is each by being so distinct. In terms of who and what are contemplated, and who and what are doing the contemplating, Zhili puts it this way:

> Thus we can say that all the sentient beings and all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future, throughout the ten directions of space, and also their constituent environments, are the object being contemplated, and also that all the sentient beings and all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future, throughout the ten directions of space, and also their constituent environments, are the wisdom as subject doing the contemplating (*neng guan zhi*). The object and the wisdom are two names for the same entity. Thus subject and object are two and not two. (Ziporyn, 2009b, p. 78)

In other words, mindfulness, if practiced properly, will show the practitioner that all the contradictions in the interpretations of mindfulness are true, as are all contradictions. The mindful mind is indeed the deluded mind, but so is the deluded mind, each deluded mind, the one true, pure, eternal mindful, Buddha-mind. That is, the true mind just is each moment of consciousness or experience of the ordinary deluded mind making all its normal, everyday confused and arbitrary distinctions reeking of attachment, defilement, and conventional or provisional interdependence, which is what all of us, all sentient and insentient beings, are doing all the time everywhere anyway. To contemplate and thus know THAT, to experience that, to be that, is to have received the nirvanic therapeutic relief of realizing and becoming the Middle Truth that all things are all things, that every thing is everything, that each moment of experience is distinctly identical to every moment of experience as the center of all experiences. Every moment is an opportunity to become what one is: the Buddha-nature that is the dharma-nature and vice versa. As Zhanran reminds us:

> Every speck of dust and every mental act anywhere are precisely the nature of the mind of every sentient being and every Buddha. There is no question of any of them belonging to anyone's own mind alone, since all together create them, all together become them, all share in being the same objects of liberative

[6] In a different work (Dockstader, 2021), I stressed this Tiantai approach to normative or axiological paradox and applied it to the field of contemporary metaethics to develop a novel view I called 'moral trivialism,' the view that all moral, and normative, judgments are true. The discussion was structured around Zhili's claim that "Other than the devil, there is no Buddha; other than the Buddha, there is no devil" (Ziporyn, 2000, p. 13). I interpreted Zhili as offering a metaethical, and ultimately metanormative view, which said that every normative view (or axiological view depending on whether one reduces the one to the other) is true, including contradictory normative views. With respect to our topic here, we see the relevance of this kind of trivialism. It is what is contemplated by the contemplating mind and ultimately is the contemplating mind, and indeed all minds, as well. Ziporyn summarizes it this way: "Good and evil, delusion and enlightenment, Buddhahood and deviltry, are all 'inherently entailed' in each and every event. …Both Buddha and devil are always in the world. So every event in the world is always both *entirely* Buddhahood and *entirely* deviltry. Every moment of experience is always completely delusion, evil, and pain, through and through, and also completely enlightenment, goodness and joy, through and through" (Ziporyn, 2022).

> transformation, and all share in in performing the same acts of liberative transformation. (Ziporyn, 2009b, p. 76)

4 Deluded Mindfulness

We can thus conclude that there is a structural isomorphism between the way Classical Daoism and Tiantai Buddhism approach contemplation, meditation, or mindfulness practice. Both view the normal, everyday mind as a deluded distinction-making machine. It views and divides up the world from its indefinite plurality of finite, limited perspectives. However, there are contemplative techniques that can enable one to see the deluded mind for what it really is. Through Daoist fasting of mind and Tiantai contemplation of mind, a therapeutically-inclined practitioner can see that all that the distinctions the deluded mind makes, all the projected particular things and properties, are in fact so many interdependent, interpenetrating expressions of a constant indivisible process of emergence and decay. Thus, in both Daoism and Tiantai the realization of the emptiness of things, of emptiness itself, is therapeutically key. It enables one to affirm the ultimate indistinguishability of all that the deluded mind distinguishes, which is obviously everything.

Next, for both Daoism and Tiantai, the center emerges, the center that was always the axis in, through, by, and as which all deluded distinctions were made. Through an accessing of the central axis, the axis of centers, the Middle Truth forever thriving in the Heavenly Reservoir, one realizes and thus becomes the trivial truth that one thing is all things, that each distinct thing is that one thing that is all distinct things and so all the ways they are so distinguished. One pure, true, empty, mindless mind is indeed the mind that is all deluded minds and which is each deluded mind is as well. Therefore, through deluded mindfulness contemplation, by combining epistemic global trivialism (where all judgments are true) with metaphysical one-all monism (where each thing is all things), the Daoist-Tiantai adept fulfils her therapeutic goal of becoming truly mindful, of discover the empty, mindless mind as the true nature of every deluded mind, including her own. She realizes her mind is all minds.

When applied to the contradictory readings of contemporary mindfulness, Daoist and Tiantai deluded mindfulness can show us that the original Buddhist emphasis on remembrance and recollection and futural normative judgmental projection is in fact nothing but the nonconceptual bare attention and dereifying present-centredness championed today and vice versa. Daoist and Tiantai deluded mindfulness is thus a meta-mindfulness practice that enables one to see all the contemporary contradictory readings of mindfulness as equally true, as true as all the other contradictory judgments projected by the deluded mind, which is indeed all judgments. Having this realization is meant to be the therapeutic upshot deluded mindfulness has to offer.

At this point, the (exasperated) reader may have a couple questions. First of all, they may wonder where deluded mindfulness leaves phenomenology. On the one hand, as Ziporyn has noted, some phenomenologists,

such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, got very close to the one-all monism of deluded mindfulness with his notions of the flesh of the world, reversibility, and intertwining chiasms (Ziporyn, 2009b, p. 61-82). Both Tiantai Buddhism and Merleau-Ponty agree on the ontological primacy of the phenomenal. On the other hand, the absolutist phenomenological realism entailed by deluded mindfulness might simply be too much for even today's most extreme phenomenological realists, with their emphasis on the intuition of essences and seemingly ardent dedication to good and common sense. This issue will have to be left to the phenomenologists to decide.

Another question might be how exactly is the global trivialism of deluded mindfulness supposed to be therapeutically beneficial? To respond to this question, I will let the main defender of trivialism in philosophy today, Paul Kabay, share his answer. He wants to remind us that the outcome of something like deluded mindfulness can be total affirmation and peace that stems from seeing that in the world all things obtain, both good and bad:

> *Why be worried? Because of the misfortune that befalls you? You regret not having taken a different course of action? But necessarily all things obtain—including everything that is bad for you. There is nothing you could have done to prevent this. So why regret your past actions? Instead, be happy and relaxed. And besides, everything good obtains too—you have missed out on nothing. The conditions for a peaceful, tranquil, and meaningful life are here to enjoy. And there is nothing you need to do in order to ensure that this remains so. Stop your worry, and be happy—and do whatever pleases you.* (Kabay, 2010, p. 138)

Bibliography

Baxter, D. (1999). The Discernibility of Identicals. *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 24, 37-55.

Bishop, S., Lau, M., Shapiro, S., Carlson, L., Anderson, N., Carmody, J., Segal, Z. Abbey, S., Speca, M, Velting, D. & Devins, G. (2004). Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition, *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 11 (3), 230–241.

Bohdi, B. (2011). What does mindfulness really mean? A canonical perspective. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12 (1), 19-39.

Dockstader, J. (2021). Tiantai Metaethics. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 100 (2), 215-229.

Garfield, J. L. trans. (1995). *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gethin, R. (2011). On some definitions of mindfulness, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12 (1), 263-279.

Horgan, T. & Portč, M. (2008). *Austere Realism: Contextual Semantics Meets Minimal Ontology*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation for Everyday Life*, London: Piatkus.
Kabay, P. (2010). *On the Plentitude of Truth: A Defense of Trivialism*, Berlin: Lambert Publishing.
Lutz, A., Jha, A., Dunne, J., Saron, C., Anderson, Norman B., and Kazak, Anne E. (2015). Investigating the phenomenological matrix of mindfulness-related practices from a neurocognitive perspective. *American Psychologist*, 70 (7), 632-658.
Schaffer, J. (2010). Monism: The Priority of the Whole. *Philosophical Review* 119 (1): 31-76.
Siderits, M. (2006). Buddhas as Zombies: A Buddhist Reduction of Subjectivity. In *Self, No Self? Perspectives From Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Perspectives* ed. M, Siderits. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Stone, O. & Zahavi, D. (2021). Phenomenology and Mindfulness. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 28 (3-4), 158-185.
Ziporyn, B. (2000). *Evil And/Or/As The Good: Omnicentrism, Intersubjectivity, and Value Paradox in Tiantai Buddhist Thought*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Ziporyn, B. (2009a). *Zhuangzi*: *Essential Writings*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
Ziporyn, B. (2009b). How the Tree Sees Me: Sentience and Insentience in Tiantai and Merleau-Ponty. In *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*, eds. Park, J.Y. & Kopf, G., Lanham, MD: Lexigton.
Ziporyn, B. (2010). Mind and Its 'Creation' of All Phenomena in Tiantai Buddhism. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. 37 (2), 156-180.
Ziporyn, B. (2016). *Emptiness and Omnipresence: An Essential Introduction to Tiantai Buddhism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Ziporyn Brook (2022). Tiantai Buddhism, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2022 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buddhism-tiantai/.

Bionote: Jason Dockstader is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, University College Cork, Ireland. His research interests are in metaethics, Chinese philosophy, and the history of philosophy.