



Approaching the problem of dualism in Buddhism through Martin Heidegger

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This paper examines the approach of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) to the problem of dualism and explores the usefulness of his approach to the study of dualism in Buddhism. Heidegger was operating within a Western philosophical tradition and his focus was on Western metaphysics and its implications. His critique of the Western philosophical tradition however provides a clearing in which important aspects of other traditions and cultures may come to light. This is particularly so in the case of Buddhism, with which his work has an obvious affinity. Analysis of the problem of dualism finds its clearest expression in Buddhism in the Yogacara school of Mahayana Buddhism, which analyses the human predicament and our entanglement in the cycle of ongoing unsatisfactoriness in terms of subject object duality. Heidegger, for his part, sees the dualist orientation in the Western metaphysical tradition as fundamentally distorting and a cause of cultural and personal alienation. In attempting a deconstruction of the dominant epistemological and metaphysical stance of the Western tradition Heidegger hoped that that the grip of the modern Western way of ‘enframing’ reality might be loosened and new attunement to Being might occur. This, in turn, may open up new ways of understanding other worlds.