

# Module 3 Lesson 1 - final transcript and srt.

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

philosopher, michel, impacting, buddhist, buddhist philosophy, real, epistemology, analysis, sense, refer, sat, level, call, mental, philosophy, establishes, different levels, causality, tradition, tibet

## SPEAKERS

John Dunne, Professor

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### J John Dunne, Professor 00:06

So, where to begin? Well, I think one place to begin is with this notion of reality that we've been talking about. And what I will be focusing on, is to give you a little bit of background: as I will be talking about some of what Michel [Bitbol] already mentioned. I'll be speaking especially though from the standpoint of Buddhist epistemology, as we call it, the Pramana tradition, and my favourite philosopher I always seem to come back to: Dharmakīrti. And one thing I'd say a few things about, maybe to contextualise this kind of philosophy before I dive into it a bit. So Dharmakīrti is a 7th century philosopher who's building on earlier Buddhist work, especially by his predecessor Dignāga. And then Dharmakīrti's epistemology is picked up later by the Madhyamaka tradition.

### J John Dunne, Professor 00:59

So we know of Nāgārjuna: we have already heard of Nāgārjuna, you know that Professor Rovelli, for example, also has written about Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Madhyamaka tradition. But the kind of the Madhyamaka that we actually have now, really, is a synthesis of Dharmakīrti's epistemology, and Nāgārjuna. So Madhyamaka, as we know it, sort of changes, and by the time by the philosopher that Michel mentioned, Śāntarakṣita, is actually a different approach in some ways. It's an approach that actually does emphasise the mind itself, the nature of the mind, so quite appropriate for us to be talking about the nature of the mind in this regard, in this session.

### J John Dunne, Professor 01:37

And another feature of this that's important to keep in mind, is actually that there is a kind of, you might say, a sort of method, that develops starting around Dharmakīrti and a little bit before, and then again, the philosopher that Michel referred to, the 8th century philosopher, Śāntarakṣita. Who's the philosopher who goes to Tibet and establishes, you know, the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet. Śāntarakṣita's method drawing on Dharmakīrti is a method that actually proceeds through different levels of analysis. So that one starts at one particular

level of analysis, and essentially establishes a kind of a clarity of understanding, and then some inconsistencies at that level of analysis are examined. And this in a sense, levels one up to the next level - and then the next level, the next level, sometimes we talk about four different levels. But we can also really kind of reduce that, in some ways, to even just two or three different levels. And I'll be referring to some of that today. So that's a kind of larger context.

#### J John Dunne, Professor 02:44

And one of the things that's really interesting about this kind of an approach to Buddhist philosophy that Michel - I think also really pointed to - is that it begins with experience. That's the starting point of this style of Buddhist philosophy - in some ways even more so than Nagarjuna. So, it begins with experience itself. And so, when we asked actually "what is real", one term - the most important term that we would use here in Sanskrit - is "Sat", the term "Sat". "Sat" [being/reality] is the thing that is just present in front of you. So the word Sat, actually - this is quite interesting even in highly realist forms of philosophy (so Buddhist philosophy tends towards a kind of anti-realism), but even in highly realist forms of philosophy in India, they use this term Sat, because the real is what's present right in front of you. So, to be real, is to be present actually. And we could think of there being an abstract term that would refer to what all things that are present have, and we can call that "satta", right Satta would be "presence" or "realness", "reality", if you like, or we can also refer to "satya". So, these terms all come back to "Sat" in the sense of being present to us. So to be real, is to be present.

#### J John Dunne, Professor 04:11

And what does it mean for something to be present, right? We can have various accounts of that, but what the Buddhists are always inviting us back to is experience itself. So to be real, in a sense - and I'm just going to hold up an object here, we won't name it - I just hold up this object and to say that this is real, is to say that it is present, is to say that it is impacting your cognitive apparatus, actually. Right? So that to say that something is real, is to see that it is in some sense impacting consciousness: that it is manifesting in consciousness, it's having a relation, if you like, to consciousness. And so Dharmakīrti will say [speaks Sanskrit]: "to be real is to be perceived". Right? (Which sounds an awful lot like Bishop [George] Berkeley, for those of you who are familiar with that.) But this does not mean idealism necessarily, right? So there's a key element here to take into account. When we say this, it sounds like what we're saying is: the only things that are real, are things that are basically mental - we create them mentally. That's not necessarily the idea, however, especially at the first level of analysis.

#### J John Dunne, Professor 05:36

At the first level of analysis, we're going to say: well, it's not that this is mental when I say the thing that is "Sat" is a mental entity. Rather, I'm saying that the evidence for there being something is a mental event, right? The evidence for there being something is a mental event. And the model here that we're going to deal with initially at the first level of analysis is causality. So to say that something is real, is to say that it has causal efficacy of what's called "Arthakriyā" in Sanskrit. In other words, it has impacts on my cognition - on my consciousness, and it has those impacts through causality. In other words, to be real, is actually to be the cause of a cognition, in some fashion. And this of course, paradigmatically, brings us to actually

the senses themselves. So what is real is what's impacting the senses: is interacting with the senses directly or indirectly. So we can know these things through their direct impact, or we can know them indirectly, essentially through an inferential process. But in the end, it always comes back to impacting the senses.