Globalizing Buddhist Philosophy: An Epistemological Deconstruction of the *taṇhā* Underlying the Dukkha of America’s Gun Culture

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A deeply rooted *taṇhā* fuels America’s gun culture, which has led to a proliferation of gun violence and the *dukkha* of senseless death. As Americans mourn the slaughter at Sandy Hook Elementary School, where twenty first grade students died along with six staff members and the shooter, various groups argue about the cause of this ongoing crisis—certain types of guns, numbers of guns, who has the guns, how guns are exalted in popular entertainment. However, any feasible solution must address the deep reserves of *taṇhā* regarding guns rooted in American history. Gun supporters perceive themselves as free and independent spirits, latter day Minuteman stalwartly defending the Constitution. Gun manufacturers, seemingly devoid of compassion, assume that like any savvy business person they are simply supplying what people demand, the same defense offered by the entertainment industry.

When interconnectedness (*pratītya-samutpāda*) goes unrealized, ignorance disconnects us from Suchness (*tathāta*, *zhen ru*眞如), with devastating consequences. The Three Poisons of Buddhist philosophy (greed, anger, and ignorance), which parallel the three causes of quarrel cited by Thomas Hobbes (competition, diffidence, and glory), provide an important clue to unraveling the mystery of gun addiction. Buddhist epistemology exposes the delusory *ātman* at the core of our misidentifications as individuals and groups. Issues of mistaken identity are at the core of the Buddha’s second discourse on *ātman* (*Anatta Lakkhana Sutta*), as well as the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta*. Like Aṅgulimāla, mass killers often identify themselves as marginalized outsiders. Texts such as the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*大乘起信論 and the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra 楞伽經 analyze the process by which deluded identities evolve, allowing us to deconstruct them and realize the encompassing compassion of Buddha nature. By addressing such pressing challenges, Buddhist philosophy can greatly enhance philosophy’s relevance in the global community. KEY TERMS:

*Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*, *Dukkha*, identity, Three Poisons, Thomas Hobbes