



## Early Evidence for the ‘no self’ doctrine? A note on the second *anātman* teaching of the Second Sermon

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1. The Second Sermon of the Buddha, preserved in the various Vinaya texts of different Buddhist sects and as a separate discourse in the Pāli canon (the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*), contains two important *anātman* teachings. The first of these *anātman* teachings is found in only one other text: the *Cūlasaccaka Sutta* of the Majjhima Nikāya (no. 35). The second and variants of it are, however, much more widely distributed throughout the early Buddhist discourses, particularly those preserved in Pāli. As Collins has pointed out, ‘a very high proportion of the discussions of not-self in the Suttas consist in various versions of this argument’.<sup>2</sup> This is therefore the more important *anātman* teaching of the Second Sermon (although it is to be noted that it lacks the term *anātman/ anattā*).<sup>3</sup> The different versions of the Second Sermon report it as follows:

From the Pāli Vinaya *Mahāvagga*:

Vin I.14.5: taṃ kiṃ maññatha bhikkhave: rūpaṃ niccaṃ vā aniccaṃ vā ti? aniccaṃ bhante. yaṃ panāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ vā ti? dukkhaṃ bhante. yaṃ panāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vipariṇāmadhammaṃ, kallaṇaṃ nu taṃ samanupassituṃ: etaṃ mama, eso ’haṃ asmi, eso me attā ti? no h’ etaṃ bhante.

‘What do you think, *bhikkhus*: is form permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent, master.’

‘Is that which is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?’

‘Unsatisfactory, master.’

‘And is it suitable to regard that which is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change as “This is mine, I am this, this is my *attā*”?’

‘No, master.’

From the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Saṅghabhedavastu*:

I.138.21: kiṃ manyadhve bhikṣavo: rūpaṃ nityam vā <anityaṃ vā>? anityam idaṃ bhadanta. yat punar anityaṃ duḥkham vā tan na vā duḥkham? duḥkham idaṃ bhadanta. yat punar anityaṃ duḥkham vipariṇāmadharmi, api nu tac chrutavān āryaśrāvaka ātmata upagacched:

<sup>2</sup> Collins (1982: 98).

<sup>3</sup> But see the teachings that begin book IV (*Saḷāyatanavagga*) of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, where all sense faculties and their objects are said to be impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkhaṃ*) and so not *attā* (*anattā*). Derivatives of this teaching, where the five aggregates are also stated to be *anattā*, can be found at S III, 20-21, 23-24 and 179.



etan mama, eṣo 'ham asmy, eṣa me ātmeti? no bhadanta. kiṃ manyadhve bhikṣavo: vedanā... saṃjñā... saṃskārā... vijñānaṃ nityaṃ vā anityaṃ vā? anityaṃ idaṃ bhadanta. yat punar anityaṃ <duḥkhaṃ> vā tan na vā duḥkhaṃ? duḥkhaṃ idaṃ bhadanta. yat punar anityaṃ <duḥkhaṃ> vipariṇāmadharṃi, api nu tac chrutavān āryaśrāvaka ātmata upagacched: etan mama, eṣo 'ham asmy, eṣa me ātmeti? no bhadanta.

From the (Mūlasarvāstivādin)<sup>4</sup> *Catuspariṣat Sūtra*:

15.6 (Waldschmidt p. 164): kiṃ manyadhve bhi(kṣavaḥ: rūpaṃ nityaṃ ani)tyaṃ vā? anityaṃ bhadant(a).

15.7: y(at punar anityaṃ duḥkhaṃ tan na vā duḥkhaṃ)? duḥkhaṃ bhadanta.

15.8: yat punar anityaṃ duḥkhaṃ vipariṇāmadharṃy (api nu tac chrutavān āryaśrāvaka ātmata upagacched: e)tan mama, eṣo 'ham asmi, (eṣa ma ātmeti)?

15.9: no bhadanta.

15.10: evaṃ vedanā... saṃjñā... saṃskārā... vijñānaṃ nit(y)am (anityaṃ vā)?

15.11: (anityaṃ bhadan)ta.

15.12: yat punar anityaṃ duḥ(khaṃ tan na vā duḥkhaṃ)?

15.13: (duḥkhaṃ bhadanta).

15.14: (yat punar anityaṃ duḥ)khaṃ vipariṇāmadharṃy api nu tac chrutavān āryaśrāva(ka ātmata upagacched: etan mama, eṣo 'ham asmi, eṣa ma ātmeti)?

15.15: no bhadanta.

Although the Mahāsāṃghika *Mahāvastu* version of the Second Sermon reports a quite different teaching, it similarly stresses the impermanence of the five aggregates and the necessity of not regarding them as 'one's *ātman*':

Mhv III.337.20: sacen manyatha bhikṣavo: rūpaṃ nityaṃ vā anityaṃ vā? anityaṃ hi taṃ bhagavaṃ. rūpasya khalu punar bhikṣavaḥ anityatāṃ viditvā, calatāṃ prabhaṅgaṇatāṃ vipariṇāmavirāgaṇirodhatāṃ viditvā, ye rūpapratyayā utpadyensuḥ āśravā vighātā paridāghā sajvarā sāmkleśikā punarbhavikā āyatyāṃ jātijarāmarañīyās, te nirudhyante. teṣāṃ nirodhān na utpadye āśravā vighātā paridāghā sajvarā sāmkleśikā paunarbhavikā āyatyāṃ jātijarāmarañīyā. sacet manyatha bhikṣavo: vedanā... saṃjñā... saṃskārā... vijñānaṃ nityaṃ vā anityaṃ vā? anityaṃ hi taṃ bhagavaṃ...

Mhv III.338.12: tasmād iha vo bhikṣavaḥ evaṃ śikṣitavyaṃ: yat kiṃcid rūpaṃ, adhyātmaṃ vā bahirdhā vā, audārikaṃ vā śūksmaṃ vā, hīnaṃ vā praṇītaṃ vā, yaṃ dūre 'ntike, atītaṃ anāgataṃ pratyutpannaṃ, sarvaṃ rūpaṃ: na etaṃ mama, na eṣo 'ham asmi, na eṣo ātmā ti. evaṃ vo bhikṣavaḥ śikṣitavyaṃ

<sup>4</sup> Since the *Catuspariṣat Sūtra* is virtually a verbatim repetition of the same biographical portion of the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, it was probably extracted from the *Vinaya Skandhaka* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins.

Mhv III.337.20: 'What do you think, *bhikṣus*: is form permanent or impermanent?'

'It is impermanent, master.'

'When you have understood the impermanence of form, and know its unsteadiness, corruptibility and the fact that it is subject to change, fading away and cessation, the corruptions that might arise in dependence on form – which are a trouble, a torment, and a fever that defile and lead to rebecoming, birth, decrepitude and death in the future – they cease. Through the cessation of them, the corruptions which are a trouble, a torment, and a fever that defile and lead to rebecoming, birth, decrepitude and death in the future – they do not arise. 'What do you think, *bhikṣus*: is feelings... apperception... volitions... consciousness permanent or impermanent?'

'It is impermanent, master...'

Mhv III.338.12: 'Therefore, *bhikṣus*, in this matter you should train yourselves as follows: 'Whatever form is internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or elevated, in the distance or nearby, past, present or future – all form should be regarded thus 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my *ātman*.' So should you train yourselves, *bhikṣus*.

Although this version of the teaching is significantly different in its wording from the corresponding Pāli and Sanskrit versions cited above, its message is the same: the five aggregates are impermanent, subject to change and so unsuitable to be regarded as one's *ātman*. The similarity between the different texts suggests that this teaching was more or less fixed before the first schism between Sthavira and Mahāsāṃghika, i.e. at some point in the pre-Aśokan period after the Second Council of Vaiśālī.<sup>5</sup> During this early, pre-schismatic period, it would seem that there was a Vinaya biography of the Buddha's early teaching career in which the Second Sermon concluded with the teaching that the five aggregates are impermanent, unsatisfactory and so not *ātman/attā*.

It is of course possible that the Mahāsāṃghika and Sthavira communities shared teachings after the first schism, and that this explains the above similarity between Sthavira (Pāli and Mūlasarvāstivādin) and Mahāsāṃghika texts. But even if this was the case, it can hardly be denied that the ideas of the Second Sermon must have been relatively fixed by the time of the missions said to have taken place under Aśoka (c. 255-250 BC).<sup>6</sup> For after this point the Theravādin tradition of Sri Lanka was separated by a great distance from the Buddhist communities of Northern India, and it would have been no simple matter for

<sup>5</sup> Gombrich (1992: 258): 'We may thus date the Second Council round 60 A.B. or round 345 B.C.; the dates are very approximate and the precise margin of error incalculable'. Gombrich had earlier estimated it to be between 50 and 75 years after the Buddha's death (1988: 17), which elsewhere he dates to 404 B.C. (1992: 246): 'The Buddha died 136 years before Aśoka's inauguration, which means in 404 B.C.' According to Cousins (1991: 59) the Second Council is to be dated to seventy or eighty years after the Buddha's death in 413 B.C. Prebish has recently argued that the date of 100 AB, which is contained in 'all the texts' on the subject, should be accepted (2008: 15).

<sup>6</sup> On these missions, see Frauwallner (1956: 13ff) and Wynne (2005: 48ff).

different Buddhist groups to share texts.<sup>7</sup> While contact between the Sri Lankan Theravādins and Indian Buddhist sects certainly continued – indeed it is proved by a variety of evidence such as ancient inscriptions from Andhra Pradesh,<sup>8</sup> Pāli books said to have been received from the North-West (*Milindapañha*, *Nettipakaraṇa*, *Peṭakopadesa* etc.)<sup>9</sup> and so on – a levelling of texts in the post-Aśokan age is far less likely than a general fixing of texts before the Aśokan expansion of Buddhism.<sup>10</sup> We can be reasonably sure, therefore, that the second *anātman* teaching of the Second Sermon belongs in the early period of pre-Aśokan Buddhism, and was considered important enough to have been given a prominent position in an important account of the beginning of the Buddha's ministry. Indeed, for the authors of this ancient pre-sectarian Vinaya biography, the importance of this *anātman* teaching was surpassed only by those teachings included in the First Sermon, i.e. the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path as the middle way between indulgence and asceticism.<sup>11</sup> As for the teaching itself, Norman has noted that the terms *nicca* and *sukha* in the Pāli version indicate that the *attan* denied is the transcendent *ātman* of the early Upaniṣads.<sup>12</sup> While these terms certainly allude to the Upaniṣadic *ātman*, however, it does not follow that the ultimate reason for this is to deny the Upaniṣadic *ātman*. Indeed these terms seem to be used in a more general sense, for the term *sukha* is used as an antonym of the term *dukkha*, which in this case must have the weak sense of 'unsatisfactory', since the impermanence of the five aggregates does not mean that they constitute 'suffering', but only that the human condition is inherently unsatisfactory. The teaching therefore states how it is unsatisfactory

<sup>7</sup> See Wynne (2005: 65-66): 'It is unlikely that these correspondences could have been produced by the joint endeavour of different Buddhist sects, for such an undertaking would have required organisation on a scale which was simply inconceivable in the ancient world. We must conclude that a careful examination of early Buddhist literature can reveal aspects of the pre-Aśokan history of Indian Buddhism.'

<sup>8</sup> For a recent study of the inscriptions referring to the Sri Lankan Theravādins at Amarāvati, see Cousins (2001).

<sup>9</sup> As has been noted by Norman (1997: 140), although Northern texts such as the *Milindapañha*, the *Peṭakopadesa* and the *Nettipakaraṇa* were highly respected by the Theravādin commentators, they were not given canonical status by them. Moreover, although they contain "a number of verses and other utterances ascribed to the Buddha and various eminent theras, which are not found in the canon... There was no attempt made to add such verses to the canon, even though it would have been a simple matter to insert them into the Dhammapada or the Theragāthā." The point that the Pāli tradition received literature from other sects but excluded it from the canon had been made already by Oldenberg (1879: xlviij).

<sup>10</sup> See n. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Although it is also possible that the First Sermon was considered a necessary introduction to the Buddha's teaching, and a sort of preparation for the higher *anātman* teachings that followed.

<sup>12</sup> Norman (1981: 22) has pointed out that the response to the Buddha's final question can only be given 'by those who know, in advance, that the term *attā* is by definition *nicca* and *sukha*, and therefore anything which is *anicca* and *dukkha* cannot be *attā*. This gives us a clear indication of the type of *attā* which is being discussed. It is the Upaniṣadic idea of an *ātman* which is *nitya* and *sukha*'. To this we might add that by equating 'impermanence' (*anicca*) with being 'subject to change' (*viparīṇāmadhamma*), the Buddha recalls a key feature of the self according to the Yajñavalkyakāṇḍa (e.g. BU IV.5.15), i.e. that it is unchangeable. BRONKHORST has noted that BU IV.5.15 'introduces the notion of the immutability of the self' (2007: 233).

that something permanent or enduring cannot be found in the five aggregates. This is not a straightforward denial of the Upaniṣadic *ātman*, then, but a radical enquiry into personal identity: the teaching attempts to establish that form and so on are affected by causes and conditions (*vipariṇāmadhamma*) and so cannot constitute what could be called a 'self', i.e. 'that which a person is really and intrinsically *he* (in contradistinction to what is adventitious)'.<sup>13</sup> The Upaniṣadic *ātman* would seem to be invoked in order to make this point. Furthermore, since the teaching presupposes that a 'self' should be everlasting or permanent (*nicca/nitya*), it is assumed to be some sort of spiritual identity. The teaching is therefore a philosophical enquiry into ultimate personal identity, it being assumed that this should be of a spiritual nature.

2. Although this teaching denies the notion of a 'self', since the denial is focused on the lack of 'self' in the five aggregates, it would not seem to state that a person is without a true identity *per se*.<sup>14</sup> This is because the list of five aggregates is not an analysis of what a human being is made of. As Rupert Gethin has noted, this fivefold list is instead an analysis of conditioned experience:<sup>15</sup>

[T]he five *khandhas*, as treated in the *Nikāyas* and early *abhidhamma*, do not exactly take on the character of a formal theory of the nature of man. The concern is not so much the presentation of an analysis of man as object, but rather the understanding of the nature of conditioned existence from the point of view of the experiencing subject. Thus at the most general level *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṃkhārā* and *viññāṇa* are presented as five aspects of an individual being's experience of the world...

Sue Hamilton has similarly written that the five aggregates are 'not a comprehensive analysis of what a human being is comprised of... Rather they are factors of human experience'.<sup>16</sup> This phenomenological understanding seems to make good sense of the textual evidence. If the five aggregates were not an analysis of the different 'factors of human experience', the following passage from the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* would make no sense:

Here, *bhikkhus*, the *bhikkhu* contemplates: 'Form is thus, its arising is thus, its fading away is thus; feeling is thus, its arising is thus, its fading away is thus; apperception is thus, its arising is thus, its fading away is thus; volitions are thus, their arising is thus, their fading away is thus; consciousness is thus, its arising is thus, its fading away is thus.'<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This is the primary philosophical definition of the term 'self' in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

<sup>14</sup> This is commonly believed. According to Walpola Rahula, for example, 'Buddhism stands unique in the history of human thought in denying the existence of such a Soul, Self or *Ātman*.' (1959: 51)

<sup>15</sup> Gethin (1986: 49).

<sup>16</sup> Hamilton (2000: 27).

<sup>17</sup> M1, 61.3: *idha bhikkhave bhikkhu: iti rūpaṃ iti rūpassa samudayo iti rūpassa atthagamao; iti vedanā iti vedanāya samudayo iti vedanāya atthagamao; iti saññā iti saññāya samudayo*

In this text the five aggregates are aspects of a person that can be observed. Since a person is made up of many things that cannot be observed in this way, it would seem that the list of five aggregates was devised precisely in order that a person could contemplate his phenomenal nature. According to this experiential understanding of the five aggregates, then, it would seem that the second *anātman* teaching denies only that a person lacks a true identity or self in conditioned experience, and not that there is no self *per se*: this is a ‘not-self’ rather than a ‘no soul’ teaching. Another understanding of the five aggregates, however, is contained in the *Vajirā Sutta*, where the *bhikkhuni* Vajirā – rather than the Buddha – is said to utter the following verses to Māra:

Why do you believe in a living being?  
Is not this your view, Māra?  
This is nothing but a heap of formations:  
No being is found here. (553)

When there is a collection of parts  
the word ‘chariot’ is used;  
In the same way, when the aggregates exist (*khandhesu santesu*)  
the conventional term ‘being’ (is applied to them). (554)

Only suffering (*dukkham eva*) comes into existence,  
And only suffering endures.  
Nothing apart from suffering comes into existence,  
And nothing apart from suffering ceases to exist. (555)<sup>18</sup>

This passage states that a person is made up of a collection of impermanent parts (*khandhas*) in which there is no essential being (*satta*), just as a chariot does not exist beyond the parts of which it consists. This is without doubt a statement of the classical ‘no self’ doctrine. Indeed Vajirā’s statement that ‘only suffering comes into existence, and only suffering endures’ is akin to Buddhaghosa’s statement that ‘there is only suffering, but nobody who suffers’,<sup>19</sup> and to Śāntideva’s statement that ‘the person who experiences suffering does not exist’:<sup>20</sup> all assume that there is no ‘ghost’ in the machine.

How can the evidence of the *Vajirā Sutta* be reconciled with the second *anātman* teaching? Since the ‘no self’ idea is not expressed in the second *anātman* teaching, and since this teaching is a common feature of the early Buddhist literature, the ‘no self’ idea of the *Vajirā Sutta* would seem to be the more unusual teaching, and so is most probably to be understood as a later

*iti saññāya athagamao; iti sañkhārā iti sañkhārānaṃ samudayo iti sañkhārānaṃ athagamao; iti viññānaṃ iti viññānaṃssa samudayo iti viññānaṃssa athagamao.*

<sup>18</sup> S I, 296 (v. 553-55): *kin nu satto ti pacesi Māra ditthigatan nu te, suddhasañkhārapuñño ‘yaṃ na yidha sattūpalabbhati. (553) yathā hi aṅgasambhārā hoti saddo ratho iti, evaṃ khandhesu santesu hoti satto ti sammuti. (554) dukkham eva hi sambhoti dukkhaṃ tīṭṭhati veti ca, nāñnatra dukkhā sambhoti nāñnatrā dukkhā nirujjhati. (555)*

Buddhaghosa cites some of these verses in his *Visuddhimagga* (XVIII.25, 27; Warren and Kosambi: 508).

<sup>19</sup> Vis XVI.90 (Warren and Kosambi p.436): *dukkham eva hi, na koci dukkhito.*

<sup>20</sup> Bcv VIII.101 (Tripathi p.164): *yasya dukkhaṃ sa nāsty.*

development. If so, we could hypothesise that the ‘not-self’ doctrine of the second *anātman* teaching somehow developed into the ‘no self’ teaching of the *Vajirā Sutta*. The problem with this hypothesis is that there is little textual evidence in support of it: we have no idea when, where and by whom the second *anātman* teaching and the ‘no self’ doctrine were formulated. We could perhaps take the *Vajirā Sutta* as evidence for an *anātmavādin* school in ancient Śrāvastī, but the location of this canonical episode in Śrāvastī cannot be assumed. Progress in this matter depends, then, on forming a better understanding of the geographical location and chronological development of early Buddhist thought. But even before this, we must somehow establish that no self’ doctrine was a later development of an early period in which the ‘not-self’ doctrine of the second *anātman* teaching flourished. Fortunately, however, the Second Sermon contains evidence suggesting exactly this development in early Buddhist thought.

3. All accounts of the Second Sermon describe how the first five disciples of the Buddha attained liberation immediately after hearing the second *anātman* teaching. Before this, the five disciples are said to have attained a preliminary understanding of the Dharma while listening to the First Sermon (on the Four Noble Truths as the middle way between asceticism and indulgence).<sup>21</sup> In the Pāli account it is first stated that the *bhikkhu* Koṇḍañña attained ‘vision into the Dharma’ (*dhamma-cakkhu*):

While this discourse was being spoken, the venerable Koṇḍañña attained this spotless and undefiled vision into the Dharma (*dhammacakkhu*): ‘Everything that is characterised by arising is also characterised by cessation.’<sup>22</sup>

Further unspecified Dharma teachings are described before the four other *bhikkhus* attain the same level of understanding,<sup>23</sup> but once they do the scene is set for the liberation of the five after hearing the Second Sermon. This crucial, defining moment in the Pāli Vinaya account of Buddhist origins, is described as follows:

While this discourse was being spoken, the minds of the five *bhikkhus* were released from the corruptions without grasping.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Vin I, 10.10ff. This teaching is preserved elsewhere as the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (S V, 420).

<sup>22</sup> Vin I, 11.32: *imasmiñ ca pana veyyākaraṇasmim̐ bhāññamāne āyasmato Koṇḍaññassa virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi: yaṃ kiñ ci samudayadhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ ti.*

<sup>23</sup> Vin I, 12.28: *atha kho āyasmato ca Vappaassa āyasmato ca Bhaddiyassa Bhagavatā dhammiyā kathāya ovadiyamānānaṃ anusāsīyamānānaṃ virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi: yaṃ kiñ ci samudayadhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ ti.*

Vin I, 13.6: *atha kho āyasmato ca Mahānāmassa āyasmato ca Assajissa Bhagavatā dhammiyā kathāya ovadiyamānānaṃ anusāsīyamānānaṃ virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi: yaṃ kiñ ci samudayadhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ ti.*

<sup>24</sup> Vin I, 14.34: *imasmiñ ca pana veyyākaraṇasmim̐ bhāññamāne pañcavaggiyānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ anupādāya āsavehi cittāni vimucchiṃsu.*

The notion that liberation is attained when the mind is released from the corruptions is, of course, a common feature of numerous early Buddhist texts. Most notably, it occurs at the conclusion of the standard description of the Buddhist path found throughout the *Dīgha Nikāya*'s *Sīlakkhandhavagga*.<sup>25</sup> Despite this apparent ubiquity, it is unusual that another canonical account of the five *bhikkhus*' liberation is different. According to the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* the five *bhikkhus* simply 'attained Nirvana':

And then, O *bhikkhus*, the group of five *bhikkhus*, being thus exhorted and instructed by me ... attained the undefiled, unsurpassed release from bondage that is Nirvana. And the knowledge and vision arose in them: 'unshakeable is our release, this is our final birth, there is now no more rebecoming.'<sup>26</sup>

This version of the five *bhikkhus*' liberation is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, it is identical to the account of the Bodhisatta's liberation also found in the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*: the Bodhisatta is similarly said to have 'attained Nirvana'.<sup>27</sup> This is the only place in the Pāli discourses where the awakening of the Bodhisatta and a *bhikkhu* are identically described.<sup>28</sup> Second, the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* is the only Pāli discourse in which the pericope describing the post-awakening knowledge of liberation is applied to persons apart from the newly awakened Buddha: the five *bhikkhus* are similarly said to recognise their liberation with the formula: 'unshakeable is our release, this is our final birth, there is now no more rebecoming'.<sup>29</sup> Third, there is no other account of liberation in which the expression 'to attain Nirvana' (i.e. *nibbānaṃ + adhi-gam*) is used in the Pāli Suttapīṭaka.<sup>30</sup> And fourth, this is the only Pāli Sutta which is set in the hermitage (*assama*) of a certain Brahmin called Rammaka,<sup>31</sup> who is not otherwise mentioned in the Pāli canon.<sup>32</sup> These peculiarities suggest that the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* contains the earliest account of the Buddha's awakening.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>25</sup> This account begins at D I, 62.

<sup>26</sup> M I, 173.7ff: *atha kho bhikkhave pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū mayā evaṃ ovāḍiyamānā evaṃ anusāsīyamānā ... asaṅkiliṭṭhaṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ ajjhagamaṃsu. nānañ ca pana nesaṃ dassanaṃ udapādi: akuppā no vimutti, ayam antimā jāti, n' atthi dāni punabbhavo ti.*

<sup>27</sup> See n. 43 below.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. the account of the Bodhisatta's realisation of the three knowledges differs from the similar account of a *bhikkhu*'s realisation of the three knowledges in the standard long account of the Buddhist path, by using *abbhaññāsīṃ* (e.g. M I, 23.14ff) rather than *pajānāti* (D I.834.1ff).

<sup>29</sup> See Wynne (2007: 20). See also (Wynne: 136 n.68), where I point that the pericope is very similar in the Chinese Sarvāstivādin Sūtra version of the text. For the Chinese Sarvāstivādin version of this text see Chau (1991: 153-159).

<sup>30</sup> Wynne (2007: 20).

<sup>31</sup> M I, 160.29: *tena h' āyusmanto yena Rammakassa brāhmaṇassa assamo ten' upasaṅkamatha...*

<sup>32</sup> DPPN, s.v.

<sup>33</sup> For full details see Wynne (2007: 14-25). Andre Bareau also believed this text to contain the most ancient account of the Buddha's awakening (1963: 72-74).



If this evidence is to be believed, it would seem that the Pāli Vinaya *Mahāvagga* must be the later account. But if so, how is the widespread agreement between the two accounts be explained? This agreement can be seen, for example, in the identical accounts of how the Buddha persuaded the five *bhikkhus* to receive his teaching. Although this speech, which the Buddha is made to repeat the obligatory three times, is narrated as a response to the fact that the five *bhikkhus* address the Buddha by the term ‘sir’ (*āvuso*),<sup>34</sup> it concludes as an exhortation for the *bhikkhus* to receive the Buddha’s new teaching:

Do not address the Tathāgata by his name or with the term ‘sir’ (*āvusonāmena*), *bhikkhus*, for a Tathāgata is an *arahant* and is completely awakened. Focus your ears, *bhikkhus*, the immortal has been attained (*amatam adhigataṃ*),<sup>35</sup> I will instruct you, I will teach the Dharma. If you practice in accordance with this instruction, before long – in this very life – you will understand, realise, attain and abide in the supreme goal of the holy life, that for which noble scions go forth from home to homelessness.<sup>36</sup>

In this speech the Buddha states that he has attained the ‘immortal’ (*amatam adhigataṃ*) and will teach the five *bhikkhus*. In both the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* and the Vinaya *Mahāvagga*, this statement corresponds to the language used before and after the account of the persuasion:

M I, 167.30 = Vin I, 4.33: This truth (*dhammo*) which I have attained (*adhigato*) is profound, hard to perceive and understand, calm, supreme, beyond the sphere of logic, subtle and to be realised by the wise.<sup>37</sup>

M I, 168.5 = Vin I, 5.8: I have attained (*adhigataṃ*) this with difficulty, away now with explication!<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Nānamoli and Bodhi (1995: 264) translate this term as ‘friend’, presumably in order to make sense of the fact that the Buddha thinks that the term is beneath him. But *āvuso* is derived from the Sanskrit *āyusmant* ‘long lived’, which is in Sanskrit a term of respect (MMW s.v.: ‘often applied as a kind of honorific title (especially to royal personages and Buddhist monks)’). The more interesting possibility raised by this story is that the Buddha balked at being addressed by a term suggesting worldly prestige or honour, as it does when it refers to ‘royal personages’, preferring instead the more apophatic and mystical *tathāgata*.

<sup>35</sup> This is how Nānamoli and Bodhi (1995: 264) translate *amatam adhigataṃ aham anusāsāmi* (‘...the Deathless has been attained. I will teach you...’), although it could be taken as ‘I will teach the immortal that has been attained’.

<sup>36</sup> Vin I, 9.12 = M I, 171-72: *mā bhikkhave tathāgataṃ nāmena ca āvusovādena ca samudācaratha, arahaṇi bhikkhave tathāgato sammāsambuddho. odahatha bhikkhave sotam, amatam adhigataṃ, aham anusāsāmi, ahaṃ dhammaṃ desemi. yathānusiṭṭhaṃ tathā paṭipajjamānā, na cirass’ eva yass’ athāya kulaputtā sammad eva agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajanti, tad anuttaraṃ brahmacariyapariyosānaṃ diṭṭhe va dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharissathā ti.*

<sup>37</sup> *adhigato kho me ayaṃ dhammo gambhīro duddaso duranubodho santo paṇīto atakkāvacaro nipuṇo paṇḍitavedaṇīyo.*

<sup>38</sup> *kicchena me adhigataṃ halan dāni pakāsituṃ.*

M I, 168.27 = Vin I, 5.31: Open this door to the immortal (*amatassa dvāraṃ*), let them hear the truth to which the Spotless One has awakened!<sup>39</sup>

M I, 169.24 = Vin I, 7.4: Doors to the immortal (*amatassa dvārā*) have been opened for those who listen and let their faith flow out.<sup>40</sup>

M I, 171.11 = Vin I, 8.25: I am going to the city of Kāsi to set the wheel of Dharma in motion, I will beat the drum of the immortal (*amatadundubhin*) in this blind world.<sup>41</sup>

These references show that the notion of attaining (*adhi-gam*) the ‘immortal’ (*amata*) is important in both the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* and the Vinaya *Mahāvagga*. But if the *Mahāvagga* really is the later account, it follows that it must have borrowed the above narrative on the attainment of the ‘immortal’ (and the decision to impart it to others) from the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*. That this is so seems to be proved by the fact that the notion of attaining the ‘immortal’ is a much more firmly rooted and integral part of the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*. Indeed this notion is mentioned right at the very beginning of the opening narrative in the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*:

M I, 162.37: And what, O *bhikkhus*, is the noble search? A certain person, being himself subject to death, and understanding the danger in that which is subject to death, seeks the immortal (*amataṃ*), unsurpassed release from bondage that is Nirvana.<sup>42</sup>

The text goes on to describe how the Bodhisatta decided to take up this ‘Noble Search’:

M I, 163.9ff: I too, *bhikkhus*, before the awakening – when I was just an unawakened Bodhisatta ... being myself subject to death, and understanding the danger in that which is subject to death, I sought the immortal (*amataṃ*), unsurpassed release from bondage that is Nirvana.<sup>43</sup>

The description of the Bodhisatta’s awakening that follows is based on exactly the same text on the attainment of the ‘immortal’:

<sup>39</sup> *apāpur’ etaṃ amatassa dvāraṃ, suṇantu dhammaṃ vimalenānubuddhaṃ.*

<sup>40</sup> *apāruṭā teṣaṃ amatassa dvārā, ye sotavanto pamuncantu saddhaṃ.*

<sup>41</sup> *dhammacakkaṃ pavattetuṃ gacchāmi Kāsinaṃ puraṃ, andhabhūtasmiṃ lokasmiṃ āhanchaṃ amatadundubhin ti.*

<sup>42</sup> *katamā ca bhikkhave ariyā pariyesanā? idha, bhikkhave, ekacco... attanā maraṇadhammo samāno maraṇadhamme ādīnavaṃ viditvā amataṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ pariyesati.*

<sup>43</sup> *aham pi sudaṃ bhikkhave pubbe va sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno ... attanā maraṇadhammo samāno maraṇadhamme ādīnavaṃ viditvā amataṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ pariyeseyyan ti.*

MI, 167.9ff: O *bhikkhus*, being myself subject to death and understanding the danger in that which is subject to death, I realised the immortal (*amataṃ*), unsurpassed release from bondage that is Nirvana.<sup>44</sup>

These sections of the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* set the context for the account of the Bodhisatta’s decision to teach that follows. The *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* therefore refers to the ‘immortal’ throughout its account of the Bodhisatta’s awakening. References to the ‘immortal’ are found in the initial conception of the Noble Search, the statement that Bodhisatta pursued this search, the description of his awakening, the account of the Buddha’s decisions to teach, his encounter with the five *bhikkhus* and finally the account of their liberation. The sections on the ‘immortal’ contained in the *Vinaya Mahāvagga*, on the other hand, are only found after the account of the Bodhisatta’s awakening. Since the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* provides the narrative context which makes sense of the notion of ‘attaining’ the ‘immortal’, and since this idea is found consistently throughout the narrative, there can be no doubt that the sections on the ‘immortal’ belonged originally to this text. If so, it would seem that the sections on the ‘immortal’ found in the *Vinaya Mahāvagga* were lifted directly from the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*. For some reason, however, the authors of the *Vinaya Mahāvagga* deviated from the account of the five *bhikkhus’* attainment of the immortal’ and instead composed a new account in which they stated that the minds of the five *bhikkhus* are liberated from the corruptions.

4. The extant *Vinaya* literature of the other early Buddhist sects is in agreement with the *Mahāvagga* of the Pāli *Vinaya*. Both the Mahāsāṃghika *Mahāvastu* as well as the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Saṅghabhedavastu* and *Catuspariṣat Sūtra* show the same features, i.e. a basic text in which numerous references to the Buddha’s attainment (*adhi-gam*) of the ‘immortal’ (*amṛtam*) are followed by the account of how the minds of the five *bhikkhus* were liberated from the corruptions. Thus the *Mahāvastu* narrates how the Buddha contemplates not teaching the *dharma* he has attained with difficulty (*kṛcchreṇa me adhi-gato*),<sup>45</sup> to which Māra responds that the Buddha has opened the door to the immortal (*apāvṛtaṃ te amṛtasya dvāraṃ*),<sup>46</sup> a statement with which the Buddha eventually agrees (*apāvṛtaṃ me amṛtasya dvāraṃ*)<sup>47</sup> before declaring that he will go to Benares to beat the ‘drum of immortality’ (*amṛtadundubhiṃ*).<sup>48</sup> The *Mahāvastu* version of the First Sermon then describes how the mind of Kauṇḍinya was released from the corruptions first,<sup>49</sup> before the same is said of the other four *bhikṣus*.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *so kho ahaṃ bhikkhave ... attanā maraṇadhammo samāno maraṇadhamme ādīnavaṃ viditvā amataṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ pariyesamāno amataṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ ajjhagamaṃ.*

<sup>45</sup> *Mv III.314.11: kṛcchreṇa me adhi-gato alaṃ dāni prakāśitum.*

<sup>46</sup> *Mv III.317.17: apāvṛtaṃ te amṛtasya dvāraṃ, śṛnontu dhamaṃ vimalānubuddhaṃ.*

<sup>47</sup> *Mv III.319.3: apāvṛtaṃ me amṛtasya dvāraṃ.*

<sup>48</sup> *Mv III.327.6: Vārāṇasīṃ gamiṣyāmi āhaniṣyaṃ amṛtadundubhiṃ.*

<sup>49</sup> *Mv III.337.3: imasmīṃ ca punar vyākaraṇe bhāṣyamāṇe āyusmata Ājñātakauṇḍinyasy’ anupādāy’ āśravebhyas’ cittaṃ vimuktaṃ, caturṇāṃ bhikṣūṇāṃ virajaṃ vigatamalaṃ dharmeṣu dharmacakṣu viśuddhaṃ Aśvakīṣya Bhadrīkasya Vāspasya Mahānāmsya, trīmśatīnāṃ ca devakoṭīnāṃ virajaṃ vigatamalaṃ dharmeṣu dharmacakṣu viśuddhaṃ.*

<sup>50</sup> *Mv III.338.19: imasmīṃs’ ca puna vyākaraṇe bhāṣyamāṇe āyusmān Ājñātakauṇḍinyo balavaśībhavaṃ prāpuṇesi. caturṇāṃ bhikṣūṇāṃ anupādāy’ āśravebhyas’ cittāni*

The key events in the Mūlasarvāstivādin texts (the *Saṅghabhedavastu* and *Catuspariṣat Sūtra*) are very similar: the Buddha contemplates a life of ease without teaching after reflecting that it would be hard for others to understand the profound *dharma* he has attained (*adhigato me dharmo gambhīro*),<sup>51</sup> Māra requests that he open the door to the immortal (*amṛtasya dvāraṃ*),<sup>52</sup> the Buddha replies that the *dharma* which has been difficult to attain (*kr̥cchreṇa me adhigato*) will not be easily understood by others,<sup>53</sup> before declaring that he will open the door to the immortal (*apāvāriṣye amṛtasya dvāraṃ*).<sup>54</sup> The narrative concludes with the mind of Kauṇḍinya being released from the corruptions first,<sup>55</sup> followed by the same for the minds of the other four *bhikṣus*.<sup>56</sup>

There can be little doubt that these Sanskrit *Vinaya* accounts derive from the same source which was originally the basis of the parallel Pāli *Vinaya* account, i.e. an old, pre-sectarian *Vinaya* biography. And it can hardly be denied that the authors of this pre-sectarian *Vinaya* biography based many of its particulars on an older *Sūtra* discourse. The older *Sūtra* account, contained in the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* and its Sarvāstivādin parallel, was followed only up to a certain point: its narrative of the Buddha's initial reluctance to teach, the request of the god Brahma that he should do so, the Buddha's pondering about whom to teach and finally his persuasion of the five *bhikkhus* were all taken over from the pre-sectarian version of the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*. But

*vimuktāni āyuṣmato Aśvakasya Bhadrīkasya Vāṣpasya Mahānāmasya, pañcāṅgikānāṃ ca devakoṣṭhānāṃ virajāṃ viḡatamaṃ dharmeṣu dharmacakṣūṃṣi viśuddhāni, āttamanā āyuṣmantā pañcakā bhadravargikā bhāgavato bhāṣitam abhinande.*

<sup>51</sup> SbhV I.128.23 (see CPS 7.10/Waldschmidt p. 108): *atha bhāgavata etad abhavat: adhigato me dharmo gambhīro gambhīravabhāso durdṛṣo duravabodhaḥ, atarkyo 'arkyāvacaraḥ sūksmo nipuṇapaṇḍītavijñavedaṇīyaḥ. taṃ ced ahaṃ pareṣāṃ ārocayeyam taṃ ca pare na vijānīyuh, sa mama syād viḡhātāḥ, syād bhramaḥ, cetaso 'nudaya eva, yan nv ahaṃ ekāki araṇye pravāṇe dṛṣṭadharmasukhavihārayogam anuyukto vihareyam iti.*

Compare Mv III.314.1: *gambhīro ayaṃ mama dharmāḥ abhisambuddho nipuṇo sukhumo duranubodho atarkāvacarō paṇḍītavedanīyo sarvalokapratyanīko... Mv III.314.6: ahaṃ ca ne pareṣāṃ deśayeyāṃ pare khu me na vibhāvayensuh so me syā viḡhātāḥ. yaṃ nūnāhaṃ eko araṇyaparvate tuṣṇībhuṭo vihareyam.*

Also compare the Pāli M I, 167.30 = Vin I, 4.32.

<sup>52</sup> SbhV 129.10-11: *apāvṛṇīṣva amṛtasya dvāraṃ, vadasva dharmāṃ virajonubaddham.*

CPS 8.9 (Waldschmidt p. 114): *avavṛṇīṣva amṛtasya dvāraṃ, vadasva dharmāṃ virajānubaddham.*

<sup>53</sup> SbhV 129.13: *kr̥cchreṇa me adhigato 'khilo brahman pradālya vai, bhavarāḡaparītair hi nāyaṃ dharmāḥ susaṃbuddhaḥ.*

CPS 8.11 (Waldschmidt p. 114): *kr̥cchreṇa me adhigataḥ khilā brahman pradālītāḥ, bhavarāḡaparītair hi nāyaṃ dharmāḥ susaṃbuddhaḥ.*

<sup>54</sup> SbhV 130.8: *apāvāriṣye amṛtasya dvāraṃ ye śrotukāmāḥ praṇudantu kāṅkṣāḥ.*

CPS 8.16 (Waldschmidt p. 118): *avāvāriṣye amṛtasya dvāraṃ ye śrotukāmāḥ pramodantu śrāddhāḥ.*

<sup>55</sup> SbhV 138.6: *asmīn khalu dharmaparyāye bhāṣyamāṇe āyuṣmata Ājñātakauṇḍīnyasy' ānupādāy' āśravebhyāś cittaṃ vimuktam; avasiṣṭānāṃ tu pañcakānāṃ bhikṣūnāṃ virajo viḡatamaṃ dharmeṣu dharmacakṣur utpannam.*

CPS 14.11 (Waldschmidt p. 162): *asmīn khalu (dharmaparyāye bhāṣyamāṇa āyuṣmata Ājñātakauṇḍīnyasyānupādāyāśravebhyāś cittaṃ vimuktam. a)vasiṣṭānāṃ pañca(kānāṃ bhikṣūnāṃ virajo viḡatamaṃ dharmeṣu dharmacakṣur utpannam.*

<sup>56</sup> SbhV 139.14. *asmīn khalu dharmaparyāye bhāṣyamāṇe avasiṣṭānāṃ pañcakānāṃ bhikṣūnāṃ ānupādāy' āśravebhyāś cittaṃ vimuktāni.*

CPS 15.19 (Waldschmidt p. 170): *(a)smīn khalu dha(r)maparyā(ye bhāṣyamāṇe 'vasiṣṭānāṃ pañcakānāṃ bhikṣūnāṃ ānupādāyāśravebhyāś cittaṃ vimuktam.*

on top of this old narrative, the authors of the Vinaya biography substituted a different account of the five *bhikkhus*' liberation. According to the authors of the old Vinaya biography, liberation is achieved through a contemplation of Buddhist doctrine, a contemplation which effects the liberation of the mind from the corruptions. What does this mean?

5. If the notion of the mind's liberation from the corruptions was an intentional deviation from an earlier account, we should regard it as a doctrinally motivated change. But what doctrinal understanding does this change indicate? What does it mean to speak of the mind being liberated rather than the person? It surely indicates a tendency towards reductionism which is found throughout Buddhist literature past and present. A person is routinely reduced to the '(awakening) mind', for example, throughout Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*:<sup>57</sup>

The Awakening Mind should be understood to be of two kinds; in brief: the Mind resolved on Awakening and the Mind proceeding towards Awakening. (I.15) The distinction between these two should be understood by the wise in the same way as the distinction is recognized between a person who desires to go and one who is going, in that order.<sup>58</sup> (I.16)

Should their mind become angry or displeased on account of me, may even that be the cause of their always achieving every goal.<sup>59</sup> (III.15)

My mind seeks acquisitions, reverence, or renown, or again wants an audience and attention. Therefore I remain like a block of wood.<sup>60</sup> (V.51)

Wherever the mind, deluded about happiness, goes for pleasure, a thousandfold suffering will arise and attend it.<sup>61</sup> (VIII.18)

These statements suggest that the mind is a sub-entity of a person that can have the resolve for awakening and proceed to it; it can also become angry, seek acquisitions and pleasure, be deluded and so on. As one of the most important Indian Buddhist texts, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is an exemplary source of ancient Mahāyāna reductionism. With regard to ancient Theravāda Buddhism the same could be said of Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*. Reductionism can be clearly seen, for example, in chapter fourteen:

<sup>57</sup> Translations of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* verses are taken from Crosby and Skilton (1996).

<sup>58</sup> Bcv I.15-16 (Tripathi pp. 11-12): *tad bodhicittaṃ dvividhaṃ vijñātavyaṃ samāsataḥ, bodhiprañidhicittaṃ ca bodhiprasthānam eva ca* (15). *gantukāmaṣya gantuṣ ca yathā bhedaḥ pratīyate, tathā bhedo 'nāyor jñeyo yāthāsaṃkhyena paṇḍitaiḥ* (16).

<sup>59</sup> Bcv III.15 (Tripathi p. 41): *yeṣāṃ kruddhā prasannā vā mām ālambhya matir bhavet, teṣāṃ sa eva hetuḥ syān nityaṃ sarvārthasiddhaye*.

<sup>60</sup> Bcv V.51 (Tripathi p. 64): *lābhasatkāra-kīrtiyarthī parivārārthī vā punaḥ, upasthānārthī me cittaṃ tasmāt tiṣṭhāmi kāṣṭhavat*.

<sup>61</sup> Bcv VIII.18 (Tripathi p. 145): *yatra yatra ratim yāti manaḥ sukhavimohitam, tat tat sahasraguṇitam duḥkham bhūtvopatiṣṭhati*.

Consciousness knows an object as dark blue or yellow, and brings about the penetration of its characteristics. But even though it endeavours, it is not able to manifest the path. Understanding knows an object in the way already stated, and brings about the penetration of its characteristics. By endeavouring it manifests the path.<sup>62</sup>

Reductionism can be taken back further than these classical Buddhist texts, however. The entire Abhidharma, as expressed in the extant Abhidharma texts of various Buddhist sects, is little more than a vast enterprise in reductionism. As an exhaustive attempt to explain the world in terms of its mental and physical events, the Abhidharma effectively eliminates the human person as a whole from religio-philosophical enquiry. The Theravādin account of consciousness is especially reductionistic, as can be seen from the following explanation of Gethin:

[T]he basic Abhidharma conception of how the mind functions is this: a collection of at least eight dharmas (consciousness and associated mental factors) arises for a moment and then falls away to be immediately followed by the next combination of consciousness and associated mental factors. Each combination is conscious of just one object.<sup>63</sup>

The Abhidharma shows that reductionism developed early in the history of Buddhism. But what does it mean? Both the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and *Visuddhimagga* suggest that the refusal to speak of the person as a whole is based on the belief that there is no essential aspect to a person. In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the existence of an enduring spiritual substance or self is denied as a matter of course:

The continuum of consciousness, like a queue, and the combination of constituents, like an army, are not real. The person who experiences suffering does not exist. To whom does that suffering belong?<sup>64</sup> (VIII.101)

Through habituation there is the understanding of 'I' regarding the drops of sperm and blood of two other people, even though there is in fact no such thing.<sup>65</sup> (VIII.111)

The *Visuddhimagga* states exactly the same idea with the dictum that 'there is only suffering, but nobody who suffers'.<sup>66</sup> This evidence suggests that the

<sup>62</sup> Vis XIV.3 (Warren and Kosambi p. 369): *viññāṇaṃ nīlaṃ pūtaṅkaṃ ti ārammaṇaṃ ca jānāti lakkhaṇapaṭivedhaṃ ca pāpeti, ussakitvā pana maggaṇāpūbhāvaṃ pāpetuṃ na sakkoti. paññā vuttanayasena ārammaṇaṃ ca jānāti lakkhaṇapaṭivedhaṃ ca pāpeti, ussakitvā maggaṇāpūbhāvaṃ ca pāpeti.*

<sup>63</sup> Gethin (1998: 211).

<sup>64</sup> Bcv VIII.101 (Tripathi p.145): *saṃtānaḥ samudāyaś ca pañktisenādivin mṛṣā, yasya dukkhaṃ sa nāsty asmāt kasya tat svaṃ bhaviṣyati?*

<sup>65</sup> Bcv VIII.111 (Tripathi p.145): *abhyāsād anyadīyeṣu śukraśoṇitabinduṣu, bhavaty aham iti jñānasamaty api hi vistuni.*

<sup>66</sup> Vis XVI.90 (Warren and Kosambi p.436): *dukkham eva hi, na koci dukkhito...*

reductionist tendency in Buddhist thought is related to the belief that a person has no self.

6. A similar relationship between reductionism and the 'no self' doctrine can be seen in numerous modern Buddhist writings. In Kornfield's collection of the teachings of modern Theravādin masters (Kornfield 1977), reductionism is common. For example:

Mind as a rule takes delight in dwelling on the sight of particular features and forms. When they are absent, mind is wanting in satisfaction. (p.75: Mahasi Sayadaw)

And only the mind which is cleansed of the five elements of sensual lust, ill will, sloth agitation, and doubt can function properly to realize Vipassana insight. (p.88: Sunlun Sayadaw)

This very joy induces clarity and freshness, mental calm and stillness, and serves, naturally and automatically, to give the mind the ability to think and introspect. (pp.127-28: Achaan Buddhadasa)

The wandering mind itself can also show the truth of the three characteristics of experience. (p.148: Achaan Naeb)

When the heart views the body in the foregoing way, with wisdom, it will become wearied both of one's body and the bodies of other people and animals. (p.177: Achaan Maha Boowa)

The mind knows all formations as changing and limited, and rushes forward to the 'conditionless element'. The mind is stirred with regard to the inherent unsatisfactoriness of all formations of existence, and rushes forward to the 'desireless element'. The mind regards all things as empty, as foreign, and rushes forward to the 'void-element'. (p.205: Taungpulu Sayadaw)

In all these examples it is the mind or heart – rather than the person – that is said to 'take delight', 'think and introspect', 'becomes wearied', 'know' things and 'regard' things in a particular way. Such statements would be absurd to a person unfamiliar with the reductionistic tendency in Buddhist thought, since it makes no sense to predicate cognitive acts to anything other than the person as a whole. This feature is not just typical of modern Theravāda Buddhism, however, but it is also common in modern Mahāyāna thought. We can consider the following examples from a recent publication of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (1994):

We gain the omniscient state of mind, which perceives the entire range of phenomena without any obstruction. (p. 83)

Next is ignorance, which misconceives the identity of the Four Noble Truths, the law of karma, and so forth. In this particular context,

ignorance refers to a mental factor that is totally ignorant of the nature of the Three Jewels and the law of karma. (p.122)

In the last step, the actual development of *bodhicitta*, the mind aspiring to achieve enlightenment for others, you should not be satisfied by seeing the importance of enlightenment for the sake of others alone. (p.145)

Ethics is a state of mind that abstains from engaging in any situation or event that would prove harmful to others. (p.161)

Effort is the state of mind that delights in virtuous actions. (p.168)

Wisdom analyses the nature of phenomena. (p.179)

In these examples the Dalai Lama routinely attributes cognition to a part of the person instead of the person himself: states of mind or being, or the 'mind aspiring to achieve enlightenment for others' (*bodhicitta*), and even abstract nouns as such 'ignorance', 'ethics' and 'effort' are all, apparently, subjects of experience. The reductionistic style of thinking would seem to be engrained in the modern Buddhist mindset. And just as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and *Visuddhimagga* indicate that reductionism goes hand in hand with the no self belief, so too is this belief common in modern Buddhist writings, e.g. in Kornfield's collection of modern Theravāda teachings:

When the meditator comes to know the difference between a bodily process and a mental process, should he be a simple man, he would reflect from direct experience thus: "There is the rising and knowing it, the falling and knowing it, and so on and so forth. There is nothing else besides them. The words *man* or *woman* refer to the same process; there is no *person* or *soul*." (p.67: Mahasi Sayadaw)

In reality, 'self' is but a very rapid continuity of birth and decay of mental states and matter. (p.134: Achaan Naeb)

If one analyses his own being into its constituent parts, either by dividing it into the aggregates of body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness, or by other more minute divisions, one will finally realize the truth that there is no self or soul anywhere to be found. (p.188: Taungpulu Sayadaw)

Other than these three co-existing elements [cognitive faculty, perceived object and consciousness] there is nothing else, no see-er, no 'I', 'you', or 'he' who sees. (p.214: Mogok Sayadaw)

Much the same perspective is found in the writings of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, e.g.: 'The Buddha taught that no such self exists and that our belief in an independent self is the root cause of all suffering.'<sup>67</sup> Reductionism and the

<sup>67</sup> Dalai Lama (1994: 111).



no self belief would seem, then, to be parts of a single doctrinal understanding. Indeed the two are very closely related in the modern Theravādin and Mahāyāna writings cited above, especially in the teachings of the Theravādin masters covered by Kornfield:

But really you are only a combination of elements or a group of changing aggregates. If the mind is free it does not discriminate. No big and small, no you and me. There is nothing. Anatta, we say, or non-self. Really, in the end there is neither atta nor anatta. (p.45: Achaan Chaa)

At this stage, he becomes satisfied with the knowledge that there is no I, mine, self, and that only formations arise; formations only are cognising other formations. (p.79: Mahasi Sayadaw)

We must realize that the wandering mind is a mental state, or we will mistakenly think it is 'I' wandering about and thus the idea of personality will remain instead of being eliminated. (p.140: Achaan Naeb)

Hence it is of extreme importance to realize that when we hear or see, it is simply the mental state or process which hears or sees. (p.147: Achaan Naeb)

Thus, analytic knowledge developed in Vipassana sees all beings not as permanent souls or personalities. (p.196: Taungpulu Sayadaw)

Feeling must not be personified with 'I', 'my' feeling. It is feeling that feels. It is simply a process. There is no 'I' that feels. (p.229: Mogok Sayadaw)

In these statements the reductionistic style of discourse is connected to the belief in the non-existence of the self; both are inextricably linked and presumed to be basic Buddhist truths. A similar relationship between reductionism and a belief in the non-existence of the 'self' can be seen in following statement of the Dalai Lama in *The Way to Freedom* (p.124):

If the ignorance that misconceives the self is a mistaken consciousness, it can be eliminated by correcting the mistake. This can be accomplished by generating within our minds a wisdom that realizes the direct opposite of that state of mind, a wisdom realizing that there is no such intrinsically existent self. When we compare these two states of mind – one believing in an intrinsically existent self, the other perceiving the absence of such a self – the apprehension of self might initially appear very strong and powerful. But because it is a mistaken consciousness, it lacks logical support. The other type of mind, the understanding of selflessness, might be very weak at the initial stage, but it has logical support. Sooner or later this wisdom realizing selflessness is going to gain the upper hand.

In this example, the reduction of the perceiving agent to ‘mistaken consciousness’ or ‘states of mind’ is connected to a denial of the ‘self’s’ existence. It is hard to doubt, then, that the reductionist tendency of these modern Theravāda and Mahāyāna teachings is intimately connected to the Buddhist belief that there is no self, just as seems to be the case in the ancient Theravāda and Mahāyāna writings of Buddhaghosa and Śāntideva considered above. Indeed we would not be far wrong if we were to suggest that reductionism developed in Buddhist thought precisely from the no self belief, in a manner suggested by Walpole Rahula as follows:

There is another popular question: If there is no Self, no Ātman, who realizes Nirvāṇa? Before we go on to Nirvāṇa, let us ask the question: Who thinks now, if there is no Self? We have seen earlier that it is the thought that thinks, that there is no thinker behind the thought. In the same way, it is wisdom (*paññā*), realization, that realizes.<sup>68</sup>

7. The above evidence shows that in the absence of a soul, Buddhist thinkers attribute cognitive acts to a person’s most important cognitive faculty: the mind. This is not to say that they do away with everyday discourse in which it is said that a person acts, thinks and perceives. It means, rather, that this conventional discourse is supplemented by the tendency to speak in the more philosophically correct discourse of the ultimate truth that there is no ‘self’. Thus Buddhist teachers tend to account for psychological processes not by using language correctly, in which the only proper subject of experience is the human being as a whole, but from the perspective of the ultimate Buddhist truth that a person lacks an everlasting or essential substance. Reductionism, in other words, is the logical counterpart to the no self doctrine, the flip side of the *anātmavādin* coin. This is true of ancient Buddhist thinkers such as Buddhaghosa and Śāntideva, as much as it is true of modern Buddhist teachers such as the Dalai Lama. We have seen that this reductionistic tendency is well developed in the canonical Abhidharma works, and if so it would seem that its origin is to be sought in the earlier canonical books of the Sutta and Vinaya Piṭakas.

As a deviation from an older understanding of how a person realises (*adhi-gam*) the immortal (*amata*) Nirvana, conclusion of the Second Sermon marks a significant development in Buddhist thought. The authors of the Vinaya account would not have veered from an old account to create a new and fundamentally different version of the five *bhikkhus*’ liberation without good reason. The use of the reductionistic formula was intentional, and if so it must surely indicate a new and different doctrinal perspective. The new doctrinal position, it seems, involved a reluctance to speak of liberation as something attained by a person: the authors of the pre-sectarian Vinaya biography rejected a strongly stated ‘personalistic’ description of the five *bhikkhus*’ liberation, and replaced it with what looks like a reductionistic account. And if reductionism is the logical counterpart of the ‘no self’ doctrine, it would seem that the Vinaya authors were *anātmavādins*: they believed that the Buddha had taught the non-existence of the ‘self’. Moreover, it would seem that this belief was read into the paradigmatic *anātman* teaching that there is no *ātman/attā* in the five aggregates, for it is this

<sup>68</sup> Rahula (1959: 42).

teaching that triggers the reductionistic account of the five *bhikkhus*’ liberation in the Second Sermon. The Second Sermon is therefore proof that an important doctrinal change had taken place in early Buddhist circles. The old teaching that no *ātman/attā* can be found in the five aggregates was at some point taken to indicate that a person lacks a ‘self’ *per se*. In other words, a ‘not-self’ teaching had developed into a ‘no self’ teaching. It would thus seem correct to believe that the *Vajirā Sutta* represents a relatively late stratum in the Pāli Suttapīṭaka. Its ‘no self’ doctrine cannot be taken back to the Buddha, but was of such influence that it came to define the Buddhist mainstream for more than two thousand years.

### Abbreviations

Bcv	Bodhicaryāvatāra (see Tripathi 1998)
BU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (see Olivelle 1998)
CPS	Catuṣpariṣat Sūtra (see Waldschmidt)
D	Dīgha Nikāya
DPPN	<i>Dictionary of Pali Proper Names</i> , G.P. Malasekera.
M	Majjhima Nikāya
MMW	<i>A Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> , Monier Monier-Williams
Mv	Mahāvastu (see Senart)
S	Samyutta Nikāya
SbhV	Saṅghabhedavastu (see Gnoli)
Vin	Vinaya
Vis	Visuddhimagga (see Warren and Kosambi)

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